POPULAR LITERATURE

A History and Guide

Victor E. Neuburg

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From the beginning of printing to the year 1897

Victor E. Neuburg

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V.E.N.

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INTRODUCTION

What I want to do in this book is to define popular literature, to trace its development in England from the beginnings of printing to the year 1897, and finally to provide a critical survey of sources available for its study. I have not attempted to discuss the growth of newspapers or periodicals. Both are related to my theme, but seem to me to require entirely separate treatment. Any attempt to be comprehensive in a book of this size would result in a superficiality which I hope, by taking a more narrow view, to have avoided.

It is more than thirty years since a French historian, Lucien Febvre, urged a change in the direction of historical studies, so that what he described as 'l'histoire des mentalités collectives' should be given greater prominence. By this phrase he meant the assumptions, beliefs, feelings and modes of thought of men and women in the past. Only during the last ten years or so, however, have serious efforts been made in this country to look with sympathy and understanding at the world of the inarticulate. In the continuing process of its exploration it becomes increasingly clear that the study of popular literature has an important role to play, for it can throw light upon what the relatively unlettered members of society were really like – how they thought and felt, their attitudes and values, the way they looked at life.

Similar claims for popular literature were made over one hundred years ago by J. O. Halliwell, who wrote:

> A student who is anxious to obtain that extensive knowledge of the habits, customs, and phraseology of our ancestors, without which the humour of Shakespeare and his contemporaries can only be imperfectly

appreciated, will do well to turn his attention to the ancient literature of the cottage, and make himself acquainted with the tales that were familiar 'as household words' to the groundlings of the Globe or the Blackfriars . . . Let us ask, where would a reader turn for explanations of the jocular allusions in a modern farce or extravaganza. Certainly not to the works of Faraday or Mrs Somerville, but oftener to the ballads of Seven Dials.[1]

At the time of its writing this claim went unheeded; but today we are inclined to look at it very much more sympathetically, in the realization that it is no longer valid to see working men and women of the past within the framework of what their 'betters' thought or assumed they believed. If we are to discover them on their own terms, then we have something to learn from what they read for pleasure. Put another way, popular literature offers us a window – and it is certainly no more than this – upon the world of ordinary men and women in the past. The view is both partial and qualitative. It will yield no data that can be quantified. At best we shall get something of the 'feel' of this world which lies beyond our grasp; at worst we shall lapse into a formless antiquarianism. The risk is worth taking, for however we qualify this view of the past, it does seem an exceptionally fruitful method of penetrating the mental universe of people.

At its simplest, popular literature can be defined as what the unsophisticated reader has chosen for pleasure. Such a reader may, of course, come from any class in society, although the primary appeal of popular literature has been to the poor – and, by the end of the eighteenth century, also to children. Generally this literature has comprised non-establishment, non-official publications; but it has also included the religious tracts which one group in society thought that another group ought to read for its own good – and these were distributed in extremely large numbers. Then, too, in the nineteenth century there was an increasing

1. *A Catalogue of Chapbooks, Garlands and Penny Histories in the Possession of James Orchard Halliwell Esq.* (for private circulation, London, 1849), Preface, p. ii.

amount of cheap 'improving' literature, which comprised for the most part cheap editions of the classics, including the Penny Poets; and these became in a very real sense equally 'popular', as the concept of self-help grew.

The study of popular literature in England today is scarcely accepted as an academic activity. In France, where, we are told, they order things better (in some respects at least), this is not true, and in the last ten years or so a number of scholarly studies in this field has appeared. It may well be that the sociologists have to some extent pre-empted things in this country, and while television programmes, newspapers – the 'mass media' – are subject to varying kinds of scrutiny, such investigations so far have generally lacked an historical perspective. Such a perspective will not, of course, provide some magic ingredient by which everything will be understood, but it will, I believe, add significantly to our understanding of both past and present.

Since the existence of printed material presupposes that someone will read it, it is necessary to speculate briefly about the ways in which men and women came to terms with the printed word in such numbers as to make a mass reading public an actuality.

