

Ballads and Newsbooks from the Civil War (1640–1649)

One of the dramatic effects of the revolution in England was a change in the character and probably in the amount of publication. The popular appetite for news was stimulated by the political upheaval, which also disturbed and suspended the usual forms of government censorship and control. From about 1641 the many and various factions in the kingdom were freer to express their views than they ever had been before or were to be for many years after the restoration of conventional government in 1660. This period did not give birth to the newspaper and the political editorial (Ben Jonson satirized the industry of newsmaking in the 1620s in *The Staple of News*), but the revolution fostered unprecedented coverage of domestic news and changed the nature of periodical publication for good.¹ Along with the newsbooks came an increased production of pamphlets and broadsides,

the cheapest and most ephemeral kinds of publication. One of the most consciously literary forms appearing in such publications was the ballad. Long an oral vehicle of news and commentary, the ballad came more often to take printed form during the interregnum. Herewith are two pieces from newsbooks and three ballads. Four of the five focus on the execution of Charles I, which was the most frequently mentioned event in English writing from 1649 until well into the eighteenth century.

Hyder Rollins edited a collection of ballads called *Cavalier and Puritan* (New York University Press, 1923); his careful transcriptions of the original texts in the Thomason collection at the British Library provide the basis of the ballads I present here. The newsbooks were selected from *Making the News*, edited by Joad Raymond (ST. MARTIN'S Press, 1993).

The World is Turned Upside Down (1646)

*To the tune of, When the King enjoys his own again*¹

Listen to me and you shall hear,
 News hath not been this thousand year:
 Since *Herod, Caesar*, and many more,²
 You never heard the like before.
 Holy-days are despised.
 New fashions are devised.

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Notes

BALLADS AND NEWSBOOKS FROM THE CIVIL WAR

¹ I am paraphrasing the introduction of *Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England, 1641–1660*, ed. Joad Raymond (St. Martin's Press, 1993); on the effects of the war on literature, see Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (Yale University Press, 1994). For a full discussion of early newsbooks, see Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649* (Clarendon Press, 1996).

THE WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

¹ This royalist ballad has been dated April 8, 1646.

² *Herod* ruler in Judea who condemned John the Baptist and returned Christ to his subordinate Pontius Pilate, having set him at nought (Luke 23.11); he was subject to Augustus Caesar.

- Old Christmas is kicked out of Town.³
*Yet let's be content, and the times lament,
 You see the world turned upside down.*
- The wise men did rejoice to see 10
 Our Saviour Christ's Nativity:
 The Angels did good tidings bring,
 The Shepherds did rejoice and sing.
 Let all honest men,
 Take example by them. 15
 Why should we from good Laws be bound?⁴
Yet let's be content, &c.
- Command is given, we must obey,
 And quite forget old Christmas day:
 Kill a thousand men, or a Town regain,⁵ 20
 We will give thanks and praise amain.⁶
 The wine pot shall clink,
 We will feast and drink.
 And then strange motions will abound.⁷
Yet let's be content, &c. 25
- Our Lords and Knights, and Gentry too,
 Do mean old fashions to forego:
 They set a porter at the gate,
 That none must enter in thereat.
 They count it a sin, 30
 When poor people come in.
 Hospitality itself is drowned.
Yet let's be content, &c.
- The serving men do sit and whine,
 And think it long ere dinner time: 35
 The Butler's still out of the way,
 Or else my Lady keeps the key,
 The poor old cook,
 In the larder doth look,
 Where is no goodness to be found, 40
Yet let's be content, &c.
- To conclude, I'll tell you news that's right,
 Christmas was killed at *Nasby* fight.⁸
 Charity was slain at that same time,
Jack Tell troth too, a friend of mine, 45
 Likewise then did die,
 Roast beef and shred pie,⁹

Notes

³ *Old Christmas is kicked out* The Puritans banned Christmas festivities and other holidays as idolatrous.

⁴ *bound* "gone away from" (OED, s.v. *boun*).

⁵ *Kill . . . regain* Puritan victories in the Civil War.

