



*Journal
of Early Modern Studies*

COVER LUCA GIULI

2-2013



UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE

DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE E STUDI INTERCULTURALI

BIBLIOTECA DI STUDI DI FILOLOGIA MODERNA: COLLANA, RIVISTE E LABORATORIO

Volume Two

Shakespeare and Early Modern Popular Culture

edited by

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FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

2013

Journal of Early Modern Studies. -

n. 2, 2013

ISSN 2279-7149

ISBN 978-88-6655-879-8

Direttore Responsabile: Beatrice Töttössy

Registrazione al Tribunale di Firenze: N. 5818 del 21/02/2011

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La rivista è pubblicata on-line ad accesso aperto al seguente indirizzo: www.fupress.com/bsfm-jems

I prodotti del Coordinamento editoriale di Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio (<<http://www.collana-filmod.unifi.it>>) vengono pubblicati con il contributo del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze, ai sensi della Convenzione stipulata tra Dipartimento, Laboratorio editoriale open access e Firenze University Press il 10 febbraio 2009. Il Laboratorio editoriale open access del Dipartimento supporta lo sviluppo dell'editoria open access, ne promuove le applicazioni alla didattica e all'orientamento professionale degli studenti e dottorandi dell'area delle filologie moderne straniere, fornisce servizi di formazione e di progettazione. Le Redazioni elettroniche del Laboratorio curano l'editing e la composizione dei volumi e delle riviste di Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna. Per sua politica editoriale, JEMS ricorre al doppio referaggio anonimo per ogni singolo contributo che le viene proposto. Per ulteriori dettagli si rimanda alla pagina web della rivista.

The products of the Publishing Committee of Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio (<<http://www.collana-filmod.unifi.it>>) are published with financial support from the Department of Comparative Languages, Literatures and Intercultural Studies of the University of Florence, and in accordance with the agreement, dated February 10th 2009, between the Department, the Open Access Publishing Workshop and Firenze University Press. The Workshop promotes the development of OA publishing and its application in teaching and career advice for undergraduates, graduates, and PhD students in the area of foreign languages and literatures, as well as providing training and planning services. The Workshop's publishing team are responsible for the editorial workflow of all the volumes and journals published in the Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna series. JEMS employs the double-blind peer review process. For further information please visit the journal homepage.

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Università degli Studi di Firenze
Firenze University Press
Borgo Albizi, 28, 50122 Firenze, Italy
<<http://www.fupress.com/>>

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*'And time, that gave, doth now his gift confound'
To Susan Rosa, in memoriam.*

Donatella Pallotti and Paola Pugliatti

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Editorial

The late twentieth century saw a move towards the study of Shakespeare as part of a popular theatrical tradition. Robert Weimann's pioneering book *Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters* was published in Germany in 1967, but it did not reach a wider audience until 1978 when it was translated into English. Weimann's book constituted an authoritative appeal for a reconsideration of Shakespeare's theatrical works in historical terms: in particular, for a study of their function in the historical and cultural context that produced them rather than as matter solely of interest to the literary critic. The tension which the study of Shakespeare's works involves between literary criticism and historical interpretation or, as Weimann says, between continuity and survival and discontinuity and historicization is clearly expressed in a passage of the book's Introduction:

On the one hand, Shakespeare's theater is irremediably a thing of the past; on the other, his plays have survived the conditions from which they originated and are continually revitalized on the modern stage ... The tension between what is past and what lives for us today is obvious; and yet, from the point of view of the function of literary scholarship, it seems impossible to relegate the pastness of Shakespeare's theater to the 'pure' historian and its contemporaneity to the 'pure' critic or modern producer. (1978, xiii)

The pioneering character of Weimann's book was not only in his assertion of the necessity to re-read and interrogate Shakespeare's theatrical works in a historical perspective and, more generally, to re-read theatre as a cultural institution in history (those were the years of a different, 'new', kind of historicism); but also in the fact that it opened up a new and extremely promising field for Shakespearean studies: that of an inquiry into the many ways in which Shakespeare's plays demonstrate their engagement with early modern popular culture and also the ways in which the popular tradition is present in his works.

The same year in which Weimann's book was translated, Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* appeared and was similarly recognized as a pioneering work. Crucially, Burke raised fundamental issues concerning the very meaning of 'popular' in connection with 'culture' and on the relationship between 'popular' and 'elite' cultures in early modern European cultural formations. Both Weimann and Burke had a deep influence on later work, especially in the English-speaking world, although, in the case of Burke's book, the impact was considerably more general owing to the scope of the issues which it developed. Yet, it could be said that their respective influences have remained discrete: following Weimann, there has been work on early modern English theatre as a 'popular' experience; while social historians responded

to the theoretical issues developed by Burke, expanding his suggestions or analysing particular contexts.

A further influence, even more ample than Weimann's, on the study of the popular elements in early modern English theatre, and Shakespeare in particular, has been Mikhail Bakhtin's work and particularly his writings on carnival and the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984), which has produced or encouraged insightful studies of festivities and misrule such as Michael Bristol 1985 and François Laroque 1991. But the book which probably best conjugates the until then discrete areas of interest of literary studies and socio-cultural reflection on the 'popular' was Annabel Patterson's *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (1989). At a time when the name of Shakespeare was invariably written between inverted commas and when 'texts' and their unconscious seemed to be the only attainable entities, she wrote: 'I have no difficulty in positing Shakespeare as a writer whose intentions, if never fully recoverable, are certainly worth debating' (4-5). Against any theoretical deletion of the author, Patterson posits Shakespeare as an authorial subject in history and supports her idea of a Shakespeare expressing a sympathetic stance towards 'the people' using a great number of often unfamiliar contemporary historical documents.

The 1980s studies mentioned above are all conscious of Burke's achievement and all briefly quote his book; yet, the approach remains essentially literary.

More recently, studies by literary historians reappraising the links between the theatre and 'the popular' have appeared. These studies have also kept a less than tangential eye on the achievements of social history. This is notable in a study by Mary Ellen Lamb (2006), in a book edited by Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (2006) and in several essays published in journals or as chapters of books. A recent volume edited by two early modern scholars, Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield (2009) include several essays which are interdisciplinary. In turn, some literary critics have ventured in the field of social history with books in which 'the people' are, at various levels, the protagonists (see Pugliatti 2003 and Purkiss 2006). On the other hand, a return to sealed compartments is represented by the 2007 *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, where the leading idea is that of exploring 'the ways in which Shakespeare has been consumed'; the plays' 'reinvention, adaptation, citation, and appropriation ... across a wide range of media in subsequent periods and cultures' (Shaughnessy, ed., 2007, 2, 1). The contributions in this volume have been entrusted exclusively to literary critics, whose attention is mainly focalised on the plays' afterlife. On the contrary, many 1980s collections of essays on popular culture by social historians venture into the field of literary studies, paying attention to certain 'literary' forms such as the cheap and widely diffused almanacs, ballads, beggar books, etc.; and, when discussing popular print, many social historians evoke Shakespeare's Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* or Jonson's ballad-seller in *Bartholomew Fair*.

What literary critics can learn from social historians is clear. However, it is probably true to say that social historians have been more conscious than literary critics of the potentialities implied by a closer collaboration between the two disciplines. Crucially, Christopher Hill, in his *Liberty Against the Law* (1996), deliberately based his historical inquiry into the popular voice during the seventeenth-century revolution on the reading of literary texts. Not less crucially, Burke has affirmed that ‘cultural history is not a monopoly of historians. It is multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary’; and that, in particular, ‘from literary critics, cultural historians can learn the “close reading” of texts’ (2008, 135).

The essays in this volume variously represent the work of social and cultural historians and literary critics and adopt an inclusive approach to ‘culture’ and the ‘popular’. In her introductory essay Paola Pugliatti explores variable and historically determined definitions of ‘popular culture’ with the people as either makers or consumers of culture and, in particular, argues against the ‘elision of the past’ performed in many recent studies, both historical and literary, and which has also affected the field of Shakespeare studies.

The first three essays in the collection consider the mediation of popular language. In ‘Demotic Voices and Popular Complaint in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England’, David Cressy confronts the question of the accuracy of the demotic language Elizabethans heard on the stage. Cressy’s archival investigations into court reports and depositions, for example, produce telling illustrations of popular idiom which resonate with the imagined voices of the ‘commons’ in plays of the time. In ‘Shakespeare and the Words of Early Modern Physic’, Roberta Mullini explores a neglected aspect of popular culture: medical terms used by the people rather than those handed down through university medicine. Mullini shows that glossaries were available to help with the classically derived, specialized medical lexicon and that Shakespeare draws on such vernacularization of classical texts. The premise of Ann Kaegi, ‘“What say the citizens” in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*?’ is similarly inspired by specific verbal occurrences which chime with the popular. She notes the frequency of allusions to ‘citizens’ in Shakespeare’s history, arguing that Richard speaks like a citizen to court popular favour. In emphasizing Richard’s skills as an actor, critics have underestimated the significance of the citizens in Richard’s rise enabled by his canny grasp of popular idiom, and the political significance of an emergent citizen culture.

The two essays which follow both deal with ‘popular’ custom and rituals. Nitália Pikli in ‘The Prince and the Hobby-Horse’ examines the figure of the ‘hobby-horse’, notably recalled by Hamlet as a forgotten ritual. In examining the meanings that accrued around the hobby-horse, as distinct from its role in the morris dance, Pikli sees these semantic shifts as indicative of an increasingly commercialized popular culture. In ‘Behind the Happily-Ever After’, Ciara Rawnsley explores Shakespeare’s use of the folktale, specifically in *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Rawnsley demonstrates the sustained appeal of stories,

transmitted orally and in print, in a culture in which tales were created by the people before they were commodified for the people.

Two essays in the collection focus on early modern manifestations of witchcraft. While one is written from the perspective of a social historian and the other from that of a literary scholar, both interrogate documentary and fictional sources for what light they shed on one another. James Sharpe's essay, 'In Search of the English Sabbat', argues that, contrary to common assumption, there was in England widespread belief in the witches' sabbat, popular in its origins and construction. Sharpe turns to Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's play *The Late Lancashire Witches*, as an example of a literary text which draws on depositions from the Northern Circuit Assize detailing an English sabbat. Luca Baratta also locates witchcraft in Lancashire. In 'Lancashire: a Land of Witches in Shakespeare's Time', Baratta examines the pamphlet and dramatic literature that emanated from the trial of the Pendle witches in 1612. In the pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, Baratta argues that fictions of witchcraft were subsumed in what purports to be an official account of the trial.

The two final essays focus on incidents which figure in poetry and tragic drama for which the social reality, particularly at the level of the popular, was very different. Donatella Pallotti details the popularity of rape narratives not only in canonical texts, but also in popular media. Examining these literary redactions in light of the contemporary legal debate, Pallotti investigates the position of rape victims who could only bring a case against their violator by producing proofs of their struggle, 'showing and telling'. In 'Buried in the Open Fields', Janet Clare details research on early modern suicide and the popular rituals practised against the self-murder. From this perspective, Clare offers a close reading of Ophelia's suicide as it is represented in the different texts of *Hamlet*, arguing that the spectrum of responses embedded in the text, from the popular to the elite, refracts the diverse social responses to self-murder in the period.

Taken as a whole, the essays published in this volume can also be read as a contribution towards erasing – or at least diminishing – the distance between the historians' readings of texts, documents and socio-cultural contexts and the 'close readings' which are the literary critics' prerogative. This approach to the issues discussed is not simply to acknowledge the obvious fact that texts live 'in history'; more significantly, it affirms the necessity of a productive exchange of values, perspectives and methods of analysis. This volume shows that such a syncretism is not only possible but also fruitful.

It is by now a habit, if not yet a tradition, that the volumes of *JEMS* be supplemented by an Appendix which presents texts belonging to different genres, different epochs and different national cultures, in which the topic of each volume is discussed, illustrated or represented. In this issue, popular culture is seen through the eyes of historians, theoreticians, anthropologists, theologians, but also through the eyes of poets, novel-writers and playwrights.

As ever, we wish to thank Arianna Antonielli and the students of the wonderful editorial team who, from the start, have made the publication of *JEMS* possible; John Denton, once more unfailingly efficient and efficacious; and Carmelina Imbroscio who helped in decoding some medieval and early modern French texts which appear in the Appendix.

Not least, we wish to thank the colleagues who joined our seminar on 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Popular Culture' which took place at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress in Prague in July, 2011, and from which the idea of this volume was born, and also the colleagues who later joined the project responding to our call for papers. The texts they have prepared for *JEMS* show that the relationship between Shakespeare and the popular culture of his time is an issue worth considering.

Janet Clare and Paola Pugliatti

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PART ONE

Elusive, Distant, Impermanent

People and the Popular, Culture and the Cultural

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Abstract

'Popular', 'culture' and 'folk' are discussed by Raymond Williams as highly charged keywords: semantically, historically and from the point of view of the various areas of research which have adopted them in their denominations. The elusive character of these terms is reflected in the many problems we encounter when exploring the field of popular culture studies. In particular, since the 1980s, neo-Marxist cultural studies historians have claimed the label of 'popular culture' for the sole study of post-industrial commercial phenomena. This exclusive identification and the comparative disregard of research on pre-industrial popular cultures has become a *doxa* in the so called 'cultural studies approach' and has also affected the field of Shakespearean studies, where 'popular' is almost exclusively connected with the 'afterlife' of Shakespeare's plays and their appropriation by the modern media. This article discusses what has been considered an 'elision of the past' performed in many recent studies, at the same time suggesting that socio-historical research on the pre-industrial and pre-commercial culture of 'the people' implies the reading of entirely different 'texts' and their different mode of transmission than the study of modern and late modern manifestations of 'popular' commercial products and their reception; and that, therefore, it requires the adoption of entirely different paradigms and methods of analysis.

Keywords: Culture, People, Popular Culture, Sources, Transmission.

1. *Definitions and Questions*

Introducing his essay 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"', Stuart Hall says: '... I want to tell you some of the difficulties I have with the term "popular". I have almost as many problems with "popular" as I have with "culture". When you put the two terms together, the difficulties can be pretty horrendous' (1981, 227). Yet, what Hall means by 'popular' in connection with 'culture' is soon clear. Popular culture, he says, 'looks, in any particular period, at those forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices' (234-235). He sees the field of such forms and activities as permanently oscillating between containment and resistance, because they are permanently involved in 'a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms' (233). But Hall also tackles the issue of periodization, and chooses as the period to be examined in the study



of popular culture the years which go from the 1880s to the 1920s because that period, he says, 'is one of the real test cases for the revived interest in popular culture', but mainly because of the expression, in those decades, of the relationship of the dominated class 'to a major restructuring of capital', that is, 'to a changing set of material relations and conditions' (230, 229-230).

Thus, the object of study is defined by confining it to the emergence of industrialization and the urbanization of an industrial working class, that is, not earlier than the late eighteenth century. Hall, however, goes farther than exposing and motivating his preference for the decades which go from the 1880s to the 1920s; he also expresses reservations about the study of earlier phenomena and forms:

Without in any way casting aspersions on the important historical work which has been done and remains to do on earlier periods, I do believe that many of the real difficulties (theoretical as well as empirical) will only be confronted when we begin to examine closely popular culture in a period which begins to resemble our own, which poses the same kind of interpretive problems as our own, and which is informed by our own sense of contemporary questions. (231)

In an essay which I will discuss later, L.W. Levine (1992) seems to have no doubts about the object of study of what goes under the name of 'popular culture': it is the study of the cultural products which were distributed to 'the people' during the Great Depression and after and of the way in which the addressees responded to these consumption products. In even more unambiguous terms, in a more recent essay, John Storey seems to radically exclude the possibility of research in the popular culture of past ages: 'whatever else popular culture might be', he says, 'it is definitely a culture that only emerged following industrialization and urbanization' (2001, 13).

Raymond Williams, in turn, included both 'culture' and 'popular' among the keywords he explored. His exploration of the word 'culture' starts with the assertion that '**Culture** is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'. He, then, adds that 'This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought' (1985, 87). Two other passages in his historical and conceptual exploration of the word seem to me to be worth quoting because they illustrate points which I am going to develop in this article. The first is a quotation from Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-91). Herder, Williams says, wrote of *Kultur* that 'nothing is more *indeterminate* than this word, and nothing more *deceptive* than its application to all nations and periods' (89; my italics); the second is Williams's own reflection on the different ways in which different disciplines or points of view characterize the contents of the word 'culture':

... in archaeology and in *cultural anthropology* the reference to **culture** or **a culture** is primarily to *material* production, while in history and *cultural studies* the reference is primarily to *signifying* or *symbolic* systems. This often confuses but even more often conceals the central question of the relations between 'material' and 'symbolic' production, which ... have always to be related rather than contrasted. (91)¹

Of 'popular', Williams registers favourable, unfavourable and neutral meanings and comments on two uses of the expression 'popular culture' saying that it 'was not identified by *the people* but by others, and it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work ... and work deliberately setting out to win favour'. In the treatment of the same word, we find yet another statement which illustrates a conceptual difference between what is meant by 'folk culture' and 'popular culture' in the English-speaking world: 'The sense of **popular culture** as the culture actually made by people for themselves ... relates, evidently, to Herder's sense of *Kultur des Volkes*, ... but what came through in English as *folk-culture* ... is distinguishable from recent senses of **popular culture** as contemporary as well as historical' (237). Herder's *Kultur des Volkes*, Williams seems to be saying, refers to cultural forms originating 'from below'; an idea which – in more recent senses of 'popular culture' adopted in English – is considered out-dated and residual. 'Folk' also appears as one of Williams's keywords, with observations which further explain the ideal divide between 'folk' and 'popular' in the English-speaking world. Owing to its use by eighteenth-century folklorists such as Herder and the Grimm brothers, 'folklore' ended up by being 'centred on the sense of "survivals" '; a similar residual meaning, then, started to be attributed, for instance, to the term 'folksong', which

came to be influentially specialized to the pre-industrial, pre-urban, pre-literate world, though *popular* songs, including new industrial work songs, were still being actively produced. **Folk**, in this period, had the effect of backdating all elements of *popular culture*, and was often offered as a contrast with modern popular forms, either of a radical and working-class or of a commercial kind. (137)²

Often quoted broader definitions of 'culture' are those by Clifford Geertz and Peter Burke. Geertz says that his idea of culture 'has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity'. Culture, for Geertz, 'denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life' (2000, 89). Burke's definition of 'culture' refers to 'a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artifacts) in which they are expressed or embodied'; 'popular culture', Burke says, 'is perhaps best defined ... in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the "subordinate classes" as Gramsci called them' (1994, xi).

The definitions and evaluations I have been quoting may appear rather random, especially since they extend over a period from 1976 (the date of publication of the first edition of Williams's book) to 2001, when John Storey's book was published. However, they illustrate problems and theoretical stumbling-blocks which still clutter the field or fields in which the study of popular culture is practised. These problems and stumbling-blocks are the issues I am going to discuss in the following pages. I am thinking, in particular, about a theoretical hypotext which runs under the surface of statements produced in the area of cultural studies when popular culture is the object of reflection: i.e. the fact that, while (rightly) affirming that interest in 'the people' started to manifest itself in the later eighteenth century, certain scholars seem not to be willing to consider the possibility of going back beyond that time in the study of phenomena which developed in a 'popular' context. Furthermore, the fact of considering only the industrial, urban and literate world worthy of reflection and examination has produced the side effect of asserting a vision of 'the people' in which they are simply (active) consumers and consequently ruling out a view of the people as possible producers of at least scraps of culture of their own. This theoretical option, furthermore, has ended up by producing a series of contradictions. While, on the one hand, analysts cannot 'deny the exploitative, manipulative tendencies of certain branches of the media and cultural industries, such as tabloid journalism, advertising and online porn' (a perspective which is present when the Gramscian formula 'hegemonic/subaltern' is evoked), they must 'give credit to, and place critical value on, the various *resignifications* and *reactivations* undertaken by audiences and consumers' (Pickering 2010, xxii; my italics).³

2. *Popular/Folk*

Reflecting on 'folk', Raymond Williams also discusses one of the word's uses, that recorded in a letter which, in 1846, J.M. Thoms addressed to the journal *Atheneum*. In it, Thoms gave a 'specializing' definition of 'What we in England designate as Popular Antiquities, or popular literature', saying that 'it ... would be most aptly described by a good Saxon compound, Folk-Lore – *the Lore of the People*' (187). Williams, then, writes that the Old English word *lar*, from which *lore* derives, 'had originally been used in a range of meanings from teaching and education to learning and scholarship', but from the eighteenth century had become 'specialized to the past, with the associated senses of "traditional" or "legendary"' (136). If we recall that, commenting on the word *popular*, Williams quotes Herder's sense of the expression 'Kultur des Volkes' as different from what in England are 'recent senses of **popular culture**' (237), we find a historical explanation of the fact that, in the English-speaking world, 'folk culture' and 'popular culture' ended up by designating different phenomena of a different nature, at the same time acquiring different connotations as to

the perspective from which they have been studied in time: while 'folk culture' came to be described (especially in the field of cultural studies) as a set of values and perspectives, now residual, tinged with the regressive aura of romantic nationalism and nostalgia, the expression 'popular culture' has acquired, again thanks to the 'cultural studies' turn, a progressive aura because it is used to refer to the post-industrial and post-capitalist context. In treatments of 'folk culture' in this perspective, Herder is invariably quoted, together with the Grimm brothers and other collectors of folk songs and tales, as exalting the values of nationalism and the Nation and as sharing the stigma attributed to the romantics, that of dreaming 'of a return to the simple virtues of nature as a means to combat and overcome the artificiality and savagery of urban and industrial life' (Storey 2003, 9).

In an article in which he surveys the relationships between history and folklore, Peter Burke distinguishes three phases in their development: the first, which he defines as 'the age of harmony', approximately from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1920s; the second, defined as 'the age of suspicion', stretching until the 1970s; and the third, the one we are living in, defined as 'the age of rapprochement'. About the present age, he records, starting around the 1970s, the emergence of a new awareness of social historians 'linked to the rediscovery of popular culture and the rise of "history from below"' (2004, 136); and argues that

The rise of social history in the 1960s prepared the way for collaboration, especially when it took the form of 'microhistory' or the history of everyday life, or 'historical anthropology'. The 'cultural turn' on the part of historians has also facilitated the rapprochement, especially the increasing interest in the history of material culture as part of the history of everyday life. (137)

However, if this is true when we consider the work of historians like Burke himself, or Jacques Le Goff, or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and others which are mentioned in Burke's article as artificers of the rapprochement, when reading certain statements of historians working in the field of cultural studies one has the impression that research on the (popular) cultures of the past, i.e. on those cultures which were not yet touched by the impact of industrialization and urbanization, is judged as nostalgia for a 'world we have lost'. In other words, that a new form of 'suspicion', which started about the 1980s and is still active today, tends to infect the field of cultural history from within.

Storey's idea about (all?) the collectors of folk culture is that they 'idealized the past in order to condemn the present' (2003, 10). However, reading treatments of the issue of popular culture by scholars working in the field of cultural studies (the so called 'cultural studies approach' to popular culture), one has the impression that these scholars almost invariably tend to idealize the present (i.e., the industrialization and urbanization era) in order to condemn the past.⁴

Indeed, as Barry Reay has remarked, 'A curious thing has happened – is happening – in modern studies of popular culture: the elision of the past', that is, 'the relative neglect – in case studies, cited authorities, discussed methodologies, and theoretical genuflections – of histories and historians of the period before the late nineteenth century' (1998, 221). Reay goes on to say that 'representations of the early modern cultures that we have lost are light years away from the consumer cultures of late-twentieth-century popular culture, the images (visual and aural) of advertising, film, TV, clothing, record, photograph, computer and material possession'. His treatment of this aspect is unfortunately limited to the last three pages of his book, where he suggests that 'Those interested in popular cultures today can surely benefit from an awareness that the complex cultural interactions of the past ... might have explanatory value for the present'; and concludes by suggesting that 'Practitioners of cultural studies should remedy history's absent presence' (222-223).⁵ The brief treatment which Reay devotes to the deep divide between the study of the popular culture of the old times (whatever times) and that of modern and late modern times, then, suggests and encourages better communication and interaction between studies which he sees as belonging to the same area of interest and, perhaps, to the same discipline. But is this really arguable? Should the difference (which is a difference in the objects of study, in their diverse contexts and in the kind of 'texts' which have transmitted them) be deleted or even smoothed over by assuming that 'a perspective on the history of culture longer than that of the modern world might have some relevance to interpretations of modernity and post-modernity' (223)? To this cluster of issues I will return later.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss certain questions which the literary historian must face when dealing with the analysis of texts and their relationship with 'popular culture'; questions which inevitably receive a partial answer if the literary historian fails to encounter the point of view of the social historian. In order to grasp something of this point of view, I will therefore attempt to venture into the field of social history temporarily setting aside the tools of my trade. But, although I will not deal with any literary considerations on Shakespeare's work and its relationship with popular culture, I have a general point of view to express on this issue: the conviction that even in a work as elitist as the plays of the most celebrated poet and playwright ever, elements may be found which connect it to a world of values and symbols of the 'popular' components of its contemporary society.⁶ Furthermore, by stating the possibility of a connection between the work of a celebrated poet and playwright and the values and symbols of the 'popular culture' of his age (later on in this article I will, on occasion, get rid of the inverted commas), I am implying that the confines between differently oriented and differently engendered kinds and manifestations of culture are, to say the least, very thin; and that more often than not they tend to disappear. In other words, I am convinced that 'any discussion of Shakespeare's relationship with popular culture must necessarily recognize that outside as well as within

his plays themselves, the popular interacts with the elite in terms of audience, genre, and value systems or beliefs'; and indeed that 'there is throughout Shakespeare's work an interweaving of high and low cultural forms which ultimately defines the nature of his drama and of his distinctive achievement as a writer' (Gillespie and Rhodes, 2006, 11).

3. *Created By the People/Created For the People*

In 1992 *The American Historical Review* published an issue devoted to popular culture. The volume was introduced by a long article by L.W. Levine, to which other scholars were invited to respond.⁷ The discussion was closed by another article by Levine who briefly responded to the others' comments.

Levine's article, which opens the forum, was entitled 'The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences'. This title illustrates the author's intention 'to explore the degree to which popular culture functions in ways similar to folk culture and acts as a form of folklore for people living in urban industrial societies, and can thus be used to reconstruct people's attitudes, values, and reactions' (1992, 1372). This article, however, represents a determined shift away from a consideration of folklore values as produced by the folk. Popular culture, in Levine's definition, is 'culture that is *popular*; culture that is widely accessible and widely accessed; widely disseminated, and widely viewed or heard or read'. With reference to the years of the Great Depression in America, this definition, Levine acknowledges, applies also to 'what we call mass culture since it was disseminated throughout the nation by such centralized mechanisms as national magazines, syndicated newspaper features, Hollywood studios, network radio, Tin Pan Alley, and commercial publishing houses'.⁸ Starting from the assertion that in those years 'not everything mass produced for the American people was popular', Levine argues against those critics and scholars whose 'aesthetic hubris ... has allowed the automatic equation of mass culture with popular culture as if everything mass produced was popular' (1373). His main contention, then, is that the receivers of mass culture (those people *for whom* certain mass-produced cultural objects were created and commercialized) in the period and in the context examined could discriminate and distinguish, that they could accept but also reject these products, thereby in certain ways influencing the cultural market by asserting the format of their own culture. The first and most important of the contentions around which the essay is organized is the rejection of 'the image of the purely passive mass audience ready to absorb, consciously and unconsciously, whatever ideological message those controlling the mass culture industry want to feed them' (1374). People, in short, 'did not passively accept whatever popular culture was thrown in their way', for 'they preselected the culture they exposed themselves to by learning to decipher reviews and coming attractions, by understanding the propensities of authors, actors, and directors

to whose work they had been exposed in the past, and by consulting members of their communities' (1380). In short, the status of mass-culture receivers must be converted from that of passive consumers to that of active users.

I agree with some of the objections which were advanced by other participants in the forum. In particular, I share Robin Kelly's remark that the main actors in the chain of actions which ends with the consumption of products, namely, the producers (and their intent) are almost completely absent from Levine's treatment; Kelly accepts the idea that 'the folk' in the industrial society were not a passive audience ready to accept whatever products were thrown in their way; but he also, rightly I believe, argues that 'a cultural studies approach ... would explore the ways in which audiences, through their own agency, both challenge and reproduce the dominant ideology' and that we must 'acknowledge that the "people" were largely relegated to the receiving end, and, in that capacity, they made choices under circumstances not of their own choosing' (1992, 1408).

Natalie Zemon Davis, in turn, although agreeing with Levine's vision of consumers as 'active users', directs attention to the users of past centuries at the same time arguing for a consideration of margins, the 'blurring of boundaries between cultural typologies' and therefore to the mixed cultural models and their cultural interaction; certain innovations in forms and motifs, Davis argues, 'may have come from local invention but also from manuscripts or peddlers' books read aloud by the parish priest' (1992, 1410); and this kind of mixture can be predicated both for the peasants of early modern Europe and for the workers of modern times. In short, 'the "people" may be among the makers in some fashion, as well as among the consumers' (1413). Furthermore, without explicitly criticizing the absence, in Levine's article, of relevant previous studies, some of which were the first to plead for a role of modern audiences as 'active receivers', when she first mentions the 'historians of late medieval and early modern Europe' (1409), Davis aptly adds a long footnote where the prominent figures in this field of study, herself included (together with Robert Mandrou, Robert Muchembled, Carlo Ginzburg, Michel de Certeau, Roger Chartier and others), are mentioned. In particular, Certeau and, after him, Chartier, were the first to systematically direct attention to the *usage* which consumers make of the cultural products they are exposed to – that is, to the 'poetics' expressed by the ways in which the products imposed by the economic system are appropriated and used by their audiences.⁹

It was Michel de Certeau who systematically and extensively drew attention to users and the tactics and practices by which they appropriate the products imposed on them by the economic system. The purpose of his book *L'invention du quotidien*, published in 1980 and, in particular, of the first volume, entitled *Arts de faire*, is

to make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combinatoires d'opération*) which also compose a 'culture', and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users

whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers'. (1984, xi-xii)¹⁰

The consumers' action is a 'poiēsis', a *bricolage*, a 'making', which represents the user's active intervention on the products imposed by the economic system. A telling example of 'poiēsis' given by Certeau in the introduction of his book is:

For instance, the ambiguity that subverted from within the Spanish colonizers' 'success' in imposing their own culture on the indigenous Indians is well known. Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept ... their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge. (xiii)¹¹

Central to Certeau's argument are the notions of 'strategy' and 'tactic'. Unduly simplifying the author's fascinating treatment of these concepts, one may say that strategies are those which are deployed by a subject of will and power which occupies a place in a system of social, economic and political relationships: in other words, a strategy is that produced by a dominating rationality. A tactic, on the contrary, is that which is practised without relying on a proper place, but on a space which is controlled by the other. 'Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many "ways of operating": victories of the "weak" over the "strong" ... maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike'. Such 'clever tricks' are what the Greeks called *mētis*, and are similar to 'the intelligence displayed in the tricks and imitations of plants and fishes. From the depths of the ocean to the streets of modern megalopolies there is a continuity and permanence in these tactics' (xix-xx).

This is obviously not the place to deal in detail with the book's engaging treatment of these issues;¹² however, one point of Certeau's analysis is relevant to my concerns here.

Contrasting what he calls 'the enigma of the consumer-sphinx', that is, the idea that consumers simply absorb passively whatever is distributed to them by the strategies of presiding institutions, Certeau again quotes the example of the tactics devised by the indigenous to divert Spanish colonization 'from its intended aims' (31) and also invokes as a relevant model that of language and the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole*. The linguistic model, he says, offers 'on the one hand, a stock of materials, on the other, transactions and users'. Similarly, 'in the case of consumption, one could almost say that production furnishes the capital and that users, like renters, acquire the right to operate on and with this fund without owning it'. The same kind of *appropriation* which is made with the use of language (by fashioning in certain ways the act

of enunciation and its product, as argued by Benveniste), according to Certeau, consumers perform in all the non-linguistic practices of everyday life (32-33). From one point of view, that of an observer of the uncontrollable invasiveness and aggressiveness of late modern strategies, Certeau's defence of the active usage and *bricolage* performed by consumers, his faith in the 'clever tricks of the "weak" within the order established by the "strong" ' (40), may appear utopian; on the other hand, however, his model may also appear reductive and ungenerous. It is true that consumption is refigured by Certeau as a form of production, but it can only figure as an ancillary form of production because it cannot but await the initiative of the 'strong' to start appropriating it. Furthermore, even a form of production as that envisaged by Certeau is reductive if applied to situations (in the past?) in which 'the people' presumably did more than react or creatively appropriate in a particular way what was given them. In other words, as Davis says, 'the "people" may be among the makers in some fashion, as well as among the consumers' (1992, 1413). This particular point of the theory poses an often repeated question in studies of popular culture: are we talking about culture created *for* the people or *by* the people?

Roger Chartier is clear on this point: the alternative created *for*/created *by* is for him a false problem. Following in the wake of Certeau's ideas, he says that

To ask whether 'popular' is merely what the people create or what is designed for them is to mistake the character of the problem we face. Cultural consumption, whether popular or not, is at the same time a form of production, which creates ways of using that cannot be limited to the intentions of those who produce. (1984, 234)

In other words, all cultural practices, not only those performed by 'the people', manifest themselves as creative appropriation; and indeed, Chartier questions the possibility 'to describe such-and-such cultural form as "popular" ' and the practice of identifying 'popular culture by describing a certain number of corpora (sets of texts, gestures, and beliefs)' (229).¹³

In a more recent essay, Chartier briefly discusses the attitudes which have characterised the study of popular culture in the perspective of the so-called 'new cultural history' and in particular the debate about the relationship between popular and elite culture. He sees two models which have characterised this study: on the one hand 'la culture populaire est pensée comme autonome, indépendante, fermée sur elle-même'; on the other, 'elle est entièrement définie par sa distance vis-à-vis de la légitimité culturelle'. In the development of this argument, we encounter another statement connected with the alternative created *for*/created *by*; that is, a challenge of what Chartier sees, in both the perspectives illustrated above, as a mistaken opposition 'entre l'âge d'or d'une culture populaire libre et vigoureuse et les temps des censures et des contraintes qui la condamnent et la démantèlent'. He finds this tendency expressed in a similar manner by historians of the Middle Ages who see in the thirteenth century 'une

acculturation chrétienne destructrice des traditions de la culture populaire laïque' of the preceding centuries and by twentieth-century historians who attribute to the advent of mass culture imposed by the new media the same dismantlement of the old oral culture. 'Le véritable problème', Chartier concludes, 'n'est donc pas de dater la disparition irrémédiable d'une culture dominée, par exemple en 1600 ou 1650, mais de comprendre comment, à chaque époque, se nouent les rapports complexes entre des formes imposées, plus ou moins contraignantes, et des idées sauvegardées, plus ou moins altérées' (2003, 7).¹⁴

In the passages quoted above, Chartier challenges certain points of view which, for many social historians, have constituted, and probably still constitute for some, firm guidelines for a diachronic reading of cultural forms and their development. In particular, he challenges the idea that certain great fractures in the European socio-cultural landscape (the obvious ones are the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the advent of industrialization) determined a contraction of the people's cultural spaces and therefore of the cultural initiative which came from below; and that, consequently, the same fractures and cultural mutations impinged on the vitality and also nonconformity of the people's cultural undertaking. Abandoning these consolidated paradigms, and consequently the idea that a 'golden age' of popular creativity ended up by being constrained by these events and fractures, he seems to embrace the idea that, in all times and contexts, the role of the people was that of (active) consumers. But, however suggestive and subtly argued his hypothesis may be, the equally convincing narrative of other social historians, which differs from the Certeau-Chartier line of thought, cannot be ignored.

Peter Burke illustrates the process of withdrawal of the elite from the culture of the people and the growing chasm between the two cultures during the period from 1500 to 1800 and for which, at two different moments, two forces were mainly responsible: the clergy and the Reformers – both in the Protestant and in Catholic contexts – and the social and economic changes determined by the commercialization and industrialization of society. Introducing his treatment of the ways in which the progressive division of the two cultures was brought about, he says:

In 1500 ... popular culture was everyone's culture; a second culture for the educated, and the only culture for everyone else. By 1800, however, in most parts of Europe, the clergy, the nobility, the merchants, the professional men – and their wives – had abandoned popular culture to the lower classes, from whom they were now separated, as never before, by profound differences in world view. (1994, 270)¹⁵

Burke also devotes a chapter of his book (chapter 8) to what he calls 'the reform of popular culture', that is, 'the systematic attempt by some of the educated ... to change the attitudes and values of the rest of the population' (207) and the attacks to those attitudes and values carried on by the reformers, in the 'attempt to suppress, or at least purify, many items of traditional popular

culture' (208). It is therefore true to say that these epochal changes, apart from determining this progressive withdrawal and division, also represented an attack on the vitality of popular culture. As a paradigmatic figure of the growing distance between the people and the elite and of the contraction of the people's cultural spaces, Burke evokes the transformation and correlative loss of function which can be observed in one of the main cultural mediators in the Middle Ages and in early modern culture: 'The old-style parish priest who wore a mask and danced in church at festivals and made jokes in the pulpit was replaced by a new-style priest who was better-educated, higher in social status, and considerably more remote from his flock' (271).

Piero Camporesi, in turn, discusses the ways in which, in the Catholic context, the Counter-Reformation deleted the folkloric elements from church rituals. In the context of reformed ritualism he sees 'the end of all the cultural elements which had been self-managed from below' and at the same time 'the birth of the monstrous formula of mass culture'. 'The victory of Lent and the final defeat of Carnival', he argues, 'the triumph of capitalist ethics and of a new relationship with money, the inevitable surfacing of new ideologies and of a different work organization modified and narrowed the cultural and existential space of the people' (1991, 54). His idea is that 'the Counter-reformation tightening contributed to dig an ever deeper furrow between the little and the great tradition which quickly recoiled from the forms of folklore culture, by then heavily branded by the negative and demonizing mark engraved on its "superstitious habits", its "vain beliefs", its "diabolical remedies"' (88). It is interesting to note that, when discussing the same process of estrangement between the 'two cultures' and the correlative loss of liberty and vitality on the part of the culture from below illustrated by Burke, Camporesi evokes the same paradigmatic figure evoked by Burke in the passage quoted above: the parish priest who had represented the driving force for popular culture, he says, lost his function. For centuries this figure had represented

the co-existence of old and new; paganism and Christianity, the profane and the sacred, the oral and the written, the alternative of life and death, rebirth and return were embodied in the same full-blooded person in charge of the great rites of passage of the community (birth, marriage, death) ... Nearly all the names of these cultural mediators, indefatigable promoters of 'low' dramaturgy, have been deleted by the joint action of centuries, of the irreversible social mutations, of the voluntary omission of the High Church. (88-89; my translation here and above)

Bakhtin is fully conscious of the genuinely popular source of certain forms of 'low dramaturgy', of the difference implied in the alternative created *by/created for* and, consequently, of the fact that in some social practices an active role can be attributed only to the senders when, discussing the creative nature of carnival and the involvement of all those who take part in it, excludes from this experience precisely the role of 'receiver' or 'spectator' as being a non-role:

... carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. (1984, 7)¹⁶

Equally conscious of the relevance of the alternative created *by/created for* was Antonio Gramsci who, in his reflections on popular songs quotes a classification suggested by Ermolao Rubieri between those composed by the people and for the people, those composed for the people but not by the people and 'those composed neither by the people nor for the people but adopted by the people because they were in harmony with their way of thinking and feeling'. He comments on Rubieri's classification saying that 'all popular songs can and must be reduced to the third category, because what characterizes them, within the framework of a nation and its culture, is neither the artistic dimension nor the historical origin, but the way in which this culture conceives the world and life, in opposition to official society'. Gramsci seems to militate on the side of the popular 'adoption' of forms formulated elsewhere (by the hegemonic culture) and to envisage an adoption (or appropriation) performed on the basis of the people's 'way of conceiving the world and life, in opposition to official society'. In other words, he seems to attribute to users both the previous possession of a cultural heritage of values and world views of their own and an oppositional intent. Then, from these observations, he passes on to more general reflections: 'in this and only in this', he says, 'the "collective" character of popular songs and of the people itself is to be found. From this, other criteria for research on folklore derive: that the people are not a homogeneous cultural collectivity, but consist of numerous cultural layers, variously combined, which cannot always be identified with particular historical groups' (1975, I, 679-680; my translation here and above).

4. *Differences: Sources, Transmission, Texts*

The last issue I wish to discuss is that of 'difference' and the various senses in which this idea seems to me to be relevant to any discourse about popular culture. The basic consideration, that has long since become part of undisputed shared knowledge, is that we should consider, even within the same temporal and geographical context, the various configurations of phenomena at a micro-level and speak of 'cultures' rather than 'culture'. Tim Harris (1995) has discussed at length the necessity to 'unpack' the notion of popular culture precisely in view of an acknowledgement of the many ways in which it is manifested according to the subjects who express it and the conditions in which it is expressed. However, while the acknowledgement of diversity in time and contexts is universally affirmed in theory and practised in case studies, it seems to me that its general methodological implications for the analyst deserve further reflection.

Once we accept the idea of micro-level variety within a certain context, we encounter the issue of macro-level differences between different contexts. As argued by Barry Reay in a passage quoted above, 'the representations of the early modern culture that we have lost are light years away from the consumer cultures of late-twentieth-century popular culture' (1998, 223). It is indeed obvious to say that, when reflecting on issues of early modern culture, we are engaged with phenomena of a completely different nature, with a world organized on the basis of a completely different economic and social structure, with different sets of values, aspirations and interests, with a different diffusion and concentration of literacy, with different power relations and power structures than those we encounter when dealing with post-industrial contexts.¹⁷ Indeed, this difference is arguable not simply because in one case we are engaged with issues which are temporally removed from us and that therefore we are not in the ideal situation illustrated by Stuart Hall, that is, 'in a period which poses the same kind of interpretive problems as our own' (1981, 231); and not simply because, in the latter case, the risk of anachronism is much reduced. Indeed, the difference in contexts, problems and representations also concerns the kind of 'texts' we can rely on as 'sources', the different *genres* to which the sparse documents the archives and libraries have handed down to us belong and also the different ways of diffusion and transmission of forms and models; and those differences imply the adoption of distinct paradigms of analysis and ways of reading. Trying to imagine, explain and provide evidence about what, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, led groups of women, throughout Europe, to 'confess' witchcraft and doing it by reading the 'evidence' provided by apparently tendentious court records is not the same as studying the strategy and rhetoric of confession of some of the accused in the extensively recorded proceedings of the Nuremberg Trials. 'Different problems', Burke says, 'require different methods of response'; and 'New sources ... require their own forms of source criticism' (2008, 117, 116). Translated into the language of literary criticism, different texts impose different methods of (close) reading.

One of the diversities which have been discussed concerns a problem of dating and continuity of phenomena and forms, which exists for the products of popular culture in the past and much less for the commercial products of the late modern age. Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, commenting on what distinguishes the idea of 'birth' of a literary work from the same idea when a folklore 'work' is recorded, say that 'the work belongs to folklore only from the moment it is adopted by the community'. The analogy with the Saussurian concepts of *langue* and *parole* appears once more apt to explain the difference: 'Just as individual neologisms cannot be considered changes in the given language (*la langue*, in the Saussurian sense) until they have entered into general usage, and thereby have become socialized, likewise a folklore work is only that which has been sanctioned and adopted by a given community' (1971, 91). The same issue about the difficulty of dating the

birth of a popular motif whose presence is disclosed at a given moment in the past is discussed by Diane Purkiss who says that 'although it is possible to date the moment when a piece of folklore *surfaces*, in print or in a piece of oral storytelling that happens to have been recorded, this is obviously not the same as the date when it was composed or created'. Purkiss also remarks that

The situation is further complicated by the difficult interactions between oral culture and print in the early modern period. What survives as folklore is often (though not invariably) print, and as soon as oral folklore is print, it becomes not the oral folklore in which the illiterate early modern public was immersed, but something that exists alongside it, in indirect and tangential relation to it. (2006, 140-141)

Purkiss is here outlining the problem of possible (maybe inevitable) *distortions* in the transition from oral to print.¹⁸ A more general problem of *mediation* is highlighted by many historians of early modern culture. It is indeed true to say that, generally speaking, early modern documents are much more deeply questionable as reliable sources than the commercial 'texts' (of whatever kind) which witness the cultures of the industrial era. Commenting on the reliability of the sources, manuscript and printed, used for one of his books, David Cressy says:

These are not necessarily reliable sources, and none is free of problems. Most are heavily weighted to the clerical, to the male, and to the literate élite. The immediate circumstances that produced them have often faded from view, and even the most generous sources leave much of the background opaque ... We know only those cases which came to court and for which documentary evidence has survived ... In the rare cases when personal testimony survives to amplify the allegation we are faced with problems of truth and diction, what had to be said to get the case into court, what had to be said to conform the story to the law, and the demands of judicial process. We may choose to call this surviving material 'evidence', in accord with established historical principles, so long as we recognize the mixture of reportage, prescription, book-keeping, special pleading, selectivity, and fiction that so often renders evidence intractable. (1997, 7)¹⁹

Other voices have expressed similar preoccupations about the reliability of early modern (popular) 'sources'. Tim Harris says that 'our access to the culture of the subordinate classes is ... normally indirect, mediated through sources produced by those who belonged to the learned culture of the elite. What becomes difficult', he adds, 'is to discern the extent to which the historical record of this popular culture has been contaminated by these elite mediators' (1995, 6). Commenting on the texts from which we get information about Elizabethan criminality, James Sharpe asks himself whether certain descriptions of the underworld 'tell us more about the fears of society, and ultimately of the government, than they do of reality'; 'Popular literature', he argues, 'constructed a stereotype of the criminal, and convinced the public at large of the dreadful consequences of sin for the individual and of the threat posed by the underworld to society at large' (1984, 165, 166). Piero Camporesi is concerned

with the sources (mainly the beggar books) which transmitted throughout Europe a misleading and deeply biased image of medieval and early modern beggars. Those sources, he says, are ‘fantastic, highly unreal, tendentious and classist’ and therefore they ‘cannot but transmit an altered, misleading and, in the final analysis, factious image of pauperism and mendicity’ (1973, clxxix; my translation).²⁰ Carlo Ginzburg expresses the same concern:

Since historians are unable to converse with the peasants of the sixteenth century (and, in any case, there is no guarantee that they would understand them), they must depend almost entirely on written sources (and possibly archeological evidence). These are doubly indirect for they are *written*, and written in general by individuals who were more or less openly attached to the dominant culture. This means that the thoughts, the beliefs, and the aspirations of the peasants and artisans of the past reach us (if and when they do) almost always through distorting viewpoints and intermediaries. At the very outset this is enough to discourage attempts at such research.

Ginzburg also establishes a difference which is relevant to his perspective, saying that ‘the terms of the problem are drastically altered when we propose to study, not “culture *produced by* the popular classes”, but rather “culture *imposed on* the popular classes”’. As an example of the risks implied in confusing the two perspectives, Ginzburg quotes Robert Mandrou who, he believes, when examining the so called ‘literature of *colportage*’ (booklets, almanacs, ballads, proverbs, etc.), equated ‘the culture produced by the popular classes’ with “the culture imposed on the masses”; Mandrou, Ginzburg argues, failed to acknowledge that those booklets, almanacs, ballads, etc., were products *imposed on* the people; that, far from being ‘escapist’, they were ‘deliberately intended for the masses’. Consequently, he missed an important point, that is, that the *intention* of that imposition was to prevent ‘those whom it affected from becoming aware of their own social and political conditions’ (1980, xv).

Here we encounter again the alternative created *by/created for*; and, again, we meet the reflection of Chartier who, discussing the same kind of cheap literature, expresses doubts – although of a different kind – about Mandrou’s treatment of the issue. His criticism is twofold: on the one hand, he challenges the idea that the so-called literature of *colportage* and other cheap print (in France mainly the so-called *Bibliothèque bleue*) was, as argued by Mandrou, meant ‘essentially for popular usage’ for, he argues, the readership of the *Bibliothèque bleue* was ‘a public made up in the city of merchants and wealthy artisans and, in the countryside, of low-ranking officials and the richer farmers and laborers’ (1984, 231). On the other hand, Chartier also challenges the idea that spiritual models and reading matter, even though suggested or imposed from above, were accepted passively, i.e. without ‘adaptations, trespassing, and subversion’ (233). The leading idea is, again, that ‘What distinguishes cultural worlds is different kinds of use and different strategies of appropriation’ (235-236).

In spite of all subtle – and convincingly argued – assumptions about appropriation, usage and the active role which, on certain occasions and stimulated by certain objects, receivers may [have] take[n] up, I still believe that the difference posited by Ginzburg as well as the dual (popular/elite) model should not be abandoned. ‘Whatever the later modifications or clarifications’, Barry Reay says, ‘bipolarity fixes the conceptual boundaries’: the problem, with Chartier’s analysis, is that, unlike the bi-polar model,

The model of appropriation ... will go directly to the form – let us say, chapbooks or festivals – or to a particular example without assuming prior social categorisation. This mode of analysis may indeed find that a polarity (of some sort) applies, but it will be more attuned to multiple uses and less likely merely to confirm something that has already been decided ... The search for commonalty, in less subtle hands, could easily distort or erase important cultural cleavages. (1998, 201)

5. ... and Shakespeare

The most radical dismissal of official sources as reliable ‘evidence’ I have come across is that of Christopher Hill. Discussing the struggle for constitutional liberty in England from the point of view ‘of those who had no share in making laws, who were legislated against’, Hill says: ‘We get a lot of information from state papers, Parliamentary speeches and the correspondence of the gentry – the traditional sources for historians’. He adds, however, his evaluation of these sources: ‘I have a certain scepticism here. We have learnt from recent experience that most state papers are works of fiction; at best they make assumptions which it is difficult for us to recover now’. Then, very aptly for the argument of this article and of those which follow in this volume, he evaluates the possibility of resorting to other kinds of sources: ‘Might not ballads, plays and other popular literary forms neglected by real historians provide fresh insight?’ Hill soon puts the idea into practice by examining Richard Brome’s play *A Jovial Crew* (published in 1652, but first staged about ten years before), a text which he considers only ‘at first sight ... an escapist utopian fantasy’ (1996, 4).

The whole book is inspired, for its historical analyses, by literary and paraliterary texts (plays, ballads, sermons, political tracts, pamphlets, etc.); and uses them to construct an interpretation of the struggles of the meaner sort during the years of the seventeenth-century English revolution; the actors in this struggle are, in Hill’s text, a mixed bag of beggars, highway men, gypsies, religious dissenters, free thinkers, poor villagers, pirates, smugglers, poachers, etc. By deconstructing the title of his book, *Liberty Against the Law*, we encounter its main questions: ‘liberty for whom?’ and ‘the law made by whom?’ Hill tries to recover the people’s attitudes towards Parliament and the idea of liberty it

enforced (which, he argues, was liberty for the legislating class of landowners and wealthy merchants) and to construct, from below, the voice of those who were 'legislated against' and their idea of 'liberty' which, he maintains, was liberty *from* the law. In the texts which he uses in support of his argument, he tries to find these voices, evaluations, needs and aspirations. It would be easy to contend that even those texts which are constructed as representing the point of view of the people were not written by the people, and therefore did not represent the people's authentic voice. But those texts which profess to record, and provide evidence for, 'truth' are, in the opinion of many historians, also unreliable or even, as Hill says, fictional. The difference between fiction and document may, therefore, in the final analysis, be only quantitative; and, although to read history by resorting to works of fiction is certainly a risky practice, at least, when reading literature, we are equipped with a set of tried and tested procedures and know how to remove filters whose presence and nature are apparent. Thus, fortified by the historian's opinion, we finally find ourselves vis-à-vis Shakespeare and his texts' relationship with popular culture.

Hill quotes Shakespeare several times – on some occasions as a member of a popular class or as friend of some dissenter and on others discussing his texts' stance towards the lower classes which, he believes, was sympathetic; he evokes Shakespeare's representation of sylvan liberty (in the symbolic context of the forest of Arden, for instance) and some of his texts' adherence to themes of 'Robin Hoodism'; he also calls forth the mention of Gypsy proverbial phrases, or the idea of insubordination which we meet in *The Tempest*; and argues that 'In *Henry VI*, *King Lear* and *Coriolanus* Shakespeare captured the mood of the poor during the hungry years of 1590s and the following decade' and maintains that, in *King Lear*, Shakespeare shows he had 'an eye for social injustice, though for the benefit of the censor his most forceful passages are given to the mad Lear, speaking for society's outcasts' (256).

Although he deals with Shakespeare in a fragmentary way, Hill's position appears clearly to be in harmony with the idea of those professional Shakespeare critics who believe that Shakespeare's plays, to a certain extent, do allow the recovery of his opinions about 'the people' and his attitude towards them. The issue is one of the thorniest in the development of Shakespeare criticism: should we talk of Shakespeare or of 'Shakespeare'; and – if we choose to talk of Shakespeare – can we comment on *his* ideas or on what *his texts* suggest? And how does this alternative influence the issue of authorship? Furthermore, among those who believe that Shakespeare's ideas can, to a certain extent, be recovered or reconstructed starting from his works, the description of his stance presents diametrically opposed evaluations: from those who, like Coleridge, style him 'a philosophical aristocrat', a conservative and a hater of the people (differently called populace, mob, crowd, etc.) to those who, like Hill, are convinced of his concern for society's outcasts. And there is also a third possibility, that of opting for the opinion of another romantic poet, John Keats,

and embrace his idea of ‘negative capability’, that is, of absolute neutrality and aloofness. From time to time, confutations of one or all of these perspectives emerge, and the whole field of Shakespeare studies is revised and restructured according to some universally embraced (new) critical convention, or better, according to a new silent covenant. Today the universally accepted covenant is stipulated on the basis of the ideas of ‘afterlife’ and of media ‘appropriation’.²¹

Going against the grain of critical and theoretical subjection and conformism, I wish to reaffirm an old covenant, that of a kind of literary criticism which keeps an eye on history. With Hill’s book, we encounter the reciprocal gesture of a social historian who keeps an eye on literature in a ‘militant’ form: a thoughtful and unprejudiced gesture since, as Peter Burke says, ‘Cultural history is not a monopoly of historians. It is multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary; in other words, it starts from different places, different departments in the universities – as well as being practised outside academe’. Historians, then, should not recoil from reading – among other things – literary texts; for, Burke adds, ‘From literary critics, cultural historians can learn the “close reading” of texts’ (2008, 135). Texts, yes, and their ‘close reading’. This is how literary critics can give a hand to social historians. After all, one of the major and, I believe, more lasting conquests of twentieth-century literary theory is the idea that each text creates the competence of its reader by selecting, imposing and even inventing the methods and instruments for its analysis (Eco 1979).

¹ For an exhaustive survey of the development of cultural history and its different perspectives, see Burke 2008; a concise but useful survey is Arcangeli 2007.

² Stephen Wilson comments on the ambiguity of the term ‘popular’ in English, saying: ‘“popular”, in English is at the superficial level simply ambiguous. It means both “widely liked or followed” and also “to do with the people”. In French or Italian of course this particular confusion does not exist but it is introduced at once when the equivalent terms are translated’. He then adds: ‘The ambiguity in English, less acute in common than in academic parlance, conveys an opinion. What is “widely liked or followed” is almost certainly “to do with the people”. And by implication what is rare, unusual must appeal to the more discerning upper strata of society’ (1989, 517).

³ For a discussion of the Gramscian notion of hegemony, see Reay 1985, 18-21. E.P. Thompson builds his discussion of power relationships in eighteenth-century English society on the idea of hegemony (1974). Many texts discussing issues of popular culture allude to the idea of ‘hegemony’ or the dominant/subordinate dichotomy, although the passages quoted are usually taken out of their contexts – understandably, because, as is well known, Gramsci’s thought is dispersed in hundreds of fragments in his prison copybooks, and the topics must be retrieved by recourse to the whole work. It is surprising, however, that Gramsci’s reflections on folklore are usually not quoted by social historians discussing issues of popular culture. An exception is Wiseman 2009.

⁴ Burke says that the field of cultural studies is a ‘loosely defined area’ (1994, xv).

⁵ In the footnote appended to this sentence, Reay comments: ‘There are two related issues here: the elision of early modern history and the elision of history. The discipline of history was

central to what can be seen as early cultural study, but it was nineteenth- and twentieth-century history' (n. 94, 221). Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes, introducing the book they edited on *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, say that "The term "popular culture" is likely nowadays to suggest Hollywood and the TV soap, games shows and fast food outlets – commercialized leisure activities designed for mass consumption. These are indeed cultural products created for the people, but they are not of the people, which is an older meaning of the term "popular". Older forms of popular culture were for the most part not specifically commercial activities, and may be understood as the cultural expressions of the people themselves' (2006, 1). I wish to point out that *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (Shaughnessy, ed., 2007b) published essays by various scholars almost exclusively devoted to Shakespeare's afterlife; in the words of the editor, to the 'reinvention, adaptation, citation, and appropriation of the plays ... across a wide range of media in subsequent periods and cultures' (1).