Central to my argument is the assumption that mass literacy is a powerful force in society, and that there was a mass reading public in this country by the end of the eighteenth century. Let us look at these two important issues.

The growth of the working class, with its increasing involvement in politics at a number of levels, would have been impossible in this country without the ability to read. Long after the demagogue and the orator have finished their speeches, long after the crowds have dispersed, long after the spoken word has slipped from memory, the written word remains. One of the earliest mass movements in modern British history, Methodism, relied a great deal upon the personal charisma of John Wesley and George Whitefield. Nevertheless, Wesley saw clearly the need to follow up the spoken exhortation with something more permanent, and a continuing concern of his long working life was with the provision

of cheap books, and with the encouragement of the writing of books by Methodists, by means of which men might be converted.

Indeed, one of the characteristics of popular movements in England since the eighteenth century has been the amount of ephemeral printed matter they produced. The first in the field was, in fact, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which, soon after its foundation in 1698, was circulating specially written tracts amongst the sailors of Admiral Benbow's fleet, the soldiers of Marlborough's army, innkeepers in London, hackney coachmen. In making their appeal through the printed word they were following a more secular tradition of balladry and popular fare which had fairly deep roots in society. The Methodists followed their example; so, too, did the various radical societies of the late eighteenth century, and in the years which followed there could have been no social movement which did not propagate its ideas through pamphlets or newspapers. The assumption that people could be reached and influenced by means of the printed word seems to have been widely held; and some confirmation of this comes from two books which look at the problem from very different standpoints. W. H. Reid, whose *The Rise and Dissolution of Infidel Societies* was published in 1800, took a sour view and held that mass literacy was unsettling and, in part at least, responsible for the spread of what he called infidelity. In his *James Watson, a Memoir* (undated, c. 1879), W. J. Linton demonstrates how Watson provided a wide range of cheap publications on Chartism, freethinking, Owenism and so on, and saw the ability to read as the means by which working men could shape increasingly the world they lived in.

Here are two views of literacy;[2] and the point I wish to stress is that the ability to read, and its effects upon society, provided the subject for discussion.

Closely connected with the notion of literacy is the method by which it is achieved. Generally the growth of literacy has been a

2. Both books have been reprinted. See *Literacy and Society* (ed. Victor E. Neuburg, Woburn Press, 1971).

gradual process; and this was certainly the case in England, where the development of elementary educational facilities during the eighteenth century, together with the ready availability of chapbooks, meant that by the time the nineteenth century began a mass reading public was in existence.

These two factors – literacy as a positive force in society and the progressive growth of the reading public during the eighteenth century – seem crucial to an historical approach to popular literature.

It is perhaps necessary to justify the date 1897 as a terminal point for this study. Like most dates used in this way, this one is largely a matter of convenience and as such open to question. The fact is – and clearly hindsight plays an enormous part here – that in this year, as the result of a prize competition run in its pages, the circulation of *Pearson's Weekly* reached one and a quarter million. Such a readership, approached also by similar journals like *Answers* and *Tit-bits*, meant that by the closing years of the nineteenth century the age of mass-produced literature was under way. The year 1897, then, symbolizes both a beginning and an end.

The period ending was one which had very largely been dominated by the cultural patterns of a rural society, one in which most people earned their daily bread in one way or another from some connection with the land. In saying this I am not, of course, denying that by 1897 the Industrial Revolution had already changed irrevocably, and often brutally, not merely the face of England but also the way of life of most of its working men and women. What I am arguing is that cultural change lags behind economic change, and that many of the industrial working men in Victorian times were quite often only one generation away from their rural past. Thus their capacity either to absorb or to create a new culture was limited both by the sense of psychic shock following upon fundamental changes in a way of life and by the unspoken wish to hold on to older values and ideas as something

secure in a rapidly changing world where human relationships were increasingly dominated by the impersonal nature of the factory system. The extent to which cultural changes took place was infinitely variable, depending partly upon influences beyond the control of men and women who earned a living in the workshops of a new age.

