

Relationships in Eighteenth-Century Ballads – Negotiation, Ideology, Imagination

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ABSTRACT. The eighteenth century in England is not well represented in the standard ballad editions, but there were many printed ballads presenting a wide range of human relationships, marital and familial, romantic and sexual. Scholars have argued variously that such ballads enabled the negotiation of real-life relationships, that they embodied the prevailing patriarchal ideology of the time, and that they allowed their audience to imagine situations outside of their everyday experience. Ballads depicting several different sorts of relationships are described here. While song texts do describe social relationships, they do so in a way that means real social relationships should not be read back from them in isolation from the external data.

KEYWORDS: ballads, 18th century, relationships, ideology, imagination.

The eighteenth century is difficult territory for students of the ballad in England because perceptions of ballad culture have been so skewed by Francis James Child's criteria of selection, and in particular his bias away from sources in cheap print (Child 1882–98; Brown 2010, 2011). One consequence of this is that there is a core repertoire of narrative ballads that were printed and reprinted in broadside and chapbook formats but which are only marginally represented in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Charting what contemporary booksellers termed 'old ballads' (even if some of them were not particularly old) is a major undertaking in itself, but one estimate is that something like 90 per cent of narrative ballads that were current in eighteenth-century England are not represented in Child's edition (author's unpublished research). The purpose of this study is to look at a few examples from this corpus, with particular attention to their ostensibly realistic representations of human relationships, marital and familial, romantic and sexual (which requires a good deal of plot summary). All of the ballads discussed were listed in the 1754 and 1764 catalogues of the

Dacey / Marshall firm¹, which dominated the street literature trade in London in the mid-century.

Take a typical ballad of the mid-century, such as *The Northamptonshire Tragedy*². Two noblemen with vast estates in Northamptonshire each had a daughter, one beautiful, the other less so. A noble knight came courting the former, but her father refused permission to marry because she was too young. The knight then made her pregnant, but scorned her when she pleaded with him to marry her and instead courted and married her less beautiful neighbour. The beautiful daughter then went away to her aunt's where she gave birth to a baby boy, who subsequently died. Then she dressed in disguise as a friar in order to beg alms from the knight who had deserted her, and to create the opportunity to shoot him with a pistol. But then, following a coach accident, her disguise was discovered and she confessed what she had done, and the knight's new wife pressed for her to be sentenced to death. Her last dying speech warns parents not to deny their children's wishes in marriage, maidens not to be taken in by deceitful men, men not to betray innocent women:

First Parents have a care, if e're your Children dear,
Think fit to marry, do not them deny,
For fear that love at last, should their glory blast,
As may be seen by this sad destiny.

Next Maidens all beware, and have a special care,
Of Mens deceitful Tongues, that flattering train,
For if you do consent, to your great discontent,
When they have you betray'd, they will you disdain.

Likewise false Men I say, beware how you betray,
Poor Innocents, it may be your ruin;
When love does turn to hate, the malice is so great,
That your destruction does your fancy prove.

Much of the extant evidence for the reception of ballads at this time comes from autobiographical accounts of persons born into the labouring classes. By way

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1 *A Catalogue of Maps, Prints, Copy-Books, Drawing-Books, &c., Histories, Old Ballads, Broad-sheet and Other Patters, Garlands, &c. Printed and Sold by William and Cluer Dacey, at their Warehouse, opposite the South Door of Bow Church in Bow Church-yard, London, ESTC T188172; A Catalogue of Maps, Prints, Copy-Books, Drawing-Books, Histories, Old Ballads, Patters, Collections, &c. Printed and Sold by Cluer Dacey and Richard Marshall, at the Printing Office, in Aldermary Church-yard, London, ESTC T162594.*

