TO THE TUNE OF “QUEEN DIDO”:
THE SPECTROPOETICS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH BALLADRY
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It is a fact well known to scholars of early modern English culture that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadside ballads were routinely printed sans musical notation. Rather, alongside their decorative woodcuts and neatly stacked stanzas of black-letter lyrics, these single-sheet publications typically included a note that they were meant to be sung “to the tune of ____.” In each case, this lacuna was filled with a textual tag suggesting a recognisable, pre-existing melody, and such tune indications were placed in a position of relative prominence on the page. Though musical literacy per se seems to have been uncommon in England during this period, the prevalence and apparent efficacy of this textual tune-tagging system would suggest that functional musical proficiency was not. Mass-produced and sold one or two for a penny in their printed forms, ballads were reputedly everywhere in early modern culture: they could not only be seen and heard circulating “in the streete,” but they also served as a significant form of “recreation…at Christmasse dinners & brideales, and in tavernes & ale-houses and such other places,” as one contemporary commentator put it (Puttenham M1).1 Given their ubiquity, it is somewhat remarkable, then, to consider that the existence of this entire ballad industry was contingent upon the English public’s collective ability to aurally master and successfully re-transmit a significant number of discrete melodies.2

A consideration of early modern theatrical texts yields pertinent dramatic examples of this sort of musical memory in action. In The Winter’s Tale, William Shakespeare’s Autolycus—undoubtedly the best-known of early modern England’s fictional balladmongers—has amongst his wares a “merry ballad” that “goes to the tune of ‘Two Maids Wooing a Man.’” In response to the seller’s assurances that this printed merchandise is much “in request” and has been particularly popular with young maids like themselves, Mopsa and Dorcas reply that they “can both sing it” already: despite never having encountered the lyrics of this particular ballad before, they “had the tune on’t a month ago” (4.4.275-82). A complementary example occurs in Ben Jonson’s Bartholomew Fair, in which Nightingale, another imaginary balladmonger, hawks a broadside sung to “the tune of

1 I have modified u/v and long s usage and regularised the capitalisation of titles in my transcriptions of early modern texts.
2 The literature on ballad circulation in the era is extensive and includes the work of Simpson, Ward, Duffin, and Poulton, amongst others in my Works Cited.
As soon as Nightingale announces this new ballad’s melody, one of his interlocutors impatiently begins singing “Fa, la la la, la la la, fa la la la,” thereby indicating his prior familiarity with the tune (3.5.50, 54-55). Such examples also serve to illumine David Atkinson’s characterisation of ballads’ melodies and texts as “inherently separable”: after all, “the same words can go to different tunes, and vice versa; and the words can exist without the melody (in broadside print, for example), just as the melody can exist without the words” (xiv).

As Christopher Marsh’s recent comments in *Music and Society in Early Modern England* suggest, much work remains to be done on how the ballad industry’s overwhelming reliance on recycled tunes must have inflected songs’ meanings for early modern audiences. Though he claims that the “role of melody in shaping contemporary interpretations of ballads has often been neglected” in contemporary scholarship, Marsh posits that “melodies were capable of reinforcing, altering and destabilising textual messages in a compelling manner” such that even “the reputation of a tune” could sometimes be “strong enough to convey a message…without the presence of words” (288-9). Similar concerns inflect Erin Minear’s *Reverberating Song in Shakespeare in Milton*, in which she centrally focuses on the possibilities of “reverberation,” a trope which encompasses “the acoustic and affective properties of music, as infectious sounds that linger in the air and in the memory” as well as “one writer’s allusions to another” (1). As Minear persuasively argues, “remembered music never remains fully in the past: recollection stimulates repetition and return, breaking down the distinction between memory and experience” (10).³

In this chapter, I take up this premise that melodies as well as lyrics historically helped to define a ballad’s generic identity and to shape early modern audiences’ perceptions of a song’s themes and affective registers. Assuming that musical synchronicity created through the reuse of common tunes aurally positions ballads in conversation with their precursors, I seek to explore the hermeneutic implications of this musical intertextuality.⁴ Described variously as “Queen Dido” or “Troy Town,” the central melody that I am concerned with in this case study was one of early modern England’s most frequently

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³ The second chapter of Minear’s monograph (53-87), anticipates my own argument; I follow Minear’s lead in exploring the possibilities of haunting as a trope in relation to early modern balladry.