Pearson's Weekly in 1897, then, highlights the fact that a change had been taking place in the kind of popular literature being produced, and throws into sharp relief the relationship between such literature and its public. If we trace the development of ballads, jestbooks, chapbooks, tracts, from the beginning of printing to that date, it must surely help us to see the way in which this mass reading public came into being, and how its taste gradually changed.

The problem, of course, is extremely complex. What, for instance, do we mean by literacy? Can we define it in terms merely of being able to read? Or is the ability to write a vital element in it? At its basic level, and seen from the standpoint of history, it seems to me that the ability to read is the fundamental point, and it seems certain that more people have, in general, been able to read than to write. I also conclude that an increase in the sheer volume of popular literature argues for an increase in the size of the reading public at the lower end of the social scale – and, again, it seems certain that such an increase did take place, notably during the eighteenth century, and with increasing impetus during the nineteenth.

All such evidence is to some extent nebulous and cannot be quantified; but this fact does not necessarily invalidate it. On the contrary, undue reliance upon computerized data can so easily be inhibiting to the understanding and the writing of social history. Is it, for example, possible to measure intellectual or moral climates? How are we to assess the strength or significance of attitudes and patterns of feeling? Of course the historian must know how to count, but there are some things he can never know. Despite this, the asking of questions is both a legitimate and an

important activity, and I am aware that in writing an introductory survey of the development of popular literature I am, by implication at least, asking questions rather than providing a set of neatly tabulated answers. If anyone disagrees with the kind of question that I pose, takes issue with such tentative conclusions as I draw, or finds anywhere a provocation that is rarely intentional, then I believe that the subject will be better served by discussion than by dogma. Even polemic is preferable, I think, to an arid dullness which can so easily clothe the give and take of argument in a cloak of respectability which grows inevitably threadbare and shabby while retaining an entirely spurious gentility.

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ONE

FROM THE BEGINNING OF PRINTING TO 1600

Lithe and lysten, gentylmen
That be of frebone blode;
I shall tell you of a good yeman,
His name was Robyn Hode.

Robyn was a proud outlawe,
Whyles he walked on grounde,
So curteyse an outlawe as he was one
Was never none y founde.

Robyn stood in Bernysdale,
And lened him to a tree,
And by hym stode Lyttel Johan,
A good yeman was he;

And also dyde good Scathelock,
And Much the millers sone;
There was no ynche of his body,
But it was worth a grome.

A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode,
ed. J. Ritson (London, undated)

In a marchauntys house in London there was a mayd which was gotten with chylde to whom the mastres of the house came and chargyd her to tell her who was the father of the chylde. To whome the mayden answeryd forsooth nobody/why quoth the mastres yt ys not possyble but some mane must be the father thereof. To whom the mayd sayd/why mastres why may not I have a chylde without a man aswell as a hen to lay eggs without a cok. Here ye may se it is harde to fynde a woman without an excuse.

A Hundred Mery Tales, ed. H. Oesterley
(London, 1866)

THE earliest forms of printed popular literature were the broad-

side, the jestbook, narratives – usually but not always based upon themes from medieval romance – and, finally, almanacs.

The fact that early material can be so readily classified in this way should not mislead us as to the complexities of the subject. These spring mainly from the curious accidents of survival. The late Cyprian Blagden talked about the destruction of 'a very high proportion of the books which are produced in the greatest quantities'.[1] This means that to a great extent we must rely for our knowledge of popular literature upon hearsay, an entry in the Stationers' Registers, or at best upon a single imperfect copy of a book or a broadside which was once widely circulated.

A wide variety of subject matter is covered by the term 'broadside'. Besides the ballads and songs with which it is chiefly associated, broadside publishing also comprised proclamations, religious documents, handbills, advertisements. What these had in common was the fact that they were printed upon one side only of a flimsy sheet of paper. A superb collection of these publications, ranging over more than three centuries, is owned by the Society of Antiquaries, who published a catalogue of their holdings in 1866.[2] The earliest item is an 'Indulgence granted by Our Holy Father Pope Leo that nowe is to all such as shall contribute money towards the ransom of Sir John Pyllet, Knyght of the Holy Sepulchre of Christ, who, coming from Jerusalem, was taken prisoner by the Mauris and Infidels . . .' Undated, this broadside was probably issued in 1513, the year in which Pope Leo X, 'Our Holy Father . . . that nowe is', was elected.

