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A Theatre of Catches

Dialogue, Theatre and Ritual in the Restoration Catch

Of the few who have come to look at the catch repertoire after its wane in popularity from the early nineteenth century, most have regarded it with some bemusement. This seemingly simple, juvenile and vulgar musical genre has, despite its popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, been an object of derision in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when not ignored entirely.¹ Eric Ford Hart noted in 1953 that catches, especially their late seventeenth-century manifestations, were an aspect of British musical history “apparently too painful a subject to be spoken of. Nor has there been much change in the official attitude towards catches since Victorian times, [... they] are still on the black list”². The situation has been only slightly alleviated through an increased interest in musical clubs and societies as fruitful venues for musicological research. However, in such studies the catch is often neglected either in favour of more ‘serious’ matters, such as the glee, madrigal, or canon, or in favour of

1 The Exeter composer William Jackson made one of the earliest public attacks on catches, which he considered to be “such pieces as ‘when quartered, have ever three parts obscenity, and one part music.’” Though there is no evidence that his essays were particularly popular, his most dramatic claim – that the performance of a catch (though he had never heard one) would make him “ashamed for [himself] – for [his] company – and if a foreigner was present – for [his] country” – would be imbued with greater significance in the nineteenth century by Edward Rimbault and William Alexander Barrett in their criticisms of the genre. [William] D. Jackson, *Thirty Letters on Various Subjects*, Dublin 1783, pp.51, 57–58; Edward Francis Rimbault, *The Rounds, Catches and Canons of England*, London [1864], pp.xxxi–xxxiii; William Alexander Barrett, *English Gleees and Part Songs. An Inquiry into their Historical Development*, London 1886, pp.213–216.

2 Eric Ford Hart, “The Restoration Catch”, in *Music & Letters* 34 / 4 (1953), pp.288–305, p.288.

entirely sociological investigations.³ However, the less-than-serious material – catches – present in such institutions was not without a certain quantity of serious musical thought.

A particularly interesting example of the depth of this seemingly superficial genre can be found in the catch's relationship with theatre, particularly in the work of one of the genre's greatest masters, Henry Purcell. This link will be explored in Purcell's works both on and off the stage. To begin, I will illustrate the variability in Purcell's treatment of character and dialogue in the catch. Secondly, I will look at the symbolic and dramatic function of Purcell's catches on stage, particularly that of "Jack thou'rt a Toper" in *Bonduca, or, the British Heroine* (1695). Finally, I will argue that the theatrical considerations discussed in the first two sections are a product of the social function the catch held in a certain segment of English male society.

I. Drama in Purcell's catches

The catch, like its regular companion the glee, resists explicit definition. Even the most common (and most inclusive) definition as a humorous round is not universally applicable, as there are indeed serious catches and the later practice of omitting sections in some parts does not coincide with the stricter definition of the round. Edward Rimbault approached a fitting description in his definition of the catch as "a humorous vocal composition of three or more harmonic parts, in which the melodies are so opposed and interrupted by the contrivance of the composer, that in the performance the singers *catch* up each other's sentences and give the words a sense different from that of the original reading."⁴

Turning first to the genre's innate theatricality, it is necessary to separate those catches which feature multiple characters from those containing only narrative or soliloquy. Hart noted that in the former "perhaps more than in any other kind of catch Restoration composers displayed their gifts of 'wit, pleasantry and contrivance'."⁵ Hart recognised only two subsets of

3 The two most significant contributions to the literature of catch and glee clubs in recent decades are: Emmanuel Rubin, *The English Glee in the Reign of George III. Participatory Art Music for an Urban Society*, Warren 2003 and Brian Robins, *Catch and Glee Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*, Woodbridge 2006.