2 *The Northamptonshire Tragedy, ESTC T43156.*

of a few examples, when he was a young man, the writer Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809), son of a shoemaker who fell into difficulties and became a pedlar, came across ballads pasted on the walls of cottages and alehouses, which, he says, ‘were at that time the learning, and often, no doubt, the delight of the vulgar’ (Holcroft 1816: I, 235–236). The satirist and editor William Gifford (1756–1826), born into straitened circumstances in rural Devon, learned to read and became acquainted via his mother with ‘the literature of a country town, which, about half a century ago, amounted to little more than what was disseminated by itinerant ballad-singers, or rather, readers’, and ‘acquired much curious knowledge of Catskin, and the Golden Bull, and the Bloody Gardener, and many other histories equally instructive and amusing’ (Gifford 1802: ii–iii). Later, the radical Samuel Bamford (1788–1872) described the songs, ballads, tales, and so forth displayed in the windows of the Swindells bookshop in Manchester, which he eagerly read for the wonders they contained (Bamford 1905: I, 87). There is a pattern here, of intelligent young men born into the labouring classes finding in cheap ballads and chapbooks a wealth of early literary experiences and developing their own sense of imaginative wonder. Of necessity, the writers of such accounts were exceptional (and were predominantly men – we simply know less, if anything, about women in this regard), but the titles they mention were, from surviving bibliographical evidence, not exceptional at all.

It is not impossible that noblemen of vast estates and their families would have come across printed matter like *The Northamptonshire Tragedy*, but they would hardly have constituted the target market for the booksellers who printed the ballad or for the small shops and itinerant hawkers through which it was sold in town and country. Rather, that market lay among the sort of people represented by the likes of Holcroft, Gifford, and Bamford – that is to say, among the middling ranks and the labouring classes. That social sector is not at all easy to define but will have included people like small farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen, and artisans, and the journeymen, labourers, apprentices, and servants who worked for them, and their families and children. The ballad audience might have owned property on a small scale, but might equally have been property-less; the only initial requirement was that they could afford to part with a halfpenny or a penny for a ballad sheet from time to time. This may well have excluded the very poor who could not afford to spend their limited resources in this way, but they could still have heard ballads in the streets and at markets, fairs, and other social gatherings.

It is difficult to see that a story about love, sex, and revenge among the landed nobility as related in *The Northamptonshire Tragedy* spoke in anything like a literal way to the social and economic structures, family and romantic relationships, of a ballad audience primarily comprising the middling ranks and labouring classes. Folklorists sometimes assert that ballads express the cultural preoccupations of

a group, in which case *The Northamptonshire Tragedy* must appear problematic – at least, that is, if the middling ranks and labouring classes can in any meaningful sense be described as a group. Nevertheless, from time to time historians have invoked ballads as evidence for cultural and social attitudes.

The most recent intervention has been by Christopher Marsh who discusses a corpus of what he calls ‘hit songs’ of the seventeenth century that depict marital relationships (Marsh 2018). Marsh holds some historians to account for their selective use of ballad evidence to depict early modern perceptions of marriage (lascivious, scolding, or murderous wives, henpecked or cuckolded men) and instead proposes that attitudes to marital relationships are better represented by a selection of songs that were supposedly especially popular, in many cases over a lengthy period of time, according to certain defined criteria³. Among this selection of ballads there is an emphasis on the resolution of crisis through reconciliation (ibid.: 85). Marsh goes on to propose that ballads, mostly written by men, were mostly consumed by women, that they embodied a negotiation between male didacticism and female taste, and that they allowed and encouraged women to appropriate them to their own readings of marital relationships (ibid.: 85–87). Marsh’s study is a useful corrective which draws attention to the sheer range of relationships that can be found in, and read into, a select corpus of ballads at any particular time.

Nevertheless, ballad stories are works of the imagination (even historical ballads are rooted as much in legend as in documentary fact), and they do not depict episodes straight out of early modern domestic life. One way around the conundrum posed by the evident gap between the sorts of relationships that are depicted in ballads and what we actually know of the fairly conservative social life of early modern England has been explored by Vic Gammon in a study of songs about sexual encounters spanning the two and a half centuries before 1850 (Gammon 1982). Citing studies from social history, historical sociology, and historical demography, Gammon concludes that the situations described in these songs are unlikely to have been everyday occurrences, that their central concern is with contravention of social norms, and that while the audience could interpret the songs in accordance with such things as their own gender, status, and social experience, at a deeper level they worked in the realm of ideology, by reproducing the attitudes and assumptions (*habitus*) underlying the prevailing patriarchal order (ibid.: 235–238).