In the same collection the earliest ballad is on Thomas Cromwell, who had fallen from grace in 1540. As the promoter of radical reform in the Church Cromwell had made many enemies who were not slow to rejoice when he lost the favour of Henry

1. 'The Distribution of Almanacks in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century', in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia*, Vol. Eleven (1958), p. 107.

2. See Bibliography.

CA ſhoꝛt Inſwere to the boke called: Beware the Cat,

To the ientil reder: harti ſalutacions,
Deſiring thee to knoe: Baldewins ſtraunge faſchions
And if in aunſering: I appere ſum what quick,
Thinke it not with out cauſe, his taunts be riue & thick
Where as ther is a boke, called: beware the cat,
The veri truith is ſo, that Stremer made not that,
Noꝛ no ſuche falſe fabels: fell ever from his pen,
Noꝛ from his hart oꝛ mouth: as knoe mani honeſt men
But wil ye gladli knoe, who made that boke in dede,
One Wyliiam Baldewine. God graunt him wel to ſpede
God graunt him mani new yeres, proſperite and helth
As he hath in this thing: fardeꝛd the Comon welth
With large leſure, byꝛ wne ſtudi: he muſing all alone
Deviſed by what meanes: he might win the whetſtone
Every thing almoſt: in that boke is as tru,
As that at Midſomer: in London it doth snu.
Every thing almoſt: in that boke is as tru,
As that his noſe to my dock: is ioyned faſt with glu,
Put vp your pipes Baldewine: if you can make no better,
Many talk moꝛe wittili: that knoe not one letter,
Put on your cap Baldewine: & kepe your brayn pan warme
Leaſt ye go to Bedlem: if ſuche topes in you ſwarme
Rede this litel ſhoꝛt Rime: Baldewinken, til moꝛe cum:
And with Stremers excrements: be bold to noint your gum
In ſtede of Diaglum, in ſtede of Coloquintida,
In ſtede of ru barbarum, oꝛ caſſia fiſtula.
If the maker hereof: had bin at moꝛe leſure.
Ye had had from his hande: a moꝛe precious treſure
But in the meane ſeaſon: content your ſelfe with this,
Foꝛ your Bagagical boke, a warme a.r.s. you may kys.
Oꝛ els a payꝛe of ſtockes: if officers do wel,
You hurt a harmeles man: which no ſuch tales did tel,
As ye were diſpoſed: loude lyes on hym to make,
Which many witti things: writes foꝛ his countreys ſake.
Alas I woide to God: your boke were halfe ſo good,
I wyth you no moꝛe harme: noꝛ to your ſwete hart bloud
The pith of this paper, (if any man in it loke)
Is to deni utterli, that Stremer made that boke
The boke (often leaves) was printed every woꝛde
Er Stremer ſaw any pece, to wipe away a.t.o.i.d.
Tergendis natibus, ſom thought his boke was good
Oꝛ to cari ſpicci, to cherliſche a ſick mans bloud.
Therfoꝛe ientyl reder: beware what credence thou ghive
The truth here conteyned: thou mayſt boldly belive
Baldwins topes do belong: to thee oꝛ any other
As well as they do touche Stremer, his poꝛe bꝛother.
And now Juge good hirers: whether he be a good man
Of whom I write theſe things; as truli as I can.
If that be not a grete faute, ſo to hurt a mans name,
Without ſufficient cauſe: what crime ſhuld a man blamee
Omnia ſi perdas; tamam ſervare memento; Qua ſemel amiſſa poſtea nullus erit,
If thou leſe all (ſayth he) yet reſerve honeſt fame
If that be ones clene gon: go home and ſuck thy dame,
I am loth foꝛ to raple, as Baldwin hath begun
Foꝛ ſo bet wine vs both: a kayꝛe thꝛede ſhuld be ſpun
This miche I haue writen: that the truith ſhuld be knowen
And that the falſite: ſhuld quite be outthꝛowen. Finis.