4 Rimbault [1864], *The Rounds, Catches and Canons of England*, p. xii (original emphasis).

5 Hart 1953, "The Restoration Catch", pp. 303–304; Hart quotes Charles Burney's valuation of Purcell's catches: "he seems hardly ever to have been equalled in the wit, pleasantry and

what he calls “semi-dramatic catches”: those which exclusively feature dialogue – which Ian Spink refers to as “dialogue catches”⁶ – and those with both dialogue and narrative. It is, however, necessary to distinguish between catches in this first category with only one character per voice-part and those which, while also consisting purely of dialogue, feature multiple characters in a single voice-part. This distinction may seem academic, given that each performer will sing through all voice-parts in the performance of a catch. The cadential periodicity of the catch, however, which demarcates the musico-poetic form, composes a sequence of discrete units of action⁷. In a catch with a single character per voice-part, the closure of the cadence ending each voice-part lends an opportunity for the performers to switch characters and thus eases listener reorientation. In catches with more than a single character per voice-part, on the other hand, character changes do not align with the musical structure and require, as a result, different performative considerations. In this regard, this second category shares many of the interpretive difficulties of the catch with both dialogue and narrator, albeit without the expositive and equalising narrative voice. I therefore suggest the following categories: A “dialogue catch” consists of pure dialogue where each voice-part consists of a single character; a “split-dialogue catch” consists of pure dialogue where a single voice-part may consist of more than a single character; and a “semi-dramatic catch” consists of both direct speech and a narrative voice. Despite the significance Hart ascribes to these kinds of catches in the output of Restoration composers, it must be noted that they only make up about one-fifth of Purcell’s catch production: of the sixty catches in the Purcell Society Edition, only three are dialogue catches, one split-dialogue and eight semi-dramatic.⁸

contrivance of his *Catches*.” Charles Burney, *A General History of Music. From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols., London 1776–1789, vol. 3, London 1789, p. 503 (original emphasis).

6 See Hart 1953, “The Restoration Catch”, p. 304 and Ian Spink’s introduction to Henry Purcell, *Catches* (The Works of Henry Purcell 22A), ed. Ian Spink, London 2000, pp. i–xiii, p. xi.

7 I am forced to use this somewhat awkward term, to avoid the, in this context, even more confusing ‘rounds’. What is meant is a bout of play, a stated period comprised of a number of turns or a specified length of time, as in a game of poker or a boxing match. The units of action or ‘rounds’ of a catch are, as with poker or boxing, clear to both participants and spectators alike.

8 The two other dialogue catches not discussed further in this paper are “Fie, nay, prithee John” and “Soldier, Soldier, take of thy Wine”, the four semi-dramatic catches left out are “As Roger last night”, “Great Apollo and Bacchus”, “The Miller’s Daughter” and “Sir Walter enjoying his Damsel”. Purcell 2000, *Catches*.

These three categories pose different difficulties to the matter of musical delineation. The most straight-forward examples are to be found in the dialogue catch. In Purcell's "Since time so kind", composed sometime in the mid-to-late 1680s (see figure 10.1)⁹, the forceful advances of the male character are clearly distinguished from the protestations of the female by the distinctly higher tessitura of the second character / part. In such a setting, the parts are characterised regardless of the singers' personal performative predilections.

1 Since Time so kind to us does prove, so kind - to us does

2 What do you mean? Oh fye, nay What do you

3 I must, I must, I can't, for - bear I can't, I can't for -

4

2 prove do not my dear re - fuse my Love.

3 do? You'r the strangest man that e'er I knew

1 bear, lye still, lye still my dear.

Figure 10.1: Purcell, "Since time so kind"

Such methods of distinguishing characters were not limited to dialogue catches. In the more explicit semi-dramatic "Young John the Gard'ner" (figure 10.2), first published in 1683, speakers are delineated by large intervals leading to a shift in register, though the narrator is not always easily dis-

⁹ All musical examples are transcribed from *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion. Being a Choice Collection of Catches, for Three or Four Voices*, London 1701. This collection may be seen as illustrative of the material catch clubs possessed at the turn of the century, as it was, according to its title page, "Published chiefly for the Encouragement of the *Musical Societies*, which will be speedily set up in all the Chief Cities and Towns in ENGLAND." To facilitate cross-reading, the catches have been set in score by the author. All errors, including in punctuation and spelling, have been kept, as they further illustrate difficulties of character delineation in these works. Some hyphenation has been added to facilitate score reading and end repeats have been amended where necessary.

entangled from the other roles. Though the performers need not aid the listener in understanding the relatively inane horticultural dialogue between John and Joan, the setting of the catch invites dramatic performance in distinguishing between the two and the narrator (e.g. at the entry of the fourth voice-part), adding greater effectiveness to Joan’s scatological punchline.

