

**‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’: Alehouse Communities and the Anxiety of Social
Dislocation in Broadside Ballads of the 1620s and 1630s**

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I. Alehouse Communities and the Black-letter Broadside Ballad

Writing of London in 1628, the pamphleteer Richard Rawlidge complains about ‘the many, and insufferable inconveniences, abuses, wast, hurt and mischiefes, which formerly have, and still doe hourelly come unto this honourable Citty, and Kingdome, by the sufferance of so many blind Ale-houses, and beggarly Tipling houses’.¹ Rawlidge further makes an urgent plea for the matter to be addressed, expressing his great apprehension at the rapid increase of the number of alehouses during this period. For, as he says, ‘some 50 or 60 years since Alehouses were scant ... whereas now every street replenished with such houses and Citizens of most sortes and rancks ordinarily frequenting them’.² This increase is presented as all the more disconcerting by Rawlidge when he considers how the number of alehouses came to be far greater than the number of churches in the metropolis. As he protests, ‘whereas there are within and about the Citties Liberties but an hundred twenty two Churches for the service and worshipp of God: there are I dare say above thirty hundred Ale-houses, Typling-houses, Tobacco shops, &c. in London and the skirts thereof, wherein the Divell is daily served & honoured’.³

As various studies in recent years have shown, such complaints were regularly expressed in early modern England by various observers who were alarmed by the proliferation of both

¹ Richard Rawlidge, *A Monster Late Found Out and Discovered* (Amsterdam, 1628), p. 11.

² Ibid, p. 8.

³ Ibid, sig. q3^r.

licensed and unlicensed alehouses in London and other urban centres.⁴ Statistical data appears to confirm the claim made by Rawlidge with so much apprehension: by the 1620s and 1630s (the period which, as I will be explaining below, provides the main focus of this essay) the country had already witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the number of alehouses.⁵ This proliferation seems to have provided a constant source of anxiety for authorities that worried about the potentially disruptive impact of these public drinking houses. The uncontrolled increase of alehouses further gave rise to a number of vociferous attacks – such as that of Richard Rawlidge in *A Monster Late Found Out and Discovered* from which I quoted in the first paragraph – that extended well beyond the issue of riotous behaviour that might be caused by excessive drinking at these places. For instance, in the literature of roguery or the so-called ‘cony-catching’ pamphlets of the period – including texts such as Thomas Harman’s *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1566) or Thomas Dekker’s *The Bellman of London* (1608) and *Lantern and Candlelight* (1608)⁶ – alehouses are presented as headquarters for an underworld of criminals consisting of gangs of idle vagabonds devoted to theft and crime.⁷ The images provided in these pamphlets may be

⁴ As Patricia Fumerton notes, a similar observation about the increase of alehouses in London is made by Thomas Dekker in his pamphlet *English Villanies* (1632), where he remarks that ‘A whole streete is in some place but a continued Ale-house: not a shoppe to be seene betweene a Red lattice’ (qtd. in Patricia Fumerton, ‘Not Home: Alehouses, Ballads, and the Vagrant Husband in Early Modern England’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3 (2002), 493-518 (pp. 493-94)). The red lattice mentioned by Dekker was a common sign painted on the windows or walls of London alehouses, especially unlicensed ones.

⁵ These estimates are provided by Peter Clark in his seminal study, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830* (London: Longman, 1983). See also Clark, ‘The Alehouse and the Alternative Society’ in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries. Essays in Seventeenth-Century History presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 47-72. As Clark points out in this essay, while the number of alehouses in the Middle Ages was relatively limited, the sixteenth century witnessed an unprecedented expansion with figures rising to at least 14,000 in 27 counties by 1577. The number continued to increase rapidly in the seventeenth century when, according to estimates, the figure possibly exceeded 30,000 by the 1630s, and 40,000 by the 1680s. As Clark further comments, the actual numbers might have been greater than those estimates indicate if unlicensed houses and counties not included in the survey were taken into consideration (p. 50).

⁶ All three of these texts have been reprinted by A. V. Judges, together with other sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century tracts and ballads dealing with rogues and vagabonds, in *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London: Routledge, 1930). Harman’s *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* and Dekker’s *Lantern and Candlelight* may also be found in the collection of rogue pamphlets edited by Arthur F. Kinney under the title *Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

⁷ For some very useful recent discussions of the literature of roguery, see the essays collected in Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (eds.), *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan

said to reflect the view often held by the middle and upper social classes of alehouses as seats of drunkenness, lower-class idleness and criminality – thereby constant sources of social and possibly political disorder. As Peter Clark comments:

There was a broad consensus of opinion among the middling and (to some extent) the upper ranks of society in Tudor and early Stuart England: that alehouses were a new and increasingly dangerous force in popular society; that they were run by the poor for the poor, victualling and harbouring the destitute and vagrant, breeding crime, disorder, and drunkenness, fostering promiscuity and other breaches of orthodox morality; and that they served as the stronghold of popular opposition to the established religious and political order.⁸

According to Clark, despite the descriptions provided by pamphleteers like Harman and Dekker, there is in fact little evidence to suggest that alehouses provided the centres of any major or concerted criminal activity. On the contrary, ‘almost all our evidence’, he suggests, ‘would indicate that the criminal activity centred on alehouses was amateur, small-scale, and sporadic’.⁹ Likewise, despite offering such a persistent source of anxiety, there is actually thin evidence to support the claim that the alehouse provided any substantial or organised resistance to the authorities or the ruling class, as, for the greatest

Press, 2004). See also Arthur F. Kinney’s ‘Introduction’ in his edition of the collection *Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars* (pp. 11-57).

⁸ Clark, ‘Alehouse’, 48. My discussion about the alehouse here and in the following paragraphs is indebted to Clark’s ‘Alehouse’ and *English Alehouse*, and also, to the more recent work by Fumerton in ‘Not Home’. For other studies that examine the early modern English alehouse, see Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women’s Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alan Everitt, ‘The English Urban Inn, 1560-1760’ in *Perspectives in English Urban History* ed. by Alan Everitt (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 91-137; Judith Hunter, ‘Legislation, Royal Proclamations and other National Directives affecting Inns, Taverns, Alehouses, Brandy Shops and Punch Houses, 1552-1757’ (Unpublished dissertation, University of Reading, 1994); Theodore B. Leinwand, ‘Spongy plebs, mighty lords, and the dynamics of the alehouse’, *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 19.2 (1989), 159-84; George Evans Light, ‘All Hopped Up: Beer, Cultivated National Identity, and Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1525-1624’, *Journal X* 2.2 (1988), 159-78; S. K. Roberts, ‘Alehouses, Brewing, and Government under the Early Stuarts’, *Southern History: A Review of the History of Southern England* 2 (1980), 45-71; and Keith Wrightson, ‘Alehouses, Order, and Reformation in Rural England, 1590-1660’, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict, 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, ed. by Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press; Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), pp. 1-27.

⁹ Clark, ‘Alehouse’, 57.

part, 'popular protest in alehouses was mostly confined to the desperate seditious outbursts of individual labourers, outbursts which seem almost invariably to have fallen on deaf ears'.¹⁰

Ungrounded as they might have been, the various complaints against alehouses no doubt reveal an important set of attitudes towards the social groups that more often frequented these places. Drawing a clear link between the alehouse and the lower social classes, Clark suggests that alehouses were indeed for the greatest part 'run by the poor for the poor' – a view shared by various other scholars in recent years, who have pointed out that while public drinking remained a predominantly male practice in the early modern period (with women having a limited presence in public drinking houses), different kinds of establishments point to the stratification of drinking communities along the lines of class.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, 64-7. As Clark further comments in his essay, 'the relative failure of the alehouse as a medium for mobilizing popular radicalism, whether religious or political, was finally exposed in the Revolution', as alehouses during the period of the Revolution do not appear to have provided the centre of much radical activity, besides perhaps that of some of the more extreme groups like the Ranters (66).

