

# Popular Literature in Sixteenth-Century England

## BROADSIDES AND BALLADS

Broadsides and street ballads were a popular form of literature in the second half of the sixteenth century. They covered an extensive range of themes, from politics to scandalous gossip to conventional wisdom, and were often sung to popular tunes. Though sensationalized, their journalistic claims to truthfulness heighten both the immediate and transitory nature of much of the material. Printed on single sheets, often with a rough woodcut, and sold for very little money, broadsides and street ballads reached a large audience. Sellers of broadsides and street ballads were not restricted to peddling their wares in shops, but could appear at any public gathering. While critics in the sixteenth and later centuries complained of the often coarse and sensational nature of the content, as well as the poor quality of the poetry in ballads, these single sheet productions provide scholars with insight into the diversity of both authors and audiences in the early modern period. The following are just a small selection of the many and varied broadsides and ballads still extant.

EDITIONS: *A new ballet of the straunge and most cruell whippes*. London: [Imprinted] by Thomas Orwin and Thomas Gubbin, 1588. STC 6558; *A ditty delightfull of mother watkins ale*. [London: s.n., c. 1590]. STC 25107; *Luke Huttons lamentation*. London: [Printed] for Thomas Millington, 1598. STC 14032.

### [*A New Ballad of the Strange and Most Cruel Whips*]

A New Ballad of the Strange and Most Cruel Whips Which the Spaniards Had Prepared to Whip and Torment the English Men and Women: Which Were Found and Taken at the Overthrow of Certain of the Spanish Ships in July Last Past, 1588.<sup>1</sup>

*To the tune of "The Valiant Soldier."*

- All you that list to look and see  
what profit comes from Spain,  
And what the Pope and Spaniards both,  
prepared for our gain.  
5 Then turn your eyes and bend your ears,  
and you shall hear and see,<sup>2</sup>  
What courteous minds, what gentle hearts  
they bear to thee and me.
- They say they seek for England's good,  
10 and wish the people well.  
They say they are such holy men,  
all other they excel.  
They brag that they are Catholics,  
and Christes<sup>3</sup> only spouse:  
15 And what so ere<sup>4</sup> they take in hand,  
the holy Pope allows.

<sup>1</sup> The exact dating announces that this ballad is a response to the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

<sup>2</sup> Ballads often incorporate these references to the audience and to the performative nature of ballad selling.

<sup>3</sup> *Christes* Christ's.

<sup>4</sup> *ere* ever.

These holy men, these sacred saints,  
 and these that think no ill,  
 See how they fought against all right,  
 20 to murder, spoil, and kill.

Our noble Queen and country first,  
 they did prepare to spoil,  
 To ruinate our lives and lands,  
 with trouble and turmoil.

25 And not content by fire and sword  
 to take our right away,  
 But to torment most cruelly  
 our bodies night and day.  
 Although they meant with murd'ring hands  
 30 our guiltless blood to spill,  
 Before our deaths they did devise  
 to whip us first their fill.

And for that purpose had prepared  
 of whips such wondrous store,  
 35 So strangely made that sure the like  
 was never seen before.  
 For never was there horse nor mule,  
 nor dog of currish kind,  
 That ever had such whips devised  
 40 by any savage mind.

One sort of whips they had for men,  
 so smarting fierce and fell,<sup>1</sup>  
 As like could never be devised  
 by any devil in hell.  
 45 The strings whereof with wiry knots,  
 like rowels<sup>2</sup> they did frame,  
 That every stroke might tear the flesh  
 they laid on with the same.

And plucked the spreading sinews from  
 50 the hardened bloody bone,  
 To prick and pierce each tender vein  
 within the body known,

And not to leave one crooked rib  
 on any side unseen:  
 55 Nor yet to leave a lump of flesh  
 the head and foot between.

And for our silly women eke,<sup>3</sup>  
 their hearts with grief to clog,  
 They made such whips wherewith no man  
 60 would seem to strike a dog,  
 So strengthened eke with brazen<sup>4</sup> tags,  
 and filed so rough and thin,  
 That they would force at every lash  
 the blood abroad to spin.

