

Love in Times Past:

Insights on Relationships of Old

Introduction: Since the EBBA Ballads are “fossils” of sorts, it is worth noting the various things that can be learned about society at the time through the ballads. Some of these ballads are particularly focused on the relationships between men and women, and so, we are able to gain a glimpse of what perceptions of relationships were like in the seventeenth century.



Discussion: By chance, many of the ballads that I created facsimile transcriptions of were related to the relationships between men and women. Many incorporated an element of humor, whether it be satire or slapstick, and the woodcuts accompanying the ballads were not always the most innocent (see above). This offers us as the audience looking backwards a chance to see the attitudes towards relationships in seventeenth-century England. We see a variety of attitudes, but the most common ones from the ballads that were transcribed were flippancy and transparency regarding how the various genders reacted in response to one another and the interactions they shared.

Conclusion: The seventeenth-century English were very open about their relationships and how they viewed them. Although there are quite a few instances where the patriarchal aspects of society are visible, there are also instances where the man is portrayed as being a fool and full of shortcomings as well (the image below is about a man who is a spendthrift). I was surprised that they talked about things that might even be rarely discussed openly in modern times through humor; this leads me to think that we can, through ballads regarding other things, learn more about English society in the seventeenth century.