¹¹ The practice of drinking and the ways in which it functions as a social marker is an area that has received increased scholarly attention in the last couple of decades. Besides the studies already cited in note 6, see also Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (eds.), *Drinking Behavior and Belief in Modern History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Beat Kümin and B. Ann Tlusty (eds.), *The World of the Tavern: Public Houses in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); James Nicholls 'Vinum Britannicum: The "Drink Question" in Early Modern England', *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 22.2 (2008), 190-208; James Nicholls and Susan J. Owen (eds.), *A Babel of Bottles: Drink, Drinkers and Drinking Places in Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000); Stuart Peachy *The Tipler's Guide to Drink and Drinking in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Bristol: Stuart Press, 1992); and Adam Smyth (ed.), *A Pleasing Sinne. Drink and Conviviality in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004). For their greatest part, studies of early modern drinking cultures have highlighted the function of public drinking houses as primarily male environments. For studies that have challenged this view, suggesting that women had a greater participation in the drinking cultures of the early modern period than often assumed (in their various roles as producers as well as sellers and consumers of alcohol), see, for instance, Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) (esp. chapter 2, 'Ale and Female: Gossips as Players, Alehouse as Theater'); Bernard Capp, 'Gender and the Culture of the English Alehouse in Late Stuart England', *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Spec. issue of *COLLeGIUM: Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (2007), 103-27, <http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume_2/002_07_capp.pdf> [accessed 30 April 2012]; Lynn A. Martin, *Alcohol, Sex, and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Bennett also explores the role of women in the brewing industry.

The alehouse notably existed ‘at the bottom of the victualling hierarchy’, providing a much more rudimentary form of accommodation than other similar establishments, namely the inn and the tavern.¹² Therefore, though by no means the exclusive domain of the poorer sort, the alehouse appears to have drawn the majority of its regular customers from the lower social levels, functioning as a kind of sanctuary for impoverished local residents as well as for poor itinerant travellers or *vagabonds* – a term often used during this period to describe the country’s large and growing population of ‘masterless’ men, a group pilloried by official proclamations and statutes, preachers and popular pamphleteers alike as prone to idleness and criminal activity, and reviled by the dominant classes as a threat to the established order.¹³

Importantly, as Patricia Fumerton has pointed out, what the alehouse provided for these people (poor local residents and itinerants alike) was not simply a place where they could resort for cheap food and drink, accommodation, and information about possible employment, but also ‘a kind of homey community’ where they ‘could feel comfortable with relative peers’. This idea has also been associated by Fumerton with the fact that the alehouse was essentially a ‘*home operation*’. While other drinking establishments – primarily inns – were housed in purpose-built buildings, most alehouses during this period

¹² Clark, ‘Alehouse’, 49.

¹³ As Beier notes, legislation during this period stipulated that every able-bodied individual who lacked independent means should have a master and those who did not were legally considered as vagabonds and persecuted accordingly. Thus vagrancy came to provide ‘the classic crime of status, the social crime *par excellence*’, since ‘offenders were arrested not because of their actions, but because of their position in society’. See A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. xxii. For other very useful studies on vagrancy in the early modern period, see Patricia Fumerton, ‘Not Home’; Fumerton, ‘Mocking Aristocratic Place: The Perspective of the Streets’, *Vagrant Subjects*. Spec. issue of *Early Modern Culture* 7 (2008), 1-25, <<http://emc.eserver.org/1-7/fumerton.html>> [accessed 23 October 2011]; Sandra Logan, Martine van Elk, and A. L. Beier in Issue 7 (*Special Issue: Vagrant Subjects*) of the electronic seminar *Early Modern Culture* <<http://emc.eserver.org/1-7/issue7.html>>. See also Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Dionne and Mentz; Paola Pugliatti, *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001); William C. Carroll, *Fat King/Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London and New York: Longman, 1988); J. Thomas Kelly, *Thorns on the Tudor Rose: Monks, Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

formed part of ‘ordinary dwelling houses’.¹⁴ In other words, setting up an alehouse might merely involve the conversion of part of the domestic space, like a back room or a cellar, into a tippling house – with the addition of some seating furniture (a bench maybe) and a few pots for drinking.¹⁵ In most cases, alehouses were also family-owned operations. Like their customers, the majority of alehouse-keepers were themselves of the poorer sort – quite often individuals from the lower occupational classes (like shoe-making, tailoring, or husbandry) who turned to the drink trade for extra income. While the keeper might himself be busy during the day at another job, the alehouse would be run by his wife or other family members who would all take part in running the business.¹⁶ Thus, Fumerton argues, ‘to enter an alehouse was quite literally to come “home”’, as the alehouse ‘offered its guests a touch of community and family – a sense of having “come home”’.¹⁷

Besides providing an alternative home for the poor, the alehouse, according to Peter Clark, ‘also stressed the continuing role of the community in popular society’, by providing a range of communal activities that traditionally used to be offered by the parish church.¹⁸ Under the increasing strain of Puritan attacks, holiday rituals, traditional games and celebrations were gradually transferred in the early seventeenth century from the local church and the churchyard to the alehouse.¹⁹ Puritan attempts to cleanse the English church of all they considered as pagan or of popish origin, and their vehement denunciation of popular pastimes, served to weaken the communal role of the church that started ‘to lose its

¹⁴ Fumerton, ‘Not Home’, 494-5.

¹⁵ For further details concerning the conversion of ordinary houses to public drinking places, see Clark, *English Alehouse*.

¹⁶ As has been noted, in family-owned drinking houses female members of the family often had a significant role in running the business. The alewife, in particular, appears to have been one of the most frequent roles held by women in public drinking houses during this period. See, for instance, Capp, 107-9.

¹⁷ Fumerton, ‘Not Home’, 495.

¹⁸ Clark, ‘Alehouse’, 61.

¹⁹ Indeed, one of the most oft-reiterated complaints against alehouses during this period, especially by Puritan preachers, was that it provided a kind of rival institution to the church, drawing people (and especially the lower classes) away from worship, and promoting a kind of communal activity that fostered vice, immorality and irreligion. As Keith Thomas has noted, having being stigmatised in this manner, the alehouse was blamed by members of the clergy on various occasions for such events as the outbreak of the plague. In such cases, therefore, it came to be used as ‘the scapegoat responsible for the community’s sufferings’. See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*. (1971; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 100.

position as the hub of communal life'.²⁰ In this respect, the alehouse came to provide an alternative gathering site for communal activity that strengthened and affirmed communal bonds.

Yet, as Clark comments, on the other hand, 'the new communal world based at the alehouse never had the same degree of cohesion and unity found in the old traditional community centred on the church'.²¹ Not only was the alehouse community less socially inclusive than that formed around the church – in most cases lacking the participation of the wealthier members of the community – but communal life was also unavoidably divided among the various alehouses operating in the same area.²² As Patricia Fumerton has also more recently argued, at the same time as it 'offered its guests a touch of community and family' (and therefore a sense of stability and belonging), the alehouse was also 'alien, fragmentary, and unsettled: in a word, "vagrant"' – a point made most apparent by the alehouse's nature as a commercial enterprise that highlighted the provisional character of the alehouse community.²³ Indeed, as Fumerton has further suggested, this vagrant or un-homey aspect of the alehouse might have exerted a special kind of appeal for its predominantly male clientele, as 'outside the threateningly constricting female space of the home, in the other home of the alehouse, the man/husband could be powerfully unobligated and free'.²⁴

Adding to this challenging work, this essay takes a closer look at the alehouse and alehouse communities as those which are presented in the black-letter broadside ballad – a literary and aesthetic form that carries close links with the alehouse as a social space. Not only does alehouse drinking inhabit the space of the ballad as one of its most popular topics, but the ballad also would in various forms inhabit the space of the alehouse – just as it did that of the street. There ballads would be sold by pedlars, who would often sing them to advertise them to potential buyers. Thus, even if they chose not to buy (or indeed did not afford to buy), alehouse customers could still enjoy broadside ballads, perhaps sing them themselves or even enjoy them – especially their woodcuts – as aesthetic objects, as ballads would

²⁰ Clark, 'Alehouse', 61. According to Clark here, the appearance of the so-called *Books of Sports* (first published by King James I in 1618 and reissued by King Charles I in 1633) and Archbishop Laud's support of traditional pastimes like church-ales were not particularly effective in their attempt to reverse this drift away from church.

²¹ Ibid, 64.

²² Clark, *English Alehouse*, p. 154.

²³ Fumerton, 'Not Home', 495.

