

A Conversation with Mr. Parker
by Madison Connaughton



Ballads, Parker, & the early modern stage of Gender Relationships

Broadside ballads were one of early modern England's most widely consumed and engaging forms of entertainment. The ability of these ballads to illustrate eye-catching images, name catchy tunes to which they could be sung, and discuss issues of widespread interest—all at a cheap cost—promoted their popularity. However, it is highly debated whether these ballads can accurately represent cultural influences in the early modern period, as there is a warranted level of debate when it comes to how much information about the life of a previous culture can be derived from a preserved artifact of that time. The debate is particularly true when looking at a concept as nuanced as gender relationships that can become highly contested in early modern accounts and modern research. With that point in mind, Martin Parker, the ballad genre's most

prolific seventeenth-century writer, illuminates a clearer understanding of how ballads engaged with the public and sought to discuss cultural issues, such as gender relationships as he encapsulates the complexities of voices and social scripts constructed in early modern England. This paper explores the types of social conversations and scripts that Parker proposes as he writes on the issues of gender relationships within early modern England.

It is essential to stipulate that the definition of what constitutes the “early modern” period can become highly disputed; this paper establishes the boundaries of the “early modern” period relevant to Parker to be the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, specifically in England. The established boundaries of the “early modern” period for this paper best ground the environment and circumstances in which Parker wrote and created important dialogue. His writing was originally published in the seventeenth century but repeatedly printed throughout the eighteenth century due to the popularity of the ballad form. For the purposes of this paper, the ballads discussed will be focused on as close to the original prints as possible, which were printed in the seventeenth century. Additionally, to provide a more strict definition of the early modern period, as discussed throughout this paper, it will refer to the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in Europe. This is supported by definition provided by scholar Ryan Prendergast in his article, “Early Modern: ‘By any other name...?’”, who uses this term over “Renaissance” or “Golden Age” as they glorify or erase the colonization, genocide, and other human rights travesties that took place during this time.¹¹ As the term “early modern” will be extensively referenced, it is important that it is clearly established to indicate a period of time before current historical events or the industrial period but also known to be more recent than the classical or ancient eras.¹²

To best consider the significance of Parker’s contributions to ballad writing in the seventeenth century and within modern research, it is important to address his history as a writer and someone who existed during the early modern period. Parker was known for being prolific in his writing and for his ability to not write about just one side of a cultural issue but various perspectives. It is most unfortunate that, compared to other historical figures with as much influence, Parker is wildly underrepresented in research of the early modern period. However, the fact that so much of his work survives in the form of contemporary prints and later editions made after his death, given the general ephemerality or disposability of broadside ballads, stands as proof of Parker’s popularity and likely influence. Traditionally, a single writer’s work within popular culture can provide, at best, a small understanding of a limited perspective of a subject within their contemporary culture. However, Parker is unique in his ability to write casually about several perspectives on the same issue, creating an archive of recurring conversations within early modern English popular culture, all by a single author. Drawing from a larger sample of Parker’s ballads allows for a proper acknowledgment of Parker’s versatility in writing, considering how he was able to create extensive discourse on gender relationships within his ballads, igniting conversation from various perspectives.

¹¹ Prendergast, Ryan. “Early Modern: ‘By Any Other Name ...?’” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 76–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jearlmodcultstud.13.4.76>.

¹² Prendergast, Ryan. 76.

When also looking to provide research within the scope of gender relations and gender theory within a historical context, a standard must be defined by which the paper seeks to measure its ability to discuss and reflect ideas put forth by the early modern period. This paper finds its ability to assume Parker's ability to make commentary on the roles of men and women through an article published by Amanda Flather, who speaks on the categorization of roles and how they were divided in early modern England.¹³ While it is a part of the early modern canon in modern research to understand a clear influence and adherence to a patriarchal society and the expectation of women as caretakers of the home and men as caretakers of the family, I found it essential to create some clear expectations that will later be supported and reflected in Parker's ballads. Flather makes clear that while there is an adherence to a patriarchal setup, it is not the idea of men's autonomy and agency that overarches, creating a strict sense of victimhood within women.¹⁴ She explains that it is a much more complicated and fluid narrative in which women are provided some agency, but that this should also not be mistaken for complete independence or even comparable to modern ideas of autonomy within a relationship.¹⁵ By demonstrating how Parker uses men's and women's voices in his ballads, I demonstrate Flather's point about the complicated and fluid nature of gender relations in the early modern period. It is a complicated task to sort through the seeming randomness of ballads written on different subjects and particular issues within gender relationships. However, these ideas can become tied together as they navigate an expectation of how different aspects of gender relationships functioned for both an early modern canon of community on the subject and a modern audience through a historical perspective.

Additionally, I find it necessary to establish the historical context in which Parker wrote, as he did lead a poorly recorded but intriguing life nonetheless. Unfortunately, there is very little record of Parker's personal life as an early modern figure. For the most part, Parker's ballads are the largest proof of his existence and contributions to early modern English society, which is not to diminish the considerable size of his anthology. However, there is one article, from 1919, by Hyder Rollins, who went through seventeenth-century documents and accounts, now lost, that can provide a modern audience with a small insight into Parker's life.¹⁶ He was believed to be born around 1600 and was not traditionally educated. However, it appears he absorbed much from his literary exposure to the extent that he was able to connect to classical literature and more scholarly ideas that developed in the period.¹⁷ Parker is first recorded as publishing ballads in 1624-1625 and was often credited as being the author of works either by his full name, "Martin Parker," or by his initials, "M.P." There is some evidence that he experimented in poetry other than ballads, as well as in pamphlet writing. However, the resulting publications from such

¹³ FLATHER, AMANDA J. "SPACE, PLACE, AND GENDER: THE SEXUAL AND SPATIAL DIVISION OF LABOR IN THE EARLY MODERN HOUSEHOLD." *History and Theory* 52, no. 3 (2013): 344–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24542990>.

¹⁴ Flather, A.J. 346.

¹⁵ Flather A.J. 346.

¹⁶ Rollins, Hyder E. "Martin Parker, Ballad-Monger." *Modern Philology* 16, no. 9 (1919). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/432894>.

¹⁷ Rollins, H.E. 449.

experimentations were not as well received as his ballads. He was praised for his flexibility and meter choice in ballad writing. However, he was criticized as being “merely the common run of mediocrity...” when considering his poetic works such as *The Nightingale*.¹⁸ Parker was also believed to be involved in the trade of alehouses, to the extent of actually running an alehouse in London as his works reflected a familiarity with the alehouse occupation and laws surrounding the trade of running one.¹⁹ He generated a large number of ballads from 1625 until 1640 and rose in popularity with the sheer volume of his work; indeed, he is credited with having the most extensive surviving collection of ballads penned by a single author.²⁰ However, Parker’s ballads from 1643-1655 are rare and were most likely either destroyed or not formally published and disseminated since all writing, especially popular writing such as broadside ballads, became restricted by parliament.