The musical score is for a four-part catch in 4/4 time. The voices are numbered 1 to 4 on the left. The lyrics are as follows:

1 Young John the Gard' - ner hav - ing late - ly got a ve - ry —
2 brag - ging to Joan, Quoth he, so Rich — a Ground for Mel - lons,
3 That's a damn'd lye, quoth Joan, for I can tell a place, that
4 Where's that? says John; in mine Ars quoth Joan, for there — is store of
Rich and — Fer - tile — Gar - den Plot.
can - not in the World be found:
does your Gar - den far — ex - cell:
Dung and Wa - ter - all the Year.

Figure 10.2: Purcell, “Young John the Gard’ner”

The semi-dramatic catch “The London Constable” (figure 10.3), first published in 1685,¹⁰ serves as a particularly egregious example of minimal character delineation. In this night-time confrontation between a police constable and a self-described “honest Tory” – who nevertheless, like the constable, approves of bribery – the music provides little aid in disentangling the two characters, particularly in the second part. Thus, if the listener is to be ex-

10 The text had been published without music the previous year in *Wit and Mirth. An Antidote to Melancholy*, London 1684, pp. 142–143.

pected to comprehend the light political humour of the linear text, the performers must go well beyond the notated music in the performance of their roles – for example, by way of accent (picking up on the educational divide between the characters) or timbre.

1 Who comes there? stand: whon comes there? stand, and come be-fore the

2 Whence come you Sir? and wheth-er do you go? you may be, Sir, a

3 To tell you the truth, Sir, I am an hon-est To-ry; but here's a Crown to

6 Con-sta-ble, we'll know what you are: What makes you out so late? says the

Je - su - it for ought — I know. You may as well, Sir, take me —

drink and there's an end of the Sto-ry. Good mor - row, Sir, a ci - vil Man is

11 Mid - night Mag-is-trate, with a Nod-dle full of Ale in a wood-en Chair of State.

for a Ma - ho-me tan. he speaks Lat - in, se-cure him he's a dan - ger-ous Man.

al - ways wel - com, go Bar - na-by Bounce, light the Gen - tle-man home,

Figure 10.3: Purcell, “The London Constable”

This diversity of character delineation in these catches is not illustrative of more or less competent catch writing. Rather, it is indicative of a broad understanding of the purpose of drama in the catch genre, at the centre of which lies a recognition in the pleasure of playing characters, of flexible role-play. This is especially evident in catches where meaning, performance and convention clash.

The first words sung in Purcell’s only split-dialogue catch, the posthumously published “Pox on you” (figure 10.4), are in response to the offending belch which opens the catch. While the third voice-part is a single character and the second voice-part may also be, the first voice-part necessarily contains dialogue of at least two separate characters. It is, of course, possible that one or both of the two other singers provide the belches during the introduction of the first part. However, once the catch is in full swing, each singer must provide the gas at which they themselves are offended. That is, within the first bar alone, the singer must play two roles, lest the belch become the pox.¹¹

The musical score for Purcell's "Pox on you" is presented in three systems, each with three staves. The first system (measures 1-6) includes annotations "Belch." above the first staff at measures 1, 3, and 5. The lyrics for the three parts are:
Part 1: Pox on you, pox on you, pox on you for a
Part 2: Fogh, Fogh, Fogh, Fogh, how sow'r he smells; now he's
Part 3: no less than a Cæ - sar, no less than a Cæ - sar no, no, no, less than a —
The second system (measures 7-12) has lyrics:
Part 1: Fop, your Stom - ach too quea - zy, can - not I belch, can - not I — belch and Fart, you
Part 2: at it, now he's at it a - gain; out ye Beast, out ye Beast I nev - er met so
Part 3: Cæ - sar de - cree'd with great rea - son, no re - straint, no re - straint shou'd be — laid on the
The third system (measures 13-18) has lyrics:
Part 1: Cox - comb to — ease me: what if I let fly — in your Face and shall please yee?
Part 2: nas - ty a Man, I'm not a - ble to bear it, what the Dev - il d'ye mean?
Part 3: (no lyrics shown for this part in the image)

Figure 10.4: Purcell, “Pox on you”

11 A similar difficulty is present in all split-dialogue catches. It is perhaps for this reason that they make up only a tiny minority of the restoration literature. Of the 98 catches in the fourth edition of *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion* only two are split-dialogue catches: “Pox on you” and Bartholomew Isaack’s “A Catch on the London Waterman”.