²⁴ Ibid, 509.

frequently decorate alehouse walls.²⁵ Further, just like alehouses, while they might be reached by all social orders, ballads primarily targeted the lower levels of society. Printed on the most inexpensive type of paper and sold, as Tessa Watt suggests, ‘somewhere between a halfpenny and a penny’,²⁶ they were affordable to a great part of the population, if not to all but the most destitute.²⁷

For the modern reader, early modern ballads may thus be said to provide an important window to the popular culture of the period, offering an invaluable opportunity to consider how the lower social orders were represented in texts primarily aimed at them – or indeed, an opportunity to examine how the lowly represented themselves, a possibility that remains open by the fact that the authors of these texts are often anonymous. In this respect, ballads register what one might call ‘lower order subjectivity’, allowing the reader to catch a

²⁵ An insightful exploration of the links between the broadside ballad as a literary and aesthetic object and the alehouse as a social space is provided by Fumerton (‘Not Home’). For other very useful studies that examine the broadside ballad, see Alan Bold, *The Ballad* (New York: Methuen, 1979); Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981); Joshua Fisher, “‘He is turned a ballad-maker’: Broadside Appropriations in Early Modern England”. *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.2 (2003), 3.1-21, <<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/09-2/fishball.html>> [accessed 23 October 2011]; David C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) (chapter 6); Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (eds., with the assistance of Kris McAbee), *Ballads and Broadside in Britain, 1500-1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print. Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Angela McShane Jones, ‘Roaring Royalists and Ranting Brewers: The Politicisation of Drink and Drunkenness in Political Broadside Ballads from 1640 to 1689’ in Smyth, pp. 69-87; Eric Nebeker, ‘Broadside Ballads, Miscellanies, and the Lyric in Print’, *ELH* 76.4 (2009), 989-1013; Nebeker, ‘The Broadside Ballad and Textual Publics’. *SEL* 51.1 (2011), 1-19; Nebeker, ‘Thinking Categorically and Pepys’s Categories’, *English Broadside Ballad Archive* <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/thinking-categorically>> [accessed 23 October 2011]; Hyder E. Rollins, ‘The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad’. *PMLA* 34 (1919), 258-339; Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study of Origins and Meaning* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962); Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999) (chapter 7); Rochelle Smith, ‘King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad, Elizabethan Drama, and Shakespeare’, *SEL* 50.2 (2010), 301-35; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad, 1550-1650*, trans. by Gayna Walls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁶ Watt, p. 12.

²⁷ For information concerning the prices of broadside ballads during this period, see also Rollins. According to Rollins, ballads were sold at the price of a penny in the early seventeenth century and just half a penny by the end of the century (296-8, 304).

glimpse of early modern community from below.²⁸ Of course, as one soon finds out, far from pointing to a neatly homogenised or unified subject position, ballads introduce us to a broad and complex range of subject positions and an equally wide set of views that often resist neat categorization. Similarly, ballads also introduce us to a bewilderingly wide range of topics (from more serious to more trivial, profane or light-hearted ones) and a broad variety of social spaces (from the public world of the fair to the private space of the household).²⁹

For the purposes of this essay, ballads provide a truly invaluable resource for the study of early modern alehouse communities. The alehouse is no doubt one of the social spaces that feature most prominently in seventeenth-century ballads, just as communal drinking features as one of the most often-revisited topics in these texts. Samuel Pepys, a particularly avid collector of ballads in seventeenth-century England, chose to bring many of these *alehouse ballads* together under the category ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’, a classification perhaps intended to reflect the close link often drawn in these texts between drinking and the elements of sociability, conviviality and companionship.³⁰ Indeed, many of the texts found in this category celebrate the alehouse and alehouse drinking as sites for

²⁸ English broadside ballads of the seventeenth century have nowadays been made much more easily accessible to readers by the remarkable online project of the *English Broadside Ballad Archive* (EBBA), launched by the University of California at Santa Barbara under the direction of Patricia Fumerton: <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>>. In addition to facsimile images of the original texts, the EBBA database also provides ‘facsimile transcriptions’ (in which the original typeface is converted into modern print) and various other useful resources (such as ballad recordings).

²⁹ The broad range of topics covered by ballads in seventeenth-century England is reflected by the various categories in which Samuel Pepys chose to group the ballads he collected in the five volumes now held at the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge. At the same time, the Pepys collection also points to the difficulties involved in any attempt to neatly categorise the material, especially as besides the presumably more straightforward categories – ‘Devotion and Morality’, ‘History, True and Fabulous’, ‘Tragedy’, ‘State and Times’, ‘Love Pleasant’, ‘Love Unfortunate’, ‘Marriage’, ‘Sea’, ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’, ‘Humour, Frolics, &c.’ – one also comes across a ‘Promiscuous Supplement’. For a brief discussion of the categories in the Pepys collection of ballads, see Nebeker, ‘Thinking Categorically’.

³⁰ All five volumes of the Pepys collection of ballads are available in digitised form on the EBBA database. This is the resource used to access the collection for the purposes of this essay (please note that in quoting from the ballads I have followed the transcriptions provided on EBBA and ballad lines have been numbered for readers’ convenience). For a printed, facsimile edition of the Pepys collection, see Samuel Pepys, *The Pepys Ballads*, facsimile edition, 5 vols., from *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College Cambridge*, ed. by W. G. Day (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

communal bonding and camaraderie that serve to affirm the endurance of male homosocial bonds.³¹

Of course, as has already been noted by scholars, this celebration of alehouse drinking and conviviality is often counterbalanced against elements that go beyond the positive aspects of drinking to provide a reminder of some of its negative possibilities – a point that is made, for instance, in ballads that present the laments of drinkers who have had to suffer the consequences of excessive consumption. But as Simone Chess has pointed out in her discussion of the ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’ ballads in the Pepys collection, we should perhaps be less surprised by the diversity of opinions expressed about drinking in these texts than by ‘the complicated ways that these varied ballads present themes of middle or working class identity’.³² As Chess has further argued, these ballads may be said to provide ‘a site for inventing and developing a unified working class group identity’,³³ as they often present different types of workers uniting together towards a common purpose or against a common enemy – as in ‘How Mault doth deal with every one’ (Pepys 1. 427), where a range of working-class men (the miller, the smith, the carpenter, the shoemaker, the weaver, the tinker, the tailor, the sailor, the chapman, the mason, the labourer, the butcher, and the glover) all embark on an eventually unsuccessful fight against ‘Master Mault’ (a personified term for malt, the raw grain used for the production of alcohol, thus in effect a personified term for alcohol itself).³⁴

And yet, according to Chess, at the same time as ballads ‘allow us to see a unified working class gathering space’, they also ‘go out of their way to assert specific occupational

³¹ Issues of gender in relation to community and companionship form part of the discussion across this Special Issue: while Bronwen Price (‘Worlds within Worlds’) and Marion Wynne-Davies (‘“More women: more weeping”’) explore questions relating to female companionship, Rosamund Paice (‘Falling in Love and Language’) and Cornelia Wilde (‘Seraphic Companions’) deal with issues of companionship across the lines of gender.

³² Simone Chess, ‘Drinking & Good Fellowship: Working Class or Workers’ Classes at the Alehouse?’ *English Broadside Ballad Archive*, <http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/ballad_project/pepys_categories/drinking.asp> [accessed 23 October 2011] (para. 2).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, para. 5. The ballad cited here from Chess’s discussion may be accessed on the EBBA database. The ballads analyzed in my discussion have been reproduced in the body of my essay, by permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge.

loyalties, making employment a central identity category'.³⁵ The example of 'Round boyes indeed' (Pepys 1.442-443) – a text that I will be discussing in greater detail later in this essay – serves to demonstrate this concurrent drive, as its distinctive celebration of shoemakers is set within the more general framework of praise for all types of manual workers. Thus, according to Chess, just like alehouses themselves, alehouse ballads are 'inherently contradictory sites for class study: they are at once home spaces and workplaces, they at once condone and condemn drinking, and the fellowship they depict is at once blind and trade-based'.³⁶

My attempt here will be to explore some of the intriguing contradictions and ambivalences that inform the concepts of communal drinking and companionship in alehouse ballads, thereby rendering them such 'inherently contradictory sites for class study'.³⁷ Much of my discussion will concentrate on some of the ballads found in the 'Drinking and Good Fellowship' section of Samuel Pepys's collection as a means of interrogating the very terms used by Pepys to refer to these texts. My contention is that these ballads register a fairly ambivalent set of attitudes towards both terms used by Pepys to describe this category ('drinking' and 'good fellowship'), that extend well beyond mere celebration of alehouse bonding and camaraderie. More specifically, my aim here will be to closely interrogate the definition of 'good fellowship' in these texts and to examine how this category serves to define alehouse communities through the practice of drinking.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid, para. 3.