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 3 The criteria are numbers of known editions and their distribution through time, numbers of surviving copies, entry in the Stationers’ Register, survival beyond the seventeenth century, and persistence of song titles as the names for tunes (Marsh 2018: 68–69). Described as ‘defensible rather than definitive’, it should be said that in bibliographical terms the foundations of this selection are quite shaky.

These are not everyday experiences, then, but stories from a modest kind of imaginative literature, with its own narrative, poetic, and melodic traditions and conventions. Ballad poetry can therefore be understood as providing a cheap and simple way for its audience to extend, imaginatively, and to reflect upon, their own horizons of experience. Jonathan Rose has interpreted the working-class experience of high culture in terms of appropriation (citing Roger Chartier) and framing (citing Erving Goffman), as the ‘organization of experience’, on an individual as well as a group basis (Rose 2010: 6). As a corollary, the interpretation through ideology is just one particularly rigid frame, which would constrain the versatility that Rose goes on to find in evidence about working people’s responses to culture (ibid.: 8–9). Rose is writing primarily about a period later than the mid-eighteenth century and at first blush his interpretive approach might seem to be asking too much of ballad poetry, which in literary terms is often conventional and repetitive, and which frequently seems to head towards a trite and moralizing conclusion (as in *The Northamptonshire Tragedy* quoted above). However, in Rose’s period cheap reprints of what has come to be regarded as canonical literature were widely available; prior to that time ballads and chapbooks comprised the bulk of the imaginative literature readily available to much of the population (St Clair 2004: 339–356; this account is overly dogmatic, but for the present purpose describes the situation well enough).

Reminiscences like those of Holcroft, Gifford, and Bamford do suggest that cheap print could fire the imagination of eighteenth-century readers in much the same way as in a later period. So it does not seem unreasonable to view the ballads through Rose’s lens, and certainly it is necessary to allow a versatility of interpretation when thinking about the target market for the booksellers, hawkers, and ballad singers. The ballad audience was heterogeneous, not just socially and economically but in terms of a whole range of factors such as age, gender, religion, location, and, of course, temperament and life experience. It is scarcely to be expected that their responses to ballad stories would be anything like uniform.

These different interpretive perspectives – which can be conveniently labelled as negotiation, ideology, and imagination – are not necessarily incompatible and it will be useful to keep all three in mind in what follows. The remainder of this paper describes a small selection of the different kinds of human relationships that are depicted in some of the core ballads of the eighteenth century.

Regardless of its social setting, the beginning of *The Northamptonshire Tragedy* touches on a perennial theme of what Malcolm Laws labelled ‘family opposition to lovers’ (Laws 1957: 15–17). In this instance, the father’s opposition to the knight’s initial courtship does not seem either unreasonable or particularly unkind:

He to her Father went, and asked his Consent,
 Immediately to him he thus did say;
 She is too young indeed. It must be thus agreed,
 If that you have her you for her must stay.

With all my heart he cried, if she is my Bride;
 I do not mind for her how long I stay;
 [']Tis she I do adore, and shall for evermore.
 With kisses sweet they pass'd the time away.

More typically, family opposition drives the entire action of *The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty*⁴. A young man of noble birth fell in love with a shepherd's daughter, to the consternation of her parents:

His Parents they were all of high degree,
 They said, She is no match at all for thee.
 If you'd our blessing have, grant us but what we crave,
 And wed with none but whom we shall agree.

Dear son, for you we have chosen out a bride,
 With store of gold, and beautiful beside;
 Of a temper kind and free, she is the girl for me,
 But not a shepherd's daughter of mean degree.

And if by us you'll not be ruled or led,
 You from our presence shall be banished:
 No more we will you own to be our only son:
 Then let our will be done, to end the str[if]e.