65 Although their bodies sweet and fair,  
 their spoil they meant to make,  
 And on them first their filthy lust  
 and pleasure for to take,  
 Yet afterward such sour sauce  
 70 they should be sure to find,  
 That they should curse each springing branch  
 that cometh of their kind.

O ladies fair, what spite were this,  
 your gentle hearts to kill,  
 75 To see these devilish tyrants thus  
 your children's blood to spill.  
 What grief unto the husband dear,  
 his loving wife to see  
 Tormented so before his face  
 80 with extreme villainy.

And think you not that they which had  
 such dogged minds to make  
 Such instruments of tyranny  
 had not like hearts to take  
 85 The greatest vengeance that they might  
 upon us every one?  
 Yes, yes, be sure, for godly fear  
 and mercy they have none.

<sup>1</sup> *fell* savage, piercing.

<sup>2</sup> *rowels* spurs, knobs.

<sup>3</sup> *silly* innocent; helpless, defenceless; *eke* also.

<sup>4</sup> *brazen* bronze.

Even as in India once they did  
 90        against those people there,  
 With cruel curs<sup>1</sup> in shameful sort  
        the men both rent and tear,  
 And set the ladies great with child  
        upright against a tree,  
 95 And shoot them through with piercing darts,  
        such would their practice be.

Did not the Romans in this land  
        sometime like practice use  
 Against the Britains bold in heart,  
 100       and wondrously abuse  
 The valiant King whom they had caught  
        before his Queen and wife,  
 And with most extreme tyranny  
        dispatch him of his life?

105 The good Queen Voadicia,<sup>2</sup>  
        and eke her daughters three,  
 Did they not first abuse them all  
        by lust and lechery?  
 And after stripped them naked all,  
 110       and whipped them in such sort,  
 That it would grieve each Christian heart  
        to hear that just report.

And if these ruffling mates of Rome  
        did princes thus torment,  
 115 Think you the Romish Spaniards now  
        would not show their descent?  
 How did they late in Rome rejoice,  
        in Italy and Spain,  
 What ringing and what bonfires,  
 120       what masses sung amain.<sup>3</sup>

What printed books were sent about  
        as filled their desire,  
 How England was by Spaniards won  
        and London set on fire.

<sup>1</sup> *curs* dogs.

<sup>2</sup> *Queen Voadicia* Queen Boadicia (meaning “victorious”) led a revolt against the Romans in Britain in the first century CE.

<sup>3</sup> *amain* with full force.

125 Be these the men that are so mild,  
        whom some so holy call?  
 The Lord defend our noble Queen  
        and country from them all.<sup>4</sup>

—1588

[*A Ditty Delightful of Mother Watkins Ale*]

A Ditty Delightful of Mother Watkins Ale,  
 A Warning Well Weighed,  
 Though Counted a Tale.<sup>5</sup>

There was a maid, this other day,  
 And she would needs go<sup>6</sup> forth to play,  
 And as she walked, she sithd<sup>7</sup> and said,  
 “I am afraid to die a maid.”  
 5 With that beheard a lad<sup>8</sup>  
 With talk this maiden had,  
 Whereof he was full glad,  
        And did not spare  
 To say, “Fair maid, I pray,  
 10 Whether go you to play?”  
 “Good sir,” then did she say,  
        “‘What do you care?’”  
 “For I will, without fail,  
 Maiden, give you Watkins ale.”  
 15 “Watkins ale, good sir,” quoth she,  
 “‘What is that, I pray you tell me.’”  
 “‘Tis sweeter far than sugar fine,  
 And pleasanter than muskadine,<sup>9</sup>  
 And if you please, fair maid, to stay  
 20 A little while with me to play,  
 I will give you the same  
 Watkins ale, called by name,

<sup>4</sup> The broadside is signed “T.D.”—probably Thomas Deloney—and ends with the following inscription: “Imprinted at London by Thomas Orwin and Thomas Gubbin, and are to be sold in Paternoster-row, over against the Black Raven. 1588.”

<sup>5</sup> The author of this broadside is unknown.

<sup>6</sup> *would needs go* wanted to.

<sup>7</sup> *sithd* sighed.

<sup>8</sup> *beheard a lad* a lad heard.

<sup>9</sup> *muskadine* wine made from the muscadine grape.

Or else I were to blame,  
 In truth, fair maid.”  
 25 “Good sir,” quoth she again,  
 “If you will take the pain,  
 I will not refrain,  
 Nor be dismayed.”  
 He took this maiden then aside,  
 30 And led her where she was not spied,  
 And told her many a pretty tale,  
 And gave her well of Watkins ale.

“Good sir,” quoth she, in smiling sort,  
 “What do you call this pretty sport?  
 35 Or what is this you do to me?”  
 “’Tis called Watkins ale,” quoth he,  
 “Wherein, fair maid, you may  
 Report another day,  
 When you go forth to play,  
 40 How you did speed.”<sup>1</sup>  
 “Indeed, good sir,” quoth she,  
 “It is a pretty glee,<sup>2</sup>  
 And well it pleaseth me,  
 No doubt indeed.”  
 45 Thus they sported and they played,  
 This youngman<sup>3</sup> and this pretty maid,  
 Under a bank whereas<sup>4</sup> they lay,  
 Not long ago this other day.

When he had done to her his will,  
 50 They talked, but what it shall not skill.<sup>5</sup>  
 At last, quoth she, “Saving your tale,  
 Give me some more of Watkins ale,  
 Or else I will not stay,  
 For I must needs away.  
 55 My mother bad<sup>6</sup> me play;  
 The time is past.  
 Therefore, good sir,” quoth she,  
 “If you have done with me.”

<sup>1</sup> *speed* fare, succeed.

<sup>2</sup> *glee* entertainment.

<sup>3</sup> *youngman* young man, but perhaps with a sense of servant.

<sup>4</sup> *whereas* where.

<sup>5</sup> *shall not skill* does not matter.

<sup>6</sup> *bad* bid.

“Nay, soft, fair maid,” quoth he,  
 60 Again at last,  
 “Let us talk a little while.”  
 With that the maid began to smile,  
 And said, “Good sir, full well I know,  
 Your ale, I see runs very low.”

65 This youngman then, being so blamed,  
 Did blush as one being ashamed.  
 He took her by the middle small,  
 And gave her more of Watkins ale,  
 And said, “Fair maid, I pray,  
 70 When you go forth to play,  
 Remember what I say,  
 Walk not alone.”  
 “Good sir,” quoth she again,  
 “I thank you for your pain.  
 75 For fear of further stain,  
 I will be gone.”  
 “Farewell, maiden,” then quoth he;  
 “Adieu, good sir,” again quoth she.  
 Thus they parted at last,  
 80 Till thrice three months were gone and past.

This maiden then fell very sick,  
 Her maidenhead began to kick,  
 Her colour waxed wan and pale,  
 With taking much of Watkins ale.

85 I wish all maidens coy,  
 That hear this pretty toy,  
 Wherein most women joy,  
 How they do sport:  
 For surely Watkins ale,  
 90 And if it not be stale,  
 Will turn them to some bale,<sup>7</sup>  
 As hath report.  
 New ale will make their bellies bowne,<sup>8</sup>  
 As trial by this same is known.  
 95 This proverb hath been taught in schools:  
 It is no jesting with edge tools.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *bale* harm, danger.

<sup>8</sup> *bowne* bowed, curved (i.e., rounded with pregnancy).

<sup>9</sup> *no jesting with edge tools* The saying is proverbial: The man who plays with sharp-edged tools may, by chance, cut his fingers.

Thrice scarcely changed hath the moon,  
 Since first this pretty trick was done,  
 Which being heard of one by chance,  
 100 He made thereof a country dance,  
 And, as I heard the tale,  
 He called it Watkins ale,  
 Which never will be stale,  
     I do believe.  
 105 This dance is now in prime,<sup>1</sup>  
 And chiefly used this time,  
 And lately put in rhyme;  
     Let no man grieve  
 To hear this merry jesting tale,  
 110 That which is called Watkins ale.  
 It is not long since it was made;  
 The finest flower will soonest fade.

Good maids and wives, I pardon crave,  
 And lack not that which you would have;  
 115 To blush it is a woman's grace,  
 And well becometh a maiden's face,  
 For women will refuse  
 The thing that they would<sup>2</sup> choose,  
 Cause<sup>3</sup> men should them excuse  
 120      Of thinking ill:  
 Cat will after kind,<sup>4</sup>  
 All winkers are not blind,<sup>5</sup>  
 Fair maids, you know my mind,  
     Say what you will.  
 125 When you drink ale, beware the toast,  
 For therein lay the danger most.  
 If any here offended be,  
 Then blame the author, blame not me.

—c. 1590

<sup>1</sup> *in prime* in its prime, popular.<sup>2</sup> *would* would like to.<sup>3</sup> *Cause* for this cause.<sup>4</sup> Proverb, "Cat (Kit) after kind" (*Tilley* C135), meaning that "like will to like."<sup>5</sup> Proverb, "Although I wink I am not blind" (*Tilley* W500).[*Luke Hutton's Lamentation*]

Luke Hutton's Lamentation, Which He Wrote the  
 Day before His Death, Being Condemned to Be  
 Hanged at York This Last Assizes for His Rob-  
 beries and Trespasses Committed.<sup>6</sup>

*To the tune of "Wandering and Wavering."*

I am a poor prisoner condemned to die,  
     ah woe is me, woe is me, for my great  
     folly,  
 Fast fettered in irons in place where I lie:  
     be warned young wantons, hemp<sup>7</sup> passeth  
     green holly.  
 5 My parents were of good degree  
     By whom I would not counselled be.  
 Lord Jesu, forgive me, with mercy relieve me,  
 Receive, O sweet Saviour, my spirit unto thee.

My name is Hutton, yea Luke of bad life,  
 10      ah woe is me, etc.<sup>8</sup>  
 Which on the highway robbed man and wife:  
     be warned, etc.  
 Enticed by many a graceless mate,  
     Whose counsel I repent too late.  
 15 Lord, etc.

Not twenty years old, alas, was I,  
     ah woe is me, etc.  
 When I began this felony:  
     be warned, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Luke Hutton is either the son of Matthew, the archbishop of York, or the son of Robert, a lesser cleric. He left Cambridge University to become a thief, and was executed at York in 1598. It is doubtful that he wrote this ballad, despite the title's claim. Such sensational trials, executions, and conversions were extremely popular with the public; *Assizes* courts which appeared at intervals in the counties.<sup>7</sup> *hemp* rope (for hanging).<sup>8</sup> The broadside is inconsistent in its treatment of the repeated lines. In subsequent stanzas, the repeated lines are shortened; in many cases, they are referred to in the stanzas or in the margins with one word or phrase: "ah woe, &c.," "be, &c.," or "lord, &c."

20 With me went still twelve yeomen tall,<sup>1</sup>  
     Which I did my twelve apostles call.  
 Lord, etc.

    There was no squire nor baron bold,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

25 That rode the way with silver or gold:  
     be warned, etc.

    But I and my twelve apostles gay  
     Would lighten their load ere they went  
     away.  
 Lord, etc.

30 This news procured my kinsfolk grief,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

    They hearing I was a famous thief:  
     be warned, etc.

    They wept, they wailed, they wrang<sup>2</sup> their hands,  
 35      That thus I should hazard life and lands.  
 Lord, etc.

    They made me a jailor a little before,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

    To keep in prison offenders store:<sup>3</sup>  
 40      be warned, etc.

    But such a jailor was never none:  
     I went and let them out every one.  
 Lord, etc.

    I wist<sup>4</sup> their sorrow sore grieved me,  
 45      ah woe is me, etc.

    Such proper men should hanged be:  
     be warned, etc.

    My office then I did defy,  
     And ran away for company.  
 50 Lord, etc.

    Three years I lived upon the spoil,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

    Giving many a carl the foil:<sup>5</sup>  
     be warned, etc.

55 Yet never did I kill man nor wife,  
     Though lewdly long I led my life.  
 Lord, etc.

    But all too bad my deeds hath been,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

60 Offending my country and my good Queen:  
     be warned, etc.

    All men in Yorkshire talk of me.  
     A stronger thief there could not be.  
 Lord, etc.

65 Upon St. Luke's day was I born,  
     ah woe is me, etc.

    Whom want of grace hath made a scorn:  
     be warned, etc.

    In honour of my birthday then,  
 70      I robbed in a bravery nineteen men.  
 Lord, etc.

    The country weary to bear this wrong  
     ah woe is me, etc.

    With hue and cries pursued me long:  
 75      be warned, etc.

    Thou long I 'scaped, yet lo at last,  
     London I was in Newgate<sup>6</sup> cast.  
 Lord, etc.

    There did I lie with a grieved mind,  
 80      ah woe is me, etc.

    Although the keeper was gentle and kind:  
     be warned, etc.

    Yet was he not so kind as I  
     To let me out at liberty.  
 85 Lord, etc.

<sup>1</sup> *yeoman* an assistant or servant, usually in a noble or royal household; *tall* brave, ready for action.

<sup>2</sup> *wrang* wrung.

<sup>3</sup> *store* many.

<sup>4</sup> *I wist* I know, or "iwis," certainly.

<sup>5</sup> *Giving ... the foil* to defeat, or perhaps referring to a small sword; *carl* a countryman, or perhaps a knave.

<sup>6</sup> *Newgate* the name of a prison.

At last the sheriff of Yorkshire came,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 And in a warrant he had my name:  
 be warned, etc.  
 90 Said he, "At York thou must be tried.  
 With me therefore hence must thou  
 ride."  
 Lord, etc.

Like pangs of death his words did sound,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 95 My hands and arms full fast he bound:  
 be warned, etc.  
 "Good sir," quoth I, "I had rather stay.  
 I have no heart to ride that way."  
 Lord, etc.

100 When no entreaty might prevail,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 I called for beer, for wine and ale:  
 be warned, etc.  
 And when my heart was in woeful case,  
 105 I drunk to my friends with a smiling face.  
 Lord, etc.

With clubs and staves<sup>1</sup> I was guarded then,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 I never before had such waiting men:  
 110 be warned, etc.  
 If they had ridden before amain,  
 Beshrew me if I had called them again.  
 Lord, etc.

And when unto York that I was come,  
 115 ah woe is me, etc.  
 Each one on me did pass their doom:  
 be warned, etc.  
 And whilst you live this sentence note,  
 Evil men can never have good report.  
 120 Lord, etc.

<sup>1</sup> *staves* wooden sticks.

Before the judges when I was brought,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 Be sure I had a careful thought:  
 be warned, etc.  
 125 Nine score indictments and seventeen,  
 Against me there was read and seen.  
 Lord, etc.

And each of these was felony<sup>2</sup> found,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 130 Which did my heart with sorrow wound:  
 be warned, etc.  
 What should I herein longer stay;  
 For this I was condemned that day.  
 Lord, etc.

135 My death each hour I do attend,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 In prayer and tears my time I spend:  
 be warned, etc.  
 And all my loving friends this day,  
 140 I do entreat for me to pray.  
 Lord, etc.

I have deserved long since to die,  
 ah woe is me, etc.  
 A viler sinner lived not than I:  
 145 be warned, etc.  
 On friends I hoped my life to save,  
 But I am fittest for the grave.  
 Lord, etc.

Adieu, my loving friends each one,  
 150 ah woe is me, woe is me, for my great  
 folly,  
 Think on my words when I am gone:  
 be warned young wantons, hemp passeth  
 green holly.  
 When on the ladder you shall me view,  
 Think I am nearer Heaven than you.  
 155 Lord Jesu, forgive me, with mercy relieve me,  
 Receive, O sweet Saviour my spirit unto thee.

—1598

<sup>2</sup> *felony* in English law, a crime punishable by death.