While the performance of the printed belch in “Pox on you” is self-explanatory, Purcell used a different method to demarcate the non-verbal utterances in the semi-dramatic “Young Collin cleaving of a Beam”, first published in 1690. In the catch’s text – Thomas d’Urfey’s translation of George Buchanan’s “In Rusticum”¹² – the half-cough, grunt-like interjection “Hem!” appears in four different contexts: first as a genuine utterance by Collin; then as a quotation in his explanation to his wife, Joan; the “Hem!” is repeated three times as a genuine utterance by Joan; then as Joan quoting Collin’s “Hem!”; and finally as Collin quoting his own “Hem!” again. Purcell uses this contextual variety of the grunt in his setting (see figure 10.5). Collin’s genuine “Hem!” takes up two beats on the g^2 , while the two referential hems are lower.¹³ Similarly, Joan’s genuine grunts take up two beats rising from e^2 to g^2 , whereas her referential “Hem!”, while also on the g^2 , only occupies a single beat.¹⁴ As one can imagine, clearing one’s throat at a specific pitch is no simple task. The notes in this instance are unlikely indicative of the sounding performance. Rather, they serve as a sort of coded performance direction, indicating a different quality of grunt to be interjected and how it might be brought about.¹⁵ Here, as in “Since time so kind”, though less explicitly, a certain amount of theatricality is forced on the performers, delineating both the characters and the quality of their grunting. However, in contrast with “Pox on you”, a superficial understanding of the linear text of “Young Collin” does not rely on the theatrical capacities of the singers, it merely deepens the listener’s understanding of who is hemming and why.

These experiments in musical character delineation show Purcell’s regard for both the pleasures and challenges of role-play in catch performance. In this, Purcell was responding to a social function of the catch, the characteristics of which are clearly reflected in the genre’s symbolic and dramatic function on the stage.

12 Georgii Buchananani Scoti, *Poemata. In Tres Partes Digesta*, London 1716, pp.466–467. A more accurate translation can be found in Philip J. Ford, *George Buchanan. Prince of Poets*, Aberdeen 1982, pp. 174–175.

13 Referring to the notated pitches, the catch would have likely been sung an octave lower.

14 Genuine grunts have been demarcated from referential ones by exclamation marks in the fourth edition of *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*. Such marks are absent in the first publication, Thomas D’Urfey, *New Poems. Consisting of Satyrs, Elegies and Odes*, London 1690, p. 186.

15 For a particularly liberal interpretation, see Henry Purcell, “Young Collin, cleaving of a Beam”, in *Thomas D’Urfey’s Pills to Purge the Melancholy. Lewd Songs and Low Ballads from the 18th Century*, The City Waites, Saydisc CD-SDL 382, 1990.

The image displays a musical score for three voices, numbered 1, 2, and 3, in 3/4 time. The lyrics are as follows:

1 Young Col - lin cleav - ing of a Beam at ev' - ry thum-ping
2 Plump Joan when at Night to Bed — they came, and both were play -
3 he laugh - ing ans - wer'd no, no, no, some Work will splitt, will

7
thum-ping blow, cry'd Hem! and told his Wife, and told his Wife, and told his Wife who the
- ing at — the same, cry'd Hem! Hem! Hem! pre thee,
splitt — with half — a blow; be - side now I Bore, now I Bore, now I Bore,

13
couse — — — — — wou'd know, that Hem made the wedge much far - ther goe.
pre thee, pre thee Col-lin doe, if e - ver thou — Love'dst me, Dear Hem now;
now, now, now I Bore, I Hem when I Cleave, but now — I — Bore.

Figure 10.5: Purcell, “Young Collin cleaving of a Beam”

II. Purcell’s catches in drama

Only four of Purcell’s catches have direct ties to the theatre: “My Wife has a tongue” in Edward Ravenscroft’s adaptation of George Ruggle’s *Ignoramus* (1615) entitled *The English Lawyer* (1677); “At the close of the Evening the Watches were set” for a revival (c. 1689) of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta* (1618); a catch for d’Urfey’s *The Richmond Heiress* (1693) suspected to be “Bring the bowl and cool Nantz”; and “Jack thou’rt a Toper” for an anonymous adaptation (1695) of Beaumont and Fletcher’s

Bonduca (1614).¹⁶ Of the four productions, Purcell made the greatest contribution to *Bonduca*, writing alongside the catch an overture, two songs, two choruses, two duets, a recitative, as well as two instrumental airs, two horn-pipes and a minuet.