³⁶ As Chess notes, this dual pull between the celebration of a general class identity, on the one hand, and praise of individual groups of workers, on the other, 'is not necessarily a choice between diametric opposites' ('Drinking & Good Fellowship', para. 5). Indeed, the general celebration of working-class identity does not preclude the expression of multiple individual identities within it, and alehouses ballads are often seen to provide a simultaneous assertion of both.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The *OED* provides a range of definitions to the word 'fellowship' that includes 'companionship' as well as 'the spirit of comradeship' and 'friendliness' (see 'fellowship, n.' 2.a. and 5.a.). Thus, besides the idea of companionship, 'fellowship' may also be compatible with the affective and intimate type of bonding associated with friendship. However, the concept of 'fellowship' described in the texts examined in this essay does not involve the more elite, classically-inspired notions of friendship which are discussed in other essays included in this Special Issue – see, for instance, the essays by Bronwen Price ('World with Worlds') and Cornelia Wilde ('Seraphic Companions').

II. Defining the Borders of Alehouse Communities: Gestures of Inclusion/Exclusion

As I will be pointing out, alehouse ballads and the idea of keeping company with good fellows that is so often repeated in these texts present complex sites of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion that delineate the borders of the alehouse community (or rather, alehouse communities, as these are multiple and diverse) in very specific ways – as readers will find, the issue of exclusion in relation to the formation of community provides a recurrent preoccupation in this Special Issue.³⁹ In Bruce R. Smith's reading, such processes of inclusion and exclusion serve to characterise the genre of the ballad in general as 'ballads help to confirm a speech community's identity' by giving voice to an either implicit or explicit 'us'. Of course, as Smith further comments, 'for there to be an "us," there has to be a "them"'. So, in a sense, 'all ballads are *border* ballads', where the process of giving voice to an 'us' relies on the implicit or explicit identification of a 'semiotically necessary Other'.⁴⁰

My argument is that the community of 'good fellows' in alehouse ballads is often defined through an intriguing set of gestures of social self-definition, inclusion, and exclusion, that destabilise, as much as they may initially seem to affirm, the elements of social unity, cohesion, and stability. Indeed, any attempt to celebrate these elements through communal drinking is in fact heavily fraught with anxiety about the exact opposites: alienation, fragmentation and social displacement. As I would like to suggest, this anxiety is perhaps nowhere more evident than in some of the views expressed in alehouse ballads towards idleness. Quite intriguingly, this issue – frequently drawn upon in early modern invectives against the culture of the alehouse – provides a recurrent point of reference in alehouse ballads too, often as part of a complex set of gestures of social self-definition that serve to dissociate the community of 'good fellows' from those higher up the social scale, but also from those vagrants at the very bottom, who seem to remain at the borders of alehouse communities themselves as their most feared 'others'.

³⁹ See, for instance, the essay by Rosamund Paice ('Falling in Love and Language') that discusses John Milton's treatment of the ideal of companionate marriage in *Paradise Lost*.

⁴⁰ Smith, p. 184. As Bruce R. Smith further notes, 'often the semiotically necessary Other is palpably present: a demon, the Sheriff of Nottingham, a Scottish knight, a seditious Catholic', but a sense of 'them' may also be suggested in subtler or more implicit ways (pp. 184-5).

Though ballads about drinking may be found scattered across all five volumes of the Pepys collection, ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’ ballads are notably grouped as a distinct category only in the first volume, the great part of which is generally assumed to have been originally collected by John Selden and to include texts of an earlier date of composition than those in subsequent volumes.⁴¹ Ranging chronologically from the 1620s to the 1630s, the ballads from this category, as well as other ballads from the Pepys collection that I will be examining here (all of which are drawn from the first volume), provide the opportunity for a historically focused type of interrogation that enables us to situate the texts within a very specific set of socioeconomic developments in the first part of the seventeenth century in England, and an important set of social and economic anxieties that would be revisited, albeit with much greater force, during the period of the civil war and interregnum.

The first ballad I would like to turn my attention to is ‘Heres to thee kind Harry’ (Pepys 1.433), published possibly in 1627 (Figure 1).⁴² The text starts by calling for ‘Roome’ to be made ‘for a lusty lively lad, / ... / That will shew himselfe blyth be he ne’re so sad’ (ll. 1, 3). This, we are told, is a lad ‘That cryes a fig / for poverty / And takes all troubles / patiently, / Will spend what he gets, / And drinke more then he eates, / That never meanes to vary / From good fellowship free’ (ll. 5-12). As this first stanza asserts as it finishes, ‘If thou such a one be, / *Ile drinke to thee kinde Harry*’ (ll. 13-4). The speaker thereby extends a warm welcome to this ‘lusty lively lad’, an apparently poor and destitute figure that, nevertheless, faces economic hardship with patience, fortitude and good cheer – all necessary prerequisites, it seems, for his inclusion in the company. Harry is also praised for his mild disposition and his avoidance of any kind of physical or verbal abuse that would disturb the companionate and cheerful spirit of the occasion: he is one ‘That scornes to brawle / For trifles small, / but himselfe doth quietly cary, / That no worsen word / From his lips will afford’ (ll. 23-7). The elements used to describe Harry also seem to point to the definition of ‘good fellowship’ itself, as it is understood in this ballad.

⁴¹ The category ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’ also appears in volumes 4 and 5 of the Pepys collection. However, rather than being presented as a distinct category, it is here combined with the category ‘Humour, Frollicks, &c’.

⁴² Unless otherwise noted, the ballads hereafter discussed in this essay are from the ‘Drinking and Good Fellowship’ category in the first volume of the Pepys collection. Information about dates of publication of ballads is taken from the EBBA database.



Figure 1: Anonymous, ‘Heres to thee kind Harry. / OR / The plaine dealing Drunkard’ (1627?), Pepys 1.433. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

The text notably acknowledges Harry’s dire economic condition, while pointing to a community that embraces him in spite of that element. Through the warmth of companionship and good cheer, this drinking community provides a space of homosocial bonding, comfort and solace, where kind Harry ‘will laugh and sing / in the midst of care, / Though sorrow force him / to despayre’ (ll. 19-22). Therefore here, ‘good fellowship’ finds positive expression in a congenial circle of alehouse camaraderie and in a community of drinkers that embrace and sustain those of its members in economic hardship. Identified by name, Harry finds himself incorporated in a group that affirms the enduring significance of communal values and connotes warmth, familiarity and stability. At the same time, Harry may be said to provide an ‘everyman’ figure – a representative of all those who sustain and are sustained by the communal bonding and camaraderie afforded at this space.

Intriguingly, Harry’s entrance in the space of communal mirth is marked by the suspension of sorrow and care, but also – rather paradoxically – by the suspension of economic restraint. Harry is a fellow that ‘will freely call for drinke, / ... / And never repine to part with his chinke’ (ll. 15, 17). In a way, the space of communal mirth constructed here bears a certain affinity with the notion of Bakhtinian festival, as a ‘space outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity’.⁴³ This space, associated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his study on *Rabelais and his World* with folk culture and the culture of the marketplace, is

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), p. 255.

said to reinforce a sense of unity in those who take part in it. There ‘the individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people’s mass body’.⁴⁴ Through the festival, according to Bakhtin, the people ‘entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, abundance’.⁴⁵ For Keith Thomas, the consumption of alcohol had such an effect on the poor in early modern England. In his view, alcohol provided ‘an essential narcotic which anaesthetised men against the strains of contemporary life’ as ‘drunkenness broke down social distinctions’.⁴⁶

Yet, this purported collapse of social distinctions may only be seen as a temporary and ultimately ineffective relief or escape from social reality. Indeed, as Thomas notes, the consumption of alcohol ‘brought a *temporary* mood of optimism to the desperate’ and drink only made ‘life appear *momentarily* tolerable’ for the poor.⁴⁷ The same point holds true for the concept of the festival in general. As Bakhtin’s own discussion suggests, festival celebration provides an only ‘*temporary* liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order’.⁴⁸ Various more recent studies have also further sought to problematise the interconnection between festival forms and the official socioeconomic order that appears to be suspended in their duration. As Leah Marcus has notably pointed out, Bakhtin ‘may be right about how holiday “liberty” is perceived by those in the midst of it. For its wholehearted participants, it may indeed be experienced as a joyous breaking free of all boundaries and limits, but that leaves open the question of its actual relationship with the hierarchy it seems to overthrow’.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Thomas, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 22-3 (italics mine). As Theodore B. Leinwand notes, similar comments on drinking as a temporary and ultimately ineffective escape from social reality and the hardships of poverty may be found in the two sermons delivered by Thomas Thompson in Bristol in 1608 under the title *A Diet for a Drunkard* (published in London in 1612). As Thompson comments, drinking allows the poor man to ‘conceit himselfe, that he is never a whit the poorer. But S. Ambrose sheweth ... they are rich while they are drunke, but when once their wine is thoroughly digested, they are themselves beggers’. As he further notes, ‘wine maketh them courageous, and will give them a good colour; but the greater is their miserie when they are waked’ (qtd. in Leinwand, 159).