The son, however, was determined to remain true to his sweetheart, despite her poverty, and so his mother bribed her gardener to murder her. A truth-telling dove (this particular ballad's distinguishing motif) then revealed to the young man what had happened and he confronted his mother, saying that if what he had found out was true he would kill himself as well. His mother became distracted and admitted her crime; her son killed himself and the lovers were buried together in a single tomb; and the 'bloody gardener', whose role had been entirely instrumental, was hanged in chains.

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 4 *The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty; or, The Shepherd's Daughter Betrayed*, ESTC T207045. See further Atkinson 2019.

The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty is just one of a whole swathe of ballads that depict courtship and marriage, and often murder, through the tension between social and economic considerations on the one hand, and romantic idealism on the other. Although at one time social historians (following the work of Lawrence Stone) tended to depict that tension as differentiating the marital behaviour of the aristocracy, or the propertied classes, from that of the middling sort, subsequent research has tended to the view that a mix of social and economic pragmatism on the one hand, and romantic idealism on the other, operated at most levels of early modern society. The middling ranks of eighteenth-century England were certainly acutely aware of both the desirability and the precariousness of wealth and status (Langford 1992: 61–79). *The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty* is certainly not a realistic portrayal of family relationships and marital arrangements, probably not even for those of 'high degree', but the ballad audience could nonetheless be expected to recognize the underlying disparities, social, economic, and romantic.

A particular kind of disparity depicted in ballads arises from the romantic involvement of masters or mistresses with their servants. The conduct and culture of servants provided a perpetual source of sensitivity for the aspiring middle classes (ibid.: 118–120). The situation is depicted in *The Famous Flower of Serving-Men; or, The Lady Turn'd Serving-Man*, written in the seventeenth century and reprinted in the eighteenth, where the issue is happily resolved by means of the literary conventions of cross-dressing and the discovery of the lady's true, noble identity⁵. But in eighteenth-century ballads the matter is subjected to a rather more questioning treatment. In *The Somersetshire Garland; or, The Serving-Man Bound Apprentice to his Mistress*, for instance, a lady with an estate of her own fell in love with her brother's servant, and when her brother, 'a squire of fame', found out he tried to have the man enlisted⁶. However, the lady was able to avert this by marrying him, which left her brother fuming, but everyone else was able to celebrate the wedding. The lady's turn of phrase, 'Nay, brother, do your worst, the lady reply'd, / But e'er he returned, she made him her bride', points to the transgressive nature of the relationship as regards gender as well as social position, although it is also needed for the sake of the rhyme.

Conversely, in *The Tragical Ballad; or, The Lady Who Fell in Love with her Serving-Man*, a young and evidently wealthy lady fell in love with her own serving-man and found herself conflicted: 'Why was I born so high, / To live in misery?'⁷ So she confided in her serving-maid, who unfortunately was also in love with the same serving-man. The lady then confessed her love to him and they conspired to

5 *The Famous Flower of Serving-Men; or, The Lady Turn'd Serving-Man*, ESTC T206181.

6 *The Somersetshire Garland; or, The Serving-Man Bound Apprentice to his Mistress*, ESTC N23794.

7 *The Tragical Ballad; or, The Lady Who Fell in Love with her Serving-Man*, ESTC N13815.

marry and elope, she in man's apparel, but the maid overheard them and betrayed their plan to her master, the lady's father, who had his daughter confined to her room and her lover sent to prison and then to serve as a soldier in Spain. The serving-maid, realizing what she had done, became distracted. Meanwhile the young lady escaped and travelled overseas in man's apparel to join her lover, where she was wounded in action against the enemy. Her lover held her as she was dying and then killed himself. When her father found out, he, too determined to end his days.