1. A sixteenth-century ballad

VIII. One of them was the anonymous author of this ballad, which begins:[3]

Both man and chylde is glad to hear tell
Of that false traytoure Thomas Crumwell,
Now that he is set to learne to spell.
Synge trolle on away.

When fortune lokyd the in thy face,
Thou haddyst fayre time, but thou lackydyst grace;
Thy cofers with golde thou fyllydst a pace.
Synge, *etc.*

Both plate and chalys came to thy fyst,
Thou lockydst them up where no man wyst,
Tyll in the Kynges treasoure suche thinges were myst.
Synge, *etc.*

Both crust and crumme came thorowe thy handes,
Thy marchaundyse sayled over the sandes,
Therefore now thou art layde fast in bandes.
Synge, *etc.*

Fyrste when Kynge Henry, God save his grace!
Perceyvd myschefe kyndlyd in thy face,
Then it was tyme to purchase the a place.
Synge, *etc.*

The ballad goes on to accuse Cromwell of interfering with the Church, and to hope that while he may suffer physical torment, his soul will be saved:

Yet save that soule, that God hath bought,
And for thy carcas care thou nought,
Let it suffre pain, as it hath wrought.
Synge, *etc.*

The final verse is a tribute to King Henry VIII.

This ballad is typical of the comment upon men and affairs

3. I quote from the version printed in Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, ed. Henry Wheatley (3 vols., 1866), Vol. 2, pp. 17ff.

which was beginning to find its way into print at the close of Henry VIII's reign. It was followed in the year of its publication by eight surviving broadsides, several of which showed Protestant sympathies. The series, preserved in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries, illustrates the political and religious conflicts of the time.

There were lighter themes. An undated broadside from the reign of Edward VI was entitled 'A New Mery Balad of a Maid that Wold Mary wyth a Servyng Man', and ended with an exhortation:

> And for my sake all you that tipple pot or canne
> Drynke freely to the merie good serving man.

Then there was Thomas Churchyard's satire upon a contemporary, 'Davy Dycar's Dream', published in 1552, which gave rise to a lively controversy with an opponent who called himself 'T. Camel'. Thirteen separate publications of this are extant in the same collection.

It was, however, not until 1557, when the Company of Stationers of London received a charter giving it a virtual monopoly of printing, that titles printed by members of the company were entered in a register[4] quoting the printer's name, the title of the publication and the appropriate fee. Until 1558 the minimum was 4d., and a book was usually 6d. The register was kept, of course, because of the need to have an accurate cash account, but its value to posterity has been immense, for it provides in brief a view of the intellectual life of Englishmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5]

The late Professor Hyder E. Rollins compiled an index to the

4. In fact some records in the first volume date from 1554. These were probably transcribed from earlier records and comprise much miscellaneous information.

5. See E. Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London: 1554–1640* (5 vols., London and Birmingham, 1875–94); and G. E. B. Eyre (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers: from 1640–1708 A.D.* (3 vols., 1913–14).

ballad entries from 1557 to 1709.[6] It contains more than 3,000 titles; for the first twenty or thirty years ballads made up the bulk of the entries – indeed, until 1640 they probably took up more space than books or plays.[7] Naturally, not all of these ephemeral sheets have survived. They were read to pieces, or thrown aside when pleasure in them waned, and many of them are known today only by their titles; but it is clear that the broadside ballad formed the most considerable element in the printed popular literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Some two hundred sixteenth-century ballads are extant today, all except two or three of them in single copies. About one third of this number are in the library of the Society of Antiquaries, to which reference has already been made; the others have a curious history. Early in the nineteenth century they were first heard of as a loose bundle of ballads, wrapped in a sheepskin, in the hands of a housekeeper at Holmingham Hall in Suffolk. They were given or sold to a Mr Fitch, postmaster at Ipswich, and passed either directly or through a dealer into the collection of George Daniel, who lived in Canonbury Square, Islington. Eventually he sold about half of them to a bookseller and they were bought by Richard Heber, whose vast collection of books filled eight houses, but was broken up and disposed of in a series of sales held in 1834 and 1835. The ballads were purchased by W. H. 'Measure' Miller, so called because of his passion for the size of his books, and he formed the Britwell Court Library, which has been in process of disposal since 1919. A reprint of the ballads was presented by their then owner, Mr Sydney Christie Miller, to members of the Roxburghe Club in 1912.