⁶ That Shakespeare's plays (obviously much less his poems) are often called 'popular' in the sense that the audience which attended theatrical events was a mixed audience, that they were greatly enjoyed and represented an extremely lucrative box office business belongs to an entirely different set of considerations.

⁷ Levine was the author of an innovative and influential book on Afro-American culture (*Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁸ Tin Pan Alley is the name given to a New York industry of music publishers active from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 1930s. I am not going to embark on a discussion of the distinct meanings which some historians give to 'popular culture' and 'mass culture'. I will only quote two definitions which show different ways in which the two concepts have been considered. The first one, quoted by Peter Burke, is by Dwight Macdonald. Burke argues that 'Literary critics and sociologists have tended to operate with two opposed models of popular culture, "Folk" And "Mass"' and quotes Macdonald's definition: 'Folk art grew from below. It was a spontaneous, autochthonous expression of the people, shaped by themselves ... to suit their own needs. Mass culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers' (Burke 1985, 32; the source from which the definition comes is *Against the American Grain*, New York, Random House, 1962). The second, formulated almost sixty years later, is by Michael Pickering: 'I regard popular culture', he says, 'as a valid term that is theoretically sustainable and worth working with as a keyword in media and cultural analysis. While I regard mass culture as an invalid term and not theoretically sustainable, we still need to think about it as a means for analytically distinguishing between different forms of popular culture' (2010, xxvii).

⁹ David Hall remarks that 'Natalie Davis has been especially insistent that the people were not passive ciphers; even if the people learned from clergy and their like, the process of consumption was a process of revision' (1984, 11). The reference is to Davis 1974.

¹⁰ Volume 2 of *L'invention du quotidien*, written with Luce Girard and Pierre Mayol and part of the same research project, is entitled *Habiter, cuisiner*.

¹¹ An unorthodox use of written materials is documented by Adam Fox in his study of literacy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. 'The Elizabethan preacher Nicholas Bownd', Fox says, 'observed the way in which the common people bought broadside ballads and set them up in their cottages and shops even if they themselves could not read' (2000, 9). The use which in this case was made of the ballads, which were probably on display on the mantelpiece, was either aesthetic, or maybe the written sheets were set up and shown to visitors as proof of literacy. The text quoted is Nicholas Bownd, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Plainely Layde Forth*, London 1595, 242.

¹² Peter Burke said that he considers 'the analysis of the creative uses of objects ... the most important contribution to the popular culture debate in the last fifteen years' (1994, xxi).

¹³ An often quoted corpus is that of the so-called *livrets bleus*, a term which designates the popular publications on various topics published in France between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. On these publications, see Burke 1981 and Chartier 1984. On chap-

books, which can be considered the English equivalent of the *livrets bleus*, see Newcomb 2009.

¹⁴ There probably are different modalities of the disappearance of the active production of culture on the part of the people and of the advent of their more passive role; different processes which develop in the short *durée* and which are connected to a mixture of taste, habits, profit, convictions and other cultural factors. Peter Burke argues that with the professionalization of Elizabethan and Jacobean London theatrical entertainment 'the role of the audience was becoming more passive'; however, he also recalls that, starting in the first decades of the seventeenth century, a contrary process developed since an active and creative role of the people was affirmed inside the separatist congregations which expressed 'alternative forms of Christianity' (1985, 41-43; 43). On certain popular traits of seventeenth-century radical religious movements see also Capp 1989.

¹⁵ As Tim Harris acknowledges, 'much of the specific scholarly work into various aspects of popular culture in early modern England seems to confirm Burke's picture'; in particular, 'the transforming effect of social and economic changes, such as the divisive impact of the spread of literacy, the commercialisation of society, the impact of the Scientific Revolution, and the rise of a culture of manners which caused the elite to withdraw from what they saw as the "uncouth" practices of the lower classes' (1995, 2, 1).

¹⁶ To further illustrate the alternative 'culture *by* the people/culture *for* the people', we may recall Roman Jakobson's communication model (Jakobson 1960) which lists at its extremes a 'sender' and a 'receiver'; and, by unduly simplifying the issues involved, say that in post-industrial, commercial and urban contexts the people are fatally (and intentionally) relegated to the role of 'receiver', although of 'active receiver', as Certeau and Chartier have argued. But, in Jakobson's model, the poetic function (the function of *poiēsis*) is inconstitutive to the message formulated by the sender. The sender may assume the role of innovator, while the receiver is somebody (or some mechanism) designed for the sole reception, however active this may be.

¹⁷ Commenting on the difficulty 'to separate not simply conceptions of popular and elite culture, but also to determine exactly which is which', Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield say: 'It is relatively easy to see such conflicts in contemporary culture, because we have some sense of where the boundaries lie even if we are aware of the problems of defining and policing them. Delving into the historical archive can often be more confusing' (2009, 2, 3). In the Introduction to his study of Rabelais, Bakhtin often comments on the misunderstandings and critical anachronisms generated by the fact that the whole culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been described according to alien visions of laughter. He speaks of these anachronistic readings and the consequent 'modernization of laughter' (1984, 45) and says that by the romantics and by subsequent generations 'The element of laughter was accorded the least place of all in the vast literature devoted to myth, to folk lyrics, and to epics. Even more unfortunate was the fact that the peculiar nature of the people's laughter was completely distorted; entirely alien notions and concepts of humor, formed within the framework of bourgeois modern culture and aesthetics, were applied to this interpretation' (4).

¹⁸ On the distortions produced by 'the inevitable mediation' in the transmission of originally oral discourses through written texts, see Lamb 2006, 11.

¹⁹ In the essay published in this volume (47-62), Cressy reconsiders the problem of mediation both in general and in the specific light of recovering the 'voices' of early modern people in Shakespeare's works. The issue of the inevitable mediation – even when the people's voices are registered in courtrooms – is also present both in Pallotti's (211-239) and in Baratta's (185-208) articles in this volume. Discussing the social composition of litigants between 1560 and 1700 on the basis of existing evidence, James Sharpe says that 'Details of occupation as given in legal records can be unreliable'; but he adds that 'if we may discount a deliberate conspiracy by the clerical staff of courts to mislead modern historians, it would seem that both litigants and witnesses at courts were drawn mainly from the middling to lower ranks of society, from men and women of moderate or small property' (1985, 252). An extensive discussion of the

adequacy of sources we use in the study of early modern history in general is Scribner 1989.

²⁰ On the representations of mendicity in early modern European beggar books see Pugliatti 2003, especially Part Three.

²¹ One of the books which authoritatively contested a critical *doxa* established starting in the 1980s, that of new historicism, deals precisely with Shakespeare and 'the people'. *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* by Annabel Patterson (1989) boldly contested 'the avant-garde proscriptions against talking about authors and intentions' and returned to 'certain categories of thought that some have declared obsolete: above all the concept of authorship, which itself depends on our predicating a continuous, if not a consistent self, of self-determination and, in literary terms, of intention'. Patterson, then, argues the possibility 'of positing Shakespeare as a writer whose intentions, if never fully recoverable, are certainly worth debating' (4-5). The 1980s avant-garde prescriptions dictated by 'new historicism' included Greenblatt's subversion/containment paradigm of Gramscian derivation, which was a most consequential idea to any consideration of popular culture.

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PART TWO
Case Studies

Vox Populi

Demotic Voices and Popular Complaint in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England

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Abstract

Though Shakespeare's creations are said to be infused by the structures of popular culture, it remains uncertain how closely his characters echo the phrases of everyday speech. The text alone cannot tell us how Shakespeare's contemporaries talked, or what commoners said of each other or of those in authority above them. Fortunately alternative and complementary sources exist that yield informal and unscripted utterances by ordinary men and women in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. Court reports, depositions, and examinations by magistrates preserve versions of scandalous and transgressive words that were never intended to be recorded. These include the gendered language of insult, expressions of social complaint, and verbal challenges to royal authority. Despite problems of mediation, ventriloquism, and scribal processing, of the sort familiar to literary scholars, these archival traces reveal a vigorous vein of plebeian speech, that can be compared to the 'speeches' of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Abundant examples illuminate the popular discursive culture of Shakespeare's age and environment, and suggest the possibility of building towards a new corpus of demotic and non-literary text that can be compared to the language of the plays.

Keywords: Defamation, Insults, Language, Sedition, Shakespeare.

1. *Voices*

More than two decades ago, in her study of *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, Annabel Patterson wondered how closely the language of Jack Cade's rebels in *Henry VI part II* reflected 'the voice of popular protest' in Shakespeare's own age. When the rebel John Holland avows, for example, 'it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up' (*2 Henry VI*, IV.ii, 8-9) does this character from the late middle ages speak the language of the troubled 1590s? And how, in any case, would we know? We might applaud or disparage the leveling sentiment, and puzzle over Shakespeare's relation to it, but the play itself cannot tell us whether we are listening to a 'popular' or 'plebeian' voice, or this was how real rebels talked. As Patterson shrewdly reminds us, we encounter 'a double ventriloquism: the voice of popular protest speaking through Cade (despite his insincerity) speaking through Shakespeare's play text' (1989, 50). Refracted through Marxist, materialist or historicist eyes, and recalled for today's international, transdisciplinary, and post-ironic conversation, the



ventriloquism now seems all the more layered and artful, in my report to you of Patterson's reading of Shakespeare on Cade. The early modern 'voice of popular protest' is faint and fading, if present at all, in this literary, theatrical, and now academic entertainment.

Though the principal characters of Shakespeare's plays are royal, noble, aristocratic or gentle, with voices derived from the English elite, they are attended, amused, and sometimes threatened by humbler sorts who may be imagined to speak with the cadence and vocabulary of the village or the street. Through them, we might suppose, we might hear the voices of the common people, and perhaps too the sympathies and attitudes of the playwright who came from their class. It is, to be sure, a game of mirrors and echoes, of buried hints and muted whispers, since Shakespeare, like fellow dramatists, was an artist, a writer of lines. It was the artist's task to conjure character and set up scenes, and give his players convincing dialogue; but it was not necessarily his business to transcribe or capture the speech of his neighbours and contemporaries. There was noise all around him, but it was filtered, processed and re-worked before it appeared in Shakespeare's plays. Tuning in to that noise, if such were possible, would illuminate the discursive environment of early modern England, and might also indicate how playwrights made use of it.

My purpose here is not to engage in Shakespeare criticism, but rather to offer a historian's guide to selected utterances from the era in which Shakespeare lived. I build on the work of other historians who have scoured the archives for traces of spoken discourse, and have sometimes linked their findings to dramatic literature. Bernard Capp, for example, has argued that 'the sharp wit and repartee of Shakespeare's comic heroines reflected and sanitized countless exchanges in the street between more ordinary folk, and represented the apotheosis of an oral culture that would have been familiar to all'. We should not be surprised by 'the verbal agility of the semi-literate', he advises, because 'sexual banter, the jocular or waspish exchange of taunts, puns, and innuendo, was part of everyday life' (2003, 198).¹ Recovering that banter, and other modes of oral expression, offers opportunities for cultural studies, legal history, historical ethnography, and perhaps too for appreciation of Shakespeare.

Historians and literary scholars share an interest in the verbal expressions in Shakespeare's drama, and in the social, cultural and linguistic influences that may have shaped them. Our attention shifts from inside to outside the play, from canonical text to historical environment – both areas of almost limitless endeavor. It is well worth asking to what degree the playwright was articulating, inhabiting, or criticizing contemporary cultural domains, but the project is hampered by problems of theory and evidence. On the one hand, our categories are compromised, since such concepts as 'popular culture' and 'the common or plebian voice' are reified, historicized, and culturally-constructed.² On the other, the oral expressions of Elizabethan and early

Stuart England are mostly irrecoverable, except through textual mediation of selected fragments. We may look to the drama to imagine how popular speech might have sounded, and seek out historical sources to find what people allegedly said, but independent confirmation of Shakespeare's demotic receptivity remains elusive.

It is commonly implied, and sometimes asserted, that Shakespeare had his ear to the ground and his nose to the wind, and was 'extraordinarily responsive' as he 'tapped into popular verbal culture'. Shakespeare, more than any of his contemporaries, is renowned for rendering, or representing theatrically, the common or plebian voice of his age. His creations are said to be infused by 'the structures of popular culture' and 'irrigated by the diction of common life'. Critics from Samuel Johnson to Neil Rhodes have registered and applauded the Shakespearian popular voice and its borrowings from 'popular idiom'. His works, by one count, include 4684 proverbs, proverbial allusions, and 'sayings' from the milieu in which he lived.³ An influential alternative line of analysis insists, however, that, far from reproducing or representing popular culture, Shakespeare and his literary contemporaries were in fact creating or producing a simulacrum that served artistic, social and ideological purposes. Their depiction or evocation of the 'popular' in texts, works, or writings is 'detached from lived interactions with members of the lower sorts', while their borrowings of speech and voice involve blurring, shading, and renegotiation. Mary Ellen Lamb alerts us to the 'simultaneous affiliation and alienation within these texts', and similar warnings are applicable to historical documentary sources (2006, 5, 230; see also Sherstow 1998).

2. *Dangerous Talk*

Social historians are concerned with the conditions, experiences, relationships and interactions of the past. We can't go back with notebooks or recorders, or eavesdrop directly on lost conversations, but we do have sources that provide access of a sort to long-ago verbal expressions. Everyday spoken language, for the most part, was lost to the wind, but certain circumstances fostered its recall, re-iteration, re-telling, and scribal recording, if only in part. As the Romans recognized, *vox audita perit, litera scripta manet*. Certain types of legal evidence, court reports, depositions, and examinations by magistrates capture, if not verbatim at least indicatively, a version of what people were alleged to have said. Fragments of oral discourse were remembered and reproduced, and entered into documentary records. The archives of judicial process, both secular and ecclesiastical, yield redactions, quotations and representations of popular parlance, especially expressions that were actionable, contentious, or of interest to the law. Even allowing for scribal interventions, legal formulae, misrepresentation, and lapses of memory – the 'fiction in the archives' syndrome (Davis 1987; Goldberg 1997; Gaskill 1998) – they leave us fragments of

exchanges, echoes of altercations, and reports of words spoken in carelessness, in anger, or in drink. The evidence is often compromised, frequently opaque, and occasionally stunning. Anyone interested in the ideas and opinions of ordinary people, as well as the responses of the elite, does well to pay attention to this hidden transcript (Cressy 2010, x).⁴

One does not need familiarity with 'speech act theory' to know that words have consequences, that spoken utterance can have situation-altering effects.⁵ Though 'words are but wind' was a popular saying,⁶ it was well recognized in Shakespeare's day that speech could hurt as hard as sticks and stones. Malicious tongues caused dispute between neighbors, seditious words endangered the state, and scandalous and impious language disturbed the community of Christians. 'It would make a man's heart to bleed', wrote William Perkins in 1593, 'to hear ... how swearing, blaspheming, cursed speaking, railing, slandering, chiding, quarrelling, contending, jesting, mocking, flattering, lying, dissembling, vain and idle talking, overflow in all places', to 'lamentable and fearful' effect (1638, sig. A2). It was a standard trope of moral reformers that common people commonly abused themselves through failure to govern their tongues. Loose conversation overflowed 'at ordinaries and common tables', as well as 'bowling-greens and alleys, alehouses, tobacco-shops, highways and water passages', and other venues where 'makebates and tattling gossips' gathered.⁷

Three distinct genres of demotic speech resonate through the archival record. We hear traces of neighbors insulting or slinging defamatory remarks against each other; railing voices raised in anger against established authority; and reckless subjects expressing treasonable or seditious sentiments against the crown. Fragments of casual banter and venomous rants appear in the records, as well as snippets of dialogue. Scandalous, offensive, and unseemly expressions by one party are sometimes offset by reports of the temperate or emollient remarks of another, such as 'say not so', or 'heaven forfend'. Representations of these exchanges survive because their participants became enmeshed in the processes of law. Taken together, they bring us closer than any other evidence to the early modern popular voice.

Interpreting these fragments requires, of course, the cautions and caveats of critical scholarship. We need to beware of their formulaic quality, their fictional elements, their speakers' discursive strategies, and the distortions of scribal processing. Even extempore speech could be artful and evocative, shaped by popular sayings or influenced by popular texts. Judicial examinations were oral proceedings (like plays?) but they generated reams of paper. They followed a script, not word for word but nonetheless guided by protocols of custom and law. The words they focused on could shape outcomes, determine guilt, or secure conviction. Detached from their original conversational context, and introduced as 'evidence', the fruits of fleeting utterance became fixed for subsequent scrutiny.

Most of these words were recalled or recited before magistrates of the gentle or armorial class, and taken down by literate clerks. The speakers themselves were mostly humbler folk in unfamiliar roles, as plaintiffs, deponents, examiners, or witnesses. Some of them were lying, or misremembering, or using the occasion to settle other scores. Some were intimidated or tongue-tied; others gave hostile, malicious, or contradictory testimony. None of the words were natural, unprocessed, or completely authentic, but then again, what is? The layers of mediation and ventriloquism in these records are at least as complex as those pertaining to the stage, and no less worthy of scrutiny.

3. *Insults*

Historians of defamation, slander, sexual honor and social reputation have made us familiar with the language of insult, so only a cursory review is needed here.⁸ The evidence is abundant in both secular and ecclesiastical courts, and its general features are well known. At issue was the damage done to a person's reputation or social standing, and the remedy or reparation deserved.

Both men and women suffered sexual defamation, but the language used against them was heavily gendered. Hundreds of cases involved the words 'whore', 'harlot', 'jade', or 'quean', usually directed at a woman, though the speaker could be male or female. 'Drab', 'slut', 'strumpet', or 'baggage' rang the changes, with such damaging adjectives as 'mangy', 'maggoty', 'lousy', 'pockey', or 'shitten'. Typical Elizabethan cases had someone saying, 'you are a damned bitch, a whore, a pocky whore', or telling a married woman who behaved like a prostitute, 'a cart is too good for thee' (Gowing 1996; Burn 1775, vol. II, 116-117). 'Whore, common whore, and rotten whore', shouted John Wall of Hereford at a female neighbor.⁹ 'Mistress stinks, mistress fart ... mistress jakes, mistress tosspot and mistress drunkensoul', taunted one Wiltshire woman or another in 1586. Similar epithets, such as 'brazen-faced quean, hacking jade, filthy bawd, and hot tailed whore', were strung together in chains of verbal sexual abuse (Ingram 1987, 300). A Middlesex man in 1608, called the local vicar's wife 'quean and drab' after she 'called him a knave' and spat in his face.¹⁰ 'What a carrion whore this is', said one Sussex woman of another, with venom that could be imagined on stage (Capp 2003, 187). 'Arrant whore', 'brazen whore', 'scurvy drab', or imputations of the pox heated the dialog and intensified the message.

Whereas a woman might be defamed for her sexual incontinency, as 'harlot', 'whore' or 'quean', a man was more likely to be attacked for his character, as 'rogue', 'rascal', 'varlet', 'villain', 'churl', or 'knave', often preceded by the adjectives 'base', 'false' or 'forsworn'. These words, along with 'fool' and 'dog', imputed inferior status, untrustworthiness, or petty criminality. 'Thou art a false deceitful knave and I will prove thee a false deceitful knave, thou art a rogue and worthy to be set on the pillory', said one male Elizabethan to

another in 1577. But a sexualized vocabulary of abuse also embroiled men, through such epithets as 'whoreson', 'whoremonger', and 'harlot monger' for alleged sexual predators, and 'cuckold' or 'wittol' for victims of another man's predation. 'Thou art a bawdy knave, old cuckoldy knave, whoreson churl', accused a woman in Cambridge (Capp 2003, 258). 'You are an old whoring rogue and a bastard-getting old rogue', said one man in Norfolk to another (Hale 1847, 14, 27, 68, 99, 208, 245). When Elizabeth Knowles called Richard Ingram of York 'whoremaster, whoremonger harlot' in 1593 his lawyers argued 'that by reason of the utterance of these defamatory words, the status, good fame and reputation of [the said Richard] are greatly and grievously injured and lessened'. The words were defamatory, and therefore actionable, because they damaged the victim's social and moral standing, and thereby his livelihood, which is why they survive in the record (Helmholz 1985, 18).

Court records sometimes render both sides of an argument in which neighbors attempted to mock, outmatch, outshout, or withstand each other. It takes little imagination to reconstruct these unstaged dramatic scenes. In 1611, for example, two fellows of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, both distinguished clerics, fell into a shouting match over slights one perceived to have been done him by the other. 'Stiff clown', 'base fawning fellow', 'back-biter', and 'base rascal', were among the insults Theophilus Field rained on Alexander Read, who told Field in turn that he was 'base and contemptible'.¹¹ On another occasion John Holt of Hereford, of the same occupation as Shakespeare's father, 'reviled and mewed' at another glover's wife, 'calling her filthy sot and a spawn of a bastard'. When the woman's husband called on the speaker 'to bridle his tongue', Holt called him 'knave' and said 'he did not care a fart or a turd for him, nor did not care for no man or no man in England' (Herefordshire Record Office, BG 11/5/35). More determined deprecators went beyond impromptu speech to elaborate, enact, or even set their ill feelings in verse, charivari, skimmingtons, rough ridings and libelous verse. One woman at Salisbury in 1614 even erected a stage on two hogsheads in her backyard and mounted a play to deride the adulterous affairs of her neighbors (Fox 1994; Croft 1995; Bellany 2001; McRae 2004; Cressy 2010, 33-37).¹²

It is clear from the archives that oral culture was rich in insults. Defamatory speech could be virulent and vicious, deployed with needling and penetrating effect. But the epithets and exchanges of everyday life seem pale beside the more extravagant cursing of some of Shakespeare's characters. When Prince Hall calls Falstaff, 'thou whoreson, obscene, grease tallow catch ... thou whoreson impudent embossed rascal'; and when Doll Tearsheet curses Falstaff, 'a pox damn you, you muddy rascal', and scorns Pistol as 'scurvy companion ... poor, base, rascally, cheating, lack-linen mate, away you mouldy rogue', the words have more cadence and flourish than those of the ordinary alehouse (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4, 227-228, 3.3, 156-157; *2 Henry IV*, 2.4, 39, 123-125). When Petruchio addresses Grumio, 'you whoreson malt-horse drudge'; and when

Antipholus berates Dromio, 'thou whoreson senseless villain', the contempt of superiors for inferiors is almost extravagantly excessive, the verbal equivalent of a whipping (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 4.1, 129; *The Comedy of Errors*, 4.4, 24). 'You whoreson dog, you slave, you cur', shouts Lear at the hapless Oswald; and the disguised Duke of Kent calls the same unfortunate character 'knave ... rascal ... rogue ... and varlet' (*King Lear*, 1.4, 81, 2.2, 15-18) in a powerful cascade of abuse. Words like these recur in hundreds of court records, but rarely with Shakespeare's dramatic, comedic, or character-making effect. Perhaps both playwright and public were learning to curse.

A special sub-set of insults flowed from the mouth of clergymen, and these were more colorful and inventive than those of lay commoners. Encompassing much of the religious spectrum, from Calvinist puritan to Arminian ceremonialists, they erupted when university-trained clerics lashed out at their sluggish and plebeian congregations. The reverend Thomas Geary of Bedingfield, Suffolk, for example, railed at his people as 'sowded pigs, bursten rams and speckled frogs'. Another Suffolk minister, Robert Shepherd of Hepworth, berated his congregation as 'black mouthed hell hounds, limbs of the devil, fire brands of hell, plow joggers, bawling dogs, weaverly jacks, and church robbers, affirming that if he could term them worse he would'. Edward Layfield of All Saints, Barking, lashed out at his parishioners as 'black toads, spotted toads, and venomous toads, like Jack Straw and Wat Tyler', when some of them protested his liturgical innovations. Other enraged clergymen called their parishioners 'base', 'greasy', or 'saucy fellows', 'scurvy companions ... reprobates ... coxcombs ... giddy headed fellows', or likened them to lowly beasts. Clearly failing in their pastoral duties, and short on charity and forbearance, these clerics deployed a vocabulary of denigration more inventive, more learned, and sometimes more vicious than that of ordinary countrymen. Their parlance was, perhaps, closer to that of the dramatists, whose social origins and linguistic competence many of them shared (Cressy 2000, 156, 157).

4. *Social Anger*

We have already heard from the glover John Holt who 'did not care a fart or a turd ... for no man or no man in England' (Herefordshire Record Office, BG 11/5/35). Expressions of this sort were common, and fall into two categories. First were leveling remarks or ventings of anger against the wealth and privilege of the elite, reflections of class hostility. The second were diatribes against authority of all sorts, almost antinomian calls for the world itself to fall by the ears.

A deep vein of social resentment connected the peasant revolts of the middle ages to the strains of the Tudor era. 'There are too many gentlemen in England by five hundred', said one Norfolk commoner in the mid-sixteenth century. 'If it pleased the king to make him hangman ... he could find it in

his heart to hang a great many of them', said another. 'As sheep and lambs are a prey to the wolf or lion, so are the poor men to the rich', opined William Cowper of Norwich. 'The false knaves are the rich men', agreed his neighbor George Smyth (Rye, ed., 1905, 18, 22, 26, 28). 'There would never be merry world before there was a new alteration', declared the tailor John Massey in 1592, 'and as for my peck of malt, set the kettle on fire'. 'If the queen was once dead, we should have land cheap enough, and a merry world', avowed the yeoman George London in 1594, 'but he wished he might be dead first' (Cockburn, ed., 1979, 336, 355). Like Shakespeare's John Holland, for whom 'It was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up', a chorus of commoners complained of social inequities in somewhat similar terms.

Fantasies of redistributive revolt continued to agitate Elizabethan conversations. 'It is time they were up; it will never be merry till they be up; or by God's blood, if they were up, I would pull the skin over some of their ears', said the Surrey laborer Roger East in 1588, evoking earlier threats of peasant commotion. Thomas Delman, a clothier from Kent, 'did hope to see the rich churls pulled out of their houses, and to see them together by the ears in England before Candlemas next', so the assize court heard in 1595. The laborer Henry Daniel declaimed similarly in 1598, 'that he hoped to see such war in this realm to afflict the rich men of this country, to requisite the hardness of their hearts towards the poor'. 'There was such sassing and oppressing one another that he could not live any longer', declared the weaver James Hearnden in 1601, and he prophesied 'that it would never be merry world amongst us until we go altogether by the ears and shift stakes' with the rich men (Cockburn, ed., 1975a, 118; 1980a, 137; 1980b, 406). Shakespeare too writes of conflict 'by the ears', and of a lost 'merry world', in dialogue shaded by popular parlance.¹³

Other social complaints invoked the power of England's enemies to bring about change. At the height of Elizabeth's war with Spain in 1596 the Hertfordshire brick-burner John Feer expressed his wish 'that all the Spaniards of Spain were landed here in England to pull out the boors and churls by the ears'. 'It is no matter if the Spaniards were come, and I would they were come, for the people here be all naught; a plague of God light upon them all', cursed a Kentish laborer the same year. Voicing similar unpatriotic thoughts, the Surrey yeoman William Whiting declared 'that there were better laws and justice in Spain than in England ... and that the charity of Spain was greater and better than is here in England ... and if the time should fall out now as it did in times past, there would be as many turn-coated now as was then' (Cockburn, ed., 1975a, 118; 1980a, 137; 1980b, 406). Some of these speakers were religious conservatives who wished for the return of Catholicism, though their seditious sentiments associated them with social rebels.

A vigorous vein of plebeian speech was marked by bloody-mindedness, an almost-nihilistic condemnation of hierarchy and power. It crudely rejected

the protocols of deference and respect for authority enjoined by mainstream patriarchalism. Commoners were supposed to tip their caps and guard their tongues, but hundreds gave vent to an anarchic and dismissive anger. 'I care not for king nor queen', said the Sussex laborer Edward Smith in 1583. 'I care not a turd for the queen nor her precepts', said the wife of a Kentish husbandman in 1599. 'A turd for the queen', said one London yeoman in 1602; 'a pox and a vengeance' on all authorities, said another (Cockburn, ed., 1975b, 182; 1980b, 445; Jefferson, ed., 1886, 283-284). Though most of the queen's loving subjects no doubt offered dutiful acclaim, the evidence provides examples of some who did not.

It hardly mattered which monarch was in power. 'By God, I do not care a turd neither for the king nor his laws', said the Essex husbandman Henry Collyn at the beginning of James I's reign. 'A turd for thee and the king', offered a Kentish laborer two years later. The sailor Thomas Gibson went further in 1607 and said 'that the king's majesty was nothing but an ass, and that he, Thomas, would make a fool and an ass of him'. Subjects of Charles I likewise derided magisterial authority, asserting that they 'did not care a fart' for local officials, and 'cared not for the king nor his laws' (Cockburn, ed., 1982, 3; 1980a, 26, 38; Staffordshire Record Office, Q/SO/5. f. 16, Q/SR/243, fos. 6-7, 11). 'Shite on Justice Jopson, and fart for him', said one disgruntled Yorkshire yeoman. 'I scorn Sir Francis Wortley's proposition with my arse, and I worship him with my arse ... I care not a fart for Sir Francis's warrants' said others (Lister, ed., 1915, 60, 159-160, 264). Derisory physical gestures theatricized this scatological vocabulary of resistance. When magistrates in Essex ordered the vintner Thomas Holman in 1608 to maintain good behavior and keep the peace, he retorted that he cared not, 'casting up his leg and layering his hand on his tail, making a mouth in a very contemptuous sort' (Essex Record Office, Chelmsford: Q/SR 182/43). Shakespeare's audience would have recognized this business with fingers, thumbs, foreheads, eyes, noses, and tongues, whether performed by actors or neighbors, onstage or off.

5. *Treasonous Speech*

Most spectacular, most dangerous, and most likely to attract the attentions of the law were speeches that scandalized the monarch or threatened royal authority. It was *lèse majesté* or sedition to speak contemptuously of the king or queen, and some thought this verged on treason. Any 'violating or abating of majesty' was treason, asserted the Elizabethan lawyer Thomas Norton. They were 'traitorous vipers' who libeled the queen or her government, Lord Keeper Egerton declared in 1599 (Norton 1570, sig. Ci; The National Archives, Kew: SP 12/273/35).

It was treason in Elizabethan England to 'compass, imagine, invent, devise or intend' the death or destruction of the queen, or to call her 'heretic,

schismatic, tyrant, infidel, or usurper'. Merely to speak scandalously or slanderously of her majesty entailed the lesser offence of sedition. Speech of this sort may have been rare, but it emerged from the same milieu as insults and libels. Legal and investigative processes allow us to hear parts of this discourse, along with more loyal rebuttals.

A recurrent canard in Elizabethan England was that 'the queen is no maid, and she hath had three sons by the Earl of Leicester'. The rumor was false and scandalous but unstoppable. Some variants were even worse, charging the queen and her midwives with infanticide. Lurid tales told of a royal daughter destroyed 'in a very great fire of coals', and serial by-blows 'wrapped up in the embers in the chimney' or otherwise destroyed. Rumor spread through Suffolk in the 1560s 'that Lord Robert kept her majesty and that she was a naughty woman and could not rule her realm, and that justice was not administered'. A Southwark artisan asserted in 1586 that 'the queen of England is a whore and hath two bastards'. An Essex husbandman claimed similarly in 1590 'that my lord of Leicester had four children by the queen's majesty, whereof three of them were daughters and alive, and the fourth a son that was burnt' (Cockburn, ed., 1982, 355; 1980b, 276; The National Archives, Kew: SP 12/148/34, SP 12/190/56, SP 12/279/48).

More common identifications of Queen Elizabeth as 'whore', 'quean', 'jade', 'rogue' or 'rascal' pale besides these seditious fantasies, though an Irish critic railed against her majesty as 'a base bastard pisskitchen woman' (Morgan 2004, 302; see also Levin, 1998, 77-95). Both men and women were heard to say that 'because she is but a woman she ought not to be governor of a realm'. But few spoke as venomously as the disaffected Kentish laborer Jeremy Vanhill, who cursed in 1585, 'shite upon your queen, I would to God she were dead that I might shit on her face' (Cockburn, ed., 1979, 246). Few went so far as the London baker, Thomas Garner, who told listeners at Rotherhithe in 1590 'that the queen's majesty was an arrant whore and his whore, and if he could come to her he would tear her in pieces, and he would drink blood; and that he would set London on fire, and it would be a brave sight unto him' (Cockburn, ed., 1980b, 345). There was drama in these words, but none of it made up by a dramatist.

Some Elizabethans looked back to an imagined past, or forward to a better future, in either case scandalizing the present monarch. 'We shall never have a merry world so long as we have a woman governor, and as the queen lived', said a yeoman in Kent in 1568 (Cockburn, ed., 1979, 77). 'It was merry England when there was better government, and if the queen die there will be a change', declared a laborer in Essex a few years later (Samaha 1975, 69). Another Essex commoner declared in 1591 that

the queen was but a woman and ruled by noblemen, and the noblemen and gentlemen were all one, and the gentlemen and farmers would hold together one with another

so that poor men could get nothing among them, and therefore we shall never have a merry world while the queen liveth.

He further bragged that ‘if we had but one that would rise I would be the next, or else I would the Spaniards would come in that we may have some sport’ (Cockburn, ed., 1982, 373; Samaha, 1975, 69). Nor was he alone in wishing ‘that all the Spaniards of Spain were landed here in England to pull out the boors and the churls by the ears’, or avowing of the Spanish, ‘I would they were come, for the people here be all naught. A plague of God light upon them all’. Such were the sentiments of a Hertfordshire brick burner and a Kentish laborer recorded by assize courts in 1596 (Cockburn, ed., 1975a, 118; 1980a, 393). The ‘merry world’ conceit could also apply to religious developments. ‘It was never merry in England since the scriptures were so commonly preached’, declared a Suffolk petticoat-maker in 1577 (Essex Record Office, Q/SR 65/61). ‘It was a merry world when the service was used in the Latin tongue, and now we are in an evil way and going to the devil’, protested a husbandman of East Tilbury in 1581 (The National Archives, Kew: ASSI 35/23/H/36). Their voices too shaped the noise in the early modern public sphere.

Legal and administrative processes captured threatening, vaunting, and desperate words, spoken, for the most part, by ordinary Elizabethans. They illuminate a belligerent and oppositional stream in popular culture, akin to Jack Cade’s rebels. But words of protest and resistance are by no means typical of everyday discourse. The same sources replete with curses reveal counter-currents of deference, docility, and assuagement. Common discourse appears to have been self-healing, with plenty of speakers quick to soften the most dangerous expressions. When a workman in Southwark asserted in 1586 that ‘the queen of England is a whore’, another rose to silence him, ‘hold your peace, ye villain, a pox upon thee . . . get hence’. When a countryman in Essex repeated ‘that the queen was a whore’, a tailor in his company claimed to be ‘stupefied’ by these ‘horrid and diabolical words’. Witnesses to angry altercations frequently report themselves to have spoken dutifully: ‘take heed what thou sayest, though thou be drunk now thou wilt repent these words when thou art sober’; ‘these are naughty words, which ought not to be spoken’; or ‘thou rogue, meanest thou to be hanged, or knowest thou what thou speakest?’ (Cockburn, ed., 1978, 294; 1980b, 345; 1975a, 191; The National Archives, Kew: SP 12/13/21, SP 12/190/56, SP 14/143/18). Traces of such words are no more reliable or authentic than any other, but they point to the many sides of each conversation, and the fragments that survive from past to present.

6. *Conclusion*

Historical research has revealed a trove of popular discourse from the age of Shakespeare that yields contentious utterances that challenged the established

order. Some of these expressions have become well known, though others have only recently emerged from the archives. What use we make of these traces will vary with our present projects. Whether we subject them to philological, legal, social or political analysis, or connect them to Shakespeare or the history of his age, may be a matter as much of disciplinary convention as judgement or taste. I offer them here with minimal processing.

There is grist here for many mills, not least the debate about Shakespeare and early modern popular culture that Paola Pugliatti and Janet Clare stimulated at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress at Prague in July 2011.¹⁴ Pugliatti and Clare pose questions about matters central and peripheral, normative and canonical, metamorphic and marginal, as well as elite and popular, that can be addressed but not resolved through study of Shakespeare's works. The discussion may be expanded by going off stage and beyond the text, into the world of dangerous talk.

The angry and agitated voices of ordinary men and women of Elizabethan and Jacobean England invite fresh analysis in several areas of current scholarship. They illuminate 'the connection between fiction and reality' that Luca Baratta examines, 'the eternal power struggle between the upper and the lower classes' that Heike Grundmann pursues, and the 'gendered version of the popular' addressed by Mary Ellen Lamb. Early modern speakers of scandalous and seditious words give voice to 'the common blocks and lower messes' that François Laroque investigates, and to the 'subaltern hierarchies' and 'underworld' discourses examined by Vladimir Makarov. Ciara Rawnsley finds Shakespeare 'relying on and exploiting his audience's familiarity' with popular culture, and contemporary verbal expressions support her case. Fragments, mediations, and scribal renditions of scandalous spoken language, contemporary with Shakespeare's plays, also shed light on Richard Meek's exploration of Shakespeare's 'common linguistic currency', and Roberta Mulini's lexicon 'from the social margins'. They complicate the attempt by Diane Purkiss to distinguish 'culture about the popular' from 'culture made by the popular', and they challenge opinions about popular culture as an environment, a commodity, or a chimera.¹⁵

The 'dangerous talk' that concerned early modern churchmen and magistrates provides an under-explored body of informally produced text. Though not so precise and scientific as a 'control group', it none the less allows comparison between words and expressions written for Shakespeare's stage, and contemporary utterances preserved (or at least rendered) by the courts. Historians might use this material primarily to expose social relations and the shifting tensions of religious and dynastic politics. It may also contribute to discussions of Shakespeare's skill and purpose in representing, reproducing, or re-creating the demotic quirks and currents of his age. Abundant examples suggest the possibility of building towards a new corpus of demotic and non-literary texts that can be compared to the language of the plays.

¹ Historians who have explored these aspects of early modern oral culture include (in order of publication) Houlbrooke 1979; Sharpe 1980; Helmholz 1985; Ingram 1987; Gowing 1996; Fox 2000; and Cressy 2010. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

² Historical enquiries include Burke 1978; Reay, ed., 1985 and Harris, ed., 1995, especially, in the same volume, his essay 'Problematising Popular Culture', 1-27. The problem is well theorized in Wiseman 2009.

³ Gillespie and Rhodes, eds, 2006, 'Introduction', 3, 14, 15, and, in the same volume, Rhodes, 161, 173. See also Wilson 1969, 101, 122, 143-175; Fox 2000, 132; Dent 1981, 4.

⁴ The phrase 'hidden transcript' evokes the work of James Scott (1990).

⁵ 'Speech act theory' begins with J.L. Austin (1962). It treats language as action, analyses 'performative utterances', and examines the consequences of 'the perlocutionary act'. Refined by John R. Searle (1969 and 1998), it has transformed the philosophy of language. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) understands linguistic exchanges as instruments and relations of power and authority. Legal scholars concerned with 'free speech' analyze 'speech as conduct', for example, Haiman 1993; Volokh 2005; Anonymous 2007. See also Greenawalt 1989; Butler 1997.

⁶ See, for example, Reyner 1656 (John Meriton, 'To the Reader'): 'Words are but wind, is the common saying, but they are such wind as will either blow the soul to its haven of rest, if holy, wholesome, savoury, spiritual, and tending to edification, or else sink it in the dead sea and bottomless gulf of eternal misery, if idle, profane, frothy, and unprofitable' (sig. B3).

⁷ Lord Keeper Egerton in 1599, quoted in Cressy 2010, 15; Taylor 1626; West 1607, sig. F.

⁸ In addition to sources in note 1, see Kegl 1994, 253-278.

⁹ Herefordshire Record Office, Hereford (1634): Quarter Sessions Recognizances and Examinations 1627-1635.

¹⁰ Guildhall Library, London: MS. 9064/15, f. 19; MS. 9064/16, f. 206v.

¹¹ Cambridge University Archives: Vice Chancellor's Court, III 17/2.

¹² The Salisbury incident is cited in Ingram 1985, 166.

¹³ For 'by the ears', see *All's Well*, 1.2, 1; *Coriolanus*, 1.1, 234; *2 Henry IV*, 2.4, 290; Dent 1981, 259. For 'never merry world', see *2 Henry VI*, 4.2, 8; *Measure for Measure*, 3.2, 5; *Twelfth Night*, 3.1, 98.

¹⁴ Seminar on 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Popular Culture', Ninth World Shakespeare Conference, Prague, 18 July 2011, organized by Paola Pugliatti and Janet Clare, with contributions from Luca Baratta, Nicoletta Caputo, John Cox, David Cressy, Heike Grundmann, François Laroque, Vladimir Makarov, Richard Meek, Roberta Mullini, Donatella Pallotti, Natália Pikli, Diane Purkiss, Ciara Rawnsley, and Karoline Szatek-Tudor.

¹⁵ Citations from papers circulated for the Prague seminar on 'Shakespeare and Early Modern Popular Culture'.

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Shakespeare and the Words of Early Modern Physic: Between Academic and Popular Medicine. A Lexicographical Approach to the Plays

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Abstract

The article aims at showing how Shakespeare relied on the medical vocabulary shared by his coeval society, which had, for centuries, been witnessing the continuous process of vernacularization of ancient and medieval scientific texts. After outlining the state of early modern medicine, the author presents and discusses the results of her search for relevant medical terms in nine plays by Shakespeare. In order to do this, a wide range of medical treatises has been analysed (either directly or through specific corpora such as *Medieval English Medical Texts*, MEMT 2005, and *Early Modern English Medical Texts*, EMEMT 2010), so as to verify the ancestry or the novelty of Shakespearean medical words. In addition to this, the author has also built a corpus of word types derived from seventeenth-century quack doctors' handbills, with the purpose of creating a word list of medical terms connected to popular rather than university medicine, comparable with the list drawn out of the Shakespearean plays. The results most stressed in the article concern Shakespeare's use of medical terminology already well known to his contemporary society (thus confuting the Oxfordian thesis about the impossibility for William Shakespeare the actor to master so many medical words) and the playwright's skill in transforming – rather than inventing – old popular terms. The article is accompanied by five tables that collect the results of the various lexicographical searches.

Keywords: Drama, Medicine, Popular Culture, Shakespeare.

Healing was, and in some parts of the world still is, a social drama, a public performance involving elaborate rituals.
Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 2006

Pray you, sir, was 't not the wise woman of Brentford?
William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1602

1. *Introduction*

1.1 *Words, Words, Words*

Strangely enough, no panel devoted to medicine is included in *Shakespeare's Words. A Glossary and Language Companion* (Crystal and Crystal 2002), while

so many others are present in the volume (such as ‘Archaisms’, ‘Exclamations’, ‘Politeness’ and ‘Responses’ plus a further 42). Actually there is a glossary panel for ‘Plants’ (330-333), but this – as its title implies – deals with medicine only very indirectly, since the ‘Comment’ column seldom highlights a particular plant’s connection with medicine. The omission of a medicine panel, which might have listed all the relevant terms interspersed in Shakespeare’s works, could be justified by the authors’ choice not to distinguish between metaphorical and plain meanings of many medical words, but no explanation is given. My article does not claim to fill this gap,¹ but will try to identify which words used by Shakespeare in his plays were already known at the level of popular ‘physic’ and which, if any, he took from his coeval scientific treatises. The final purpose of my intervention is to estimate the role played in Shakespeare by popular and widespread medical knowledge (also derived from the herbal tradition of wise women)² *vs* the contribution of the regular practitioners and their documents (see Pelling 2003 for the distinction between ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ practitioners).

1.2 *Methodological Premises (and Limits)*

Since the nineteenth century various scholars have studied the presence of physicians, apothecaries and surgeons not only on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage at large, but particularly in Shakespeare’s plays, deftly highlighting the role played by these characters and by medicine, collecting quotations from the plays and emphasising the function of medical practitioners in the texts (see Stearns 1865; Chesney 1884; Silvette 1967). Recently scholars have analysed various Elizabethan and Stuart plays foregrounding ‘[t]he perilous and shifting conjunctions of nature, disease, the patient, the practitioner’s art, performance, and the representations of these conjunctions in early modern drama’ (Moss and Peterson 2004, xi),³ and Pettigrew (2007), via an even more comprehensive cultural approach, has studied how Shakespeare uses medical discourse and displays medical practice. The close relationship between the playwright and Dr. John Hall, one of his sons-in-law, has also been stressed, in order to explain Shakespeare’s medical knowledge (Tierra 2008), while precisely this knowledge has been used by Oxfordians to deny ‘William of Stradford’ authorship of the plays (Davis 2000, 55). While grounding my research on previous critical results, in my article I would like to search the plays for medical terms hinting at the influence of popular medicine, at a time when scientific medicine was still lagging behind. And this by means of a computer-aided and corpus-based lexicographical analysis.

In order to ground my research on reliable data, after outlining the state of early modern medicine, I’ll make use of a corpus of seventeenth-century quacks’ handbills, which I have built up myself by transcribing one third of the two British Library collections containing them (*A Collection of 185 advertise-*

ments; A Collection of 231 advertisements). Of course, this corpus displays the language used in its historical context, i.e. later than Shakespeare's times, but I consider it useful because it contains a rich medical lexicon deriving mainly from popular use, rather than from university knowledge.⁴ From this corpus a list of keywords will be extracted as resulting from the concordancer Ant-Conc 3.2.1 (Anthony 2009). Secondly – with the help of the MEMT corpus (which also includes some texts of the early sixteenth century, Taavitsainen, Pahta, and Mäkinen 2005) – another list of keywords relating to the field of medicine and remedy books will be built, and compared with the previous one, in order to verify the permanence of the older terms in seventeenth-century language. What proves to have a long duration and words of a high ranking will be searched, later, throughout Shakespeare's plays, so as to verify their durability and/or variation in the Shakespearean vocabulary.⁵

A subsequent phase will be devoted to checking, on the basis of some early modern medical texts, to what extent Shakespeare drew on contemporary terminology, or to what extent he still relied on the previous medical lexicon, which, in his times, had already become part of Elizabethan shared knowledge. This phase will also take advantage of the recently issued EMENT corpus (2010).

Finally, the labels of 'popular' and/or 'elite' medicine will also be discussed according to the results of the previous sections, in order to see whether, and how far, the language of 'physic' in Shakespearean plays was permeated with words coming from the social margins, or rather adhered to the lexicon approved by the Royal College of Physicians.

From the steps outlined above, it is evident that such a project would require more space than allotted for this contribution. Therefore, since a large amount of data is expected, on this occasion my lexicographical results will be verified in a limited number of plays, leaving further in-depth exploration to future research.

2. *Physicians, Surgeons, and Empirics in the Sixteenth Century*

2.1 *Henry VIII and Physic*

In 1421, nearly a century before Henry VIII founded the College of Physicians (1518), a petition was written by some members of the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge, who asked that

no man, of no maner estate, degree or condicion, practise in Fisik from this tyme forward bot he have long tyme y-used the scoles of fisik withynne som universitee, and be graduated in the same. ... Undur payne of long emprisonement, and paynge xl li ... to the Kyng; and that no woman use the practise of fisik under the same payne.

(*Rotuli Parliamentorum*, IV, 158, quoted in Rawcliffe 1997, 120)

Only during the third year of Henry VIII's reign did Parliament issue a law which observed that

the science and cunning of Physick and Surgery (to the perfect knowledge whereof be requisite both great learning and ripe experience) is daily within this Realm exercised by a great multitude of ignorant persons, of whom the greater part have no manner of insight in the same, nor in any other kind of learning. Some also can no letters on the Book, so far forth that common Artificers, as Smiths, Weavers, and Women boldly and accustomedly take upon them great Cures, and things of great difficulty; in the which they partly use Sorcery and Witchcraft, partly apply such Medicines unto the disease, as be very noyous, and nothing meet ... (3 H. VIII. C11, in Merret 1660, 1-2)

Non-licensed people were consequently prohibited from practising medicine and surgery within the city of London and 'within seven miles of the same'. The licence had to be obtained from religious authorities who availed themselves of university physicians. Some years after that (in the tenth year of Henry's reign), the College of Physicians was created via a royal letter patent, giving Thomas Linacre and other royal physicians – all of them university graduates – the privilege to constitute a corporation in charge of testing would-be physicians. As a consequence only after obtaining the College's approbation was a physician allowed to practice in London (14. 15. H 8. C 5, in Merret 1660, 9-10). In spite of these restrictions, though, some time afterwards, in 1542, the king issued what goes under the label of 'Quacks' charter' (34, 35 H.8. C 8). This law, probably due to the small number of university doctors in the country and – as the document declares – because of the *Chirurgions*' 'minding only their own luces', gave permission to practice to everyone 'as well men as women, whom God hath endued with the knowledge of the nature, kind and operation of certain herbs, roots and waters, and the using and ministering of them, to such as been pained with customable diseases'. These people were allowed to work 'within any part of the Realm of England, or within any other of the Kings Dominions', provided that their healing remedies were limited to 'outward sore[s]' (Merret 1660, 27-29). In other words, the College's power resulted hedged and limited and the role of empirics was recognized and tolerated by law.

2.2 *Women Healers*

It is evident from these historical notes that so far physicians and surgeons were considered as one single body. However, later a distinction was made according to which surgeons, not to mention apothecaries, were considered separate 'mysteries' (actually surgeons were grouped with the Barbers in a single company in 1540, while apothecaries had to wait longer in order to see their profession officially recognized in 1617). What appears very interesting in the above mentioned royal documents are the words they use for women: the earliest bill indirectly (but not excessively so!) accuses women of witchcraft and illiteracy,

while the latest acknowledges women's expertise in traditional herbal cunning, and does not touch the problem of literacy. All these aspects – the role of women in health care, together with limited female literacy when compared with men's – will continue to be at the basis of the social condemnation of women healers: suffice it to remember the Countess's words to Helena in AWW:

But think you, Helen,
 If you should tender your supposed aid,
 He would receive it? He and his physicians
 Are of a mind; he, that they cannot help him,
 They, that they cannot help: how shall they credit
 A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,
 Embowell'd of their doctrine, have left off
 The danger to itself? (1.3.233-40)

On a non-fictional level, the learned reproval of women healers is witnessed, as late as 1651, by the engraving on the frontispiece of James Primerose's *Popular Errours* showing a woman being prevented by an angel from getting near a sick man's bed.⁶ Women, together with unlicensed practitioners, were considered 'empirics', then, and as such – in spite of Henry's 1542 statute – dangerous to the public health.

A specific historical process mustn't be overlooked, i.e. the dissolution of monasteries in the late 1530s, which 'released' throughout the country many friars, monks and nuns. Most of them – according to a century-long tradition – were well-trained in growing, collecting and using herbs both as simples and compounds not only for their communities' necessities but also to relieve the poor who crowded in for help (see Maple 1968, 66-67). Many empirics, then, were available around England, and administered remedies to the sick, especially administering external cures (thus leaving the cure of internal diseases to university physicians), so much so that Thomas Gale attacked the 'rude Emperikes' and those 'who, under the name of Chirurgians be nothing els but open murderers' (Gale 1563, ii^v), they being favoured because 'without penaltie and correction of lawes frelye [they] take on them the practise of Chirurgerie' (Cii^r).

Women, though, had always been the 'family doctors', those in charge of caring for the health of whole households (and more besides), as it clearly appears from the letter John Paston III sent to his wife, Margery, around 1487:

Mastress Margery, I recomand me to yow, and I prey yow in all hast possybyll to send me by the next swer messenger that ye can gete a large playster of *your flose vngwentorum* for the Kynges Attorney Jamys Hobart; for all hys dysease is but an ache in hys knee. He is the man that brought yow and me togedyrs, and I had lever then xl li. ye koud wyth *your playster* depart hym and hys peyne. But when ye send me the playster ye must *send me wryghtyng hough it shold be leyd to and takyn fro hys knee, and*

*hough longe it shold abyd on hys kne vnremevyd, and hough longe the playster wyll laste good, and whethyr he must lape eny more clothys a-bowte the playster to kepe it warme or nought. And God be wyth yow. Your John Paston (italics and emphasis mine)*⁷

John Paston asks his wife not only to send him a balm used by the family at home, but also to let him have all the necessary information for the dosage and the whole curing process, thus showing himself to be completely in the dark as for health-care procedures.

From the rich correspondence between the male and female members of the Paston family in the fifteenth century it is clear that those women could at least read, but for them and for many other women from social lower classes reading was not strictly necessary in order to possess the knowledge transferred from mothers to daughters, i.e. that mentioned in Henry VIII's 'Quacks' Charter'.⁸ However, in Elizabethan London female practitioners themselves, far from collecting their own herbs, 'were just as likely to buy their medicines, or at least their ingredients, from apothecaries' (Pelling 1997, 76), i.e. the 'mythical' figure of the herb-woman seems to belong to the romance landscape of *Pericles*, for which Shakespeare built the word, and to the countryside, rather than to the reality of the city.⁹

2.3 *Medicine, English, and Print*

In the sixteenth century both lay and university-trained medical practitioners started to have access to more and more medical treatises written in English, a quantity which increased during the century and which continued the trend of vernacularization begun as early as the last quarter of the fourteenth century (see Taavitsainen 2004). Instead of studying Latin volumes, they could rely on a certain variety of English books, the spread and relatively easy availability of which was promoted by print. These books were both translations of the classical texts (Galenic medicine still held the floor till late in the seventeenth century), and books of remedies published for family use, when sickness was cared for by the household women, and also for a wider and wider readership: '[b]ooksellers and printers financed, created, and disseminated popular health manuals to a new body of readers' (Furdell 2002, 29).

If Sir Thomas Elyot found it necessary to preface the second edition of his *The Castel of Helthe* to justify the use of English in a book dealing with 'herbes and medicines' (1541, Aiii^v), by protesting that 'if phisitions be angry, that I have wryten phisike in englyshe, let theym remembre, that the grekes wrate in greke, the Romanes in latyne, Auicena, and the other in Arabike, whiche were their owne propre maternal tonges' (Aiv^v), later authors as well were compelled to defend their writing in their own language.¹⁰ Students' fatigue is diminished and shortened by works in English, says Thomas Gale in his preface addressed to his 'Frindly [sic] readers', because otherwise 'my Brethren Chirurgians who althoughe they are desirous to attayne ther arte, yet both

because it is so long, and not set out in our usuall language, they are frustrat of ther desire' (1563, *i). However, in spite of the process of vernacularization and of the continuous publishing of English medical books, some words were certainly still either unknown to most, or of difficult understanding. In *The Book of Compoundes* – a dialogue between Sicknes and Health, which is a part of William Bullein's *Bulleins bulwarke of defence* (1562) – Sicknes laments that 'Now you haue ended your Table, with the names of compoundes. There are certain wordes, very harde for me to understand as when you name *Apophlegmatismus*, ... I knowe not what they doe meane, by their proper names, I praiue you tell me the significacions' (1562, Iii^v). Health, of course, soon afterwards starts explaining the tough terms to Sicknes (and to the reader).

But the 'words of medicine', especially those derived from Greek and Latin, certainly continued to be considered among the 'hard words', so that glossaries were printed in order to help readers – the common ones, therefore, and not specifically the students of the university schools of 'physic' – to understand new terms (which also served to unify medical terminology all over the country). In 1598 Jacob Mosan published his translation of Christoph Wirsung's *Arzney Buch* (1568), entitled *Praxis medicinae uniuersalis, or, A generall practise of physicke*, with the addition of a glossary of 574 lemmas concerning 'Apothecaries' "simples", mainly herbs' (Schäfer 1989, I, 44), a medical book 'very meete and profitable, not only for all phisitions, chirurgions, apothecaries, and midwiues, but for all other estates whatsoeuer' (Wirsung 1598, for the complete title). Some years later Robert Cawdrey issued *A Table Alphabetically, contayning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes [...]* *With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull person [...]* (1604), addressed specifically to a female readership, with a wider variety of lexical fields and including 2543 lemmas (Schäfer 1989, I, 51). The long title of Cawdrey's 'Table' is particularly revealing, since on the one hand it still groups women – even belonging to high social classes – with the unlearned, but – on the other – it shows the advancement of literacy among women, who – at least – are considered capable of reading the 'dictionary'.¹¹

From all this, it is not difficult to perceive that Elizabethan and early Stuart society had all the instruments they needed to understand not only 'hard words' at large, but also medical ones. These works were easily readable by whoever wanted to learn (and could afford them), or wished to acquire an in-depth knowledge of a certain subject. Why couldn't Shakespeare, then, have been one of those readers, especially if we consider that the volumes mentioned (and many similar others) were all printed in London? After all, 'If medical books did not force themselves on the attention of the literate by their numbers, they probably existed in sufficient quantity by the end of the period [Tudor era] to be accessible to most of the readers who positively wanted them' (Slack 1979, 240).