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, p. 10 (italics mine).

⁴⁹ Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth. Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 7.

The broadside ballads I'm looking at here persistently turn to this question, inviting us to consider the broader social and economic structure that the apparent celebration of alehouse camaraderie appears to suspend or evade. Indeed, images of communal celebration are hauntingly accompanied by images that register the anxiety of social alienation, displacement and downward mobility, as the alehouse comes to stand at the crossroads of a significant range of social and economic changes that marked the landscape of early modern England. In 'Heres to thee kind Harry' this anxiety comes to the surface at the end of the second part of the ballad, as the jovial group is about to depart. 'Now tis time to depart' (l. 79), the speaker says,

Let us drinke up this quart.
and then no longer wee'll tary
Each man pay the shot,
What falls to his lot.
But I will pay for Harry. (ll. 80-4)

This final variation upon the refrain carries an intriguingly contrasting set of connotations. On the one hand, paying for Harry's drinks may be read as a friendly gesture that provides an affirmation of the communal values shared by the group. On the other hand, though, it may be read as an act of charity that provides a grim reminder of the economic condition that probably renders Harry unable to pay for his own drinks and, therefore, dependent on such acts. The temporariness of this solution points to the transience of communal mirth itself and reminds us that, outside this space, Harry remains exposed to degradation and hardship. After all, as the first few lines of the ballad let us know, Harry is one who will 'drinke more then he eates'. One wonders, purely for his love of drink and good fellowship? Possibly so; but also possibly because alcohol (ale and beer in particular) would provide a fairly cheap alternative to other forms of nutriment.⁵⁰ Statistical evidence reports the 'prices [of ale and beer] moving more sluggishly than the leaps and bounds of bread prices' during this period⁵¹ – an issue that I will be returning to.

But what is also of great interest in 'Heres to thee kind Harry' is how, at the same time as the ballad may be said to present a largely inclusive space of male homosocial bonding and

⁵⁰ As Keith Wrightson notes, ale provided an important 'nutritional necessity for the mass of the population' in early modern England (p. 2).

⁵¹ Clark, 'Alehouse', 54.

camaraderie, the community of drinkers it describes is in fact largely based on the principle of exclusion. This becomes clear when one considers the various gestures of exclusion on the basis of which the community comes to form. These render the circle of ‘good fellows’ considerably more select than initially suggested and destabilise the idea of an all-embracing group. Harry’s spirit of generosity and his promptness to ‘spend what he gets’ on keeping company with his boon fellows (in defiance of economic restraint) are contrasted, for instance, in the first part of the ballad to the rapacity and pettiness of those ‘greedy Cormorant[s]’ (l. 29) who enjoy economic affluence but are loath to spend any of their money, either on themselves or on communal drinking. Indeed, Harry’s inclusion in the drinking community seems to gain greater force by the exclusion not only of this but also of various other groups. One notes that in this process ‘honesty’ becomes an important category of inclusion/exclusion as in the second part those who lack Harry’s integrity and plain-dealing – like the liar, the braggart, or that ‘fawning Sycophant’ (l. 29), who, as the speaker says, ‘gives me / pleasant words to my face, / And railes at me / in another place’ (ll. 33-6) – are left out. Defining themselves as ‘honest joviall blades’ (l. 71), Harry’s boon companions further exclude from their community any ‘pilfering theefe’ (l. 15) that ‘steales to give his corps releefe’ (l. 17), and ‘That though he can / himselfe maintaine / By some honest trade / he will take no paine’ (ll. 19-22). In yet another gesture of exclusion, the first part of the ballad makes reference to the ‘idle Sharke’ (l. 43) who ‘lives by shifts, and will not worke’ (l. 45), and is therefore unwelcome in the drinking community.

III. A Critique of Idleness

As becomes clear, these gestures contain an explicit critique of idleness which, as I will point out, becomes a recurrent feature and often comes to define the borders of the drinking community in alehouse ballads. An intriguing example may be found in ‘Round boyes indeed. / OR / The Shoomakers Holy-day’ (Pepys 1.442-443), printed possibly in 1632 (Figure 2). Like the first ballad I examined, ‘Round boyes indeed’ develops the theme of communal mirth – though the text here concentrates on a much more specific occasion, that of the shoemakers’ holiday, traditionally celebrated on the feast day of the two patron saints of the trade, Crispin and Crispinian (the holiday famously commemorated in the pre-battle speech delivered by King Henry in act four of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, commonly known as the Saint Crispin’s Day speech). The ballad notably rehearses some of the gestures of exclusion that we saw in ‘Heres to thee kind Harry’, as the shoemakers here distinguish themselves from ‘cheating knaves and queanes / ... / Which doe not live by honest meanes’

(ll. 49, 51). Their company is restricted, as the second part of the ballad says, to ‘men of good report, / That lead their lives in honest sort’ (ll. 13-4). In this part, the company of ‘good fellowes’ is extended from shoemakers to a much broader group of labourers, ranging from the smith, the weaver and the tailor, to the sailor, the carpenter, the mason, the bricklayer, the malt-man and the baker. Within this community of ‘good fellowes’, the bonds of friendship and camaraderie are strongly affirmed through such gestures of traditional hospitality as that of the tapster who joins in this celebration of class camaraderie himself and will ‘give his friend a jugg of beare / *if that he stand in need*’ (ll. 39-40) even if ‘barly broth ne nere so deare’ (l. 38) – a gesture that, as in ‘Heres to thee kind Harry’, seems to suspend economic relations; here, in particular, the economic relation between tapster and customer.

In effect, as Simone Chess has pointed out, the ballad contains ‘an ode to all working men’, that allows us to see the alehouse as the meeting space for a unified group of workers. But, as Chess has further remarked, the ballad also provides ‘a very specific call to shoemakers’.⁵² Therefore the concept of ‘good fellowship’ in this text acquires a much more specific set of connotations besides the more general call for working class solidarity. Indeed, drinking and good fellowship here come to form part of a systematic cycle of labour and celebration that affirms shoemakers’ occupational loyalty and solidarity. As the first part of the ballad asserts, ‘Since we are here good fellowes all, / drinke we must and worke we shall. / And worke we will what ere befall, / *for money to serve our need*’ (ll. 5-8). Shoemakers in this part of the ballad are further seen as taking pride in being the ‘gentle Craft’ (l. 39), a title of honor conferred upon the trade of shoemaking by association with Saints Crispin and Crispinian, as well as with Saint Hugh (also a patron saint of shoemakers). The text refers to ‘the titles which our trade adorne’ (l. 25): ‘Shoemakers sonnes were princes borne’ (l. 27), we are told, so ‘For kind S. Hughe and Crispins sake, / a merry day we meane to make, / And after to our tooles betake, / *for money to serve our need*’ (ll. 29-32).

This reference to the princely origin of shoemakers is related to the stories of the patron saints of the trade, and their abandonment of their princely status to pursue the humble trade of shoemaking – in the case of the two brothers, Crispin and Crispinian, in order to avoid religious persecution, while in the case of Sir Hugh, for love of Winifred whom he eventually joins in martyrdom. These stories were probably well-known in the early

⁵² Chess, ‘Drinking & Good Fellowship’, para. 4.

modern period, especially through the publication of Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (1597), 'a collection of stories celebrating the trade of shoemaking and "shewing what famous men have beene Shoemakers in time past in this Land, with their worthy deeds and great Hospitality"'.⁵³ Various aspects of these stories were also appropriated for the theatre by Thomas Dekker in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (first performed by the Admiral's Men in 1599 and published in 1600) and by William Rowley in *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (possibly written about 1608 and published in 1638), both of which enjoyed considerable popularity in the decades before the closing of the theatres in 1642.⁵⁴



Figure 2: L.P., 'Round boyes indeed. / OR / The Shoemakers Holy-day' (1632?), Pepys 1.442-443. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

Yet, at the same time as the princely origin of the trade is called up as a source of pride, the shoemakers' evocation of their patron saints here launches an explicit critique or defiance