George Daniel retained the other half of the ballads until his death in 1864, when they were bought by Henry Huth, whose son bequeathed them to the British Museum in 1910. They had been

6. See Bibliography, p. 276.

7. Unfortunately the Stationers' Company records are defective. There is a hiatus between 1570 and 1576, and the practice of registering ballad titles fell into disuse during the greater part of the reign of James I.

reprinted by Huth in 1867 for members of the Philobiblon Club, and were commercially reprinted by Joseph Lilly in 1867 and 1870.[8]

This digression into the bypaths of nineteenth-century book-collecting has been made to stress the role played by bibliophiles in preserving the most ephemeral and flimsy of sheets and books, many of which would otherwise have disappeared.

The name 'ballad' given to these broadsides is a reminder that, whatever the subject matter, most of them were intended to be sung. Usually the words were set to an air which would have been familiar to both seller and purchaser, and it does not take too great an effort of the imagination to see the broadside being sold by street vendors or pedlars. The titles hardly lent themselves to verbal repetition in order to attract buyers: 'A discription of a monstrous Chylde borne at Chychester in Sussex, 1562', 'A merye balade, how a wife entreated her husband to have her own Wyll', 'The Marchants Daughter of Bristow' – all these are typical titles which add credence to the notion that melody was a major factor in selling broadsides. 'A Spell for Jone' or 'A Paradox' are certainly briefer titles, but essentially the contents of these sheets were sung by the seller, and presumably by the customer too.

The ballads which follow, quoted from Lilly's edition, are typical. At this period it would be difficult to make a clear division between popular literature and some overspill from serious literature, for each borrowed from the other – an obvious example, perhaps, would be the work of Shakespeare. With this in mind, it will be seen that the first two ballads quoted were by writers who were able to make literary allusions derived from a classical tradition.

8. See Bibliography, p. 269. There is also an American facsimile reprint of Lilly's edition.

A NEWE BALLADE OF A LOVER EXTOLLINGE HIS LADYE

To the tune of Damon and Pithias

Alas, my harte doth boyle,
And burne within my breste,
To showe to thee, myne onely deere,
My sute and my request.
My love no toung can tell,
Ne pen can well descrye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

My love is set so suer,
And fixed on thee so,
That by no meanes I can abstaine,
My faythfull love to showe;
My wounded harte, theirfore,
To thee for helpe doth crye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

Although the gods were bent,
With greedie mynde to slaye
My corpes with cruell panges of death,
And lyfe to take awaye.
Yet should my faythfull harte
At no tyme from thee flye;
Show love therfore for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

Although the sun were bent
To burne me with his beames;
And that mine eyes, throw greous pangs,
Should send forth bloudy streames;
Yet would I not forsake,
But styll to thee woulde crye,
To showe me love for love again,
Or els for love I dye.

Ye though ech sterre were tournd
Untyll a fiery darte,

And were all ready bent with payne,
To perce throwe-out my harte;
Yet coulde I not forsake
To love thee faythfullye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

Ye though eche foule were formde,
A serpent fell to be,
My corps to flay with bloudy wounds,
And to devower me;
Yet would I be thine owne,
To love full hartelye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or else for love I dye.

Ye though the lyon were,
With gapinge gredye jawe,
Readye with rygorus raggye teeth,
My fleshe to teare and gnawe;
Yet woulde I be thine owne,
To serve most earnestlye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

Ye though the fishes all,
That swymes in surginge sease,
Should swallowe me with gredy mouth,
Yet could thee not apease.
My earnest harte to thee,
To love entyerlye;
Extend thy love for love againe,
Or els for love I dye.

