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Bohemica litteraria. 2023, vol. 26, iss. 1, pp. 233-243

ISSN 1213-2144 (print); ISSN 2336-4394 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BL2023-1-14>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.78436>

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Access Date: 27. 11. 2024

Version: 20230719

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The Making of the Czech Broadside Ballads Edition

An interview with Patricia [Paddy] Fumerton (University of California, Santa Barbara), director of English Broadside Ballad Archive

1. *Our cooperation began in 2019, when we invited you to Brno for a conference on Czech broadside ballads. We knew you just from the book covers, as the author of several monographs on English broadside ballads and the director of the much admired English Broadside Ballad Archive. Frankly, we didn't even hope you would respond, let alone actually come to Brno for the conference; it's a really long journey from Santa Barbara (California). However, an hour after we sent our e-mail, we received a reply from you saying that you were coming, with a note saying, "please, call me Paddy". What were you thinking when you got our invitation e-mail and what convinced you to decide for an almost 30-hour exhausting journey to the unknown and maybe a bit exotic Czech Republic?*

When you invited me to Brno, Czech Republic, of course, I was first flattered that you recognized my many years of work on the English broadside ballad as important. My second feeling was exhilaration at the fact that my work, and that of others, on broadside ballads had extended beyond just the English (British and American) and even beyond Western Europe to reach as far east as Central and Eastern Europe. Also, my curiosity was awakened. I wondered, What would Czech broadside ballads be like? What were their aesthetic form and popular dissemination? Did their format, sale, and consumption resemble anything like that which occurred in the late 16th and 17th century of the city I've focused on in most of my work: London? I must admit I was also excited at the prospect of traveling to what was, indeed, for me, an exotic country—the Czech Republic.



Figure 1. Patricia Fumerton at Masaryk University (Workshop Czech Broadside Ballads in the International Context, September 2023). Photo: Alexandra Snováková.

2. *What was your path to research English broadside ballads? What fascinates you about the broadside ballads?*

I came to study broadside ballads out of guilt. As a disintuished guest speaker at the University of Texas, Austin back in the late 1980s, I was talking about my first book, which was soon to come out and focused on the ornaments, subjectivity, and literature of the early modern English aristocracy. Someone in the audience raised their hand and asked me whether I didn't feel guilty focusing on a social group and the canonical literature printed for it which constituted no more than 10% of the early modern population? I immediately felt such guilt, and I became determined that, for my next book, I would go as far down the social spectrum as I could and look at everyday men and women on the street, even those who turned vagrant, and find out what literature, if any, was printed

for them. After a couple of years, I found the broadside ballad—sold for a penny or less, and the most disseminated of all literature in my period of study. Due to the popularity by scholars of purely oral folk culture for over two centuries, all but one or two books on broadside ballads had been published in English. I became determined to bring back into scholarly study the popular printed broadside ballad, which took the form of single sheets printed on one side that sported not only tunes but also verses and many eye-catching illustrations.

I was also very attracted by the fact that English broadside ballads were often pasted up on walls, whether of printers' stalls, posts, alehouses, or peoples' homes. I have always been attracted to literature and the visual, so I had found an aesthetic form that especially appealed to me, as it did to people of the time when it was printed, sold, and consumed.

3. *How did the idea of establishing EBBA come about, what were the reactions of those around us (e.g. colleagues, university management) and how did the libraries that own the English broadside ballads react to the idea?*

The development of EBBA as it stands—a large corpus of as many extant English printed broadside ballads, c. 1550-1700 (some 11,000 items)—was never my original goal. My first intent was simply to teach a course on popular early modern literature printed in English, with a focus on broadside ballads. As part of a retention package, when my husband and I were each offered tenure-track positions at the University of Virginia, I secured from UCSB the founding of an Early Modern Center and also the purchase by the UCSB Library of a subscription to the newly digitally published EEBO (Early English Books Online). I thought EEBO would give me access to broadside ballads, which were securely guarded in rare book rooms across Britain and the United States, for example, places such as the British Library in London. Unfortunately, as I soon found out, when EEBO went fully online, it had digitized few broadside ballads. I had to cancel my planned course. I thus traveled to the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge University, UK, and convinced the librarian in charge to sell me a copy of the microfilm of Samuel Pepys' broadside ballads, which was the biggest collection of printed ballads of the 17th century (about 1,800 ballads). I was also able to purchase permission from the Pepys Library to mount the ballads online, and via a small Instructional Development Grant from UCSB, I had them digitally mounted and catalogued in the most basic way (by title and tune).

Getting the Pepys ballads online allowed me to teach the course I had originally wanted to teach, and I required my graduate students taking the course more thoroughly to catalogue the ballads they were reading and also to transcribe them from early modern black-letter or Gothic typeface (hard to read for most Moderns) into Times New Roman typeface. Though I didn't know it then, that was the beginning of EBBA. I subsequently applied for one of the largest U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Grants and was denied. But I persevered and tried for funding again. This time I succeeded, and received an NEH Grant of the most amount the Foundation gave, then and now: \$350,000 in funding over 2-3 years. That's about when I began to think big—to decide to try to digitally archive all extant English broadside ballads.

I'd like to say it was all downhill from there, but it wasn't. Most big and important libraries when I was first started EBBA, in the early 2000s—those which held a lot of broadside ballads, such as the British Library—were very suspicious of having any of their original holdings digitized. I negotiated with the British Library for a couple of years, even after I won my second NEH grant to put online its large collection of Roxburghe ballads (c. 1,500 printed ballads). Negotiations were most difficult, though we finally succeeded in arriving at an agreement. When EBBA began to add more and more collections of broadside ballads from more and more libraries, it became increasingly easier to get the libraries I approached to allow me to digitize their holdings. EBBA had become a globally recognized resource, much used by scholars, students, and the general public. Libraries suddenly became eager to include their holdings of broadside ballads in the archive.

Though I continued to publish traditional, printed books, editions and articles, I began to insist that my university recognize my EBBA's landmark digital achievements (the product of each of the 8 large NEH grants I won) as each equivalent to a book in itself. To its credit, UCSB *did* acknowledge such online work, and I received many merit increases and one promotion based on my directorship of EBBA alone.

4. *Can you please give us a brief introduction to the EBBA project? Who is it for and what can we find in it?*

EBBA was originally conceived to be a teaching tool, but I soon expanded its scope so that it would be a rigorous archive for scholarly research of the period as well as an interdisciplinary one. Because I and my team early on decided to

record all the tunes we could locate from the period of the ballads (c. 1550-1701), and also catalogue all the images, the archive soon also became an attraction to the general populace. Thus, after the second NEH grant I won, I insisted that the archive be not only an instructional but also a scholarly and open public resource, holding to the highest and most consistent standards we could set as well as most entertaining—exhibiting all the eye-catching and sound-catching media of the printed ballad. The archive could thus be appreciated by anyone who wanted to read the relatively simple lyrics and study the many fascinating (if also often bawdy, i.e., frankly sexual) themes and especially enjoy fully the ballads' illustrations and songs—just as people in the time did.

5. *Who is part of the EBBA team and what does working in EBBA look like?*

That is a huge question. More than 500 graduate students and undergraduate students, since EBBA's founding in 2003, have worked on EBBA, both in large and small ways. The most important contributor, who early on came onboard the project, is Dr. Carl Stahmer, currently Director of the DataLab at Sterling Library, University of California-Davis. Carl has done most of the programming for the database. He also created a way for students easily to convert ballad data into TEI-XML; he furthermore created an image recognition tool and many data mining tools. At UC-Davis, he now has his own digital team that still works on EBBA.

I am director of EBBA, and Carl is associate director of EBBA. Below Carl, I hire an assistant director to manage most of the lower workers; the assistant director usually has a recent UCSB PhD. From the UCSB Music Department, I find a music specialist (for the last 6 years, Erik Bell), who runs his or her own team of singers. Below the assistant director, there are several managers from English, and then a huge team of graduate students and undergraduate students, mostly from English but also from related fields, such as Comparative Literature, History, Art History, and Music. The latter students regularly rotate into and out of work on EBBA and are trained by those more experienced in the archive. I think of EBBA as a hierarchical democracy. I am at the top and in charge, but those below me know they can freely speak their minds about any particular issue under consideration and even raise a new issue I haven't thought of. This especially happens, often loudly and with much passion, at regular meetings of myself, Carl, Erik, the assistant director, and the managers. We need to meet regularly to ensure that everyone is on the same page and deviations don't occur

in practice. Such deviations would cause a deterioration of EBBA's high standards, so we guard against them.