Parker’s power as a ballad writer was seen as a threat to the stability of the British monarchy during the English Civil War, alongside several of his contemporaries: John Taylor, Samuel Sheppard, John Cleveland, and John Hakluyt. There was a fear by authorities that disseminated print could cause insurrection and thus a felt need to control and regulate the content of what was printed as political propaganda.²¹ As restrictions grew in the House of Commons to regulate ballad writing, many writers turned to writing news pamphlets to continue writing on popular culture but escape censorship laws. Parker was among the several writers and began writing more pamphlets from a royalist perspective. His pamphlets never garnered the same attention and popularity as his ballads, but many audiences respected them. However, censorship grew in London, and several of Parker’s associates were arrested. While there are no formal records of Parker being jailed, several accounts suggest that he was imprisoned during a large arrest of royalist pamphleteers in 1648, once the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell came into power. Parker was believed to have died in prison between 1653 and 1656 as those believed to be imprisoned with him or know of his imprisonment remarked, “nothing is known of Martin Parker after this date, and he may have died in prison.”²² Despite his spurt of royalist pamphlets, Parker covered many topics within his ballads during his life. His ability to not become too attached to specific political conversations and topics won him a larger audience. While Parker faced several critiques and challenges within his career, as well as the destruction of his work and loss of personal recorded narrative, his ambiguity, and versatility in ballad writing reflected access to more diverse conversation to be conceptualized and variegated audiences within the genre of ballad writing.

Parker has over 65 recorded and preserved ballad titles that cover various genres; within these categories, Parker has a notable focus on gender relations and the complexities of a marriage that can reflect the power of his desire to engage in conversation with his audiences and among his characters. He speaks about the idea of gender from several perspectives and targets a

¹⁸ Rollins, H.E. 453.

¹⁹ Rollins, H.E. 462.

²⁰ Rollins, H.E. 455.

²¹ Rollins, H.E. 465.

²² Rollins, H.E. 468.

range of audiences: specifically, young or married men, maids, wives, widows, spinsters, and shrews. In the context of the ballads discussed, the relationship between men and women is typically veiled under the pretense of romantic or sexually interested relationships. However, men can be removed from the title of marriage as young men, while women are almost exclusively identified by their marital status as one of many kinds: maids, wives, widows, spinsters, or shrews. While the narrative structures and roles of women and men can be thus defined strictly, Parker created flexibility in offering opposing perspectives; this allows for social conversations to be set up from varying perspectives. These ballads are broken down into categories and conversations as they are structured through women's voices, men's voices, and conversing narratives that either situate each other across several titles or require two characters to discuss topics within gender relations within the same tune. This paper will use fourteen ballad titles written by Parker that fall within the scope of gender relationships and marriage in early modern England to analyze how those conversations engage with particular audiences or characters to engage with social scripts surrounding the complexities of early modern gender relationships.

Engaging Women's Issues & the Complexities of Social Scripts in Parker's Ballads

When thinking about social scripts and the expectations within a particular community, Parker set forth multiple complex conversations by using ballads written from the perspective of women's lives or using issues concerning women in relationships and asking audiences to engage with his work. His ballads concerning this topic often played with themes of trickery by women, abuse of women, and lessons from one woman, typically married, to be heeded by a larger audience. Bringing into light the conversations he sought to ignite within his ballads from the perspective of and for the audience of women, this section will examine the ballads he wrote to discuss these gendered social scripts that illuminate and broaden an understanding of women's issues and roles within early modern England and the audiences he was trying to reach.

In the ballad "A Hee-Divell,"²³ we first encounter using the story of a woman whose husband is so horrible she compares him to the devil. Parker uses this ballad to open a conversation up on the struggles of women within marriages where they do not feel their needs met or respected. It is written from a first-person perspective, and the woman first describes that she was foolish for marrying for love. She says that while she hated being single, she should have chosen her husband more wisely. She lists her husband's behavior as "basely" (an early modern word often meaning wretched or dishonorable) and repeatedly refers to him as a "knave" (meaning lowly or of the nature of a bastard). By the sixth verse, the woman starts describing the abuse he inflicts on her, stating, "Yet all the thankes I have therefore, / is nought unlesse 't be a beating."²⁴ insinuating that unless she is constantly assuring and appeasing her husband, he will beat her. The abuse becomes more intense as the ballad progresses, and in the eighth verse, she sings, "And if the meat doe not him content, /

²³ Magdalene College - Pepys, 1.398, 1.399, Pepys Ballads 1.398-399, EBBA 20186.

²⁴ EBBA 20186

heelee breake my head with the platter.”²⁵ which continues the narrative that her husband has become an all-powerful being in her life, controlling her with violence. In the fourteenth verse, the woman ends her story with a plea to young maidens to consider her story and for married wives with better husbands to pity her. In telling this horrific story of abuse, Parker, as the writer, concludes this ballad by explicitly calling out for his audiences to purchase this song. With the line, “All you Maidens faire, / that have a mind to wed, / Take heed and be aware, / lest you like me be sped.”²⁶ Parker invites any maiden to purchase and engage with this content by arguing that this is an important warning to be considered. Parker then turns to broaden his audience with the plea, “And you good wives, / that heare my wofull Ditty, / If you ere bought Ballad in your lives, / buy this, for very pittie.”²⁷ as the final line. He directly asks other married women to be interested in what he has to say with the encouragement to take pity on the woman in his ballad. Through “A Hee-Divell,” Parker ignites a conversation within gender relationships that touches on themes of abuse to be used as warnings and entertainment that he encourages women to reflect on in their own lives as he makes the explicit invitation for multiple audiences to actively engage with this ballad.

A ballad that similarly generates conversation and engages with its audience to discuss themes of abuse and womanly advice in early modern marriages is “A Penny-worth of Good Counsell,”²⁸ which is written from the perspective of a woman who sings out to her peers, offering to tell her story in hopes that they consider their own marriages through the lens of her misfortune. It begins with an extension in the title to say, “To Widdowes, and to Maides, this Counsell I send free; And let them looke before they leape, or, that they married bee.”²⁹ The wife immediately makes clear who she is trying to speak with, calling the attention of the widows and maids who may hear this tune on the street from buskers and should be drawn in by her story. The words “this Counsell I send free...”³⁰ is not a statement on the cost of her advice, as that comes from the title “A Penny-worth of Good Counsell” as ballads were typically sold cheaply for only a penny or two. Those words are actually meant to reflect the idea that this woman has held these thoughts for quite some time and that she no longer can keep them to herself and has to set them free to be heard and heeded by her peers.

The ballad begins with the singer, presumably written as Parker relaying the voice of this woman’s story, as they come upon the wife singing loudly in the street, distressed. Parker describes this woman as coming undone with “her hands sate wringing; / shee wept apace, / and cryd, alas; / My Husband hath no fore-cast in him.”³¹ He uses the imagery of the wife wringing her hands and crying loudly to amplify the anguish of her words, a wife whose husband has no direction in life and can not meet her needs. Parker then turns the voice of the ballad to the woman as she reflects on her maidenhood, “Quoth she, when as I was a Mayden, / I had store of

²⁵ EBBA 20186

²⁶ EBBA 20186

²⁷ EBBA 20186

²⁸ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.312, 1.313, C.20.f.7.312-313, EBBA 30215.

