

INTRODUCTION

The political broadside ballads of the seventeenth century were the cheapest and most accessible of political print forms in the early modern period, both informing and reflecting the views of the broader political nation. By turns polemical, satirical, despairing, mocking and angry, these songs – printed on one side of a single sheet and usually between 14 and 24 verses in length – offer fascinating perspectives on a tumultuous political and cultural landscape. The ballad titles listed in the *Political Broadside Ballads of Seventeenth-Century England: A Critical Bibliography* (henceforward *PBB*) were all printed and published between 1639 and 1689: a period that comprised the horrors of civil war, the experimental disruptions of interregnum regimes and the beginning of a long-running series of wars with the Dutch and other expansionist powers in the New World. The restoration of the monarchy did little to heal the scars of the civil wars and soon religious and political divisions were deepened by the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, which saw the emergence of ‘party’ politics. The so-called ‘Glorious Revolution’ brought with it a new civil war in Ireland (which, like the tunes, lasted centuries), and European war against what balladeers invariably considered the eternal enemy: France.¹ No member of the national body politic, man or woman, however lowly or young, remained untouched by these events. Nor did they suffer in silence. Blithely ignoring the old maxim ‘meddle not with state affairs’, a thousand and more distinct broadside ballad titles helped them describe or comment upon the social, political and religious divisions of this intensely traumatic period.

Printed in London for the most part, ballads were multi-media print products: many were illustrated and all were intended for oral – though not necessarily musical – transmission. They were so ubiquitous and unremarkable to early modern people that they rarely bothered to mention them – a matter of some frustration for the historian. They were extremely vulnerable to bad usage as they were pasted or pinned up on walls or posts, folded and pocketed to destruction, or ended their lives as tops for jars, in household privies or as printer’s waste used for binding or overprinting. Yet, despite their topicality and the ephemerality of their material form, thousands have survived for hundreds

of years, sometimes only in the barest scrap, bringing us songs about contemporary heroes and villains, war and peace, 'Right, Religion and Law'.

What are 'Political Broadside Ballads' and why Catalogue Them?

From the outset of this research project, my broader intellectual concern was to find a correspondence between the lowest form of literature (the broadside ballad) and the highest level of politics: between the ordinary subject and the state. Ballads on 'affairs of state' would usually imply topical songs based around the four axes of 1. royal events; 2. military affairs; 3. execution and punishment of traitors and rebels; and 4. foreign events, especially where Protestantism was felt to be under threat from Catholic powers and Christians under threat from the Turk. In *PBB*, however, the term 'political' is interpreted more broadly to include ballads that commented on social justice or political mores; on questions of loyalty; on religious divisions; on state religious policy and on controversies over professions of faith (but not traditional 'godly' ballads, such as those discussed by Tessa Watt).² In addition, a large number of military recruiting ballads have been included, many of which were formulated as love songs.³ Ballads that mention soldiers are almost always included, because they were always employed by political authorities. Sailors' songs present a conundrum, however, as while on the one hand many refer to the civilian profession of sailors in the merchant fleet, on the other hand naval wars were frequently sparked off by trade interests and both Royal Navy and merchant fleets shared the constant risk of armed combat with foreign ships and operated with an enhanced patriotic ethos. To solve this, ballads that relate in any way to naval campaigns are included, as are sailors' ballads that refer to patriotic loyalty or foreign policy events.

While the compilation of this reference work has often seemed a somewhat antiquarian task, the need for such a resource became clear during research carried out for my doctoral thesis.⁴ Almost none of the usual bibliographical backup on which the literary scholar or historian hopes to rely was available. Broadside ballads are scattered across the Anglophone world in disparate collections, not all of which have been catalogued, making knowledge of and accessibility to them a problem. Moreover, as a subgenre, political broadside ballads have suffered from a long period of scholarly neglect. As a doctoral student, I tussled with a historiographical literature that dated almost entirely from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with the notable exception of work by historians Tim Harris, Mark Jenner and, for a slightly later period, Paul Monod).⁵ The lack of plentiful or reliable scholarship on these texts by modern historians, literary scholars or bibliographers means that the catalogues of holding libraries often differ wildly in dating the same edition of a broadside ballad or, more commonly, they simply remain silent on the matter – retreating behind the ominous and unhelpful [s.l.], [s.n.] and [n.d.] – resulting in an exasperated scholar and a mystified student.

