

Intro:

The English Broadside Ballad Archive is a database dedicated to reconstructing and archiving ballads in and around the 17th century. This archive allows professors, students, and many more to look back at one of the earliest forms of entertainment in history. Although it may not be obvious at first, there is an immense amount of time and dedication that goes into ensuring easy access to these ballads for research and teaching purposes. It is really rewarding knowing that my time working with EBBA allows for the safe curation of these tales that may otherwise have been lost to time, so that my current and future peers may have the ability to take a look at what story-telling was like during this time. During my position as an undergraduate research assistant, I became comfortable using Photoshop and Excel in a way that I never had before, and I am quite confident that I will be using these skills in the future in graduate school and beyond. Even more than online knowledge, I was able to engage with the ballads themselves, and took note of the different styles and writing tactics utilized by authors who lived so long ago. One particularly interesting trio of ballads I took note of all used the format of the alphabet to write their ballads, using each letter as the start of each stanza. However, the audience of each ballad is right in the title, hoping to inform them of how to live their best life.

Discussion:

The three ballads I've chosen to engage with are EBBA 30292, 30293, and 30328, each with a target audience of women, men, and all people of the church, respectively. EBBA 30292, entitled "The Virgin's ABC", is nothing more than a guide of "vertuous admonitions for a chaste, modest, and well governed maid" (EBBA 30292). If the audience is a female one, this ballad is the patriarchy in writing, policing women and telling them how they should go about living their lives. On the other hand, if the audience is male, it acts as a kind of rule book on how to raise their daughters and doubles as the expectation for how their wives should act as well. No matter the audience, this ballad aims to ensure that women suppress their sexuality and conform to the expectations set in place by the dominating male figures in their lives. Even more abhorrent than condemning sexuality are the instructions not be too sad, "yet use not too much laughter, lest you be sleighted and scorned for your immodesty", directly demanding that "maidens, widdowes, wives and all" suppress their feelings and true emotions "but in humility obey his will" (EBBA 30292). This ballad is probably one of the most sexist pieces of literature I have ever read, outright calling for all women to submit themselves in practically every way to their husbands and God.

The Young Man's Ballad, or EBBA 30293, not only sets much different standards for men than women, but targets women directly as "x thousand times more cruel... than heathens... or any one that on the earth doth go" (EBBA 30293). The title alone attests to the vast difference in respect between genders during this period, acknowledging men as simply that whereas the previous one emphasizes a woman's virginity as her most important feature. In terms of content, this ballad is constructed of a couple dozen verses written by a man who puts his love on the line only to be rejected. The narrator makes it seem as though love is something she is doing to him, as if she intentionally means to make him feel this way only to make him spiral into depression when she doesn't accept his love. Even before the reader knows that she doesn't want to be with him, love is described in a very negative way that is associated with the woman he's writing to. He escalates into calling her out directly, at one point commenting on how her "mind be so perversely bent that nothing can procure [his] hearts' content" (EBBA 30293). Her rejection of his advances is unacceptable behavior to him because he believes he deserves her love, most likely

having been raised listening to ballads like The Virgin's ABC. This ballad shows the fruition of the previous one in turning men into beings that expect women to be completely submissive to their whims. The dichotomy between these two ballads is a striking example of the societal expectation of gender in this time that reflects the deep rooted issues of misogyny that continue to plague our society today.

While religion in the 17th century is famous for conservative and sexist ideologies, EBBA 30328, The Christian's ABC's, displayed a surprising equal message for all people of the church to model themselves with. This ballad encourages chastity for both sexes, a topic unseen in the Young Man's iteration yet repeatedly mentioned in EBBA 30329. In fact, the topic of abstinence is the most conservative aspect of the ballad, with most of the other stanzas preaching to "love every man unfainedly, hate no man in thy heart" and to be merciful and kind (EBBA 30328). This iteration of the ABC's is surprisingly the one filled with the least problematic instructions for the public on how to live, despite the church's past of discrimination and a strict adherence to outdated traditions. However, this ballad acts as a sort of foil for the other two, showing how bias against each gender informs the rules they're forced to abide by.

Conclusion:

EBBA is an amazing resource for research, reference, and learning about any ballads that have endured the tests of time. The incredible work and commitment from my fellow interns and the project managers is reflected in the form and content of the website, which I plan to use in the future for my own research needs. I am proud to know I had a small part in helping create a safe archive for these ballads that I hope will serve as a source for others for years to come.