“Jack thou’rt a Toper” (figure 10.6) is rich in hidden meaning. Linearly, the text presents the audience with a (presumably inebriated) speaker attempting to persuade his friend, Jack, to stay out drinking with him. The speaker’s ribbing “none but a cuckold” becomes more explicit in the cross-reading “Jack, thou’rt a – cuckold.” The emphasis on the “coming” of “coming late” in the second part paints three different scenes: it is the voice of the drawer at the inn responding to the ringing of the bar bell; the voice on the other side of the door of the house being “called on and knocked”; and, finally – and this is perhaps the meaning the experienced catch listener would be searching for – at the intersection of the accusation of cuckoldry and the repeated knocking of the third part, it is the climax of the cuckolding act. Furthermore, despite the linear reading revealing only one speaker, Jack himself appears in the fleeting “so are you” when heard as a retort to the first and second’s “thou’rt a – cuckold”.

In the drama, the catch is sung by Roman soldiers in a forward camp in Britain while foraging for foodstuffs in act 2 scene ii, before being captured by Britons.¹⁷ This scene essentially fills in the gap left in the original between the soldiers complaining about their hunger in act 1 scene ii and appearing with “Halters about their Necks” before Bonduca and her daughters in act 2 scene iii.¹⁸ The play’s adapter thus gives the audience a small view into the behaviour of these scared and hungry soldiers. How do these soldiers assuage their fear and hunger in this foreign land? By singing about a drunken night back home – a home that seems closer to seventeenth century London than first century Rome. That such a catch – the first words sung in the play – comes from the mouths of the foreign invaders is not the result of the adapter’s carelessness, as the “peculiar inversion of loyalties” in the original

16 W. Barclay Squire, “Purcell’s Dramatic Music”, in *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 5 / 4 (1904), pp. 489–564, pp. 500–501, 521–522, 533, 545–546; Curtis Alexander Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 117–125, 168, 202–203.

17 *Bonduca. Or, The British Heroine*, London 1696, pp. 16–17.

18 John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, “Bonduca”, in *The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher*, vol. 6, ed. Henry Weber, Edinburgh 1812, pp. 9–130, pp. 21, 45; for a brief comparison of the adaptation and the original, see Arthur Colby Sprague, *Beaumont and Fletcher on the Restoration Stage*, New York 1965, pp. 160–165.

1
2
3

Jack thou'rt a To - per, Jack thou'rt a, thou'rt a To - per, let's
None but a Cuck - old, a Cuck - old, a Cuck - old, a Cuck - old Bul - ly'd
free, — I'm free, and so are you, so are you, so are you too,

6
have toth - er Quart; Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring,
by — his Wife for com - ing, com - ing, com - ing, com - ing, com - ing, com - ing, com - ing, com - ing,
call — and knock, knock bold - ly, knock bold - ly, knock bold - ly, knock

11
ring, we're so so - ber, so so - ber, so so - ber 'twere a shame to part;
com - ing, com - ing, com - ing late, fears a Do - mes - tick strife; I'm
bold - ly, tho' Watch - men cry past — two a Clock.

Figure 10.6: Purcell, “Jack thou’rt a Toper”

work – “Fletcher’s sympathy with the Romans and not the British Bonduca” – has been greeted with an almost unanimous interpretation in that “all the play’s interpretations excepting one” see Bonduca as representing “an uncomfortably familiar Otherness, while the Romans and [the British general] Caratach represent British audiences.”¹⁹

The intentions of the adapter go beyond a mere strengthening of Fletcher’s sympathetic portrayal of the Romans. While some have regarded the adaptation as a failed attempt to shift audiences’ sympathies from the Ro-

19 Wendy Nielsen, “Boadicea on Stage before 1800. A Theatrical and Colonial History”, in *Studies in English Literature* 49 / 3 (2009), pp. 595–614, p. 599.

mans onto the Britons,²⁰ Nina Buhadin McQuown makes the case that the 1695 adaptation is a “celebration of British history as a heterogeneous, discontinuous narrative wrought through the process of time and the work of mixture[.]”²¹ In giving the Romans the urban and idiosyncratically English catch – the reference to the bar bell, the anachronistic familiar “Jack”, the quart mug – Fletcher’s adapter(s) bring the ancient Romans closer to the contemporary British audience, though not necessarily at the expense of their sympathy for their fellow Britons on the stage.