3. Words in the Shakespearean Corpus: Which and Wherefrom?

3.1 The Oxfordian Position

On the basis of what written so far, it appears that for Shakespeare his ‘little Latin and less Greek’ were quite sufficient to access his coeval medical literature: actually, he didn’t need any specific classical language to read medical treatises, they being now mainly printed in English. For example, when Frank Davis writes that ‘[i]t is quite remarkable that in three plays he [Shakespeare] refers to the *pia mater*’, adding that whoever wrote the plays must ‘either have studied anatomy or read medical literature. He certainly did not get this knowledge from folk-medicine, Galen or Hippocrates’ (Davis 2000, 52-53), he is not completely favouring his own Oxfordian standpoint. In fact, ‘pia mater’ is a collocation occurring 24 times in six texts of the MEMT corpus (see Table 1).¹²

Line	Text	File	
2)	benne bineþ þe brains þer is	[pia] mater & dura mater, and þen l	(chauliac_anatomy_interpolated
3)	at kenneþ-to is dura mater &	[pia] mater, and þei ben two pannik	(chauliac_anatomy_interpolated
4)	þette in-to þe brains fro þe	[pia] mater, and þer comþe to hem vel	(chauliac_anatomy_interpolated
5)	en on þe dura mater þat þe	[pia] mater and þe brains be not greu	(chauliac_anatomy_interpolated
6)	of þe dura mater wypon þe	[pia] mater, and be cause of cõmpres	(chauliac_anatomy_interpolated
7)	nei firste, dura mater and	[pia] mater, þen þe substance of þe	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
8)	e vnder the brayn cõþeþ aþen	[pia] mater and dura and laste þe a	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
9)	þat cometh is dura mater and	[pia] mater. And þei heþþ two faise	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
10)	cranium by commissures. Of	[pia] mater narisþonge is þis in þe	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
11)	llyng of dura mater aboue	[pia] mater end of þristyngs of þe br	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
12)	- The seconde spryngþ of	[pia] mater, and þe ynnar partis is c	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
13)	whiche is now isþongen of	[pia] mater. Galien assigneþ þe fourþ	(chauliac_cyurgie.rtf [8] :
14)	þat neiþere dura mater ne	[pia] mater, þere as þey ben y-hongyd	(lanfranc_chirurgia_magna_2.r
15)	re, & of hem ys engendryde	[pia] mater. Afterward þey descenden	(lanfranc_chirurgia_magna_2.r
16)	rel forme of vnderstõdyngs.	[pia] mater environneþ ek þe hreyne.	(lanfranc_chirurgia_magna_2.r
17)	þis, whioþ þe™ is clepid	[pia] mater; and þis pannycle is þe	(chirurgie_de_1392.rtf [14] :
18)	ne bitwene þe scolle, & þe	[pia] mater, and þe neische. And þe	(chirurgie_de_1392.rtf [14] :
19)	d arteries þan y-næwæ& þe	[pia] mater, and sett here togidere	(chirurgie_de_1392.rtf [14] :
20)	ads þere þe llyve of a beast.	[pia] mater wipouten mens touchip þ	(chirurgie_de_1392.rtf [14] :
21)	, þat ben y-sprungen of þe	[pia] mater; and þe is said: Enier	(chirurgie_de_1392.rtf [14] :
22)	culus as ys dura mater and	[pia] mater weche ar þe skynneþ þat	(book_of_surgery.rtf [16] :
23)	skynnes ben icalled in Letyn	[pia] mater and dura mater. Of the	(thesaurus_pusperum.rtf [66]
24)	and his tong blaketh. But yf	[pia] mater is hurt that is the jrn	(thesaurus_pusperum.rtf [66]

Table 1: Occurrences of PIA MATER in MEMT (2005).

‘Pia mater’, therefore, was an expression widely used and known, so much so that Thomas Gale, printing his works on surgery in 1563, did not even feel it necessary to explain its meaning when introducing the subject of ‘Hydrocephalon’, a ‘tumour’ a type of which ‘is betwixt pia mater and the braine’ (1563, 27^v). Furthermore, neither the medieval sources nor Gale can be considered ‘anti-Galenic’: all of them are well inside the traditional humoral and Galenic medicine. Of course, these sources cannot be interpreted as folkloric, or derived

from popular culture; nevertheless words used in Middle English works can be thought of as part of the country's shared linguistic treasure in Elizabethan times. The last mentioned text in Table 1 (*Thesaurus pauperum*) in particular is written to help the poor unable to resort to physicians, and therefore addressed to and written for lower social classes in need of cures, as the *incipit* reveals: '[b]rother I pray the for charite that thou write to me a fewe medecynes that I myght help pore folk that falleth into sekenes and beth vnkonnyng to helpe hem sylfen and of vnpower to huyre hem leches' (f. 29^r, in MEMT, 2005).

The basic question, though, remains: did 'William of Stradford' have access to medical treatises? We cannot know, but the richness of the medical lexicon in Shakespeare's plays is not a totally convincing reason to be given in support of the Earl of Oxford regarding the issue of authorship.

3.2 *The Process by Steps and the Corpus Results*

3.2.1 - Regarding the intention stated in 1.2, I built up a wordlist from the corpus of the two BL collections of handbills, so that a seventeenth-century popular medical lexicon was available. I selected keywords relating to body parts, illnesses, medicines and physiological processes, thus creating a whole (List A) made up of terms certainly connected to medicine (very presumably derived from popular culture, given the writers of the handbills) and comparable with other subsequent lists.¹³ Afterwards, the whole Shakespearean corpus of plays (excluding *Edward III*, but including *TNK* and both versions of *Lr.*, *Q* and *F*, since I used the OUP floppy disk edition of the *Complete Plays*) was processed with the help of the AntConc 3.2.1 concordancer. Then another list (List B) was extracted from the concordance results, including the same word types as obtained from the previous one if present also in Shakespeare, with the addition of all other terms which might relate to the body and its possible diseases, such as appeared in Shakespeare's plays but not in the handbills.

A further step consisted in looking up the words of List B in the MEMT corpus, in order to verify which items were already present in vernacular medical texts of the late Middle Ages (up to c. the 1520s) and could be considered 'survivors' from the past, and which on the contrary were clearly new coinages (of course spelling variations due to the passage from Middle English to Modern English were not taken into account, for example EYE was assimilated to EY/EY3E). Of the five sections offered by MEMT ('Surgical texts', 'Specialized texts', 'Remedies and Materia medica', 'Verse' and 'Appendix'), 'Remedies and Materia medica' was chosen for a first confrontation with List B, because of the more popular origin of the texts included in this section when compared to the others; later the check was also carried out throughout the other four sections.

Such tools as lexicographical studies of early modern English, general ones (see Schäfer 1989) and those especially relating to medicine (Norri 1992; McConchie 1997) and, of course, the *OED*, were also implemented in the research.

3.2.2 - The first impressive result from the Shakespearean concordances is the high amount of words the playwright used just once in his plays (out of 25261 word types – with 1056068 word tokens – 9273 are counted as occurring only once).¹⁴ An immediate surmise might be that very specific medical nouns and adjectives appear exactly within this group, while it is evident that very widely used (and old) terms are to be found at the top of the frequency table (see Table 2).

Tokens	Type	Rank
1267	hand*	1.
1240	heart *	2.
1130	eye*	3.
700	head*	4.
696	blood	5.
497	tongue*	6.
458	mother*	7.
456	arm*	8.
429	spirit*	9.
398	ear*	10.

Table 2: Frequency ranking in the Shakespearean corpus (from List B).¹⁵

The data in Table 2, though, are soon questionable since many, if not all, of the words listed have both literal and metaphoric meanings, thus apparently invalidating the whole process. At this point a very careful verification of occurrences in their individual co-texts would have been necessary, so as to be able to say, e.g., that HEART* occurs – let's say – only 300 times out of 1240 with its exact meaning as a body part. Another example: the word SCRUPLE, indicating a unit of weight in the medical world (20 grains), is very often used in its moral meaning in the corpus (where it occurs 23 times, while SCRUPLES – always to be understood morally – occurs 5 times).¹⁶ This kind of operation, I admit, scared me and so I decided to focus only on certain plays which, due to their plots, contain situations where medicine and medical language appear relevant, also considering a fairly homogeneous distribution over time. With all the limits and drawbacks of this decision, I worked on *1H4*, *2H4*, *Wiv.*, *Rom.*, *Tro.*, *Tim.*, *Oth.*, *JC* and *Per.*¹⁷

3.2.3 - A new list (List C) was derived from the latter procedure, resulting after looking up the same words as included in List B, but in the nine-play corpus only. The results are partly visible in Table 3, which shows that no remarkable change occurs in the top ranking positions (the concordancer processed 249387 word tokens). It is interesting, though, to notice that

some very specific words, on the basis of the plays selected, occupy higher positions than in List B. For example, *Rom.* being in the selection, NURSE, with its 168 occurrences corresponding to 0.067% of all tokens in List C, acquires relevance when compared with List B in which the word does occur 227 times, but with a lower percentage equal to 0.021% (in both cases SSDD and speech headings are included).

Tokens	Type	Rank
307	hand*	1.
303	heart*	2.
233	eye*	3.
168	nurse*	4.
165	head*	5.
157	blood	6.
118	matter*	7.
103	spirit*	8.
101	ear*	9.
94	arm*	10.

Table 3: Frequency ranking in *1*, *2H4*, *Wiv.*, *Rom.*, *Tro.*, *Tim.*, *Oth.*, *JC*, *Per.* (from List C).

Apart from these remarks, a basic issue arises from the concordance data, relating to the lexical richness of the selected plays: the number of word types in List C (nine plays) is 14787. This means that these plays use a wide variety of terms, in particular some medical ones which occur in the selection more than elsewhere: for example, ACHE* occurs 11 times out of a total of 13 in the whole corpus, and other words are present only in the selected plays (e.g. BLAINS, BONE-ACHE, BURNING FEVER, COLOQUINTIDA, EPILEPSY, FALLING SICKNESS, GUTS-GRIPING etc.; see Table 4).

List C	List B	Word type
11	13	ache*
1	2	antidotes
3	4	apoplexy
10	13	apothecary (6 SSDD)
3	6	aqua-vitae
1	1	balsam
3	4	bladder
1	1	blains
2	2	blister*
2	2	bone-ache

2	3	bots
1	1	burning fever
9	25	cholera
2	3	colic
1	1	coloquintida
7	11	conceptions
3	6	contagion
5	5	curer
1	2	deafness
5	16	dram*
1	2	dropsies
4	9	drugs
101	177	ear*
1	1	epilepsy
5	17	eyelids
3	8	eyesight
2	2	falling sickness
1	2	fennel
1	2	forefinger
3	5	Galen
3	8	gout
2	2	gouty
3	4	green-sickness
2	4	gum
11	16	guts
2	2	guts-gripping (**)
1	1	herb-woman
1	2	honeysuckle
1	1	Hibbocrates
60	136	humour*
1	1	impostume
3	6	incontinent (moral?)
2	4	incurable
3	7	infectious
7	7	infirmity*
1	1	unflammation
1	1	itches
1	2	jaundice
1	1	kidney

1	2	leech
2	4	leprosy
1	3	let blood
4	5	letharg*
1	1	lime-links
9	27	liver*
1	2	mandragora
3	4	mandrake*
3	7	marrow*
2	3	medicinable
10	27	medicine*
1	1	midriff
168	229	nurse*
7	13	palate*
3	5	palsy* (**)
2	2	phthisic (**)
12	31	physician*
2	3	pill*
52	116	plague*
1	1	poppy
2	2	pothecary
1	1	poultice
10	24	pox
1	1	pregnancy
2	5	prescribe
2	6	prescription*
2	5	purblind
1	2	quicksilver
1	1	recipe
2	4	rheumatic
2	3	rupture* (**)
2	4	scab
2	2	sciatica*
14	30	scurvy (adj)
1	1	shanks
62	166	sick
2	6	simples
10	32	spleen*
3	5	sterile

2	5	sulphur
8	16	surgeon
1	2	syrups
1	3	tetter
8	15	thigh*
10	15	thumb
1	2	ulcer
1	3	ulcerous
3	4	urinal*
5	16	vapour*
16	43	vessel*
2	5	vomit*
4	11	web
1	1	wheezing-lungs
1	1	yellowness

Table 4: Frequency comparison of medical terms (from Lists C and B).¹⁸

3.3 *Shakespeare and Sixteenth-Century Medical Treatises*

3.3.1 - Few of the affections listed in the 'Quacks' Charter', the cure of which non-professionals were allowed to carry out, remain in Shakespeare (there is no trace of the names STRANGURY, MORFEW, SCALDING, BURNING, and THE STONE), whereas APOSTEMATION is substituted by the more recent IMPOSTHUME (occurring twice in the whole corpus). Only PLASTER and 'a pin and the web in the eye' survive: the former once each in *Cor.*, *Jn.*, *MND* and *Tmp.*, the latter once in *Lr.* Q (Sc. 11, 105-106), in *Lr.* F (III.iv.109-110), and in *WT* (I.ii.293). However, all these were external diseases. As for internal ones, the repertory from both List B and List C is much richer (illnesses, cures and healers in the selected plays are listed in Table 5).

Rank	Tokens	Word type
1.	168	nurse*
2.	68	wind*
3.	52	plague*
4.	48	doctor*
5.	32	pain*
6.	23	disease*
7.	14	sickness (alone)
8.	12	physician*

9.	11	ache*
10.	10	apothecary
11.	10	pox
12.	8	surgeon
13.	7	infirmity*
14.	6	cure
15.	6	plant*
16.	5	ague*
17.	5	canker*
18.	5	curer
19.	5	vapour*
20.	5	wart
21.	4	herbs
22.	4	infection
23.	4	letharg*
24.	4	miscarry
25.	3	apoplexy
26.	3	aqua-vitae
27.	3	corruption
28.	3	distemper
29.	3	contagion
30.	3	frenzy
31.	3	Galen
32.	3	gout
33.	3	green-sickness
34.	3	incontinent
35.	3	infectious (+-ly 1)
36.	3	mandrake*
37.	3	midwi*
38.	3	pestilence
39.	3	swoon
40.	2	blister*
41.	2	blot
42.	2	boils
43.	2	bone-ache
44.	2	bots
45.	2	colic

46.	2	contagious
47.	2	effects
48.	2	falling sickness
49.	2	leprosy
50.	2	gouty
51.	2	guts-gripping
52.	2	incurable
53.	2	malady
54.	2	medicinable
55.	2	palsy*
56.	2	pothecary
57.	2	phthisic
58.	2	prescription
59.	2	purblind
60.	2	rheum
61.	2	rheumatic
62.	2	scab
63.	2	sciatica*
64.	2	simples
65.	2	vomit
66.	1	antidotes
67.	1	balsam
68.	1	blains
69.	1	brainsick
70.	1	burning fever
71.	1	catch cold
72.	1	cordial
73.	1	deafness
74.	1	dropsies
75.	1	epilepsy
76.	1	fennel
77.	1	gravel
78.	1	herb-woman
79.	1	Hibbocrates
80.	1	impostume
81.	1	impotent
82.	1	inflammation
83.	1	itches
84.	1	jaundice

85.	1	leech
86.	1	let blood
87.	1	lime-kilns
88.	1	mandragora
89.	1	pepper
90.	1	poppy
91.	1	poultice
92.	1	putrefied
93.	1	qualm
94.	1	quicksilver
95.	1	recipe
96.	1	rheumy
97.	1	ruptures
98.	1	syrups
99.	1	tetter
100.	1	ulcer
101.	1	ulcerous
102.	1	wheezing-lungs

Table 5: Names of illnesses, cures and healers in the nine-play corpus.

3.3.2 - After searching for the words of Table 5 in the MEMT wordlist and sorting out those not present in late Middle Ages medical texts, I proceeded to verify through EMEMT the possible occurrence of the terms left over. The latter are in bold in the same table (30 in total). All these, apart from INCONTINENT (n. 34), BRAINSICK (n. 69), HERB-WOMAN (n. 78), LIME-KILNS (n. 87), QUALM (n. 93), RHEUMY (n. 96), and WHEEZING-LUNGS (n. 102) are attested in the sixteenth-century medical treatises included in EMEMT. All 30 items, though, were also looked up in the *OED* and their use (excluding HERB-WOMAN and LIME-KILNS)¹⁹ was proved either in texts of the same period as the plays, or even from earlier times. Most words, in the end, appeared to have been known in the Elizabethan era, even if some of them – such as INCONTINENT, for example, and LIME-KILNS – are used metaphorically in Shakespearean plays, i.e. with no medical meaning. It is interesting, however, to briefly analyse some of the 30 words, because of their ‘lexical’ history.

A) BONE-ACHE (n. 43)

The word, which the *OED* signals as present in John Skelton’s *Magnyfycence* (1520?), appears twice in *Tro.*, both times hinting at syphilis: Thersites, in 2.3.17-18, invokes ‘the vengeance on the whole camp or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache’, and – towards the end of the play in the Quarto version – inserts an ‘incurable bone-ache’ in his colourful list of maledictions, where ‘incur-

able' clearly refers to the desperate situation of people suffering from syphilis, the subsequent bone-ache caused by which could not be eliminated by any contemporary cure. While used as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, the much more frequently employed 'French pox' actually spread in the seventeenth century, and Shakespeare, therefore, still seems to follow the link between syphilis and Naples, according to what Jones writes in his *Dial for All Agues* (1566, 57; in EMEMT CDRom):

... he [George Agricola] affirmeth that the parts of the world hath varied in forme and kindes of the plage: for the Egyptians were plagued with the Lepry, ... the Neapolitanes, or rather the besegers of Naples, with the pockes (spred sence to far abrode, through al the parts of Europe, no kyngdome that I haue bene in free, the more pity).

B) BURNING FEVER (n. 70)

The word occurs in *2H4*, 4.1.54-56, when the Archbishop of York laments the common situation of illness by saying: 'we are all diseased, / And with our surfeiting and wanton hours / Have brought ourselves into a burning fever'. The usual collocation found in MEMT is 'brennyng ague' (with various spellings), while in the second half of the sixteenth century there are many instances of alternation between this older and the newer collocation 'burning fever', till the definitive adoption of the latter (see EMEMT). Thomas Gale, for example, uses the more modern form in his *Antidotarie* (included in Gale 1563), but the *OED* ignores this fact and dates the first use of the collocate to 1661 (defn. 1.b).

C) CORRUPTION²⁰ (n. 27)

The item is present in *1H4*, *2H4* and *JC*, but it is in the first play that it apparently acquires a medical, if metaphoric, meaning very similar to *CONTAGION*. Worcester, speaking of Hotspur and trying to excuse his behaviour, says: 'We did train him on, / And, his corruption being ta'en from us, / We as the spring of all shall pay for all' (*1H4*, 5.2.21-23). The word is clearly used in a moral sense; however, the phrase 'to take corruption from' seems to equate *CORRUPTION* to the *OED* 2.a. definition: 'infection, infected condition; also *fig.* contagion, taint'.

D) CURER (n. 18)

The *OED* attests the word in *St. Augustines Man* by T. Rogers ('[t]hou purger of wickednes and curer of wounds', 1581), but in a purely medical meaning it is used by Thomas Gale in his translation of Galen's *Methodus medendi* in 1586 (EMEMT). Shakespeare shows a knowledge of both usages: Thersites promises 'I'll be a curer of madmen' (*Tro.*, 5.1.47), while Shallow qualifies the evidently still neuter word with 'He is a curer of souls, and you a curer of bodies' (*Wiw.*, 2.3.36), a distinction repeated by Host later in the play when he tries to define 'Gallia and Gaul, French and Welsh, soul-curer and body-curer' (3.1.89-90).

E) FALLING SICKNESS (n. 48)

The correspondence of EPILEPSY to FALLING SICKNESS (FS) is evident (and in this meaning Shakespeare uses the term in *JC*), but what appears interesting is the progressive substitution of 'sickness' to 'evil' during the sixteenth century. EMEMT shows the transformation of the item: as early as 1528 FS is used in Mediolano, *Regimen sanitatis salerni*, but the later *Boke of Children* by Phayer (1546) alternates between FALLING EVIL and FS, an uncertainty shared by Braunschweig's *Homish Apothecarye* (1561), which talks of 'the falling euell or sykenesse'. Apart from other occurrences, Brasbridge definitively uses FS in his *Poore mans Jewel* (1578). But the old usage still persists as late as Batman's *Batman Vppon Bartholome* (1582), where there is the following definition: 'palsie or Epilepsia, that is the Falling Euyll' (all quotations are from EMEMT).

F) GREEN-SICKNESS (n. 33)

The first occurrence of the word in the *OED* refers to *Mamillia* by Robert Greene (1583), while my search in EMEMT showed that the word – meaning 'chlorosis', an anæmic disease usually associated with female adolescents – appears earlier, being used by William Bullein in his *Bulleins Bulwarke* (1562), and later, in 1578, by Brasbridge's *Poore Mans Jewel*. (This would, therefore, introduce an antedating). In my limited corpus of Shakespearean plays it occurs three times: in *Per.*, Sc. 19.22, and *Rom.*, 3.5.156, attributed to female characters, whereas in *2H4*, 4.2.90 Sir John finds it necessary to redefine the word as 'male green-sickness' when applied to young men with a sober life in his famous 'sack' speech.

G) GUTS-GRIPING (n. 51)

The phrase appears in *Tro.*, 5.1.17, in the already mentioned list of maledictions uttered by Thersites, and it also occurs in the Quarto version of the play. It does not seem to have any antecedent (and actually the *OED* cites this play as the first occurrence), but a search in EMEMT testifies to the previous existence of similar expressions. Brasbridge (*Poore Mans Jewel*, 1578) uses 'griping paines of the belly', and Hester, in his *Key of Philosophie* (1596), speaks about the 'griping torment of the belly', and of 'gripings or wind in the guts'. From these examples Shakespeare, as often happens, shows his great skill in forging words, not only when he 'invented' some of them, but mainly when he drew from the existing vocabulary and coined more impressive compounds.

H) HERB-WOMAN (n. 78)

This is a case of a real Shakespearean coinage (even if not present in McQuain and Malless 1998), occurring only once. It is to be found in *Per.*, Sc. 19.86-87, when Lysimachus answers Marina's question 'Who is my principal?' with 'Why, your herb-woman; / She that sets seeds of shame, roots of iniquity'. The passage, even if transferring the word's meaning from the medical to the

moral discourse, clearly employs linguistic elements traditionally connected to the herbal tradition of wise women.

i) INFECTIOUS (n. 35)

Shakespeare makes use of this adjective three times: there is an ‘infectious house’ in *Oth.*, 4.1.21, an ‘infectious pestilence’ in *Rom.*, 5.2.10, and ‘potent and infectious fevers’ in *Tim.*, 4.1.22. The *OED*, for the meaning 2.a (‘of diseases’), quotes *Rom.*, but at 1.a (‘having the quality or power of communicating disease by infection’) forgets to refer – while listing some previous medical works – to Queen Elizabeth I’s ‘Orders by Her Majestie’ issued in 1578, i.e. not a specialistic volume, but laws to be enforced all over the kingdom, and therefore to be known everywhere: this document quotes ‘infectious persons’, in whose presence a certain medicine, made of ‘Angelica, Gentian or Valerian’, is counseled (EMEMT).

j) SIMPLES (n. 64)

The word occurs twice: once in *Rom.*, 5.1.40, in Romeo’s description of the apothecary ‘In tattered weeds, with overwhelming brows, / Culling of simples’, and once in *Wiv.*, 1.4.59, when Dr. Caius says that, ‘for the varld’, he does not want to leave behind ‘some simples in my closet’. The word was widely used and known to mean herbs as components of medicines, especially when used individually, i.e. it belonged to the common and shared lexicon of apothecaries, physicians and surgeons, but also of those women who actually grew and picked the herbs of which their medicaments were made.

4. *Conclusions: Much Ado About Nothing?*

At the end of my endeavour perhaps it is difficult to say whether the results are worth the time spent obtaining them. But one thing emerges with certainty: even if it is true that Shakespeare enriched the English language with so many new words, this principle does not seem to be applicable to medical discourse, since the words he uses were well-known in the Elizabethan era, deriving either from the spread of medical knowledge through the vernacularization of classical texts or from the continuous writing in English by contemporary medical practitioners and surgeons.

The medical texts seen either directly or through the historical corpora I availed myself of cannot be said to be addressed exclusively to the university ‘schools of physic’. Actually they belong rather to the series of medical publications which became popular especially during the second half of the sixteenth century, many of them being written not by members of the College of Physicians, but by surgeons (e.g. Thomas Gale and Thomas Vicary), and by unlicensed practitioners, or by those interested – like Sir Thomas Elyot in the 1540s – in the field of medicine. John Jones was a physician, but from

the complete title of his *A Dial for All Agues; Containinge the names in Greeke, Latten, and Englyshe, with the diuersities of them, Symple and compounde, proper and accident, definitions, deuisions, causes, and signes, comenly hetherto known: Uery profitable for al men ...* (1566) it is evident that his readership was not necessarily limited to medical practitioners. Paul Slack writes that ‘only a third of the textbooks, regimens and collections of remedies with identifiable authors came from the pens of established physicians’ (1979, 252). William Bullein was also a physician, but his work being in dialogic form, the author’s will to develop medical awareness and to pass his knowledge to a large readership is unmistakable.²¹ A similar intention is readable in the title of Mosan’s translation of Wirsung’s *Arznei Buch* (Wirsung 1598). By the end of the sixteenth century, therefore, medicine was using a widely anglicized vocabulary, made available to all educated people.²² When publishing his *Antidotarie*, Thomas Gale still apologized to his ‘louynge Reader’ because ‘I put the receptes and compositions in the Latyne tongue’, adding as an excuse that

the Latyne names are uniuersallye used, & that there are an infinite number of simples which want Englyshe names, & those for the more part that may be Englyshed, are not uniuersally known through England by that same name: because of the diuersitie that is used in callinge of simples, accordynge to the cuntry. (Gale 1563, Aaa.iii^v-Aaa.iii^{iv})

However, while stressing the necessity for a common scientific vocabulary in English, he advised his readers to ‘conferre with the Apothecarie ... or elles use the helpe of a Dictionarie’ in case of necessity (Gale 1563: Aaa.iii^v). Even when translated, some words were possibly still considered ‘hard’: for example, in the *Table Alphabetical* Cawdrey (1604) listed ‘epilepsies’, explaining it as ‘the falling sicknes’, and ‘lethargie’ as ‘a drowsie and forgetfull disease’. These words, both present in *Oth.*, are not ‘translated’ in the play, but certainly Shakespeare trusted his spectators and relied on widely shared medical understanding (both lexical items appear in the texts collected in MEMT, i.e. they were used in the later Middle Ages).²³

What can be affirmed – once again – is that Shakespeare mainly used a medical vocabulary with which his audience was acquainted, actually adding very little to it. This terminology cannot be said to come exclusively either from the social margins or from university-trained physicians, since early modern medicine had not yet reached such a high scientific level as to separate these two social spheres neatly. Galen and ‘Hibbocrates’ (*Wiv.*, 3.1.61) were still the authorities and even if Paracelsus is mentioned by Lafew (*AWW*, 2.3.11), chemical medicine itself was not widely practised. All remedies were still based on the humoral tradition and on popular herbal recipes. Regular and irregular medical practice had not yet undergone any real scientific process, in spite of the new empiricist movement. In the field of medicine, therefore,

Shakespeare used the words his country had used for ages, sometimes creating new effective compounds, sometimes recalling some nearly forgotten terms of the past, but very rarely inventing.

The results of my research also contradict the basic assumptions of the Oxfordian position concerning Shakespeare's medical knowledge, i.e. that 'The vast majority of medical works were published in Latin or in Greek' and that England suffered from 'the relative scarcity of available books on medicine' (Davis 2000, 45). Even if it is true that on the Continent medicine was starting its great scientific progress more quickly than in England, it is not true to maintain that early modern England lacked vernacular medical literature, given the long process of vernacularization started far back during the Middle Ages.

What was the role of popular medicine (and of popular culture) in all this? How far can the majority of the volumes quoted here refer to (or take part in) popular culture? None is an almanac, none a handbill; on the contrary they all seem to belong to the elite kind of printed material.²⁴ Only that – given the relatively high number of reprints (see Slack 1979, 239) – one is entitled to suppose that their diffusion and success was large, thus reaching a wide and multifaceted readership, although limited to the literate and fairly well-off. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the matter of medicine did not change much during the whole sixteenth century, so as to justify the inclusion of many of these texts in a then 'popularized' medical library. One cannot forget, furthermore, that Shakespeare wrote first of all for London spectators, many of whom had, for decades, been accustomed to recurrent plague visitations and to difficult and unhealthy living conditions (i.e. they could recognize and name many a disease and a lot of frightening symptoms), and – at the same time – were 'exposed' to the popular medical literature inserted in almanacs and calendars, something that – though mixed with astrological stuff and folklore – could do nothing but rely on the same scholastic vocabulary as the university physicians. As Nagy affirms, 'popular practice was at the centre of health care, not its fringe' (1988, 79), simply because '[t]here were not two distinct medical cultures' (Slack 1979, 273); or because even if people recognized the differences between the 'learned physician trained in the universities and the empiric or mountebank', they were not troubled by them: 'in practice those distinctions were often ignored' (Wear 1992, 17).

¹ After this article was already finished, I read the book by S. Iyengar (2011) which systematically covers the issue of the rich presence of medical language in Shakespeare. The volume lists entries in alphabetical order, offering for each term the historical meaning (in section A), the identification of occurrences in Shakespeare (in section B), and brief citations of early modern medical treatises employing the word, and of modern studies on the subject (in section C). The wide scope of this volume does not seem to supersede, though, the more

limited purpose of the present paper, especially since the latter uses various and different sources. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

²Given the scope of this paper, vernacular herbal literature will not be taken into account. Suffice it to say that it dates back to the Middle Ages, with Old English manuscripts and such later texts as the translation into Middle English of Macer's *De viribus herbarum* (before the fifteenth century) and Henry Daniel's *Rosemary* (mid-fourteenth century). See MEMT 2005. The sixteenth-century production reached its apex with John Gerard's *Herball* (1597). For plants and herbs in Shakespeare, see Kail 1986, 123-140; Tierra 2008. Neither will I touch on 'books of secrets' (but see Eamon 1996).

³In the same book, see in particular Traister 2004.

⁴I have discussed the relevance of these handbills for popular culture in Mullini 2011 (see also Mullini 2009).

⁵The plays themselves will be searched by using the AntConc 3.2.1. concordancer.

⁶The 'Explication of the Frontispiece' reads: 'Loe here a woman comes in *charitie* / To see the *sicke*, and brings her *remedie*. / ... But lowe an *Angell* gently puts her backe, / Lest such *erroneous* course the *sicke* do wrack, / Leads the *Physitian*, and guides his hand, ...' (Primerose 1651, ll. 1-2, 19-21).

⁷This version is drawn from <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=Paston;rgn=div2;view=text;cc=cme;node=Paston%3A10.74>>, accessed 9 Jan 2011; a modern spelling edition is in Davis, ed., 1983, 257.

⁸For the relevance of wise women in health care in provincial parishes, see Cook 1986, 32-33, and Laroche 2009 for the relationship between women and herbal knowledge. A general survey of Medieval and early Renaissance medicine is to be found in Siraisi 1990.

⁹For a concise view of the role and status of medicine in early modern times, see Mikkeli and Marttila 2010.

¹⁰See Wear 1992, 20-24 for Elyot's defence against the College of Physicians of London.

¹¹On the levels of literacy in England see Barry 1995; Reay 1998, 36-70; Fox 2000.

¹²All these texts date between the end of the fourteenth century and the first quarter of the fifteenth (see MEMT 2005, 'Catalogue of MEMT Texts').

¹³For brevity this list and the others are not included here.

¹⁴A caveat must be kept in mind: given the source of my Shakespearean corpus – the OUP electronic edition – editorial words (and the SSDI) were also counted in the totals. Certainly the editors' intervention does not affect the data referring to the occurrence of 'hard' lexical terms. Due to the former reason, though, I have not tried to calculate percentages, leaving this phase to a possible further study, for the necessity of editing the individual files without any spurious material.

¹⁵Here and elsewhere in the tables, an asterisk signals that plural forms have also been counted.

¹⁶It is interesting to note that Shakespeare has Falstaff make a joke of the transfer of meaning from the material to the ethical sphere when, answering the Lord Chief Justice, who is there to admonish him, he says: 'I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not so patient. Your lordship may minister the potion of imprisonment to me in respect of poverty; but how I should be your patient to follow your prescriptions, the wise may make some dram of a scruple, or indeed a scruple itself' (*2H4*, 1.2.128-132).

¹⁷At least a note is needed to justify my choice, besides that which has already been stated. My first reason for the choice derives from the plots of the individual plays, even if this criterion might have suggested quite different plays, given the omnipresent use of medical language in the canon. But there were other valid motives, mainly deriving from either the plots themselves or the frequency of certain word-types: *1H4*, *2H4*, and *Wiv*. feature a 'great' body such as Falstaff's, with all its possible parts and diseases, *Rom*. has a herb collector such as Friar Laurence and an apothecary among its characters, *Tim*. deals with moral and bodily

corruption; *Tro.*, *Oth.*, *Per.* and *JC* present interesting word-types because of their either high or low frequency (for the relevance of high- and low-frequency lexical items see Halliday 1989, 65). Furthermore, I wanted to have samples of comedies, tragedies, history and problem plays, and romances represented in my corpus. Of course my 'collection' consists in less than a quarter of the Shakespearean canon, so that my whole paper has to be read as a methodological attempt at the issue raised, and should later be extended to a more representative set.

¹⁸ (**) These terms occur twice in *Tro.*: both in the Folio and Quarto version.

¹⁹ Iyengar 2011, 192 explains the term as follows: 'This obscure and figurative description in Thersites' long catalog of the 'diseases of the South' could allude to the painful chalk deposits found in the hands in chronic gout, or, more likely, to the excruciating burning itch of palmar psoriasis'.

²⁰ CORRUPTION is included in this section because its meaning in the play (*IHA*) seems to anticipate a general, although at least partly metaphorical, medical sense of the term.

²¹ See Taavitsainen 1999 for an analysis of dialogic medical treatises.

²² This fact is also stressed by Iyengar 2011, 7.

²³ In MEMT 'epilepsy' occurs 21 times with different spellings; there is also the adjective 'epilentic' (in *De spermate*, dating back to the late fifteenth century): it is a first coinage of 'epileptic', a form of which Shakespeare is considered to be the 'inventor' in *Lr.* F, 2.2.81 / *Lr.* Q, Sc. 7.79 (McQuaine and Malless 1998, 59). However, to further limit the halo of inventiveness surrounding this adjective, it is notable to see that Thomas Vicary, surgeon to all Tudor sovereigns, uses a very similar form: writing of how human brain may suffer from the influences of the Moon, he says 'And this [the brain] is moved in men that be lunaticke or mad, and also in men that be *epulenticke* or hauing the falling sicknesse' (1587, 17; my italics).

²⁴ For women's almanacs see Weber 2003.

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‘What say the citizens’ in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*?

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Abstract

Shakespeare’s residency in London coincided with a period in which the City underwent unprecedented demographic growth and commercial expansion. By the 1590s two thirds to three quarters of the adult males resident in the City were citizens, at the time a uniquely urban identity that denoted a person who possessed ‘the freedom’ and was thereby entitled to the economic and political privileges of enfranchised inhabitants of a city or borough. These phenomena were transforming urban popular culture, yet their impact is largely unregistered in studies of Shakespeare and popular culture. The article seeks to direct attention to the presence and significance of the citizen, citizen languages and the culture of citizenship in *Richard III*, the play in which the word ‘citizen’ appears more often than in any other Shakespearean drama yet is rarely the focus of critical enquiry. The relative critical neglect of the citizens and of ‘citizen language’ more generally in *Richard III* stems from the widespread perception that its freemen are ultimately complicit in Richard’s tyranny. The paper challenges such views and focuses attention on Richard’s sustained effort to play the citizen to secure the crown.

Keywords: Citizens, Commerce, Consent, Election, Urbanisation.

1. *Citizenship and Popular Culture*

The culture of citizenship in late Elizabethan England marks an intersection between urbanisation and commercial expansion, two interrelated forces which were transforming contemporary popular culture.¹ The mounting pace of urbanisation was particularly acute in London, which experienced a growth rate about three times that of the national population in the last half of the sixteenth century (Boulton 1987, 2). Although estimates of the inhabitants of the City of London in 1550 vary considerably, most place the population at between 61,000 and 80,000, rising to about 200,000 in 1600 and approaching 400,000 by 1650, more than quadrupling in the span of a hundred years.² To put this in context, whereas London was Europe’s seventh or eighth largest city in 1550, fifty years later only two cities (Paris and Naples) outstripped it, by 1650 Paris alone exceeded it and by 1700, with a population exceeding half a million, it had become Europe’s biggest metropolis (Boulton 1987, 1; Sacks 2000, 22; Newman 2007, 2). London’s unprecedented demographic growth between 1550 and 1650 was linked to its burgeoning market economy which drew increasing numbers of migrants to the city, many of them young men who aspired to become citizens.³ In sixteenth-century England ‘citizen’ was a specifically urban identity

and denoted someone who had been admitted to 'the freedom' and was entitled to the economic and political rights and privileges of enfranchised inhabitants of an incorporated city or borough. By stipulating that all freemen 'be of some mystery or trade', the charter granted to London by Edward II in 1319 effectively ensured that the prescribed route to the civic franchise was via membership of one of the city's corporate organisations – its trade and craft companies or 'guilds' – and that only guild members would exercise political power in the city (see Rappaport 1989, 31-35). Consequently, virtually all London citizens were also guild members, the two identities being so closely entwined as to be virtually inseparable with the two oaths of admission frequently being sworn in separate ceremonies on the same day.⁴ Given the duplex nature of early modern citizenship, the urban freeman of the 1590s is perhaps best understood as a 'corporate citizen' and the freedom as a form 'corporate citizenship'.⁵

Steve Rappaport has described the freedom as 'the most important criterion upon which was based the distribution of urban privileges in the sixteenth century' (1989, 29; see also Selwood 2010, 39). Shakespeare, however, was unlikely to have benefited from those privileges during his time in London (see also J.M. Archer 2005, 1). London-born sons of freemen were entitled to apply for company membership and thereby citizenship by inheritance (or 'patrimony'), some obtained it through marriage to a freeman's widow or daughter, others purchased it by paying a fine in a process known as 'freed by redemption', and a few were granted it through city or royal patronage, but of the various routes to corporate citizenship completion of a lengthy apprenticeship in London was by far the most common.⁶ As a married adult migrant to London, Shakespeare was ineligible for the first and second, appears not to have resorted to the third, been a recipient of the fourth or pursued the fifth. In time he would purchase a coat of arms, style himself a gentleman, become one of the 'King's Men' and be expected to wear royal livery on ceremonial occasions, yet in London he remained a 'foreigner', as adult English migrants from beyond the City were termed (overseas immigrants were 'aliens' or 'strangers').⁷ Whether his outsider status influenced how Shakespeare viewed the emerging culture of citizenship in the capital we can only speculate; however, not being a freeman of the City no more prevented him from writing about citizens than his not being a king prevented him from writing about monarchs. As Shakespeare's status as a foreigner in London illustrates, citizens could be said to constitute 'a privileged group'⁸ in that they possessed economic and political rights and privileges from which strangers, foreigners, non-free Englishmen and the overwhelming preponderance of women were excluded. Yet as an estimated two thirds to three quarters of the male population of the City of London in the 1590s were citizens and enjoyed the privileges of the freedom, the culture of citizenship was also an integral part of urban popular culture in London by the close of the sixteenth century.⁹ An examination of Shakespeare and popular culture must therefore include some consideration of the impact on his writing of the increasingly self-conscious

and assertive culture of citizenship within the rapidly expanding metropolis in which he resided for much of his life and his plays were chiefly staged.¹⁰

Richard III may seem an odd choice of play for such a study. Asked to nominate the Shakespearean drama in which the word 'citizen', in its singular and plural forms, appears most frequently in the dialogue how many would answer *Richard III* (c. 1592)?¹¹ Yet it occurs nearly twice as often in this English history play (eleven occurrences in total) as it does in *Coriolanus* (the play with the second highest number of occurrences at six) and over five times as often as in *Julius Caesar* (two), a pair of plays set at the time of the Roman republic which turn on highly charged encounters between members of the governing elite and citizens of Rome. A survey of criticism would suggest that the lexical prevalence of citizens in *Richard III* is a statistical aberration, for while commentary on the citizens in the two Roman plays is commonplace those in *Richard III* typically receive only glancing attention despite the fact that key members of the ruling elite make a determined effort to sway the political sympathies of citizens at a crucial moment in *Richard III* as they do in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and like their counterparts in *Coriolanus* the citizens in *Richard III* participate in a process of popular election. However the outcome of popular political participation in *Richard III* appears, at first glance, to be the inverse of that in *Coriolanus*, for whereas Rome's citizens eventually block Coriolanus's nomination as consul and their tribunes secure his exile,¹² the initial refusal by London's citizens to proclaim Richard 'England's royal King' (3.7.18) is subsequently overturned by their mayor in the first quarto version and by the mayor and his companions in the First Folio text.¹³ The comparative critical neglect of the citizens and of 'citizen language'¹⁴ more generally in *Richard III* stems from the widespread perception that its freemen are meek at best and at worst ultimately complicit in Richard's tyranny. The view that London's citizens are marginal players in the drama of state and the play of history in *Richard III* has distracted attention from Shakespeare's broader engagement with citizen culture and discourse, which this paper will argue is much more extensive in *Richard III* than is generally recognised. Shakespeare's Richard of Gloucester commits his first major political blunder when he miscalculates the willingness of London's citizens to endorse his succession to the throne. A similar underestimation of the extent to which the emergent civic culture of 1590s London permeates the drama and inflects Richard's speech is commonplace in critical commentaries on *Richard III*.¹⁵ The growing body of research on urbanisation and commercial exchange in early modern England makes this a timely moment to reappraise the intersection of citizens with history in Shakespeare's play.

2. Political Capital

Richard III is set predominantly in the City of London and its immediate environs, and the relationship between the City and the crown, citizens and

monarchs (both actual and potential) is an important consideration in the duke of Gloucester's bid to become king. Toward the end of act four, Richard marches from London never to return (4.4.448-451). Buckingham is executed in Salisbury at the outset of act five, and the remainder of the fifth act centres on the battle at Bosworth Field near Tamworth in Staffordshire where Richard encounters the armies of Richmond as they march 'towards London' (4.5.14). But apart from the execution of Rivers, Vaughan and Grey at Pomfret Castle (3.3), the first four acts of *Richard III* unfold in and about the city, and by the second scene of the fourth act Richard is enthroned. Richard Gloucester delivers his opening speech in a London street where he encounters first Clarence and then Hastings before intercepting Lady Anne as she accompanies Henry VI's hearse from St Paul's cathedral. Moments after promising Anne to see Henry's body interred at Chertsey monastery in Surrey (1.2.201-203), Richard redirects the pallbearers to Whitefriars priory in Fleet Street just beyond the city walls. Richard invites Anne to await him and instructs Clarence's executioners and later Catesby to report to him at Crosby Place, his London residence. Meanwhile, the royal court is resident in the palace of Westminster alongside the Thames, a short distance upriver from the City, and after the death of her husband Edward IV and the arrest of her brother Lord Rivers, Queen Elizabeth seeks sanctuary in nearby Westminster Abbey. On his first appearance Prince Edward is formally welcomed to London (3.1) and exits the stage '[w]ith a heavy heart' (3.1.149) for the royal Tower of London where he will be smothered alongside his brother, his uncle Clarence and Hastings already having been executed there. When Buckingham unexpectedly fails to persuade the citizens to elect Richard as their king at the Guildhall, the seat of London's municipal government, Richard launches a second attempt to secure the City's support for his coronation, this time at Baynard's Castle, the stronghold and former royal residence which lent its name to one of London's twenty-six wards.

Given the play's focus on how Richard becomes king, the fact that the majority of the action unfolds within the vicinity of London underscores the City's importance to the crown. Ever since the Great Rising of 1381 during the reign of Richard II,¹⁶ England's sovereigns had been periodically reminded of the need to win and maintain the loyalty of Londoners to secure their hold on the throne. Long reliant on the municipal government's capacity to muster trained bands of militia to defend the capital and prosecute their wars, by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries successive Tudor and Stuart monarchs were also critically dependent on loans from the City to fund their reign (Bucholz and Ward 2012, 20, 83). Shakespeare's Richard too has every reason to court the favour of London's citizens and to seek to prevent the forces of Richmond from converging on a vital source and conduit of power in the kingdom. For it is above all as a locus and nexus of political capital that London features in Shakespeare's play. As is typical of plays

written before the printing in 1598 of John Stow's landmark work of urban chorography *A Survey of London* and remains characteristic of Shakespeare,¹⁷ the evocation of material London in *Richard III* is sketchy at best. The clutch of well-known buildings which figure in the drama – the Tower of London, Westminster, Westminster Abbey, Crosby Place, Baynard's Castle and the Guildhall – do not serve to conjure up an intimate sense of the city's vicinities, neighbourhoods and communities. Rather than sharply differentiating London's constituent parts, each site functions as a metonym for a strand of power and authority – royal, religious, aristocratic and civic – which Richard seeks to spin into a single 'deadly web' (1.3.238-239), not neglecting to extend its tracery to the city's streets where he undertakes his bold seduction of Lady Anne and tries to persuade Elizabeth to support his espousal to her daughter. In each he finds willing agents to assist him in his designs – that is until Buckingham returns from the Guildhall to report that '[t]he citizens are mum and speak not a word' (3.7.3), stonily refusing to voice their assent to Richard supplanting Prince Edward as their future king. To determine what their silence signifies, we need to examine the culture of citizenship and its expression in the play more closely, for the importance of London's citizens is figured in Richard's language.

3. *Engendering the City: Wife/Royal Mistress/Whore*

For all his and Buckingham's assiduous courtship of citizens later in the drama, Richard's undisguised scorn for and hostility towards the first Londoner to feature in the dialogue is revealing of his true regard for the City. Long before the first citizens appear on stage in *Richard III* an infamous city-wife has made her presence felt at court. Directly after Richard confides to the audience that he has plotted to have his brother George, the duke of Clarence 'mewed up' in prison '[t]his day' (1.1.38), Clarence enters on cue 'with a guard of men' (1.1. sd.) who are escorting him to the Tower. 'Why this it is', Richard remarks disapprovingly, 'when men are ruled by women' (1.1.62). The audience well knows that Gloucester is the source (and proper subject) of the 'G' prophecy which prompted Clarence's arrest (1.1.32-40); however, 'Simple, plain Clarence' (1.1.118) believes Richard's allegation that the queen and her brother are behind his and Lord Hastings' imprisonment respectively (1.1.63-68), and extends the list of those with undue influence at court to include one 'Mistress Shore', the royal concubine to whom Hastings successfully sued for his liberty. Clarence's emphasis on the frequency with which heralds nightly 'trudge betwixt the king and Mistress Shore' (1.1.72-73; added emphasis) signals his contempt for an erotic thralldom which he implies has transformed King Edward (whose sexual caprice the heralds serve) into a figurative 'night-walker'¹⁸ who prostitutes his majesty to satiate his lust for a commoner's wife. Clarence similarly mocks Hastings' debasing plea

to Mistress Shore to use her influence to win his 'delivery' from the Tower (1.1.74-75), the wordplay on childbirth emphasising the supposed gender reversal at Edward's court. To someone as acutely status and gender conscious as the duke of Gloucester that a lord chamberlain sued to a citizen's wife turned royal mistress for his release is held by Richard to be symptomatic of a world turned upside-down: to tolerate such topsy-turvydom would make liveried servants of royal princes and a deity of a common adulteress (1.1.76-80). Nevertheless as a Machiavellian rhetorician Richard aims solely at success, so although he too scorns Hastings' demeaning adoption of the posture of a 'humble suppliant' (1.1.74) to Mistress Shore, Richard is also quick to note that the stratagem worked and promptly presents himself as a 'poor devoted suppliant' (1.2.194) to effect Anne's seduction in the very next scene (1.2). Derision does not preclude transgressive simulation so long as such simulation advances Richard's political objectives.

In a play where most attempts to persuade or dissuade fail, except those undertaken by Richard and Buckingham, it is striking that we never hear the woman credited with winning Hastings' release from prison speak. The marginalization of Mistress Shore in *Richard III* runs counter to the play's most important sources and to her treatment in writings by several of Shakespeare's contemporaries.¹⁹ Shore's wife is portrayed at length and relatively sympathetically by Thomas More in his *History of King Richard III*, by Thomas Churchyard in the tragedy of 'Shore's Wife' which he contributed to the expanded edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates* (printed in 1563), and in the Queen's Men's play *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (printed in 1594). Churchyard's poem was widely imitated in the plaintive literature in vogue in the 1590s which saw new laments of Shore's wife penned by Anthony Chute (1593), Michael Drayton (1597) and the anonymous author of the 'Wofull Lamentation of Mistress Jane Shore' (c. 1597), the success of Chute's *Bewtie Dishonoured* prompting Churchyard to issue an augmented version of his original poem in *Churchyard's Challenge* (1593). The subject of several ballads, including one by Thomas Deloney (1593), 'Jane' Shore (as the historical Elizabeth Shore is lastingly re-named) is also central to Thomas Heywood's two-part drama on *Edward IV* (1599). By contrast, Mistress Shore has no lines and does not appear on stage in either version of Shakespeare's play unless directors contrive to give her a mute walk-on part.²⁰

In recounting Mistress Shore's socio-sexual rise and fall, these writers do not so much transcribe her history as construct an account of London's moral and political culture by means of her affecting story. Their rival estimations of Shore as injured wife, royal concubine and serial adulteress likewise offer alternative perspectives on the relationship between the City and the Crown. Thus Shore/London is variously depicted in these writings as the victim of royal predation and the corrupting effects of court culture; a dutiful, selfless and benevolent intermediary concerned to temper monarchical and aristocratic

excess; or as trading whorishly on appetites and desires. Richard Helgerson contends that 'Shakespeare's "Mistress Shore" ... is a figure of fun' and the object not only of Richard's and Clarence's mockery but also of 'Shakespeare's laughing scorn' (2000, 33, 37; added emphasis). Certainly Richard seeks to trivialize Mistress Shore's suasive power by disarticulating her into a selection of sexualized anatomical parts – 'a pretty foot, / A cherry lip, a bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue' (where 'tongue' carries the primary sense of 'speech' and is also sexual slang for 'cunt') – before further reducing her to a promiscuous sexual cipher or 'naught' (1.1.93-94, 98). The insinuation is that it was not her eloquence but her sexual appeal which moved the king. But while Richard and Clarence do indeed make the king's mistress the object of 'naught'-y jokes when first they talk of her, in the midst of their ribald exchange Richard also describes the queen and Shore as 'mighty gossips in this monarchy' (1.1.83), exaggeratedly attributing the power to imprison whom she chooses to the former and to liberate to the latter. Bernard Capp has shown that gossip was an important method by which women exercised informal authority in early modern England, and that the characterisation of gossip as female reflected male unease about its subversive potential to undermine their respect and authority (2003, see esp. 272-281). Richard voices such disquiet when he complains that, by socially elevating his mistress to the rank of gentry and marrying Lady Grey (a 'jealous, o'er-worn widow' of comparatively modest means and pedigree for a royal spouse), the king has permitted mere 'gossips' to exercise a destabilizing, oxymoronic power at court that threatens social and gender hierarchy (1.1.81-83).

Richard's mockery and subsequent demonization of Mistress Shore and disparagement of the king and Hastings for forming an amorous alliance with her betray his unease at the influence this city-wife (or City/wife) exerts within the precincts of the royal court. He ridicules those who have '[n]aught to do with Mistress Shore' (1.1.98), yet rather than nullifying Shore's wife Richard's repeated iteration of her surname and shifting socio-sexual identity as wife/mistress/whore ensures that she retains a place in the conventionally masculine and aristocratic narrative of 'great affairs' from which he would have her expunged. Insofar as Mistress Shore is to be remembered, Richard would have her caricatured as a 'harlot strumpet' (3.4.73); however King Edward's belated castigation of himself and his court for failing to plead for Clarence's life (2.1.104-132) sets Shore's intervention on Hastings' behalf in stark relief as a rare act of benevolence in an otherwise corrupt and corrupting courtly milieu. The more stridently Richard derides Mistress Shore the more power he ascribes her, the spurious allegation of practicing witchcraft attributing her with the demonic power to deform his body. As a female, commoner and adulteress, the transgressive influence Mistress Shore held with the former king makes her vulnerable to Richard's bogus accusation that she conspired with the queen to cause his 'death with devilish plots / Of damned witchcraft',

leaving him with a 'withered' arm (3.4.62-74) as evidence of their maleficia (see More 1963, 2.48). The notion that the queen would join in league with her husband's lover strains credulity, but Shore has abruptly ceased to be 'a figure of fun', least of all to Hastings whose hesitancy to condemn her is seized on by Richard as evidence of the lord chamberlain's complicity in plotting treason (3.4.75-77). Behind Richard's sneering contempt for Shore's adulterous wife lies the greater threat of topsy-turvydom posed by the City of London which Mistress Shore's sexual and discursive intimacy with Edward IV and Hastings presages. Typically characterized as female and, by the end of the sixteenth century, often as a fickle mistress (Gowing 2000, 131-132), London's perceived potential to destabilize social and gender hierarchy was a focus of the developing genre of city (or citizen) comedy. And it is this transgressive potentiality which is distilled in the person of Mistress Shore, a city-wife (*cf.* F, 3.7.8) who swayed a king and to whom a lord chamberlain was a suppliant for his liberty – social witchcraft indeed.

4. *Citizen Culture*

Helgerson argues that 'Shakespeare suppressed Shore's wife' to prevent her 'profoundly transgressive' story from detracting from 'the monarch-centered history he was making his own' (2000, 44, 35, 51). However, he overstates the exclusion from the drama of 'the urban community for which Jane Shore stands' (55), first, because she is not the only representative of the urban middling sort in the play, and, second, because the playwright has fashioned a would-be monarch who judges it necessary to play the citizen and adopt citizen discourses to secure the throne. While the notorious Mistress Shore is an absent presence in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, freemen of the city play a tangible part in the unfolding political drama. Citizens are first seen and heard on stage in act two, scene three as news of Edward IV's death reaches London. Identified as citizens in the stage directions and speech prefixes, 3 Citizen addresses his two companions as 'masters' (10), indicating that they are freemen and heads of households.²¹

Much can be gleaned from the manner in which these three citizens converse with one another. For Phil Withington, discussion, debate and civility are not just 'modes of discourse and activity associated with corporate governance and citizenship' but 'defining attributes of ... corporate citizenship' that fostered the creation of a civic public sphere in later-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England by inculcating in citizens the habit of public discourse (2007, 1017-1018; quotations on 1020 and 1024). Shakespeare's trio of citizens exhibit all three discursive traits: they greet one another familiarly and courteously as neighbours and friends (1, 7, 19), share news of the king's demise, debate what the succession of a child to the throne bodes, and appraise the quality of counsel at court before accompanying one another 'to

the Justice' (47-48; 'Justices' in F). The informality with which they discuss affairs of state suggests that, while the death of their king is momentous, their engagement in public discourse is unexceptional, even mundane. 3 Citizen shows both insight and, as events prove, sound judgement in his derogatory estimation of the crown prince's counsellors and the danger posed by the duke of Gloucester, in particular. He also touches on an issue central to contemporary debates about tyrannicide: what to do if a country is governed by those that ought 'to be ruled, and not to rule' (2.3.30)? The question underpins the play and is addressed explicitly by Richmond in his battle oration when he justifies armed rebellion on the ground that Richard is '[a] bloody tyrant and a homicide' and as such is 'God's enemy': 'If you do sweat to put a tyrant down, / You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain' (5.3.252-253). 3 Citizen directs his observation at royal counsellors, not a royal sovereign, and obediently resolves to 'leave it all to God' (2.3.46). Yet his judgment that Gloucester and the queen's kindred are unfit to rule is arrestingly frank and couched in language very similar to that used by Sir Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum* (printed in 1583) to justify the exclusion of lowlier subjects from government. Having first divided the commonwealth hierarchically into four groups or 'sortes', 'gentlemen, citizens [and burgesses], yeomen artificers, and laborers' (1906, 1.16), Smith then distinguishes citizens and burgesses 'of some substance' (1.22) from 'marchantes or retailers which have no free lande', grouping the latter with various handicraftsmen as among 'the fourth sort of men' who were 'oneliie to be ruled, not to rule other' (1.24).²² That a speaker whom Smith may have grouped with 'the fourthe sort' (depending on his wealth and occupation) is so bold as to characterise members of the social and political elite as unfit to rule is suggestive of a more robust civic culture than commentators who remark only on 3 Citizen's politically quiescent resolution to 'leave it all to God' have allowed.

