

Transcribing Mother-Daughter Rivalry

Introduction

The EBBA staff recently learned that ballads were published and circulated in the early modern period as a way to promote literacy among young persons. Accordingly, many ballads address the tension between the authority of adults and the willfulness of the youth, particularly in terms of mother-daughter relationships.



Figure A

Conclusion

I believe that the ways in which ballads explore the power struggle between mother and daughter—youth and adult—cultivated a revolutionary mentality in young readers. This is particularly interesting in light of how media manipulates youth culture, and the extent to which politics, cultural practices and literature have been and continue to be inextricably tied together.

Discussion

I worked with the Houghton Collection, and transcribed ballads by typing out their contents in specific font styles which correspond to the black-letter or white-letter fonts as they appear in the original ballad. The transcription was conducted in this way so as to preserve the format of the ballad while converting it to a more legible format.

Many of the ballads I transcribed dealt with tension in mother-daughter relationships regarding the question of suitors. In some ballads, the mother and daughter are able to achieve a harmonious relationship by openly discussing the nature of prudent behavior in regards to suitors (Figure A); in others, a power struggle arises between mother and daughter because one or both of them is too unyielding (Figure B). In effect, these ballads are a manner of teaching how to achieve the harmonious ideal of effective communication and mutual respect between mother and daughter. While the mother is generally presented as a source of wisdom in these ballads, she is not necessarily portrayed as infallible or even reliable. When the daughter criticizes her mother using shrewd and prudent tactics, she triumphs over her mother and successfully asserts her own will.

Such themes of youthful triumph were likely implemented to appeal to young people, thereby encouraging them to read. However, this valorization of youthful challenges to adult authority may have extended into the political realm. That is to say, the questioning of authority in mother-daughter ballads promotes the questioning of authority on a larger scale. I make this connection because I also encountered many ballads about political parties, and because the Early Modern Era was a politically turbulent time.

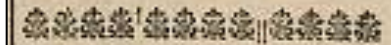
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UCSB English Broadside Ballad Archive
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The Cobler he was so fat,
fell sick and needs must dye,
Except my Love would grant
him love, as a remedy:
Cobler my Mother said,
you have of late been dypt, (have
Before you shall my Daughter
He see you soundly whipt.
But now let Father frown, &c.
A Maiden-head it is a load
too heavy for me to carry;
Therefore I will make all t be
that ever I can to marry, (speed
No matter for his wealth
nor Trade, what'er it be,
for I will dearly love the Man
if he could fancy me.
So now you know my mind,
although my Mother chide,
A Husband I must have,
what ever me betide.

F I N I S.



London, Printed by E. Crouch, for
F. Coles, T. Vere, & J. Wright.

Figure B