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The English political broadside ballad in the second half of the Seventeenth Century

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Citation

Pronk, L. L. C. (2008, September 18). *The English political broadside ballad in the second half of the Seventeenth Century*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/13303>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The broadside ballad was one of the most popular and widespread forms of seventeenth-century English literature. Its mass appeal among members of all layers of society made this simple, cheap form of poetry part of the daily lives of the majority of seventeenth-century English citizens. The broadside ballad is a highly heterogeneous type of song that is primarily defined by the way it was published rather than by any intrinsic literary characteristics of the song itself: a broadside ballad is a song, printed on one side of a single sheet. The wide variety of topics and styles helped to attract a wide audience and to suit all tastes. Broadside ballads sang of miracles and disasters, of crime and punishment, of unfortunate love and successful seduction, of sinful life and the approach of death, and of events and figures of national or even international importance.

It is this last category of ballads, those on national and international events and figures, or on 'State and Times' as the diarist and ballad-collector Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) called them, with which this study is mainly concerned. Focussing on the political ballads of the second half of the seventeenth century, this examination will analyse the way in which the broadside ballads on affairs of state put their message across through text, tune, and illustration, while questioning the traditional boundary between the political (or news) ballads and the non-political ones.

THE ENGLISH POLITICAL BROADSIDE BALLAD

illustration not available in this digital edition

IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

LIJNTJE PRONK