Further markers of civic culture can be detected in the amiable verbal exchanges which characterise this scene. Beyond indicating residential proximity, citizenship and guild status, the citizens' genial salutations, candid interchange of views and companionable departure exhibit the traditional virtue of 'good neighbourliness' which remained highly prized in Elizabethan London due to the widespread reliance on credit in the capital (Wrightson 2000, 79; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 74).²³ The need for credit arose because the supply of cash in circulation was inadequate to meet the demand generated, from the 1550s onwards, by the City's rapidly expanding population and its inflationary economy.²⁴ The dependence of London's market economy on the availability of credit placed a social premium on 'trust and the maintenance of human obligation' (Muldrew 1998, 125; see esp. 124-129), as credit was negotiated between individuals rather than institutionally with only a token sum, known as pledge money, used to seal the bargain (Muldrew 2001, 83). We see evidence of such trust in the citizens' frank exchange of views on the

implications of the succession and the blunt criticism of the duke of Gloucester and the queen's kindred (2.3.28-29) by 3 Citizen in an open discussion conducted on a London street. At a time when social exchange underwrote commercial exchange, social capital was a vital form of wealth. It was by fostering and maintaining personal bonds on which reputation, trust and thereby the provision of credit depended that neighbourliness supported the system of market exchange.²⁵ With cash scarce, London's burgeoning market economy was reliant on credit, its credit economy was in turn reliant on a moral economy in which a reputation for honesty earned trust, trust accrued credit, and credit enabled market exchanges to be transacted. The 'good neighbourliness' displayed by the citizens in this scene is thus not simply a residual social virtue; it sustained the circulation of material goods in 1590s London.

The dependency of commercial exchange on social exchange in London's credit economy slowed the erosion of neighbourliness caused by unprecedented demographic growth (see Finlay and Shearer 1986; Wrightson 2007, 21) and hostility towards the mounting influx of 'foreigners' and 'strangers' to the city (see Selwood 2010, esp. 19-50; Rappaport 1989, 42-47; I.W. Archer 1991, 4-5). That all three citizens have been called to attend a judicial proceeding may nevertheless suggest a wider breakdown in communal bonds. The multiple summonses 'to Justice' may be a symptom of the sharp rise in litigation and greater preparedness to resort to the law to settle disputes rather than to resolve them informally which characterised the period from about 1580 to 1640 (Muldrew 1998, 3).²⁶ However, no guard is present, no constable is needed to coerce their attendance, and their prompt response to being summoned – the haste of 2 Citizen eliciting the query 'Whither away *so fast?*' (1; added emphasis) – indicates a ready willingness to comply with the legal process. The citizens may themselves be high ranking civic officials serving as justices of the peace who have been called to attend a daily or quarter session where they were empowered to mete out summary justice and oversee poor relief.²⁷ If so their summons is an opportune reminder of London's powers of self-government and the participation of citizens in every aspect of municipal administration. Alternatively, if they are attending an assize court, the fact that freemen of London had the privilege of attending their own assizes also underscores the City's autonomy (Withington 2005, 8).

5. *Playing the Citizen*

The contrast between this neighbourly encounter of freemen on a London street with aristocratic conduct at the royal court in Westminster could hardly be more striking. At court, proximity and familiarity have bred mutual distrust, duplicity and inveterate hostility, as Margaret wryly observes (1.3.184-185). Richard Gloucester's chilling assertion at the end of *3 Henry VI*, 'I am myself alone' (5.6.84), and his present delight in pronouncing himself 'subtle,

false, and treacherous' (1.1.37) could not be more antithetical to the moral economy on which London's credit economy was contingent. Yet Richard's language is uniquely strewn with idioms of the marketplace (see Siegel 1978 and 1986; Berry 1985, 22-23): he intends that 'George be packed with post-horse up to heaven' (1.1.145) as if he were a bundle of goods; smugly rebukes himself for plotting so far in advance that 'I run before my horse to market' (1.1.159); equates service to his brother Edward with being 'a packhorse in his great affairs' (1.3.121); and remarks that the imprisoned Clarence is 'well repaid' (1.3.309). Contriving the execution of one brother and fervently wishing the death of another are equated by Richard to securing a pecuniary advantage by eliminating market competitors: 'When they are gone, then must I count my gains' (1.1.161). On successfully seducing Anne over the bleeding corpse of Henry VI, he mockingly suggests that Anne's willingness to find him 'a marvellous proper man' warrants a shopping spree: 'I'll be at charges for a looking glass, / And entertain some score or two of tailors / To study fashions to adorn my body' (1.2.242-245). In the Folio version of the so called 'wooing-by-proxy' scene (4.4) Richard endeavours to lure Elizabeth into supporting his proposal to marry her daughter by vowing to recompense the dowager queen for her suffering. Appealing to her greed and ambition, he invites her to conceive of her grief as a loan which he pledges to repay with compound interest, repairing 'all the ruins of distressful times ... with double riches of content' (323), 'Advantaging ... love with interest / Of ten times double gain of happiness' (327-328). Confident that he has succeeded in tempting her, Richard dismisses Elizabeth as a 'shallow, changing woman' (436), but soon after we learn that she did not credit his oaths and instead has 'heartily consented' that Richmond 'shall espouse ... her daughter' (4.5.17-18). 'Credit ... was based on mutable trust' in early modern England (Muldrew 2001, 86), and Elizabeth's trust in Richard is spent. She has rightly discerned that Richard 'intend[s] to prosper' but has no intention to 'prosper *and* repent', despite his protestations to the contrary (402; added emphasis). Earlier Gloucester had parodied Elizabeth's strained claim that she 'had rather be a country servant maid / Than a great queen' to escape his 'gross taunts' (1.3.106-109), professing that he 'had rather be a pedlar' than a king (1.3.148). His preferred occupation is apposite, as the itinerant profession of pedlar or 'petty chapman' was viewed as socially 'masterless' and physically rootless and so classed as a profession of vagrancy and declared illegal under the vagrancy acts of 1572 and 1598.²⁸ The perceived social deviancy of the Elizabethan pedlar as an 'unbound' and unsettled subject neatly matches Richard's deviant and boundless aspiration for the crown.

Describing the crown on one occasion as his 'ripe revenue' (3.7.138), Richard repeatedly monetizes worth; however, monetizing worth was an increasingly vexed process from the 1550s until the great recoinage in 1696 as not only was the supply of coins deficient, but their value was also often

suspect and, like trust, mutable. The value of gold and silver coins in early modern England was based on the scarcity of those precious metals. Although a coin's exchange value was related to the intrinsic value of its gold, silver or copper content, with the practice of clipping coins rampant and an extraordinary mix of old, foreign and counterfeit coins in circulation, determining a coin's intrinsic worth was often difficult. 'Thus, what was supposed to be *the* standard measure of the value of all things in exchange remained itself an extremely variable commodity, whose market worth had to be judged based on its quality, just like any other commodity' (Muldrew 2001, 89, 90).²⁹ Several of Richard's expressions tap into late Elizabethan concerns about the quantity and quality of contemporary coinage. In *3 Henry VI* Richard Gloucester confesses that sovereignty is 'the golden time' (3.2.127) he dreams on despite knowing full well that his gaining possession of the crown is 'more unlikely / Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns' (3.2.151-152), a reference to the scarcity of gold coins in circulation in the crisis years of the 1590s.³⁰ At the outset of *Richard III* he describes himself as 'rudely stamped' (1.1.16), comparing himself to an unskilfully made or counterfeit coin (OED *v.* III.4.a). Before asking Buckingham whether he consents to the princes' murder, Richard warns his accomplice 'now I do play the touch / To try if thou be current gold indeed' (4.2.7-8), likening this trial of Buckingham's loyalty to testing whether a coin is genuine gold by rubbing it against a touchstone (OED *v.* I.8.a). Richard uses a variant of the pedlar/king trope when, having seduced Anne in the most unpropitious of circumstances, he compares his improbable love-suit to an 'all or nothing' wager staking his dukedom against a 'beggary denier' (1.2.239), a minuscule French copper coin, worth a fraction of a penny, which the poor were compelled to accept as among the few inferior coins available (Muldrew 2001, 100). He uses wordplay on the gold coin known as a 'noble' to express his contempt for Edward's elevation of members of the Woodville faction to the peerage, complaining that 'promotions / Are daily given to ennoble those / That scarce some two days since were worth a noble' (1.3.80-83). After Dorset impertinently dismisses Margaret as 'lunatic' (1.3.250) she similarly reminds him that his 'fire-new stamp of honour is scarce current' (1.3.252), comparing Dorset to a newly minted coin whose novelty provokes doubts as to its worth. Richard calculates gains, refers to court rivals as counterfeit coins which 'yet go current from suspicion' (2.1.92), and is confident that 'corrupting gold' (4.2.33) can purchase immoral service.

Together with his practice of sharing a joke with the audience through wordplays and sardonic asides, Richard Gloucester's use of everyday commercial expressions is part of a broader rhetorical strategy to ingratiate himself with a popular urban audience. As Ralph Berry remarks, such verbal devices make it seem 'as though Richard were saying "I am really one of you, you know"' (1985, 22-23). Though he derides the Woodville faction as upstarts and never tires of asserting his social pre-eminence at court, Richard's self-styled plainness

(1.3.51) and mockery of members of the titled elite (which extends to 'blunt upbraidings' of no less a person than the queen) (1.3.104) erode the social distinction between the commons and the nobility. With his bustling energy, plain-speaking and frequent adoption of everyday monetary and mercantile idioms, the duke of Gloucester can sometimes seem more like a late Elizabethan citizen than a leading peer. But while his colloquialisms are disarming and his humour engaging, alarmingly for citizens Richard gives 'business' a bad name. The word takes on sinister connotation after he encourages Clarence's executioners to be 'about ... [their] business' (1.3.350), an instruction which Buckingham echoes when he directs Sir William Catesby to 'effect this business soundly' (3.1.184) on sending him to gauge whether Hastings would support Richard's installation as king. Even Richard's solicitation of the opinions of Elizabeth and the Duchess of York on the proposal that Prince Edward be accompanied to London by a small retinue is a ploy to lull suspicion and make them complicit in a 'weighty business' (2.2.113) which proves fatal to the two young princes, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey. Margaret characterises Richard as a demonic 'factor' or business agent employed 'to buy souls' for hell (4.4.67). Not content to be a 'lowly factor for another's gain' (3.7.124), Richard schemes with Buckingham to usurp the throne in a joint enterprise which he refers to as 'our business' (3.4.39). Their compact dissolves when each believes the other has failed to demonstrate the reciprocity expected of a business partner and 'near' neighbour. Having formerly treated Buckingham as his 'other self' (2.2.120), Richard resolves that 'Buckingham / No more shall be the neighbour to my counsel' (4.2.42-43) after Buckingham requests 'some breath, some little pause' before declaring whether he will 'consent that [the princes] ... shall die' (4.2.22-23). For his part, Richard breaks his promise to award Buckingham the earldom of Hereford and some of Edward IV's moveable possessions on becoming king (3.1.193, 4.2.88-91), replying dismissively that he is 'not in the giving vein today' (4.2.117) when Buckingham presses him to keep his word. Buckingham falls at the hands of the person whom he 'trusted most' (5.1.17); needless to say, as his business with Richard was 'underhand, corrupted, foul injustice' (5.1.6), litigation is not an option.

Richard appeals to citizen morality by remarking disapprovingly on Edward's 'evil diet' (1.1.139) and sexual incontinence and affirming a preference for plainness, piety and simplicity (1.2.198-203; 1.3.47-53, 302-304; 2.1.51-70; 3.7 and *passim*); however, his blunt admission that he contrives to 'seem a saint when most I play the devil' (1.3.334) together with his inveterate untrustworthiness and self-serving violation of neighbourly reciprocity set him increasingly at odds with the ideals of the late Elizabethan culture of citizenship. The Marxist critic Paul N. Siegel argues that Shakespeare incarnates 'in the monstrous form of Richard III the spirit of the bourgeoisie at the time of its menacing approach to power' (1978, 106 and 1986, 85). But if Richard's single-minded pursuit of the crown is meant to be construed as a damning

embodiment of the individualist, capitalist and acquisitive ethos which Siegel dubiously attributes to 'the most aggressive section of the bourgeoisie' in 1590s England (1978, 101; 1986, 80), why is the language of the citizens in *Richard III* devoid of commercial terms or grasping, materialist sentiment? As noted at the outset of this essay, the identity of 'citizen' was a duplex one in 1590s London; in *Richard III*, however, the identity of the politically enfranchised citizen is strictly isolated verbally from that of the commercially enfranchised company member. Contemporary fears that the self-interested pursuit of material gain was undermining morality and weakening social bonds are transposed in *Richard III* from the corporate citizen to the corrupt prince. 2 Executioner suggests that anyone who seeks to thrive in a town or a city must abandon his conscience: 'It beggars any man that keeps it. It is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well, endeavours to trust to himself and to live without it' (1.4.120-123). However, it is not commercial dealings in the marketplace but underhand dealings at court which have tempted him to banish his conscience, and it is an ambitious prince, not a greedy citizen, who has importuned him to murder for money. His accomplice proves a willing journeyman in murder and kills Clarence for the promised fee,³¹ but despite claiming that his conscience is 'In the Duke of Gloucester's purse' (1.4.109) the moral qualms of 2 Executioner ultimately trump the enticement of pecuniary reward (1.4.106-107, 110). An inveterate schemer, Richard ruthlessly exploits the immoral economy of power at a court where even grief is tallied (4.4.28-109). The success of Richard's murderous enterprise is critically reliant on its speedy dispatch. We glimpse in 2 Citizen a figure momentarily bewildered by the hectic pace of city life, but as previously noted it is Richard whose relentless, bustling tempo (see 1.1.151 and 5.3.285) consistently wrong-foots those around him. Craig Muldrew argues that, 'For the middling sort, especially, who depended on the market for their livelihood, wealth was not so much a state of ownership or inclusion in a privileged group, as a continual *process* of ethical judgement about credit' (2001, 98). The rise to the throne of a self-confessed counterfeit who prides himself on his falsity exposes the wholesale failure of the ruling elite to exercise ethical judgment in time. For as Richard observes with disarming frankness, 'none are for me / That look into me with considerate eyes' (4.2.28-29).

6. Popular Election

One of the signal features of Shakespeare's play, as of Sir Thomas More's *The History of King Richard III*, is that Richard's progress to the crown is dependent on successive acts of consent and complicity. Who pronounces 'Amen' when Buckingham salutes Richard as 'England's royal king' (3.7.18, 220) is therefore critical to determining whether London's citizens too are culpable. The person whose utterances most implicate London's citizens in the enthronement of a

tyrant is the city's lord mayor. It is in the immediate aftermath of Hastings' execution that Richard turns his full attention to the City and seeks to lure its mayor and citizenry into sanctioning his usurpation of the crown. In act three, scene five Richard and Buckingham are anxious to persuade the mayor that Hastings was a traitor whom they were forced to execute 'against the form of law' due to 'the extreme peril of the case' (3.5.40-42).

Shakespeare's departures from his principal source in this scene are illuminating. Although Shakespeare did not consult the original Latin version of More's *History* directly in writing *Richard III*, the English version (translated by More's nephew William Rastell in 1557) had been incorporated wholesale into the two chronicles on which the playwright mainly relied, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548) and *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (1587) of Raphael Holinshed. Holinshed's *Chronicles* makes its indebtedness to More explicit, stating that More's unfinished *History* has been followed 'word for word'.³² More reports in his *History* that news of Hastings' death 'flew ... swiftly through the citie, & ... farder about like a winde in euery mans ere', and that the protector, 'entending to set some colour vpon y^e matter, sent in al y^e hast for many substauncial men out of the city into the Tower' (2.52), 'substauncial men' being men of wealth and hence of social standing (OED *A.adj.*1.7). More names the then lord mayor as Edmund Shaw (or Shaa) but makes no mention of him being in attendance on that occasion; however he states that the mayor was 'made of Counsaill' by Richard to advise him how best his intention to possess the crown 'might be first broken to the people' (2.58). According to More the mayor was enticed by the prospect of advancement 'whereof he was of a proud hart highly desirouse' (2.58). By contrast the mayor in *Richard III* is not identified by name, only by his political office, making the role more presentist. London's mayor is also the lone citizen called to the Tower, which he enters not knowing what has occasioned his urgent summons, the news of Hastings' abrupt beheading not having had time to fly 'like a winde in euery mans ere'. Thrust on his arrival into a scene of bewildering commotion with Richard and Buckingham both dressed in armour (3.5.sd) and behaving as if they feared an assault on the royal stronghold was imminent, he is wholly unprepared for the grisly spectacle which confronts him when Catesby appears bearing Hastings' severed head. That the mayor is unaccompanied and caught off guard by the apparent tumult he encounters on entering the Tower helps to account for his timid response to the lord chamberlain's extrajudicial execution. He requires no evidence of Hastings' alleged treason or of a wider coup plot before pronouncing himself satisfied that the lord chamberlain 'deserved his death' and that the Lord Protector and Buckingham were right to execute Hastings without a trial as a warning to other 'false traitors' (3.5.45, 40, 46-47). Although Shakespeare's mayor appears to be daunted by circumstance and overawed by the two dukes' high rank rather than driven by personal

ambition, the mayor's willingness to condone the execution of a high-ranking court official 'against the form of law' (3.5.40) is a disturbing development and contrasts both with the dutiful observance of the judicial process shown by the three citizens summoned 'to the Justice' earlier in the play and with the ensuing silence of the citizens at the Guildhall (3.7.3, 17-22).

Because the personal motives of the mayor of London remain opaque in *Richard III*, Richard's fleeting reference to Mistress Shore plays a greater part in framing the mayor's meek response. In the *History* Richard's claim that Shore's wife 'went about to bewitch him, & ... was of counsel w^t the lord chamberlein to destroy him' (2.54) fails to convince Londoners, and 'euery man laughed' when the protector resorted to denouncing her for being 'nought of her body' since this had long been known by 'al y^e world' (2.54). In *Richard III* Gloucester condemns Mistress Shore as a witch during a council session as a ploy to entrap Hastings; when he addresses the mayor Gloucester merely refers obliquely to Hastings' 'conversation with Shore's wife' (3.5.30). The comment is typically glossed as a coy euphemism for sexual intercourse; however, Richard's carefully chosen words leave open the insinuation that Mistress Shore may have been acting as an intermediary for others in the city who supported Hastings' alleged coup attempt. By responding that he 'never looked for better at his [Hastings'] hands / After he once fell in with Mistress Shore' (3.5.48-49), the mayor hastily distances himself and the City from their actions, sexual and political. Interestingly, as a consequence of Shakespeare's reworking of the episode, the sexual morality of the urban middling sort becomes the ostensible standard against which a lord chamberlain is judged and found wanting by a lord mayor.

While the mayor's extreme obsequiousness in undertaking to acquaint their 'duteous citizens' with Richard's and Buckingham's 'just proceedings' (3.5.63-64) appears craven, it is equally striking that two such high-ranking nobles are so anxious to assuage the popular alarm which they anticipate their unlawful execution of Hastings may provoke in the capital. Buckingham is fearful that 'the citizens ... may / Misconster us ... and wail his death' (3.5.58-59) and Gloucester is concerned 'To avoid the carping censures of the world' (3.5.66). Despite the mayor's abject display of loyalty, Richard urges Buckingham to hurry after the mayor to the Guildhall with instructions to deliver a speech 'Infer[ring] the bastardy' of the former king and his children (3.5.72, 83-91). Not content with challenging Prince Edward's lineal right, Richard seeks to turn popular sentiment against the former king by having Buckingham tell the assembly that King Edward executed a citizen 'Only for saying he would make his son / Heir to the Crown – meaning (indeed) his own house', and that Edward's 'bestial appetite ... stretched to their servants, daughters, wives' whom he made 'his prey' (3.5.72-81). In the Folio version Buckingham makes specific reference to Edward IV's 'enforcement of the city wives' (3.7.8). This brash attempt to appeal to citizen morality and self-interest

ends in abject failure. According to fable Amphion built the walls of ancient Thebes by charming the stones into place with his moving eloquence and music; Buckingham's attempt to 'play the orator' (3.5.92) has precisely the opposite effect and turns the citizens into 'dumb statues or breathing stones' who look 'deadly pale' with fear (3.7.21-22). Rather than crying out 'God save Richard, England's royal King!' on cue, '[t]he citizens are mum and speak not a word' (3.7.3). If they are to be addressed in the seat of civic government, the citizens require that it is a civic official, the Recorder, who addresses them (3.7.25-26). Civic culture limits, albeit temporarily, the reach of aristocratic authority and ambition. Buckingham's inability to persuade the citizens in the Guildhall to proclaim Richard their king is an example of a failed election.³³ In a play in which a tyrant rises to power by finding willing accomplices and exploiting the power of persuasion to secure acquiescence, the silence of the citizens is politically and morally highly charged.

The Scrivener gives eloquent expression to the ethical quandary of remaining silent in the face of wrongdoing and deceit on the part of the powerful. In his *History More* records the scepticism with which London's citizens responded to Richard's repeated attempts to win their support. The 'many substauncial men' summoned to the Tower were not taken in by the allegations levelled against Hastings but dissembled their disbelief, 'as though no man mistrusted y^e mater which of trouth no man beleued' (2.53). The proclamation, which Richard issued 'w[ith]in .iii. houres' of Hastings' beheading, was so lengthy and 'so fair written ... y^e eueri child might wel perceiue, that it was prepared before' (2.54). And so it proved when, after hearing it read out at Paul's Cross, a schoolmaster reportedly remarked aloud on the incongruity between the 'shortnes of y^e time' which the protector had supposedly had to prepare the document and 'the length of y^e matter', prompting a nearby merchant to remark drolly that 'it was written by profecy' (2.54). In *Richard III* disbelief of the official version of events is similarly voiced by a common citizen. Unlike the discerning schoolmaster and the sardonic merchant, however, the Scrivener does not feature in *More's History* (though one would have had a hand, literally, in documenting Hastings' fall). Much as the lord mayor in *Richard III* is identified solely by his political office, so the Scrivener is identified solely by his occupation (3.6.1-7), and it is his occupation as a skilled craftsman which has afforded him a chilling insight into the disparity between the official and actual sequence of events surrounding Hastings' execution. He not only holds '*in his hand*' the indictment of the good Lord Hastings' (3.6.0 sd), but the 'set hand' in which the official document has been composed is also his handiwork – 'Eleven hours I spent to write it over' (3.6.5). While his involvement in making a fair copy of the charges against Hastings potentially implicates him in the attempt to legitimise the lord chamberlain's execution, to the contrary the Scrivener uses his expert knowledge of penmanship to establish that the indictment is fraudulent. He realises that the draft version

must have been composed several hours *before* the alleged treason plot was supposedly discovered and Hastings was condemned because Catesby delivered the draft to him 'yesternight'. And he knows from experience that it would have taken 'full as long' to write as the formal copy, yet the indictment purports *and ought lawfully to be* the 'sequel' to those developments (3.6.4-7).³⁴ The Scrivener's knowledge of his craft exposes Richard's Machiavellian craft, yet the Scrivener is troubled by his own silence, which he regards as symptomatic of a society grown so corrupt that 'such bad dealing must be seen in thought' (3.6.14). But of course, in performance, the Scrivener does speak out publicly about the 'palpable device' which he has detected and shares his misgivings via print with an audience of readers, so he is neither 'so gross' as not to see nor 'so blind' morally as to say 'he sees it not' (3.6.10-12).

The Scrivener's fourteen-line 'quasi-sonnet' (Lull, ed., 2009, 3.6. n. 1-14) is one of the most arresting speeches in the play. However it is the silence of his fellow citizens at the Guildhall which reverberates most loudly. Until Buckingham reports on how his speech to the citizens at London's Guildhall fared, he and Richard have consistently won the compliance they needed to advance toward their goals. When Richard, anxious for news of whether he has won popular support for his bid to possess the crown, asks Buckingham 'what say the citizens?' Buckingham's stunned response, 'The citizens are mum and speak not a word' marks a turning point in the play (3.7.1-3). At first glance it may appear that Buckingham's failure is only a temporary setback which Richard swiftly reverses when he re-stages his 'election' within the precincts of Baynard's Castle. But the composition of the electorate at Baynard's Castle is very different to that at the Guildhall. In the first quarto Buckingham states that 'the Mayor and citizens' (3.7.61) have come to Baynard's Castle to confer with Richard on 'matters of great moment' (3.7.61-62); in the Folio version Buckingham specifies that the group of citizens comprises 'the Mayor, and aldermen' (3.7.65). The distinction is significant and bears directly on a second crucial variation between the two texts. The central question is whether the 'citizens entreat' Richard to become their king, as the lord mayor claims in both versions (3.7.181; *F*, 3.7.200). In the quarto an ensuing speech prefix indicates that 'A CITIZEN' urges Richard to recall the citizens as they make their exit; however, the mayor alone responds 'Amen' to Buckingham's cry: 'Long live, Richard, England's royal king!' (3.7.202, 220-221). In the Folio it is Catesby who urges Richard to recall the citizens but, according to a variant speech prefix, 'ALL' (not just the mayor) pronounce amen in response to Buckingham's exclamation proclaiming Richard their king (3.7.219, 239). But to whom does this 'ALL' refer? To the mayor and a clutch of the city's aldermen, as Buckingham's earlier comment (noted above) makes clear. The distinction is critical as it differentiates the silence of the multitude of citizens gathered at the Guildhall from the assent voiced at Baynard's Castle by a select number of London's civic elite.

Key elements of London's civic government were formally oligarchic. Executive authority resided with the twenty-six member court of alderman, each of whom held office for life. All aldermen customarily belonged to one of London's twelve most prosperous and powerful livery companies, known as the 'The Great Guilds', as did all mayors. And it was the aldermen who chose which of the two nominees, drawn from their ranks and selected by the liverymen, would serve as the next mayor.³⁵ The expectation that the City's governors would maintain the custom of communal feasting was another factor which further restricted access to the most senior and powerful civic offices, since the office-holder was expected to subsidise the growing cost of the annual cycle of civic commensality. As a result, in the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign the rising cost of office-holding meant that many were dissuaded from standing for the highest civic offices, and the positions of alderman, sheriff and mayor had become 'the preserve of the wealthy'.³⁶ Thus while London's administrative substructure (the subdivision of its 26 wards into 242 precincts and 111 parishes) meant that civic participation in local administration was fairly widespread and extended far beyond the mayoralty and the court of aldermen (I.W. Archer 1991, 64-69; I.A. Archer 2000; Withington 2005, 52-53), executive power was highly concentrated and stratified by wealth and guild membership. More describes the episode at Baynard's Castle as a 'mockishe eleccion' (2.82), and this is what both versions of Shakespeare's *Richard III* stage. In neither the quarto nor the Folio do Buckingham and Richard succeed in persuading the corporate body of enfranchised freemen to acclaim Richard king. In the quarto the 'many' prove resistant to persuasion and twice over 'say not a word'; in the Folio version the only citizens who voice assent are drawn from the ranks of the City's oligarchic 'few'.

7. *Theatre of a City*

If 'citizenship provided an identity which accelerated politicization' in early modern England (I.W. Archer 2000, 27), it was because citizenship in Elizabethan England consisted in much more than membership of a guild and possession of 'the freedom'; it was participatory and discursive. As self-governing communities the guild and the incorporated city or borough both 'provided a framework, or structure, for continuous and systematic public activity' by freemen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Withington 2007, 1017). Phil Withington argues that, in the course of the sixteenth century, the participatory and discursive nature of both guild and municipal administration 'intersected with the ideals of civic humanism to create a new kind of urban political culture' and 'what might be termed a "civic public sphere"' (2007, 1018). The emerging outlines of such a civic public sphere are perceptible in *Richard III*, not least when the body of corporate citizens gathered together at the Guildhall resist tyranny by stonily refusing to assent to the nomination of Richard as their king. Their silence does not prevent Richard from seizing

the crown, it merely withholds from the usurper the popular legitimation he seeks. However, the very fact that he makes two concerted attempts to be elected king by the citizens of London and feels obliged to play the citizen to win their support speaks volumes. Richard boasts of being 'born so high' that he 'scorns the sun' (1.3.259-261) and mocks Edward IV and Hastings for suing to Mistress Shore, yet it is Richard who whorishly prostitutes his tongue and speaks like a citizen to court popular favour.

The incursion of the City and of citizens into the drama of state and the play of history is a little regarded yet recurrent feature of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. When Buckingham welcomes Prince Edward to London he calls the City Edward's 'chamber' (3.1.1), a reference to the traditional conception of the capital as *camera regis*, 'the king's chamber' (see Munro 2005, 12, 77, 83). Conventionally, the trope affirms the subordination of the City to the Crown, yet on this occasion the audience's foreknowledge of Buckingham's malign intentions and the prince's fate taint it with menace. However, it is not Buckingham's treachery which alone unsettles the conventional application of the trope in *Richard III*. For in this highly meta-theatrical drama, we are especially mindful that when Prince Edward enters London he also enters onto the stage of a commercial playhouse which was itself a product of London's expanding market economy (see Agnew 1986; Bruster 1992; Howard 2007). The London setting, the incorporation of citizens, Richard's adoption of citizen idioms and direct involvement of citizens in pivotal affairs of state through his failed attempts at popular election transform the playhouse into a *camera civica* or 'city chamber' and, momentarily, into a *camera civium* or 'citizen's chamber'. It is into this civic and commercial chamber that successive Shakespearean rulers and would-be rulers, English and Roman, are obliged to step, and it is within the walls of this 'theatre of a city'²⁷ that several judge it necessary, advantageous or both to try their hand at playing the citizen to secure power.

¹ Arguably commercial expansion is a feature of 'structural urbanisation', a term used by urban historians to describe the concentration of 'large-scale, coordinated activities', such as 'a centralized state, the production and exchange of goods via large-scale markets, the organization and delivery of resources, especially water and services such as trash collection', and coordinated transportation. Karen Newman argues that the confluence of demographic and structural urbanisation led to 'an unprecedented concentration of both financial and cultural capital and ... distinctive urban behaviours, social geographies, and new forms of sociability in the early modern city' (2007, 2-3).

² Boulton's estimate of 70,000 in 1550 is relatively conservative and indicates a near trebling of London's population by 1600 (1987, 3). Finlay and Shearer estimate 'around 120,000 in 1550' (1986, 48); Harding considers this to be inflated and offers a tentative estimate of 61,000-75,000 for the period 1548-50 (1990, 123, and table 1 on 112). Keene puts the number closer to 80,000 (2001, 7; see also Finlay 1981; Newman 2007, 2). Rappaport excludes the suburbs and outparishes of the City to arrive at an estimated population of about 150,000 in 1600 (1989, 61, n.1).

³ Boulton remarks that, as its death rate exceeded its birth rate, 'most of London's growth was sustained by immigration – particularly the immigration of young adults'. He calculates that, 'for the period 1550 to 1650 ... one in eight of the survivors of the nation's births would have been destined to have direct experience of life in the capital' (1987, 3; see also Bucholz and Ward 2012, 64–70).

⁴ After being 'called to the freedom' by swearing an oath before the masters and wardens of their guild at the company hall and paying a fee, new companymen usually went to London's Guildhall later that same day or soon after to be sworn a citizen of London, completing what was in effect a duplex ceremony for conferring municipal privileges (see Rappaport 1989, 23–24; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 80).

⁵ I borrow the terms 'corporate citizen' and 'corporate citizenship' from Phil Withington (2007). Theodore B. Leinwand proposes 'merchant-citizen' but acknowledges that this hyphenated term blurs important distinctions in status and economic activity among merchants involved in overseas trade, shopkeepers (householders) who had no such trade links, and journeymen (1986, 21).

⁶ The lawyer John Manningham reported that 'almost any man for some 40£. may buy his freedom, and these are called freed by redemption'; nonetheless, over eighty per cent of company admissions were through apprenticeships (Porter 2009, 41; see also Rappaport 1989, 24), and even those entitled to claim the freedom by inheritance often undertook apprenticeships (Ramsay 1975, 34). On the methods of gaining the freedom see also Barry 2000, 191–192.

⁷ See also J.M. Archer 2005, 1, 9. Though Shakespeare was a foreigner in London, his father's artisanal identity as a glove maker and involvement in town politics in Stratford-upon-Avon would have afforded the playwright some insight into the status, culture and administrative roles of burgesses.

⁸ Wrightson 2000, 80. Although no law barred them from citizenship, in practice few women became citizens. Some women apprenticed, 'usually as seamstresses or textile workers' (Bucholz and Ward 2012, 79). On women and guild status see Rappaport 1989, 36–42. On how city women pursued advancement despite being prevented from participating fully in most formal institutions see Hubbard 2012.

⁹ 'Within the City therefore freemen were not a privileged minority élite but were ubiquitous in the social order' (Boulton 1987, 151; see also Pearl 1979, 13–14; Rappaport 1989, 53, 112; I.W. Archer 2000, 27). The percentage of residents who were freemen was likely to have been lower in the suburbs, where population growth was most concentrated (Finlay and Shearer 1986; Merritt 2001, 1).

¹⁰ It is notable, for example, that Thomas More, a company member, citizen and former undersheriff of London, regularly refers to London's aldermen as the *senate*, the Guildhall as the *forum*, and never refers to the English as *subjects* in the Latin version of his *History of King Richard III*, doing so only once in the English version (More 1963, 2.62); (Wegemer 2007, 40–41).

¹¹ Oliver Arnold's *The Third Citizen: Shakespeare's Theatre and the Early Modern House of Commons* (2007) is typical in including chapters on the *Henry VI* plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* but not on *Richard III*. John Michael Archer devotes approximately six of the 211 pages of his *Citizen Shakespeare: Freeman and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (2005) to *Richard III*, but the play sits uneasily within the framework of 'Civil Butchery' devised for the chapter on Shakespeare's English Histories.

¹² On popular participation in civic politics in *Coriolanus* see Kaegi 2008.

¹³ In the first quarto the mayor alone pronounces 'Amen' (3.7.221) whereas in the Folio version the speech prefix 'ALL' indicates that the accompanying citizens do so as well (3.7.239), a point to which I will be returning. All citations from the first quarto printed in 1597 refer to *The First Quarto of King Richard III*, ed. by Peter Davison (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996). All citations from the First Folio version (1623) refer to the Folio-based edition of *King Richard III*, ed. by Janis Lull (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, updated edition 2009).

¹⁴ I borrow the expression from J.M. Archer 2005, 20.

¹⁵ Shakespeareans are not alone in devoting insufficient attention to urban culture; Phil Withington argues that 'historians of both English politics and the English state have vastly underestimated the urban dimension of their subjects' (2005, 7).

¹⁶ Also known as the Peasants' Revolt or Wat Tyler's Rebellion, the uprising was reportedly quelled after London's lord mayor mortally wounded Wat Tyler during a parley with the king.

¹⁷ Rowland 2010, 24; on Shakespeare see 27-34. On the influence of Stow's *Survey* on citizen history see Bonahue 1998; see also I.W. Archer 1995; Manley 1995; Merritt 2001.

¹⁸ A 'night-walker' is a term for a prostitute *OED* *n.* 1b.

¹⁹ On versions of the Shore legend and its cultural importance see Pratt 1970; Brown 1998; Wall 1998; Helgerson 2000; Steible 2003.

²⁰ Directors sometimes have Mistress Shore appear briefly alongside Hastings after Lord Stanley's messenger rouses him from his sleep in 3.2. In the recent Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Roxana Silbert in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2012, Mistress Shore also appeared in the first court scene (1.3), where she stood to the left of Edward IV's high throne while Queen Elizabeth occupied a much lower throne to his right.

²¹ Menenius addresses the citizens similarly as 'masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours' in *Coriolanus* (1.1.61). The rank of 'householder' entitled guildsmen to open a shop and employ apprentices, and is a level above the rank of 'journeyman' (wage-labourer) at which most former apprentices entered a guild. In stricter usage a master of a guild was someone who had attained the senior rank of 'liveryman' and been selected to manage the guild, together with the wardens and court of assistants. The latter sense would be consistent with the citizens serving as justices of the peace, but is not typically Shakespearean usage.

²² Although supportive of the view that such men should 'have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth', Smith grudgingly admits that even '[t]he fourth sort . . . be not altogether neglected' due to the absence of requisite numbers of yeomen 'in cities and corporate townes' and the need to fill lesser offices in villages that previously had not employed 'such lowe and base persons' (1906, 1.24).

²³ For a wide-ranging reappraisal of the supposed decline in neighbourliness see Wrightson 2007.

²⁴ Muldrew 2001, 88-89; on inflation in sixteenth-century England and the crisis of the 1590s see also Rappaport 1989, 14-15; Wrightson 2000, 116-120, 145-149, 193-194, 197.

²⁵ 'Due to the preponderance of credit transactions, and the increasing problems of maintaining trust as chains of credit grew longer, a reputation for honesty, trustworthiness and good neighbourliness became an attribute of wealth, enabling someone to do more business. This meant that reputation was no less a part of someone's "value" than any monetary calculation of their alienable property' (Muldrew 2001, 98; see also 105). See also Boulton 1987, 138-154; Muldrew 1998, 124-127; Wrightson 2007, 24, 26.

²⁶ Keith Wrightson describes the broader period from 1560 to 1640 as being 'perhaps the most litigious period in English history' and finds evidence of 'a greater willingness to suppress the traditional assumption that litigation was to be avoided as a breach of charity, and to involve public authority in the handling and settlement of disputes' (2007, 37). As most suits concerned unpaid debts or breaches of commercial agreements, the steep rise in civil litigation may simply reflect the increased volume of commercial transactions (Withington 2005, 31).

²⁷ From the Middle Ages through to the early seventeenth century, the office of justice of the peace was restricted 'to the recorder, the current lord mayor and those aldermen who had already held that position' (Dabhoiwala 2006, 798-799).

²⁸ Pedlars were omitted along with tinkers from the new vagrancy act issued by James I and VI in 1604 (Fumerton 2006, 3-4).

²⁹ 'Clipping' refers to the practice of trimming slivers from the edges of gold or silver coins and then flattening their rim.

³⁰ Muldrew calculates that 'by the end of the sixteenth century the demand for money had probably increased by something like 500 to 600 per cent, while the supply of coins hardly

expanded at all'. Moreover, the best coins tended to be hoarded by wealthy tradesmen and merchants 'for long-distance trade or for moneylending', making gold coins especially scarce (2001, 88, 90, 95).

³¹ I borrow the expression 'journeyman in murder' from Wiggins 1991.

³² 1587, 3.711. As Shakespeare drew on the chronicles of both Hall and Holinshed in *Richard III*, I have opted to quote directly from More's *History* for consistency. All quotations from *The History of King Richard III* by Sir Thomas More are from the Yale edition of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 2*, edited by Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1963). All references to this work are to this edition and are provided in parenthesis after the quotation.

³³ Mark Kishlansky argues that, prior to 1640, '[c]ontested elections were failures ... They represented a breakdown in ... the safeguards designed to prevent them'. 'Communities', he explains 'were not used to contested choices' (1986, 73, 55).

³⁴ As Paola Pugliatti argues, 'although he is responsible for the spatial *sequel* (the chain of words which compose the official text), he is not for the temporal *sequence*, the chain of events which led to Hastings' execution: the trick he has detected (the fact that the *sequel* was composed before the *sequence* of the accusation and condemnation began) is precisely what excludes his responsibility in the formal validation of the events' (1996, 210).

³⁵ I.W. Archer 1991, 18-19, 29; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 8, 77-78, 82-83. Archer calculates that 'There were probably 2,500 liverymen in late Elizabethan London, constituting about 10 per cent of householders in the capital' (19).

³⁶ I.W. Archer 1991, 18. Archer calculates that from 1579 until the end of Elizabeth's reign there were at least fifty-six refusals to take on the burdens and mounting expense of the office of sheriff of London (1991, 21). In *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the mayor predicts that Simon Eyre 'shall spend some of his thousands' (sc. 9.71) if elected sheriff. Firk subsequently greets the news of Eyre's election as a mixed blessing, exclaiming 'My master is chosen, my master is called, nay, *condemned* ... to be sheriff of the city ...' (sc.10.3-5; added emphasis).

³⁷ I borrow the phrase from J.E. Howard's book, *Theatre of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (2007).

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Cultural Memory

The Prince and the Hobby-Horse: Shakespeare and the Ambivalence of Early Modern Popular Culture¹

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Abstract

The Shakespearean hobby-horse, mentioned emphatically in *Hamlet*, brings into focus a number of problems related to early modern popular culture. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the word was characterised by semantic ambivalence, with simultaneously valid meanings of a breed of horse, a morris character, a foolish person, and a wanton woman. The overlapping of these meanings in different cultural discourses of the age (playtexts, emblem books, popular verse, pictures) exemplifies the interaction of different productions of early modern popular culture, from social humiliating practices to festivals and public playhouses. This attests to a complex circulation of cultural memory regarding symbols of popular culture, paradoxically both 'forgotten' and 'remembered' as a basically oral-ritual culture was transformed into written forms. In this context, the Hamletian passage gains new overtones, while the different versions of the playtext (Q1 & 2: 1603, 1604, F: 1623) also offer insights into the changing attitudes regarding popular culture, as it became gradually commercialised and politicised in the following decades. Finally, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* solidify a critical and sceptical attitude, which seems to have signalled the end of 'Merry Old England' on-stage and off-stage as well.

Keywords: Ben Jonson, Cultural Memory, Popular Culture, Transition, William Shakespeare.

1. *The Hobby-Horse Forgotten and Remembered: the Paradox of Remembrance*

'For O for O the hobby-horse is forgot' (3.1.133, Jenkins ed.)² – Hamlet's recollection of the forgotten hobby-horse before *The Murder of Gonzago* brings into focus significant problems of early modern popular culture, and its inherent ambiguity in a state of transition. The hobby-horse – together with old wives' tales and fairies – was evocative and symbolic of a popular culture,³ which was simultaneously remembered and forgotten, cherished and recalled with nostalgia as 'Merry Old England' while being stigmatised by the growing emotional and attitudinal distance on the part of the more educated and the middling sorts (Lamb 2006). In addition, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries forms of popular culture became commercialised in the context of a nascent money industry as well as being appropriated by royal image-making practices and politics (Hutton 1994). This ambivalence

is highlighted and dramatised in Shakespearean plays, which not only present but problematise popular culture in opposition to other contemporary plays and different cultural discourses of the age, which usually represent a less equivocal view. The Shakespearean hobby-horse differs from the ones which feature in anti-festivity Puritan writings (Stubbes 1583; Gosson 1579; 1582), ballads, emblem books, poems, songs and other plays in this respect, therefore examining its appearance and specific meaning in the given context may offer us a subtle and many-layered view on problems associated with early modern popular culture.

The hobby-horse stands at the intersection of different meanings and discourses in Shakespeare's age. The textual records regarding the hobby-horse are the most frequent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which period is also characterised by the multiplication of meanings around the hobby-horse, which could refer to a small Irish breed of horse, the wickerwork-and-costume dancing, prancing hobby-horse of the morris dance, as well as to wanton women and fools (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 'hobby-horse'). Therefore, the question of what the hobby-horse, this symbol of popular culture, meant precisely in different discourses and contexts of the age offers a challenging field of research, as a brief overview will attempt to outline, followed by a closer focus first on *Hamlet*, then on *The Winter's Tale* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* for comparison and in order to illustrate the ongoing process of change regarding popular culture.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, probably written in an uneasy period of Elizabeth I's late reign yields a complex outlook on different forms of use and abuse of popular culture. The ambivalent attitude of the educated is clearly palpable in Horatio's sceptical words and Hamlet's malevolent jibes at Polonius and Claudius (to Polonius 'He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry or else he sleeps', 2.2.496, Jenkins ed., of Claudius/fool 'the king of shreds and patches', 3.4.103, Jenkins ed.). However, the references to jigs, games, ballads, songs and the hobby-horse create a significant subtext, which proves meaningful not only in relation to the play's intrinsic problems but also to a wider context. Prince Hamlet's appropriation of popular culture is more profound and multi-layered than suggested by Bristol, who emphasises Hamlet's aptitude to carnivalesque equivocation and laughter but places this mostly in scenes of grotesque mortality: when Hamlet is speaking about the politician Polonius's corpse as food for 'political worms' (4.3.20) and when he is talking to the gravediggers (5.1; see Bristol 1998, 246-250). I propose that the 'downward carnivalesque movement articulated by Hamlet, the players, and the gravediggers' compromising Claudius's political appropriation of Carnival, used 'as a means for reinforcing and making legitimate his otherwise dubious political authority' (Bristol 1998, 244) needs to be analysed in a broader framework. Prince Hamlet's relation and use of the hobby-horse and its peers sheds light on complex issues both within and outside the play. This appropriation also

recalls one of the basic dilemmas of definition with regard to popular culture, which is also subject for ardent debate in Shakespeare's age: what constitutes 'popular' culture, is it 'of the people' or 'for the people' (Burke 2009, 7-15)?

The dominant mood of *Hamlet* is obviously characterised by a strong feeling of nostalgia, which is also inherent in the idea of popular culture of the age. Elizabethan plays are interspersed with frequent recollections of 'Merry Old England', though the exact reference of this phrase remains obscure. As early as 1552 Dr. John Caius wrote about 'the old world when this country was called merry England' (quoted in Hutton 1994, 89), which became an enduring and often repeated expression in Elizabethan works and after the accession of James I, the reign of 'Good Queen Bess' seemed a lost golden age. According to the shifting periodical limits of living memory, or oral history, each bygone age appeared less complicated and easier to have lived in, the phrase 'it was never a merry world since' gaining in popularity. Nevertheless, nostalgic recollection was completed and gradually substituted by criticism and scepticism regarding popular culture in the plays of the Jacobean period. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1611) offers a different commentary on the subject, especially in the light of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), which presents the world of cony-catchers and the grotesque carnival of the fair with much less sympathy. Although Jonson was always more sceptical and consciously keeping aloof from being identified with the masses (cf. the paratext of his play, analysed later), the shift is conspicuous even in Shakespeare. The delicately balanced ambiguity of belief and disbelief, sympathy and scorn regarding hobby-horses, jigs and ghost-lore in *Hamlet* became replaced by a more disillusioned and sceptical look on such form of popular culture in *The Winter's Tale* (see Laroque 2011). This shift will be analysed in depth in the final part of this article.

My contention is that *Hamlet* represents a specific period in transition when what is being lost and forgotten is still fresh in the memory, i.e. the ghost of popular culture haunts the play so strongly that hobby-horses, fools and such phenomena are forgotten and remembered with the same power, while a decade later commercialised and written forms of popular culture overwrite and seem gradually to efface the original ones. This process is strongly connected to the transition from an oral and ritually based popular culture to written and fixed forms, which, according to Jan Assmann, corresponds to a specific phase in cultural memory when 'ritual coherence' is replaced by 'textual coherence', the former characteristic of societies without writing, where a cyclical concept of time supports the collective memory represented in never-changing rituals. Textual coherence appears with literacy, and coalesces with the gradually canonised solidity of the stream of tradition, when ritual becomes text, which might be dangerous as it leaves room for alternative interpretations. In addition, texts may also be forgotten by not being read, therefore writing both preserves and endangers particular elements of cultural memory (Assmann

2006, 101-121). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus's words on 'the poet's pen', which 'gives to airy nothing / a local habitation and a name' (5.1.16-17) may serve as an informative comment on this, highlighting the ambiguity that, although writing serves the purposes of preservation, fixing meaning and 'shaping' things, there are potential concomitant side-effects: the danger of distortion and misapprehension in reception and interpretation as well as due to the power of consciously 'distorting' poetic imagination. Writing thus may even paradoxically be a means of forgetting, as the 'vessel' which contains the formerly quite amorphous content might also drop out of memory by not being read and not being cyclically-communally repeated. Thus *lieux de mémoire*,⁴ places for remembering become textual *loci*, though their interpretation is individualised and they become subjects for potential criticism as opposed to a former communal understanding. The problem of truth and authenticity as associated with writing features strongly in *The Winter's Tale*, where the palpable lies in ballads are considered 'true' if written – at least to a naive country shepherdess, Mopsa: 'I love a ballad in print, a life, for then we are sure they are true' (4.4.261-262). We also find a deep ambivalence in the words of the oracle at Delphi *as well* which are both sounded and written in a parchment. The problem of verity in *The Winter's Tale* proves the contention that Shakespeare incorporated early modern popular culture in his plays in a much more complex way than most of his contemporaries: not only *in corpore*, i.e. as images and references evocative of a wider background⁵ but also as corporeal manifestations of his poetic ideas.

2. *The Hobby-Horse as a Palimpsest of Meanings: Morris Characters, Fools, Toys, Horses and Whores*

The most curious phenomenon related to the hobby-horse is that the *OED* records most meanings (a special breed of horse, the morris hobby-horse, a fool, a loose woman, a plaything; but not the usual present-day meaning of a 'favourite theme or pastime') by references from the second half of the sixteenth century or later. This fact definitely attests to its popularity in Elizabethan and early Jacobean times as well as to a curious overlapping of meanings in the age, which creates a form of palimpsest. Although one meaning may be superimposed on another as defined by the specific context, it can only partially efface other possible meanings, the remnants and echoes of which keep influencing semantic reference. Therefore the hobby-horse presents a complex phenomenon, varied in meaning and interpretation as well. In an attempt to uncover the partially hidden layers, the latency of meanings in the hobby-horse, the relation between contemporaneous but differing uses of the same word will be addressed, providing potential explanations for a curious mingling of meanings in the word 'hobby-horse', to which several scholars have called attention without offering wholly satisfying reasons for the phenomenon.⁶

The Oxford English Dictionary as well as the LION bibliography⁷ attests to the fact that the time of the hobby-horse being so (in)famously ‘forgotten’ corresponds to the time of its most frequent appearance in texts of cony-catching pamphlets, Puritan anti-festival attacks, songs and – most importantly – of plays. According to the number of records in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the primary meaning in the age was the hobby-horse of medieval and early modern festivities: ‘a figure of a horse, made of wickerwork, or other light material, furnished with a deep housing, and fastened about the waist of one of the performers, who executed various antics in imitation of the movements of a skittish and spirited horse’ (*OED* 1989, ‘hobby-horse’). It featured in morris dances,⁸ both in popular and elite surroundings, in rural or urban festivals, aristocratic entertainments and on the stage. Pictorial representations of it include the so-called Betley window (stained glass window of the early sixteenth century in a house at Betley, Staffordshire) and the image of morris dancers with a hobby-horse along the Thames, from c. 1620 (detail of the Dutch artist Vinckenboom’s *Thames at Richmond, with the Old Royal Palace*, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Hutton briefly summarises the elusive history of the hobby-horse as follows: ‘[T]he first surviving reference to it is in a late 14th-century Welsh poem by Gryffyd Gryg, who implied that it was a new development’. Later ‘it features as part of parochial finance ... by 1500 it was part of the entertainments of the royal court and familiar in Cornwall, where the author of the play *Beunans Meriasek* seems to describe it as travelling with a troupe. Thereafter it is encountered in the midland’s churchwardens’ accounts ... but none earlier than 1528’ (Hutton 1994, 61). Despite the sketchy nature of records, the interaction of and easy travel between popular and elite pastimes is not difficult to trace already in the early history of the hobby-horse. The history of the morris, of which the hobby-horse appears an almost inalienable part, demonstrates not only this oscillation between royal court and village church ale but also attests to it becoming a commodity, the most striking example being William Kemp’s *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600), the written account of his solo morris production, which both in performance and afterwards in print was aimed at individual profit.

The earliest morris reference in Shakespeare is made to Jack Cade in *Henry VI, Part 2*, act 3, scene 1: ‘I have seen / Him caper upright like a wild Morisco / Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells’ (3.1.363-365) or in the mostly Fletcherian late collaborative play of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where a whole group of morris-dancers gives a performance.⁹ As opposed to the examples given in the following pages, these earliest and latest Shakespearean references work more as direct evocative poetic devices than complex textual *loci*. They had actual reference e.g. to the actor playing Jack Cade, Will Kemp, who already by then was regarded as a famous morris dancer and clown.

The popularity of the hobby-horse of the morris in Shakespeare’s age might also be aligned with the concept of monstrosity and the grotesque, so

catching and attractive to the Elizabethan age. The late sixteenth century was characterised by simultaneous anxiety and curiosity regarding the ‘monstrous man-beast’, which corresponded to the then dominant form of the tourney-style hobby-horse, where man and beast are both visible as opposed to the earlier full costumes (tourney with a headmask). In this light, even Claudius’s reference to the French horseman offers a disturbing and not easily decipherable comment:

And they can well on horseback, but this gallant
Had witchcraft in’t. He grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse
As he been incorps’d and demi-natur’d
With the brave beast. (4.7.83-86, Jenkins ed.)

Although Jenkins and other editors gloss this passage briefly as either a personal allusion to the cavalier mentioned in Castiglione or as a reminder of Claudius’s comparison to a satyr and ‘of kindred animal images’ (*Hamlet*, Jenkins ed., gloss. 369, 543-544), the half-man-half-horse image of the Norman strongly recalls Hamlet’s hobby-horse, the ‘incorps’d’ half-man, half-beast monster. Although Jenkins also refers to centaurs here, the phrase ‘grew into his seat’ rather evokes the shape of the hobby-horse (cf. the Betley window) in the audience’s imagination than the centaur, which presents not a man *riding* a horse, but the man’s upper body substituting for the head and neck of the horse. In addition, the centaur belonged to Humanist erudition, while the ever-present morris hobby was well known to the masses. The reference to witchcraft (rather than magic) also reaffirms the strong link to popular culture.

The early modern hobby-horse was also a play-horse (as it is even today): ‘a (childs) hobbie-horse, *bastob, ou cheval du bois d’un enfant*’ (Sherwood 1632, *French-English Dictionary*, as quoted in *OED* 1989), appearing in a number of pictorial representations of the age both in England and on the Continent.¹⁰ When surfacing in texts, however, it often became a complex object of both nostalgia and dismissal as a children’s pastime not fit for grown-up men. George Puttenham’s reference to this toy – though alluding to both attitudes – emphasises the nostalgic aspect, scolding King Agesilaus though in very cautious wording with a tone of lenient moralising:

No more would it be seemely for an aged man to play the wanton like a child, for it stands not with the conueniency of nature, yet when king Agesilaus hauing a great sort of little children, was one day disposed to solace himself among them in a gallery where they plaied, and tooke a little hobby horse of wood and bestrid it to keepe them in play, one of his friends seemed to mislike his lightnes, ô good friend quoth Agesilaus, rebuke me not for this fault till thou haue children of thine owne, shewing in deede that it came not of vanitie but of a fatherly affection, ioying in the sport and company of his little children, in which respect and as that place and time serued, it was dispencheable in him & not indecent. (Puttenham 2011, 234; emphasis mine)

The hobby-horse in this meaning appears as an object of nostalgia, thus adding another interpretation to the Hamletian complaint of the forgotten hobby-horse even for an early modern audience – the yearning for a lost Golden Age, that of easy play, innocence and childhood. The easy association between popular village festivities, children, foolishness and the toy hobby-horse also appears in the engraver Francis Delaram's one-page print entitled *Will Sommers King Heneryes jester*. It features Will Sommers with a jester's cap tucked in his belt while in the background a boy is riding a hobby-horse surrounded by other forms of childish and popular entertainment. The verses printed below reaffirm the association between visual appearance and essence: 'What though thou thinkst mee clad in strange attire, / Knowe I am suted to my owne deseire ... All with my Nature well agreeing too'.¹¹

The toy hobby-horse features as a worthless trifle in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, and in Peacham's emblem book, *Minerva Britanna* (1612) in *Vanae merces. Ad Nauplaum*, where the woodcut presents an ape holding a hobby-horse, a windmill, a fox's tail, beads and a rattle. The verse castigates foolish knights who return from their adventurous sea expeditions parading like Jason though only bringing back trifles instead of the golden fleece: 'Hee is thence return'd a worthy Knight awaie, / And brought vs back beades, Hobbie-horses, boxes / Fannes, Windmills, Ratles, Apes, and tailcs of Foxes' (Peacham 1612, 168).

Foolishness provides the origin for the third meaning in Shakespeare's age. In *Much Ado About Nothing* the hobby-horse becomes a synonym for a dim-witted, stupid man or fool, with Benedick referring contemptuously to Don Pedro and Claudio when exiting with Leonato: 'I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these hobby-horses must not hear' (3.2.64-66). The morris called for easy association as the Fool was another traditional figure of the morris dance, and both the hobby-horse and the Fool were responsible for a close interaction with the audience, collecting donations and frolicking with members of the audience: the Fool beating them with his bauble or pig's bladder, the hobby-horse pulling girls under its costume. In the Betley window the hobby-horse appears with a ladle in its mouth for collecting donations, the ladle referring to the direct addressing of the audience as the hobby-horse cajoled the onlookers to pay. Foolishness and levity are easily attached to the behaviour of both the hobby-horse and the Fool during the morris dance; therefore the conflation of the two meanings must have seemed uncomplicated and easily available for an early modern audience, well-versed in the traditions of the morris.¹² As the phrase 'the hobby-horse is forgot' gained in popularity around the turn of the century, the interchangeability of fools and hobby-horses seems to have turned into substitution, as Ben Jonson also attests:

But see the Hobby-Horse is forgot.
Foole, it must be your lot,

To supply his want with faces
 And some other Buffon graces.
 You know how ...
 (Ben Jonson, *Entertainment at Althrope*, 1603, ll. 286-290)¹³

The association between wanton women and the hobby-horse, however, proves more complicated, although it is well-known from the following Shakespearean quotations:

ARMADO: But O – But O –
 MOTH: ‘The hobby-horse is forgot’
 ARMADO: Call’st thou my love a ‘hobby-horse’?
 MOTH: No, master. The hobby-horse is but a colt, and your love perhaps a hackney.
 (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 3.1.26-30)

BIANCA [speaking to Cassio about the handkerchief]: This is some minx’s token,
 and I must take out the work; there, give it the hobby-horse, wheresoever you had
 it, I’ll take out no work on’t.
 (*Othello*, 4.1.151-153)

LEONTES: My wife’s a hobby-horse; deserves a name
 As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
 Before her troth-plight.
 (*The Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.276-278)

The hobby-horse in the previous quotations is explained in the glossaries as a ‘wanton, loose woman, even a prostitute’, which meaning is further supported by the words ‘minx’ or ‘hackney’ or ‘flax-wench’, all alluding to a pejorative, degraded image of women, closely associated with sexuality. (The ‘O’ of Armado’s love pains being another bawdy reference to the female genital organ). How and when did the image of hobby-horses played by a man and the image of wanton women intermingle? Folklore and anthropological studies explain this by pointing to the fertility aspect implied by the hobby-horse (Brissenden 1979, 6), who frightened and captured girls, sometimes taking them away ‘under its skirt’, i.e. the costume, which might account for a transposition of bawdy sexuality from one to the other. This is nicely expressed in the following short verse from *Cobbes prophecies, his Signes and Tokens* (Anonymous 1614, D3r), which shows hobby-horses and women in parallel grammatical structures and a rhyming pattern, emphasising an equal share of joy for both parties:

But when the Hobby-horse did wihy,
 oh pretty wihy,
 Then all the Wenches gaue a tihy,
 oh pretty tihy.