⁴ The case study I here present bears some resemblance both to Williams’s recent attempt to describe what she calls the “acoustic profile of a witch” in early modern ballad culture (“A Swearing and Blaspheming Wretch” 310) and her interests in “how specific melodies developed ‘reputations’ because of their repeated usage with certain subject material” (“Witches, Lamenting Women, and Cautionary Tales” 33). My line of inquiry is also indebted to Winkler’s *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note*, particularly its third chapter (63-113), which discusses Henry Purcell’s operatic representation of Dido—an ambiguous exemplar of “disorderly femininity”—alongside “the songs of other suffering women” (64).
This tune was originally associated with “The Wandring Prince of Troy” (Figs 1.1 and 1.2), which narrates the classical tale of Dido’s desire for Aeneas and her suicide after being abandoned by the hero. Central to my broader argument is the assumption that early modern audiences, when prompted to sing new lyrics to the tune of “Queen Dido,” remembered more than just the requisite melody. Put otherwise, later ballads set to “Queen Dido” are haunted (and I mean this in something of a Derridean sense) by the cultural and textual legacies of the lovelorn mythological heroine. In what follows, I first offer a sustained consideration of “The Wandring Prince” before turning to consider how the image of Dido’s spectre, as it appears in Part 2 of this ballad, can serve as a useful metaphor through which to conceive of early modern broadside balladry’s melodic hauntings, more generally. The chapter’s final section then examines a selection of later ballads sung to the tune of “Queen Dido,” suggesting how the tale of this suicidal heroine might well function within them as a spectral subtext.

**DIDO AND AENEAS IN “THE WANDRING PRINCE OF TROY”**

In Thomas Middleton’s 1604 *Penniless Parliament of Threadbare Poets*, there is a jesting reference to the sort of “ale-knights” who “devour the marrow of the malt and drink whole aletubs into consumptions.” Such men, the text suggests, relish “tell[ing] strange news over an alepot” and are also wont to “sing Queen Dido over a cup” (112-14). Middleton’s mention of “Queen Dido” as he characterises such drunken antics may well be the earliest surviving literary reference that we have to “The Wandring Prince,” and it is a testament to the ballad’s reputation as something of a classic by the turn of the seventeenth century. As is the case with so many of early modern England’s broadside ballads, the origins of “The Wandring Prince” remain obscure. Though no sixteenth-century imprints of this ballad have survived, records show that in 1564—approximately four decades prior to its citation in Middleton’s *Penniless Parliament*—this ballad was entered into the Stationers’ Register and licensed to Thomas Colwell for printing (Arber 1.270). We can also infer that the ballad must have achieved fairly immediate renown: a mere four years later, the Stationer’s Register

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5 On this tune, see Simpson 587-90. In Marsh’s quantitative list of “The top fifty ballad tunes” of the era, “Queen Dido” is tied for eighth place (236).
6 My thoughts on haunting and balladry throughout this chapter have been loosely inspired by Derrida’s notions of “hauntology” or “spectropoetics,” as presented in *Specters of Marx*. 
records “a ballett intituled the wanderynge prynce moralyzed” (presumably a spin-off or continuation) being licensed to Colwell’s competitor Richard Jones (Arber 1.176). 

Like the majority of the early modern England’s broadside ballads, “The Wandring Prince” is narrative in nature, and—although this ballad ultimately relates a version of Dido and Aeneas’ story that little resembles the events of Aeneid 1, 4, and 6—its lyrics seem at least partially inspired by Vergil’s seminal account of Dido and Aeneas. The relationship between “The Wandring Prince” and the Aeneid seems strongest in the eleven stanzas of Part 1, which begins:

When Troy towne for ten yeere wars
withstood the Greeks in manfull wise,
Yet did their foes increase so fast,
that to resist none could suffice.
Wast lye those walls that were so good,
And corne now growes where Troy Towne stood

This scene-setting reference to Troy’s inexorable fall is swiftly followed by a shift of focus: having spent a “long time” at sea, the eponymous wandering Trojan, Aeneas, arrives at “mighty Carthage walls.” Those familiar with Vergil’s account will be unsurprised to hear that the Carthaginian “Queene with sumptuous feast / Did entertaine this wandring Guest.” And when Dido presses this “comely Knight” to tell the tale of his exile, he mournfully relates his story “With words so sweet and sighes so deepe, / That oft he made them all to weep.” Echoing her counterpart in Aeneid 4, the ballad’s Dido is driven to a frenzied and insomniatic state by the presence of her handsome houseguest. Despite these aforementioned similarities to this classical account, however, there are also significant divergences from Vergil’s text in Part 1. Perhaps most obviously, the interventions of the Aeneid’s heavy handed deities are entirely omitted. Moreover, the timeline of events is greatly compressed, such that Aeneas spends only one fleeting night under Dido’s roof. At daybreak, when she hears “tidings” of Aeneas’ departure, the bereft heroine swiftly resolves to take her own life with a “bloody knife.” The final words of Part 1 thus represent Dido’s own swan song as she invites death to “resolve [her] smart.”