²⁹ EBBA 30215

³⁰ EBBA 30215

³¹ EBBA 30215

Suters brave...³² to allow her story to be understood by her audience more personally. Now that the audience hears the story from her perspective rather than recounting events, she shares that her husband was charming when she met him but believes she should have waited longer to know his character. The ballad creates a greater intimacy with the audience with the line, “I tell you friends now seriously, / my Husband he doth nought but chide....”³³ By calling the audience the wife’s friends, it changes the environment of someone listening to a ballad and rather a widow, maid, or fellow wife listening to the story of a poor wife as she shares her troubles in community. Further, she creates this repetition of a wife downtrodden as each verse ends with the lament, “My Husband hath no fore-cast in him.”³⁴ in a way that almost reminds her of her misery and more assertive communication to the audience of her situation.

As each verse adds to the growing evidence that her husband is not of good character, it becomes overwhelming the way her husband limits her within their home by not allowing her to leave and restricting her finances even though she brought a substantial dowry and this last line in each verse then acts as a breath to summarize his character in a way that her listeners, or friends as she refers to them, can agree with her. In the last two verses, she then switches from sharing her story and heeding her listeners to reflecting on how she can help her situation and asking for advice from her audience. In the second to last verse, she shares that if she is kind to her husband, “With sweet embraces I will cling him; / Ile speake him faire to have more care....”³⁵ This may give him more fore-cast or care in their relationship. While sharing this idea with her audience, it acts two-fold. She asks her audience if they believe these actions will help her situation, but it can also be seen as a question she asks herself. Through the doubt of her husband’s ability to heal and be kinder to her, she considers the thought to herself of her relationship to the functions of their marriage. This question is then furthered in the last verse as she asks, “But if I see hee will not mend, / come tell me Widdow, Maid, or Wife; / What shall I doe in this same woe?”³⁶ So if these sweet embraces and fair words do not fix him, the wife asks what advice the local widows, maids, and wives have. For most of this ballad, the wife offers her story and advice on choosing a husband carefully. Her voice is meant to be heard as it is passed from the singer to her own in the second verse. However, she ends this ballad by inviting her audience in, leaving them with a question to generate conversation, what would you do in this situation?

“A Penny-worth of good Counsell” creates conversation in many different ways. It sought to create intimacy by describing the listeners as the wife’s friends, creating closeness with the audience, which is then deepened throughout the narrative by a repeated phrase grounding the audience in knowing the wife’s situation and closes by leaving the audience with an open-ended question. This question could then be answered by the wife by her audience, but also open a broader conversation within the community as its tale is shared by the wives, widows, and

³² EBBA 30215

³³ EBBA 30215

³⁴ EBBA 30215

³⁵ EBBA 30215

³⁶ EBBA 30215

maids who hear this ballad and discuss with their peers what they would do in the wife's situation. All of this plays into Parker's intentions with his ballads, creating conversation both within his ballads and externally within an audience or community.

In Parker's repository of ballads that discussed women's issues within gender relationships was "The wooing Maid,"³⁷ which is written from the perspective of a 21-year-old woman who deals with the struggles of being an unmarried woman within her community and engages her audience by hoping to be illuminated as to what makes her so undesirable. The woman compares herself repeatedly to the women around her and cites, "For every one else / can have Suters great plenty, / Most marry at fourteene..."³⁸ while she must be twenty-one and unwed. As the ballad progresses, she compares herself to women she increasingly thinks should not have been able to get married before her. At the peak of her comparisons, she mentions a woman named "Sisly," who is disabled in some capacity and has still managed to be married off by the time she was nineteen.³⁹ Following each verse is a chorus that speaks to the audience, "Come gentle, come simple, / come foolish, come witty, / O if you lack a maid / take me for pitty."⁴⁰ The woman repeatedly invites any man who hears this tune to come wed her. She begs for pity and promises that she is not picky in choosing a husband, for she only needs one suitor to be satisfied, and that suitor can even be less desirable himself, both simple-minded and foolish. By the end of the ballad, the woman's desperation becomes explicitly clear with the line, "For I needs must have one, / be he good or evill:"⁴¹ meaning that she is content with even having an evil and potentially abusive husband rather than continue being single. Even the last chorus escalates in dramatic flair as the last line is changed from the standard "O if you lack a maid / take me for pitty." to "O let me not die a maid, / take me for pitty."⁴² continuing the woman's descent into distressed attempts at asking a man to marry her. Parker engages several audiences of both married and unmarried individuals with this ballad as he writes from the perspective of a young woman seeking a husband and, in doing so, aims to engage a diverse audience to best address the topic of desirable qualities of a wife within the scope of early modern expectations of gender relationships.

The ballads within this section sought to engage in several conversations surrounding women's narratives or voices within early modern gender relationships, including topics of abuse, advice, and issues that can arise within marriages. In speaking on these topics, Parker sought to engage particular audiences, specifically maids, married women, and unmarried men, with the issues he set forth by asking his audience for advice or how they would address a situation or by allowing a narrator to provide guidance on the issue. Parker demonstrates through these ballads his desire to elicit particular environments to discuss gender relationships by

³⁷ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.452, 1.453, C.20.f.7.452-453, EBBA 30304

³⁸ EBBA 30304

³⁹ EBBA 30304

⁴⁰ EBBA 30304

⁴¹ EBBA 30304

⁴² EBBA 30304

discussing particular gendered issues and audiences in relation to women's roles surrounding marriage, both explicitly and implicitly.

Engaging Men's Issues, Advice, & Social Scripts set forth in Parker's Ballads

Like a Jack-of-All-Trades, the ballads Parker writes in this next section are from the perspective of or written for the audience of men. They include themes of men's virtues to be relayed to women, and how to manage women and advice shared from one man to another. Parker's ballads will continue to demonstrate discourse through many themes within gender relationships—consequently expanding on ideas within social scripts he set forth that allow for the expectations and roles that men play within early modern England, creating a continuously complex demonstration of early modern gender culture within his ballads and his audiences.

A ballad that employs a development of conversation on male issues within early modern perspectives in gender relationships is "The Married Mans Lesson,"⁴³ which engages its audience by using a married man's voice to provide advice and warning about the danger of jealousy within a relationship. With each verse, he acknowledges a different problem or issue that can come up between a man and his wife, most of these issues relating to how a wife can disrespect her husband. For example, one verse considers the ways a wife can be horrible and how despite her horribleness, to heed the advice of this man would be to exercise patience in the line, "A wife at the worst (as I told you before) / a drunkard, a swearer, a scold, theefe, or whore, / By gentle perswasions, reclaimed may bee..."⁴⁴ He encourages his audience that jealousy will only make a situation worse, but with virtues like patience, a better outcome is more likely. This idea is driven further throughout the entire ballad as the chorus repeatedly recites a variation of the two lines, "Be not thou jealous I prethee deere Lad, / for jelousie makes many good women bad."⁴⁵ These lines emphasize that the narrator is attempting to reach out to his audience with a plea to limit jealousy in marriages, as it will lead to nothing good. At the end of the ballad, in a further attempt to fetter jealousy, the man begins a verse by calling out to both married men and women. In this verse, the narrator says, "Now lastly to both men and women I speake... / All fighting and scratching, and scolding shall cease, / where jelousies harbord there can bee no peace."⁴⁶ Parker uses the narrator's last verse to broaden his audience, hoping to engage a larger and more diverse audience as he asks his audience to heed the advice he gives and take a moment of reflection to examine how they see themselves in relation to expectations of their gender within marriage in the early modern period. Looking at the entire ballad, Parker continuously draws in his audiences with open-ended questions and provides advice that his audience can then further engage with outside the constraints of the ballad by setting up a constructive format of dialogue through his ballad writing.