⁶ *amain* with vigor.

⁷ *motions* legal motions, like the one banning Christmas festivities.

⁸ *Nasby* the decisive battle of the Civil War, June 14, 1645.

⁹ *shred pie* mince pie.

Pig, Goose and Capon no quarter found.
 Yet let's be content, and the times lament,
 You see the world is quite turned round. 50

*The King's Last farewell to the World, or The Dead King's
 Living Meditations, at the approach of Death denounced
 against Him¹ (1649)*

Through fear of sharp and bitter pain,
 by cutting off my days,
 No pleasure in my Crown I take,
 nor in my Royal Rays.²
 I shall descend with grievèd heart, 5
 (for none my life can save)
 Unto the dismal gates of death,
 to moulder in the Grave.

Farewell my Wife, and Children all,
 wipe off my brinish teares. 10
 I am deprived of my Throne,
 and from my future years.
 Farewell my people every one,
 for I no more shall see
 The wonders of the Lord on earth, 15
 nor with you shall I be.

Mine eyes do fail, and to the earth
 to worms I must be hurled:
 Henceforth no more shall I behold
 the people of the world. 20
 My Crown and Sceptre I must leave,
 my glory, and my Throne:
 Adieu my fellow Princes all,
 I from the earth am gone.

Mine Age (which did approach to me) 25
 departed is away;
 And as a Shepherd's tent removed,
 and I returned to clay;
 And as a Weaver doth cut off
 his thrum,³ even so my life, 30
 Must be cut off, from people and
 from Children, and from Wife.

Notes

THE KING'S LAST FAREWELL TO THE WORLD

¹ This Puritan ballad appeared on January 31, 1649, the day after the execution of King Charles I; denounce "To threaten by proclamation" (Johnson).

² Rays "Any lustre corporeal or intellectual" (Johnson).

³ thrum "The ends of weavers' threads" (Johnson).

In sighs by day, and groans by night
 with bitterness I moan,
 And do consume away⁴ with grief, 35
 my end to think upon.
 Fear in the morning me assails,
 Death Lion-like I see,
 Even all the day (till night) to roar
 to make an end of me.

I chattered as the shrieking Crane, 40
 or Swallow that doth fly:
 As Dove forlorn, in pensiveness,
 doth mourn, even so do I.
 I looked up to thee, O Lord, 45
 but now mine eyes do fail.
 Oh ease my sad oppressèd soul,
 for death doth now prevail.

What shall I say, to God's Decree,
 if he would speak, I then 50
 should live; it is a work for God,
 I find no help from men.
 Yet if my life prolongèd was,
 my sins for to repent,
 Then softly I would go and mourn, 55
 until my life was spent.

And all my years, that I should live,
 for mine offences foul,
 I would pass o'er in bitterness,
 of my distressèd soul. 60
 O Lord, thou hast discoverèd
 to me, that by these things
 Men live; through thee, Princes do Reign,
 thou swayest over Kings.

In all things here God's Providence, 65
 and will alone commands,
 The life of my poor spirit sad,
 is only in his hands,
 Oh, that the Lord would me restore.
 My strength then I would give, 70
 To serve my God in humbleness
 whilst he would let me live.

Behold, O Lord, when I in peace,
 did look to be restored,

Notes

⁴ consume away "burn away" (OED, 6c).

- Then was my soul in bitterness, 75
 cast off, and I abhored,
 Yet in the love of God most good,
 his righteousness most just
 Hath thrown me down into the pit,
 and to corrupted dust, 80
- Because that I have gone astray,
 And cherished war and strife,
 My days are now cut off, and I
 am quite bereft of life,
 Oh cast my sins behind thy back, 85
 good God, I humbly pray,
 And my offences with the blood
 of Christ wash clean away.
- When my dead body is interred,
 I cannot praise thee there, 90
 Death cannot celebrate the Lord,
 my God, most good, most dear;
 They that go down into the pit
 destructions them devour:
 For in thy truth they cannot hope, 95
 but perish by thy power.
- The living, Lord, the living, they
 shall praise thy holy name.
 With all the glorious host above,
 and I shall do the same, 100
 The father to his children here,
 that are of tender youth,
 Shall them forewarn, and unto them
 make known thy glorious truth.
- Forgive my sins, and save my soul 105
 O Lord, I thee entreat,
 And blot out mine offences all,
 for they are very great:
 Receive my soul for Christ his sake,⁵
 my Prophet, Priest, and King, 110
 That I with Saints and Angels may
 eternal praises sing.