The adapter of *Bonduca* was not the first to see the catch’s potential in conferring identity. P. T. Dircks noted the use of the catch as an “identity symbol” in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1601) and *Tempest* (1610–1611),²² and David Lindley acknowledges, in the same works, the catch’s “strong potential to command the complicity of the audience in its conspiratorial combination.”²³ While the catch is not used to delineate any national identity in Shakespeare, the catch’s interplay between form and substance, which necessitates the active search – on the part of the listener – for hidden meaning made manifest in the performance, is used to similar ends in both *Twelfth Night* and the 1695 *Bonduca*.²⁴

In both candidates for the catch in *Twelfth Night*,²⁵ the one-sided command (“hold thy peace”) – in itself an ironic text for a part-song – quickly becomes an exchange of insults on the entry of the third part (“thou knave – thou knave”). Aguecheek’s choice of a catch with this text carries the irony

20 See Price 1984, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, p. 118; Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700*, Oxford 1996, p. 429. Bridget Orr refrains from attributing intent, noting only that “a kindlier and more patriotic image of the British” is to be found in the adaptation, while the “plot construction is still slanted to the Romans[.]” Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage 1660–1714*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 261–262.

21 Nina Buhadin McQuown, “‘Britain-Gulf’. *Bonduca* and the English Earth”, in *Restoration. Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700* 40 / 2 (2016), pp. 23–42, p. 33.

22 Dircks however oversimplifies that which the catch delineates in these examples, seemingly influenced by the class associations Malvolio attributes to it. Linda Phyllis Austern correctly notes that the “reality is that catches transcended conventional boundaries of class[.]” Cf. P. T. Dircks, “Shakespeare’s Use of the Catch as Metaphor”, in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24 / 1 (1973), pp. 88–90; Linda Phyllis Austern, “Music and Manly Wit in Seventeenth-Century England. The Case of the Catch”, in *Concepts of Creativity in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard, Woodbridge 2013, pp. 281–308, p. 290; see also Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 193–195.

23 David Lindley, *Shakespeare and Music* (The Arden Shakespeare), London and New York 2006, p. 221.

24 The catch in *The Tempest* is not realised and is therefore omitted in this comparison.

25 Cf. Thomas Ravenscroft, *Deutoromelia*, London 1609, sig. B4^r and Jill Vlasto, “An Elizabethan Anthology of Rounds”, in *The Musical Quarterly* 40 / 2 (1954), pp. 222–234, p. 231.

into the dramatic action, given Sir Toby's intent of using a catch to "rouse the night owl" Malvolio.²⁶ Furthermore, regardless of their varying status, they are all very much 'acting the knave', playing at exactly that which Malvolio denounces them as – though as Aguecheek remarks, fooling comes more naturally to some than others.²⁷ The composite meaning is what draws the audience into the conspiracy, to which the catch itself, like "The Mousetrap" in *Hamlet* (c. 1600), serves – in the case of *Twelfth Night*, a mockery of the puritanical Malvolio. To this end, the staging of the catch – three men loudly singing at each other to shut up – is a resounding success and this comedic subplot is not without seriousness, mirroring, as it did, "perhaps the most ominous conflict of Elizabeth's reign."²⁸

In *Bonduca*, the irony of "Jack thou'rt a Toper" – that it is Jack, who presumably proposed cutting the night short, whom the speaker calls a drunkard – is similarly compounded by the irony of the catch's relationship to the dramatic action; there is also something tragic in these starving men singing "I am free and so are you", after being called slaves and threatened with hanging by a Roman officer in the previous scene and being put in halters and threatened with hanging by a British officer in the following scene.²⁹ Here, unlike in *Twelfth Night*, the catch's "strong potential to command the complicity of the audience" serves not to draw the audience into a conspiracy on the stage, but rather serves to draw the audience into the imagination of these three soldiers; the audience's search for meaning – to find a world ulterior to the one presented – mirrors the soldiers' own escapist fantasies.³⁰

Each of Purcell's four stage catches are quite distinct, as are their respective dramatic functions. "My Wife has a Tongue" is the only catch to seemingly be the product of a character's own contrivance;³¹ the catch "in praise of Punch" in *The Richmond Heiress* is performed by "singers" who have no

26 William Shakespeare, "Twelfth Night, Or What You Will" [1601], in *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, Basingstoke 2007, pp. 650–696, p. 664 (2.3.43–45).