'Wihy/Wehee' indicates the horse's sound from Middle English times onwards, 'tihy/teehee' already appeared in relation to female sexual joy in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where Alisoun, the young wanton wife in 'The Miller's Tale' did 'tehee' (line 3740), i.e. tittered and giggled after Absolon kissed Nicholas's backside. *OED* records this word meaning 'a representation of the sound of a light laugh, usually derisive ... usually in female use', citing examples ranging from Middle English to early modern times (*OED*, 'wehee' and 'tehee'). The onomatopoeic nature of both rhyming words (wihy, tihy) even more emphatically refers to the strong orality or the 'acoustic factor' and the atmosphere of joyful and bawdy entertainment shared by women and men in the costume of the hobby-horse.

However, the shift in gender still poses a problem. The Maid Marion or the Lady of the morris was usually played by men, and although we have ample evidence of cross-dressing in festivals and on the stage, they mostly entail men dressed up as women, while in these Shakespearean passages there seems to be no uncertainty of gender – they directly refer to women. (Although we must bear in mind the fact that, as all female parts were played by boys or men, a double-edged irony may also be at work in these references). Despite the problematics of gender on stage, this overlapping of meanings must be explained as we find the association of wanton women and hobby-horses in other texts of the age. Light women and hobby-horses featured in playtexts and even in later emblem books, as in George Wither's recounting of warnings against marriage: 'Some, fancy *Pleasures*; and such *Flirts* as they, / With ev'ry *Hobby-horse* will run away' (Wither 1635, Book 2, XXI). Breton's *Pasquils Mistresse*, 1600 is even more interesting in this respect as it records the use close to the concepts appearing in *Hamlet*. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark exhibits a scornful attitude to women he considers unvirtuous, Ophelia and Gertrude. Breton's 'unworthy mistress' is also compared to different animals (cow, sow, parrot, fox), as 'she can simper like a mare / and like a hobby-horse can holde her heade' (Breton 1600, D1r) while playing the wanton on a wooden bench. Consequently, wanton women and hobby-horses are easily brought into meaningful connection by Shakespeare's age.

As another explanation for equating wanton women and horses, I suggest that different semantic fields and circulating cultural narratives intermingled in the last decades of the sixteenth century as popular shrew-narratives were superimposed on the tradition of the vanishing (and commercialized, cf. Kemp's) morris. The early modern shrew narratives implied the association of taming women and horses, which was even further strengthened by the original meaning of a 'hobby', i.e. a kind of Irish horse. Florio's Italian-English dictionary (1598) explains *Vbino* as 'a hobbie horse such as Ireland breedeth', in 1609, Dekker's *Gull's Horne-book* also refers to real horses: 'At the doors, with their masters hobby-horses, to ride to the new play' (*OED*, 'hobby-horse').¹⁴ The concept of 'mounting or leaping' women sexually also helps connect the two concepts, for which a great number of examples can be detected in the

age. 'To take his leap' was the technical term for the copulation of mare and stallion. According to Lamb, 'to take a hobby-horse turne or two' also referred to the illicit sexual activity inherent in the figure of the hobby-horse.¹⁵

Besides the comparisons in dramatic texts between the gait of the horse and the wife – both considered goods of the husband (Hartwig 1982)¹⁶ – the conduct books of the age, advising good household management frequently referred to the similarities of taming horses and wives (Heaney 1998; Sloan 2004), which was made even more direct by the 'homeopathic' practices of early modern ballads. (E.g. *Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curste Wyffe, Lapped in Morelles Skin, for Her Good Behavyor*, as reprinted in Dolan 1996, 257-288). Social humiliating practices, like the Skimmington ride, carting, or the scold's bridle also associated the loose tongues and loose behaviour of women with horses. The Skimmington ride, though intended to punish mismatched couples, henpecked husbands and shrewish wives, featured a neighbour as a substitute victim, who had to ride through the village, often facing the tail of the horse amongst peals of laughter and derision (Ingram 1984). The association between a mismatched horse and rider and wife and husband was easy to make for the early modern onlookers, due to the still prevalent analogous thinking of the supposed superiority of husband over wife, human over beast, will/reason over passion.¹⁷

Some forms of punishment for shrews and scolds also entailed humiliation and association with horses. The two categories (the shrew representing 'home misrule', the scold being a legal category) often overlapped, as women's major weapon has always been their tongue, and any female subject opposing the traditional hierarchy was often demonised as a shrew, a scold or a witch (Boose 1991; Dolan 1996). One form of punishment was carting, where the female offender was put on an open cart and wheeled through the town. Although not on a horse, the horse-drawn cart and the woman on it were in metonymical relation, being objects of derision and shame, as it is clearly recognised by Shakespeare's Katharina Minola, who defies being made a stale, i.e. a laughing stock for men's derision – after references to courting/carting her are made (1.1.52-58).

The scold's bridle served as an even more obvious connection between unruly horses and women – although the first extant references to it come from after Shakespeare's career, it might have been known earlier. The metal cage surrounding the woman's head was equipped with a metal (often spiky) gag put into the mouth, effectively silencing and hurting the unruly member of the female body. The scold was then led through the town/village, often on a leash, thus emphasizing not only her inferiority but also her bestiality and similarity to horses. The first pictorial reference comes from 1655 from Ralph Gardiner's *England's Grievence Discovered* (London, 1655), where we see a scold with the metal cage on her head and the tongue suppressor in her mouth, being led on a leash by a man (reprinted in Dolan 1996, 291). Even

today, boisterous horses are said to have a 'rigid or hard' mouth, which needs to be tamed, and managing the horse relies heavily on the controlling power of the horse's bridle, on the power over its mouth. Although some scholars doubt that such an instrument of humiliation and torture was in use in Shakespeare's time, the numerous references to bridling the unruly tongue in texts and images of the age proves that this association was ready-made for Shakespeare's contemporaries. The verb 'bridle' also appeared in prestigious normative discourse, as e.g. in the *Homily of the State of Matrimony*, appearing in *The Second Tome of Homilies, of Such Matters as Were Promised and Entitled in the Former Part of Homilies* (first published in 1563, as reprinted in Dolan 1996, 170); marriage was supposedly 'brydlyng the corrupt inclinations of the fleshe'. In conclusion, the overlapping of unruly women and horses might account for the semantic interchangeability of wanton women and hobby-horses.

3. *Hamlet: Haunted by the Ghost of Popular Culture*

In such a varied semantic context Hamlet's hobby-horse deserves revisiting. Although a number of brilliant studies touched upon the problem of the hobby-horse, they mostly focused on other aspects.¹⁸ The lines in act 3, scene 2 surrounding *The Murder of Gonzago* are pregnant with meanings and gestures related to popular culture, and offer us a new and enriched reading not only of this passage, but also of the play itself. These passages prepare the onstage and offstage audience for the play-within-the-play while commenting on it continuously, and finally they serve as an epilogue to both *The Murder of Gonzago* and the dramatic action of *Hamlet* in this scene.

The King's neutral question ('How fares our cousin Hamlet?') launches the first puns on Hamlet's part with air/heir ('I eat the air, promise-crammed') and Polonius's role as Caesar as a capital/Capitol calf – with a potential extradramatic reference to the *Julius Caesar* performance of the newly opened Globe in 1599. Then Hamlet turns to Ophelia, and to the bawdy: 'Shall I lie in your lap?', 'That's a fair thought to lie between maids legs'. This bawdiness is strengthened by the sexual innuendo inherent in Hamlet's answer of 'nothing', which was also a slang expression for the female privy parts and the pun on 'country/cuntry manners'.¹⁹ Consequently, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, acts as a Lord of Misrule, arranging for a light and lewd entertainment during festival time, like e.g. the twelve days of Christmas. According to Hutton, Lords of Misrule reigned under different names in different surroundings throughout the sixteenth century, employed by mayors, sheriffs, universities, inns of court and even by the royal household. The most famous one was George Ferrers at the end of Edward VII's reign, who organised indoor entertainments and outdoor spectacles like e.g. a hobby-horse joust, had his own coat-of-arms and retinue, and 'combined the traditional fun of inversion and parody with a dash of Renaissance metaphysics' (Hutton 1994,

90-91). Although in Elizabeth's reign the name was used more loosely to denote different carnivalesque leaders (Stubbes called a summer lord a Lord of Misrule), the original association of Lords of Misrule and organised indoor (Christmas) festive spectacle seems to have been retained, at least partially. In this light, Hamlet may be considered a Lord of Misrule, who acts out a spectacle himself – combining and performing the roles of the fool and the harassing hobby-horse as well. Thus Hamlet is the fool, the 'only jig-maker', twisting and playing on words while performing the role of the hobby-horse, who plays with a girl. His words carry a strong sexual meaning even before the (in)famous hobby-horse makes an appearance in the lines following:

HAMLET: So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables! O heavens - die two months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But, by'r lady 'a must build churches then, or else shall 'a suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For O! for O! the hobby-horse is forgot'. (3.2.127-133, Jenkins ed.)

Hamlet's role as the Lord of Misrule is reaffirmed by the way he comments continuously on what is going on on stage and off stage, finally presenting a song in easy and catchy meter, in style quite similar to Lear's Fool's chants:

What, frighetd with false fires?
Then let he stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play,
For some must laugh while some must weep –
Thus runs the world away! (Q1 9.174-178)

The end of the scene in Q2 also strengthens Hamlet's positioning as the Lord of Misrule – at the end of the scene (before Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter), he rounds off the on-stage and off-stage performance with calling for music several times.

HAMLET: Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
For if the King like not the comedy
Why then belike he likes it not, perdie.
Come, some music! (Q2 3.2.283-287)

This passage cannot be found in Q1, and in the Folio the two messengers enter before this call for music, which gives a different interpretation to the scene, rather attaching it to the later 'recorder' metaphor; however, Hamlet's role as an organiser of entertainments seems indisputable. The relation of the three texts is still subject of scholarly debate. Nevertheless, what proves instructive from our point of view is to what extent and how they feature carnivalesque references to popular culture. In act 3 scene 2 even the shortest Q1 version features the 'capitol calf', the 'jig-maker' and the hobby-horse forgotten,

though the memory is not of a 'great man' but a 'gentleman'.²⁰ Curiously, in Q1 possible references to bawdy carnival are reaffirmed (while the sexual 'groaning' is cut from the Folio), where even Ophelia appears joyfully taking part in flirtation, while Hamlet's lines are much more abrupt and rude:

OFELIA: Your jests are keen, my lord.

HAMLET: It would cost you a groaning to take them off.

OFELIA: Still better – and worse!

HAMLET: So you must take your husband. (*to Players*) Begin! Murderer, begin! A pox! Leave thy damnable faces and begin! Come! *'The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge!'* (Q1 9.160-164)

In addition there are some textual versions that pose a dilemma – the 'pooopies' in Hamlet's offer to Ophelia in 'I could interpret the love you bear if I saw the pooopies dallying' (ll. 144-145) might refer to the 'puppets' of the other texts (a clear reference to popular culture) as a simple printing error but it also might mean the female genitals, according to Thompson and Taylor glossing this phrase. This latter interpretation strengthens the bawdy in the interaction of Hamlet and Ophelia, which is even more underlined by the fact that previously Q1 featured the (in)famous and equivocal (nunnery/brothel) 'Go to a nunnery' eight times (7.162-194) as opposed to Q2 and F, where it appears only five times. In conclusion, the earliest Q1 version shows the most traces of being a cut version for the public theatre as opposed to its title page that refers to prestigious surroundings of earlier performances of Cambridge and Oxford (Patterson 1989, 16), and we might say that this view is supported by its ruder language. Interestingly, even the 'good' Q2 a year or two later exhibits more vulgarities than the more prestigious Folio, as e.g. in Hamlet's earlier monologue in act 2, scene 2, the well-known Folio first-line being 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (2.2.544). Although it is a passionately coarse soliloquy in all versions, featuring asses, John-a-dreams, scullions (kitchen servants) and drabs (whores), the change in the Q2 very first line is still shocking as Hamlet cries out: 'Why, what a dunghill idiot slave am I' (Q2 7.404).

Although the references to contemporary theatre can be found in all versions, Q1 puts more emphasis on 'playing the clown'. In the scene where Hamlet instructs the Players, Q1 features several sentences that are unique to this early text only. Interestingly, Hamlet seems to mock the same extemporizing he is engaged in at the moment. Indeed, his lines are full of catchphrases and jokes which were presumably current then; in a word, he is acting the clown while mocking him, which reaffirms the carnivalesque in his complex character:

HAMLET: And – do you hear? – let not your Clown speak more than is set down. There be of them, I can tell you, that will laugh themselves to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh with them – albeit there is some necessary point in the play then to be observed. O, 'tis vile and shows a pitiful ambition in the fool that useth it.

And then you have some again that keeps one suit of jests – as a man is known by one suit of apparel – and gentlemen quotes his jests down in their tables before they come to the play, as thus: ‘Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge?’ and ‘You owe me a quarter’s wages’ and ‘My coat wants a cullison!’ and ‘Your beer is sour!’ and, blabbering with his lips and thus keeping in his cinquepace of jests when, God knows, the warm Clown cannot make a jest unless by chance – as the blind man catcheth a hare – masters, tell him of it’. (Q1 9.23-38; sentences in italics only in Q1, not in Q2 or F)

These subtle differences underlie the shift in attitudes to popular culture that characterised the first decades of the seventeenth century, which will be examined in the following section. The years 1600-1604 (*Hamlet’s* conception and the first quartos) display a transitory period in the sense that both the old and the new seem equally powerful – the old world being associated with the ‘merry England’ of hobby-horses, fools, and Old Hamlet, with the feeling of times unavoidably changing. Under such circumstances memory and forgetting fight an equal battle, which is epitomised in Hamlet’s forgetting and recalling the hobby-horse in a play where the Clown/Fool features only in his spectacular absence, partly as performed and recalled by the Prince or as a skull.

4. The Winter’s Tale and Bartholomew Fair: from Criticism to Scepticism

The transformation of popular culture due to its commercialisation and later politicisation are palpable in the plays of the 1610s. One example for this is the attitude of the educated middling sorts and the aristocracy towards elements of popular culture.²¹ After Theseus’s clear refusal of ‘antique fables’ in the 1590s, Horatio’s cautious attitude to popular folklore in *Hamlet* is palpable in his answer to superstition about ghosts: ‘So have I heard and do in part believe it’ (1.1.170, Jenkins ed.). He believes and he does not; as a Wittenberg-educated Humanist scholar, he should not, but recalling his Danish identity and faced with the ghost, he must. A shift is detectable even in this respect: Theseus’s clear refusal attests to a rather solid framework of thinking about popular and elite culture in Elizabeth’s reign, while *Hamlet* is a work of transition: the old world is crumbling apart, Elizabeth is aging without an heir, the famous clown Will Kemp has gone on a solo commercial venture with his nine-day morris, and popular culture has been commodified with success (cf. the Globe Theatre). However, the memory of a lively and ritually stable popular culture is still strong. A decade later, *The Winter’s Tale* already voices criticism and scepticism regarding the verity and authenticity of popular culture, when e.g. Antigonus’s dream of ghosts is presented as more of a parodic piece with its exaggerations than an authentic and persuasive account of ghost-lore, and his refusal to accept folk superstitions is soon overwritten by credulous belief in shrieking ghosts. Antigonus’s character is further discredited by his sudden and strange death as ‘exit pursued by a bear’.

ANTIGONUS:

I have heard, but not believ'd, the spirits o' th' dead
 May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother
 Appear'd to me last night; for ne'er was dream
 So like a waking. To me comes a creature,
 Sometimes her head on one side, some another;
 I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
 So fill'd and so becoming; in pure white robes,
 Like very sanctity, she did approach
 My cabin where I lay; thrice bow'd before me,
 And gasping to begin some speech, her eyes
 Became two spouts; the fury spent, anon
 Did this break-from her: ...
 And so, with shrieks
 She melted into air. Affrighted much,
 I did in time collect myself and thought
 This was so and no slumber. Dreams are toys:
 Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously,
 I will be squared by this.
 (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.3.16-27, 36-41)

In this late play even Shakespeare criticises the authenticity of popular culture (or presents, as Laroque calls it, 'the hybridity of popular culture', Laroque 2011). Not only Autolycus, the balladmonger, pedlar and conman/cony-catcher is a less sympathetic and lively character than Bottom and Falstaff, but the verity of anything belonging to popular culture is touched with dramatic irony. The naive country shepherdess, Mopsa, ensures us that textualised versions are true ('I love a ballad in print, a life, for then we are sure they are true' 4.4.261-262), while the topic of ballads is outrageously nonsensical:

AUTOLYCUS: Here's one, to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed.
 (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.263-266)

Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, which – according to a 1631 title page and the Induction – was performed in the Hope Theatre in 1614, exhibits open criticism and sarcasm regarding popular culture. Most of the Induction consists of the monologue of the Scrivener, an educated man, who is condescending and disillusioned. He condemns nostalgia for the 'sword-and-buckler age of Smithfield' and the bad taste and judgement of the audience, who still swear that the best plays are the 25-year-old *Jeronimo or Andronicus* (i.e. Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*). He openly criticises playwrights 'like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries' (Ind. 124-125), and expresses his scorn for playwrights and plays that cater

for the lowly taste of the masses. Even the hobby-horse is mentioned not in its usual context but as a reference to the sexual liberty of the fair: 'Nor has he the canvas cut i' the night for a hobby-horse man to creep in to his she-neighbour and take his leap there!' (Ind. 19-21). Here, the hobby-horse man is the seller of toy hobbies, who has sex ('takes a leap') in the booths during the Fair.

The underlying dramatic irony that discredits popular culture in *The Winter's Tale* thus becomes more obvious in Ben Jonson, paradoxically especially in *Bartholomew Fair*, which is supposedly his most carnivalesque play, the dramatisation of the marketplace itself. However, the grotesquely fat body of Ursla, the pig-woman, who sells all kinds of flesh from pork to young wanton girls is more disgusting than alluring in its vitality. Falstaff was said to 'lard the earth' as he was walking, but Ursla's sweating and later injured body is a far cry from the fat knight's carnivalesque vitality. She is sweating and whining so profusely that a spectator cannot but help but laugh at her – instead of with her, which would stand closer to the universal and inclusive nature of carnival laughter (Bakhtin 1984, 11-12). Although she is the 'fatness of the Fair' (2.2.112) and is associated with carnival on several occasions, her being a scold (cf. reference to 'cucking-stool', 2.5.106), a prostitute and a bawd rather reinforces the commercial aspect of the utopian 'Lubberland' (3.1.71), which undermines the opportunity for presenting an exuberant festive popular culture.

Ursla, the commercial woman, cannot raise festive laughter since Jonson's Fair is a commercial venture, where the foolish ones are duped, stripped and robbed.²² Jonson's scepticism and scorn about anything belonging to popular culture is evident from his use of popular culture. As a shrewd playwright, he employed elements and symbols of popular culture, but his authorial intention was evident from the start: his satirical attitude aimed at uncovering the ills and follies, his comedies always served some form of social corrective. In *Bartholomew Fair* hobby-horses appear as toys, cheap and useless commodities in the Fair, belonging to 'such like rage' as babies (dolls) and puppet-plays (Prologue, ll. 4-6). Even the 1631 Quarto Title Page attests to a judgment passed on popular culture, with a quotation from Horace's *Epistles*, referring to the laughing philosopher Democritus, implying that he would laugh at this audience as well, on the grounds that they are 'deaf donkeys'.

The 'discovery' of the ills of popular culture is supported by the presentation of the character of Cokes, whose name refers to him being a ninny and an ass (Hibbard's gloss, 34). He comes from the country and stupidly buys up the whole store of toy hobbies and dolls. He has a child's fancy for toys, while his carelessness about his things and the simple joy of stealing a pear, as well as his utter enjoyment of the puppet-show underlie the equation of fools, children and hobby-horses. He is described by other characters as 'a child i'faith' (5.4.194), or 'a resolute fool ... and a very sufficient coxcomb' (3.4.36-37). His nostalgic recollection of his childhood memories of listening to ballads at the fireside and

looking at them pasted up in the nursery (3.5.43-45) emphasises his naivety that can only be compared to Mopsa's in *The Winter's Tale*.

Bartholomew Fair represents the corruption of popular culture on several levels. Jonson aptly illustrates the commercialised 'underworld' of the fair in Nightingale the ballad-singer and the cutpurse Edgeworth's criminal duo, who strip Cokes bare of all he possesses, following in the vein of cony-catching pamphlets and literature (on cony-catching see Pugliatti 2003). They also recall their counterpart in *The Winter's Tale*, Autolycus. The ballad titles and themes are as nonsensical as the ones in *The Winter's Tale*, with an even stronger touch of parody, like e.g. 'The Windmill blown down by the witch's fart' (2.4.16). Although anti-festivity Puritans like Stubbes are also mocked in the figure of Zeal-of-the-land Busy, this character discredits not only hypocritical Puritans but also hobby-horses and other elements belonging to popular culture. Curiously, while Jonson mocks the Elizabethan Puritan Stubbes, he also discredits the vigour of country festivals, which can be felt even in Stubbes. However, in *Bartholomew Fair* such carnivalesque symbols become associated not with devilry but with childhood nonsense in Busy's answer to Leatherhead, a seller of toy hobbies. The two passages are worth quoting in full:

Thus al things set in order, then haue they their Hobby-horses, dragons & other Antiques, together with their baudie Pipers and thundering; Drummers to strike vp the deuils daunce withal ... marche these heathen company towards the Church-yard, their pipers pipeing, their drummers thundring, ... dancing, ... their handkerchiefs swinging about their heds like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters. Then, after this, about the Church they goe into the church-yard, where they haue commonly their ... banqueting houses set vp, wherin they feast, banquet & daunce al that day & (peradventure) all the night too. And thus these ... furies spend the Sabaoth day. (Stubbes, 1583, M2r-v)

LEATHERHEAD: What do you lack, gentlemen? What is't you buy? Rattles, drums, babies – BUSY: Peace, with thy apocryphal wares, thou profane publican – thy bells, thy dragons, and thy Toby's dogs. Thy hobby-horse is an idol, a very idol, a fierce and rank idol; and thou the Nebuchadnezzar, the proud Nebuchadnezzar of the Fair, that sett'st it up, for children to fall down to and worship. (3.6.49-56)

The puppet-show at the end – meant to crown the commercial festival of the fair – also plays on the ambivalence of puppets, which are simultaneously presented as living characters and clothes on a stick. The Puppet of the Ghost of Dionysos is seen as a toy hobby-horse (5.5.56), and all majesty of either ghosts or ancient gods is ridiculed in the show and in the comments by the spectators. The final komos, when everyone is invited to 'drown the memory of all enormity in your biggest bowl at home', forcing even Justice Overdo to remember that he is 'but Adam, flesh and blood' (5.5.90-97), though it recalls the generous open door and table of the wealthy at Christmas in Tudor England, is actually a form of

punishment for Overdo's pretensions. Finally, the Epilogue addressed to the King tilts the play even more definitely towards elite entertainment, where hobby-horses and 'such like rage' are only recalled as childhood folly. The final stage in the process of the hobby-horse's degradation is its politicisation by Milton in 1645: 'The word Politician is not us'd to his maw, and therupon he plaies the most notorious hobbihors, jesting and frisking in the luxury of his nonsense' (as quoted in *OED*, 'hobby-horse'). By the end of the golden age of Renaissance theatre the high-spirited and merry hobby-horse of the morris became an object of disgrace and stupidity, first as associated with wanton women then with childhood nonsense to be discarded and scorned. The ambiguities inherent in the polysemous hobby-horse of earlier decades seem to have given way to a less equivocal and more elitist approach to popular culture by the 1640s.

¹ An earlier version of the first part of this article has appeared as Pikli 2012. The issues developed in the 2012 text were those I presented for discussion at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011). The present article is a differently oriented and further elaborated reflection on the theme of the hobby-horse.

² As later on the several textual versions of *Hamlet* will be contrasted, from this point on I refer to the different editions in the following way: 'Jenkins ed.' refers to the conflated version of Arden 2 when the textual differences are of little significance, while Q1, Q2, F refer to the critical editions of these texts by Thompson and Taylor in Arden 3.

³ I agree with Mary Ellen Lamb's proposition that together with fairies and old wives' tales, the hobby-horse should be considered as a symbol of popular culture, with differing interpretations in differing 'productions' (Lamb 2006, 1-25 *et passim*).

⁴ 'Such aides-mémoires are also the *lieux de mémoire*, memory sites in which the memory of the entire national or religious communities is concentrated, monuments, rituals, feast days and customs' (Assmann 2006, 8-9).

⁵ Relying on the audience's intimate knowledge of the things mentioned, the references to popular culture such as mentioning a 'maypole', 'May Day', usually worked as 'popular emblems that conjure[d] up an entire scene in which the carefully coded symbols were familiar to everyone' (Laroque 1993, 46). Laroque's phrase of a 'popular emblem' is particularly apt – partly due to the popularity of emblem books in the age, but more importantly alluding to the method of *ut pictura poesis*, the interdependence of word and image in an emblem. This way even a direct verbal reference to a hobby-horse, like the one in *Love's Labour's Lost*, could evoke a whole range of meanings and images, especially if this potential was exploited by the poet – and Shakespeare was never one to miss such a chance.

⁶ Cf. 'The sexual connotations of the hobby-horse were both feminine and masculine. In the feminine sense, the hobby-horse is equated with a whore, or at least a promiscuous person' (Brissenden 1979, 5). 'As for the word "Hobby-horse", it acquired a succession of meanings, beginning as "gee-gee", "pet hobby" or childish fancy, and ending up as "woman of easy virtue or dissolute morals"' (Laroque 1993, 46).

⁷ In the period 1477 to 1640 the *Literature Online* database lists 9 entries and 10 hits in poetry, 35 entries and 75 hits in drama, 4 entries and 4 hits in prose for the 'hobby-horse'.

⁸ Due to space constraints, the mysterious history of the medieval hobby-horse cannot be treated here. I will simply recall that E.K. Chambers mentions and describes the hobby-horse in his wide-ranging account of the medieval stage (Chambers 1903, 142, 196-197). However, one interesting fact needs to be mentioned here: Cawte translates the fourteenth-century Welsh

poem, which expresses a nostalgic (!) attitude to the 'once magnificent' hobby-horse (Cawte 1978, 11). Jane Garry's article tracing the history of the morris from agricultural ritual and folk custom and then to courtly entertainment and popular theatre makes a highly valuable attempt at following the morris through the centuries; however, a lot of questions cannot be answered with certainty – therefore the real 'history' and meaning of the morris remain a challenge and a mystery (Garry 1983).

⁹Brissenden's informative essay on Shakespeare and the morris collects all these references, although he does not offer any serious categorisation and explanation for them.

¹⁰Cf. e.g. an early sixteenth-century Flemish calendar, in the British Library, and a French wood carving from 1587, as they appear in Endrei and Zolnay 1986, 15-16, 32-33.

¹¹Cf. the digital reproduction in Folger Shakespeare Library ART 256-916, <<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/6859o4>>, accessed 15 Dec 2011.

¹²Brissenden's explanations for this line seem less persuasive to me: 'He [Benedick] may merely mean that Claudio and Don Pedro are dim-witted, like a hobby-horse, or perhaps he is being contemptuous, as the Variorum editor seems to suggest, since the hobby-horse had fallen into disfavour under Puritan influence. A third possibility is that Benedick is implying that their talk is as empty as the hobby-horse's wooden mouth, manipulated by the dancer to open and shut with a dry clacking sound, but signifying nothing' (1979, 6). However, neither Benedick appears as one with Puritan sympathies nor the reference to the full-costumed hobby-horse (complete with headmask and snapping mouth) seems probable, as the late sixteenth – early seventeenth-century hobby-horses were rather the visible composite of a half-man, half-horse being.

¹³Quoted by Montgomery 1956, 219. Although Montgomerie's numerous associations between *Hamlet* and diverse folklore phenomena are definitely interesting, they are, however, too easily made without further analysis, therefore the reader is not convinced of their validity.

¹⁴It is important to note that the third record the *OED* provides for this meaning seems incorrect if one reads the source more carefully: in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* 3.4. 'A Carroch ... with four pyed hobbyhorses' as quoted in *OED* s.v. 'hobby-horse' is actually an ironic remark by Wasp on the childish ignorance of Cokes, who bought up the toyshop with all the hobby-horses and dolls, therefore the 'little odd cart' and the four hobby-horses may be actual toy hobbies: 'You are in Smithfield; you may fit yourself with a fine easy-going street-nag for your saddle again Michaelmas term, do. Has he ne'er a little odd cart for you to make a caroch on i' the country, with four pied hobby-horses? Why the measles should you stand here with your train, cheaping of dogs, birds and babies? You ha' no children to bestow 'em on, ha' you?' (3.4.21-27).

¹⁵'A respected and well-loved performer at church ales in the reign of Henry VIII, the hobby-horse came to signify low taste or even illicit sexuality by the close of Elizabeth's reign' (Lamb 2006, 15).

¹⁶Hartwig also mentions a 1534 treatise on husbandry which contains the word 'brydell', the 'leaping', the idea of commodity and the management and 'gait' of horses and women.

¹⁷A similar attitude is observable in late sixteenth-century Hungarian libellous verse condemning unruly women, and comparing them to mares and horses to be tamed (cf. Pikli 2010).

¹⁸Lindley focuses on revenge tragedy, Liebler on wider-ranging anthropological issues and Bristol on a more generally conceived idea of carnival and Claudius's appropriation of it. These aspects would also deserve revisiting in light of what is said about the hobby-horse. However, this may only be the topic for a later study.

¹⁹Smith refers to this pun and such inherent bawdiness in country ballads (1999, 171).

²⁰The lines are the following: 'Nay, then, there's some likelihood a gentleman's death my outlive his memory. But, my faith, he must build churches then, or else he must follow the old epithet: "With ho, with ho, the hobbyhorse is forgot!"'

²¹Supporting the claims of Lamb and Burke, regarding the 'withdrawal of the elite'.

²²Cf. the process of commercialisation of festivity, Bartholomew Fair and Smithfield in Haynes 1984.

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Behind the Happily-Ever-After: Shakespeare's Use of Fairy Tales and *All's Well That Ends Well*

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Abstract

Fairy tales were a very important part of early modern popular culture. Not only did they provide people with much needed entertainment, they offered a means of exploring one's most secret dreams and deepest anxieties. Beneath their enchanting exteriors, fairy tales contain certain recurrent emotional situations, which are actually quite primitive in nature. Shakespeare recognised this, and drew on these popular tales in his plays not just for their entertaining storylines, but for their emotional models, too. This allowed him to connect with his audience on an intimate, perhaps subconscious level. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, one of the playwright's most undervalued plays, Shakespeare drew heavily on fairy tales – but on the darker aspects of these stories. Understanding not only why but how Shakespeare used fairy tales as sources offers a new perspective on the play and may help to collapse *All's Well's* 'unfortunate' reputation.

Keywords: *All's Well That Ends Well*, Fairy Tales, Folk Sources, Oral Culture, Psychoanalysis.

1. *Neglected Sources*

Shakespeare seems to have preferred reworking established tales to inventing his own. It is no secret that the chronicles of Holinshed and Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* were the inspiration for Shakespeare's history and Roman plays; and that many of his romances and comedies drew on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and popular romance; or that Italian *novelle* motivated several of his comedies and tragedies. All these renowned sources are in written, literary forms and are still accessible. There is, however, another deep well of inspiration from which Shakespeare drew which has until now largely been overlooked: the treasure trove of traditional oral stories in circulation in Shakespeare's time – folk- and fairy tales.¹

The general neglect of folk- and fairy tales by Shakespearean scholars of both literature and early modern popular culture is understandable: these old stories are elusive and difficult to trace. Created by anonymous oral storytellers and passed on by word of mouth for countless generations, fairy tales' origins are obscure. Only when (and if) they make their way into the literary record can we sketch their history. The majority of the stories that we know today as folk- and fairy tales were recorded for the first time during the nineteenth

century, well after Shakespeare's era (Ashliman 2004, 12). Our ignorance of oral fairy tales before 1800 is compounded by the fact that the research done on these old stories is now itself getting old;² and most new scholarly work on the general subject of fairy stories necessarily uses written versions of the tales which appeared post-1800 because of the scarcity of earlier written versions. But admitting the elusiveness of such unwritten sources should not deter us from examining the area: the evidence contained in Shakespeare's plays alone, especially *All's Well That Ends Well*, reveals their ubiquitous influence.

Catherine Belsey's recent *Why Shakespeare?* makes an original contribution to this relatively unexplored area of Shakespeare scholarship. As she herself makes clear, 'There has not been a great deal of critical interest in Shakespeare's links with ... fireside tales' (2007, 17).³ Belsey argues that Shakespeare's continued popularity among modern audiences has to do with his use of folk- and fairy tale storylines, which show a parallel durability and appeal. While the significance of Belsey's insightful book is unquestionable, it is very short and is intended to be suggestive rather than in any way exhaustive. Her approach begs further analyses and expansion, especially with regard to the plays she has not considered, such as *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Shakespeare, I believe, was too shrewd a playwright to neglect such a rich resource, and regularly drew on old wives' tales in his plays, putting his audience's familiarity with them to work in new and surprising ways. With this in mind, I will suggest a new way of approaching *All's Well That Ends Well*, a consistently misunderstood drama, suggesting not only *why* but also *how* Shakespeare used fairy tales as sources. In so doing, I hope to offer an innovative perspective on both the play and the playwright's creative processes, which can be extended to analyses of other works by Shakespeare.

2. *Fireside Fancies*

Fairy tales were a very important part of early modern popular culture. They were invaluable as a means of entertainment in this pre-industrial society, making 'long nights seeme short, and heauy toyles easie', as the author of a popular seventeenth-century chapbook put it (Johnson 1965, 2). In Shakespeare's day, the majority of England was still a farming community and the year was organised around agricultural concerns. Working-hours were determined by the weather; and the northern climate could be harsh. In winter, farming was limited to a few hours a day, and it became largely impossible during the coldest months over Christmas. With no electric light or central heating, Elizabethans spent many long and dreary nights, Sundays, and Christmas holidays crowded around the fireside. This is the context in which fairy tales flourished.

Stories were an inveighing way of distracting people from the boredom of unoccupied hours. Henry Bourne, a cleric in Newcastle-upon-Tyne with an interest in the habits of the common people, wrote in 1725: 'Nothing is

commoner in Country Places than for a whole Family in a Winter's Evening, to sit around the Fire, and tell stories of Apparitions and Ghosts' (quoted in Spufford 1981, 5). Robert Burton, writing in the early 1600s, expands on the point, listing the recreations available in winter '[to] busy our minds with': cards, chess and other such games; music, singing, dancing; jests, riddles, catches; and, importantly, 'merry tales of errant Knights, Kings, Queenes, Lovers, Lords, Ladies, Giants, Dwarfes, Theeves, Cheaters, Witches, Fayries, Goblins, Friers, &c' (Burton 1990, 79). This list could conceivably belong to the *dramatis personae* of a number of Shakespeare's plays.

Even in London, the servants, maids, and nurses of the urban and elite would tell old wives' tales to divert themselves from the monotony of domestic chores, or to entertain a young lordling in his nursery. 'The fashion when I was a boy', John Aubrey recalls, was 'for the maydes to sitt-up late by the fire tell old Romantique stories of the old time, handed down to them with a great deal of alteration' (1972, 445). Reginald Scot similarly attributed the spread of folktales to 'old doting women' and 'our mother's maids' (1886, 122). While these entertaining tales would have been particularly popular with children, as they are today, they were not restricted to the young. Philip Sidney maintained that a poet, a 'maker of fictions', tells 'a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner' (Sidney 2002, 92). Another of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Richard Johnson, used an old tale in his popular early seventeenth-century chapbook, claiming it would appeal to a broad audience: 'The ancient Tales of *Tom Thumbe* in the olde time, haue beene the onely reuiuers of drouzy age at midnight; old and young ... Batchelors and Maides ... the old Shepheard and the young Plow boy ... haue carold out a Tale of *Tom Thumbe* to make merry with' (Johnson 1965, 2). Chapbooks like this one, as well as other printed texts like ballads and jest-books, often featured fairy tales, and were very popular in Shakespeare's day, even among the aristocracy (see Burke 1994, 26-28). John Clare admits he used to save every penny he could to buy the 'sixpenny Romances, of "Cinderella", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Jack and the Beanstalk", "Zig-Zag", "Prince Cherry", etc.', when 'hawkers offerd them for sale at the door' (*Sketches in the Life of John Clare*, in Robinson 1983, 5-6). Presumably the 'hawkers' were pedlars like Autolycus from *The Winter's Tale*.

Great dramatists recognise a good story when they hear one; Shakespeare used these popular traditional tales, both relying on and exploiting his audience's familiarity with such tried and tested plotlines. Perhaps, however, the dramatist drew on these old stories for another, more subtle reason, one which offers a new way of approaching his plays and goes far to explain his remarkable popularity.

3. *Children's Tales?*

The traditional folk- and fairy tales with which Shakespeare would have been familiar provided *more* than entertaining stories and simple distractions. They

served a very important function, especially in a society where disease, death, social injustice, and food shortages were rampant. As Bruno Bettelheim suggests, traditional fairy tales provide emotional support:

Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity. For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image, but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul – its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles. (1976, 309)

Unfortunately, nowadays, this suggestive and psychologically complex aspect of fairy tales has generally been forgotten or eclipsed. This further accounts for why we have neglected these stories as possible sources for Shakespeare's plays. We tend to dismiss fairy tales as childish. Despite the dark, Jungian adaptations by Angela Carter, we generally disregard them as serious works in their own right.⁴ They're simple stories set in fantastic worlds 'where wishing still does some good' (Ashliman 2004, 38). Fairy tales, by definition, contain a strong make-believe content: they recount fantasies and wishes, not truth. Great literature and drama should be about life-like characters in believable contexts. Surely Shakespeare, then, one of the most influential dramatists of all time, would not have relied on far-fetched children's tales.

Disney has, of course, helped to instil the perception of fairy tales as naive children's stories. Most people today are exposed to such narratives only in the prettified and simplified versions made for the big screen. Unfortunately, these forms suppress fairy tales' traditional meaning and deprive them of any deeper significance. For thousands of years, fairy tales have been a resource of *adults*. But our popular culture has transformed them from products created 'of the people' (an earlier meaning of the term 'popular') to empty-minded entertainment 'for the people'.⁵ And in the process, fairy tales have lost much of what gave them their enduring appeal.

4. *Beneath the Happily-Ever-After*

Behind their simple and enchanting exteriors, traditional fairy tales satisfy a number of personal needs. Perhaps most obviously, they provide a means for us to explore our most secret dreams and desires. Here, youngest children always prove most successful; unnoticed little boys can prove themselves and win princesses; and lowly servant girls can advance from kitchen to castle. This fundamental element of hope is one of the most alluring features of such stories.

As well as wish fulfilment, fairy tales provide a safe space in which to acknowledge and confront our deepest fears and most profound anxieties. A girl is forced to marry a hideous beast, but he turns out to be a handsome

prince. A bloodthirsty ogre threatens to devour a boy, but he uses his wits and escapes unscathed. Fairy tales assure us that 'a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but ... if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious' (Bettelheim 1976, 9).

A chief purpose of fairy tales, then, is to express our conscious and subconscious fears and desires. The fictional characters and events externalise our overwhelming but often formless emotional turmoils, allowing us to give voice to and confront such issues in a safe, imaginary realm, and come back to reality more reassured. Each story is an 'enabling device', as Maria Tatar put it (2002, xiv). Accordingly, fairy tales contain certain recurrent emotional situations: jealousy; hate; fear of death, rejection, and abandonment; anxiety over sex, courtship, and marriage; the desire to prove oneself, be recognised, be loved; and so on. These recurrent emotional situations, or 'terrifying truths of the inner life' (Orgel 1996, 17), are distillations of universal human issues – they are the purest expression of our collective psyches.

For this reason, fairy tales have often been compared to dreams. Both forms seem to express or release deep-rooted and often taboo human emotions buried deep in the subconscious.⁶ Shakespeare himself appeared to recognise the connection between the two forms. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, a veritable fairy tale from start to finish, repeatedly and deliberately points up its relationship to dreams. The four leading characters are led to believe (by magical fairies) that the disordered and fantastic experiences of a night in the forest (a typical fairy-tale setting) were but the events of a strange dream. And at the end of the play, Puck bids the whole audience to see the entire performance as the contents of a dream: 'this weak and idle theme, / No more yielding but a dream' (*Epilogue*, 6-7).⁷

As so often in dreams, the underlying emotional material at the heart of fairy tales is actually disturbingly primitive. Indeed, fairy tales have persuaded psychologists and folklorists to uncover just how violent, sexual, and potent their basic emotional subtexts are (see, for example, Dundes 1987, 3-46). In some fairy stories, little boys burn witches, husbands murder their wives, and fathers seek to wed their daughters. It is this murky side that makes these wonder tales so important psychologically. *Little Red Ridinghood* is a prime example. On the surface it seems a cautionary tale about listening to your mother and not straying from the path of obedience. But this surface simplicity hides an underlying complexity about a young woman's sexual curiosity and the danger of being seduced by, and falling into bed with, entirely the wrong sort of man – a predator.

Significantly, the dark and complex emotional dramas which undergird and motivate the fairy-tale narrative are *latent*. They linger suggestively *below* the surface of the story. This is possible because in these stories nothing is stated

outright: 'Even fairy tales, with their naive sense, their tenacious materialism, their reworking of familiar territory, and their sometimes narrow imaginative range, rarely send unambiguous messages' (Tatar 2002, xv). Fairy tales communicate to us via symbols and images which have various layers of meaning, some literal and some obscure. Part of their charm is that these symbols can be interpreted differently by different people. In 'Rapunzel', a story in the Brothers Grimm's collection, for example, a young woman lets down her hair to give her prince charming access to her secret chamber, and later discovers her clothes have become too tight. No doubt adults would understand this quite differently from children.

The symbolic imagery of fairy tales allows the great majority of people to shrug them off as trivial escapist fantasies. It is often possible to take them at face value or to focus on their enchantments and happily-ever-afters, but their characteristic happy endings often follow a journey which is quite dark; a voyage through our deep inner anxieties, which stem from our primal drives. This material, upon closer examination, is in fact very 'adult' in nature. But, because it is usually subsumed beneath the more child-like narrative, it works at a sub- or unconscious level, and can therefore be overlooked (or, as in Disney's case, cut out all together).

5. Shakespeare's Use of Fairy Tales

Even on a superficial level, many of Shakespeare's plays seem to recall fairy tales – the plots, motifs, and characters could have been lifted from any number of such stories. Jumped-up country girls and servants manage to find rich, handsome princes (*All's Well That Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*); love can be stimulated with a few drops of a fairy potion (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); youngest children prove to be the most worthy (*King Lear*, *As You Like It*); the dead can come back to life (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles, Cymbeline*); and the living can seem dead with the help of a magical breath-stilling tonic (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*). I propose, however, that Shakespeare borrowed more than just superficial elements from fairy tales: he recognised and utilised the potent emotional dramas such tales encode, too. Fairy tales may initially attract their audiences by being entertaining, but they *maintain* rapt listeners by connecting with each member on an individual and emotional level. In drawing on fairy tales, then, Shakespeare was also evoking their rich emotional and personal resonances. This allowed him to add layers of subtle meaning to his plays, and to connect with his audience on a private, perhaps subconscious level.

6. *All's Well That Ends Well* – a Fairy Tale for Adults

Among Shakespeare's plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* has attracted comparatively little critical attention. It has, in fact, been almost entirely dismissed as an unsuccessful comedy. As a result, *All's Well* was categorised, along with other plays written about the same time in the early 1600s, as a 'problem play'.⁸ Today,

critics tend to approach the play with more of an open mind than in the past, but it is still generally regarded as having or presenting distinctive 'problems'.⁹

Much of the plot causes discomfort, not least the 'bedtrick', where Helena tricks the unwitting Bertram into sleeping with her. 'Everyone who reads this play is at first shocked and perplexed by the revolting idea which underlies the plot. It is revolting; there is no doubt about it', said the first Arden editor (Brigstocke, ed., 1904, xv). Less prudish critics are still disturbed by the play's dark tone. Rather than charming us with the romantic optimism of comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost* or *As You Like It*, *All's Well* seems to present the 'seamier side' of life, as Geoffrey Bullough put it (1958, vol. II, 380). We are not even certain, at the end of this supposed comedy, if all is indeed well.¹⁰

The play's characters do little to help the situation. Bertram has been overwhelmingly condemned, with most people content to follow Dr. Johnson's renowned estimation of him as

a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness. (Quoted in Snyder, ed., 1993, 26)

Helena is praised by the play's characters as virtuous, but most critics find her behaviour puzzling at best, downright repellent at worst: 'I cannot reconcile my heart to Helen', says Susan Snyder, condensing general opinion of the heroine in the style of Dr. Johnson, 'a woman who pursues and captures, not once but twice, a man who doesn't want her; uses trickery in order to force herself on him sexually; and finally consolidates her hold on her husband to a chorus of universal approbation' (30). On the whole, as one critic aptly summarises, '*All's Well* perplexes more than it satisfies, and repels more than it attracts' (Lawrence 1922, 448).

7. *Shakespeare's Literary Source*

Shakespeare's acknowledged source for *All's Well* is Boccaccio's novella in *The Decameron*, Day III, Story 9. The playwright probably knew the tale from William Painter's close translation of it in *The Palace of Pleasure*, published in 1566 and reprinted in 1569 and in 1575 (in Bullough 1958, vol 2, 389-396). *The Decameron* is a fourteenth-century Italian collection of 100 novellas, told over 10 days. Although a written collection, the *Decameron* has an intimate relationship with oral stories, and this is reflected within its own text. The frame tale tells of a group of seven women and three men who, to flee from a plague epidemic, take shelter in a villa in the countryside near Florence where they pass their evenings by telling each other stories. These stories, recounted orally to the group, make up the 100 novellas. Many classical, medieval and

early modern texts, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, or Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, present their stories as being told orally, reflecting the illusory boundary between oral and written forms that existed in those days. This is further evidenced if we consider the communal mode of transmission of many written stories like Boccaccio's: 'there is no question that oral reading and recitation were common means by which medieval audiences received romances' (Huot 2000, 73).¹¹ Tale III.9 of the *Decameron* has obvious roots in two folktales: 'The Dragon-Slayer' and 'The Man Who Deserted His Wife' (ATU 300 and ATU 891 respectively).¹² It would seem quite possible that Boccaccio heard these tales orally, for in no other literary work do these two stories appear together (Lawrence 1922, 448).

8. Folk Sources

Most people admit that *All's Well* has a 'fairy-tale feel' to it, and a recent production of the play, directed by Marianne Elliott and presented by Britain's National Theatre in 2009, was conspicuously based on a fairy-tale atmosphere. It was even described as being 'a fairy tale for adults' by the *Daily Telegraph*.¹³ But the idea that *All's Well* may have actual fairy-tale sources has largely been ignored.

As early as 1922, however, William Lawrence pointed out that the play is clearly based on two different fairy-tale types or analogues, which he termed 'the healing of the king' (subsequently categorised as ATU 300) and 'the fulfilment of the tasks' (ATU 891). The significance of Lawrence's identification of the play's folk ties cannot be doubted; as G. K. Hunter noted, he brought about a 'revolution in our attitude to *All's Well* in terms of source material (1959, xxx). And whenever critics do mention *All's Well*'s fairy-tale links, Lawrence is cited as the authority. But Lawrence's work has had less impact than one would expect. Rather than picking up the clues he left almost a century ago, critics have instead shied away from examining or uncovering *All's Well*'s fairy-tale roots. The reason for this avoidance could lie in the fact that Lawrence's analysis of the fairy-tale sources and their bearing on the play is lacking. He fails to perceive any deeper meaning to the traditional tales. Like the Disney productions today, he divorces the stories from their potent emotional subtexts, particularly any potentially murky subtexts.¹⁴ In his eyes, the tales are merely charming narratives about clever but simple folktale protagonists, who behave virtuously despite their testing, and are unreservedly rewarded with happily-ever-afters. Given that Shakespeare incorporated such tales into his play, Lawrence insists that *All's Well* should therefore be interpreted in the same light (1922, 463). This reductive interpretation of *All's Well*'s folk sources has helped to strengthen a general perception of the play as being poorly constructed. Various critics see *All's Well* having two opposing threads: 'fairy tale', which encompasses the idealistic and magical elements of the play, as

well as Lawrence's interpretation; and 'realism', which contains all the gritty problems (emotional, psychological, moral) of the play that Lawrence's optimistic reading could not quite satisfy.¹⁵ The darker 'realistic' thread of *All's Well* is perceived to undercut or fight against the romantic 'fairy tale' thread, leaving us with a play that lacks a distinct sense of unity – a 'problem play'.

But I suggest it is possible to approach the play from a different angle, and in so doing get behind some of its problems.

9. *Stirring Up Emotions*

The reason, I believe, for *All's Well's* unfortunate reputation is that the play draws deeply on fairy tales – but on the darker aspects of these stories.

In *All's Well*, Shakespeare takes the usually dormant emotional content in his fairy-tale sources, which is often quite disturbing, and agitates and enhances it, so that it seethes dangerously close to the narrative surface, threatening to boil over and overwhelm the optimistic story line. The dramatist gives voice to all the difficult emotional and moral tensions which fairy tales traditionally only symbolically represent (and Boccaccio doesn't represent at all). How would it feel to be the trophy blithely given away like an object? What's wrong with a woman lustily chasing after the man she desires, or choosing how she loses her virginity? How rigid is the line between determination and obsession, right and wrong? In this light, the perceived split in the play between the romantic fairy-tale elements and the grisly realistic elements is erroneous. The darker, emotionally complex elements of *All's Well* do not fight against the fairy tale elements: they comment on them, because they are *part* of the fairy tale. Rather than oversimplifying the play, in other words, the folktale strains complicate it.

All's Well, then, is a play where extremely 'adult' subjects, like pursuing a sex object and losing one's virginity, are placed inside an 'envelope' that seems to involve more child-like narrative expectations. The clash is not between realism and fairy tale, in that case, but as a fairy tale, between adult subjects and child-like narrative expectations. It's as if Shakespeare is anticipating (as always) modern insights into the disturbingly primitive material of so-called children's stories. As Terry Eagleton observed, 'though in many ways we appear to have left Shakespeare's age behind, there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him' (1987, 5).

10. *The Mingled Yarn*

Shakespeare's ingenious use of folktales is evident in the second half of *All's Well*, particularly in the characterisation of and the relationship between Diana, Helena, and Bertram. For this part of the play, Shakespeare drew on the latter half of Boccaccio's tale III.9.

Boccaccio based the second part of his story on a very popular type of folktale, ATU 891, 'The Man Who Deserted His Wife'. This tale type has numerous variants, across many cultures, which were documented most recently by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004. In stories of this type, a man marries a clever woman, but then quickly deserts her, leaving her with a set of ostensibly impossible tasks (one of which is to bear him a child) to fulfil before he will accept her as wife. The wife follows her husband in disguise, and by some deception manages to sleep with him without being recognised. She goes home and gives birth to his child (or children). When the husband returns and sees the child, he acknowledges his wife's fulfilment of the tasks and the pair lives happily ever after.¹⁶ The following Arabian tale, 'The Sultan's Camp Followers', is a good example:

A sultan is impressed with a poor saddlemaker's daughter's ability to pose riddles, and so he marries her. He abandons her untouched, however, setting out for war instead. She follows him to his camp, disguised as a man, and the pair plays a game of chess. She lets him win, and as a prize offers to let him sleep with her slave woman. She then disguises herself as the slave woman, sleeps with her unwitting husband, and conceives a child by him. This happens twice more, before the sultan learns the truth and finally accepts his wife and children.¹⁷

Boccaccio follows the narrative tradition quite closely. The count Beltramo marries and then abandons Giletta, without sleeping with her, and flees to war in Italy, where he falls for a Florentine gentlewoman. Contrary to the source tales, however, the Florentine woman is not Giletta in disguise, but a distinct person. Perhaps this change was motivated by the desire for a more realistic story, or possibly Boccaccio was inspired by a closely related group of folktales, ATU 1379, in which the wife is always distinct from the mistress (who tends to be a maid serving in the husband's house). Poggio Bracciolini provides us with an early European example in 'An English Dyer who Had an Adventure with His Wife', which goes as follows:

A married man asked his pretty serving-maid to grant him certain favours. The maid told his wife, who advised her to agree to the man's wishes. At the arranged time, the wife went instead of the serving-maid to the secret meeting place, and so the man committed adultery with his own wife.¹⁸

Despite Boccaccio's separating Giletta from the Florentine mistress, he fails to develop the latter's character. She is simply a device. We know nothing of her except that she is 'a gentlewoman, very poore and of small substance', who is nevertheless 'of right and honest life and good report' (Painter 1958, 393). Boccaccio does not even give her a name.

Like Boccaccio, Shakespeare makes the 'other' woman distinct from Helena, but he diverges from his literary source by building the character up

considerably. His inspiration seems to have come from the oral stories at the heart of Boccaccio's narrative. With Diana, as we shall see, Shakespeare shows his familiarity with the oral tradition, and his ability to read between the lines and dramatise the hidden meaning contained therein.

In folktales of both type 891 and 1379, the husbands' intended mistresses are all of one sort: they are maids, slaves, servants, or virgins. They are, in other words, vulnerable, powerless, and submissive.¹⁹ Significantly, the wives are shown to be the opposite. Each tale makes a point of noting the wife's cleverness. Often, it is this cleverness that wins them the men in the first place, as in 'The Sultan's Camp Followers' quoted above, where the heroine's skill at posing riddles attracts her husband.²⁰ The wives' cleverness seems to imply a certain level of assertiveness or competence. Indeed, it would appear that this same quality, which may have initially seemed attractive, is part of what scares the men off without consummating the marriage. A resourceful woman, whose wits are often more than a match for her husband, is also an intimidating woman.

The fact that the folktale husbands all flee before consummating their marriages (and sometimes even insist against it) hints at an underlying fear of female sexuality.²¹ No doubt such anxieties would have been brought about or at least exacerbated by the idea of submitting to a sharp-witted, capable woman. It is telling that the men escape their wives' beds for activities like war or hunting.²² These typically male environments are far less threatening to their masculinity and dominance.

Considering this, it is not surprising that when the folktale husbands do decide to sleep with a woman, she is meek and unthreatening. The wives, then, by disguising themselves as slaves or serving girls, are not merely hiding their features, but their personalities too. They transform themselves into what their husbands need in order to assuage their sexual anxieties: unthreatening and exploitable objects.

Boccaccio either doesn't see or chooses to overlook these potent sexual undercurrents. He ignores the hint that the folktale husbands' motivations for leaving their wives may have sexual roots, and instead bases Beltramo's rejection and desertion of Giletta on an *external* reason: her low status. The count is shocked when he learns Giletta is to be his wife since he sees her as 'not to be of a stocke convenable to his nobility' (Painter 1958, 391); so he leaves for Italy straight after the ceremony, where he is sure he will be received in a manner more befitting his noble status (391-392).²³

Ironically, the woman Beltramo falls for in Italy is of even lower status than Giletta. While this accords with the source tales, it seems inconsistent with Beltramo's earlier sentiment. This reveals that Boccaccio was less concerned with the psychological motivations behind the characters' actions than with the actions themselves. It doesn't particularly matter whom Beltramo chooses to sleep with, as long as it is not Giletta. Accordingly, the Florentine mistress remains a device. Unlike Boccaccio, Shakespeare recognises the primitive

subtext driving the folktale storylines, and he not only pushes it to the surface, but enhances and emphasises it too.

