

The Three Ravens

A folk ballad recorded in the songbook *Melismata* compiled by Thomas Ravenscroft and published in 1611, although thought to be older than that. Different versions have been recorded over the years. The ballad is about three birds talking about what and when to eat. They come across a slain knight who is very lucky because his hounds, hawks and wife care for his dead body.

There were three ravens sat on a tree,
Down a down hey down hey down.
They were as black as they might be,
With a down.
Then one of them said to his mate:
"Where shall we our breakfast take?"
With a down derry derry derry down down.

Behold, alas, in yon greenfield,
Down a down hey down hey down.
There lies a knight slain under his shield;
With a down.
His hounds they lie down at his feet,
So well they can their master keep.
With a down derry derry derry down down.

His hawks they fly so eagerly,
Down a down hey down hey down.
There is no fowl dare come him nigh
With a down.
But down there comes a fallow doe,
As great with young as she might go.
With a down derry derry derry down down.

She lifted up his bloody head,
Down a down hey down hey down.
And kissed his wounds that were so red.
With a down.
She got him up upon her back
And carried him to an earthen lake
With a down derry derry derry down down.

She buried him before the prime,
She was dead herself ere evensong time.
With a down.
Now God send every gentleman
Such hounds, such hawks and such a leman.
With a down derry derry derry down down.