⁵³ Anthony Parr, 'Introduction' in Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (The New Mermaids. 2nd ed. London: A & C Black; New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), pp. vii-xxxii.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of how shoemakers are depicted in these and various other early modern texts (such as Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V*), see Alison A. Chapman, 'Whose Saint Crispin's Day Is It?: Shoemaking, Holiday Making, and the Politics of Memory in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001), 1467-94. As Chapman argues, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts draw a persistent link between shoemakers and the celebration of artisanal holidays that suggests a connection between the trade and the attempt to 'change the calendar and create new holidays' and 'highlights the tension between elite control over the pattern of ritual memory versus popular impulse to reframe annual commemorations' (1468). As Chapman further points out, Shakespeare's two plays (*Julius Caesar* and *Henry V*) ultimately contain the threat posed to the festal calendar by shoemakers: the former by silencing the cobbler who appears at the head of the crowd in the opening scene of the play, and the latter by having the king appropriate to himself the shoemakers' ability to alter the calendar (1480-91).

of an upper-class ethos. Shoemakers seem to trace in their patron saints a source of nobility that is, however, very different from that of the upper classes, in being intricately interwoven with an expressed pride in manual labour. This connection is signified in the symbolic association between the tools of the trade and the bones of Saint Hugh, whose relics shoemakers honour by taking them up. ‘S. Hughs bones up we take in hast’ (l. 37), the ballad says, ‘both pinsers, punching alle and last, / The gentle Craft was never disgrast, / *they have money to serve their need*’ (ll. 38-40). (A shoemaker’s tool kit was conventionally called Saint Hugh’s Bones during this period, based on the legend that the saint’s bones were turned into tools for making shoes after his death.) This pride in manual labour serves to dissociate this group from the ethos of the upper sorts, who would traditionally find pride in ‘idleness’ – as in not having to labour physically in order to earn their living.⁵⁵ Robert Burton makes special reference to the disease of upper-class idleness in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621), when he caustically remarks that ‘idleness is an appendix to nobility; they count it a disgrace to work, and spend all their days in sports, recreations, and pastimes, and will therefore take no pains, be of no vocation; they feed liberally, fare well, want exercise, action, employment, (for to work, I say, they may not abide)...’⁵⁶ Analyzing the various types of personal expenditure involved in sustaining the status and lifestyle of the nobility, Lawrence Stone also makes reference to the various pastimes and entertainments considered appropriate for ‘a gentleman, one of whose functions was to live in idleness with elegance and grace’.⁵⁷

In ‘Round boyes indeed’, the shoemakers’ exaltation of their own pride in manual labour contains a clear critique of and perhaps also a dose of contempt for this upper-class ethos of idleness that would sometimes force gallants to resort to the selling of land in order to sustain their needs. As the shoemakers here affirm, ‘Our livings we get by our hands, / as plainly you may understand, / Whilst many gallants sell their land, / *for money to serve their need*’ (ll. 13-6). Like the speaker’s exclusion of ‘greedy Cormorants’ from the

⁵⁵ Attention to this upper-class type of idleness has recently been drawn by Patricia Fumerton in her article ‘Mocking Aristocratic Place’ (see especially para. 6).

⁵⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 16th ed. 1836 (Oxford: Thornton’s of Oxford, 1997), p. 160. For a challenging discussion of Burton’s critique of upper-class idleness and his contemporaries’ lack of industry, see David J. Baker, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), chapter 5, “‘Idleness is an appendix to nobility’: The Preface to Robert Burton’s ‘The Anatomy of Melancholy’” (pp. 21-41).

⁵⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Abridged ed. 1967. London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 259.

drinking community in 'Heres to thee kind Harry', the shoemakers' words in this ballad provide an intriguing gesture of social self-definition; one that asserts the boundaries of the community, by affirming pride in the manual labour of the working class, on the one hand, while denigrating the idleness of the upper sorts, on the other. Yet, in various other ballads, this dialectic between manual labour and idleness is used to distinguish the identity of the worker not only from the upper sorts, but also from those able-bodied, yet unemployed, individuals at the other end of the social scale, who move from place to place like beggars, without taking up any honest kind of calling. An example may be found in 'The honest plaine dealing Porter' (Figure 3),⁵⁸ where the poor porter expresses nothing but scorn for those 'idle knaves about this towne' that 'basely loyter up and downe' (first part, ll. 33-4):

And ere they'le set their hands to worke,
From place to place they'le live by 'th shirke,
They'le sit i'th Alehouse all the day,
And drinke and eate, yet nothing pay. (first part, ll. 35-8)

Despite his poverty, the honest porter repudiates beggary as a shameful and disgraceful practice that he would never allow himself to succumb to. 'Well may they heare that I am poore' (second part, l. 43), he says:

yet not to beg from doore to doore.
Let him who hath no house nor land,
some honest calling take in hand,
Whereby a living may be got. (second part, lines 44-7)

⁵⁸ This ballad appears in the category 'State and Times' in the first volume of the Pepys collection. The same is the case for the next ballad discussed in this essay, 'The Beggars Intrusion' (Pepys 1.216-217).

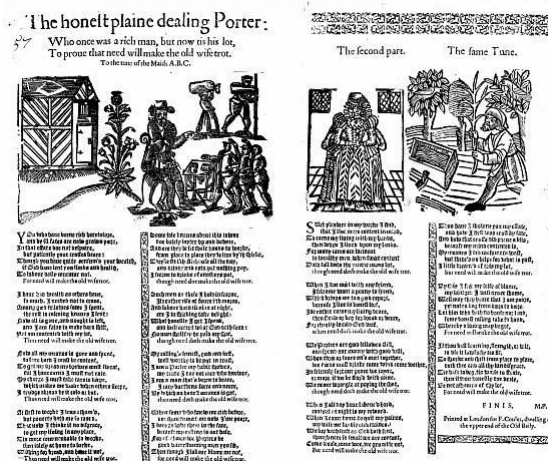


Figure 3: Martin Parker, ‘The honest plaine dealing Porter: / Who once was a rich man, but now tis his lot, / To prove that need will make the old wife trot’ (1630?), Pepys 1.194-195. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

Quite intriguingly, such descriptions seem to reproduce some of the stereotypes found in the literature of roguery or the so-called ‘cony-catching’ pamphlets (some of which I cited at the beginning of this paper), as well as in other forms of material produced during this period (such as official proclamations and statutes), that described a vagrant underworld of able-bodied, yet idle individuals, prone to crime, dissolution and deceit – and referred to alehouses as the headquarters of this underworld. As has already been noted by scholars, the charge of idleness was so frequently brought against vagrants and beggars in the early modern period (especially by the dominant classes) that the term ‘idleness’ often provided a synonym of ‘vagrancy’. As William C. Carroll further points out, ‘the beggar’s idleness ... was increasingly read as an act of will, rather than a consequence of general economic failure, and the so-called sturdy beggar ... became the paradigm of the willful social parasite’.⁵⁹ It was perhaps in subsequent years that the social and economic role of these ‘idle beggars’ would be fully conceptualised within the context of early modern capitalism, but also within the context later on of industrial capitalism which, to quote Richard Halpern, would ‘produce unemployment, but in the form of a “reserve army of labor” which played a functional role in depressing wages’.⁶⁰ Indeed, as Halpern points out in his compelling discussion of this issue, for Adam Smith (whose *The Wealth of Nations* was first published in 1776) ‘vagrants are simply potential labourers in search of capital; they

⁵⁹ Carroll, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 75.

are therefore part of the nation's economic life.' However, 'during the heyday of primitive accumulation ... the vagrant classes played the role of a fully decoded body with respect to the dominant social order'.⁶¹ Seen with increasing fear and suspicion as a possible threat to the established social and political order, and faced with increasing punishment and persecution, these vagrant poor 'became, in a sense, the quintessential "other" of English society'.⁶²

IV. Vagrancy and the Anxiety of Social and Economic Dislocation

Alehouse ballads insistently point to how the vagrant poor might have functioned as the quintessential 'other' not only of the dominant social classes but also of those working-class communities that are so often portrayed in these texts. Indeed, the image of vagrancy is often considered by the working-class communities in these ballads with perhaps as much horror and detestation as it appears to have been countenanced by the upper classes. Of course, one wonders: is this how labouring communities truly felt about the vagrant poor? Or, are we to read these ballads as a subtle means of social control, aimed at reminding working-class groups of what might happen of them if they stopped taking part in the cycle of labour? Could it be that working-class groups were encouraged through singing of these ballads to see themselves and others in specific ways? It may indeed be naive to take the various gestures of social definition and self-definition in these ballads at face value. Yet, it is also very difficult to provide any definitive answers to these important questions, especially as in most cases very little is known about authorship.