Ye though the earth would gape,
And swallowe me there-in,
And that I should tormentyd be
In hell, with every syn;
Yet would I be thy owne,
To save or els to spyll;

Show me therfore lyke love againe,
Or els thou dost me kyll.

Finis, q M. Osb.

Imprinted at London, in Fletstrete, at the
signe of the Faucon, by Wylliam
Gryffith, 1568.

In the original sheet the first eight lines are set to music. First published in 1563, this seems no better and no worse – although quaintly archaic on the page – than the words of any twentieth-century popular song.

The same is true of the following ballad, which was published in 1569. The original sheet includes five woodcuts in a line at the top. The entry in the records of the Stationers' Company reads: 'Received of Thomas Colwell for his lycense for pryntinge of a ballett intituled the prayse of mylady marques iiiid'.

A PROPER NEW BALAD IN PRAISE OF MY LADIE MARQUES,

whose Death is bewailed to the Tune of New lusty gallant

Ladies, I thinke you marvell that
I writ no mery report to you,
And what is the cause I court it not
So merye as I was wont to dooe;
Alas! I let you understand,
It is no newes for me to show;
The fairest flower of my garland
Was caught from court a great while agoe.

For, under the roufe of sweete Saint Paull,
There lyeth my Ladie buryed in claye,
Where I make memory for her soule
With weepinge eyes once everye daye;
All other sightes I have forgot,
That ever in court I ioyed to see,
And that is the cause I court it not,
So mery as I was wont to be.

And though that shee be dead and gone,
Whose courting need not to be tolde,
And natures mould of fleshe and bone,
Whose lyke now lives not to beholde,
Me thinkes I see her walke in blacke,
In every corner where I goe,
To looke if anie bodie do lacke
A frend to helpe them of theyr woe.

Mee thinkes I see her sorowfull teares,
To princelye state approching nye;
Mee thinkes I see her tremblinge feares,
Leste anie her suites shulde hit awrie;
Mee thinkes she shuld be still in place,
A pitifull speaker to a Queene,
Bewailinge every poore mans case,
As many a time shee hath ben seene.

Mee thinkes I see her modeste mood,
Her comlie clothing plainlie clad,
Her face so sweete, her cheere so good,
The courtlie countenance that shee had;
But, chefe of all, mee thinkes I see
Her vertues deutie daie by daie,
Homblie kneeling one her knee,
As her desire was still to praie.

Mee thinkes I cold from morow to night
Do no thing ells with verie good will,
But spend the time to speake and writte
The praise of my good ladies still;
Though reason saith, now she is dead,
Go seeke and sarve as good as shee;
It will not sinke so in my head,
That ever the like in courte will bee.

But sure I am, ther liveth yet
In court a dearer frinde to mee,
Whome I to sarve am so unfit,
I am sure the like will never bee;

For I with all that I can dooe,
Unworthie most maie seeme to bee,
To undoo the lachet of her shooe,
Yet will I come to courte and see.

Then have amongste ye once againe,
Faint harts faire ladies never win;
I trust ye will consider my payne,
When any good venison cometh in;
And, gentill ladies, I you praie,
If my absentinge breede to blame,
In my behalfe that ye will saie,
In court is remedie for the same.

Finis, q[d] W. ELDERTON.

Imprinted at London in Fletestreat
beneath the Conduit, at the signe
of S. John Evangelist, by
Thomas Colwell.

The next ballad is far from romantic. Undated, it belongs approximately to the same period as the others, and besides having Chaucerian overtones it represents an attitude to marriage and human relationships which was common in the popular literature of the time, faithless wives and cuckolded husbands always being good for a laugh.

A MERRY NEW SONG HOW A BRUER MEANT TO MAKE A COOPER CUCKOLD, AND HOW DEERE THE BRUER PAID FOR THE BARGAINE

To the tune of, In Somer time

If that you list, now merry be,
Lend listning eares a while to me,
To heare a song of a Bruer bold,
That meant a Cooper to cuckold.

The Cooper walked downe the streete,
And with the Bruer chanc'd to meete: