I’ll tune my pipe to playful notes . . . And hail the one I love: “Kate of Aberdeen” in relation to Mr. Bingley’s sentiments in Pride and Prejudice

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John Cunningham’s “Kate of Aberdeen,” (1777), gives further insight into Mr. Bingley’s interest in Jane Bennet in Pride and Prejudice (1813) (Burns 303). “Kate of Aberdeen” can be found in The Blackbird, a publication that provides for the regency music lover a collection of songs of predominantly pastoral subject matter. In the poem the speaker describes a “grove” (line 18) on the last evening of April, where he waits in anticipation “till morn unbar her golden gate, / And give the promised May” (11-12). It becomes increasingly apparent that the awaited May is a metaphor for the speaker’s anticipation for the moment that Kate of Aberdeen will reciprocate his love. Evidence of this can be seen throughout the poem. For example, he devotes the entire second stanza to a description of “nymphs and swains” who “wait, / in rosy chaplets gay” (9-10) for the beginning of May, which they insist is “not half so fragrant, half so fair / as Kate of Aberdeen” (15-16). The mention of the nymphs and swains, which are often associated with promiscuity, awaiting something that he associates with love confirms that the speaker is hoping for a form of yielding on Kate’s part. He continues to exalt his love until the end of the poem, when he partakes in a “festal dance that shepherds lead” (27) as they celebrate the fact that “May in morning robes draw nigh / and claim a virgin queen” (29-30). Considering these quotes and the metaphor between Kate’s love and May, one can assume that the speaker uses dance as an expression of the reckless abandonment that one feels at the moment of yielding to love.

This last scene of the poem correlates with the balls in which Bingley and Jane conduct much of their courtship, and the speaker’s sentiments in relation to this dance gives further insight into the character of Mr. Bingley. It is a pre-established notion in Pride and Prejudice that “to be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley’s heart were entertained” (Austin 38). So, while considering this consensus, it is not hard to believe that Bingley’s love of dancing, particularly his love of dancing with Jane, has a major impact on his love for her in the first volume. However, it is also suggested that dancing is merely a means of furthering conversation between young people, which is an avenue for falling in love. When taking “Kate of Aberdeen” into consideration, dancing is not only a method of expressing sentiments but an actual outlet of feeling. Within the poem dance is a celebration of yielding to emotion, and similarly, Bingley uses dance as an excuse to lose control over his feelings towards Jane. While dancing with his love, Bingley is oblivious to all other distractions. In fact, during his ball Elizabeth notices that while her family is acting ridiculous “some of the exhibition had escaped his notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be distressed by the folly which he witnessed” (142). It is not until he is not dancing with Jane, and is thus in control of his emotions, that he allows people to dissuade him by use of reason from pursuing Jane. Through the dance and the music, Bingley “hail[s] the maid [he] love[s]” (20).
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