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7 As the first extant printed copies of “The Wandring Prince,” which date from approximately 1620, present us with a ballad in two parts (of eleven and twelve stanzas in length, respectively), it is unclear whether the original version licensed by Colwell in 1564-5 would have included this entire twenty-three stanza text or only the eleven stanzas of Part 1. It is not impossible that Part 2 of this ballad as it was represented on seventeenth-century broadsides is synonymous with the originally discrete moralisation licensed to Jones in 1568-9.

8 I have used the ballads and transcriptions available at the University of California-Santa Barbara’s English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA). The EBBA recording of “The Wandring Prince” can be heard here: <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/21745/recording>.
Part 2 of “The Wandring Prince”—in which we learn of the effects of Dido’s suicide on the still-living—bears even less resemblance to Vergil’s epic. Its twelve stanzas relate a curious continuation of Dido and Aeneas’ tale that seems to have no precise precedent in either classical or vernacular literary tradition. Aeneas, “shipt and gone” to “an Ile / in Grecia, where he liv’d long space,” is unambiguously vilified. Since the hero’s former “flattery” of the queen is explicitly blamed for “caus[ing] all [Dido’s] moane,” the deceased heroine’s disconsolate sister Anna takes it upon herself to write him a censorious letter. This epistle, the text of which is recounted within the ballad’s lyrics, acrimoniously identifies Aeneas as a “False hearted wretch” who “betraid” Dido and thus deserves a similarly “untimely” death. Although Anna’s missive also reports that “on her death-bed” her sister selflessly “pray’d for [Aeneas’] prosperity,” when Dido’s own spectre rises up to haunt Aeneas upon his receipt of the letter, her “grisly Ghost” appears less than forgiving. Though, ultimately, the “woefull Prince” admits his error, acknowledging that he “left unpaid what [he] did owe” to Dido, this repentance comes too late. Despite his contrition, Aeneas is swept off by “a multitude of ugly Fiends,” and, as the ballad’s final line ominously asserts, “no man knew his dying day.”

It is possible that Aeneas’ encounter with Dido’s ghost in Part 2 of “The Wandring Prince” is loosely inspired by a passing verbal threat that Dido makes as her lover prepares to depart Carthage in Aeneid 4:

…sequar atris ignibus absens
et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus,
onnibus umbra locis adero. dabis, improbe, poenas.
audiam et haec Manis veniet mihi fama sub imos.

[Though far away, I will chase you with murky brands and, when chill death has severed soul and body, everywhere my shade shall haunt you. Relentless one, you will repay! I shall hear, and the tale will reach me in the depths of the world below!]

(4.384-7)\(^9\)

Nonetheless, Aeneas’ encounter with Dido’s ghost in “The Wandring Prince” markedly diverges from the Vergilian account in Aeneid 6 when Aeneas briefly encounters “infelix Dido” [unhappy Dido] on his visit to the underworld, and, unlike the ballad’s ghost, she proves to be neither verbose nor particularly vindictive (6.456). In thinking about the ballad’s narrative divergences from the Aeneid, it is also worth noting the obvious fact that an Aeneas spirited away to an unknown death by “ugly Fiends” would have had difficulties achieving his epic destiny as the founder of the Roman nation. Indeed, not only does the nature of the

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\(^9\) English translations of all Roman poetry derive from the relevant Loeb editions.
punishment that Aeneas receives in Part 2 of “The Wandring Prince” seem at odds with Vergilian tradition, but its very severity also seems strikingly disproportionate to the supposed crimes that he committed against Dido (and love) in Part 1. After all, the condensed chronology of Aeneas’ visit to Carthage in Part 1 means that, amongst other things, there is no ambiguous marriage—or-maybe-not-marriage for the ballad’s hero to deny—or even, apparently, a consummation of the couple’s relationship. In fact, it is even questionable whether Dido in Part 1 of “The Wandring Prince” ever divulged her feelings to the Trojan hero at all.