27 Ibid. (2.3.61–63).

28 J. Simmons, "A Source for Shakespeare's Malvolio. The Elizabethan Controversy with the Puritans", in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36 / 3 (1973), pp. 181–201, p. 181.

29 *Bonduca. Or, the British Heroine*, pp. 12, 18.

30 A similar fantasy is to be found in *Henry V*: "Would I were in an ale-house in London: I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety." Shakespeare, "The Life of Henry the Fifth" [1599], in Bate and Rasmussen (eds.) 2007, *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, pp. 1032–1096, p. 1056 (3.2.10–11).

31 Edward Ravenscroft, *The English Lawyer*, London 1678, p. 38.

other part in the play;³² “At the close of the Ev’ning” is the most particular to its dramatic setting;³³ and “Jack thou’rt a Toper” is the most incongruous with the dramatic action.

While the catch in *Bonduca* is both put to the most effective use and is the most musically interesting of the four, they all share a jovial light-heartedness, which reacts to – and is reacted to by – its dramatic environment: The violinists who accompany Cupes’ catch in *The English Lawyer* are beaten by his wife (the one with the tongue) for their insolence and inability to keep time; the catch in *The Richmond Heiress* and the punch it praises serve unsuccessfully to prevent “brawling and quarrelling” and bring the listeners “lovingly together”; and the guards’ premature celebration of the watch’s end in *The Knight of Malta* is cunningly punished.³⁴ In other words, each example serves as a piece of ritual theatre, conferring group shared identity – whether through exclusion or inclusion, mock or otherwise – and transporting the performers, though, importantly, not the on-stage listeners. This function of the catch in staged drama reflects that which it held off the stage, most significantly in the typically well-lubricated and all-male institutions that formed around the genre and which were becoming increasingly popular at the turn of the century.

III. The social function of the catch and its theatricality

By way of conclusion, I would like to argue that the theatricality of the catch – most notable in the dialogue, split-dialogue and semi-dramatic catches – had a specific use value for the institutions which formed around the genre; a use that, in turn, influenced the symbolic meaning of the catch when used in staged drama. Centring theatricality when looking at the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century catch explains the aptness of the genre for the peculiar goals of these institutions.

32 Thomas D’Urfey, *The Richmond Heiress. Or, a Woman Once in the Right*, London 1693, p. 33.

33 Playford (ed.) 1701, *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*, no. 88. Given the similarly onomatopoeic texts, it would seem the catch was supposed to reflect the watch’s song that it likely replaced. Beaumont and Fletcher, “The Knight of Malta”, in *The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher*, vol. 8, ed. Henry Weber, Edinburgh 1812, p. 314.

34 As there is no record of the revival of *The Knight of Malta*, in which Purcell’s catch appears, it is impossible to say if the reaction to the watch’s song was altered in any way. Cf. Price 1984, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, p. 203; Sprague 1965, *Beaumont and Fletcher on the Restoration Stage*, p. 67 and Squire 1904, “Purcell’s Dramatic Music”, p. 533.

The preface to the fourth edition of Henry Playford's *Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion* (1701) and its prefixed eulogisms illustrate the priorities of these societies. Playford claims a twofold purpose to the catch collection: "Persons who give themselves the liberty of an Evenings [*sic*] Entertainment with their Friends, may exchange the Expence they shall be at in being Sociable, with the Knowledge they shall acquire from it". To this end, Playford "prevail'd with his Acquaintance and others in this City, to enter into several Clubs Weekly" and provide music, instruction and articles to be observed as "standing Rules, which each respective Society is to go by"³⁵.