Diana, the Florentine maid, is a paragon of symbolic interpretation. She embodies precisely what the folktale husbands desire, but which is only *implied* in the oral stories. She is beautiful, chaste, modest, honest – and powerless. As both a poor maid and the daughter of a widow, she is extremely vulnerable, especially in the patriarchal and hierarchical society of the day. Perhaps more important than all these aspects, however, is the fact that she chastely rebuffs Bertram's advances: 'she is armed for him and keeps her guard / In honestest defence' (3.5.70-71). 'I spoke with her', Bertram eagerly confides to a friend, 'And found her wondrous cold' (3.6.103-104). The combination of Diana's blushing hesitancy and her vulnerability awakens and inflames Bertram's lust. 'Stand no more off', he begs her, 'But give yourself unto my sick desires / Who then recovers' (4.2.35-38).

Helena, by contrast, extinguishes Bertram's desire; she is Diana's foil. Although she begins the play as a self-effacing physician's daughter, pining over an idealised love for Bertram, by the time she is married to the young count she has wealth, power, and the king's backing: 'Virtue and she / Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me' (2.3.139-140). She has proven herself exceedingly resourceful, 'A showing of heavenly effect in an earthly / actor!' (2.3.22-23), as well as determined and assertive: 'Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, / Which we ascribe to heaven' (1.1.199-200). She not only mirrors the clever wives of the folktales, she exceeds them, pushing the envelope of her generic type. Helena is also presented as overtly sexual.²⁴ Her undisguised desire for Bertram comes out first in her discussion with Parolles, where she muses on virginity, 'How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own liking?' (1.1.140) – a very radical expression of sexual desire from a woman. Soon thereafter she laments that her 'wishing well [for Bertram] had not a body in't / Which might be felt' (168-169). Later, she goes so far as to beg Bertram for a kiss: 'Strangers and foes do sunder and not kiss' (2.5.81).²⁵ Where Diana plays 'hard to get', Helena openly and unashamedly throws herself at Bertram.

Bertram, an 'unbaked and doughy youth' (4.5.30), is visibly repelled by Helena. When he is informed he will be marrying her, his initial shocked response recalls Beltramo's: 'A poor physician's daughter, my wife? Disdain / Rather corrupt me ever' (2.3.111-112). But the king quickly quashes this excuse, saying that he will build her status up (113-114). Bertram then reveals that he simply 'cannot love' Helena 'as a maid' (138-141). It is not her rank, in other words, that motivates Bertram's unwillingness to marry Helena, but some other, *internal* reason.²⁶ We get a hint as to what this may be after the wedding. Bertram agrees to the ceremony, on account of the king's bullying, but no amount of harassment could make him sleep with his new bride. He vehemently refuses to consummate the marriage: 'Although before the solemn priest I have sworn, / I will not bed her'; and again, 'I'll ... never bed her'

(2.3.253-254; 257). Indeed, on the very night '[w]hen [he] should take possession of the bride' (2.5.24), he decides to flee to Italy. He will not so much as kiss his new wife (2.5.78-82).

Bertram, then, recoils from Helena because of her forbidding sexuality. This is further emphasised by Parolles, Bertram's close companion, who articulates the count's dread: 'He wears his honour in a box unseen', says Parolles,

That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,
Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
Of Mars's fiery steed. (2.3.263-267)

Bertram fears being sexually dominated by his wife and losing his masculinity. It is no accident that he, like all the folktale husbands, flees to a very manly activity. War is much easier to navigate than the emotional and sexual intricacies of a relationship: 'Wars no strife / To the dark house and the detested wife' (2.3.275-276).²⁷ Similarly, it is not surprising that Bertram should fall for a poor Florentine maid. Unlike Helena, Diana presents no threat to Bertram's masculinity or his control. On the contrary, her vulnerability and sexual naivety are clear from the outset: 'Beware / of [men], Diana; their promises, enticements, oaths, tokens, and / all their engines of lust, are not the things they go under' (3.5.16-18). As Bertram sees it, Diana can be manipulated, used, and then discarded, with no thought for the consequences. She is precisely what Bertram needs in order to overcome his sexual qualms. Through the character of Diana, Shakespeare reveals what Bertram both fears and desires and makes clear through contrast what Helena lacks.

A number of critics have postulated that Bertram's anxieties over marriage with Helena have sexual origins.²⁸ Stanley Wells likens Bertram to Adonis, suggestively noting that 'here as in the poem [*Venus and Adonis*] the young man's resistance to the advances of a woman who is more sexually aware than himself hints at psychological reasons which may lie beyond his conscious understanding' (2010, 141). I suggest that these 'psychological reasons' Shakespeare found in the oral folktales, where the husbands' inner sexual anxieties are subtly implied. The dramatist merely brings them to the surface, and makes them more problematical.

Bullough characterised tale III.9 of the *Decameron* as a simple story 'describing what people did and said rather than analysing what they felt and thought' (1958, vol. II, 378). Shakespeare modifies his literary source by (re)introducing fairy tales. Perhaps influenced by the tales he heard orally, Shakespeare recognised the fairy-tale patterns within Boccaccio's story, and realised – despite Boccaccio's handling of them – that these stories mapped out compelling emotional situations. He brings these to the fore, emphasising and provoking the disquieting tensions present in the original tales but suppressed or excised by Boccaccio. In

the second half of the play, as we have seen, Shakespeare brings to the surface the latent sexual undercurrents contained in folktales of type 891 – suggested in narrative incidents such as the folktale husbands’ deserting their clever wives before sleeping with them – while Boccaccio removes any hint of such primitive motivations behind the storyline. As a result, Shakespeare magically transforms Boccaccio’s simple, child-like narrative ‘describing what people did and said’ into a rich drama of adult feelings and complicated ambiguities. The dramatist had an uncanny ability to draw out the human significance in any story, no matter how ostensibly trivial.

11. *Conclusion*

All’s Well That Ends Well is far from alone in the Shakespeare canon in its utilisation of disturbing material plundered from the dramatist’s childhood experience of folk- and fairy tales. Motifs like the ghost in *Hamlet* and the witches in *Macbeth* are other clear examples, while in plays like *Cymbeline*, *Measure for Measure*, *Pericles* and *King Lear*, the kinds of plots we encounter in orally transmitted stories lie close to the surface and add the kinds of disturbing qualities we find in *All’s Well*.

¹ Although in everyday usage folktales and fairy tales are often treated as two different kinds of stories, fairy tales form a subcategory of folktales, not a separate genre. In this essay, therefore, I will be treating folk- and fairy tales as two manifestations of the same well of oral sources. For a more in-depth explanation of the classification of folk narratives, see Ashliman 2004, 29-34. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

² Katharine Briggs’ renowned dictionary (1970), for instance, was published forty years ago – and it does not focus on fairy tales as *stories*, but is intended as a reference work. A book which focuses more on fairy tales as narratives, Stith Thompson’s *The Folktale* (1946), was published 66 years ago.

³ Similarly, Anne Thompson, in her introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, asserts that critical discussion on the matter of sources for that play has been hampered by ‘the reluctance of literary scholars to deal with folktale and oral tradition’ (1984, 9).

⁴ See for instance Carter 1979. In this book, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Carter seizes on the suppressed psychological material in old fairy tales like ‘Bluebeard’, ‘Puss in Boots’ and ‘Little Red Ridinghood’, and uses it to create new, subversive, and unsettling stories, often overtly sexual and violent.

⁵ Gillespie and Rhodes 2006, 1. Disney has even gone so far as to copyright these stories!

⁶ For a good psychological approach to fairy tales see von Franz 1996.

⁷ All Shakespeare quotations are taken from Greenblatt *et al.*, eds, 1997.

⁸ The label was coined in 1896 by F. S. Boas for plays that posed particular social and psychological problems which required unusual and often unsatisfying solutions. He applied the term to *Troilus and Cressida*, *All’s Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Hamlet* (Snyder, ed., 1993, 16).

⁹ See Waller 2007 for a collection of essays on the play which are much more optimistic in spirit.

¹⁰ See Price 1968 to get a sense of the critical dissatisfaction with *All's Well* (especially with Bertram's callowness, Helena's deception, and the so-called reconciliation).

¹¹ Boccaccio was not alone in borrowing folktale plots: Giambattista Basile, Giovanni Francesco Straparola, and Geoffrey Chaucer all regularly incorporated popular folktales into their work (Ashliman 2004, 22-23, 153). Shakespeare was not doing anything new, then, in using folktales in his plays, he was merely continuing an old and fruitful narrative tradition.

¹² Uther 2004, part 1, 174 and 516. The ATU number attributed to a folktale refers to its classification as a certain 'type'. A 'type' is a term used by folklorists to describe a basic plotline or sequence of events. Stories with the same basic plotlines are grouped together as one type, having one ATU number. Aarne and Thompson first catalogued folktales in this manner, and Uther later updated the catalogue, hence the label 'ATU'.

¹³ *The National Theatre Live* (2009), <<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=52899>>, accessed 15 Nov 2009.

¹⁴ As a result, Lawrence oversimplifies things which are actually quite complicated – like the moral status of Helena. Where Lawrence sees Helena's tricking Bertram into bed as a completely acceptable convention of storytelling, for instance, other critics deem her behaviour as tantamount to rape. See, for instance, Wells 2010, 122.

¹⁵ See for example Hunter 1959, 1, who says that the main issue with the plays seems to be 'the specific problem of reconciling a simple magical heroine derived from the source with a realistic background'. Hunter seems intent on showing that much of the play runs against the folk-narrative effects that Lawrence perceived. Snyder puts it as a 'dramatic clash between romantic wish-fulfilment and brutal social fact' (1993, 8).

¹⁶ Tales of this type are both very old and very popular. Not only Boccaccio, but Straparola (*Le Piacevoli notti*) and Basile (*Pentamerone*), as well as a number of early fabliaux and jestbooks, all make use of type 891. In addition, the type has an oral tradition which goes back at least as far as the eleventh century, the date of *The Kathá sarit ságarā; or, Ocean of the streams of story*, an Indian collection of folktales. It is likely, in this case, that Shakespeare was familiar with stories of type 891 in some form other than Boccaccio's. This is especially plausible if we consider that Shakespeare used the bedtrick, which lies at the heart of every type 891 story, in another of his plays, *Measure for Measure*. According to Stith Thompson, tales which turn on seduction and adultery, 'deceptions connected with sex-conduct', were high favourites in the Middle Ages, among both oral and literary storytellers (1946, 202-203).

¹⁷ My summary, from Bushnaq, ed., 1986, 339-343.

¹⁸ My summary, from Bracciolini 1928, no. 116, 143.

¹⁹ In an Indian tale entitled *The Clever Wife*, for instance, the wife disguises herself as a cowherd's daughter in order to sleep with her husband (Stokes 1880, tale XXVIII, 216).

²⁰ Sometimes the wives are simply stated as being clever, as in *The Clever Wife*, referred to above. Often, though, they actively display their cleverness: in a Turkish story, a Vizier's daughter is very good at answering and posing riddles (Lawrence 1922, 429).

²¹ This seems especially true if we consider that the folktale men generally marry their wives willingly. They don't flee, in other words, out of hatred for their brides. Evidently, as new and probably nervous husbands, they fear what marriage entails: sex. In part, these are tales of sexual maturation; they trace the husband's budding awareness of his sexuality and his relationship to the opposite sex.

²² In the Turkish story mentioned above, once the prince has married the Vizier's clever daughter, he leaves immediately to go hunting, where he remains for nine years (Lawrence 1922, 429).

²³ Although Beltramo also does not sleep with Giletta before fleeing, the implication is that he does so because the marriage will then be open for annulment; there is no suggestion that he *fears* sleeping with Giletta.

²⁴ Shakespeare picks up on the fact that the folktale husbands fear female sexuality, and he dramatises and builds on this by making Helena intensely sexual.

²⁵ See also 4.4.21-26, where she reflects on her night in bed with Bertram, his 'sweet use' of her, how 'lust doth play', and her sense of defilement.

²⁶ This makes Helena's rejection much more heart-wrenching; Bertram rejects *her*, as a person, rather than her status. It is with small changes like this that Shakespeare draws out the human meaning behind the story.

²⁷ This theme seems to have been a favourite of Shakespeare's. He first explores it in *Venus and Adonis*, which deals with a male's fear of a predatory female. Adonis is not interested in sexually voracious Venus, and all he wants to do is go hunting. This is echoed in *All's Well*, written after that poem, which recounts Bertram's fear of lustful Helena. Like Adonis, all Bertram wants to do is go engage in a manly activity (in this case, war). Shakespeare picks up the theme once more in *I Henry IV*, with the battle-hungry Hotspur. Hotspur's wife complains that all her husband wants to do is fight in war, depriving her of her wifely rights: 'O, my good lord, why are you thus alone? / For what offence have I this fortnight been / A banished woman from my Harry's bed?' (2.4.31-33).

²⁸ See, for instance, Snyder, ed., 1993, 11; Neely 1985, 71; McCandless 1994, 456-457. While critics have identified Bertram's sexual anxieties, what has not been said is where Shakespeare got the idea for these psychological tensions: folktales.

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Witchcraft

In Search of the English Sabbat: Popular Conceptions of Witches' Meetings in Early Modern England

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Abstract

This article explores the evidence for belief in the witches' sabbat in early modern England. England is generally thought of as a country where the concept of the sabbat did not exist, and it was certainly largely absent from elite thinking on witchcraft, as displayed in the witchcraft statutes of 1563 and 1604 and Elizabethan and Jacobean demonological writings. But evidence entering the historical record mainly via depositions taken by justices of the peace suggests that there was a widespread popular belief in the sabbat or in parallel forms of witches' meetings, evidence that the concept of the sabbat existed in popular culture. In this, the English evidence seems to support Carlo Ginzburg's model of the sabbat being essentially a popular construction in its origins. The article also examines a play based on one of the historical incidents analysed, Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), and uses it as a starting point for a brief discussion of witchcraft motifs in contemporary drama, notably Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Keywords: Popular Beliefs, Witchcraft, Witches' Sabbat.

1. *Anne Armstrong's Depositions*

In 1673 Anne Armstrong, from Birchen Nook near Stocksfield in Northumberland, gave a remarkable series of depositions to local justices of the peace.¹ We know very little about Anne. She was servant in nearby Burytree House, and the documentation suggests that she was young, probably a teenager. What we do know is that in what seems to have been her only appearance in the historical record, she provided the Northumberland justices with a highly personalised and extremely elaborate account of the witches' sabbat which was apparently rooted very firmly in popular culture.

In her first deposition, dated 5 February 1673, Armstrong, after some preliminaries, told how the previous August she had met 'an old man with ragged clothes', who warned her that she was going to be bridled like a horse and ridden to a meeting where various strange things would happen, and where she should on no account eat any of the food which might be offered to her. At this Armstrong fell into a trance, and after recovering from it was troubled by other trances over the following days. Then, shortly before Christ-

mas, a woman called Anne Forster, with whom she had previously bargained about eggs, came to her and put a bridle on her, at which Armstrong's head assumed the shape of a horse's. After this, she recounted, Forster 'ridd upon this inform[er] cross-legg'd until she came to the rest of her companions at Ridinge Mill Brigend where they usually mett'. The assembly 'stood all upon a bare spott of ground', and Armstrong sang to them 'whilst they danced in severall shapes first of a haire then in their owne and then in a catt and sometimes in a mouse and severall other shapes'. They also ate at a table, presided over by what Armstrong dubbed 'their Protector', a title with obvious resonances a mere fifteen years after the death of Oliver Cromwell, 'which they called their God sitting at ye head of the table in a gold chair'. A rope hung over him, and by pulling on it those assembled received 'severall kindes of meate and drinke'. Such meetings, Armstrong reported, took place over 'six or seven nights in a row' (TNA [The National Archives], ASSI 45/10/3/34).

Armstrong, perhaps in response to questions posed by the justices, added further details in her later statements. She described Anne Baites going to the meetings 'riding upon wooden dishes and egg shells', and when she arrived changing into various shapes, 'letting the devil (who she called her protect[or]) see how many shapes she could turn herself into' (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/35). On another occasion, Armstrong recounted, the devil put a stone on the ground, and the witches gathered around it and said the Lord's Prayer backwards (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/38). Yet, despite such embellishments, the basic elements of her description of the sabbat stayed the same as in her initial deposition. She repeated them in her fullest account, apparently given to the Northumberland justices assembled at Quarter Sessions on 9 April 1673 (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/36). In particular, she described a meeting of 10 February that year, whither she 'was ridden upon by an enchanted bridle by Michael Aynsley & Marg[ar]et his wife'. The enchanted bridle was taken off when they came to the meeting place, where Armstrong again sang while those present danced in the shape of hares, cats, bees, or in their own shapes. Then each told the devil of the harm he or she had done, '& those that did the most evill he made most of'. Her description of another meeting, held on 3 April, contained an elaborate account of the food the witches pulled down from a rope strung across the 'balkes' of a house. 'Every person had their swings in ye said rope', Armstrong recounted, 'and did get sev[er]all dishes of provision upon their severall swings according as they did desire'. The food was plentiful but simple: a capon boiled in plum broth, cheese, butter, flour, currants, mutton, wine, sack and ale. Armstrong also told how the witches gathered in 'coveys' each of thirteen people, each covey being presided over by a devil. She named about thirty of those who were present.²

A number of those thus named were questioned by the justices, and at least two of them imprisoned. Among them, as was frequently the case in parallel continental cases, were people with an established reputation as

witches. One of those singled out by Armstrong was Isabel Thompson, and a man named Mark Humble deposed to the justices how he had suspected her of bewitching him some seven or eight years previous, 'she being form[er]ly suspected of witchcraft' (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/40). Margaret Teadle, afflicted by a strange illness for a period of six months, told how she was 'advised to get blood of one Isabell Thompson and Thomasine Watts [another of those identified by Armstrong as a sabbat-attender] which accordingly she did, and since that time she has beene much better and now able to goe abroad' (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/40). Armstrong, indeed, was acquiring a reputation as a witch-finder. George Tayler and John Marsh deposed how they came to her after hearing about her tales of the sabbat, and how her description of witches reporting the acts of *maleficium* to the devil had helped them both define the misfortunes which they and their neighbours had been experiencing as attributable to witchcraft and identify the authors of these misfortunes (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/53-34). Armstrong herself told how she had come into Allendale 'by ye parishioners for ye discovery of witches', and how Isabel Johnson, 'being under suspicion', was brought to her and made to breathe on her. At this Armstrong fell into a swoon for three quarters of an hour, 'and after her recovery said if there were any witches in England, Isabell Johnson was one' (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/47). So far as we know, none of those named by Anne as being present at the sabbat or questioned in the wake of her statements were formally prosecuted.³ But, in less propitious circumstances, stories of the sabbat like Anne Armstrong's might have generated a mass witch-hunt.⁴

2. *The Sabbat: an UnEnglish Phenomenon?*

The witches' sabbat is surely among the most remarkable phenomena encountered by the historian of the European witch-hunts. Despite local variations, the main elements of the sabbat remained fairly constant, and have been summarised neatly by Carlo Ginzburg:

Male and female witches met at night, generally in solitary places, in fields or in mountains. Sometimes, having anointed their bodies, they flew, arriving astride poles or broom sticks; sometimes they arrived on the backs of animals, or transformed into animals themselves. Those who came for the first time had to renounce the Christian faith, desecrate the sacrament and offer homage to the devil, who was present in human or (most often) in animal or semi-animal form. There would follow banquets, dancing, sexual orgies. Before returning home the female and male witches received evil ointments made from children's fat and other ingredients. (1990, 1)

The origins of this remarkable cultural construct are subject to various interpretations. Current thinking, however, suggests that it emerged more or less fully formed in trials in northern Italy around 1400. Its reality was accepted by a number of fifteenth-century commentators,⁵ although, remarkably, it did

not feature in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487; see the comments of Broedel 2003, 129-131).

The concept of the sabbat seems to have gained growing acceptance among demonologists in the years following 1500, and subsequently received full treatment in the classic demonological works published later in the sixteenth century,⁶ with demonological writing on the sabbat reaching its apogee in 1612 with the publication of a massive work by the French judge Pierre de Lancre. De Lancre had headed a witch-hunt in the Pays de Labord, a Basque-speaking area in the extreme south-west of France, in the course of which, he claimed, he had been responsible for the execution of 600 witches (modern estimates suggest a much lower total). What makes de Lancre's work distinctive, however, is the centrality he awarded to the sabbat, and the lengthy descriptions he gave of what happened there, based on the confessions of those suspected witches he had interrogated, with special emphasis on the sexual promiscuity they described (de Lancre 1612).⁷ It was no doubt this type of prurience which led Robin Briggs to refer to accounts of the sabbat as 'a kind of scholarly pornography' (1996, 32). But as de Lancre's activities demonstrate, this 'scholarly pornography' might all too easily lead to the concrete obscenity of a major witch hunt.

In some regions the idea of the sabbat did not take hold, and there is a consensus that England was one of these. Cecil L'Estrange Ewen, an important pioneer student of English witchcraft, declared that in England 'little or nothing of the black mass is to be traced, and there is remarkably limited enterprise in the way of *al fresco* conventions' (1933, 57). Another major pioneer of English witchcraft studies, G.L. Kittredge, was adamant that '“covens” and devil priests and Satanic orgies are, for England, out of the question' (1929, 275). When the scholarly study of English witchcraft was revived in the early 1970s, much the same interpretation prevailed. Alan Macfarlane, in his deservedly influential study of that heavily witchcrafted county, Essex, stated that witches there 'were not believed to fly, did not meet for “sabbats” or orgies, dance and feast, indulge in sexual perversions, like some of their continental counterparts' (1970, 6). Keith Thomas was equally insistent that the sabbat was almost unknown to 'the general run of English accusations' and that the 'scattered allegations' of witches' meetings 'seem to have been literally picnics by comparison with their continental counterparts' (1971, 445). The apparent absence of a developed concept of the sabbat in England helped reinforce the idea, current from at least Wallace Notestein's study of 1911, that witchcraft in England, in contrast to what was normally described as 'continental' witchcraft, was a relatively low-key, non-demonic affair.

This conventional wisdom about the near-absence of the sabbat in England seems, at a first glance, accurate. Certainly, the sabbat does not figure in the three statutes passed against witchcraft, in 1542, 1563, and 1604, none of this legislation mentioning the sabbat (33 Henry VIII, cap. 8; 5 Eliz. I,

cap. 16; 1 James I, cap. 12). English demonological works likewise paid little attention to the phenomenon, especially at the point where educated beliefs about witchcraft were at their formative stage. The Elizabethan and early Stuart periods witnessed the emergence of a distinctly English demonological style: the first, and most technically accomplished, work in this genre was Henry Holland's *A Treatise against Witchcraft* of 1590, the last was Richard Bernard's *Guide to Grand Jury Men* of 1627, and the most important, at least on the basis of its author's reputation, was William Perkin's *Discourse of the damned Art of Witchcraft* published posthumously in 1608. These three works, all written by Church of England ministers of Puritan leanings, make scant mention of the sabbat. Holland does devote a paragraph to the phenomenon, but it is unsensational and not in any way prurient, stressing the sabbat's role in organising witches to perform evil acts (sig. F1). Bernard, who was familiar with and cited the works of such continental demonologists as Bodin and Del Rio, mentions witches' meetings very briefly in terms of an inversion of Christian beliefs (261). Perkins does not mention the sabbat at all.⁸

This lack of attention to the sabbat in English demonological writings probably owed much to their authors being Protestant. Delineating the different emphases which Protestant and Catholic writers brought to their analyses of witchcraft is a complex matter, but there are indications that Protestant demonologists, and possibly Protestant magistrates, were relatively unconcerned about the sabbat (here I follow Clark 1990). There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, Protestants were less likely than Catholics to be affronted by a phenomenon which had its origins in a supposed inversion of the Catholic mass. Secondly, there was no scriptural basis for the sabbat. And, thirdly, the principal thrust of mainstream Protestant writing on witchcraft was concerned with the evangelising objective of correcting vulgar errors about witchcraft rather than elaborating a view of the demonic sect of witches: thus the sabbat could be interpreted as a popular superstition or satanic delusion, as could that other much contested issue, the witches' flight to the sabbat. Certainly, the two works on witchcraft by continental Protestant theologians most cited by Elizabethan demonologists, those authored by the Dane Niels Hemmingsen (1575) and the Geneva-based Huguenot Lambert Daneau (1575), did not afford the sabbat a central importance.⁹

English Protestant aversion to the Catholic model of the sabbat was demonstrated in 1612 in one of the very few instances when an English assize court was confronted with anything like the phenomenon. In that year, famously, a number of witches were tried, and ten of them executed, at Lancaster. In the midst of these trials of what have become known as the Pendle Witches came a separate set of accusations, levelled by fourteen-year-old Grace Sowerbutts, who alleged that three women were bewitching her. Sowerbutts' evidence contained features which were unusual for an English trial: the alleged witches sucked blood from a live child, and, after it subsequently died,

they exhumed its body, boiled it in a pot, ate some of it, and used the residual fat as an ointment to assist them in shape-changing. The girl also recounted how the witches regularly met 'foure black things, going upright, and yet not like men in the face', with whom they ate strange food, danced, and after the dancing had sexual intercourse. But, as the presiding judge, Sir Edward Bromley, rapidly made clear, Grace had been schooled in matters of witchcraft by a Jesuit priest named variously as Thompson or Southworth (Potts 1613, sigs K3-M4).¹⁰ The charges against the three women were dropped, and Grace's tale of their eating, dancing, and having sexual relations with four black demons was dismissed by the tract describing the trials as 'more proper for a legend of lies, then the evidence of a witness upon oath, before a reverend and learned judge', and was ascribed to the Jesuit's influence (Potts 1613, sigs K3-M4). Thus even during an assize which led to more executions for witchcraft than England had hitherto experienced after one court sitting, the judge was perfectly happy to dismiss this striking account of what looks very like a sabbat as popish mummery.

This lack of concern about the sabbat among scholarly writers and judges makes Anne Armstrong's depositions all the more remarkable. There are, of course, tremendous difficulties in using any type of court record as evidence of popular mentalities.¹¹ Armstrong's statements as they made the transition from her verbal account to the written record would have been mediated by the justices of the peace and the justices' clerks, while her sex and (if our presumption about her being young is correct) her age would have been factors in how she framed her story for adult, male authority. The impression, nevertheless, is that her depositions turn on a concept of the sabbat which, although many of the elements common across Europe were present, was rooted firmly in popular culture. The obscene kiss and sexual promiscuity which so worried learned demonologists were absent, but there is feasting (albeit on normal food rather than the flesh of new born children), dancing, the inversion of religious ceremony by saying the Lord's prayer backwards, the presence of the devil in a gold chair, the reporting to the devil by the witches of acts of *maleficium* and, above all, the enchanted ride to the sabbat and shape-changing, yet all of it apparently owing more to popular beliefs than learned constructs. If nothing else, Anne Armstrong's descriptions of the sabbat encourage us to dig more deeply into English sources in search of further evidence of popular conceptions of witches' meetings.

3. *Imagining Witches' Meetings in Seventeenth-Century England*

Two well known episodes have been interpreted as providing evidence for the sabbat in England, both of which collapse on close inspection. The first of these was the witch-hunt of 1612 in Lancashire, which involved a meeting of witches in the Malkin tower, residence of Elizabeth Sowthernes, alias

Old Demdike, one of those executed. Nine-year-old Jennet Device, despite her age a key prosecution witness, told how she attended a meeting there on Good Friday 1612 where about twenty people, all but two of them women, and some of whom she recognised, came together and ‘had to their dinners beefe, bacon and roasted mutton’ (Potts 1613, sig. I3v).¹² Weaving her and other testimonies together, we find, apart from the feasting, nothing of the classic sabbat. If such a meeting did take place in reality, one suspects its main objective was to allow those who knew that they were suspected as witches to discuss how best to defend themselves. Although described by Thomas Potts, author of the tract on the 1612 trials, as ‘a speciall meeting ... of all the most dangerous, wicked and damnable witches in the country farre and neere’ (Potts 1613, sig. C2v),¹³ this was seemingly a very tame affair.

The other incident where it has been claimed the sabbat appeared in England was the mass witch-hunt which spread across eastern England in 1645-1647, associated with the witch-finder Matthew Hopkins.¹⁴ Defending his conduct in 1647, Hopkins claimed that the seven or eight witches who first attracted his attention at Manningtree in Essex in the winter of 1644-1645 met ‘with divers adjacent witches of other towns’ every sixth Friday, where they ‘had their severall solemne sacrifices there offered to the devil’ (Hopkins 1647, 2). This is an interesting statement, but there is little evidence of concern over witches’ meetings in the subsequent trials. Anne Leech told how she and two other women met in the house of Elizabeth Clark, the first Essex suspect, ‘where there was a book read, wherein she thinks there was no goodnesse’ (H.F. 1645, 9). Rebecca West, another of the Essex suspects, gave Hopkins an account of a meeting in Elizabeth Clark’s house, where a book figured prominently, and where the devil was present, albeit (in line with English lore about familiars) in the shape of a dog and other animals (14). More promisingly, John Stearne, Hopkins’s associate, in his own defence of witch-hunting, mentioned meetings of witches ‘as at Burton Old, where they met above fourscore at a time; and at Tilbrooke bushes at Bedfordshire ... where they met above twenty at one time’ (1648, 11), but nothing like a full-blown sabbat is recorded.

There is, moreover, little evidence of ideas of the sabbat entering popular consciousness through the actions of officialdom. One exception came in 1665, when a Somerset justice of the peace, Robert Hunt, previously involved in a witchcraft case in 1658, again found himself investigating witchcraft. These new investigations turned on the bewitching of a thirteen-year-old girl named Elizabeth Hill (Glanvill 1681, Part 2, 127-147). A woman called Elizabeth Style was suspected of bewitching her, and eventually confessed to Hunt. She told how she met the devil ten years previously and entered into a pact with him, and how more recently she and three other women had met the devil on a nearby common. One of the other women, Alice Duke, had brought a wax image of Elizabeth Hill. The devil took the image, and, in a parody of

Christian baptism, held it in his arms, and anointed it with oil: as Style put it, 'he was the Godfather, and this examinant and Anne Bishop Godmothers'. They stuck thorns in the wax image, after which 'they had wine, cakes and roast meat (brought by the man in black) which they did eat and drink. They danced and made merry, and were bodily there, in their clothes' (137-138).

Questioned further, Style elaborated her account of the sabbat. She told how the witches flew to their meetings after anointing themselves with oil, that the devil greeted them on arrival, and that proceedings were illuminated by 'wax candles like torches'. At the meetings they ate and danced while 'the man in black, sometimes playes on a pipe or cittern', and plotted acts of *maleficium* (139-141). Many of the details Style gave were obviously founded on local folklore, but equally other elements of her description of the sabbat were framed in response to questions posed by a justice of the peace with an interest in, and some knowledge of, witchcraft. She was found guilty at the Taunton assizes, but died in prison before execution.¹⁵

Although this case does demonstrate how learned concepts of the sabbat might have entered popular consciousness, there were few justices like Robert Hunt, and hence accounts of the interplay between learned demonological theory and popular ideas of witches' meetings are rare.¹⁶ And in any case popular thinking seemed perfectly capable of envisaging meetings with the devil, although these were sometimes far removed from the sabbat proper. One such was recorded in an unusually detailed description of the bewitchment of two of his daughters commencing in 1621 written by a Yorkshire gentleman named Edward Fairfax (Grainge, ed., 1882). Fairfax's narrative contains detailed accounts of the visions his daughters claimed to see while in their witchcraft-induced trances. On Thursday 10 April 1622 one of the witches' familiar spirits apparently told the girls in a vision how 'all the witches had a feast at Timble Gill; their meat was roasted at midnight. At the upper end of the table sat their master, viz., the devil, and the lower end Dibb's wife, who provided for the feast, who was the cook' (Grainge, ed., 107-108).¹⁷ Other passing references can be found to witches eating or drinking in the devil's company. In 1645 a local witch-panic, resulting in several executions, occurred at Faversham in Kent. Joan Cariden alias Argoll, one of those executed, told how another suspected witch, goodwife Hott, had told her recently of 'a great meeting at Godwife Pantery's house', where 'the Divell sat at the upper end of the table' (Anonymous 1645, 3). A very similar reference comes from a pamphlet of 1650 dealing with the bewitchment of three children in Northumberland. One of the suspects, Margaret White, confessed that she and some other witches were together 'in the Divel's company' in the house of her sister Jane, 'where they did eate and drinke together (as by her conceived) and made merry' (Moore 1650, 24).

Such references, although suggestive of a growing acceptance that witches might meet the devil almost on a social basis, are far removed from the sabbat

as envisaged by Anne Armstrong, let alone by Pierre de Lancre, yet evidence of more elaborate ideas about the sabbat on a popular level does exist. Gossip about witches among servant girls and other young women from Lymptone attracted the attention of the Devon justices in 1638. One of those involved, Jane Moxie, apparently knew a lot about witchcraft, and the girls' gossiping probably attracted official attention because Moxie opined that a local woman was a witch. But she also had a clear notion of the sabbat. As one of those involved, Eleanour Forde put it:

About halfe a yeere since Jane Moxie the daughter of Robert Moxie shoulde saie in the house of John Adams in Lympton that those that woulde be witches when they did receive the communion must drinck the wyne and keepe the breade and carrye w[i]th them and give it to the next bodye that they mett w[i]th and that should be a toade, and after that they should be witches. And that everye Mydsomer Eve those that woulde be witches must meet the divell upon a hill and then the divell did licke them and that the place was blacke and the next Midsummer Eve the divell woulde meet them again and licke them as before.¹⁸ (Devon Record Office, Exeter, Quarter Sessions Rolls, Bapt 1638, 57)

The examining justice, Sir Thomas Prideaux, did not question Moxie further, so we have no idea of what else she thought witches did at the sabbat, or, indeed, how she thought they got there. She did, however, have a distinct notion of witches' meetings apparently based firmly on popular culture, although the giving of communion bread to a toad provides an echo of that desecration of the host which was central to Catholic accounts of the sabbat.

But for a model of the sabbat to set beside Anne Armstrong's we must return to Lancashire. A major witch-hunt was almost initiated there in 1633-1634 by an eleven-year-old boy named Edmund Robinson. The hunt was averted when worried assize judges contacted Westminster seeking guidance as the accusations mounted, possibly involving as many as sixty suspects, some twenty of whom were convicted but held without sentence. Central government stepped in removing Robinson, his father and several of the suspected witches to London for further investigation.¹⁹ Robinson, giving his initial evidence in February 1634, deposed how on the previous All Saints' Day he came across two greyhounds and tried to hunt with them. They refused to hunt, whereupon he tied them to a bush and beat them, at which one of them turned into 'one Dickinson wife, a neighbour'. She put a bridle on him, which changed him into a horse, and rode him to a witches' meeting on Pendle Hill. There witches were roasting meat, and he was offered food and drink, which he refused after the first taste, '& said it was naughtie'. He then came upon the witches, in a striking parallel to Anne Armstrong's account of the sabbat, pulling on ropes and bringing down roasted meat, butter and hot milk. Robinson named several of the people he had seen at the meeting, and also recounted how he had met with and fought the devil in the shape

of a boy with a cloven foot. Later, however, while held in London, he was to retract his statement. He told how he was worried about being chided by his mother because he was late getting the cows home, and had made up the story to avoid punishment (TNA, State papers Domestic, SP 16/271, f. 119).

The examinations of several of the supposed witches survive, among them that of Margaret Johnson, a widow, taken at Padiham on 9 March 1634. She told how about eight years previously she met the devil in the shape of a man clad in black, made a pact with him, and had sexual intercourse with him. She deposed that the was not at the All Saints' Day meeting described by Robinson,

But saith that shee was at a second meetinge the Sunday after All S[ain]ts Day at the place aforesaid [i.e. Harestones in Pendle Forest] where ther was at that time between 30 and 40 witches who did all ride to the said meetinge. And th'end of the said meetinge was to consult for the killing and hurting of man & beasts, and that there was one devill or spirit that was more greate & grand devil than the rest ... And further saith that the devil can raise foule wether and stormes, and soe hee did at their meeting.

She went on to depose that witches and their spirits routinely had sexual intercourse at these meetings, and, in an echo of Thomas Potts' account of the 1612 trials, that witches had an annual meeting on Good Friday (British Library Add MS 36674, f. 196). Further connections with the 1612 trials were provided by young Edmund Robinson. Asked where his ideas about witchcraft and the sabbat had come from, he replied that 'the tale is false and feigned, and has no trueth att all in itt, but onely as he has heard tales and reportes made by women ... so he framed the tale out of his owne invention'. The reference to 'tales and reportes' gives us, like the gossip among young women which got Joan Moxie into trouble in 1638, the presence of witchcraft as a source of interest in the oral culture of the period: but it is noteworthy that among those 'tales and reportes' to which Robinson alluded was the story of the witches' meeting at the 'Mocking' [i.e. Malkin] tower (TNA, SP 16/271, f. 119). There was clearly a rich local tradition of witch beliefs upon which Robinson could frame his account of the sabbat: one suspects that it must have been much the same for Anne Armstrong and Jane Moxie.

4. *Popular Culture, The Late Lancashire Witches, and Macbeth*

Interpreting the witches' sabbat has become a much more complex, if potentially much more rewarding, exercise since the publication, in 1990, of Carlo Ginzburg's *Ecstasies*. This is a large, rich, and complex book, and summarising it without doing it injustice is difficult. Briefly, following leads originating from his earlier researches on the Friulian *benandanti* (Ginzburg 1983), Ginzburg argues that the concept of the sabbat which emerged in late medieval and early modern Europe originated in a pan-Eurasian belief in the spirit flight

of shamans. Connecting with earlier work by Mircea Eliade, Ginzburg proposed a universalist interpretation of the witches' sabbat which, despite local variations, maintained certain core elements: 'the presence of variants or of re-elaborations tied to specific cultural contexts', he wrote, 'does not contradict the hypothesis of a common pattern: the ecstatic journey to the realm of the dead', ecstatic journeys which were essentially 'similar to those of the Siberian shamans' magical flight and animal metamorphosis' (1990, 212, 257).²⁰ This interpretation does indicate the possibility of analysing the sabbat at a deeper level, although it has not, of course, gone uncontested (e.g. by Hutton 2001, 144-146, and Behringer 1998, 138-139). But Ginzburg also emphasised another point. Before he wrote, the major interpretation of the development of the concept of the sabbat, that of Norman Cohn (1975), argued that it was largely a construct of the educated elite, of theologians and inquisitors. This interpretation was shared by later scholars such as Robert Muchembled (1990), and earlier ones like G.L. Kittredge (1929, 243). Ginzburg, conversely, argues that the origins of the sabbat as a cultural phenomenon lay in popular beliefs, and stresses the importance of 'the folkloric roots of the sabbath' (1990, 11).

Let us now return to the fullest account we have of an English sabbat, that provided by Anne Armstrong. We shall leave her candidacy for shamanistic status for another occasion, and turn rather to the question of what light her depositions throw on the second of these issues raised by Ginzburg, the folkloric roots of the sabbat. Armstrong's account comes to us, we must remember, as depositions given to justices of the peace, and hence, had been subjected to mediation and modification. Conversely, one feels that with these depositions we are encountering something which is rooted firmly in popular culture. Although her accounts of the sabbat became more elaborate, they did not incorporate elements derived from learned demonology along the lines, say, of the Somerset witches examined by justice Robert Hunt in 1665. The Northumberland justices to whom Armstrong deposed may simply have had no demonological framework at hand, or, if they had, may not have wished to apply it.²¹ Nationally, the activities of Matthew Hopkins in the 1640s had formed a connection in the mind of the post-Restoration elite between witch-hunting and the religious enthusiasm which had, it was hoped, been put back in its bottle by the Restoration. Locally, Newcastle had in 1650 experienced a severe witch-hunt fostered by the town's Puritan ruling elite, so the justices examining Armstrong would have had their own reasons for associating witch-hunting with the unfortunate circumstances of the Interregnum.²² Armstrong's statements, we must repeat, await detailed analysis; yet at present they seem to have been based on a popular belief system little touched by learned demonology, and much the same can be said of the depositions made during the Lancashire scare of 1633-1634. Arising as they did in an area which in 1612 had experienced England's most severe witch trial to date, we may safely surmise that these 'tales and reportes' re-

ferred to by Edmund Robinson contained a powerful and developing set of beliefs about witchcraft. As Ginzburg put it, records of this type 'manifestly contradict the thesis, still common today, according to which the sabbath was an image elaborated exclusively or almost exclusively by the persecutors' (1990, 7). Indeed, recent research into other European cultures has suggested that, to varying extents, local beliefs modified or even supplanted official or demonological models of the sabbat.²³

If learned constructs of the sabbat are to be discounted as an influence on Anne Armstrong, we must nevertheless consider, given Northumberland's status as a border county, the possible influence of Scottish beliefs on her ideas about the sabbat. Famously, the North Berwick trials, which initiated large-scale witch-hunting in Scotland, had the sabbat at their core; James VI discussed the phenomenon in his *Daemonologie* (1597), albeit mainly in terms of religious inversion, and witches' meetings were regularly referred to in later Scottish trials (Anonymous 1591; Stuart 1597, 35-37; Levack 2008, 66). Conversely, what is probably the most detailed regional study of the witch-hunts in Scotland reveals surprisingly little evidence of the Sabbat, and indeed shows that the clergy investigating witches who allegedly met in the West Kirk, Culross, in 1675 apparently lacked the conceptual framework needed to turn this proto-sabbat into a full-scale example of the phenomenon (MacDonald 2002, 180-182). Indeed, it appears that the Scottish witches' assembly, like the sabbats in so many other parts of Europe, was essentially rooted in popular culture (Larner 1981, 135). This conclusion is complicated by the case of Isabel Gowdie, tried at Auldearn in 1662, whose depositions tell of a system of supernatural beliefs much more complex than those outlined by Anne Armstrong, this episode having recently formed the subject-matter of a monograph by Emma Wilby (2010). Yet Auldearn is in northern Scotland, not far from Inverness, nearly as far from Birchen Nook as is London, and it seems unlikely that verbal accounts of Gowdie's confessions would have travelled so far. Moreover, it should be noted that perhaps the most accomplished historian of witchcraft in north-eastern England has played down Scottish influences there (Rushton 1983, 28).

We have paid considerable attention to Anne Armstrong's construction of the sabbat, deservedly so on account of its richness. But her story was to be lost for nearly two centuries, gathering dust among the Northern Circuit Assize depositions until discovered by a Victorian antiquary and then rediscovered by modern scholars investigating early modern witchcraft beliefs. Conversely, the vision of the sabbat conjured up in the Lancashire scare of 1633-1634 reached a wider contemporary audience by being incorporated into a play, Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634, later retitled *The Late Lancashire Witches*).²⁴ Heywood and Brome wrote, and the play was performed by the King's Men at the Globe Theatre in August 1634, when Robinson and his father and four of the women convicted as witches

were under examination in London. The play's authors, anxious to exploit the topicality of its theme, clearly had access to a number of the depositions relating to the case, notably those of young Edmund Robinson, Margaret Johnson and Mary Spencer, another of the accused witches sent down to London. There are witchcraft elements in the play which are absent from surviving documentation dealing with the Lancashire witch-scare: normal patriarchal relations in a household are inverted by witchcraft; a wedding feast is disrupted through the malevolence of the witches; and the newly married husband is rendered impotent, and his wife thus rendered extremely annoyed, by something very like the ligature, a device unfamiliar in English witchcraft. But much is clearly based on the depositions. One of the witches, Meg Johnson, calls her imp Mamilion at various points; an unnamed boy encounters greyhounds which turn into women, is subsequently taken to and escapes from the sabbat, and also fights the devil in the shape of a boy with a cloven foot; and the witches pull on ropes to get food and drink, in the play stolen from the wedding feast by witchcraft.

With Brome and Heywood's play we thus have a rare example of documentation from an English witchcraft case helping to form the basis of a dramatic work, and thus of a transmission from a view of witchcraft rooted in popular culture to elite culture. Even more unusually, a letter survives which gives a description of the play and its impact. On 16 August 1634 the civil servant and former MP Nathaniel Tomkyns wrote a letter to his friend Sir Robert Phelips, at that time staying at Montacute House in Somerset, which ended with an account of the *Witches of Lancashire*. The play, he reported, was a great hit, and had played for three days to a 'great concourse of people ... a greater appearance of fine folke gentlemen and gentlewomen than I thought had bin in town in the vacation [i.e. outside the law terms]'. Tomkyns continued:

The subject was of the slights and passages done or supposed to be done by these witches sent from thence hither and other witches and their familiars; of their nightly meetings in severall places; their banqueting with all sorts of meat and drinke conveyed to them upon by their familiars upon the pulling of a cord; the walking of pailles of milk by themselves ... the transforming of men and woemen into severall creatures and especially of horses by putting an enchanted bridle into their mouths; their posting to and from places farre distant in an incredible short time.

Tomkyns felt that the play did not have 'any poeticall genius, or art, or language, or judgement to state or tenet of witches', but that since it was full of 'odd passages and fopperies to provoke laughter, and is mixed with divers songs and dances, it passeth for a merrie and excellent new play' (cited in Berry 1984, 212-213).²⁵ But this 'merrie and excellent new play', so warmly received, provides a rare example of seeing how a view of witchcraft and above all of the sabbat based firmly on popular culture could be readapted into an entertainment for 'fine folk gentlemen and gentlewomen'. We are

reminded that the interaction between elite and popular culture was not a one-way process.

In a collection of articles themed around Shakespeare and popular culture, Brome and Heywood's play, and its use of a contemporary witchcraft case and contemporary documentation leads us to consider that most famous early modern depiction of witches on stage, that provided by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. This depiction is, of course, far from unproblematic. Interpretations of the role of the witches ranges from seeing them as representing supernatural forces trying to control the destiny of Macbeth, and hence of Scotland to, as Diane Purkiss would have us believe, 'nothing more and nothing less than *Macbeth's* missing comic sub-plot' (1996, 214). Stage or cinematic productions have been equally varied in their portrayal of the weird sisters, with them appearing in 1.1 of *Macbeth* as schoolgirls desecrating a graveyard in Geoffrey Wright's 2006 film set in modern Australia and as military nurses killing their patient and ripping his heart from his corpse in the 2010 telefilm version of Rupert Goold's production of the play. And also, their function varies at different parts of the play, from prophesying in 1.2 to apparently providing something of a diversion by singing and dancing in 2.5, this last adding a further complication, the problem of subsequent interpolations in *Macbeth* and, in particular, the relation of that scene to certain passages of Middleton's *The Witch* (1616?). The witches of *Macbeth* are obviously more problematic than their Lancashire cousins whose story was dramatised three decades later.

What is less contentious is the range of sources Shakespeare drew on. The idea of the weird sisters, or as most modern observers would have it, witches, as well as the problem of how to label them, comes from Holinshed's *Chronicles*. There they are described as

three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of the elder world ... afterwards the common opinion was, that these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as you would say) the goddesses of destinie, or else were nymphs or feiries, indued with knowledge of prophesie by their necromaticall science. (cited in Rosenberg 1978, 2)

These weird sisters, renamed the Tres Sybillae, were to greet James VI and I when he visited Oxford in August 1605, a year before that commonly accepted for the first performance of *Macbeth*, with suitably re-written prophecies in Latin (cited in Rosenberg 1978, 2).²⁶ It is also probable that Shakespeare had read *Newes from Scotland* (1591), that propaganda tract telling how the threat of witchcraft to Protestant divine right monarchy had, with God's assistance, been overturned, and James VI's *Daemonologie*. If he has read this latter work, he would have been informed that witches had the power, thanks to the devil, to foretell 'things to come' (cited in Rosenberg 1978, 2). There are also strong indications that he was familiar with Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*

(1584), a source that was certainly drawn on for Middleton's *The Witch* (Purkiss 1996, 218). Hecate, of course, demonstrates Shakespeare's familiarity with classical myth, while the notion of the cauldron, widely disseminated in both legend and learned writing on witchcraft, can also be traced back to classical writings, with Medea rejuvenating Jason's father Aeson, after draining his blood, with a liquid she had boiled in a cauldron concocted from ingredients on a par with those used by the witches in *Macbeth* (Zika 2006). Shakespeare has witches reporting their misdeeds to Hecate in much the same way as witches at the sabbat, both in Anne Armstrong's version of that phenomenon and those of learned demonologists, were supposed to have done to the devil. And those misdeeds introduce an incident of *maleficium* which was triggered by a refusal of charity very like those which, as Macfarlane alerted us, underlay village-level witchcraft accusations. But the misbehaviour reported by the witches contains no elaborated portrayal of village-level witchcraft. In 1.3 the Second Witch, asked by the First witch what she has been up to, replies simply 'killing swine' (1.3.2). The First Witch, describing an incident which fits the village tensions/charity refused model, tells how she is angered when a sailor's wife refuses her chestnuts, but what she plans to do in revenge is not to exercise *maleficium* against the woman's cattle or children, but rather to sail in a sieve to Aleppo (1.3. 4-10), the port to which the woman's husband had sailed, a wreak vengeance on him there, something which takes us away from normal village witchcraft narratives but rather takes us to Agnes Sampson's confessions as related in *Newes from Scotland* (Anonymous 1591, sig. C1).

What we are left with, then, is a sense of the eclecticism which consideration of the possible sources of the witchcraft scenes in *Macbeth* arouses. This has been commented on with some forcefulness by Diane Purkiss, who notes that the play's witches are 'an awkwardly compressed mass of diverse stories', and accuses Shakespeare of 'unblushingly strip-mining both popular culture and every learned text he can lay his hands on for the sake of creating an arresting stage event' (Purkiss 1996, 207). Continuing on her theme, she claims that 'the play encourages slippage between definitions of the witch which made sense in village society and definitions of the witch which made sense to European demonologists and their followers and definitions of the witch which made sense to humanist scholars' (Purkiss 1996, 207-208). As we have shown, one of the main functions of the sabbat, the reporting of evil done, was present in the play, with Hecate filling the role of the devil, while in a sense the whole notion of witches meeting to plan evil, clearly present in 1.1, is central to the weird sisters' characters' input to the play. Thus in a sense we have some of the elements of the sabbat. But we have nothing like the fully developed concept of the sabbat as developed by learned demonologists: the worshipping of the devil and the obscene kiss; the desecration of the host or other elements of Christian ritual; promiscuous sexual intercourse; feeding on the flesh of newborn children or other prescribed foods; and the

presence of hundreds, perhaps thousands of witches – all those elements which distinguished, absolutely or by degree, the sabbat of the demonologist from what we can reconstruct of popular concepts of the phenomenon.

But what *Macbeth* demonstrates is that Shakespeare, like any playwright in his period, had a range of sources from which to construct his stage versions of witches, and drew on them as the mood took him. This variety of models of witchcraft is amply demonstrated by other dramatic works of the period. With *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), authored by a team consisting of William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, like *The Late Lancashire Witches*, we have a play based on a contemporary case, in this instance already described in a pamphlet (Goodcole 1621). With John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606) we have witchcraft elements which are derived mainly from classical literature, and with Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens* (performed at Whitehall in 1609) we have an elaborate model of witchcraft which relied very heavily on classical sources and recent continental works of demonology, with the sources being in this case listed by the erudite playwright. Shakespeare, of course, draws on beliefs about the supernatural in a large number of his plays, and it is unfortunate that considerations of space dictate that I must limit my discussion to some brief thoughts on *Macbeth*. But, as I have stated, the witches there clearly owe little to a developed consideration of popular conceptions of witchcraft, although, of course, here as elsewhere the relationship between 'popular' and 'elite' culture remains uncertain. What we can safely say is that comparing the popular conceptions of the sabbat which we have considered in this article with the witches of *Macbeth* reminds us that Shakespeare's relationship with the popular culture of early modern England, as evidenced in his dramatic works, remains a problematic one.²⁷

Much of that popular culture still awaits reconstruction, and in particular we await a fuller investigation of some of the motifs found in Margaret Johnson's and, in particular, Anne Armstrong's depositions: popular attitudes to trance states, food in popular culture, the traditions of shape-shifting and night-riding. Yet for this last at least we have some wider evidence, sometimes appearing in unexpected places. Thus an anti-Quaker pamphlet of 1659 has Mary Phillips, a woman who had abjured Quakerism, suffering a strange fate. As she slept with her husband, she was 'being bewitched and enchanted out of the room where she lay, and transformed into the perfect shape of a mare', and then ridden to a village near Cambridge where Quaker meetings had been held, but which was now the location of a witches' sabbat. She accused two Quakers, a man and a woman, of bewitching her, and they were arrested and subsequently tried for witchcraft (Anonymous 1659a, 4).²⁸ The trial resulted in their acquittal, the judge, interestingly, telling Philips that her experience 'was a meer dream, and a phantasie', and the authors of the pamphlet taking a standard Protestant theological position on the impossibility of shape-changing (Anonymous 1659a, 4). What is evident, however, is

that Mary Phillips believed that being changed into a horse and being ridden to the sabbat was a standard way of getting there, and that there was an expectation that the readers of the pamphlet would find this narrative device familiar and convincing.

For further, and final, demonstration of how the sabbat and the notion of being ridden to it were embedded in popular culture, let us turn to a case which occurred in 1736, ironically a few months after the English and Scottish witchcraft acts had been repealed. On 5 November of that year a dispute broke out in the main street of Baildon, an isolated West Yorkshire parish near the Lancashire border, between members of the Goldsbrough and Hartley families, leading to various of the Hartleys being bound over to keep the peace. According to one witness, Sarah Brook, Mary Hartley claimed that Bridget Goldsbrough had entered her house in the shape of two grey cats, and that Margaret Goldsbrough came into the house in her own shape, 'and said yt the said Margaret had with her a black saddle and bridle, and that Margaret offered to put a bridle upon her sone John Hartley & would needs ride him to some hill, & swore damn them they were all witches'. Margaret Goldsbrough gave her own version in these words:

This examinant saith the 5th instant came to her father's house one Mary Hartley of Baildon to pretend to sell beesoms, & upon that began to say to Bridget this examinant's mother, I wou'd have you let my barn [i.e. bairn] alone, he works hard for a living, and cannot bear to be disturbed at night. Upon that this examinant's mother said What do you mean? The said Mary replied, You know well enough, you know where you were last night, and then begun of saying that both she & her mother were witches, & was riding of her sone to Pendle Hill the night before and that Margaret brought a saddle & bridle & wou'd have put the bridle into his mouth but the bits were too large.²⁹ (West Yorkshire Record Office, Wakefield, Quarter Sessions Rolls, QS1/76/2/File 3)

Again, that motif of being bridled and ridden to a witches meeting, and how fascinating that that meeting should be held on Pendle Hill, clearly well established in local witch-lore as a place where witches met a century and a quarter after the famous trials of 1612. Whatever its status in official demonological theory, it is clear that the idea of the witches' sabbat was firmly established in early modern English popular culture.

¹ The National Archives (TNA), London, Clerks of Assize Records, Northern Circuit Depositions, ASSI 45/10/3/34, 36, 40, 43-54. Most of these materials are reproduced in Raine, ed. 1861, 191-201. Armstrong's statements are discussed and contextualised in two analyses of witchcraft in the north east: Rushton 1983 and Bath 2008.

² Rushton 1983, 14 suggests at least thirty-one, and notes their geographical distribution beyond the Tyne Valley near Corbridge, where Armstrong located the sabbats she attended.

³No relevant evidence was found in the Northern Circuit Indictment Files for 1673 and 1674 (TNA, ASSI 44/21, 22); Ewen 1933, 404 notes an indictment against Isabel Thompson for bewitching Margaret Teasdale in TNA, ASSI 44/21, but this could not be traced. A set of depositions for 1673 survive concerning witchcraft accusations at Morpeth which are almost certainly related to Armstrong's statements (TNA, ASSI 45/10/3/125-127).

⁴This is confirmed by the fact that at around the same time as Anne Armstrong's descriptions of the sabbat were being recorded, Sweden was experiencing its only large scale witch-hunt, which was initiated by children and young people telling stories of being taken to what was an initially folkloric version of the sabbat (Ankarloo 1990).

⁵A number of relevant texts are gathered together in Ostorero, Bagliani and Tremp, eds, 1999; for an important collection of essays on the sabbat see Jacques-Chaquin and Pr  aud, eds, 1993.

⁶For the development of the concept of the sabbat between the fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries, see Clark 1997, 139-140.

⁷For a discussion of de Lancre's treatise, see McGowan 1977.

⁸Perkins did, however, accept Satan's ability to transport witches, although he suggested that most witches claiming to be thus transported were deluded (1608, 21, 49, 194-196).

⁹Daneau 1575 discusses the sabbat briefly and unsensationally in chapter 4 of his work, where he devotes considerably more attention to the problem of transvection; Hemmingsen simply dismisses the sabbat and flight to it as 'diabolorum illusio' (1575, sig. K4).

¹⁰The events of 1612 are contextualised in Poole, ed., 2002 and by Baratta in this volume (185-208).

¹¹Yet it is difficult not to concur with a pioneer scholar of this type of documentation that depositions and similar witness evidence bring the historian closer to popular mentalities than any other form of record (Kieckhefer 1976, 28). For a discussion of witchcraft narratives in English official documentation, which includes a brief analysis of Anne Armstrong's depositions, see Rushton 2001.