While the general subversion of Aeneas’ epic identity and emphasis on his romantic perfidy in this ballad may seem distinctly un-Vergilian, there are certainly literary precedents in which Aeneas’ heroism is similarly derogated. Ovid’s *Heroides*, which includes a missive supposedly written by Dido to Aeneas following his departure, is an important intertext in this regard. Clearly serving as the model for Anna’s letter in Part 2 of “The Wandring Prince,” *Heroides* likewise downplays Aeneas’ identity as future founder of the Roman nation (Reid 129-35). In spirit, this ballad seems closest to the earlier vernacular renditions of Dido’s tale in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* and *House of Fame*, which similarly open by referencing Vergil’s authority yet draw extensively on the counter-epic tradition exemplified in the *Heroides*; as in the works of Chaucer—who, throughout his oeuvre, posits Aeneas as the consummate example of romantic falsity—in “The Wandring Prince,” Dido is presented as unambiguously wronged.

**Dido’s Ghost as Metaphor**

Any text in public circulation will inevitably accrue various communal or societal associations, and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadside ballads were no exception to this rule. Early modern drama, again, furnishes some interesting examples that illustrate the ways in which audiences of the era understood particular melodies to have established cultural resonances. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for instance, Lucetta, brandishing a love letter that Proteus composed “in rhyme” for Julia, playfully teases her mistress: “That I might sing it, madam, to a tune. / Give me a note.” When Julia responds that her maid should

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10 In considering this ballad’s debt to Ovid’s *Heroides*, it is also worth noting that the final lines of its first stanza (“Wast lye those walls that were so good, / And corne now growes where Troy Towne stood”) are adapted from a line in *Heroides* 1, Penelope’s letter to Ulysses: “iam seges est, ubi Troia fuit” [Now there are fields of corn where Troy once was] (1.53).

11 Pugh has made the further point that the inclusion of Anna’s letter may well be a stroke of “ingenious pedantry,” whereby the ballad’s author attempts to explain away a well-known continuity problem with Aeneas’ dialogue in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* highlighted by Servius and other Vergilian commentators.
try singing Proteus’ words “to the tune of ‘Light o’ love,’” the “saucy” Lucetta punningly replies that the missive’s contents are “too heavy for so light a tune” (1.2.79-84). The women’s witty banter as they discuss the possibility of setting Proteus’ love note to music relies upon the assumption that particular ballad melodies are suited to different types of lyrical texts. We find a similar understanding of the relationship between tunes and lyrics being played upon elsewhere in Shakespeare’s oeuvre, as well. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, for example, Mistress Ford makes a point about the discrepancy between Falstaff’s words and actions by commenting that “they do no more adhere and keep place together than the hundred psalms to the tune of ‘Greensleeves’” (2.1.54-55), and, in As You Like It, in response to Amiens’s rendition of “Under The Greenwood Tree,” Jacques retorts by singing a newly composed “verse”—a set of ballad lyrics that comically reverse the sentiments of the original via semantic dissonance—to the same “note” (2.5.40). These Shakespearean examples illustrate some of the ways in which, to borrow Marsh’s phrasing, early modern audiences of ballads “constantly connect[ed] tunes… with their previous incarnations” (290).

In another stage play of the era, John Fletcher’s historically set Bonduca, we find this same idea that certain types of tunes belong with certain types of lyrics being applied with particular reference to “The Wandring Prince.” This dramatic piece provides interesting insight into the cultural associations that “Queen Dido” had accrued by the turn of the seventeenth century. In one scene, Junius—who has unluckily fallen for Bonduca’s youngest daughter and is, resultantly, languishing in typical Petrarchan fashion—is mocked by his Roman compatriot Petillius, who reports that the lovesick officer has enclosed himself “In’s Cabin” where he is “most lamentably loving, / To the tune of Queen Dido” (2.1.10-11). Petillius’ commentary underscores how references to certain ballad tunes could be used in early modern culture almost as a form of shorthand to express a collection of affects. Furthermore, his sardonic description of Junius’ behaviour suggests that the particular tune of “Queen Dido” derived its semantic register primarily from the narrative of Dido’s unrequited love and her suicidal impulses, as relayed in “The Wandring Prince.” Extrapolating further from Petillius’ words, we might say that one of the primary generic signals broadcast by “Queen Dido” is an association with tales of tragic desire.