The broadside genre has always presented intransigent problems of cataloguing, storage and preservation for hard-pressed librarians and archivists who must eke out limited resources of space and time. In the past, library cataloguers have naturally turned to established bibliographic and literary authorities such as Wing/ESTC, NUC or Foxon.⁶ However, where these authorities list ballad titles at all, they are frequently misleading: failing to cite reasons for their incorrect (sometimes impossible) surmises about dating and silently drawing upon the dubious opinions of nineteenth-century enthusiasts such as Joseph W. Ebsworth, James Lindsay, Earl of Crawford, and William Hazlitt, or early twentieth-century scholars of literature and history, especially Hyder Rollins and Sir C. H. Firth, who could never have dreamed of the facilities available to scholars today.

One example from the Chetham Library catalogue for *The Ballad of the Cloak* (PBB No: 402X) offers a useful case in point. The detailed Chetham Library entry reads:

Date of publication from Wing CD-ROM, 1996. 'Satire on the Presbyterians' – NUC pre-1956 imprints. Originally published in 1660 as 'The cloaks knavery'. Foxon gives the publication date of 172–? The Bodleian Ballads Database gives the range of publication dates, 1711–1769.

This conscientious summary of bibliographical opinion is both confusing and ultimately incorrect. In fact, as the PBB entry shows, the ballad was first published in 1663 under the title *The Tyrannical Usurpation OF THE INDEPENDENT CLOAK OVER THE EPISCOPAL GOVVN*. The ballad text, with minor alterations to the last verse, was then reissued in at least twelve editions from 1679 to the early eighteenth century, mostly under the title *The Ballad of the CLOAK: Or, The Cloak's Knavery*. (The Chetham copy is from the twelfth edition.) The case of mistaken identity began at the Beinecke Library when, under the auspices of Donald Wing, an unusually small quarto broadside, anonymous, undated and entitled *The Cloaks Knavery* (with a contemporary inscription 'Ballat Cloakt Knavery' on the verso) was inscribed in pencil by a busy librarian: '1660?'. While, like most copies of the ballad, the text referred to Jack Catch (or Ketch) the hangman, who was not appointed until late in 1663, the Beinecke sheet also has a printed marginal note: 'The Practice of the present Whigs'. This would immediately have told a more careful reader that the earliest possible date of publication was 1678.⁷ Copies of the ballad are held by many of the world's great libraries: the British Library; Cambridge's University and Pepys libraries; the National Library of Scotland; Oxford's Bodleian; Harvard's Houghton; Yale's Beinecke and the Huntington libraries, yet, dependent as they are on Wing as a reference point, none of these authorities are currently able to offer any more accurate an account of its publishing history.

While many ballad titles, editions and copies are not entered in Wing/ESTC at all, all too often, those that are entered currently convey incorrect and unhelpful information. At the same time, having now located, as far as possible, all the known editions and copies of over a thousand ballad titles, it is often unclear to which edition or copy a Wing entry refers, as libraries often hold several copies and editions of the same title. For this reason Wing/ESTC numbers have not been included in *PBB* entries. Each individual entry in *PBB* has been newly researched and each title, edition and copy described and located by shelfmark. References are made in the Notes to contemporary publications, where these are connected, and to printed editions, where ballads have been discussed. Reasons for decisions about dating are given and, where necessary, discussed, while the entire texts of all ballads and editions are fully indexed. Therefore, the entries in *PBB* supersede those of Wing/ESTC. Moreover, as many library catalogues are now updating and improving their own entries independently of Wing/ESTC, they often provide a better reference point. Where *PBB* dates differ markedly from those suggested by holding libraries (current at time of going to press), or other authorities, this is indicated in the entry under Notes.

Given the ever-increasing calls for library resources and time, and the low regard in which texts like these have been held for much of the last century, it seemed unlikely that this bleak situation would change very quickly. Yet, since beginning my research project in 1998, the scholarly appeal and status of the broadside ballad has changed radically. Ironically, thanks to the technological revolution of the digital age, the most traditional and neglected of print forms has become the hottest new property. Many thousands of single-sheet works, especially broadside ballads, have been digitized, suddenly making them one of the most freely available primary print sources on the internet. This has done wonders for accessibility and, as a result, the cataloguing of ballad sources is constantly improving. Yet there is still no agreement to standardize the cataloguing of these items or to share information across holding libraries, which would enable them to offer more transparent, extensive and up-to-date information about provenance and opinion on bibliographical matters.

Selection, Scope and Arrangement of *PBB*: Titles, Typographies and Chronologies

PBB entries are arranged first in chronological and then in typographical order. A detailed outline of the eleven elements in each entry, explaining the sources and criteria used is given in Notes on Entries below, but a discussion of the rationale behind the arrangement of titles in *PBB*, and the processes involved in location and selection of the ballads included, follows.