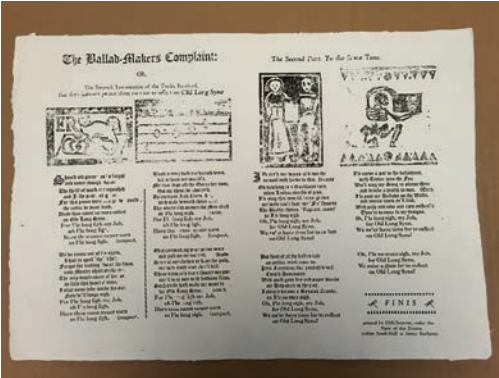
6. *How do you imagine the future of EBBA?*

EBBA now has the good fortune to be endowed. The endowment is not large, but it is large enough for whoever is in charge of the Early Modern Center to hire a programmer to update its databases as needed and to hire a graduate student researcher to update facts or add a new ballad if one is found.

2023 marks the 20th Anniversary since EBBA's founding in 2003—a long time for any digital archive to exist that is not funded by an institution or paid for by a paywall—and I expect it to live on for as long as the internet does. I predict that scholars of English culture (especially of History, Art, and Music) will continue to write articles and books that draw on EBBA, and teachers will continue to use it in their classrooms on a regular basis. EBBA is not a flash in the pan. It will continue to be of great use to many over many, many years, especially because it is free and open to the public and because it will be regularly updated.

7. *You also devote a lot of energy to teaching. In addition to the great lectures about Shakespeare, for example, you also lead a printing lab. Can you describe what these courses look like and how students react to them?*

I try always to incorporate popular culture into my classes. Even in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we see that Ophelia, in her madness, sings broadside ballads. It's as if, gone mad, she is finally free to fully express herself—and what better way to reach a large audience beyond the court and speak everything that the court has suppressed in her than through street ballads, especially those that are bawdy, which Ophelia's ballads mostly are? In teaching the printing press, I also often turn to broadside ballads, since, consisting of just one side of a page, they are relatively easy to print. Some of my students also go so far as to make the paper for their printings with me or to carve the woodcuts (or easier, to carve linolium blocks); they use these images on their sheets of typeface when printing with me to add eye-candy to their prints, just as early modern broadside ballads did.



Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Patricia Fumerton with her team during printing labs and making paper. Personal collection of Patricia Fumerton.

8. *I have heard and also personally experienced that at some of your lectures and conferences, English broadside ballads are also sung. Why do you think singing of broadside ballads together with just reading them is important nowadays; what do you think song brings to the participants?*

Song touches a visceral nerve in the human body. People naturally hum a tune or sing outloud while doing repetitive work, and they did so even more in the early modern period, when it was more accepted regularly to sing while working than it is today (where most people are too inhibited to express themselves out loud in song when at work). Song also brings people together. Once one person starts singing, especially if the song they sing has a refrain, those listening can't resist but join in. Song may be the most collaborative media we have, and people always feel part of a community when they join together in song with others—even if the others are strangers.

9. *What's your favourite English broadside ballad and why?*

My favorite ballad is not a particularly happy one. It's called "Anne Wallens Lamentation" and tells the real-life story, which happened in 1616, of a wife who murdered her husband and was subsequently punished by being burned alive at the stake (the punishment in England for such a crime, called "petty treason," since the husband was considered king of the household). I like this ballad because it is a story that actually happened, because it is sung to the most popular tune in England—in fact, in all of Europe—titled "Fortune My Foe," and because, if one pays attention to the lyrics, it is clear that the husband murder is a case of a wife retaliating against a husband for his physically abusing her. He comes home drunk, she rails verbally against him, he strikes her, and she retaliates by stabbing him with one of his own work-tools. Today, such a murder might well be justified as self-defense. But not in the English Renaissance. That very fact tells scholars, students, and the general populace a whole lot about early modern England and how hard life could be for women. It's important to know the past in order to know the present when women still do not hold equal status with men.

10. *In February 2023, you organized the EBBA Annual Conference in Santa Barbara. What did you enjoy about the conference?*

I was very proud of the EBBA Conference, which marked the 20th Anniversary of EBBA's founding. The conference brought in wonderful scholars from across the world, such as your own Professor Pavel Kosek, who gave a terrific eye-opening talk about Czech broadside ballads. The conference also brought back to UCSB many former graduate students, who had worked long ago on EBBA but are now professors, chairs, deans, and directors of projects. That reunion of so many success stories, as well as the eagerness of many up-and-coming scholars to participate in the event, was the greatest tribute to EBBA's impact.