A third ballad, *The Love-Sick Serving-Man, Shewing How He Was Wounded with the Charms of a Young Lady, but Did Not Care to Reveal his Mind*, is scarcely a narrative at all⁸. It falls into two parts: in the first, the serving-man declaims his seemingly hopeless love across the social divide; in the second, he appears to the young lady in a vision or dream, and after some brief hesitation on account of their social disparity ('to cast myself away / On my father's meanest servant'), she determines to return his love and give him her hand in marriage:

What tho' my noble father dear,
 Disowns his daughter utterly;
 I have five thousand pounds a year,
 Of which no one can hinder me:
 'Tis sufficien to maintain us,
 Should my father prove a foe.
 My love I'll marry, nor no longer tarry
 For it must and shall be so.

Each half of the ballad is framed as a kind of internal debate of the character with him- or herself, which lends the piece an air of literary conceit, enhanced by the rhyming couplet form and high poetic language, in the first part especially, and the quasi-pastoral identification of the young lady as Clarinda. There is no need to consider these stories as being in any way naturalistic for the audience still to recognize ubiquitous eighteenth-century concerns with romance, economics, and social status.

Not all of the century's tragic ballads are set among the nobility or gentry, although a good number of them are. In *The Berkshire Tragedy* a miller seduced a young woman with promises of marriage but when she fell pregnant he killed her⁹. Eventually her body was discovered and the murder brought to light, and the miller

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 8 *The Love-Sick Serving-Man, Shewing How He Was Wounded with the Charms of a Young Lady, but Did Not Care to Reveal his Mind*, ESTC T38686.

9 *The Berkshire Tragedy; or, The Whittham Miller*, ESTC T60621; *The Berkshire Tragedy; or, The Whittham Miller*, ESTC N49176.

was hanged. The social setting sketched in at the beginning of the ballad places it among the aspirant middling sort:

My tender Parents brought me up,
 Provided for me well,
 And in the Town of *Whittam* then,
 Did place me in a Mill.

The earliest copies are two chapbooks dated 1744 which are remarkable for having appended to the ballad text a page of prose containing *The last dying Words and Confession of John Mauge, a Miller; who was Executed at Reading in Berkshire, on Saturday the 20th of last Month, for the barbarous Murder of Anne Knite, his Sweetheart*. Even more remarkably, so far as is known, the reported events, including the execution at Reading, are entirely fictional. There is no evident social or economic disparity to explain why the miller would not simply marry his pregnant sweetheart. Instead, the ballad story is governed by a providential framework which brings the murder to light and serves as a warning to young men to avoid debauchery and lust.

One reason is that this piece conforms to the pattern of a particular sub-genre of ‘murdered sweetheart ballads’, of which there are numerous eighteenth-century examples (Pettitt 2005, 2010, 2014). In *The Kentish Tragedy* ‘a wealthy goldsmith’s only son’ paid court to the beautiful, virtuous, and well-educated daughter of ‘One ’squire Clark of Maidstone town’¹⁰. Having promised to marry her, however, he seduced her and then eloped. Then she encountered him again by chance in London, where he apologized for his earlier conduct and persuaded her to go away with him, still promising marriage. Predictably, once they were clear of the city he murdered her. Equally predictably, the murder came to light, in this case at an inn where he had put up for the night, when her spirit appeared before the company with blood running from her wounds. He then confessed everything to a minister who was also staying there and cut his own throat from ear to ear.

Both *The Berkshire Tragedy* and *The Kentish Tragedy* are at some pains to sketch in a social background among the independently prosperous middling ranks of society against which the tragedy is acted out. Although the audience might infer a motive in terms of economic anxiety, the reluctance of a young man to find himself constrained by responsibility for a wife and child, the ballads themselves moralize the stories in terms of crime and punishment, lust and perjury:

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 10 *The Kentish Tragedy; or, A Warning-Piece to All Perjured Young Men*, ESTC T29355.

Young Men be warned by my Fall,
 All filthy Lust defie,
 By giving Way to Wickedness,
 Alas! this Day I die.
 Lord wash my Crimson Sins away,
 Which have been manifold;
 Have Mercy, Lord, on me, I pray,
 And Christ receive my Soul. (*The Berkshire Tragedy*)

You that have heard these mournful lines,
 Don't prove deceitful in your love;
 Lest by your breaking of your vows,
 You like him should anger God above. (*The Kentish Tragedy*)

It is as if these ballads are torn between a realistic concern with readily recognizable human relationships (even if they develop in rather an extreme direction) and a providential framework for telling stories of crime and punishment, inherited from the previous century, which privileges human relationships with God above everyday relationships between human beings (Atkinson 2018: 161–192). The eighteenth century is easily characterized both as an age of advancing rationalism and as a time when religiosity was still pervasive.