In order to make *PBB* as comprehensive as possible, it was first necessary to track down the histories of seventeenth and eighteenth century collections, and their current whereabouts. This called for a close reading of ballad editors from the eighteenth century to the present day, especially Bishop Percy, Francis Childs, Joseph Ebsworth, William Chappell, James Lindsay, Earl of Crawford, Harold Brooks, Hyder Rollins, Sir Charles Firth, Thomas Wright, W. W. Wilkins, Charles Mackay and Claude Simpson.⁸ Some of these men were the last to see ballad sheets that have since deteriorated or been lost, or early modern collections in their original state. The eighteenth-century ballad revival and the nineteenth-century growth of interest in folklore saw the founding of ballad societies and concerted efforts being made by a host of amateur scholars to locate, collect and print many hundreds of ballad sheets.⁹ The downside of this Victorian enthusiasm for balladry was the competitive spirit it engendered among a leisured and well-connected class and newly founded or newly energized universities and institutions, especially in the US, that were keen to develop world-class collections. This led to the wholesale auctioning of private holdings and the breaking up of contemporary collections; it also encouraged some well-bred stealing from public collections (such as the Bodleian), and even to the forging of ballad songs, so that some sheets, even whole volumes, are now lost, while others never really existed.¹⁰ Having located, as far as possible, all the major ballad collections, the selection of appropriate titles for inclusion in *PBB* was made by reviewing the many thousands of ballads they contained, wherever possible through direct access to the sheets. Without doubt, some copies or perhaps titles have been missed and I would be grateful to hear of any omissions or errors, as an updated and extended version of this catalogue, preferably online, may be possible in due course.

Titles

Establishing a broadside ballad title, and its original date of publication, is fraught with difficulty. Even 'topical' songs were frequently reissued, sometimes years after their original publication date, with minor or major changes in title, text, imprint and/or illustrations. For example, should the second edition of a ballad, reissued with exactly the same text and illustrations except for the significant exchange of the words 'James II' for 'William III', be considered a *new* ballad title? Should a ballad reissued with a complete change of title, but with only minor changes made to the text of the final verse, be counted separately? Binding and collecting practices can also make identification difficult. For example, 'traditional' black-letter ballads were often published in two parts, printed side by side on the recto of a single sheet (a practice that decreased from the late 1670s onwards). This led a few collectors, such as the Earl of Roxburghe, to cut their sheets in two so they could be easily pasted into books, but it also

meant they occasionally got out of order, or were lost. If the two parts of a single ballad-broadside are held by two different libraries, should they be counted as one ballad title, or two? Does a scrap of just two verses count as a ballad at all? Further problems also arise: should 'verso ballads' – printed on the reverse of another ballad perhaps years later – be recorded as one title or two? What about sheets with two ballads printed on the same side? What about ballad titles that appear in the Stationers' Registers, but for which no known copy exists: can anything be gained by listing them? And, finally, are ballads that were circulated in manuscript, or for which only a manuscript copy exists, to be catalogued as ballad titles?

Answers to all these problems had to balance the need to acknowledge new texts while at the same time avoiding an unwieldy proliferation of entry numbers and cross-references. A ballad 'title' in *PBB* is taken to refer to all editions of a printed song, where the vast majority of the song text remains the same over time, and regardless of any changes to what the ballad was called. Subsequent inclusions, omissions and later editions (involving minor changes to the text, imprint, title, format or illustrations) are fully described under Copies/Editions in the entry for each 'title'. Parts one and two of ballads, wherever located, are not catalogued separately unless one part has been lost. All scraps have been identified and have been entered as a damaged title. Verso ballads count as separate individual titles, but when different ballads are printed together on the same side of a sheet, they are treated as one 'title'. Registered titles that appear to be 'political', but for which no printed copy is known, have been included in the bibliography. Although book historians point out that publishers occasionally registered titles that were never published, this seems much less likely in the case of broadsides, which did not expose a publisher to the same financial risks or difficulties of production as a book. Indeed, non-registration of ballads was a much more common practice. Moreover, the inclusion of these titles gives a much more balanced view of political balladry, especially for periods, such as 1639–40 and the 1650s, when the survival rate of sheets is poor. Finally, many more songs and libels on affairs of state than are listed in *PBB* were published in anthologies, distributed in manuscript, copied into commonplace books or rumoured in State Papers and contemporary histories: these have only been included, or referenced in entries under the Notes, if they can be linked to the publication of a broadside. Taking all the above selection criteria into account, *PBB* lists 1,055 political titles that were certainly published between 1639 and 1689, and over 1,400 ballad editions published between 1639 and *c.* 1720. Editions published after the early eighteenth century have not usually been listed.