Whatever the answers to these issues may be, the reason why the image of the vagrant poor is so often presented with fear and at times even detestation in these ballads should perhaps be found not in the alleged voluntary idleness and deceit that was thought to characterise that condition and contributed to the perception of vagrants and beggars as willful social and economic parasites, but in the labouring classes' fear of their own susceptibility to that condition. Quite notably, the threat of vagrancy constantly intrudes in the narrative space of the ballad to destabilise any vision of social and economic stability. A telling example may

⁶¹ Ibid. As Halpern explains, his use of the term 'decoded' to refer to the vagrant poor is not meant to suggest that this category of people 'lacked any organised social life, only that this life and its structures were largely detached from the ruling ones' (p. 284, note 45).

⁶² Ibid, p. 73.

be found in ‘The Beggars Intrusion’ (Pepys 1.216-217), possibly published in 1620 (Figure 4), where the figure of the beggar thrusts himself into various social spaces like an uninvited guest, to reproach various types of people for their vices and point out to them how these may cast them down to his position. The beggar in this ballad may turn his attention to all social stations, but, as Patricia Fumerton has recently underlined, those most prone to social and economic instability and displacement were servants, apprentices, but also ‘poor householders from the lowest depths of the amorphous “middling sort” who were at any time susceptible to unsettling change (indigent husbandmen, small craftsmen, and petty traders in the poorer occupations, such as glovers, weavers, carpenters, fishmongers, fruiterers, and the like)’.⁶³ This is not very far from Raymond Williams’s description of small owners, ‘these men caught ... in successive but temporary settlements: achieving a place in the altering social structure of the land but continually threatened with losing it: with being pushed down, as eventually many were, into the exposed anonymity of the landless poor’.⁶⁴ These middling groups (the exact same ones that so often populate the alehouse ballad) were indeed the ones most susceptible to unemployment and, by extent, most prone to downward mobility, landlessness, dislocation and vagrancy – a type of vagrancy which, contrary to the various stereotypes found in the literature of roguery, was produced by enforced and involuntary idleness rather than anything else. Williams provides an apt description of the insecurity constantly felt by these groups when he refers to the ‘savage anxiety of middle men’.⁶⁵

⁶³ Fumerton, *Unsettled*, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁴ *The Country and the City* (1973; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 43.

⁶⁵ Williams, p. 44. Williams also identifies the ‘double-edged’ anger of these deeply insecure middling groups: this, he suggests, would be targeted both ‘against the speculative rich and the idle poor’ (pp. 43-4).



Figure 4: William Hockom, ‘The Beggers Intrusion. / Or the worlds Illusion’ (1620?), Pepys 1.216-217.
© The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

Having this in mind, perhaps it should come as no surprise that alehouse ballads express a constant preoccupation with economic viability that in many ways undermines the more positive aspects of ‘good fellowship’. In ‘Round boyes indeed’, for instance, the various versions of the refrain at the end of each stanza remind us that what allows the different groups of labourers to take part in the celebration is not only honesty and good cheer, but that *‘they have money to serve their need’*. Likewise, the intrusion of the ballad-singer in the alehouse as he inscribes himself in the text near the end of the second part, reminds us of the commercial nature of this space that ultimately seems to be governed by the forces of the marketplace – forces that put strain on the celebration of communal bonding and probably altered the kind of communal spirit traditionally sustained around the parish church. Gestures of hospitality, such as that extended by the tapster, who joins the circle of companionship in the second part of the ballad by ‘giv[ing] his friend a jugg of beare / *if that he stand in need*’ (ll. 39-40), prove an only temporary and transitory escape from the socioeconomic relations governing that space. One cannot fail to notice also that in various other ballads, the tools of the trade – so proudly taken up by the shoemakers in ‘Round boyes indeed’ – are pawned by labourers to the alehouse-keeper to buy drinks.

The limits of companionship and good fellowship are ultimately put to the test when members of the community come face to face with economic degradation. At many of these moments, far from providing a site of stability, solidarity, and collectivity, communal drinking is exposed as a site of instability, alienation, and fragmentation. Repeatedly, figures in the ballads complain that at the end of the day it is ‘money that makes a man’ as they find themselves excluded from the circle of good fellowship or deserted by their

friends when they have no more money to spend. An example may be found in ‘A pleasant new Song’ (Pepys, 1.447), published possibly in 1622 (Figure 5). Here the speaker warns his audience against good fellowship, pointing to the precarious and transient nature of the alehouse community:

Thou thinkest good fellowes be thy friends
And what thou hast on them thou spends:
What thou by worke gainst all the weeke,
Consumeth by *good fellowship*.

But when that all the money is gone,
And score nor credit thou hast none:
These friends from thee away will slipe,
And farewell all *good fellowship*. (first part, lines 21-8)

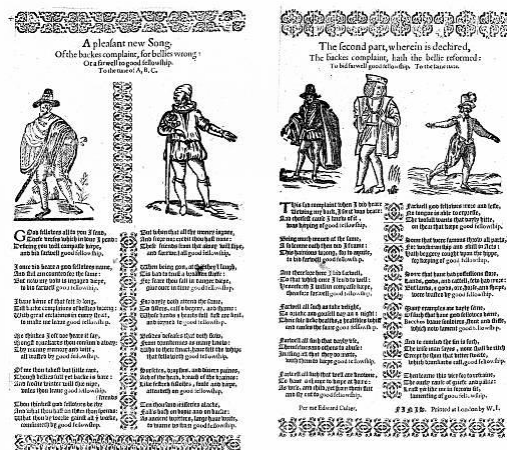


Figure 5: Edward Culter, ‘A pleasant new Song, / Of the backes complaint, for bellies wrong: / Or a farewell to good fellowship’ (1622?), Pepys 1.447. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

Far from affirming the ties of friendship and communal bonding, the text here registers the anxiety of social displacement and alienation that provides a recurrent preoccupation in various other ballads in the collection. Another ballad titled ‘A goodfellowes complaint against strong beere’ (Pepys 1.439), published around 1630 (Figure 6), gives voice to a similar complaint against good fellowship as the speaker describes his downward process to destitution: ‘I once enjoyed both house and land / But now t’is otherwise you see, / My moneys spent my cloathes are pawnd’ (first part, ll. 9-12). As he further laments: ‘Now all

is gone and nothing left, / It is not as it was wont to be / Of all my friends I am bereft' (first part, ll. 25-7). Based on a shifting set of economic conditions, alehouse relationships prove transitory and unstable, and the speaker, once embraced by the alehouse community, now runs the danger of being literally cast out of doors. 'When I had coine no tapster durst, / Refuse to trust me shillings three, / But now thele see my money first' (second part, ll. 1-3), he complains. 'Besides', he says, 'ther's Tapsters three or foure, / Where I have spent my money free, / Are like to thrust me out of doore' (second part, ll. 13-5), while another one who would once welcome him warmly, will now not even 'know my name' (second part, l. 7). Unlike the figure of Harry in the first ballad I examined, this good fellow here is reduced to anonymity. Alienated from his land, home and friends, he comes to bear a striking resemblance to those vagrant figures from whom the workers in the texts we have looked at so insistently try to dissociate themselves. Ranging from door to door and one alehouse to the other, he reminds us of those beggars who 'basely loyter up and downe' in 'The honest plaine dealing Porter'.

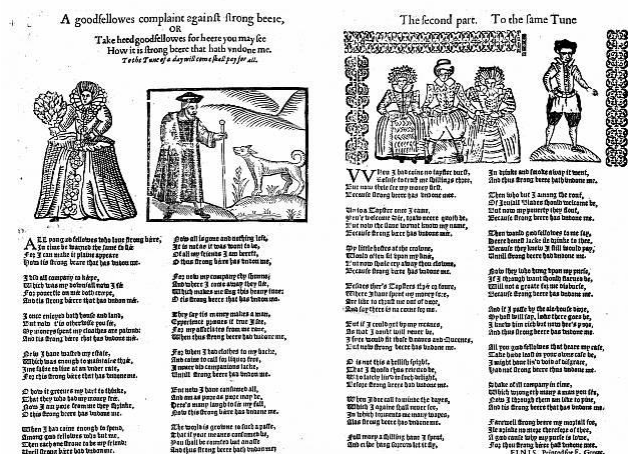


Figure 6: Anonymus, 'A goodfellowes complaint against strong beere, / OR / Take heed goodfellowes for heere you may see / How it is strong beere that hath vndone me' (1630?), Pepys 1.439. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