Not all the ballads are either unhappy or moralistic, however. In *Maudlin, the Merchant's Daughter of Bristol* a merchant's daughter and a neighbouring youth fell in love, but her friends – that is to say, family, relatives, and other interested persons – remained opposed, so the young man determined to travel abroad, to Padua¹¹. Maudlin then arranged with a ship's master that she should go on board in disguise as a ship-boy, ostensibly to visit her brother who was lying sick in Italy. On her arrival she found her lover in prison and condemned to die unless he would forsake his religion and turn Catholic, which he had refused to do, and she overheard him lamenting his fate and declaring his fidelity to Maudlin. She herself took service in the house of the judge and fulfilled her duties so well that he, the judge, fell in love with her, promising her anything she might desire if she would reciprocate. She pleaded for the life of her 'brother' in prison, and although the judge could not grant that, he did permit an English 'friar' to visit him, who was in fact the ship's master in disguise. He was unable, however, to persuade the young man to change religion, and so Maudlin requested of the judge that she might die along with him. The two lovers were condemned to die, and the mariner went along with them, but when the judges saw their faithful friendship in action they

11 *Maudlin, the Merchant's Daughter of Bristol*, ESTC N3938.

were all pardoned and sent back to England. There Maudlin found her father dead and her mother overjoyed to see them, and to see them married, with the ship's master standing in for her father:

Their wishes she denied not,
but wedded them to their hearts delight.
Her gentle master she desired
to be her father, and at Church to give her then,
It was fulfilled as she required,
to the joy of all good men.

Friendship, and steadfastness in religion, drive the relationships of this story every bit as much as romantic love and defiance of social constraint. Even the implicit anti-Catholicism is tempered by the sympathetic portrayal of the judge. One could plausibly argue that the human relationships, and the factors that make it possible to reference them to eighteenth-century life, are subordinate to the basic adventure story and the exoticism of an imagined Italy.

There is a certain amount of exoticism among the old ballads (and probably more so among eighteenth-century chapbook stories in prose). One example is the ballad *Roman Charity, a Worthy Example of a Virtuous Wife Who Fed her Father with her Own Milk*, which reworks the legend of Pero and Cimon, about a daughter who secretly fed her father with milk from her own breast when he was imprisoned and sentenced to starve to death¹². The legend was recounted by Valerius Maximus (and in another version by Valerius Maximus and Pliny the Elder, where a plebeian woman was nursed by her daughter) and depicted by numerous artists, including Rubens and Caravaggio, in early modern Europe, before it was adapted into fiction by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*. A ballad on the subject was in print by the early seventeenth century.

The ballad story is that a nobleman had offended the emperor (the cause is not explained) and was sentenced to prison and to death by starvation. Half of the ballad is taken up with him lamenting his situation. No one dared assist him for fear of offending the emperor, until eventually his daughter, described as 'a virtuous wife', although 'she liv'd in mean estate', determined to aid him, even though her sisters cautioned her against it. She went to the prison but was denied entry, so she appealed to the emperor himself with a story that she had married against her father's wishes (hence, presumably, her living in 'mean estate') and now sought one last opportunity to be reconciled:

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12 *Roman Charity, a Worthy Example of a Virtuous Wife Who Fed her Father with her Own Milk*, ESTC T45191.

It chanced so, I match'd myself
 Against my father's mind,
 Whereby I did procure his wrath,
 As fortune had assign'd.
 And seeing now the time is come,
 He must resign his breath,
 Vouchsafe that I may speak to him
 Before the hour of death.