¹²Jennet Preston was subsequently to give evidence against a number of those whom she named as having been present at the Malkin Tower meeting.

¹³For background to this episode, see Lumby 1995, chapter 10, 'The Meeting at the Malkin Tower'.

¹⁴Gaskill 2005 is a major study of the Hopkins trials. For a slightly earlier assessment of their importance see Sharpe 1996. That the notion that the sabbat figured prominently in the Hopkins trials has gained wide currency is demonstrated in Ginzburg's comment that the 1645 Essex trials were 'rich in descriptions of the Sabbath' (1990, 3).

¹⁵This case and Hunt's activities more generally receive detailed analysis in Barry 2012, 58-102.

¹⁶For a pioneering investigation of the relationship between elite and popular concepts of witchcraft more generally, see Holmes 1984.

¹⁷Timble is about three miles from Fewston, the Fairfax family home.

¹⁸It is interesting to note that a pamphlet describing the Scottish North Berwick trials of 1590-91, probably written for English consumption, informed its readers that the witches received their devil's mark when the devil 'dooth lick them with his tung in some privy part of their body before he dooth receive them to be his servants' (Anonymous 1591, sig. A2v).

¹⁹For a brief account of this incident, see Findlay 2002. John Webster, who was in 1634 the minister of the Yorkshire parish of Kildwick, over forty years later gave a vivid description of Robinson's witch-finding activities when the boy and 'the two very unlikely persons that did conduct him' came to the parish, which is about twenty miles from Pendle. Webster stated that seventeen persons were convicted at the Lancashire assizes, all of them reprieved by the presiding judge who was unhappy with the evidence (Webster 1677, 382-383).

²⁰Eliade 1964 is the most relevant of his works; see also Eliade 1975.

²¹Certainly there was no mention of the sabbat in the standard justice's handbook of the period, whose various editions after that of 1630 included detailed instructions on how to investigate witchcraft (Dalton 1630, 338-339).

²² Although differing in emphasis, this conclusion is broadly in accord with Rushton 1983, 16-19, which also provides an analysis of the justices involved in Armstrong's case; for the witch-hunt in Newcastle, see Gardiner 1655, 107-110.

²³ E.g. Henningsen 1990; Rowlands 2003, 97-98; Roper 2004, 108-109; Klaniczay 1990, 252; Briggs 2007, 137.

²⁴ Two important essays on the play are Berry 1984 and Findlay 2002.

²⁵ The reference to pails walking by themselves relates to the deposition of one of the suspected witches who were in London, Mary Spencer, who was alleged to be able to make pails move by magic: TNA, State Papers Domestic, SP 16/269, f. 77.

²⁶ The performance was masterminded by Dr. Matthew Gwinn of St. John's college.

²⁷ Aspects of this relationship are discussed in the various contributions to Gillespie and Rhodes, eds, 2006.

²⁸ A refutation appeared in the shape of Anonymous 1659b. I am grateful to Brian Capp for bringing these two pamphlets to my attention. They are discussed and contextualised in Elmer 1996.

²⁹ Interestingly, a case was recorded at Baildon in 1658 in which an Abraham Hartley, aged sixteen, was allegedly bewitched by a woman named Mary Armitage (TNA, ASSI 45/5/5/1).

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Lancashire: a Land of Witches in Shakespeare's Time

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Abstract

This article focuses on the connection between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the famous English witch trial which took place in Lancashire in 1612. The judicial proceeding was recorded by a clerk of the court, who went by the name of Thomas Potts, whose reportage of the events was inconsistent and unstable, as I attempt to point out. In so doing, I underline the reasons – political, religious and opportunistic – that possibly motivated his behaviour, highly criticisable by modern standards.

Keywords: Authorial Intervention, Lancashire Witches, Political Context, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Trial Records.

The ride is over, and they alight near the door of a solitary hovel ... The inside of the hut corresponds with its miserable exterior ... A caldron is suspended above a peat fire, smouldering on the hearth. There is only one window, and a very thick curtain is drawn across it, to secure the inmate of the hut from prying eyes. Pendle Forest swarms in witches. They burrow into the hill-side like rabbits in a warren.

William H. Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, 1848

1. *Introduction*

In 1606 the first example of an alleged devilish confederacy made its debut on the London stage with the most famous witches of all: the 'weird sisters' in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Two years before, the new monarch James I, who probably wanted to show severity in matters of public order and religion, had issued a new Witchcraft Act (1 Jac. I, c.12), which decreed death for those who 'take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth – or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person – to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment' (Luders *et al.*, IV, pt. II, 1028). As a consequence of this, in 1612 Lancashire became the scene of an extraordinary witch trial: after several months of imprisonment, seventeen women and two men, all coming from the small county of the Forest of Pendle, were tried for witchcraft and ten of them were sent to the scaffold in Lancaster. Echo of the events was thorough. It had been a large trial and, although the

numbers involved did not exceed those of any previous judicial proceeding, it had attracted to Lancaster castle enormous crowds, drawn no doubt by the ghoulis prospect of seeing so many witches choking to death on the gallows. 'No episode in the history of superstition in England, gained such wide fame' (Notestein 1911, 121).

Witch-hunting in England, but not only, is today among the most written about, yet most indefinable, of historical topics. Even before the last alleged witches were burnt (as far as we know, the last legal execution was carried out at Glarus in Switzerland in 1782), educated Europeans were trying to explain what a well-known Italian scholar, Raoul Manselli, has rightly defined 'the shame of Western Christianity' (1975, 39). This intellectual quest has continued unchanged over the centuries, but only recently the phenomenon has shown all its complexity and multifaceted variety.¹

Starting from a perspective which is both political and religious, I will briefly discuss sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lancashire, whose particular social conditions made it appear as a land of dissidents and non-conformists; I will then concentrate on the trial which was held in the region only a few years after the act on magic and witchcraft was passed. In so doing, I will try to tease out relations with the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 to which the activities of the Lancashire witches were compared by Thomas Potts, the trial's chronicler, and whose conspiratorial connections reached into Lancashire, in the attempt to show how the families of the local gentry were implicated in the underworld of persecuted Catholicism and to suggest that their mostly Protestant Jacobean descendants sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the state by seeking out witches. The final purpose of my article is to look at what Potts' 1613 witchcraft pamphlet, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, can tell us about the importance of the connection between fiction and reality in early modern popular culture. I will not take into account just the content of the story of the Lancashire witches, but also the way in which their vicissitudes have been transmitted to us, by whom and why, and whether that process can give us access to the actual personalities and events of the time. And with respect to the particular aspect of the correlation between facts and fiction Shakespeare's *Macbeth* comes to the foreground. It was in fact after the tragedy was performed for the courtiers and lawyers at Hampton Court that the full repertoire of the black mass was witnessed in England, complete with those macabre elements – infanticide, cannibalism, necromancy, and anthropophagy – which had for so long characterized the continental demonological theory.

2. 'This so unbridled and bad an handful of England'

Considered one of the most obscure, remote, insular and backward corners of England, Lancashire had been giving the government in London cause of

concern over many centuries. Since the Middle Ages, it had been regarded as a rather wild and lawless region, a place 'fabled for theft, violence and sexual laxity and where the church was honoured without much understanding of its doctrines by the common people' (Hasted 1993, 5).

The Reformation had made matters worse by removing parishes, convents and chapels previously scattered through the landscape, and not replacing them with other places of worship. By the 1590s the atmosphere had become so disturbing that fifteen of the more Puritan clergy, including the incumbents at Whalley and Blackburn, decided to sign a petition to demand action. According to this, the majority of Lancastrians was ignoring the established religious authority: 'most of the people refraine their Parishe Church, under pretence of their Chapelles, and having no service at their Chapelles, come at [none] at all; but many of them grow into utter Atheisme and Barbarisme, manie enjoy full security in Poperie and all Popishe practises' (Whitaker 1801, 89).²

Things went on this way, so that the Puritan divine John White of Eccles had much the same to tell in 1608. Speaking of the Lancashire Catholics, he wrote:

I will not speake how unable they are to render account of the faith, to understande the points of the Catechisme, to judge of things lawfull and unlawfull and such like ... And while superstitiously they refuse to pray in their owne language with understanding, they speak that which their leaders may blushe to hear. And it cannot be answered that these are customs of a few simple people: for this I say, is generall throughout the country, the whole bodie of the common people practising nothing else, until it please God by the ministry of his Gospel to convert them. (1624, 148)

The government had tried to invert this situation in two different ways. Senior churchmen had been sent north on preaching tours to exhort local people to change their customs. Meanwhile the lord lieutenant, the High Sheriff and the magistrates received regular instructions to fine those who did not behave as decent and proper Christians. For a long time, these methods achieved little and it became clear that the justices of the peace were slow to prosecute their Catholic neighbours simply on the basis of a difference in personal religious belief (cf. Leatherbarrow 1947, 56).

Episodes such as the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, whatever its origins, did much to link the idea of Catholicism with treason in people's minds. The conspiracy and its aftermath caused a security scare of major proportions and the interrogation of the captured connivers seemed to reveal a network of Catholic subversion throughout the country. Lancashire was implicated; the plotters were fleeing towards the county when they were arrested, and two of them confessed that they were expected to start a rising there against James I.

From the government's point of view, therefore, Lancashire was a hot-bed of seditious intrigue centring on the religious question. Inevitably, stern measures were to be taken. Early in 1612 the JPs of the province received

orders from the council of the crown that they were to compile a report of all those who refused to take communion in church, and to confiscate any arms they might own. Besides, it was also commissioned that on Easter Sunday (8 April) a notice should be read from every pulpit in the county that non-communicants had twenty days in which to conform or be listed for prosecution. And it was exactly at this time, when the magistrates were deeply busy in their districts tracking down religious subversion, that Roger Nowell, Esquire of Read Hall, chose to take action over some long-standing witchcraft accusations in the Forest of Pendle.³

3. The horror of the Murthers and the crying Sinne of Bloud': Events Leading Up to the Trial

We know of the occurrences surrounding Pendle because one of the officials who presided the trials had been commissioned by the court judges to produce a comprehensive account of the nineteen 'notorious' witches arraigned at Lancaster castle in August 1612:

Upon the Arraignement and triall of these Witches at the last Assizes and Generall Gaole-deliuerie, holden at Lancaster, wee [the judges Altham and Bromley] found such apparent matters against them [the witches], that we thought it necessarie to publish them to the World, and thereupon imposed the labour of this Worke vpon this Gentleman by reason of his place, being a Clerke at the time in Court, imploied in the Arraignement and triall of them. (Potts 1612, 11)

The entrusted man was Thomas Potts, an expert in legal matters who had acted as clerk in the Lent and Summer Assizes of the Northern Circuit.⁴ Although not an unbiased reporter, as is shown in section 4, he registered for posterity the dramatic story of the Lancashire witches. In his reconstruction of the events we read that everything began on 18 March 1612 when Alizon Device, on her way to Trawden Forest to start her habitual occupation of begging, had a fateful encounter with the pedlar John Law, as a result of which, following that refusal of a favour which so often provoked the wrath of a wretched individual, the man went instantly into what was identified as a witchcraft-induced illness.⁵ The victim, helped by his relatives, decided to invoke the aid of officialdom, and on 30 March Alizon Device with her mother Elizabeth and her brother James appeared at Read Hall to be examined by a magistrate. In the presence of authority in the person of Roger Nowell, Alizon was so awe-struck as to agree with the suggestions implied in the magistrate's questions. On 2 April Nowell, as further accounts of *maleficia* reached him, also interrogated Elizabeth Device's mother, the eighty-year-old Elizabeth Southern (alias Old Demdike), Anne Whittle (named Chattox), and three local witnesses. Around 4 April the magistrate committed Alizon Device, Demdike, Chattox, and Chattox's daughter Anne Redferne to prison awaiting

trial at the next session of the Assizes. On Good Friday, less than a week after the four Pendle women had been lodged in Lancaster castle, several friends of the Demdike family visited Malkin Tower.⁶ Two of the visitors were relatives, two were near neighbours, and some went there out of idle curiosity to discuss possible verdicts at the forthcoming trial, in August. When rumours of this obscure meeting reached Read Hall, Nowell decided that more enquiries should be made. His examination of Elizabeth Device and her children James and Jennet convinced him that Demdike's old home had been the scene of a witches' coven and that all who had been present must be witches.

Space constraints do not allow me to thrash out the way in which the confessions of the alleged witches changed as their interrogations proceeded, and the way in which initial denials or cautious statements turned to confession as judicial pressure and questioning became harder. The evidence of the children Jennet and James Device was vital in initiating the wider suppositions of witchcraft, and a thorough analysis of the examinations of the trials shows that by this stage suspects were clearly beginning to panic and accuse each other.⁷ The investigations had reached critical mass, and fellow citizens came forward in large amount to tell the authorities of acts of witchcraft that had taken place sometimes many years before. This aspect is very interesting because it reveals how witchcraft suspicions were quite often enmeshed in local feuds and rivalries.

More or less contemporary, over the county border in York, another woman, Jennet Preston of Gisburn, was arraigned before Judge Altham on a charge of killing by witchcraft Mr. Thomas Lister and causing great loss to Mr. Leonard Lister. In 1611, as Potts says, she had been before the Assize Court for the murder of a child but had been found not guilty and acquitted. At her present trial the depositions of Elizabeth, James and Jennet Device were read out to show that at Malkin Tower she had enlisted the help of her friends from Pendle Forest to kill Mr. Lister, but the most important evidence was provided by a witness, who stated that 'Jennet Preston, the Prisoner at the Barre, being brought to M. Lister after hee was dead, & layd out to be wound vp in his winding-sheet, the said Jennet Preston comming to touch the dead corpes, they bled fresh bloud presently, in the presence of all that were there present' (179). She was found guilty and executed at York Castle: 'after the Gentlemen of the Lurie of Life and Death had spent the most part of the day, in consideration of the euidence against her, pronounced Iudgement against her to bee hanged for her offence' (185-186).

The Lancaster Assize Court opened with pomp and ceremony on Monday, August 17, with Judge Bromley playing the leading role. With him on the bench was Judge Altham and, to assist them in their deliberations, several important personalities including Lord Gerard and Sir Richard Hoghton. The prosecution lay in the hands of Roger Nowell who had made the preliminary examinations and had sent the accused for trial. The prisoners, frightened,

suffering from the foul conditions of jail life, crowded together and guarded by gaolers, had no counsel to plead for them and were not allowed to call witnesses to speak on their behalf. All that they could now do was to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty', listen to the evidence of witnesses against them, hear their own confessions, and then wait for the inevitable verdict. The judges could, if they wanted, ask questions to help the accused, but it will be clear what use was made of this rule in the Pendle case.

Old Demdike had died in her cell before her case came up. The sudden death of a woman who, although old, still enjoyed good health throws a suspicious light on the work of the warder Master Cowell. In the records of the trial we read that he took 'great paines ... during the time of [the] imprisonment [of the accused], to procure [the court] to discouer ... such other Witches as he knew to bee dangerous' (78).⁸ Nevertheless, we are never told in which way depositions were obtained, neither do we know if torture was used as a means of coercion. Apparently then, the defendants spontaneously confessed their crimes, but on 18 August James Device 'was so insensible, weake and unable in all thinges, as he could neither speake, heare, or stand, but was holden up to receiue his triall' (69). This particular detail allows us to suppose that the so often reported 'great paines', also with reference to other prisoners, could just be an example of understatement.

Anne Chattox, Elizabeth Device, James Device and Anne Redferne were tried on the first day, and all, with the exception of Anne Redferne, were convicted. 'But the innocent bloud yet unsatisfied, and crying out vnto God for sastisfaction and reuenge; the crie of his people (to deliuer them from the danger of such horrible and bloudie executioners, and from her wicked and damnable practices) ...' (109) led the judges to try the young woman again on the following day, as were Alison Device, Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewitt, John and Jane Bulcock, Isabel Roby and Margaret Pearson.

All of them were found guilty. To Alice Gray – whose trial was not recorded, though she was as deeply implicated as her companion, Katherine Mouldheels – and to three other people from the Samlesbury contingent, the judge gave solemn warning not to presume too heavily upon God's mercy. They had been acquitted in this instance, 'yet without question there are amongst you, that are as deepe in this Action, as any of them that are condemned to die for their offences' (167). He bade them forsake the Devil, 'fall not againe', be of good behaviour and present themselves at the next assizes at Lancaster. To those sentenced to death, Sir Edward Bromley uttered with emphasis and gravity those dreadful words we find in the final verdict:

What persons of your nature and condition, euer were Arraigned and Tried with more solemnitie, had more libertie giuen to pleade or answer to euerie particular point of Euidence against you? In conclusion such hath been the generall care of all, that had to deale with you, that you haue neither cause to be offended in the proceedings of the Iustices, ... nor with the Court that hath had great care to giue nothing in evidence

against you, but matter of fact [...]. It only remains I pronounce the Judgement of the Court against you by the Kings authoritie, which is: you shall all goe from hence to the Castle, from whence you came; from thence you shall bee carried to the place of Execution for this Countie: where your bodies shall bee hanged vntill you be dead; and GOD HAVE MERCIE VPON YOVR SOVLES. (163-165)⁹

The execution took place on the following day, 20 August, upon the moor about a mile from the Castle, watched by an immense crowd in raptures for whom this was a gruesome and indispensable spectacle.

4. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster: the Testimony of a Distracted Clerk*

In the autumn of 1612, the pen of Thomas Potts marked the word 'Finis' on the enormous quarto that had kept him hard at it in the comfort of his lodgings in London's Chancery Lane since late summer. On 7 November, with the voluminous bundle of papers produced by his labours in his hands, the obscure registrar had *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* entered in the Stationer's Register. A few weeks later, to his great gratification (and possibly, he hoped, to his advancement), there came into his hands a copy of his work. He had every right to feel proud for he had brilliantly recalled what had so deeply upset the 'North Parts'. The manuscript had been revised and approved by Sir Edward Bromley, who wrote a prefatory note for the first edition of the pamphlet in which he praised the narrative skills of the author and guaranteed the authenticity of his transcriptions:

After he had taken great paines to finish it, I tooke it upon mee to reuise and correct it, that nothing might passe but matter of Fact, apparent against them by record. It is very little he hath inserted, and that necessarie, to shew what their offences were, what people, and of what condition they were: The whole proceedings and Euidence against them, I finde upon examination carefully set forth, and truely reported, and judge the worke fit and worthie to be published. (9)

But at the end of his relation, Thomas Potts would specify: 'it is no part of my profession to publish any thing in print, neither can I paint in extraordinary termes. But if this discouerie may serve for your instruction, I shall thinke my selfe very happie in this Seruice, and so leaue it to your generall censure' (168-169). Soon after, as if to justify himself for missing faults and imperfections, he also added:

It was a worke imposed vpon me by the Iudges, in respect I was so wel instructed in euery particular. In hast I haue vndertaken to finish it in a busie Tearme amongst my other imployments. My charge was to publish the proceedings of Iustice, and matter of Fact, wherein I wanted libertie to write what I would ... And this I hope will giue good satisfaction to such as vnderstand how to iudge of a businesse of this nature. (168)

These lines show how the jurist, before taking leave of his book, had been animated with the desire to state that, although overburdened with other engagements, he had tried to carry out his task with anxious zeal and a good deal of flair, using ‘matter vpon Record, euen in their owne Countrie tearmes’ to recreate vividly for the reader the activities, the processes and the convictions of the Lancashire witches (168). A careful reading of his precise work, however, highlights the fact that we are not in front of a reliable version of the events and suggests that the author’s conclusive apologies are only a pure formality: ‘If I have omitted any thing materiall, or published any thing imperfect, excuse me for that I have done’ (168). When confronted with a matter unknown to him, Thomas Potts was not at all unprepared. As an active and selective reporter, he represented prior written depositions as *viva voce* testimony, improved the jury speeches to display the shining efficiency and impartiality of the legal system and intentionally manipulated the judicial hank:

Heere you may not expect the exact order of the Assizes ...; but the proceedinges against the Witches, who are now vpon their deliuerance here in order as they came to the Barre, with the particular poyntes of Euidence against them: which is the Labour and worke we now intend (by Gods grace) to performe as we may, to your generall contentment. (31)

As a consequence, one of the most striking characteristics of the pamphlet is the presence of incongruities and ambiguities. About the length of Elizabeth Demdike’s career as a witch, for example, Thomas Potts offers diverse conflicting reconstructions. We must keep in mind that he never met the old woman because she passed away before he was appointed as assistant to Lancaster, but none the less he described her personality in detail, thanks to the information previously collected by the magistrate Roger Nowell:

She was a very old woman, about the age of Foure-score yeares, and had been a Witch for fiftie yeares. Shee dwelt in the Forrest of *Pendle*, a vaste place, fitte for her profession: what shee committed in her time, no man knowes. Thus liued shee securely for many yeares, brought up her owne Children, instructed her Graund-children, and took great care and paines to bring them to be Witches. (16-17)

Here Potts stresses that she had been a witch for a very long time, fifty years. But in old Demdike’s personal confession we read that she had been ‘generall agent for the Deuill in all these partes’ for a shorter period:

The said Elizabeth Southernns confesseth, and sayth; That about twentie yeares past, as she was comming homeward from begging, there met her this Examine, ... in the sayd Forrest of *Pendle*, a Spirit or Deuill in the shape of a Boy, ... who bade this Examine stay, saying to her, that if she would giue him her Soule, she should haue any thing that she would request. (18)

These assertions are once again discredited when Demdike's daughter, Elizabeth Device, appears at the bar; when questioned about the activities of her mother, she admits that she had been a witch 'by the space of fourty yeares' (26). With reference to the duration of her years of servitude Thomas Potts only comments: 'the Deuill and shee knew best with whome shee made her couenant' (26). Elizabeth Demdike was a widow, but we hear nothing of her husband, not even his name. The fact that one of her sons was called Howgate, while the rest of the family was known as Southern, lets us assume that he was illegitimate, unless she had been married more than once. Whether her deposition was the result of threats, ill treatment, or promises of good turn, we do not know. Roger Nowell, the only person who saw her alive, may have convinced her that she was a witch, and that the animals she encountered in the fields or that strayed into her house were the Devil in disguise. Or, by intimations and insinuations, he may have turned the story she told into the tale he wanted to hear, perfectly knowing that a later denial would have carried little weight. And Thomas Potts, always so alert in registering the proceedings, behaved similarly.

Disagreeing features can also be found in the rendition of Alizon Device's story; in this case, apparently without noticeable authorial intervention, Thomas Potts tries to involve as directly as possible the reader in the encounter between the witch, the pedlar and the witness.¹⁰ But if we consider the three different accounts of Alizon Device's story, Thomas Potts' interference becomes much more evident. The first version we have is the young woman's own confession; on 18 March 1612 she set off for Trawden on a begging expedition. Near Colne Field she met one John Law, a Halifax pedlar, whom she asked to buy some pins. What happened after the pedlar refused to open his pack is related as follows:

The Black Dogge spake vnto this Examine in English, saying; What wouldst thou have me to do vnto yonder man? To whom this Examine said, What canst thou do at him? And the Dogge answered againe, I can lame him: wherevpon this Examine answered, and said to the said Black Dogge, Lame him: and before the Pedler was gone fortie Roddes further, he fell downe lame. (140-141)

These words are presented as the transcription of what she said in court; it is Thomas Potts himself who declares that her confession 'agreeth verbatim with her Examination taken at Reade, when she was apprehended and taken' (140-141). The second version of Alizon Device's story comes from the pedlar himself:

He [John Law] went with his Packe of wares at his backe thorow Coln-fielde: where vnluckily he met with Alizon Device, now Prisoner at the Barre, who was very earnest with him for pinnes, but he would give her none: whereupon she seemed to be very angry; and when he was past her, hee fell downe lame in great extremitie; and

afterwards by meanes got into an Ale-house in Colne, neere vnto the place where hee was first bewitched: as hee lay there in great paine, not able to stirre either hand or foote; he saw a great Black-Dogge stand by him, with very fearefull firie eyes, great teeth, and a terrible countenance, looking him in the face. (142)

The pedlar does not say that Alizon asked him to buy pins, but that she begged them from him. The two versions are evidently versions quite clashing. Since Alizon also said that she was going out to beg in Trawden Forest that day, it may seem likely that she would beg pins from John Law rather than ask to buy them. But John Law's son, Abraham, gives yet another version of events, which makes the reader question the stability and truthfulness of any of the stories about the case. Abraham Law told the authorities he had been sent for by letter on 21 March 1612, and had found his father 'speechlesse, and had the left side lamed all save his eye' (143). He subsequently describes the conversation with his father, who

had something recovered his speech, and did complaine that hee was pricked with Knives, Elsons, and Sickles, and that the same hurt was done vnto him at Colne-field, presently after that Alizon Device had offered to buy some pinnes of him, and she had no money to pay for them withall; but as this Examinates father told this Examinee, he gave her some pinnes. And this Examinee further saith, that he heard his said father say that the hurt he had in his lamenesse was done vnto him by the said Alizon Device, by Witchcraft. And this Examinee further saith, that hee heard his said Father further say, that the said Alizon Device did lie vpon him and trouble him. (143-144)

He therefore affirms that Alizon begged pins from his father, but that John Law gave her pins rather than refusing them. If this were the truth, Alizon would have not had any valid reason to attack him. So, what did really happen that day in Pendle? And how can we interpret the contradictions contained in the text? Are we dealing with a physiological element, that cannot be avoided when facts are reported (and so the witnesses' tales can be considered reliable) or are the differences, or contradictions, the result of the colouring the zealous clerk did of the events, here as well as elsewhere? Thomas Potts' *Wonderfull Discoverie* offers a useful case study of the problems involved in reading Elizabethan and Jacobean popular accounts of witchcraft.¹¹

The legal historian James S. Cockburn has neatly summarised views about how early modern news pamphlets represent witchcraft trials with this dexterously balanced admission of the complex and paradoxical nature of the sources:

Some of the pamphlet evidence is persuasive ... on the other hand doubt about the reliability of the pamphlet evidence persists. This is not to suggest that assize indictments contain no reliable material of a quantifiable nature, merely to emphasise the necessity of first giving due attention to the complex problems of interpretation with which they are clearly synonymous. (1972, 183-184)¹²

Thomas Potts said he had 'taken great paines' over the account of the Lancashire witches, respecting as much as possible the restrictive instructions he had received and toiling 'for the benefit of [his] Countrie' (1612, 6). But what kind of advantage did he hope to offer his fellow countrymen by printing the transcripts of that legal material which, as the novelist Robert Neill ironically pointed out, became literally his dusty memory?¹³ Since his evidence is the only source of information we have on the Pendle witch case, in order to answer this question it is necessary to examine it carefully to see why it was written, what was the author's point of view, and how accurate an account he was likely to give.

If we consider the religious context in which Thomas Potts operated, it will be clear that he was not entirely unbiased. He was the client of Sir Thomas Knyvet, who was an effective channel for him to gain the ear of the king when presenting the glorification of the authorities involved in the Pendle affair. Knyvet was probably aware of the fact that the *Wonderfull Discoverie* would have been well received at court and this would have turned to his advantage as promoter of the book. He was the man who had made the discovery of the explosives in the basements of the House of Commons and had effectively foiled the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 by arresting Guy Fawkes. As a keeper of the Jewell House under Elizabeth I he had held a certain amount of respect, but his had never been a high-flying position. Following the episode of the plot, he became a favourite of James I and was appointed Warden of the Mint; he was also made a knight and privy councillor, guardian to princess Mary and, in 1607, became Baron of Escrick. In his memoirs on the conspiracy, king James I called Knyvet 'one, of whose ancient fidelity both the late Queen and our now Sovereign have had large proof' (1697, 141). Unfortunately for Knyvet his skills in handling money were somewhat limited and thousands of pounds of royal funds had miserly been lost. He could hold on to his position by sharpening the threat to James I's person from the Catholics and endorsing himself as 'Keeper of the King's Person. The publishing of the *Wonderfull Discoverie* in 1613 was providentially timed so as to revive his fortunes within the court. In the Epistle Dedicatory of his pamphlet Thomas Potts sets out his intention of ensuring that there would be no mistake as to where his loyalties lay: 'to the right honorable, Thomas, Lord Knyvet, Baron of Escrick in the Countie of Yorke, my very honorable good Lord and Master. And to the right honorable and vertuous Ladie, the Ladie Elizabeth Knyvet his Wife, my honorable good Ladie and Mistris' (1612, 3). To the modern eye these words are a touch oily, but they manage to go downhill from here onwards:

Let it stand (I beseech you) with your favours whom profession of the same true Religion towards God, and so great love hath united together in one, jointly to accept the Protection and Patronage of these my labours, which not their owne worth hath encouraged, but your Worthinesse hath enforced me consecrate unto your Honours. To you (Right Honourable my very good Lord) of Right doe they belong: for to whom shall I rather present the first fruits of my learning then to your Lordship:

who nourished then both mee and them, when there was scarce any being to mee or them? And whose just and upright carriage of causes, whose zeale to Justice and Honourable curtesie to all men, have purchased you a Reverend and worthe Respect of all men in all partes of this Kingdome, where you are knowne. (3-4)

With such an ambitious benefactor, Thomas Potts must have been strongly influenced by Protestantism. Indeed, he reveals as much in the first part of his pamphlet, where he acknowledges that 'Lord Thomas' grave and reverent counsell reduced [his] wauering and wandring thoughts to a more quiet harbour of repose' (6-7) and deliberately compares the Lancaster trial with that of the Gunpowder conspirators, quoting the words of the judges in his description of the witches' felonies:

Practices, meetings, consultations, Murthers, Charmes and Villanies: such and in such sort, as I may justly say of them, as a reverend and learned Judge of this Kingdom speaketh of the greatest Treason that ever was in the Kingdome, *Quis haec posteris sic narrare poterit, ut facta non ficta esse videantur?* That when these things shall be related to Posteritie, they will be reputed matters fained, not done. (50-51)

As a land of dissenters, Lancashire offered security and protection for outlawed Catholic priests smuggled over from Europe 'who by reason of the generall entertainment and protection they find, and great maintenance they have, resort hither. This Countie of Lancaster ... now may lawfully bee said to abound as much in Witches of divers kindes as Seminaries, Jesuits, and Papists' (94).

From a political outlook, Thomas Potts' interest surely lay in backing his protector's loyal support for James I and the Protestant succession; accordingly, no opportunity is missed for a flattering reference to the king.

The subject of witchcraft was itself one of great interest to James I. He had, he believed, himself been object of a murder plot by Scottish witches before he came to the English throne.¹⁴ In his *Daemonologie* he had formulated witchcraft as a menace to the state. In 1584 the learned Reginald Scot had published *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* in which he poured scorn on the whole idea of magic. In the preface of his treatise James I denounced the 'damnable opinions of this Englishman, [who] is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther[e] can be such a thing as Witch-craft' and ordered Scot's book to be destroyed (1597, 4). He argued that monarchs were godly appointed instruments on earth, and ruled by divine right. It followed then that God's eternal enemy, Satan, should be the sovereign's enemy too. As the king was on the side of good and head of the established Church, it was obvious that all those who did not conform in religion were in league with the devil, and there was little difference between such heresy and treason:

since the Deuill is the verie contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie; ... by the falshood of the one to consider the

trueth of the other, by the injustice of the one, to consider the Iustice of the other:
And by the cruelty of the one, to consider the mercifulnesse of the other. (55)

As Stuart Clark points out, 'demonism was, logically speaking, one the presuppositions of the metaphysics of order on which James's political ideas ultimately rested' (1977, 156-157). Certainly, there were great divisions in his kingdom. Like his predecessor, he needed to impose religious uniformity on the country to unite it politically and had reason for fearing an uprising by the strong Catholic faction in the country, strengthened by its links abroad. Equally, he was convinced of the existence of witches, and felt their operations could be a real threat to his position. For this reason, in 1604 he had promulgated a new *Witchcraft Act* which not only stiffened the penalties, but also altered the bearing of the previous laws by amplifying the 'invocation section' to include the keeping of familiar spirits and exhumation of corpses or use of bones for the purposes of witchcraft.¹⁵ The use of bones or skin from the dead was more common in Scotland than in England, and it was implied in few cases, even after this date. But mention of the familiar, already common in popular English witch-beliefs as a privately owned spirit in animal form, had the effect of giving formal and legal sanction to the idea that the very existence of a witch's pet was indeed proof of her commerce with the forces of evil. This led directly to search for the teat at which she supposedly nourished her familiar and encouraged many judges to value its possible presence as most important demonstration for the prosecution.¹⁶

Given this background, it is not surprising to find faithful supporters of the king deeply concerned in rooting out witchcraft. Thomas Potts specifically refers to James I's book and to the Lancashire trial as a demonstration of its accuracy: 'what hath the King's Majestie written and published in his *Daemonologie*, by way of premonition and prevention, which hath not here the first or last beene executed, put in practise or discovered?' (1612, 153-154), and regards the publication of his pamphlet as a patriotic duty:

That the example of these convicted ... may worke good in others, rather by withholding them from, than imboldening them to, the Atchieving such desperate actes as these or the like, and further exhorts his readers my loving Friends and Countrymen ... awake in time and suffer not yourselvs to be thus assaulted. (6-7)

Even the distinction between two different kinds of witches seems to follow the model proposed by James in his treatise:

Potts:

The two degrees of persons which chiefly practice Witchcraft, are such, as are in great miserie and pouertie, for such the Deuill allures to follow him, by promising great riches, and worldly commoditie; Others, though rich, yet burne in a desperate desire of Reuenge. He allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hearts contentment. (115)

James IV:

These two degrees now of persones, that practises this craft, answers to the passions in them, which ... the Deuil vied as meanes to intyse them to his seruice, for such of them as are in great miserie and pouertie, he allures to follow him, by promising unto them greate riches, and worldlie commoditie. Such as though riche, yet burnes in a desperat desire of reuenge, hee allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hartes contentment. (1597, 32)

But the Lancashire witches were not tried simply for being poor women in search of richness or revenge. Amongst the copious crimes they were charged with, one of the most compromising for them was that of having taken part to a witches' sabbat. To enforce this point, Thomas Potts described the 'Great Assembly' held on the Lancaster Moor in heightened language; having told, for instance of the imprisonment of old Demdike, Chattox, Alizon Device and Anne Redferne, he says that:

Heere they had not stayed a weeke, when their Children and Friendes being abroad and at libertie, laboured a speciall meeting at *Malkin Tower* in the Forrest of Pendle, upon Good-fryday, within a weeke after they were committed, of all the most dangerous, wicked, and damnable Witches in the County farre and neere. (1612, 27)

He then goes on explaining the reasons of the clandestine rendezvous, where all the table-companions had 'had to their dinners beefe, bacon and roasted mutton' and had

mette there for these ... causes following, as this Examinates said mother [Elizabeth Device] told this Examinee [James Device]. The first was for the naming of the Spirit. The second cause was, for the deliuerie of his said Grand-mother; this Examinates said sister, Alizon; the said Anne Chattox, and her daughter Redfern; killing the Gaoler at Lancaster, and before the next Assizes to blow up the Castle there; to the end that the foresaid Prisoners might by that meanes make an escape, and get away ... (119)

Weaving Potts' meticulous descriptions together, we find, apart from the feasting of the participants, nothing of the classic stereotype of the old hag, who flew in the darkness of the night on her broomstick to reach the place where the orgiastic banquet would be celebrated. It is plausible that a reunion of people worried about their fate and that of their relatives really took place in old Demdike's home, but the plan of a possible assault to the castle definitely appears fictional, although destined to grip the popular fantasy. What is interesting here is the fact that before Malkin Tower it had never been alleged in England that witches gathered for ceremonial meetings. Geoffrey R. Quaife has argued that 'witchcraft was neither a religion nor an organization. English witches ... showed no sign of co-operation with each other, no continuing or common aspect in ritual' (1987,

59).¹⁷ James Sharpe has corroborated this view by stating that accusations of collaboration or beliefs in secret communities were 'little more than suspicions of *ad hoc* co-operation between witches and certainly little by way of organised rituals or the worship of a devil who was present in person' (1997, 76). Sharpe has also demonstrated that, although learned concepts of the sabbat might have entered popular consciousness, there was a general lack of attention to this theme in the English demonological writings (in this volume, 161-183). But, if allegations of such a terrible menacing assembly were almost alien to the imagery of the time, where did Potts take the idea of the diabolic confederacy? Some indications suggest that he might have been inspired by the first performance of *Macbeth*.

By the middle of December 1605, the King's Men had been back at the Globe, and by the end of the year they went up to the palace as usual to open the Christmas season at Whitehall, staging some plays in the Banqueting House. On the following summer the company was called back for performances, twice at Greenwich and once at Hampton Court, on August 7, 1606, at the conclusion of the visit of the royal brother-in-law King Christian of Denmark. He had come to see her sister, who was pregnant, and to firm up his relations with England in anticipation of the war with Sweden, which his practical council managed to delay until 1611.¹⁸ It is most likely that the play performed on this state occasion, in which all the leaders of the English judiciary would have been in attendance, was *Macbeth*. The absence of swearing in the work indicates that it had probably been cleansed of profanity after the *Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players* was passed by the Parliament on May 27. No swearing, but no renounce by Shakespeare to represent on stage the use that James I had made of witchcraft to serve his political ends. In this way he would further contribute to his patron's ideology of divine right, by deepening the subject of magic, which the king had been cultivating for many years. It is not mere coincidence, then, that Shakespeare's witches, although associated with those 'Sisters Three' or 'Furies fell' who shear the thread of life in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or with the three baleful women Macbeth and Banquo encounter by chance in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, are exactly like those described in the *Daemonologie*.¹⁹ They are ugly females, with 'choppy finger[s]' and 'skinny lips' (1.3.44-45) and own familiars, the cat Graymalkin and Paddock the toad; they beg food from door to door, and when a sailor's wife refuses one of them the chestnuts she is eating, she revenges herself by sending succubi to her husband: 'I'll drain him dry as hay / Sleep shall neither night nor day / Hang upon his penthouse lid; / He shall live a man forbid' (1.3.18-21).²⁰ They spread disease among the animals ('killing swine') and wind up enchantments of various types: 'The Weird Sisters, hand in hand, / Posters of the sea and land, / Thus go about, about: / Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to make up nine / Peace! – The charm's wound up' (32-37). There are however more serious matters. As shown in the prologue, *Macbeth's* witches use to congregate: 'When shall we three meet again? / In thunder, lightning, or in rain? / When the hurlyburly's done, / When

the battle's lost and won. / That will be ere the set of sun. / Where the place? / Upon the heath (1.1.1-7). And by reciprocating in rhyme, they accumulate a malign collective purpose that could be Shakespeare's decisive contribution to the appearance in England of the equivalent of the continental figure of the witch. For Terry Eagleton, this repetitiveness is a signifier of the 'sisterly community' in which the witches exist and, 'revolving around dance, the moon, pre-vision', compact with the forces of darkness (1986, 2-3). In a gloomy cave, with a boiling cauldron in the middle, the witches assemble and mix strange ingredients to produce a potent brew: 'the charm is firm and good' (4.1.38).

The Devil does never concretely materialize in the play, but we are told of the existence of superior demons. When questioned by Macbeth, the 'weird sisters' answer by saying: 'Speak. / Demand. / We'll answer. / Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths, / Or from our masters? ... Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow; grease, that's sweaten / From the murderer's gibbet, throw / Into the flame. / Come, high, or low; / Thyself and office deftly show' (4.1.61-63 and 64-68).

Through these hell-gate scenes, Shakespeare buried 'popular culture under a thick topdressing of exploitative sensationalism, unblushingly strip-mining both popular culture and every learned text he [could] lay his hands on for the sake of creating an arresting stage event' (Purkiss 1996, 207).

James I must have been enormously pleased with *Macbeth*. It was the Stuart play, 'celebrating his ancient lineage, portraying the critical event in it and in Scotland's history, and making divine-right kingship identical with nature and sanity' (Kernan 1995, 88). But there was more; Shakespeare, in his play, had also been able to elaborate a new paradigm of witchcraft as a political conspiracy centred on the perversions of the sabbat. This is significant and relevant as, just six years later, the fantasy of a convention first appeared in English law at the trials of the Lancashire witches. We have no way of knowing if Thomas Potts was among the illustrious guests hosted at Hampton Court, but we know for sure that at that time he was in London to study law. We can presume that he heard of the great stir caused by the official performance at court and kept it in mind when, in 1612, he had to provide the court with proofs, which showed conceivable evidence of illicit motive – the sabbat:

Vpon Good-fryday they met, according to solemne appoyntment, solemnized this great Feastival day according to their former order, with great cheare, merry company, and much conference. When they hath finished, all the witches went out of the said House in their owne shapes and likenesses. And they all, by that time they were forth of the doores, were gotten on Horsebacke, like vnto Foales, some of one colour, some of another, ... and they all presently vanished out of ... sight. (119-120)

Thomas Potts knew that the story of the 'solemne appoyntment' at Malkin Tower had to be told in terms that the judges and the juries could recognize, be-

lieve and at last condemn. Insisting therefore with pedantry, over many pages, on those features that were recurrent in English witchcraft – the Lancashire witches had, for example, familiars, as well as ‘withered face[s]’ – he came to the conclusion that ‘if this were not an Honorable meanes to trie the accusation against them, let all the World vpon due examination give judgement of it’ (128). In this perspective, it is interesting to see how paradoxically different was the fate of the Salmesbury witches, who were acquitted although their description of the sabbat was much more compromising of that provided by their Lancaster companions. ‘Upon her Oath’, one Grace Sowerbutts blamed her grandmother, Jennet Bierley, her aunt, Ellen Bierley, and a friend of them, Jane Southworth, of having bewitched her. Her accusatory statement invited suspicion in its sensational details, rather than in its familiar outlines:

This Examine and the said Ellen Bierley stayed there, and the said Jennet Bierley went into the Chamber where the said Walshman and his wife lay, & and from thence brought a little child ... and after the said Jennet Bierley had set her downe by the fire, with the said child, shee did thrust a naile into the nauell of the said child: and afterwards did take a pen and put it in at the said place, and did suck there a good space. But she saith, that she thinkeeth that the said child did thenceforth languish, and not long after dyed. And after the death of the said child the next night after the burial thereof, the said Jennet and Ellen Bierley, taking this Examine with them, went to Samlesburie Church, and there did take up the said child, and the said Jennet did carrie it out of the Church-yard in her armes, and then did put it in her lap and carried it home ... and having it there did boile some thereof in a Pot, and some did broile on the coales, of both which the said Jennet and Ellen did eate ... And after they had eaten, the said three Women and this Examine danced, euery one of them with one black thing, and after their dancing the aforesaid black things did pull downe the said three Women, and did abuse their bodies, as this Examine thinketh, for she saith, that the black thing that was with her, did abuse her bodie. (89-90)

To demonstrate the absurdity of these accusations, Thomas Potts assessed the evidence point by point, dwelling on the alleged carnal commerce with the devil as especially doubtful: ‘here is good Evidence to take away their lives. This is more proper for the Legend of Lyes, then the Evidence of a witness upon Oath, before a reverend and learned Judge, able to conceive this Villanie, and find out the practice’ (98). On the one hand, he juxtaposed the two cases, Lancashire and Samlesbury, to show the perspicuous judge’s ability to distinguish credible from incredible; on the other hand, he contrasted witches who really populated English forests and courtrooms to the excessively voracious and licentious spectres of legends and lies (cf. Dolan 1995, 94-95). While ‘monstrous’, the Lancashire witches ‘were never so cruell nor barbarous’ (98) as those portrayed by Grace Sowerbutts, and it was this moderated brutality that qualified their ‘otherness’, making them believable, terrifying, and therefore, all the more worthy of a severe punishment.

5. Conclusion

From the excursus outlined in these pages, it is evident that a trustworthy report of the Lancashire trials of 1612 will never be attained. The evidence we have from Thomas Potts' pamphlet and other sources leaves it open to doubt how far the accused were involved in witchcraft practices. We do not know under what conditions confessions were obtained, or whether the educated prosecutors and the convicted individuals even understood each other completely. As to why this particular case was so expertly publicised by the authorities in that precise period calls for more than one answer. Who were these unfortunate so-called Pendle witches? Certainly, they were not witches of the classic tradition. In the main, they were ignorant peasants – social outcasts – scraping a meagre living by begging and stealing.²¹ They probably believed – or half-believed – that they were witches and knew that if they could convince the local populace of their power to kill or maim through witchcraft, they could use threats and blackmail to demand what they wanted from anyone they chose. In this respect, they had the advantage of living in an age when there was a great deal of superstition, a large amount of popular beliefs and an irrational fear of the supernatural.

As a highly political trial, the Pendle affair can be interpreted as an object lesson for the more conservative people of Lancashire in the dangers of clinging to traditional ways no longer acceptable to those in power. Their public and severe punishment was extremely effective, both at the time, when the court was crammed with spectators and the witch trial was a much-appreciated form of popular entertainment, and afterwards as accounts of it circulated in every corner of the county.

In conclusion, the fact that Thomas Potts reported on the events that took place in that frenzied year of 1612 allows us knowledge of the general development of the facts. Indeed, without the *Wonderfull Discoverie* we might have never heard about the Pendle witches; but the evidence Potts provided does not help readers and historians to fully understand how much he cleaned up his reminiscences by tidying and editing relevant information, and how much that other dust of absent-mindedness, mistake and prejudice did alter the account he has left us. If we were to remove the statements of the accused from the context of a witchcraft trial, and strip them of their fanciful Faustian embroidery, the many instances of diabolical actions quoted in the courtrooms of the Assizes would appear both normal and insignificant.

Although *The Wonderfull Discoverie* constitutes a unique (even if inaccurate) document about Pendle Forest folk during the early modern period, the doubt remains about what exactly happened four hundred years ago on those whereabouts. Indeed, the story of the Lancashire witches seems to be both a documentary reportage and a process of mythologizing in which the line between fact and fiction is inevitably and severely blurred by the suspicion of a tendentious manipulation.

As a consequence, trying to establish here to which extent Shakespeare's first performance of *Macbeth* may have influenced the contemporary criminalization of witchcraft is, of course, a complex matter, but it is not misleading, after all, to contemplate the possibility that a stage performance inspires or shapes reality or its representation, today as in the past.

¹ Scholars agree in saying that from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Europe passed through what Hugh Trevor-Roper (1967) has described as a 'witch-craze'. Learned notions about witchcraft were superimposed upon popular and traditional ideas of black magic. Inquisitors increasingly began to look not simply for *maleficium*, but for evidence of a demonic pact, an arrangement made with the devil whereby, in return for renunciation of baptism, services on earth and one's soul at death, he promised material rewards and supernatural powers. It was thought that such witches did not operate singly, but met with others for malefic worship. Hence, allegations of witchcraft inevitably led to search for other culprits. This witch mania began in northern Italy and southern Germany in late fifteenth century. The publication in 1484 of Innocent VIII's Bull (*Summis desiderantes affectibus*) against witchcraft and, two years later, the *Malleus maleficarum* by Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Institor Krämer, is significant. The witch-craze spread widely and quickly, and went beyond the English Channel. For an overview of English witchcraft in this period, see Notestein 1911; L'Estrange 1929 and 1933; Briggs 1962; Thomas 1971; Hole 1977 and 1979; Willis 1995; Sharpe 1997; Macfarlane 1999. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

² See Wright 1974, 198-225. On the turbulent religious situation in Lancashire see Walton 1987 and Mullet 2003. For a general history of the Reformation, see Bainton 1952; von Greyerz 1984; McGraph 1987; Wallace 2004.

³ Roger Nowell was about sixty years old in 1612; in 1591 had succeeded his father Alexander to the Read estate. His family had considerably increased its fortunes under Elizabeth I and would have found an interest in loyal service to her Protestant successor, supporting the established Church of England. His decision to investigate the Pendle witchcraft accusations at this particular moment may be interpreted as an astute political move. Such a prosecution showed in fact that the magistrates were diligently seeking out the king's enemies (in this case the witches) and imposing religious conformity.

⁴ About Potts himself very little is known; in the dedication of the pamphlet he says that he was brought up under the patronage of Lord Thomas Knyvet of Escrick. He probably studied law in London, being described as of 'Chancery Lane', and was instructed to prepare and publish an account of the trial by the assizes judges, who felt that the case was of special importance and should be more widely known (Baigent 2004, 1778-1842).

⁵ 'The hatred and terror which a witch evokes is due to her will and her power to inflict bodily injury ... The witch is a murderer, or may become a murderer on the slightest provocation' (Kittredge 1929, 4-5).

⁶ Old Demdike bequeathed a mystery that remains unsolved to this day – the site of her home, Malkin Tower. Was it Sadler's field, near Newchurch, or Greenhead, Roughlee, Fence, Barley? – Or was it at a place near Blacko, off the road between Gisburn and Colne? Perhaps the truth lies in both camps. Could it be that Demdike's life began in one place and ended, short of Lancaster, in another? We may never know, anymore than we shall know the origin of the name Malkin Tower.

⁷ The presence of children involved in witchcraft trials was quite usual in England. On this specific aspect, see Briggs 1962; Seth 1969.

⁸ For a critical inquiry of the case of the Lancashire witches, see Mitchell 1978 and 1984; Catlow 1976; Eyre 1975; Douglas 1978; Tempera 1981; Peel and Southern 1985; Bennet 1993; Lumby 1995; Clayton 2007.

⁹ As Marion Gibson points out, 'the story of the Lancashire witches is one of the many that became the subject of ephemeral literature from the mid-Elizabethan period until the birth of the news article industry in the eighteenth century' (2007, XII).

¹⁰ On this specific aspect, see Gibson, 1999, 78-104; on the connections between testimony and truth, see Purkiss 1996, 231- 249.

¹¹ The term 'popular', which often accompanies the description of these texts, 'indicates the pamphlets' cheapness (longer ones were prohibitively expensive for the lower sort), their ephemeral character and their sometimes crude and hastily produced content, as well as their attempt to divulge as widely as possible knowledge of their subject' (Watt 1991, 48).

¹² David Cressy has recently suggested that in approaching specific and contested events in early modern England, we should have 'to posit a double set of negotiations, a nested epistemology, involving past and present'. If in deciding what had occurred and why, we look not just at the negotiations between witches and their questioners, but also at our own attempts to untangle events, we can admit that 'the telling takes precedence to the tale' and look at the recorders and tellers, their strategies and our own expectations as readers – potentially a much richer exploration of events than a simple desire to know 'what happened' (2000, 26).

¹³ Robert Neill dedicated his novel *Mist over Pendle* 'to the dusty memory of MASTER THOMAS POTTS, sometime Clerk to the Judges in The Circuit of the North Parts who in November, 1612, at his Lodging in Chancery Lane, wrote of the Late WONDERFUL DISCOVERY OF WITCHES in the Countie of Lancaster' (1951, 4).

¹⁴ In a sensational case in Edinburgh in August 1593, a coven known as the 'witches of Lothian' was charged with having conspired to keep James Stuart from returning from Denmark with his new bride, Queen Anne, in 1590. Under torture the witches revealed that they had practised against the king's life as well. Pieces of dead bodies had been tied to cats, which were thrown into the sea; threads were prepared und knotted to raise tempests; a black toad had been roasted, hung up for three days, and the juice from it collected in an oyster shell. Eventually, as the demonic coup, a handkerchief of the king's was obtained and an image made which was passed to the devil at a witches' sabbat with ominous words: 'this is King James the Sixth, ordained to be consumed at the instance of a nobleman, Francis Earl of Bothwell' (see Carmichael 1592; Normand and Roberts 2000).

¹⁵ In England the first secular law against witchcraft appeared in 1542, during Henry VIII's reign, and was repealed in 1547 by Edward VI without having been put in action more than once. It dealt mainly with treasure seeking. Digging for gold and other precious objects in tumuli and ruined buildings was time-honoured sport in England, though it was felt to be practical to pay a magical specialist for protection against the spirits of heathen or miserly owners who might be lingering wretchedly around their treasure. It has been suggested that this act, which came two years after the Six Articles, was a propitiatory gesture towards the Catholics and an attempt to restrain the iconoclasm of the reformers who had joined the treasure seekers in searching and destroying church monuments. Witchcraft became a crime again in 1563 under Elizabeth, almost surely due to the influence of the Marian exiles, who had seen the continental laws against witchcraft and felt that England needed such provisions too. Although bewitching to death carried the capital punishment, injuries to persons or cattle or damage to goods left offenders liable to be imprisoned, but were more likely subjected to four appearances in the pillory where the local community could be involved in the denigration (see Rosen 1969, 21-29; Swain 1994, 3-5).

¹⁶ With respect to the projections of a dangerous and lewd maternal instinct on the figure of the witch, Diane Purkiss points out that: 'in and through the breast, anxieties about and longing for the maternal body are expressed. Some of these fears and desires were projected onto the figure of the witch, who acted to mark all appropriate boundaries by transgressing them.

As with all fantasies about the witch and her body, violent fear or desire is abjected into the witch, who signifies both men's and women's idea of the bad lactating mother. These worries translate into the elaborate fantasy of the witch and her suckling familiar. The witch gives blood instead of milk; the purified blood that is milk, and hence the narrative of the female body as a source of nourishment rather than poison, does not exist as far as she is concerned' (1996, 134).

¹⁷ On the history of the sabbat, see Ginzburg 1989; Bagliani 2002.

¹⁸ For the state visit as the occasion of the first performance, see Paul 1950, 317-331.

¹⁹ As Mary Ellen Lamb points out, 'the representation of witches in [*Macbeth*] confirms rather than confutes the stereotypes circulated by such texts as Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*' (2009, 190).

²⁰ The charity denied or the generosity rewarded by ingratitude and aggression, the models proposed by Keith Thomas and explored by Alan Macfarlane, as a feature of (or explanation of) accusations, are typical of the English witchcraft (see Thomas 1971 and Macfarlane 1999).

²¹ 'Because they, which are commonlie accused of witchcraft, are the least sufficient of all other persons to speake for themselves; ... the extremitie of their age giving them leave to dote, their poveritie to beg, their wrongs to chide and threaten (as being void of anie other waie of revenge)' (Scot 1584, XXIII).

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*Desecration:
Rape and Suicide*

Maps of Woe

Narratives of Rape in Early Modern England

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Abstract

By considering a selection of texts, both fictional and non-fictional, this study addresses different representations of rape in early modern English culture. Its aim is to highlight the interconnections between aspects of culture and the creative exchange, the confrontation and mutual assimilation between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms.

Keywords: Popular press, Representation of rape, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*.

Doubte it not ... that it is noo pleasance to the chaste
ladyes of herte and thought to be rauysshed but it is
to theym right grete sorowe aboute all other ...
Christine de Pisan, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*

1. *Introduction*

Rape, whether imagined, threatened, attempted, achieved, or resisted, was a pervasive subject in early modern English literature. In Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' works, rape stories are often chosen as their main subject, both shaping and reflecting common anxieties.¹ The theme was indeed widespread, and after Elizabeth I's death its incidence rose sensibly.² Its popularity, together with a change (though a slow one) in rape legislation, a shift of emphasis, rather than strict definition, reveals an interest in, and concern about sexual violence.

However recurrent the theme in literature may be, rape as a criminal offence constituted less than one per cent of all indictments. Though legal authority and statutory law regarded rape as a serious crime, incurring severe punishment, the records of the main law courts show that most of the small proportion of men charged with rape were found 'not guilty', reprieved, described as 'at large', or released without trial. Only a few of the accused were convicted and hanged (Bashar 1983, 22-48; Chaytor 1995, 378-407).

This study aims to investigate some of the different discourses on, and representations of rape that circulated in early modern English culture, by considering a selection of texts belonging to different genres, both canonical and non-canonical: poetry, drama, religious and legal writings, court records,

ballads and pamphlets. All these sources bear witness to the creative and critical exchange between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms, their confrontations, reciprocal adaptations and assimilations.

I am aware that the breadth and scope of the subject cannot be covered in the space allowed; therefore, I will limit myself to discussing and identifying areas that will need further investigation. This exploration requires, among other things, finding 'shared patterns without making a generalising distance from the objects of study' (Wiseman 2009, 23). Shared patterns, however, could veil a multiplicity of emphases and applications; attention, therefore, should be paid to the variegated meanings these patterns are given and to their uses. Therefore my endeavour will be to point out (inter)connections between aspects and levels of culture and highlight how 'ideas, concepts, discourses and practices might compete, clash or co-exist in a multitude of ways' (McShane and Walker 2010, 2). Analysing the representations of rape in the context of early modern English culture raises some general, and yet crucial, questions that need a preliminary discussion.

2. *Rape and Representation*

Rape is difficult to represent. As Mieke Bal argues,

rape cannot be visualized because the experience is, physically as well as psychologically, *inner*. Rape takes place inside. In this sense, rape is by definition imagined; it can only exist as experience and as memory, as *image* translated into signs, never adequately objectifiable. As a consequence, the signs are all we have. (2001, 100)

Rape can only be made real, and made a legal and social matter, as an artificial construction, a codified representation of an inaccessible event whose occurrence has to be proved by the victim herself, who has first to demonstrate her own sexual innocence (Solga 2006, 56-57).