While Parker, when seeking to include male voices and issues within his ballads, wrote ostensibly about advice that can be shared by men, commenting on the virtues and expectations

⁴³ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.510, 1.511, C.20.f.7.510-511, EBBA 30343.

⁴⁴ EBBA 30343

⁴⁵ EBBA 30343

⁴⁶ EBBA 30343

of women in early modern society, this next ballad creates a narrative for an audience to consider in their own conversations through the perspective of men's roles dependant on their age and relationship to other men within their communities. "The father hath beguil'd the sonne."⁴⁷ is a ballad that tells the tale of a father who misguides his son on purpose to dissuade the young man from his father's female affections. The story begins with a narrator, presumably the person who sings the ballad, sharing the context of the story they are about to tell. They hint towards a ballad that will cover themes of trickery, family dynamics, and gender roles, as well as how the ballad will contain a story that most will probably not have seen in their own life with the line, "Nor I thinke any of you, / since wooing and wedding begun, / That ith way of marriage, / Or such kinde of carriage...."⁴⁸ Within the first verse, Parker uses his narrator to encapsulate an audience, drawing them in with a story of gossip that they will be intrigued to know. The voice then turns to the father of a son as he shares some advice. With the words, "I purpose to sing: / and tis of a certaine truth, / A widower old / Well stored with gold..."⁴⁹ the father encourages his young adult son to consider marrying a widow. He cites that widows usually come with their late husband's money, so he should consider this an option to raise his status when choosing a wife. Even though the first few verses end with the line "...the father beguil'd his owne sonne."⁵⁰ it is unclear where trickery will take place, as so far in the story, he seems like a caring father who seeks to counsel his son on marriage. Especially when the ballad becomes so critical as to call the father an "old fox,"⁵¹ which seems unnecessary as far into the ballad; as the ballad continues, the voice is then passed to the son, who shares his own opinion on the matter and how he has fallen in love, "The sonne told his father, / How that he had rather: / to have in the same his consent. / So to have a view / Of his Lover true...."⁵² This lover turns out to be a beautiful young woman, and the son begs his father to consider his affection for the young maid. At this point, the beguiling reveals that the father also falls in love with the woman, and his advice towards his son is not meant as sage advice but rather an attempt to keep his son away from her. This trickery and selfish character is first revealed to the audience, who then are subjected to watching the son be unknowingly manipulated by his father.

The voice of the ballad changes once more in the next section, moving to a third-person point of view as the conversations between the young maid and father occur, and the audience is meant to watch the unfolding of events and use them as a reflection for their own conduct in their relationships. Further, the ballad encourages the audience to think poorly of the father as he is described as "briske as a body louse."⁵³ and "such an old knave"⁵⁴ (an early modern word for bastard or outcast). As the ballad continues, the story unfolds in a rather violent manner. The father successfully swindles the maid from his son and marries her for himself, causing the son

⁴⁷ Magdalene College - Pepys, 1.362, 1.363, Pepys Ballads 1.362-363, EBBA 20170.

⁴⁸ EBBA 20170

⁴⁹ EBBA 20170

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⁵¹ EBBA 20170

⁵² EBBA 20170

⁵³ EBBA 20170

⁵⁴ EBBA 20170

to become incredibly heartbroken and take his own life by stabbing himself in the heart. After the son has passed, the father realizes the weight of his actions and goes mad, running through the streets crying out for his son. In this verse, we see that the father has failed his son, not only in action but through the use of language to describe his character, “The unnaturall dad, / Ran presently mad....”⁵⁵ The father is described as having failed his duties as a parent to guide and counsel his child, making him “unnaturall” in character. The now young wife grows increasingly embarrassed at the events unfolding and throws herself down a well. The ballad closes with two dead characters and one who runs from town to town crying out about his son. The narrator takes the story back over with the last verse as they leave the audience with the haunting message about the consequences of older generations trying to fool those they are meant to guide. They directly invite the audience to take warning in the line, “Let every god father, / A warning here gather...”⁵⁶ implying that to be a good father, one must listen and heed the consequences of this ballad. Parker creates an ongoing conversation around the line, “For both were to blame, / And both suffer'd shame...”⁵⁷ asking the audience to consider the advice and intentions of men in the community, both those who seek counsel and those who share. In this way, Parker used the power of an intriguing narrative to capture the audience of men from many generations to leave them with the conversation about how they choose to support one another, particularly regarding marriage and choosing wives.

A ballad that Parker wrote addressing and contributing to conversations surrounding issues in early modern expectations of marriage from the male perspective that engages with the practice of young men marrying widows for financial support and benefit is “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot, Tis good to strike while the Irons hott.”⁵⁸ This ballad is written from the perspective of a man who seeks to counsel unmarried men to consider the benefits of marrying wealthy widows. The man begins by saying that he has observed an increasing number of rich widows who are looking for husbands and that he believes his unmarried peers should seize the opportunity with the line, “Now is the Wooing time or never, / Widowes now will love Young-men...”⁵⁹ As the ballad continues he acknowledges the allure of wanting to marry young maids as there is a better opportunity for love connections. However, he deters men from this option as he sings, “Maydens loves are coy and fickle, / they too much their equalls looke...”⁶⁰ explaining that while they may look like an appealing path to follow, it does not reap the most benefits. To further his argument for widows, he goes on to say, “If a poore Young-man be matched / with a Widdow stord with gold, / And thereby be much inritchd, / though hes young and she is old...”⁶¹ In this verse, he argues that while a widow may not be what a man desires in a wife as she may not be as young or pretty, it is only for a short while as she is old and will die. He will then be free to marry a young maid with the new money he inherits from the widow and

⁵⁵ EBBA 20170

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⁵⁷ EBBA 20170

⁵⁸ Magdalene College - Pepys, 1.386, 1.387, Pepys Ballads 1.386-387, EBBA 20179.

⁵⁹ EBBA 20179

⁶⁰ EBBA 20179

⁶¹ EBBA 20179

her late husband. To continuously drive home this message, each verse ends with a one-line chorus from the title of the ballad that encourages men, “To strike the Iron while tis hott.”⁶² meaning that these men are presented with an opportunity that has not been traditionally considered in society and should be used to absolute advantage. In this ballad, Parker continues to discuss themes of men speaking about marriage and managing women while also seeking to engage an audience to consider the cultural values of men looking for wives during this time by setting forth an expectation of conversations as structured by his ballads.

Within the ballads that center men’s voices and perspectives and their relation to gender relationship issues, Parker ignites conversation through his versatility in employing different themes and structuring various social scripts that his audience can engage with. In these ballads, Parker reaches the audience of married men and women, unmarried men seeking wives, and the complex relationship between father, son, and a woman. He also discusses resolving problems within marriages and the interests, the intricacies of finding a wife as an unmarried man in early modern England, the theme of trickery between father and son, and the consequences of greediness and lust from the male perspective. Parker’s ballads scaffold the expectations of gender-related conversations as they bring attention to the narratives that people may encounter with similar problems and how they may avoid or resolve these issues and invite his audiences to question their experiences or engage with his material.

A Conversation Among Characters; How Gender Issues are Engaged with Multiple Voices

So far, Parker’s ability to generate conversation on gender relationships has been demonstrated through his ability to engage with audiences from a single-point perspective, this next section will explore Parker’s ability to engage audiences and discuss issues in gender relationships across multiple characters with a single ballad or create a single narrative across several titled ballads. The following ballads are thus divided into two categories of conversation: the first are ballads that juxtapose topics and perspectives quite literally across different tunes that return to a central theme within gender relations and the second is a ballad centered around a conversation between two characters, a husband and wife, within a single tune. Parker’s desire to deeply discuss gender relationships is exemplified in the next ballads as demonstrated in their respective categories using multiple voices or ballads to disseminate early modern issues within marriages.

An example of a set of ballads that creates a conversation across several publications in order to disseminate themes within the complexities of a marriage are the titles “Keep a good tongue in your head”⁶³ and “Hold your hands honest men.”⁶⁴ “Keep a good tongue in your head” is written in the first-person point of view of a husband who loves his wife and believes her to be a good and virtuous person, but her fault is that she is a gossip who can not control her tongue. This ballad was written first in the conversation between the two as the tune listed for this ballad

⁶² EBBA 20179

⁶³ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.512, 1.513, C.20.f.7.512-513, EBBA 30344.

⁶⁴ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.514, 1.515, C.20.f.7.514-515, EBBA 30345.

is “the Milkmaids,”⁶⁵ while the tune for “Hold your hands honest men” is cited as “Keep a good tongue in your head.”⁶⁶ This example is also part of the argument that these ballads are meant to respond to each other. They are set on the same tune to create a conversation, even on a musical level. “Hold your hands honest men” is a ballad written from the perspective of a wife who knows that her husband loves her but finds that in times of anger or conflict, he lacks self-control and patience and turns towards violence to deal with her. These ballads are centered around someone, either the wife or husband, having a problem with their partner’s character. While they are taken from opposing views of the other gender, they create conversation by following the exact ballad positioning and rhythmic structure. In both ballads, the tunes primarily comprise the narrator listing their partner's accomplishments in their physical fitness, social skills, and hobbies. They directly answer one another through one verse and respond to each other line for line through rhyming couplets. In “Keep a good tongue in your head,” the line, “Her body which I have oft / embraced so smooth and soft...”⁶⁷ is introduced to discuss the wife’s physical beauty. This verse can then be mirrored in “Hold your hands honest men,” through the lines, “His body is straight and tall, / proportioned well withall...”⁶⁸ that starts the discussion of the husband’s appearance. The direct parallel between the lines strengthens this conversation, “Proportioned aright, / tis straight as any shaft, / Her leg is compleat...”⁶⁹ and “In every respect, / Hees void of defect, / his legs are straight as wands...” These verses make a point to discuss the straightness of their partner’s legs as grounding points connecting the ballads through early modern expectations of beauty. Additionally, these ballads use a repeating chorus line to drive the central theme home, the flaw their partner has. In both cases, this line is just a variation on the title, “keep a good tongue in your head” and “hold your hands honest men,” which would be sung in the same way as these ballads are written under the same tune, creating a deeper connection and evidence of a conversation between the ballads. The complexities that men and women within marriage during the early modern period are demonstrated through Parker’s ballads “keep a good tongue in your head” and “hold your hands honest men,” and with these ballads, one can disseminate the desire Parker had to engage audiences by using multiple ballads and voices to generate that conversation.

When looking at how conversation about early modern gender relationships can evolve and take on multiple perspectives and seek to expand its audience, the ballads “Well met Neighbor”⁷⁰ and “Have among you good Women”⁷¹ have to be considered for their ability to demonstrate the complexity on conversation within ballad positioning and the constructs of conversation that Parker set forth. These titles create an interestingly complex conversation that can be understood from multiple perspectives. The ballad “Well met Neighbor” is written as a conversation between two women, Nell and Sisse, as they describe the horrible way that they see

⁶⁵ EBBA 30344

⁶⁶ EBBA 30345

⁶⁷ EBBA 30344

⁶⁸ EBBA 30345

⁶⁹ EBBA 30344

⁷⁰ University of Glasgow Library - Euing, Euing Ballads 383, EBBA 32002

⁷¹ British Library - Roxburghe, British Library - Roxburghe, EBBA 30093

men treating wives in their community, and each verse ends with the agreement that these men should be hanged for their violence. In opposition, the ballad “Have among you good Women” is a conversation between two men, William Starket and Robin Hobs, who discuss their perspective that the women in their community are taking advantage of their husbands. They come up with different punishments they believe the women deserve. What first connects these ballads is their content; they mirror each other in the storyline as two individuals who pass each other out in public and strike up a conversation, observing their community. Further, within the second verse, these ballads copy one another in verse. In “Well met Neighbor,” Nell describes a violent husband who threatens violence against his wife with the couplet, “Know you not Laurence the Miller, / O he is as good as ere twangd, / His wife sayes he threatens to kill her, / O such a Rogue would be hangd.”⁷² A similar verse is also used in “Have among you good Women” as Robin shares with William a story of a wife who steals from her husband in the lines, “What thinke you of Jone the Spinner, / her husbands pocket she pickt, / And she grudges her servants their dinner / oh such a Queane would be kickt.”⁷³ These verses employ rhyming couplets to create a recognizable pattern between the two ballads. The first line is used to introduce the offender, the next two describe the infractions of the person, and the last line creates a punishment for the person. While it is clear that these ballads share conversation, it is difficult to ascertain which ballad was written first. The complex relationship between these ballads may result from one ballad being written in response to an original ballad and that original ballad being edited to create more conversation.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving original copies of these ballads, so it is difficult to know the progression of this conversation exactly. Nevertheless, evidence for each ballad being the first adds to the argument that an irrefutable conversation occurs between the two ballads. These ballads are written to different tunes; however, “Have among you good Women” is written to the tune of a ballad titled “O such a Rogue,” and while “Well met Neighbor” is written to the tune of “Ragged and Torne” each verse in this ballad ends with a verse saying “O such a rogue should be hanged.”⁷⁴ This line creates a double meaning within the ballad, as it can refer to the abusive husband discussed in the verse and be used as a line to call out “Have among you good Women” written to the tune of “O such a Rogue.” This idea would indicate that “Have among you good Women” was written first. Therefore, “Well met Neighbor” would be written as a response arguing that abusive treatment of a wife is always uncalled for, which opposes the initial argument. Oppositionally, the ballad “Well met Neighbor” is sung primarily from the perspective of Nell sharing with her neighbor, Sisse, all the abuse she knows about throughout the community. This idea is made even more evident as “Have among you good Women” mentions Nell at the end of the ballad. In “Have among you good Women,” Nell is described as being unable to part from her friends and that she should be carted for her indecencies in the

⁷² EBBA 32002

⁷³ EBBA 30093

⁷⁴ EBBA 32002

lines, “She lodges with mouldy fac[.]t Nell, / and I doubt they will never be parted, / Till the one get the lash in Bridewell, / and the other from Newgate be carted.”⁷⁵

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to know which ballad came first definitively; however, one line in “Have among you good Women” suggests that it was written first, “Well met Neighbor” responded, and “Have among you good Women” was edited and rereleased with an added verse. The line in “Have among you good Women” says, “But stay neighbour, / harke you one word, / which I had forgotten before. . . .”⁷⁶ This line suggests that the ballad may have ended initially with the verse before, but after the response that Parker wrote with “Well met Neighbor,” he went back and rewrote the original ballad to include the last verse, which directly calls out Nell. Its phrasing suggests that the speaker had an original statement but calls back his audience to include one last word. This is a metaphor for Parker writing an original ballad and inviting the audience back once more to include more thought. A conversation was created in any case or understanding of these two ballads. Parker employs verse structure and almost a call-and-response conversation between these two ballads that expands on what can be defined as conversation, as the ballads are drawn into the concept on a two-fold, through cultural expectations and social scripts that the content of the ballads address and setting forth a literal format of conversation as these ballads respond to one another.

These several sets of ballads engage their audiences and discuss subjects within gender relationships in literal conversation through ballad positioning and spreading discourse in patterns of two (and in the case of “Well Met Neighbor” and “Have Among You Good Women” possibly three) ballads over one narrative. Furthermore, Parker extends his audience by using the narratives of troubling characteristics and marriages to be seen as warnings to those of early modern England who are not yet married but looking for partners. These ballads demonstrate how Parker spread his writing of gender relations and discussions of early modern marriage from multiple perspectives in order to establish conversation among characters, issues, and audiences.

The next section of ballads demonstrates how Parker was able to create a conversation that employed the use of multiple complex perspectives that did not have to stretch across multiple ballad titles to engage the audience and characters within the text. In speaking to a larger audience, Parker includes narratives of both men's and women's experiences and their respective roles in a relationship. The different gender perspectives are enacted by exchanging roles—to ill ends—in the ballad titled “The Woman to the PLOW; And the Man to the HEN-ROOST”⁷⁷ The ballad begins with an argument between the husband and wife, in which the husband critiques his wife's abilities as a housewife. The wife challenges her husband, and they agree to exchange household chores for a day to experience the other's role in the marriage. By the fifth verse, all has gone awry, and the husband encounters an immense failure and causes harm to his child in the line, “Another time he went to rock / The Cradle, and threw the Child o th floor, / And brok his Nose, and hurt it sore.”⁷⁸ While both the husband and child suffer injury

⁷⁵ EBBA 30093

⁷⁶ EBBA 30093

⁷⁷ University of Glasgow Library - Euing, Euing Ballads 397, EBBA 32024.

⁷⁸ EBBA 32024

to pride and face in the home, the wife meets a similar catastrophe outside, in the field. While trying to fill her husband's role, the wife makes several mistakes leading to the consequence, "She overthrew it, nay and worse, / She broke the Cart, and kild a Horse..."⁷⁹ After both the husband and wife face frustration and defeat they return to the home at the end of the day and discuss their mishaps. Each partner is given a verse to speak to the audience by the end of the ballad. The wife uses her lines to encourage women to enjoy their marriage roles. The husband calls out to other men to learn a lesson from his experience and appreciate the respective roles within early modern English marriages. Ultimately, this ballad does not attempt to advance one side of the argument or the power of one gender above the other. Instead, like so many of Parker's broadside ballads, it continues to contribute multiple perspectives on the complexity of early modern English culture surrounding the topic of gender relationships. While Parker can create a conversation between a ballad and its audience, Parker also demonstrates that he can create a dialogue between ballads and characters that further topics within the theme of gender relations.

When thinking about social scripts and how conversation can be used as an example of social influences of etiquette, Parker's "Man's Felicity and Misery" has to be discussed for its ability to engage with both men's and women's perspectives in the complexities and expectations within an early modern marriage. While looking at conversations that engage with audiences in this context, we often discuss dialogue between a man and woman, usually man and wife. However, this ballad offers the conversation between two men and their experiences within a marriage that includes insight into two very different marriages within, presumably, the same age group. The ballad takes on the conversation of two cousins in London, Edmund and David, who are married and discuss their wives' qualities. Edmund is seemingly a newlywed, while David has been married for some time; this difference in time married will alter one's perspective on the joys of marriage throughout the ballad. Edmund begins the ballad by greeting his cousin and telling him of his new wife, acknowledging that he is unique, but believes that he has the best wife a man could have. David responds with a congratulatory echo of Edmund's news and laments troubles with his wife. The two then take turns making twin verses that will lead to Edmund picking the topic and often complimenting his wife, to which David then returns with a response of how his wife fails in the ways Edmund's wife succeeds.

One of the more obvious examples of this back-and-forth comparison of Edmund's and David's wives is found in the leading lines of two verses. Edmund sings the first one in the couplet, "My Wife is affable and meeke, / To please my fancy shee doth seeke..."⁸⁰ in which he describes his wife's tender nature and though she portrays a modest beauty if she does desire to accentuate her looks it is to please her husband. Edmund also sees his wife as an overall pleasant person who is easy to talk to and desired company within his community. This is then immediately juxtaposed by David, who cries out, "My wife is obstinate and froward, / Shee's sullen, peevish and untoward..."⁸¹ describing his wife as incredibly difficult in nature. David

⁷⁹ EBBA 32024

⁸⁰ EBBA 20182

⁸¹ EBBA 20182

feels his wife is unpleasant company as she will be critical in conversation. While Edmund's wife is described as "meek," giving the appeal of someone who is even-tempered, David's wife is seen as "peevish" and "obstinate," implying that she may be easily angered and stubborn, making her difficult company and maybe not as well-liked by her peers. The capabilities of their wives to be seen as good or bad within their roles can then be expanded upon across several verses towards the end of the ballad.

The debate of the competency of their wives is actually started by David, who makes the statement that his wife does not trust him with almost the entirety of his verse, "If I upon a woman looke, / My wife will sweare upon a booke, / That she is certainly my whore, / Though I nere saw the woman before. / Shee'l claw her eyes out if she can..."⁸² Through this verse, we can see this continued aggressive nature within David's wife as she is suspicious of her husband's fidelity. At any chance to accuse her husband of cheating, she will attack both David verbally and physically attack the woman if given an opportunity. Edmund then responds to this idea by saying in his verse, "My wife will never follow me, / Goe where I will, at home staves she, / Though I from Morn till night doe come, / She smiling bids mee welcome home, / This makes me haste home to my Nan..."⁸³ Edmund implies the idea that he is free to live his life however he sees fit, and will always be safe to return home to a loving wife, unquestioning of his behavior or how he conducts his business outside the home. Edmund also shares that because his wife is so sweet, he would not dare think of being unfaithful, as her sweet nature makes it desirable to return home. To this, David responds once more to this idea with the verse, "If I unto the Alehouse goe, / To drink a Jug of beere or so, / Though nere so fast I thither hie, / My wife is there as soone as I..."⁸⁴ saying that no matter where he goes his wife will follow him. While Edmund lives with the security of knowing his wife will stay home and he has the desire to go to her at the end of the day, David lives in the opposite reality in which he can not escape his wife as she will follow him wherever he goes and has the desire to be away from her constantly.

If the content of each verse was not enough, these verses also end with the chorus line for each of these men reflecting on their respective wives. Edmund, characterized by the love and adoration he has for his wife, is filled with the line or some version of, "Shee is the best Wife that ever had man."⁸⁵ Edmund deliberately says that his wife is an example of the best characteristics a wife can have. Further, everything that makes up Edmund's wife is seen as the desirable qualities that make her the best wife a man could have. In opposition, David uses his line to further complain about his opinion of his wife with some version of, "Oh she's the worst wife that ever had man."⁸⁶ Like Edmund, David explains that every story and description of his wife's behavior makes up the qualities of being the worst wife a man can have. These characters both use this ballad to set up the expectations of wives they have, praising them for the virtues of Edmund's wife and the pitiful behavior of David's wife. This is further proved by the author's

⁸² EBBA 20182

⁸³ EBBA 20182

⁸⁴ EBBA 20182

⁸⁵ EBBA 20182

⁸⁶ EBBA 20182

character, traditionally just a sung characterization of Parker's internal dialogue, who ends the ballad with a final invitation to the wives who listen to this ballad.

Parker initiates conversation to take place within his audience, directly calling them out, "You wives who have heard this discourse, / Now shew who's better and who is worse..."⁸⁷ and asking them to participate in what he has presented as the difference between a good and lousy wife. This quote makes Parker's intentions evident that the ballad was created to set up a conversation, literally, among men and the ways they view their relationships with women in marriages, but also include women, particularly wives, to examine their etiquette within society and consider the social scripts set forth by Parker.

A ballad takes on an interesting conversation of multiple characters trying to engage with a larger audience to address the weight of each role within a marriage as a wife feels disrespected by her husband's assumption that her contributions to their marriage are not as taxing. As the ballad progresses, the husband turns into his wife to create a conversation with her that audience then witnesses. "A merry Dialogue betwixt a married man and his wife concerning the affaires of this carefull life."⁸⁸ is a ballad that seeks to discuss a man's perspective on the contributions to the marriage by a man and woman by seventeenth-century standards, with an evident bias of the husband that men contribute more to a marriage. However, this position is argued by his wife, who makes the case for herself and other women within a marriage by interjecting at multiple points to share her own story and the women in her communities struggles within their marriages.

The ballad begins with the husband naming his audience of good wives and starts singing that he acknowledges the troubles and labor women contribute to the functions of family life but that this contribution is far less laborious than what men perform. Stretching from the end of verse one and into the introduction of verse two, the audience is given a clear picture of the husband's argument, "Their labours great and full of paine, / yet for the same they have small gaine. // In that you say cannot be true, / for men doe take more paines then you..."⁸⁹ Through these lines, he states that he sympathizes with their roles in a marriage, but compared to the impact the work has on the relationship, he believes men take more pain than women. While the husband does attempt to use this argument to position men as above women in a marital relationship, he does suggest that this comes from a place of defense for his contributions in the lines, "Yet let us doe all what we can, / your tongues will get the upper hand."⁹⁰ This verse suggests that he feels at the mercy or, more often, a lack of mercy of women's words. Even as he begs for women to acknowledge his work in the relationship and hold their comments, the following verse is a rebuttal from his wife. She does not try to defend herself with any direct call out but instead begins reciting her daily schedule as proof of her work, refuting the idea proposed that she has time to be idle in a day. The verse begins with the lines, "We women in the morning

⁸⁷ EBBA 20182

⁸⁸ Magdalene College - Pepys, 1.388, 1.389, Pepys Ballads 1.388-389, EBBA 20180.

⁸⁹ EBBA 20180

⁹⁰ EBBA 20180

rise, / as soone as day breakes in the skies, / And then to please you with desire...⁹¹ What is essential to note is that not only does she describe the physical labor she is responsible for of rising and preparing the house, but the emotional responsibility of constantly pleasing her husband. Her argument allows for her physical efforts to be seen, but her case most clearly lies in her emotional work and the weight and toll it takes on her. The husband does not as clearly understand this as he returns to the argument of physical labor with the lines, “Why men doe worke at Plough and Cart, / which soone would break a womans hart...⁹² He continues to push this idea that because his work is more physically laborious, he should be awarded more respect and honor within the relationship. Along with this argument for respect, he repeatedly centers himself on the idea that women should not speak ill of their husbands as most of his verses end with some version of, “In praise of wives speake you no more, / for these were lies you told before.”⁹³ This is not the same as some chorus lines we have seen before, as it is not a repeating line, but a similar argument is made in some capacity every time he speaks. It is important to note his passion for this part of the argument as well as the difference in contribution to the relationship as an interesting dynamic is introduced by the wife in the ballad.

Throughout the ballad, a dynamic is set up in which the husband and wife can mildly agree that men contribute most of the physical labor to maintain the family’s financial and household stability. In contrast, the women contribute most of the mental work and smaller tasks that maintain emotional stability and routine chores within the family. While their roles in the family keep this primary setup of men (physical) and women (intellect), this idea is carried on into how conflict is handled within many marital relationships with men responding to conflict with physical violence while women will use communication (often viewed as nagging) in response to conflict. As the wife reveals to her husband, the audience, in a way, makes a more considerable comment on societal manifestations of expectations that men will maintain that physical aspect of their role in the conflict by becoming physically aggressive and violent. In contrast, women will maintain an emotional, intellectual perspective in handling conflict with violent language. She makes this argument towards the end of the ballad, “Will you poore Women thus abuse, / our tongues and hands we need to use. / You say our tongues doe make men fight, / our hands must serve to doe us right.”⁹⁴ The wife levels with her husband’s accusation of being verbally violent by saying in the same way that men instinctually resort to using their hands against their wives; wives naturally use their words to defend themselves when feeling inadequate in their marriage. This argument changes the husband's tone as he begins to understand what his wife is trying to communicate. He immediately changes his previous statements and offers, “Then I to you must give the way, / and yeeld to women in what they say...⁹⁵ He humors his wife and allows her to speak. As the ballad comes to a close, they come together in agreement that even though it is the instinct of men and women in conflict to resort to

⁹¹ EBBA 20180

⁹² EBBA 20180

⁹³ EBBA 20180

⁹⁴ EBBA 20180

⁹⁵ EBBA 20180

physical or verbal violence, they each take turns in advising the audience to choose wives and husbands who are slow to anger and respectful of each other within a marriage.

The ballad finishes as the husband sets the example and establishes the social script for his audience within his marriage that mutual respect and agreement are best for a successful and happy marriage with the lines, ““Well, come sweet heart, let us agree... / I will love thee as my life, as ever man should love his wife.””⁹⁶ While the ballad is not as clearly structured as other conversational ballads that Parker writes, it sets up a more organic conversation on the struggles within a marital relationship that an audience may connect with in a more genuine capacity. Parker uses this organic conversation to guide an audience to consider their partners' contributions within a marriage and how to work together to create a content and well-respected relationship. He invites reflection to married audience members and encourages unmarried people to remember this ballad when looking for their future partners. While this ballad created an unconventional form of conversation as the audience was given both the role of engager and viewer throughout, it was still a dialogue Parker felt worth having to create connections within early modern English society on the topic of marriage and gender hierarchies.

As the dynamics of marital relationships have become continuously discussed in several contexts throughout this paper, it is essential also to discuss the contributions of “Robin and Kate: or, A bad husband converted by a good wife, in a dialogue betweene Robin and Kate.”⁹⁷ to the dynamics of how conversation can cause cultural change even within an individual. This ballad takes on a dynamic not as popularly seen within previously discussed texts as it covers the narrative of a husband's character being reformed by his doting wife. Not often does Parker position women in the space of correcting their husband's behavior without either being punished for speaking out of place or being criticized for their contributions or shortcomings within a relationship; however, this ballad attempts to do just that.

The audience is first introduced to the narrator, who describes a story he heard of a man who was known as the town drunk, how his wife begged her husband to change his ways, and eventually, he gives into his wife's requests out of love. Additionally, the audience is initially shown Kate's request as her chorus is introduced as, “Turne backe agen Robin, / and ga not to drinke.”⁹⁸ Kate expresses that she wants Robin to turn away from the alehouse and return home to be with her at the end of the day. However, Robin is introduced as a loving husband that can not stay away from the bottle and playfully argues with his wife that he provides as much as he can and should be allowed this vice. He makes the argument in the second verse, “Thou hast all the good / that a wife can desire, / Thast servants to tend thee, / and I pay their hire: Then for my good-fellowship / doe not thou prate...”⁹⁹ stating that he provides her with more than a fair share of accommodations with servants to help her with her chores and pays them so she never has to worry about money. In exchange for this help he provides, he asks Kate not to question and nag him about this subject. At the end of each of his verses, he attaches some version of the line, “For

⁹⁶ EBBA 20180

⁹⁷ British Library - Roxburghe, 1.354, 1.355, C.20.f.7.354-355, EBBA 30241.

⁹⁸ EBBA 30241

⁹⁹ EBBA 30241

I must and I will / have my humour sweet Kate.”¹⁰⁰ as a resounding chorus that he is entitled to and requires alcohol.

What is interesting is that this dialogue discusses a rather sensitive topic of a man drinking excessively, a wife becoming involved in matters of financial affairs and desiring her husband to be at home with her, which, as seen in other ballads discussed previously would be met with violent language and descriptions of nagging wives by husbands and basely natures by wives, Kate and Robin treat each other with pleasant dispositions for the most part. They both refer to each other with the affection of “sweet” when speaking. Kate, in the third verse, begs her husband to consider her words with the statement, “Sweet husband consider / and take my advice, / Let not thy companions / thus lewdly intice / Thy heart from thy Kate, / but upon my words thinke...”¹⁰¹ which suggests that even though Kate is disapproving of Robin’s drinking, she still thinks of her husband as a good and loving man. She describes him as her “sweet husband” and asks Robin to reconsider who he keeps as company as they may try to poison this gentle disposition within him. Robin also uses the word “sweet” to describe Kate; as mentioned, his chorus sings the lines, “For I must and I will / have my humour sweet Kate.”¹⁰² In this space where Robin may be inclined to become frustrated with Kate, he returns to this mantra of maintaining his stance of needing to drink and using kind language for his wife.

Kate explains in a verse much later in the ballad that she does not seek control over Robin but offers wifely advice, this may then be some indication of why Robin does not feel his wife is overstepping or judged for his actions. Kate explains in the second to last verse that last of verses which the audience hears from her, “I doe not command thee, thats not my intention, / For my humble duty unto thee is such...”¹⁰³ While her conversation with Robin does initially come across as though she is trying to ask her husband not to drink anymore, she goes on to explain that this is not her intention. Instead, Kate seeks to illuminate her husband’s recent habits and ask him to reconsider his actions. In reiterating her advice, she lends, “I give thee good counseil, / I doe not command: Then with due discretion. / upon my words thinke...”¹⁰⁴ restating that she does not mean to be conveyed as commanding in her marriage, but as suggestive. Kate also returns any misplaced power in her words to her husband in the phrase, “with due discretion” implying that while she can suggest as many ideas as she wants, these words are also to be examined by her husband in how he sees fit. Robin comes to the conclusion at the end of his final verse as he reflects on his behavior and heeds Kate’s counsel. He acknowledges that her words come from a good place and cares for Robin’s well-being in the line, “Ah now my sweet Kate I perceive very well, / thy words doe proceed from a hearty affection...”¹⁰⁵ Kate’s approach to speaking with her husband and trying to persuade him not to drink has worked. Robin even goes on to take full responsibility for his shortcomings as a husband and promises, “My former

¹⁰⁰ EBBA 30241

¹⁰¹ EBBA 30241

¹⁰² EBBA 30241

¹⁰³ EBBA 30241

¹⁰⁴ EBBA 30241

¹⁰⁵ EBBA 30241

ill husbandry, / I will repent...”¹⁰⁶ which is then clarified to mean that he will stay home with Kate and stop drinking excessively in the last lines before the chorus, “in thy sweet company, / rest well content: / Strong Liquor no more, / shall impaire my estate.”¹⁰⁷ This line also suggests that Robin sees the toll his drinking had on Kate and not just himself, as he uses the word “estate” when describing the harm his drinking did. He promises that his drinking will not impair or injure those within his responsibility, including Kate. The audience also sees a change in the last chorus line from which Robin begs Kate to acknowledge his entitlement to drink and instead sings the line, “Now Ile stay at home / with my bonny sweet Kate.”¹⁰⁸ stating that instead of wanting to drink, he would rather be at home with his “sweet Kate.” Through the dialogue in this ballad, Parker uses the character’s self-reflection and conversations to set up and introduce possible conversation on a topic such as alcoholism in a marriage.

Parker creates an interesting dialogue and shift in cultural conversation surrounding how advice can be shared and heeded within an early modern marriage. The initial introduction of this conversation to the audience presents a woman who would usually be seen as full of incessant prattle and nagging about her husband’s habits. However, Parker uses language to recenter Kate as a devoted and concerned wife who seeks to counsel her husband. This then repositions the wives’ conversation concerning their husbands as having a voice when using it to counsel instead of command their husbands. It invites the audience, specifically women, to consider how they speak to their husbands and how they can also seek to provide sage advice within their marriages. It also extends to husbands, asking them to consider the advice their wives offer and take it more seriously. Parker creates this conversation to extend across men and women with gender relationships and how respect for one’s perspective on situations that may come up within early modern marriages should be considered.

Ballads were one of the largest forms of entertainment within early modern England, and Parker’s contributions to the ballad scene, specifically the work he wrote dedicated to the genre of gender relationships, demonstrate the way in which ballads could be used to generate conversation among an audience or within a narrative. While his work spans more topics than gender relations, in even such a specific and nuanced topic, Parker includes the perspectives and audiences of a wide variety of people and thus a broad consumer market: young and married men, maids, widows, wives, shrews, and spinsters. In some cases, as my analysis shows, he even created themes of conversational debate within and between ballads that were important and sold among early modern Londoners, thus encouraging conversation amongst the public regarding gender relationships. Parker’s success as a ballad writer was grounded in his ability to cater towards multiple audiences and create those meaningful conversations and narratives. While it can be challenging to understand Parker’s perspective on many of these conversations, he can undoubtedly be seen as a carrier of this culture for his contemporary audiences and those who research him today. As his work is carried into the twenty-first century, his vast contributions to

¹⁰⁶ EBBA 30241

¹⁰⁷ EBBA 30241

¹⁰⁸ EBBA 30241

the conversation on early modern English gender relationships and their portrayals in popular culture accompany it. Parker's contributions to this topic reflect the narratives and conversations of experiences within gender relationships that he sought to disseminate within his works and discuss with broader audiences.

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