The emperor granted permission on condition that she be searched each time she visited so as to ensure she was not bringing in any food or drink. In this manner, she was able to breastfeed her father for a twelvemonth and a day, at which time the emperor realized what was happening and pardoned the father and honoured the daughter:

Her father ever after that
 Lov'd her as his life;
 And blest the day that she was made
 A virtuous loving wife.

The Roman tale and the ballad are therefore primarily concerned with the relationship between father and daughter. The legend is in fact an *exemplum* for filial piety (directed at either father or mother, as in the variant Roman versions). What is notable about the ballad, however, is the grafting on to the legend of the family opposition to lovers motif. The theme of parental opposition is scarcely developed, but it does bring the narrative more into line with established ballad conventions. It alludes to eighteenth-century concerns, but it is debatable whether it really does anything more than enhance the odds the daughter must overcome in her exercise of virtue. Marsh speculates that 'this virtuous wife worked her way, in exaggerated and exoticised guise, through the daily dilemma that faced many early modern English wives: how to find fulfilment within patriarchy through the somewhat paradoxical or counter-intuitive project of making it their own' – even while allowing that the ballad provided a 'fantastical escape' from the reality of early modern social relationships (Marsh 2018: 80).

A final example is of what some European scholars call jocular ballads. This is *The Fair Maid of the West, Who Sold her Maidenhead for a High-Crown'd Hat*¹³. A maiden went to market to buy a high-crowned hat, but the shopkeeper, a 'youthful batchelor', asked seven shillings for it, but said he would let her have it for

13 *The Fair Maid of the West, Who Sold her Maidenhead for a High-Crown'd Hat*, ESTC T35164.

a crown (five shillings) if she would let him have her maidenhead as well. This she refused, so he backtracked and offered her the hat outright in return her virginity. Home she went with her bargain, a hat for a maidenhead, and told her mother. But her mother flew into a rage and thrust her out of doors, threatening to disown her if she did not return to town and swap the hat for her maidenhead back again. The shopkeeper was happy to do so, and all was right in the end – as the mother put it:

Well daughter had it not been so,
It might have been your overthrow;
But since he did it you restore,
See that you play the fool no more.

Evidently she was just as foolish as her daughter. Here the ballad characters are from the middling sort. Seven shillings might have been a lot for a hat, so it is probably unsurprising that the young woman would rather have it for ‘nothing’, but the story is really little more than a conventional sexual jest, the consequences constrained by the boundaries of the ballad narrative. Only the final stanza, quoted above, goes a little way to frame the narrative with an allusion to the realities of eighteenth-century social life.

There is a pertinent couplet in a poem (‘The Shy Lover’) by John Clare, who had a first-hand knowledge of village life at the beginning of the following century: ‘Snares are so thickly laid in woman’s way, / The common ballad teaches men betray’¹⁴. Gammon quotes this as a warning against the simplistic interpretation of a ballad like *The Fair Maid of the West* as some kind of straightforward celebration of bawdiness. The narrative songs Gammon studied were situated at the margins of acceptable behaviour, and much the same can be said of the ballads described here, clustered in print around the middle of the eighteenth century. The imagined relationships they depict represent, so to speak, a frame for the real, everyday relationships of eighteenth-century society – between parents and children, employers and servants, lovers, sweethearts, and casual sexual acquaintances. Song texts do describe social relationships, but they do so in a way that means real social relationships cannot be read back from them in isolation from the external data. Conversely, while the popularity of any particular ballad might or might not have had anything to do with its social or ideological content, the ballad audience were, in principle at least, free to try out imaginatively the character roles they depicted and to test them against their everyday, lived social lives, the ideological *habitus* that formed the world they inhabited. Ballads, in William Gifford’s words, provided the ordinary people with ‘much curious knowledge’ from outside of their everyday lives.

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14 Quoted by Gammon 1982: 235.

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Note: ESTC numbers refer to the *English Short Title Catalogue*, available from: <http://estc.bl.uk/>.

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Žmonių santykiai XVIII amžiaus baladėse: ribų nustatymas, ideologija, vaizduotė

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S a n t r a u k a

Raktažodžiai: baladės, XVIII amžius, santykiai, ideologija, vaizduotė.