Despite Playford's high-minded rhetoric, the eulogism written by "T. B." lays bare the priorities of such societies:

So, Now this is something that's like to be Taking,
 For Musick's the Devil without Merry-making.
 A Pox on lean Scraping, and Thrumming, and Trilling!
 What delight can it give, without Stuffing and Swilling?
 [...]
 Friend *Harry*, thy Fore-sight prevents this Abuse,
 Making that which has sweetness, be likewise of Use;
 As the Glass handed forward, puts forward the Song,
 And gives life to the Senses, and strength to the Tongue.³⁶

The use that T. B. values in Playford's catch collection is further clarified by the poem appearing on the title page of Playford's *Supplement of New Catches*, published the following year:

Short's a *Catch* united in its Parts,
 And leav's a *Lasting* Pleasure in our Hearts.
 As it dispells our Sorrows, and destroys
 Th' impediment to Friendship's lawful Joys.
 While *Bacchus* with *Apollo* jointly Reigns,
 And *Rapture* fills our *Soul*, and *Wine* our *Veins*.³⁷

35 Playford (ed.) 1701, *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*, sig. B1^{r-v}. Hawkins claims that Playford's project had "some success in promoting the process of catch-singing in and about London and also at Oxford". John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols., London 1776, vol. 4, p. 477–478.

36 Playford (ed.) 1701, *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*, sig. B2^r (original emphasis). Identified by Hawkins as Tom Brown. Hawkins 1776, *A General History*, vol. 4, p. 478.

37 Henry Playford (ed.), *Supplement of New Catches, to The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*, [London] 1702 (italics inverted).

The catch's capacity to "destroy" that "impediment to Friendship's lawful Joys" – namely, inhibition – and "strengthen the tongue" is the product, on the one hand, of what Lindley described in its theatrical context as the catch's "conspiratorial combination" and, on the other hand, of its dramatic discourse – that is, role-play and acted dialogue. The listeners of the catch enter into fellowship in their acquisition of the catch's esoteric meaning; the singers likewise enter communion in acting out various forms of interpersonal conversation (jovial, romantic, confrontational), either with the other catch-singers, imagined listeners, or the audience directly.³⁸ It is to this purpose – the catch as musical ice breaker – that the genre's theatricality, even outside the dialogue, split-dialogue and semi-dramatic catches, becomes essential.

The "pale faces" of the catch "Pale Faces, stand by", first published in 1688, are observers, summoned by the singers, whose gaze and countenance they mock, others against which they may define themselves ("we look like our wine, you, worse than our scores").³⁹ The imagined contrast of this direct address to spectators serves to strengthen the collective identity of those present, further breaking down that "impediment to Friendship's lawful Joys". However, whether the "pale faces" are indeed those same bodies listening and watching the catch being performed, turning the catch into a mock intragroup confrontation (i.e. in the vein of "Pox on you" or "Jack thou'rt a Toper"), is a dramaturgical decision not without consequence.

The performative communicativity of the catch is further evidenced by the genesis of Purcell's "To all lovers of music". In John Carr's *Comes Amoris, or, the Companion of Love* (1682), this "Catch by way of Epistle" serves as a musical preface.⁴⁰ It is telling that Carr's mind turned to the catch – in what is otherwise a collection of accompanied songs – for this early example of a musical advertisement; the marketing benefit of commanding "the complicity of an audience" need not be expanded upon. Aside from the catch's commercial aspects however, it is worth noting that the preface is a direct address to the reader / listener and it is here once again that the catch's

38 This dialogue may even extend between catches, e. g. between Henry Aldrich's "Tom Jolly's Nose" and John Blow's "Answer to Tom Jolly's Nose". John Playford (ed.), *Catch That Catch Can. Or, the Second Part of the Musical Companion*, London 1685, nos. 4–5.

39 Playford (ed.) "1701, *The Second Book of the Pleasant Musical Companion*, no. 23.

40 John Carr (ed.), *Comes Amoris. Or, the Companion of Love*, London 1682, sig. A2^v.

performativity serves dramatic ends: Carr delivers his sales pitch through the catch singers, speaking directly to his potential customers.

Though the catches presented in this paper exemplify one composer's attempts to respond to a socially-oriented conception of the genre in providing in it a theatrical outlet, Purcell's catches are far from anomalous. That the catch was constantly rediscovered, explored and probed by composers and performers throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and even into the nineteenth century was the result not of a general interest in part-song, but rather a specific interest in this sort of part-song, in which theatricality (in the broadest possible sense) played a primary role. It is, in part, a failure to recognise this critical aspect of the genre which left so many commentators confounded by the catch's perennial popularity.