FINIS

*Notes*⁵ Christ his Christ's.

The Royal Health to the Rising Sun (1649)

To the tune of, *O my pretty little winking, &c.*¹

As I was walking forth one day,
 I heard distressed people say,
 Our Peace and Plenty now is gone,
 And we poor people quite undone:
 A Royal Health I then begun² 5
 Unto the rising of the Sun,
Gallant English Spirits
do not thus complain;
The Sun that sets
may after rise again. 10

The Tempest hath endured long,
 We must not say, we suffer wrong,
 The Queen of Love sits all alone.³
 No man is Master of his own.

We over-whelmèd are with grief, 15
 And harbour many [a] private Thief,
 Poor House-keepers can hardly live,
 Who used in former times to give:⁴

The Thistle chokes the Royal Rose,
 And all our bosom friends turned foes, 20
 The Irish Harp is out of tune,⁵
 And we, God knows, undone too soon.

The second Part, to the same tune.
 True love and friendship doth now decay,
 Poor People's almost starved they say, 25
 Our Trading's spoiled, and all things dear
 We may complain, and ne'er the near:⁶

Though all be true that here is said,
 Kind Country-men be not dismayed,
 For when the worst of harms is past, 30
 We shall have better times at last.

When Rulers cast off self-respects,⁷
 Then shall our Yokes fall from our Necks,

Notes

THE ROYAL HEALTH TO THE RISING SUN

¹ This bravely optimistic royalist ballad laments the state of the kingdom after the execution of Charles I on January 30, 1649 and predicts a happy turn of events. The tune is unknown.

² The six-line refrain follows every stanza.

³ *Queen of Love* Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henry IV of France, wife to Charles I.

⁴ *to give* to give to the poor.

⁵ *Thistle*. . . *HARP* the thistle is symbolic of the Scots, whose Presbyterian forces contributed importantly to the defeat of Charles; the Royal Rose is England (and Charles); the Irish were nearly in rebellion against Charles, but suffered most terribly under Cromwell.

⁶ *near* "Nearer to one's end or purpose" (*OED*, adv.¹ 5).

⁷ *self-respects* selfish aims.

Our safeties shall not then depend
 On promise of a Faithless Friend: 35
 When as the Cloud of War is down,
 The Royal Sun enjoys the Crown,
 The Lamb shall with the Lion feed,
 'Twill be a happy time indeed:
 Let us cheer up each other then, 40
 And show ourselves true English-men,
 And not like bloody wolves and Bears,
 As we have been these many years.
 The Father of our Kingdom's dead,
 His Royal Sun from *England's* fled, 45
 God send all well that Wars may cease,
 A Royal Health I then begun
 Unto the rising of the Sun,
Gallant English Spirits,
do not thus complain; 50
The Sun that sets
may after rise again.

from *A Perfect Diurnal of Some Passages in Parliament* (1649)

Number 288
29 January–5 February 1649

Tuesday, January 30

This day the King was beheaded, over against the Banqueting house by White-Hall. The manner of Execution, and what passed before his death take thus.