Didžiuosiuose baladžių rinkiniuose XVIII a. Anglijos medžiaga nėra labai gausi, tačiau tuo laikotarpiu būta nemažai spausdintų baladžių, atspindinčių plačią žmonių santykių skalę: sutuoktinių ir šeimos narių bendravimą, romantiškus ir seksualinius ryšius. Antai baladė „Nortamptonšyro tragedija“ pasakoja apie meilę, išdavystę, nužudymą ir kerštą, o jos veikėjai – aukštuomenės nariai. Didžioji dalis išlikusių liudijimų apie tai, kaip tuo metu baladės buvo suvokiamos ir vertinamos, randami autobiografiniuose iš darbininkų klasės kilusių žmonių pasakojimuose, pavyzdžiui, Thomaso Holcrofto, Williamo Giffordo ar Samuelio Bamfordo. Sunku

įsivaizduoti, kad toks kūrinys, kaip „Nortamptonšyro tragedija“, galėjo perteikti visuomeninę ir ekonominę padėtį ar šeimos narių ir įsimylėjėlių santykius, tiesiogiai susijusius su baladės klausytojais, kuriuos daugiausia sudarė vidurinėsios klasės ir darbininkų atstovai.

Vis dėlto nemažai tyrėjų teigia, kad tokios baladės sudarė galimybę nustatyti tikrų gyvenimiškų santykių ribas (Christopheris Marshas), kad jos įkūnijo vyraujančią patriarchalinę to meto ideologiją (Vicas Gammonas) arba leido klausytojams įsivaizduoti situacijas, esančias anapus kasdienės jų patirties ribų (Jonathanas Rose'as). Straipsnyje aptariama nemažai skirtingų baladžių, kurių veikėjai yra tiek didikai, tiek vidurinėsios klasės atstovai ir kurių dėmesio centre yra šeimos priešiškus įsimylėjėliams, paprastai grindžiamas socialinėmis ir ekonominėmis priežastimis („Nortamptonšyro tragedija“, „Kruvinajo sodininko žiaurumas“), ponų, ponių ir jų tarnų santykiai („Garsusis tarnų gėlės žiedas“, „Somerseto girlianda, arba Tarnas, priverstas tapti savo ponios mokiniu“, „Tragiška baladė, arba Ponia, pamilusi savo tarną“, „Įsimylėjęs tarnas“), mylimųjų nužudymas, dažniausiai susijęs su ikivedybinio nėštumu („Berkšyro tragedija“ ir „Kento tragedija“), romantiški bei egzotiški nuotykių („Madlena, Bristolio pirklio duktė“, „Romėnų labdara, sektinas dorybingos moters, išmaitinusios tėvą savo pienu, pavyzdys“) ar atsitiktiniai lytiniai santykiai („Gražioji mergelė iš Vakarų, išmainiusi skaisybę į aukštą skrybėlę“).

Apskritai šios baladės nėra perdėm realistiškos. Jose veikia vaizduojami santykiai, balansuojantys ties socialiai priimtino elgesio riba, kurie savotiškai įrėmina tikrus, XVIII a. įprastus visuomenei santykius – tarp tėvų ir vaikų, tarnų ir šeimininkų, mylimųjų, sužadėtučių ir atsitiktinių seksualinių partnerių. Dainų tekstuose vaizduojami ir tikri socialiniai santykiai, tačiau tai daroma taip, kad jų neįmanoma išskaityti atsietai nuo išorinės aplinkos. O to meto baladžių klausytojai, priešingai, bent jau iš principo galėjo mėginti vaizduotėje pritaikyti įvairius jose piešiamų veikėjų paveikslus ir išbandyti juos savo kasdieniame, tikrame gyvenime bei ideologinėje aplinkoje, formuojančioje juos supantį pasaulį. Baladės suteikdavo paprastiems žmonėms, W. Giffordo žodžiais tariant, gana pikantiškų žinių apie anapus jų kasdienybės ribų esantį gyvenimą.