Of course in 'A goodfellowes complaint against strong beere' the speaker's downfall is clearly said to be self-inflicted, with the cause found in his own indulgence to drinking – as he laments again and again in the refrain (different versions of which appear at the end of each stanza), 'tis strong beere that hath vndone me'. Similar complaints are repeated in various other texts that warn about the potentially destructive consequences of habitual and excessive drinking, especially as that might lead to the neglect of one's affairs. Complaints of this type, for example, are regularly voiced in ballads by disgruntled wives who find

themselves and their families neglected by their husbands for the homosocial pleasures of alehouse drinking. Such instances point to some significant tension between the alehouse as a predominantly, even if not exclusively, male space and the home as a space dominated by the wife. The alehouse would notably provide a space where men could find escape from domestic pressures, or as Patricia Fumerton has noted, from the wrath of angry wives, venting their frustration not only by indulging themselves in drinking with their male companions but also in many cases by hurling abuse at the alewife⁶⁶ – according to Fumerton, a displaced expression of male anxiety over female domination of the domestic space and a manifestation of a repressed ‘fear that female domestic labour could rule’.⁶⁷

Wives, on the other hand, often complained about their husbands’ excessive indulgence in alehouse drinking and failure to attend to domestic affairs. This apparent tension is expressed in a number of ballads where the husband’s drunken visit to the alehouse is said to have been followed upon his coming home by violent incidents of domestic abuse. In some cases such incidents are even said to have escalated, as Fumerton has further remarked, with the murder of the husband by the wife.⁶⁸ It would no doubt be fascinating to register the various responses to the voices of women in these ballads, especially as they would be ventriloquised by men in the space of the alehouse: one imagines that while they would probably intensify male anxiety concerning the presence of women in the home and heighten misogynistic attitudes, on another level they would also serve as an extreme reminder of the potentially dire aftermaths of male overindulgence in the pleasures of the alehouse.

V. Afterword: Utopian Visions and the Failure of Community

But, as I would like to emphasise here, besides such self-inflicted causes of demise as the speaker’s drinking in ‘A goodfellowes complaint against strong beere’, a number of ballads

⁶⁶ Fumerton, ‘Not Home’, 507-8.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 508.

⁶⁸ Fumerton cites the example of ‘Anne Wallens Lamentation’ (Pepys 1.124-125), a ballad that tells of how the husband, having returned home from the alehouse in a drunken condition, is rebuked by his angry wife who ends up stabbing him to death in the subsequent physical conflict (Ibid, 509). For another insightful discussion of this and other ‘murderous wife’ ballads, see Simone Chess, “‘And I my vowe did keepe’: Oath Making, Subjectivity, and Husband Murder in “Murderous Wife” Ballads’ in Fumerton and Guerrini, pp. 131-47.

persistently turn towards various other factors that contributed to the social and economic dislocation of the poor. The cruelty of greedy landlords and their indifference towards the predicament of the poor features as one of the most prominent of these factors. For example, ‘A Looking glasse for Corne-hoorders’ (Pepys 1.148-149), published in 1631 (Figure 7),⁶⁹ mournfully considers the poor who are ‘abus’d / by the rich, by the rich / And by them cruelly us’d / in every Towne’ (first part, ll. 25-8), making an earnest plea to God to take pity, ‘Since mens hearts are so hard, / that poore from bread are bard, / And divers almost starv’d / in this our Land’ (first part, ll. 13-16). The ballad registers the example of John Russell, a rich farmer in Buckinghamshire, who agrees with a poor man to the sale of his corn at a particular price. Yet, upon the poor man’s return with the agreed amount, the rich farmer refuses to honour the agreement, asking for a higher price on the grounds that ‘Corne did rise / every day, every day’ (second part, ll. 17-18). In another ballad titled ‘A Lanthorne for Landlords’ (Pepys 1.146-147), possibly published in 1630 (Figure 8), a poor woman and her newborn babies are driven out of door by their cruel landlord after the death of her husband. The fact that the man died in war in the landlord’s service seems to carry no special import in his decision to evict the poor widow and her baby twins, as the ‘mizer’ has one main concern: that ‘he the mother should maintaine / and give the other meat’ (first part, ll. 28-9). Yet, in this text, as well as in ‘A Looking glasse for Corne-hoorders’, the rich landlords find due punishment for the cruel treatment of their social inferiors – punishments inflicted, according to the ballads, by divine providence. The first one sees his horses sink and vanish into the ground while harrowing his field, while the second one is, like the poor widow he evicted, reduced to beggary and his wife and children accused and executed for various crimes.

⁶⁹ This ballad and the next one discussed in this essay, ‘A Lanthorne for Landlords’ (Pepys 1.146-147), both appear in the category ‘Tragedy’ in the first volume of the Pepys collection.

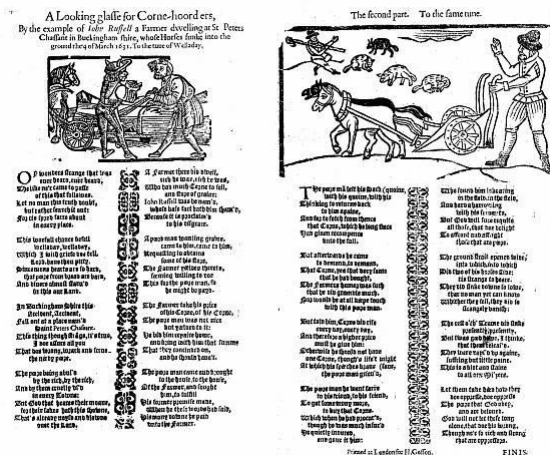


Figure 7: Anonymous, ‘A Looking glasse for Corne-hoorders, / By the example of John Russell a Farmer dwelling at St Peters / Chassant in Buckingham shire, whose Horses sunke into the / ground the 4 of March 1631’ (1631), Pepys 1.148-149. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

This unexpected – rather miraculous – turn in the narratives of the two ballads probably expresses the need of the lower orders to sustain a glimpse of hope in the vision of a divinely ordained justice that administers punishment for the social wrongs of the upper classes. Maybe it would even provide them with a chance to rejoice at the idea of cruel lords being cast as low as they themselves were. Yet for the thousands of homeless and dispossessed who swarmed the streets of London and (to a much lesser degree) other English towns during this period, the utopian vision of divine providence would probably provide little consolation – maybe just as much or for as long as singing the ballad would last. Likewise, for all those others on the verge of vagrancy, the anxiety of landlessness and homelessness could not very easily be dispelled. Indeed, as various studies have shown, factors like the dramatic increase in the country’s population (that nearly doubled from almost 2.8 million in the 1540s to about 5 million in the 1630s)⁷⁰ and the failure of agricultural productivity to keep pace with the demands of this expansion, in combination with factors like enclosures and engrossing, resulted by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in the production of an ever-growing population of socially, economically and geographically displaced individuals, many of whom were itinerant

⁷⁰ These figures are taken from Alan G. R. Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State. The Commonwealth of England 1529-1660* (2nd ed. London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 165-6. Pointing to the bleak economic conditions that the lower orders had to face from the sixteenth- to the mid-seventeenth century, Smith also makes reference to the significant increase of food prices and the famines of 1597-8 and 1623 that brought part of the population to starvation and death (pp. 165-8).

workers who flocked into urban centres in search of work – and who were often persecuted by authorities as virtually indistinguishable from vagrants.⁷¹



Figure 8: Anonymous, ‘A Lanthorne for Landlords’ (1630?), Pepys 1.146-147. © The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. ([larger image](#))

For the alehouse communities that populate the ballads examined in this essay these issues are never far from mind. On the contrary, as the intriguing gestures of social self-definition found in these texts indicate, any positive affirmation of companionship and good fellowship as a site of stability is constantly fraught with anxiety about its exact opposites: social and economic instability, alienation, displacement, downward mobility, landlessness, homelessness, and vagrancy. The persistence with which anxiety about these issues appears in alehouse ballads of the 1620s and 1630s is perhaps indicative of the urgency they acquired for the lower orders during this period. But, to conclude this discussion by going back to some of Peter Clark’s comments about the alehouse: it may be true, as he argues, that this space ‘was never quite the radical levelling centre that preachers and magistrates portrayed’.⁷² It may also be difficult for us to determine the degree of political awareness of the lower orders that occupied this space. Yet, the broadside ballad clearly points to the existence of a popular alehouse culture that systematically engaged with an important range of social and economic anxieties these lower orders had. And one may only take a look at such groups as the Diggers to see how these anxieties would be more radically and more

⁷¹ The proliferation of alehouses which I noted at the beginning of this paper may be seen as a direct consequence of this growing migration and mass urbanization.

⁷² Clark, ‘Alehouse’, 72.

urgently reconsidered within the historical juncture of the English Revolution in the 1640s and 1650s.