11. *You have generously offered to co-edit a monograph on Czech broadside ballads (the monograph was published by Amsterdam University Press in Autumn 2022, also in Open Access form; its review is included in this special issue of the journal). How would you characterize the monograph? Was the editing specific in any way?*

It was my suggestion to become part of the Czech book edition, which my co-editors eagerly accepted, because I saw the publication as an extremely important expansion of previous work done on broadside ballads. I was not disappointed. I won't say that work on editing the project was easy for me, or for my co-editors for that matter. I wanted the otherwise fine English of the contributors to sound more colloquial, more like a native speaker of English, and I wanted very clear usage and definition of terms; I thus suggested multiple revisions, pushing the contributors likely to near exhaustion. But everyone remained eager and timely in their submissions. I was very impressed.

12. *During our three-year work on the monograph, you, Pavel Kosek and I had a complex and very long discussion about how Czech kramářské písně should be called. In the end, we decided to use the term Czech broadside ballad (and the term Czech chapbooks for the broader category of cheap prints, which includes prayers, longer narrative stories, holy pictures, almanachs e.t.c.). I won't bother you with a detailed „justification of the term“, which can be found in the monograph. But could you describe what came to your mind when you saw various Czech broadside ballads and the blocks, špalíčky, in Moravian Library?*

Well, in the beginning, when I attended my first conference in the Czech Republic, I was puzzled by those present using the term „broadside ballads“ to discuss Czech items which clearly were NOT printed on one side of a single sheet of paper and unfolded—a key feature of English broadside ballads. But as I grew to learn more about Czech printed ballads, I realized that they *were* printed on a single sheet, if on both sides and folded, and, most importantly, they were cheap print, with text, art, and tune titles, and disseminated broadly to a lowly audience. These latter features, eventually I agreed, made Czech printed ballads very much akin to English broadside ballads. I was also struck by viewing the original blocks or *špalíčky* at the Moravian Library. They were so tiny and most hand-sewn. Some would even fit in one’s pocket. I realized then that Czech broadside ballads could be carried around and personally shown to viewers, just like English broadside ballads. Viewing the originals was an eye-opener for me. Of course, It is also always a delight and privilege to see originals of long-ago works. Seeing so many blocks and single sheets layed out on a long table by the curator of the Moravian Library, just for myself and my co-editors, nearly took my breath away. It was a very special, once in a lifetime, moment.

13. *What would you advise us for the development of research on Czech broadside ballads?*

In an ideal world, with lots and lots of funding, I’d advise my Czech colleagues to translate (or hire a translator) so that more of their fascinating work could be read by people outside of the Czech Republic, especially those who speak only English. I’m hoping that in a decade or so, there will be developed a good enough translation tool (Google Translate hopelessly mangles full sentences of Czech to English, and vice versa) that will allow the Czechs to input their abundance of superb work into such a tool and produce foremost an English version—the dominant language in academia and professional organizations, such as Air Traffic Control—and even eventually into other languages. That is currently a dream. But it *will* eventually happen.

I’d also advise more work on the specific characteristics of the Czech language and culture that make Czech broadside ballads so unique to your country. Finally, I’d advise recording more of the ballads so that the general public, not just academics, would be included in your audience. After all, broadside ballads of all

countries were meant to be enjoyed by the common person, and nothing captures the attention of the populace more than song.

14. *We hope to have the opportunity to welcome you back to Brno in the future. Can you tell us what are your impressions of the Czech Republic, Brno and maybe even Czech language?*

Brno is a lovely city, especially its central square, which I treasure more than Prague because though Prague is full of history, it is overrun with tourists. On my first visit to Brno for a conference, I went to a pilgrimage site, hosted by you and others in charge of the conference, and it was nothing like I had seen before.

Also, though I've heard from Czechs themselves that Americans are more outgoing and friendly than Czechs, I've been impressed that, on each of my three visits to your country, the Czechs I met were very friendly and helpful to me, even when they could only speak a bit of English. Furthermore, they often understood my sense of humor, which even Americans sometimes don't "get".

On a non-academic front, your country also makes the most beautiful and tasty gingerbread I've ever enjoyed in the world, and your "young wine", or *burcak*, cannot be surpassed by any wine anywhere, especially when *burcak* is home-made. Listening to the hearty and often heart-felt songs of one of your local village group of male singers and drinking *burcak* is a very special experience. As for the Czech language, since I do not have a good ear for languages and since Czech is *so* different from English, I'm hopeless. The only Czech word (which by the way, I love) that I have learned is "Ahoy", and I'm probably not even spelling it right. But, on that note, Ahoy! And thank you for the honor of interviewing me.



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