It's a little thing called marriage

The English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA) serves as an online database in which online users can view ballads from primarily, but not limited to, the 17th century. EBBA’s purpose is to preserve these ballads and make them user-friendly for all to read through modern transcriptions and provide online users the ability to compare and contrast these transcribed ballads with the originals. EBBA also offers the ability to listen to recordings of certain ballads in order to get a sense of sound, and kind of live vicariously through the recordings.

I have encountered numerous ballads throughout my time as a Research Assistant with EBBA, but there were certain ballads that struck me the most—as they were the most relatable to modern society.

For example, I encountered a ballad against marriage (left, EBBA ID 32916). There’s a sense of hatred and this wife’s almost loathing of her husband in which she gives off negative views of marriage. I am not saying that I particularly am against marriage, or the foundations of marriage, myself, but I like the idea of this writer preaching (regardless of tone) that a woman shouldn’t feel the need to get married, then proceed to listing all of the reasons why she believes that a woman shouldn’t get married. While the hatred in this writer’s voice is a bit stronger than I can agree with, what a person is passionate, the voice and style come off in the same passionate, fiery intensity. However, it was nice to read a woman’s voice and her opinions about marriage during a time when women had a certain role in society that didn’t necessarily go along with what this ballad preaches.

This goes in part with another ballad that I encountered about a man looking for a perfect wife (right, EBBA ID 32915). However, as a woman who believes that any woman is good enough and shouldn’t live a life for a man, or to impress men, this struck me wrongy. So, I ask: what makes the ideal wife? What about the ideal husband? What makes him think he is good enough for the wife that he is searching for?

The writer of this ballad almost is sitting on his high horse and giving a sense of entitlement and claiming that in order for a woman to be lucky enough to be his wife, she should look a certain way, act a certain way, be virtuous and have money, but relating that back to the ballad against marriage, that can ultimately lead to a life of unhappiness and the wife loathing her husband because then what would he offer to the marriage (besides his strong ego and sense of entitlement)?

Being able to see the numerous ballads and having the opportunity to read and, sometimes, laugh at the absurdity of certain ballads was an enriching experience to have as an English major at UC Santa Barbara. I had the opportunity to explore the minds of people in the 17th century and understand and realize that some people had the same struggles, or same opinions as I do, a person living in the 21st century, which was a great experience. I am glad to have had the opportunity to be a research assistant with EBBA.

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