In a constant blending of the novel and the known, audiences of the era were habituated to sing any new lyrics that they encountered to tunes already stored in their memories. So, if we consent that melodies such as “Queen Dido” must have routinely conveyed generic, thematic, and affective messages to the early moderns who heard, memorised, and performed them, then how might we approach the tissue of intertextual
relationships that undoubtedly emerged between the multitude of lyrics sung to the same pre-existing tunes? In what follows, I argue that effect of setting multiple sets of lyrics to a single ballad tune might be conceived, at least in part, through the theoretical trope of haunting.

In “The Wandring Prince,” Aeneas is first informed of Dido’s death by means of Anna’s accusatory letter, and his receipt of this neo-Ovidian epistle seems to directly precipitate the appearance of “Queene Didoes Ghost both grim and pale” within the narrative. Conceptually, the mise en abyme of Anna’s text about Dido’s suicide and the spectral presence of the deceased queen herself are provocatively interlinked. I want to suggest that this moment of textual/spectral alignment, as narrated within “The Wandring Prince” serves as a strikingly apt metaphor for how the spectre of Dido also haunts distinct lyrics later set to the same melody as “The Wandring Prince” and serves as a figuration for the systemic hauntings of early modern broadside balladry, more generally. This image of Dido’s ghost rising up before Aeneas’ eyes seems presciently expository of the way in which the early modern broadside ballad industry perpetually created ghosts and conjured up spectres through its explicit system of tune referentiality. A distinct resonance exists between the combinatorial textual and melodic mechanics of balladry in this period and the ontological and temporal paradoxes and disruptions that Jacques Derrida described as “hauntology.”

Since the publication of Derrida’s influential Specters of Marx, contemporary scholarship has experienced something of a “spectral turn,” to borrow a phrase from Roger Luckhurst, and, in what follows, I use a Derridean-derived sense of “spectropoetics” in considering the confluence of discrete early modern ballads sung to the tune of “Queen Dido.”

Ghosts are, by definition, liminal. Neither fully present nor fully absent, they lack a determinate ontological status. As Derrida conceives of such spectres, they not only problematise notions of identity and existence, but also of space and chronology. The figure of the ghost—a “non-present present”—resists clear categorisation between the realms of the living and the dead, “between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being” (Derrida 6, 11). Ghosts also fail to respect distinct spatiotemporal boundaries: a spectre is neither here nor there, then nor now. If spectres, then, can be said to be the same and yet not identical with their formerly living selves, this is also true of any ballad’s relationships with other songs sung to the same tune. A later, lyrically distinct ballad sung to the tune of “Queen Dido” is obviously not the same text as “The

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12 For an overview of scholarship’s recent “spectral turn,” see Blanco and Peeren’s Introduction in The Spectralities Reader as well as Luckhurst.
Wandring Prince,” and yet its reproduction of the earlier song’s melody means it is neither wholly separate nor semantically independent from its precursor(s).

**Spectropoetic Speculations**

In the final section of this chapter, I turn my attention to a selection of four seventeenth-century ballads set to the tune of “Queen Dido.” Though, admittedly, such a project is necessarily speculative, in each instance, I seek to imagine how the aural cue of reusing the well-known tune of “Queen Dido” in a novel context might have provided an interpretative lens or served as an allusive form of commentary for the audiences of these later ballads. A consideration of how early moderns may have deciphered the lyrics of these later songs with reference to “The Wandring Prince” and/or Dido’s broader literary and cultural associations in the period demonstrates something of how—through the broadside industry’s system of selective melodic replication—later ballads open themselves to haunting, thereby also entering into musical conversations about the signification and affective timbres of “Queen Dido.”

It is not difficult to imagine how a spectral intertextuality reliant on musical connotations might be discerned in the lyrics of my first two examples, “The London Damsels Fate by Unjust Tyrany” and “The Fair Maid of Dunsmore’s Lamentation.”¹³ Both of these seventeenth-century ballads set to the same tune as “The Wandring Prince” also depict acts of suicide-by-knife—a markedly uncommon occurrence in broadside lyrics more generally (Würzbach 137; Newman 192). Moreover, in each instance, these acts of suicide are likewise committed by young women who are romantically distressed. “The London Damsels Fate,” as its opening lines indicate, is explicitly addressed to audiences “that unto marriage tend.” In its exhortatory capacity, this nineteen-stanza ballad presents a strong argument against enforced marriage. Its central example is a young Londoner bullied by her “pevish Parents.” The maid’s tyrannical father and mother cruelly prevent her marriage to a “youngman” of her own choice, preferring to select their daughter’s future spouse themselves. The damsel’s copious “sighs and tears [do] not prevaile,” and, when she subsequently learns that her beloved has died of a broken heart, she resolves to join in death the man with whom she cannot be united in life. “The Fair Maid of Dunsmore’s Lamentation” is similarly didactic, with its central lesson about the evils of concupiscence.