He was brought from Saint *James* about ten in the morning, walking on foot through the Park, with a Regiment of Foot for his guard, with Colours flying, Drums beating, his private Guard of Partisans, with some of his Gentlemen before, and some behind bareheaded, Doctor Juxon late Bishop of London next behind him, and Colonel Thomlinson (who had charge of him) to the Gallery in Whitehall, and so into the Cabinet Chamber, where he used to lie, where he used to lie, where he continued at his Devotion. . . . The Scaffold was hung round with black, and the floor covered with black, and the Axe and Block laid in the middle of the Scaffold. There were diverse companies of Foot and Horse, on every side the Scaffold, and the multitudes of people that came to be Spectators, very great. The King making a Pass upon the Scaffold, looked very earnestly on the Block, and asked Colonel *Hacker* if there were no higher; and then spake thus, directing his speech to the Gentlemen upon the Scaffold. King. 'I shall be very little heard of anybody here, I shall therefore speak a word unto you here;¹ indeed I could hold my peace very well, if I did not think that holding my peace, would make some men think that I did submit to the guilt, as well as to the punishment; but I think it is my duty to God first, and to my Country, for to clear myself both as an honest man, and a good king, and a good Christian.

Notes

FROM *A PERFECT DIURNAL*

¹ here on the scaffold; ranks of soldiers separated King Charles from the large crowd.

I shall begin first with my Innocency. In troth I think it not very needful for me to insist long upon this, for all the world knows that I never did begin a war with the two houses of Parliament, and I call God to witness, to whom I must shortly make an account, that I never did intend for to encroach upon their Privileges; they began upon me; it is the Militia they began upon; they confessed that the Militia was mine, but they thought it fit to have it from me; and to be short, if anybody will look to the dates of Commissions, theirs and mine, and likewise to the Declarations, will see clearly that they began these unhappy troubles, not I; so that as the guilt of these Enormous crimes that are laid against me, I hope in God that God will clear me of it. . . . yet for all this, God forbid that I should be so ill a Christian, as not to say that God's Judgements are just upon me: Many times he does pay Justice by an unjust Sentence, that is ordinary; I only say this, That an unjust sentence [meaning Strafford]² that I suffered for to take effect, is punished now, by an unjust sentence upon me; that is, so far I have said, to show you that I am an innocent man. Now for to show you that I am a good Christian: I hope there is [pointing to Dr. Juxon] a good man that will bear me witness, That I have forgiven all the world, and those in particular that have been the chief causers of my death; who they are, God knows; I do not desire to know; I pray God forgive them. But this is not all, my Charity must go further; I wish that they may repent, for indeed they have committed a great sin in particular. I pray God with St. Stephen,³ That this be not laid to their charge; nay, not only so but that they may take the right way to the Peace of the Kingdom, for Charity commands me not only to forgive particular men, but to endeavour to the last gasp the Peace of the Kingdom: so (sirs) I do wish with all my soul, and I do hope (there is some here will carry it further) that they may endeavour the Peace of the Kingdom'.

from *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (1649)

Number 43
30 January–6 February 1649

Nay, you may e'en go to rest now, your *Great* and *Acceptable* WORK is done; the *Fatal Blow* is given, the Kingdom is translated to the Saints – Oh Horror! Blood! Death! Had you none else to wreak your cursed *malice* on, but the sacred Person of the King? *cursed be your rage for it is fierce, and your malice for it is implacable.*

Good God, how every day adds fresh supplies of Miseries to poor dying England; enough of Care, but little enough of Cure; though years and months end, yet your sorrows are still beginning, and our Calamities cease not . . .

Beware the building, for the *Foundation* is taken away, the winds begin to blow, and the waves to beat, the *Restless Ark* is tossed; none but unclean Beasts are entered into her, the *Dove* will not return, neither will the *Olive Branch* appear.¹ The *Axe* is laid to the *Root*,² even of the Royal Cedar, then what can the *Inferior Tree* expect but to be crushed and bruised in His fall, and afterwards hewn down and cast into the fire. . . .

Notes

² *Strafford* Privy councillor to Charles I, executed May 12, 1641 for treason.

³ *St. Stephen* A martyr killed with stones.

FROM *MERCURIUS PRAGMATICUS*

¹ Genesis 8.11; the olive branch is the sign that the waters of the great flood have subsided, and there is peace on earth.

² The apocalyptic prophecy of John the Baptist, reported in all four gospels (e.g., Matthew 3.10).