¹³ The EBBA recordings of these two ballads can be heard here: <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/32715/recording> and <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30646/recording>.
addressed to “all-young men.” In part 1, or the ballad’s first fourteen stanzas, the “fair and bright” daughter of a shepherd is brought to “woe” by “lustful love” (as the song’s refrain repeatedly reminds us). Wigmore, the “Governour, / of Warwick-castle,” first encounters Isabel when he stumbles upon her bathing in a “silver Stream alone” on a warm summer’s day. Immediately infatuated, “his heart [is] movd; / to work her ruin and his fall.” Returning to his castle, Wigmore summons Isabel “without delay” and sends her home pregnant. The ballad’s eleven-stanza Part 2 sympathetically narrates Isabel’s anguish when “her belly swelled and big did grow.” Socially marginalised and despairing of moral reprieve, Isabel—like both Dido and the London Damsel—plunges a dagger deep into her own breast in a final act of lonely desperation.

As my above accounts would indicate, the lyrics in both of these later ballads sung to the same tune have loose narrative and thematic affinities with the story of Dido as relayed in “The Wandring Prince,” similarly constellating romantic mishap, social despair, and auto-violence. I would further argue that their shared tune makes these parallels aurally perceptible, drawing the audience’s attention to the way in which these stories of unfortunate English maidens are haunted by the memory of Dido’s self-annihilating passion. The spectre of Dido seems to haunt these ballads not merely on the level of their corresponding narrative details or overlapping thematic content, but also on the levels of their affective tenor and moral implications. Both of these later ballads overtly share in the desire to exonerate its suicidal heroine as a woman wronged, and both also follow the lead of “The Wandring Prince” by showing how the (at least allegedly) guilty parties later feel remorse for their callous actions. It is impossible to forget the image of the repenting Aeneas when we hear, for instance, that the tyrannous parents of the London Damsel futilely mourn her lifeless body, ultimately regretting the role that they played “as Accessaries of her death.” Likewise, when the news of Isabel’s suicide reaches him, Wigmore recognises “his sins” and promises that he “openly will…proclaim” the “wrong” he did to his social inferior. We might say, then, that the aural signals broadcast by the recycling of “Queen Dido” in “The London Damsels Fate” and “The Fair Maid of Dunsmore’s Lamentation” also shapes our understanding of their stated didactic lessons: their musical associations draw our attention to the fact that both of these later ballads share a common conception of poetic justice with Part 2 of “The Wandring Prince,” as well as replicating its implicit sympathy towards acts of suicide committed under romantically tragic circumstances.

Other seventeenth-century ballads sung to the tune of “Queen Dido” may have been haunted in slightly different ways by the Carthaginian’s spectre. To borrow the phrasing of
Margaret Ferguson, in the early modern period, the figure of Dido “became a focus for enduring debate about history and fiction, about licit and illicit sexual behaviour, about masculine and feminine social roles, and about the dangers of speaking and listening to strangers.” Furthermore, by the turn of the seventeenth century, the character of Dido had a long history of use as a stock exemplum in the querelle des femmes, in which citations of her story were commonly used to illustrate various points—both positive and negative—about the nature and relative virtue of women (Reid 37-68). In thinking about how the figure of Dido haunted ballads sung to the tune of “Queen Dido,” it is also useful to think beyond the scope of her portrayal in “The Wandring Prince” and to consider how a more non-textually specific, literary and cultural composite Dido may also have haunted seventeenth-century ballads in this more nebulous exemplary capacity.

Included alongside a number of other “histories of...kings, queenes, princes, lords, ladies, knights, and gentlewomen” in The Golden Garland of Princely Pleasures and Delicate Delights, a collection of ballads from 1620, is a set of lyrics entitled “Of the Inconveniences by Marriage” (F7'-F8'). Sung to the tune of “Queen Dido,” the song directly addresses those “Fond wanton youths” who are foolishly inclined to “make Love a god.” This short, antifeminist ballad of only six stanzas presents a strong argument against matrimony. As the song’s refrain reminds us, young men naively “woo their woe” and then “wed their grief.” After all, “Love’s sweets” are reduced to “sour care” with time since “Foul wives” inevitably turn out to be “jealous” and “fair wives” always prove “false.” It is thus that “Of the Inconveniences by Marriage” draws less directly on the particularities of the bereft queen’s portrayal in “The Wandring Prince” than it does on Dido’s broader cultural associations with exemplarity and the querelle des femmes. Playing off what Deanne Williams has referred to as her generally “unstable reputation” during this period (e.g. “is she a canny seductress or a hapless victim?”), the song implicitly asks its audiences to reconsider the story of Dido and Aeneas as an antifeminist exemplum in malo illustrating the inevitable “woe” that his romantic relationship with (and, according to sources such as Vergil, his ambiguous marriage to) Dido eventually brought upon Aeneas (32).

Along with Dido, the classical heroine Penelope was another frequently cited exemplum in late medieval and early modern debates about the nature of women and marriage. Like Dido, Penelope has a venerable representational heritage in both classical and vernacular literature, and her tale similarly unfolds against the backdrop of the Trojan War and its aftermath. Unlike the polysemantic and representationally malleable figure of Dido, however, the ever-faithful and wifely character of Penelope was unvaryingly cited as a
positive exemplar. So what might it have meant, then, that a seventeenth-century ballad entitled “A Looking-Glass for Ladies; Or, A Mirrour for Married-Women” (Fig 1.3)—a text that “Lively [set] forth the rare Constancy, Chastity, Patience, and purity of Penelope the Wife of Ulisses” was also sung to the tune of “Queen Dido”? I would argue that the use of “Queen Dido” in “A Looking-Glass” is deliberately—even provocatively—inversionary. As the ballad’s rather heavy-handed introductory blurb tells us, Penelope’s story will be particularly instructive for “Ladies, Gentlewomen, and others” who should lean “to Imitate her vertuous Example.” This same didacticism again appears at the ballad’s close, where “Young Ladies” learn that the example of Penelope will aid them “twixt vice and virtue to discern.” Since Ulysses’ wife is held up to the ballad’s female audiences as an exemplar of perfect, emulable chastity who as “constant prove[s], / As…the harmless Turtle-Dove,” the audience is therefore musically primed to re-evaluate any former feelings of compassion they may have felt for Dido on moral grounds. In “A Looking-Glass,” when “Ulisses with a heavy heart” tells his wife “The time is come that we must part,” there is a distinct situational echo of Dido’s abandonment by Aeneas. Penelope “dropt many a tear” for her departed husband, yet she shows a resilience that Dido of “The Wandring Prince” most certainly does not. Though she keenly feels the “absence of her dearest love,” Penelope is not one for wallowing. The ballad’s thus encourages a comparative appraisal of Dido and Penelope’s respective behaviour. If its lyrics are meant to teach girls and women the differences “twixt vice and virtue,” and if Penelope is unequivocally virtuous, then the ghostly Dido lurking just beneath the surface of the text is retroactively recast as a negative exemplum: in contrast with the long-suffering Penelope, she looks selfish, impetuous, rash, and unnecessarily violent.

To briefly conclude, my intention throughout this chapter has been to draw fresh attention to the possible aural dimensions of intertextuality in early modern balladry. Using the tune of “Queen Dido” as a case study, I have sought to reconstruct some of the ways in which recycled ballad melodies undoubtedly “created a web of powerfully efficacious cultural referents for the early modern listener,” to borrow Sarah F. Williams’s phrasing (“A Swearing and Blaspheming Wretch” 333). The historical consumers of early modern broadside ballads were required to repeatedly draw on their familiarity with a relatively modest personal and cultural repertoire of popular tunes and to constantly overwrite their knowledge of one song with that of another. As I have also suggested in this chapter, one way of conceiving the implications of the ballad industry’s recursive tune-tagging system is

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14 The EBBA recording of this ballad can be heard here: <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/21745/recording>.
through the conceptual metaphor of haunting, and my speculations about the spectropoetics of “Queen Dido” suggest some of the ways in which, through uncanny musical incantation, the dead Carthaginian heroine’s spectre moves through and defies the boundaries of time and space, providing a mutable subtext for the many later ballads sung to the same tune.

**WORKS CITED**