Generally speaking, the narrative produced by the victim is the result of both a linguistic transformation and a biographical reconstruction: she has to externalize her *inner* experience and shape it. What is recollected and told is not only filtered by affective factors, both emotional and psychological, but crucially, by the views of rape dominant in the culture to which the victim belongs.

In early modern England, however, words were not enough; indeed, for the victim, her own words could sometimes become traps. As Garthine Walker argues, at the time, the victim's 'agency to act and speak after a rape was heavily circumscribed – many rape accusations resulted not in the prosecution of the alleged rapist but of the woman herself for slander' (1998, 19).

Though difficult to represent, yet, 'rape is very much a *represented* crime, whether it is represented in the testimony of a complainant or defendant,

or in a “literary” text’ (Catty 1999, 11). The nature of this representation is not transparent, the boundaries between ‘the represented’ and ‘the real’ are highly problematic and their relationship is complex, and highlights its inseparability from questions of subjectivity, authority, meaning, power and voice. Moreover, the term ‘representation’ cuts across boundaries of juridical, theological, philosophical, and literary discourses, a recognition that sustains the assumptions underlying my study (see Higgins and Silver 1991, 1).

The entanglement of rape and representation requires that we pay attention to who is speaking and in what circumstances (but also to who does *not* speak and why): ‘Whether in the courts or the media whether in art or criticism, who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as “truth” determine the definition of what rape is’ (Higgins and Silver 1991, 1). The nature of the ‘who’ includes more than gender; race, class, the sexual history of the victim, the relationship to the perpetrator (e.g. whether he was a stranger or an acquaintance), all play a role in whether a ‘rape’ is perceived to have occurred (1).

We broach here another problematic subject: the sources on which the investigation can rely.³ Whether addressing the world of imagination or the ‘real’ world, texts considered here contribute to offer us ways into reconstructing mental and material worlds. Far from being a direct expression of attitudes and concerns, sources require particular alertness not only to the distortions of ‘real’ actions and social relationships but also to the distortions of ‘actual’ attitudes as well. For instance, most early modern texts present women telling stories that echo, or ventriloquize definitions of rape that obfuscate what might have been radically different perceptions. The prevalence of masculine perspectives in stories told by women leads, for instance, Kahn to pose a question concerning who is speaking in the character called Lucrece (1976).⁴

Indeed, even legal records, apparently more ‘objective’ sources, are problematic. First of all they cannot be taken as wholly representative of victims’ attitudes, not only because rape appears to have been under-reported but also because many of the women’s words survive in records created by male civic authorities.⁵ Examinations and informations record the responses of witnesses, accusers or accused to questions by JPs.⁶ They are mostly, but not always, written in the third person; their fidelity to the spoken word cannot be assumed; there is always some mediation by the JP, questioning, and the clerk, writing down an answer that is likely to be framed according to what legal officials thought worth recording. What is reported is a discursive (re) construction filtered by a frame of reference and an axiology that are in tune with the ethos and goals of contemporary culture. Though mediated, these texts represent a version of how women and men told their stories of rape and sexual violence and as such they can shed some light upon the cultural, social and religious expectations of a given community (Crawford and Gowing 2000, 10-11). The narratives were

all constructed to be plausible, to make sense to contemporary ears. Seeking to justify, explain, complain, confess, or deny, [men and] women in court played on familiar themes, established knowledge, and common fears or assumptions, and gave texture to their picture with a wealth of local, circumstantial detail. (11)

In the courts, for instance, in order to produce a ‘convincing’ and ‘acceptable’ testimony, victims (and perpetrators) have to adopt an almost ritualized discourse, a language as well as the communicative models and narrative conventions framing that discourse (Davies 1987, *passim*; Hanawalt 1998, 125-126).

A problem, perhaps obvious, arises immediately; it concerns the conflict between the personal meaning and individual experience and the discursive conventions that rationalize that experience, that make it knowable, understandable, and crucially, for the wronged person, believable. Moreover, most rape cases are characterized by a split reality, in the sense that they may well involve an event experienced as rape by a woman but not perceived as rape by the man (Higgins and Silver 1991, 2).

As Crawford and Gowing suggest, it is possible that these stories have been told and retold both outside the court as well as inside it (2000, 11). They may have also provided material for the composition of broadsides, ballads and chapbooks, ‘popular’ texts that had a large circulation and reached a widely differentiated audience. But who were the authors of these texts? Even though they reflect, to a certain extent, the attitudes, and concerns of ordinary people – the target audience – some of them were designed to persuade and shape opinions and were published with propagandistic aims. Therefore, it becomes ‘very difficult to distinguish between what was genuinely popular sentiment and what was the propagandist’s opinion, which he hoped his audience would come to share’ (Harris 1995, 8). It is true that many ballads, for instance, have their origins in oral culture; however, most of them have been transcribed into printed sources, and collected by antiquarians in later periods. Thus, once again, ‘we cannot readily assume that here we have firm evidence of authentic popular culture’ (8).

In the end, what emerges from these observations on the nature of texts and sources is the complex interaction between levels of culture, and an idea of culture as a dynamic process, where practices and beliefs are disseminated in society, often, as Natalie Zemon Davis reminds us, ‘jumping barriers of wealth, birth, religion, and ethnic background’ (1992, 1411).

3. *Meanings and Legal Definitions of Rape*

The term ‘rape’ has different meanings in different times and cultures. According to Mieke Bal,

its meaning depends on the status of, in particular, women in relation to men, and the status of the individual subject in relation to the community and its juridical

organization. It is thinkable that the action concerned is interpreted as rape by a part of the culture at stake, and not at all by another part. (2006, 156)

Moreover, the legal definition of rape has varied over time and between legal systems. This means that the semantics of the term is closely connected with the legal attitude to rape. Thus, we need to take into account the various early modern definitions of the word and their ideological implications.

'Rape' derives from the Latin 'raptus', a term which is commonly found in medieval legal documents, and applied equally to forced sexual intercourse, abduction – the theft of a woman – and elopement for the purpose of marriage, sometimes with the consent of both partners. The related term 'ravisht' is similarly ambiguous, since its meaning ranges from sexual violence to metaphorical delight in God (Robertson and Rose 2001, 7).⁷

Law and legal compendia in the medieval and early modern periods betray influence from other discourses, in particular those of the Old Testament law, the medieval and classical theories of human generation and classical literature. They are also founded on 'constructs of female sexuality and consent derived from a complex body of theological, medical, and philosophical texts, both medieval and classical' (Baines 1998, 69).

Medieval law sees the offense primarily in terms of power relations among men. As Bashar maintains, 'Rape law in the medieval period was constructed around the protection of male property in the form of movable goods, their wives and daughters, their bequeathed inheritances, their future heirs' (1983, 41). Although the definition of the crime of rape acknowledges the lack of female consent and the use of force,⁸ the thirteenth-century statutes show that it was understood primarily as a crime against property; the law was geared to protect the property of the wealthy, as well as to safeguard bloodline and family interests (31).⁹

Amongst the 'goods' that had to be protected was female virginity, and the law was particularly concerned about its preservation. Virginity as a property value is highlighted by Bracton, the most prestigious legal authority of the Middle Ages, who was also highly influential in the early modern period. Bracton assesses rape within the context of virginity as follows:

The rape of virgins is a crime imputed by a woman to the man by whom she says she has been forcibly ravished against the king's peace. If he is convicted of this crime [this] punishment follows: the loss of members, that there be member for member, for when a virgin is defiled she loses her member and therefore let her defiler be punished in the parts in which he offended. Let him thus lose his eyes which gave him sight of the maiden's beauty for which he coveted her. And let him lose as well the testicles which excited his hot lust. Punishment of this kind does not follow in the case of every woman, though she is forcibly ravished, but some other severe punishment does follow, according as she is married or a widow living a respectable life, a nun or a matron, a recognized concubine or a prostitute plying her trade without discrimina-

tion of person, all of whom the king must protect for the preservation of his peace, though a like punishment will not be imposed for each. (1968, vol. II, 414-415)

Though all women must have some protection under the law, punishment for rape depends, for Bracton, on two factors: first, the (potential) relationship between the raped woman and another man; second, the quality of the loss: 'virginity defines the value of an unmarried woman' (Baines 2003, 60).¹⁰ The role of the woman's consent is downplayed, if not irrelevant.

The description of the raped woman as 'defiled' derives mainly from Deuteronomy 22 which, together with narratives of rape such as those of Dinah, Jacob's daughter (Gen. 33:18-34:31), Tamar, David's daughter (2 Sam. 13:1-22), and the nameless Levite concubine (Judg. 19:1-21:25), has shaped the law's attitude in the early modern period. Deuteronomy 22 directs attention to offences by, and against 'maids', and makes a distinction between those who are betrothed and those who are not. If the raped virgin is not betrothed, the rapist must marry her and pay fifty shekels of silver to her father. Thus Deuteronomic law provides the model for marriage as one solution to rape, a solution indicated by Bracton and by many early modern authorities in order to protect the family honour after 'defilement'.¹¹ Deuteronomy 22 characterizes a woman's position, both legal, social and economic, in terms of her relationship to men; sexual offence is seen primarily as protecting the rights of fathers, and if the woman is married, of husbands. Moreover, it presents rape as 'the ultimate form of subjugation of women by men' (Baines 2003, 28). Significantly, in the Geneva Bible, as well as in the King James Version, the Hebrew word for 'raped' is rendered in English both as 'humbled' and 'defiled'.¹²

This is no surprise, since the early modern period was highly dependent on the Bible for legal, and social authority. It was on the Old Testament that the (law's) assumption of the subjugation of women was predicated. Rape law reflects, and contributes to strengthen, gender hierarchy; by emphasising property concerns, it diminishes the relevance of female consent: it protects male interests before women's rights.

Though medieval laws of rape applied for the period 1558-1700, Bashar contends that 'it seems that in the late sixteenth century, the legal view of rape changed. Rape came to be seen as a crime against the person, not a crime against property' (1983, 41). The 1557 and 1597 statutes treat rape and abduction as separate offences, but still describe rape as a property crime.¹³ And, as the first English law book written for women, *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights* shows, in the first decades of the seventeenth century, the legal definition of rape still subsumes both abduction and sexual violence:

There are two kindes of Rape, of which though the one be called by the common people, and by the Law itselfe, Rauishment; yet in my conceit it borroweth the name from *rapere*, but unproperly, for it is no more but *Species stupri*, a hideous, hatefull

kinde of whoredome in him which committeth it, when a woman is enforced violently to sustaine the furie of brutish concupiscence: but she is left where she is found, as in her owne house or bed, as *Lucrece* was, and not hurried away, as *Helen* by *Paris*, or as the Sabine women were by the Romans, for that is both by nature of the word, and definition of the matter: The second and right raiishment, *Cum quis honesta famae foeminam, siue virgo, siue vidua, siue sanctimonialis sit inuitis illis in quorum est potestate, abducit. Neque refert, an quis (volente vel nolente rapta) id faciat, nam vis quae Parentibus vel Curatoribus sit, maxime spectat.* (1632, 377-378)

However, some legal manuals underscore the distinction made in the 1557 and 1597 statutes and suggest that an important change in the definition of rape occurred around the middle of the sixteenth century. In the revised edition of Sir Anthony Fitzherbert's *The New Boke of Iustices of Peace* (1554), the crime of 'rape', 'which is to raiishe a woman agaynst her wyl' is distinguished from the category of 'Takers of women against their wyll' (fol. 1012v).¹⁴ After this, the crimes of forced sexual intercourse and abduction tended to be treated separately; as a consequence, the issue of the victim's consent begins to be momentous in legal definitions (Greenstadt 2001, 343).¹⁵

The issue becomes evident, towards the end of the seventeenth century, in the influential definition of the crime given by Matthew Hale in his *Historia Placitorum Coronae*: 'Rape is the carnal knowledge of any woman above the age of ten years against her will, and of a woman-child under the age of ten years with or against her will ... To make a rape there must be an actual penetration or *res in re*' (1736, vol. I, 628).¹⁶

What appears particularly significant in Hale's definition and in the indications he gives for the prosecution of rape, is, as Julia Rudolph contends, the importance assigned to the sexual nature of the crime: 'Hale focuses on the specific physical actions and the physical manifestations of sexual violation' (2000, 177). The shift from a view of rape as a property crime to a view of rape as a sexual crime entails that greater emphasis is now placed on the victim's consent, on her innocence, morality, resistance and will. Increasing attention is paid to the question of proving or disproving consent, on the 'credibility' of the victim's testimony, on the necessity of showing 'circumstances and signs of the injury' and on the speed with which she 'make[s] fresh discovery and pursuit of the offence and the offender, otherwise [the appeal] carries a presumption that her suit is but malicious and feigned' (Hale 1736, vol. I, 633, 632).¹⁷

It should also be pointed out that, contrary to common contemporary opinion, Hale rules out the equation of conception and consent (628-631; see also Rudolph 2000, 177). In the law, this equation appears first in a thirteenth-century treatise by Britton, and was repeated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuals for justices of the peace (Greenstadt 2001, 315). According to this view, female pleasure was necessary for conception: 'if the woman conceive upon any carnall abusing of her, that is no rape, for she can-

not conceive unless shee consent' (Finch 1627, 204).¹⁸ Founded on popular and quasi-medical theories, the assumption that conception invalidates any accusation of rape was a commonplace in the early modern period.

The growing emphasis on the issue of the woman's consent shows a growing anxiety about the woman's ability to lie about her consent which, in turn, highlights a fear of women's sexual independence. As Julia Rudolph maintains,

Since the law was ... increasingly motivated by a fear of malicious rape prosecutions, the attendant increased focus on consent was double-edged: on the one hand, the emphasis on female consent was tied to a definition of a woman as an autonomous person, a rational agent; on the other hand, the whole issue of consent was also tied to a definition of woman as sexual, dangerous, and irrational, as female identity was being equated with female sexuality. (2000, 179)¹⁹

Failing to prove lack of consent, a woman could become complicit in the crime; therefore, the raped victim must not only refuse consent to her assailant but also make her refusal unambiguously evident to an audience that prejudicially questioned women's sexual motives (Solga 2006, 58). Thus her credibility, innocence, and consequently the possibility of a successful appeal to the authorities, rely on 'her physical and rhetorical performance before and after the act of violation' (Sallmann 2010, 47). Only by making visible what 'cannot be visualized', and translating it into 'signs', can the victim legitimates her legal action.

Significantly, Bracton 'instructs' a raped woman about the ways in which she could present herself as a credible victim of violation:

She must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry, to the neighbouring township and there show the injury done her to men of good repute, the blood and her clothing stained with blood, and her torn garments. And in the same way she ought to go to the reeve of the hundred, the king's serjeant, the coroners and the sheriff. ... Let her appeal be enrolled in the coroners' rolls, every word of the appeal, exactly as she makes it, and the year and the day on which she makes it. A day will be given [her] at the coming of the justices, on which let her again put forward her appeal before them, in the same words as she made for the county court, from which she is not permitted to depart lest the appeal fall because of the variance. (1968, vol. II, 415)²⁰

The victim must provide evidence not only in her own voice and words but also with her body: 'torn garments' are proof of struggle, 'blood' and 'clothing stained with blood' indicate wounds and also bear witness to her (lost) virginity.²¹ Moreover, in order to be successful, an appeal must include several exact repetitions of the account, each time addressing a different audience.

Borrowing from Bracton's treatise, *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights* argues that a victim's efficacious appeal depends on two separate but related actions, lamenting and showing:

She ought to goe straight way ... and with Hue and Cry complaine to the good men of the next towne, shewing her wrong, her garments torne ... and then she ought to goe to the chiefe Constable, to the Coroner, and to the Viscount, and at the next Countie to enter her Appeale. (1632, 392-393)

Like Bracton's treatise, *The Lavves Resolutions* describes the constraints surrounding a rape appeal; here again, the burden of proof rests on the victim. However, though the 'instructions' given in the two treatises are very similar, *The Lavves Resolutions* shifts the emphasis and makes clear the complementarity of word and action, of telling and showing, in the initial revelation of a rape, a revelation that has to precede legal action, and, in a sense, make it legitimate. The introduction of the verb 'complaine', which, according to the *OED*, in medieval and early modern times, had the meaning of 'bewail', 'lament', signals the shift. The verb indicates the linguistic action the woman has to take: voice ('hue and cry') is not enough, she has to perform a specific speech act that conveys sorrow and suffering (Solga 2006, 58-60).²² However, words alone can give rise to suspicion, since women can be liars; furthermore, given the early modern association of vocal and sexual openness, a 'loquacious' or 'eloquent' victim may convey a disturbing lack of innocence. According to Solga, in *The Lavves Resolutions*,

Making rape known ... is a matter of staging a familiar process of show-and-tell that relies on the mutual reinforcement of word and image ... Rape's revelation becomes more overtly a staged tragedy, the victim a tormented heroine: she is to go to the nearest town and raise hue and cry by 'complain[ing]' of the crime while at the same time showing her ripped clothes and bodily wounds in the public street. Her damaged body, spoken through her lamenting voice, will sign the truth of her narration ... producing her innocence via the dramatic convergence of action, speech, and sight. (59, 60)

The *inner* act of violence is thus turned into a public spectacle, its victim into an actor – playing both herself and the self she is expected to be – whose ability to perform according to a script determines the successfulness of the legal appeal. *The Lavves Resolutions* describes and prescribes a code of conduct that serves not only to make an act of violence known but also to construct the reality of an act that has taken place 'offstage'; in so doing, however, the actuality of rape itself is irremediably effaced (60; Sallmann 2010, 48).

Other strategies were enacted by the early modern legal system in order to expunge the reality of rape. As Barbara Baines has pointed out, the effacement of *real* rape occurred 'through the concept of coerced consent, through the concept that conception negates a charge of rape, through the concept of a woman's carnal pleasure that makes her "no" really mean "yes", and through the practice of avoiding litigation altogether by marriage arranged between the rapist and his victim' (2003, 9).

4. *Loathsome Acts of Lust: Lucrece, Lavinia ...*

1594 saw the publication of the only two works by William Shakespeare in which a rape 'actually' takes place: the early drama *Titus Andronicus* and the narrative poem (*The Rape of*) *Lucrece*.²³ The exact time of composition remains uncertain for both texts. *Titus Andronicus* may have been written a few years earlier and retouched in or around 1593, and it is commonly believed that *The Rape of Lucrece* was written during the plague years of 1592-1593. Both works enjoyed initial popularity; *The Rape of Lucrece*, with its eight editions before 1640, of which six between 1594 and 1616, also influenced the so-called 'complaint poems' of the 1590s (Swärdh 2003, 11-12).²⁴

Composed and printed so close in time, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece* show several similarities. One of these is that the acts of rape at the centre of both texts are part of larger political conflicts.²⁵ In *Titus Andronicus*, external conflict turns into the internal strife over the rule of Rome, and *The Rape of Lucrece* tells the story of the legendary birth of the Roman republic, the uprising against the royal rulers and the change of state government 'from kings to consuls' ('The Argument', 41).²⁶ Moreover, both texts draw on mutual sources of inspiration, for instance, Ovid and Virgil, and share formal aspects, such as the 'ekphrastic mode' (Swärdh 2003, 133). Further, there are direct references in the play to the rape of Lucrece, and, on several occasions, the texts mutually reverberate on the level of expression.

Lucretia, Bal says, is "the heroine of rape" celebrated throughout Western culture', her story, repeatedly reproduced, 'was, so to speak, part of the culture' (1994, 77, 76; see also 2001, 95). Livy's *History of Rome* and Ovid's *Fasti*, both relating the beginnings of Rome, are generally recognized as the most important classical sources of Shakespeare's poem, as well as of other narratives circulating during the early modern period.²⁷ Augustine's exposition on rape and Lucretia's suicide in *De Civitate Dei* (1.16-19), 'firmly established the legend as a basis for theological and legal debates on the subject, particularly during the medieval and early modern periods which, in turn, were reflected in the literature of the time' (Sallmann 2010, 45).²⁸ After Painter's translation of Livy's text in *The Palace of Pleasure*, the legend acquired wide popularity in English literature, Shakespeare's poem representing the most acclaimed example. As Donaldson has pointed out, 'The story of the rape of Lucretia is not one story but many stories' (1982, 3).²⁹

In his version of the story, Shakespeare expands, and departs from, the classical sources and alludes to contemporary formal debates on the moral acceptability of Lucretia's suicide, thus adapting the story into his own cultural context.

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, rape is understood both as a crime against property and as an act against Lucrece herself, in which the woman's 'wyll' plays a crucial role. Lucrece is represented as belonging to Collatine and 'stolen' by Tarquin,

a king and a tyrant.³⁰ Once ‘stolen’ and spoiled, Lucrece laments the loss of her worth and the stain on her husband and family: calling for revenge, she kills herself. Her death triggers the revolution that, by popular ‘consent’, leads to the Roman republic. While the classical sources foreground the outcome of the rape and the subsequent suicide for the history of Rome, Shakespeare’s poem focuses primarily on the physical and emotional states of the two main characters, Tarquin and Lucrece.³¹ In Shakespeare’s reconstruction of the story, special prominence is given to Tarquin’s inner debate, to the verbal exchange between the victim and the aggressor, and Lucrece’s extended lament after the rape. As Philippa Berry has noted, ‘over a third of the total number of lines in the entire poem’ is actually spoken by Lucrece, a ‘long rhetorical performance’, the greater part of which is a ‘complaint ... for her lost virtue’. This long speech, Berry continues, represents Shakespeare’s remarkable departure from his main sources, since most of it is uttered when Lucrece is alone. In Livy’s *History* and Ovid’s *Fasti*, Lucretia’s lament is much shorter and always addressed to a male audience (2003, 458). However, Lucrece’s fluent speech can be problematic since, given the negative connotations women’s ‘loquacity’ had in early modern culture, her eloquence could be perceived as a mark of lewd conduct and sexual incontinence. Indeed, in the rape scene, Lucrece’s fervent verbal defence cannot do anything but incite greater desire in Tarquin (ll. 645–651). However, no matter how much Lucrece says ‘no’, and tries to persuade Tarquin to give up his heinous deed, her language fails and the offense is perpetrated. Moreover, Tarquin tries to obfuscate his responsibility for the crime by telling Lucrece, ‘Thy beauty hath ensnar’d thee to this night’ (l. 485), thereby illustrating the ‘familiar pattern of shifting the blame from the rapist to the victim’ (Baines 2003, 89).³²

The different genres of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Rape of Lucrece* – a play and a narrative poem – highlight the different ways in which a rape victim can communicate the violence she has experienced. As the legal compendia prescribed, in order to be deemed credible, a woman had to provide evidence both in words and action for the violence inflicted upon her.

On the stage, Lavinia is a ‘performer’, but a performer who cannot perform through the conventional theatrical means, voice and gesture, being deprived of tongue and hands: her complaint is ‘speechless’, her ‘action’ ‘dumb’ (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.2, 39–40).³³ What she enacts ‘is a performance of writing, an active, painful, full-body gesture that rehearses [her] violation, not by way of any well-worn convention, but by crudely miming the awkward, struggling contortions and oral invasiveness of forced sexual encounter’ (Solga 2006, 64). Differently, Lucrece is a textual construction, existing within a narrative poem, that is, in a text meant to be read by the literate élite; her drama is expressed through ‘spoken’ monologue. In the act of reading, individual readers incorporate the words printed on the page.

The poem and the play exhibit two different representations of rape. In the poem, the sexual assault takes place in Lucrece's (and Collatine's) mansion, in the marital bed, the symbol of the spatial, physical and spiritual union of marriage.³⁴ Insidiously, on the basis of friendship and trust, Tarquin introduces himself into, and desecrates 'the sanctity of another hearth and home', as well as the laws of hospitality. 'Like a foul usurper' (l. 412), he 'takes unlawful possession of what does not belong to him' (Belsey 2001, 320): he is a thief, a traitor and a ravisher. Tarquin is well aware of the consequences of his 'impious act' (l. 219): the 'scandal will survive' (l. 204) his death, his 'posterity' 'shall curse' his 'bones' (ll. 208-209). He also knows that his crime has no justification:

'Had COLLATINUS killed my son or sire,
Or lain in ambush to betray my life,
Or were he not my dear friend, this desire
Might have excuse to work upon his wife,
As in revenge or quittal of such strife.
But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,
To shame and fault finds no excuse nor end. (ll. 232-238)

Tarquin's deliberative monologue preceding the rape pivots on the conflict between his 'brainsick rude desire' (l. 175) and the 'sorrow', the 'shame', the 'dishonour', the 'scandal', the 'guilt' and the 'fear' that will ensue if he perpetrates the deed, between 'frozen conscience and hot-burning will' (l. 247). The decision is reached when he comes to Lucrece's chamber door; no more debating, thought gives way to action: 'I must deflower' (l. 348).³⁵

Shakespeare's poem contains two different narrations of the rape. The first account, given by the narrator, is focused on Tarquin's 'reprobate desire' (l. 300) and the deferral of its fulfilment. The reader (over)hears Tarquin's deliberations and 'follows' his progress towards Lucrece through the dark and locked rooms leading to her bedroom. The rape is described, both by the narrator and by Tarquin himself, as a form of heroic action, a 'march' towards conquest. Lucrece is objectified, her body is troped; the recurring imagery is that of a city that is 'besieged, conquered, and colonized' (Belsey 2001, 322).³⁶

The act itself is depicted as coercive bodily violence: Tarquin interrupts Lucrece's plead, puts out the torch, like a 'wolf' 'seiz[es]' and gags her with 'the nightly linen' and rapes her (ll. 667-681), 'Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears / That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed' (ll. 682-683).³⁷ The text – 'at this point, at least – is as unequivocal as language can make it' (Belsey 2001, 329): Lucrece does not consent to the rape. The deed leaves her 'frantic with grief' (l. 762); it has not just attacked her body but also the core beliefs about her own identity that is thus dramatically altered (ll. 1682). For Tarquin's part, his unlawful 'appropriation' represents the loss of all his 'properties', he is 'A captive victor that hath lost in gain' (l. 730). And as Lucrece has reminded him: 'kings' misdeeds cannot be hid in clay' (l. 609).³⁸

The second narration of the rape is voiced by Lucrece herself and addressed to her husband, father and kinsmen. Her account is condensed into four stanzas (ll. 1625-1652); the accent is on being overpowered and silenced. Tarquin threatened her both physically – he set his falchion against her heart (l. 1640) – and emotionally – he would cast ‘perpetual infamy’ (l. 1638) upon her if she did not yield. In Lucrece’s words:

Mine enemy was strong, my poor self weak,
 And far the weaker with so strong a fear.
 My bloody judge forbade my tongue to speak;
 No rightful plea might plead for justice there. (ll. 1646-1649)

Interestingly, in her narrative, Lucrece highlights her silence and withholds from her audience mention of her long and eloquent verbal resistance, a piece of information the poem’s reader possesses. The reader also knows that this resistance, the only kind that was open to her, was fruitless not only because it had to oppose physical violence but also because it effected her aggressor’s further arousal (ll. 645-646). Moreover, the reader is aware that Lucrece’s words and subsequent behaviour are the result of her tormented deliberation following the rape. She has summoned an audience to whom she reveals the violence inflicted upon her and the name of the offender, indeed, in front of an audience, by daylight, she performs her suicide, an act whose import she had explained in her oral ‘will’ and ‘testament’, uttered soon after the rape (ll. 1181-1206).³⁹ It is indeed after Tarquin’s departure that, ‘desperate’, she addresses her absent husband, and mandates ‘How TARQUIN must be used, read it in me’ (l. 1195), offering her death as a paradigm for the punishment of her rapist and as means for her to eternize her own ‘fame’ and reputation for chastity (ll. 1202-1204).

The words Lucrece utters are the words that we see written on the page, the words we read, the words that constitute the poem itself. Lucrece’s request ‘to be read suggests a connection between her body and that of the poem itself, which was first published in 1594 under the title *Lucrece*’ (Greenstadt 2009, 57). Thus her ‘will’ is both her ‘resolution’ (ll. 1193, 1200) and the written form in which it is expressed, the text of her own body that she requests (commands?) others to ‘read’. The display of Lucrece’s ‘bleeding body through Rome’ (l. 1851) witnesses and makes public the act of violation performed secretly on her: it ‘publish[es] TARQUIN’s foul offence’ (l. 1852).⁴⁰ Lucrece’s call for Tarquin’s public punishment is realized by means of his and his kin’s ‘everlasting banishment’ (l. 1855), a momentous event in the history of Rome marking the foundation of a new ‘state government’. It was indeed the vindication of Lucrece’s rape and of her subsequent suicide that fuelled the ‘revolution’ which, with the consent of the people, overthrew the Tarquins’ monarchic rule, instituted the Republic and made Brutus consul. Since the

offence is brought to the community's attention, revenge cannot be merely a private matter, although steeped in political motivation, but becomes an action that necessarily goes beyond personal vengeance.

While in *The Rape of Lucrece* revenge is excited by the 'loathsome act of lust' (1636), in *Titus Andronicus*, rape occurs within a framework of revenge where an act of violence retaliates against another act of violence.⁴¹ The play records the distinction between the two contemporary meanings of the term 'rape': rape as abduction and rape as sexual violation. In *Titus*, both forms of rape take place; they are treated as separate offences, thus reflecting the change in the definition of rape that legal manuals around the middle of the sixteenth century began to acknowledge.

When Saturninus charges Bassianus and his 'faction' with the 'rape' of Lavinia, Bassianus thus reacts:

'Rape' call you it, my lord, to seize my own,
My true-betrothed love, and now my wife?
But let the laws of Rome determine all;
Meanwhile am I possessed of that is mine. (1.1.410-414)

Here 'rape' clearly refers to abduction, and is perceived as a crime against property: it is a *theft of a woman*, a matter between men, a question of male rivalry and honour, strife over the possession of Lavinia, who functions as 'moveable goods' in the patriarchal economy. Her will appears irrelevant; she accepts silently whatever decision and action her (future) husband and/or her father may take. 'Her rape and dismemberment simply figure what has already happened to her: absolute objectification' (Baines 2003, 161).

Rape as sexual violation, as a crime against the person, takes place 'behind the scenes', in the 'ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull' woods (1.1.628), where none can see and none can hear. It is described as 'pillage of ... chastity' (2.2.44), or in terms of defloration (2.3.26) and ravishment (2.3 stage direction in Bate's edition, 5.1.92; 5.3.56; 5.3.98).

Significantly, the play draws attention to the 'invisibility' of the crime, and, implicitly, to the difficulty of its representation. The stage-direction to 2.3 (Bate's edition) reads: 'Enter the *Empress's Sons* with *Lavinia*, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravished'.⁴² As Jocelyn Catty points out, this description primarily helps the reader, not the spectator (though the production may make use of visual signals, e.g. blood stains); in a stage production, in order to be known, the rape 'needs to be related' by the victim 'in some way' (1999, 109). When asked to reveal the crime committed against her, Lavinia writes: *Stuprum* (4.1.78), a term pertaining to Roman law which might have sounded somehow 'strange', if not 'foreign', to a popular audience in early modern England. The use of a stark Latin legal term to define the offence produces a kind of distancing effect likely to enhance the perception of the

offence itself. According to Berger, *stuprum* refers to 'illicit intercourse with an unmarried woman or widow of honorable social condition' (1953, 719), a term highlighting the sexual nature of the crime that, in turn, is distinguished from another offence, *raptus*, 'the abduction of a woman against the will of her parents' (667). By choosing *stuprum*, Lavinia rejects the implication of *raptus*, i.e. that she is personal property, and overcomes the ambiguity inherent in the English legal term 'rape' whose definition subsumes both abduction and sexual violence. Her disfigured body is the tangible proof that she adequately resisted the rapists, her injuries corroborate her lack of consent.

As the play makes clear, though triggered by Chiron's and Demetrius's lust, the rape of Lavinia is an act planned and supported by Aaron and Tamora who conceive it as a form of revenge against Titus. Aaron himself encourages Chiron and Demetrius to combine strength to rape Lavinia and, by using hunting imagery, he compares the rape with the pursuit and capture of a 'doe' in the forest.⁴³ The phrase 'dainty doe' superimposes the characteristics of wildness, as well as nimbleness and shyness, onto Lavinia: she is the target to aim at, the quarry to be captured by means of weapons and force. Indeed, as Aaron himself makes clear: 'Single you thither then this dainty doe, / And strike her home by force, if not by words' (1.1.618-619). By equating the hunting process with the violation, the metaphor underscores aggressiveness and violence, it entails hurting and killing but it also implies that the victim shows resistance and evasiveness.⁴⁴

An interesting difference in the treatment of rape in *Titus Andronicus* and in *The Rape of Lucrece* lies in the fact that, while in the poem, as well as in many other early modern rape scenes, the rapist first tries to obtain the woman's consent, in the play Chiron and Demetrius never address Lavinia to this purpose.

In 1594, the story of Lucretia's rape had become 'a theme for disputation' (*The Rape of Lucrece*, l. 821). Disputes or *controversiae* were part of the Renaissance educational system and stories of rapes were often chosen as a subject on which the exchange of perspectives could take place. Sometimes the debate voiced the rapist's inner struggle; more frequently it took the form of a contention between two types of discursive acts: the aggressor's persuasive speech aiming at obtaining the woman's consent and the victim's dissuasive speech whose failure leads to the violence itself and, in turn, to the loss of her good name.

5. ... and Nameless Others

One of the issues that early modern narratives of rape invariably address concerns the notions of (dis)honour and reputation, notions that applied to all social levels, though their meanings varied sensibly according to gender and status (Reay 1998, 213).⁴⁵

The biblical account of Dinah's rape (Gen. 33:18-34:31) provides the authority for the troubling equation of raped woman and whore. In this story, the victim is stigmatized as 'whore' and thus implicitly condemned for the violence done to her: rape 'defiles' her body and 'pollutes' her reputation. Further, it reclassifies the woman from a socially accepted figure, that of the 'honest' or 'good' woman, to that of the 'unchaste' woman, a discrediting category, that causes a change in social estimation. Once chastity is lost, Vives maintains, all other virtues are missing:

What can be safe to a woman sayeth *Lucretia*, when her honestye is gonne; And yet had shee a chaste minde in a corrupt bodye. ... Take from a woman her beautye, take from her kindred, riches, comelynesse, eloquence, sharpnesse of witte, cunning in her craft, gyue her chastity, and thou hast giuen her all thinges. And on the other side, giue her all these thinges, & call her a naughty packe, with that one word thou hast taken al from her, and hast left her bare and foule. (1585, 56-57)

In his 'True Roman Tragedie', *The Rape of Lucrece*, Thomas Heywood makes clear the loss of status and the social stigma that the victim of rape will experience. While telling her husband, father, and kinsmen about her violation, Lucrece stresses the damage done to her:

Heare me, I am dishonour'd and disgrac'd,
My reputation mangled, my renown
disparaged, but my body, oh my body
...
Staind, polluted and defilde.
Strange steps are found in my adulterate bed,
And though my thoughts be white as innocence,
Yet my body soild with lust-burning sinne,
And by a stranger I am strumpited,
Rauisht, inforc'd, and am no more to ranke among the Roman Matrons. (1608, h2r-v)⁴⁶

The sense of dishonour, shame and exclusion Lucrece experiences is shared by many other rape victims, often nameless women whose voice is sometimes recorded in broadside ballads and other popular texts.

'A new ballad, intituled, A warning to youth' (1628-1629), tells the story of a dissolute young man who rapes 'an honest Maide' (l. 81) after 'inforc[ing] her to drink' (l. 95).⁴⁷ 'Sencelesse' (l. 101), and therefore unable to make any 'resistance' (l. 100), she loses 'her sweet virginity' (l. 102). The ballad highlights a series of features that are present in many other representations of rape: the victim voices her complaint ('In pining grief, she languisht long, / Like Philomel by night', ll. 113-114); in her speech, great emphasis is put on status loss: rape has turned her from 'an honest Maide' (l. 81) to 'a Strumpet in disgrace' (l. 129). Shame finally leads her to self-destruction and, as a consequence,

to the death of the child she is expecting. As the story of Lucretia illustrates, rape and suicide are frequently associated. The raped woman often commits suicide with the weapon used by the rapist either to threaten her (the 'knife' in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*) or to deceive her ('wine' in this ballad, where the victim drinks herself to death). The ballad also seems to contradict the view that pregnancy disproves rape. Indeed, the 'honest Maide' (l. 81) is 'sencelesse' (l. 101) when the rape occurs and the 'lustfull Lecher' (l. 93) succeeds in accomplishing his deed only with 'Satan aid' (ll. 90-91), that is, with the complicity of a supernatural entity. In spite of this, the victim conceives a child, an event that shows that rape and conception are not mutually exclusive. This, in turn, might suggest that the equation between conception and consent was not as generally accepted as scholars believe.

'The Life and Death of M. Geo: Sands' (1626) records the criminal events leading to the execution of a 'caitiff', George Sands, whose whole life was devoted to crime and mischief. After robbing and strangling a girl in Holborn, Sands 'perforce did ravish' an honest maid by threatening to kill her. In this case, the rape is committed with the 'ayd' of an accomplice whom Sands had seduced into 'this abuse' (ll. 81-84). The coercive circumstances in which the rape here as elsewhere – Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* is another instance – occurs are emphasized. In this case, however, the emphasis is on the aggressor, whose exemplary iniquity serves the moralistic aims of the author of the ballad.

The image of the rapist as a 'cultural other' is exploited in 'A lamentable ballad of the tragical end of a gallant lord and vertuous lady' (1658-1664). The protagonist is 'a heathenish and blood-thirsty Blackamoor', a servant in a noble white family, who, in order to revenge himself on his master's unfair reproach, imprisons the whole family, except the master, in a locked tower of their castle, rapes the lady, and kills the children and their mother in the full sight of all the town-folks. Seeing all the horror and violence on his family, the gentleman dies. The 'villain void of fear' (l. 189), then, commits suicide by throwing himself out of a tower window. Locating responsibility for rape and violence outside the local community and attributing them to a 'racial Other' represent a way of underscoring the 'chastity' of the Western (imperialistic) culture (Little 2000, *passim*).

While ballads, or at least some of them, construct the rapist as someone outside the community and/or a devious and brutish creature, the picture portrayed by court records and pamphlets appears different.⁴⁸ Indeed, in most cases, the man charged with rape is known to the victim and part of the same cultural and social environment.

Surviving information about the thirty-four rape victims for the period 1640-1700 recorded by the Northern Circuit assizes shows that they were the wives, daughters or servants of husbandmen, labourers, shopkeepers or craftsmen; most of them were poor, or at least poorer than the men accused of rape (Chaytor 1995, 381).⁴⁹ From the late 1670s, accounts of the trials

that took place at the Old Bailey began to be published regularly. Compiled soon after the conclusion of each session (Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker 2003-2012), the 'Proceedings' sold well.⁵⁰ A few accounts record rape cases.

In the narrative of a trial that took place on 6 September 1677, the man was found 'not guilty', since the woman who charged him 'did not cry out', and 'neither a woman who was in another room of the same house', nor a neighbour 'heard the least disturbance'. Furthermore, the alleged victim failed to report the abuse immediately to her husband and, when meeting her assaulter, she 'never charged him or took any notice of it' (Anonymous 1677, 4-5). In another case, the man 'Indicted for Ravishing a Maid' was cleared of the charge since the maid, when examined by the constable after being beaten by the defendant's wife, did not mention the rape, but afterwards 'pretended' it. In the account, she is described as 'a silly Country animal', while he is portrayed as a married man who offered to 'entertain her in his Service' (Anonymous 1678b, 5).

In his *Historia Placitorum Coronae*, Matthew Hale maintains that it is left to the jury to assess the credibility of the 'party ravished': she is 'more or less credible according to the circumstances of fact, that concur in that testimony'. Hale lists a few 'concurring evidences' that, he maintains, 'give greater probability' to the testimony. These are the victim's 'good fame', the present discovery of the offence, showing 'signs of the injury', 'if the place, wherein the fact was done, was remote from people', and whether she made an outcry 'when the fact was supposed to be done'. If these conditions did not obtain, 'a strong presumption, that her testimony is false or feigned' must weigh on the judgement (633).

In trials involving children, however, the young girl's concealment of the assault is frequently justified by her shame and fear. Often it is the child's mother who discovers the physical damage on the girl's body. In an account of the proceedings at the Old Bailey session for London and Middlesex held at the beginning of July 1678, a 'Prentice' was found guilty of raping a 'Maiden Child' between eight or nine years old. The crime was discovered only some days after it was committed because the girl had contracted a 'Disease' which 'caused the Mother to inquire into it' (Anonymous 1678a, 2). The girl was one of the few children who testified in court and the rape was proved by the testimonies of 'a Midwife, and other Matrons'. Similarly, in the narrative of another trial held at the Westminster Quarter Sessions in October 1680, a 'Girl of Nine or Ten Years of Age', 'being ashamed, and not thinking of any harm', did not reveal the violence committed against her, 'till her Mother found out that the lower parts of her Belly were ... grown so sore, that she could not sit down' (Anonymous 1680, 3). The man charged with the rape, a 'Popish Priest' (4), was found guilty and sentenced to pay 'a Fine of 500. Marks, to continue in Prison till it be paid, and to give good Security for his Behaviour during Life' (4).

In another case, after appearing before justice, the impenitent rapist, 'like *Judas*', hangs himself; here it is the perpetrator, not the victim, who commits suicide (Anonymous 1674, 4). The man, William Stapeler, a drover from Romford in Essex, was caught in the act and found guilty of raping a thirteen-year old girl who lodged in his house. Though, in this case, the pamphleteer vehemently condemns the act, his attention is fully focussed on Stapeler and the actions leading to his suicide. Nothing is said about the victim; indeed, she disappears from the scene.

The preoccupation with the convicted criminals' repentance, their open confession, and full conversion to God plays a central role in the 'Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts', which are other interesting sources for the study of early modern rape and, more generally, crime.⁵¹ The stories here contained focus largely on 'The Behaviour of the Condemned Criminals in Newgate'; their life is presented as following a pattern that details stages of sin, crime, repentance, 'change of heart', as well as other questions of faith. The accounts are highly didactic, their aim being to impart moral lessons to contemporaries and encourage respect for the criminal law. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that, in these narratives, the victim is hardly mentioned. Very little is said, for instance, of Elizabeth Nichols, a child who was repeatedly raped by Thomas Benson, an apprentice to the girl's father; only her age – she was about seven or eight years old when she was assaulted – is mentioned. In the 'account of himself' that Benson gave to the ordinary, 'he said that the girl came into his Chamber and so he took the opportunity to commit this ... Act being then in Drink' (*Ordinary of Newgate's Account*, October 1684). Highlighting lack of premeditation on Benson's part, the statement also appears as an attempt to downplay his responsibility in the crime, an attempt that the ordinary immediately unmasks.

Most rape stories, as well as other crime narratives, were designed to deter the audience from felonious activity; they also served the authorities as a means to maintain direct control over public opinion concerning criminal matters. Indeed, serving a moral purpose, most pamphlets and cheap publications exemplify how evil is rightly punished, their closing words typically highlighting a 'fit warning' for lewd men to deter from committing 'sinful and dreadful actions', especially on children.

Space constraints do not allow me to devote adequate attention to how rape was represented in early modern women writers' texts.⁵² Generally speaking, when reading these texts, we have to resist temptation of assuming that a woman writer's representation of rape will be different from a man's, and therefore we should be cautious of attributing gender-specific perspectives to these narratives. Significant in this sense is the fact that, in these texts too, mentions of Lucretia, as an example of chastity, proliferate.

However, it is interesting to notice that the only poem of the period written by a woman which apparently refers to her own experience of rape is

one of the so called 'casket sonnets' by Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary's writings have been for centuries highly controversial and closely examined for their political and biographical significance. This sonnet, too, has been exploited to this purpose. The first lines contain a possible mention to Bothwell's rape of Mary at Dunbar in April 1547:

Pour lui aussi j'ai jeté mainte larme.
Premier, quand il se fit de ce corps possesseur,
Duquel alors il n'avait pas le coeur. (ll. 1-3)⁵³

After voicing a sense of distress, the poem denounces the rape, indirectly expressed through periphrasis, a device that reveals how Mary conceives rape: a possession of a body before 'having' its (her) heart. The phrasing of the lines, however, appears to betray a view of heterosexual love in terms of 'possession' whereby women surrender both heart and body to men, a view that implies a loss of sovereignty on the woman's part, and reinforces the dominant account of love and sexuality between man and woman.

One of most interesting discussions of rape by a woman writer is contained in Leigh's *The Mothers Blessing*, in a chapter concerning the names recommended for children (1616, 27-43). Here, she praises chastity as the pivotal virtue and exhorts women to be wary of men who 'lye in waite euey where to deceiue' them, and 'laugh and reioyce, that they haue brought sinne and shame to her that trusted them' (33). But shame, Leigh contends, is an indication of a woman's innocence, not of her guilt and complicity as Augustine and others worryingly suggested. 'Heathen women', she argues,

before they would be defiled, haue been carelesse of their liues, and so haue endured all those torments, that men would devise to inflict vpon them, rather then they would lose the name of a modest mayd, or a chaste Matrone. Yea, and so farre they haue beene from consenting to any immodestie, that if at any time they haue been rauished, they haue either made away themselues, or at least haue separated themselues from company, not thinking themselues worthy of any society, after haue once bin deflowered, though against their wils. (38-39)

Leigh portrays women as victims of men's violence and coercion, and takes a clear stand on the issue of the woman's consent, sweeping away all 'presumption of collaboration' (Vigarello 2001, 29) between victim and perpetrator. In the passage, no doubt is expressed as to where the responsibility lies, and no reluctance to exonerate the victim is manifested. Moreover, Leigh seems to show awareness of the psychological consequences of rape and claims that it is shame, not guilt, that leads the victim to self-seclusion, or worse, to suicide.

As we have seen, in most early modern discussions of rape, the core question appears to be the possible consent of the victim, an issue that encourages an examination of her decisions, wishes and personal autonomy. The

significance given to these aspects, and to suffering as well, varies with time and alongside 'changes in the systems of oppression exercised over women, their permanence, their refinement and their displacement' (3). Since early modern judgement of rape is grounded in the understanding of the legitimacy of consent, a study of rape can shed some light on the era's understanding of broader epistemological questions such as free will and the nature of individual agency, whose relevance pertains to both men and women alike.

Rape is indeed deeply embedded in culture: it 'simultaneously exists as always one thing – a savage act against a woman ... – and never one thing, since it inevitably constitutes a thread in a complex network of interconnected cultural institutions and practices that changes from one historical moment to the next' (Robertson and Rose 2001, 7). In speaking about rape, therefore, we cannot avoid such issues as patriarchy, domination, poverty, racism, war, sexuality, desire, morality and perceptions of crime and punishment. But speaking about rape also means unmasking that mechanism of violence which, as Eve Ensler puts it, 'destroys women, controls women, diminishes women, and keeps them in their so-called place' (2007, xiii-xiv). It means making visible what happens out of sight; it means giving voice to the unspoken.

¹ The concern here is with rape as an act committed by men on women. This does not mean to deny the reality of same-sex rape. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

² An examination of a large number of early modern English literary texts representing rape or attempted rape in fiction, poetry and drama can be found in Catty (1999, in particular, 25-118).

³ In this volume, the problem of the reliability of early modern sources is addressed by Pugliatti (19-42) and also discussed by Cressy (47-62) and Baratta (185-208).

⁴ On gender ventriloquism, see Harvey (1992) and Purkiss (1992).

⁵ Legal records began to be kept more methodically from 1580. Through the period 1580-1720, legal records became fuller, but often less individual in style (Crawford and Gowing 2000, 6).

⁶ Rape, murder, infanticide, arson, and witchcraft were dealt with at the higher criminal court, the assizes. However, as Gowing highlights, 'most detailed testimonies of rape come not from prosecutions at the assizes, where rape was a capital offence, but from witness statements at the quarter sessions and church courts, where the offence at stake was pregnancy or fornication' (2003, 101).

⁷ The Latin verb 'rapere', from which the word 'raptus' descends, means 'the action of carrying off by force', a meaning that implies a lack of consent, but not the sexual connotation that characterizes the modern sense of the word.

⁸ See section XXII, 'The Old Law of Libidinous Rape', in *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632, 378-379).

⁹ For studies on the medieval rape law see Post 1978.

¹⁰ Later while treating gang rape, Bracton makes clear that 'to defile a virgin and to lie with one defiled [are different deeds]' and therefore 'only one shall be held for the defilement, though several may be liable for lying with her' (1968, vol. II, 417).

¹¹ The marriage solution as a means of protecting family honour is discussed by Post (1978, 152-153).

¹² Baines notes that in his lectures on Genesis, Luther explains that the word 'humbled' 'is the way the Hebrews speak of defilement' (2003, 53). In the Geneva Bible, the marginal note to Deuteronomy 22:24 elucidates the synonymic use of the words 'humbled' and 'defiled': subjugation equates with violation. The Latin Vulgate establishes a similar semantic connection between 'raped' and 'humbled'; in Deuteronomy 22:24 the term used is 'humiliavit'. In this study, quotations from the Old Testament are taken from the Geneva Bible.

¹³ *Statutes of the Realm*, 4 & 5 Phil. & Mar. c.8, 1557-1558, 329-330; 39 Eliz. c.9, 1597-1598, 910. In the 1557 statute, the focus is on disinheritance and the forfeiture of property when a person abducts, deflowers, or contracts secret marriage with a 'Maide or Woman Childe'.

¹⁴ The first edition, *The Neue Boke of Iustices of Peas*, which appeared in both law French and English editions in 1538, does not distinguish between the two offences.

¹⁵ After Fitzherbert's work, the definition of rape became more precise, turning away from the ambiguity that characterized earlier descriptions; see, for instance, Cowell's legal dictionary (1607); Finch's compendium (1627, 204-5); Dalton (1630, 281).

¹⁶ Hale makes clear that, within marriage, rape cannot be recognized: 'the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimony consent and contract, the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract' (1736, 629). Hale's *Historia Placitorum Coronae*, published thirty years after Hale's death but written in the late seventeenth century, became the 'main authority on English criminal law for a century thereafter' (Cromartie 2004).

¹⁷ For discussions of Hale's definition of rape, see Rudolph (2000, 176-177) and Chaytor (1995, 395-396).

¹⁸ The same idea can be found in Staunford (1557, 24); Lambarde (1583, 261); Dalton (1630, 281); *The Lavves Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632, 396). The first edition of Lambarde's *Eirenarcha* (1581) does not contain the conception-equals-consent view, which was introduced in the second edition (1583). As to conception-equals-consent view, Thomas Laqueur traces it back to second-century Rome (1990, 161). For a discussion on conception and consent, and on the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the concept of consent in early modern England, see Baines (2003, 63-79).

¹⁹ Significantly, at the end of his chapter on rape, Hale engages in a discussion on malicious suits brought against innocent men (1736, 634-659).

²⁰ Similarly, Glanville's treatise of 1187 emphasized the importance of the victim's display of the 'injury done to her', the 'effusion of blood', and 'tearing of her clothes' (Eng. trans. 1965, quoted in Hanawalt 1998, 126).

²¹ Deuteronomy 22 prescribed that, in case a man slanders his wife, saying that he 'found her not a maide' (22:14), the woman's parents 'take and bring the signes of the maydes virginitie vnto the Elders of the citie' (22:15); and the father will say: 'loe, these are the tokens of my daughters virginity' (22:17). The marginal note in the Geneva Bible explains that the 'tokens' are 'the sheet, wherein the signes of her virginity were'.

²² In Bracton's treatise, the verbal expression of the crime is implied, and, in the initial disclosure of rape, the attention is focused on the victim's show of injury and blood.

²³ The first quarto of 1594 gives the title as *Lucrece* on the title page and *The Rape of Lucrece* on the first page of the text and in the running heads. Not until the 1616 edition did the title-page read *The Rape of Lucrece*.

²⁴ For the genre of 'female complaint', see Catty (1999, 62ff). For a discussion of the editorial alterations and the transmission of the texts of *The Rape of Lucrece*, see Roberts (2003, 102-142).

²⁵ Other works by Shakespeare that mention, or allude to rape are: *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Proteus attempts to rape Silvia); *The Tempest* (Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda is part of the back-story); *Pericles* (rape appears as a theme in the brothel scenes); *Cymbeline*

(Cloten imagines his rape of Imogen, 3.5.137-144). Moreover, according to Stanley Wells, 'the bed trick in both *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* represents a kind of rape by a woman of a man' (2010, 146). In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo, as a redeemed rapist, is modelled on the biblical character of Shechem, who violates Dinah in Gen. 33:18-34:31. Stanley Wells also argues that, in Shakespeare's works, 'loveless desire leads to brutal rape'. In this sense, *The Rape of Lucrece* 'forms an extended examination of the effects of lust without love' (119, *passim*).

²⁶ Quotations from *The Rape of Lucrece* are from The Arden Shakespeare (2007).

²⁷ Titus Livius (c. 64 BC – 17 AD), *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57-60 and 344-49; Publius Ovidius Naso (c. 8 AD), *Fasti* 2.721-852. Shakespeare's sources are discussed in Bullough (1957, 177-199). In early modern England, the influence of classical literature accounts for a proliferation of allusion to Lucretia, Virginia and Philomela, whose stories are made available in English translations by Painter (1566), Pettie (1576) and others, while Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, made popular by Golding's translations of 1565 and 1567, takes rape as its prototypical metamorphosis and provides a model of rape as foundation myth (Catty 1999, 9). The importance and the popularity of Ovid's works in sixteenth-century humanist education cannot be over-emphasised. As Sarah Carter has recently underlined, the practice of reading, memorising, translating Ovid (both from Latin into English and back to Latin), the imitation and rewriting of his works played a crucial part in the curriculum of sixteenth-century English grammar education; the *Metamorphoses*, *Fasti*, *Heroides*, and *Tristia* were the 'sources for a variety of myths and exemplars in poetic style'. The *Metamorphoses* in particular, with their focus on 'desire, mutability, and mortality, [have] prove[d] eminently resonant to early modern thinkers' (2011, 2, 3). According to Amy Richlin, in the fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses*, over fifty stories of rape are contained, and in the six books of the *Fasti*, ten tales involving rape are told (1992, 158).

²⁸ According to Augustine, Lucretia's suicide undermines her claim of innocence. Her self-destructive act leads him to wonder: 'If she be an adulteresse, why is shee commended? If shee bee chaste why did shee kill her selfe?' (1610, 31).

²⁹ Medieval accounts of the story of Lucretia appear in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* ('The Legend of Lucrece', c. 1386-1387) and in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (VII.4754-5130, c. 1390-1393).

³⁰ Lucrece's condition as (male) property is highlighted directly or by allusion in ll. 17-18, 33-35, 1056, 1067, 1191, 1660, and especially 1791-1806. René Girard reads the poem in terms of relations among men along the line of the paradigm of 'mimetic desire'. To his mind, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Tarquin, 'unlike the original Tarquin of ... Livy' is drawn to Lucrece 'solely by her husband's excessive praise' of her virtues; driven by his 'false desire' (*The Rape of Lucrece*, l. 2), 'he resolves to rape a woman he has never actually met' (Girard 2000 [1991], 4. For the extensive analysis of the motif in the poem, see 23-28).

³¹ One of Shakespeare's departures from the classical accounts lies in the fact that, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, he omits the first part of the story, which is contained in the prose 'Argument', and opens his poem with Tarquin's 'second' visit to Lucrece's house. Moreover, Shakespeare dedicates only a couple of lines to the aftermath of Lucrece's rape and death. After the display of Lucrece's 'bleeding body' (l. 1851), 'The ROMANS plausibly did give consent / To TARQUINS everlasting banishment' (ll. 1854-1855).

³² The strategy of blaming Lucrece for the offence perpetrated on her, a strategy very often detected in real rape-cases, is also used earlier in the poem when Lucrece urges Tarquin to tell her 'Under what colour he commits this ill' (l. 476). His explanation is crystal clear: 'The fault is thine, / For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine' (ll. 482-483; for the whole reply see ll. 477-483).

³³ Quotations from *Titus Andronicus* are from The Arden Shakespeare (1995).

³⁴ The marriage bed as the centre of conjugal intimacy was a theme treated in the contemporary moral literature. William Perkins, for instance, states that 'the marriage-bed signifieth that solitarie and secret societie, that is betweene man and wife alone' (1609, 111; the treatise

appeared first in Latin in 1590 and later it was translated by Thomas Pickering). The intrusion of a third person into this society can be seen as something like the germ of disintegration of the society itself. In a sense, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, rape also represents a violation of the spatial rights and norms that regulate domesticity.

³⁵ The verb chosen by Tarquin reveals that he equates Lucrece with a virgin thus presupposing her innocence and chastity.

³⁶ See ll. 221, 428-445, 463-483, 1170-1173. The land-as-woman (and the woman-as-land) metaphor was pervasive in early modern travel narratives. Sir Walter Raleigh described Guiana as 'a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead ... neuer been ... conquered or possessed by anie Christian Prince', waiting for her English lover or conqueror to put his 'glad feet' on her 'smooth ... breast' (1596, 96; see also Chapman 1596, A1v-A4r.). Moreover, the personification of cities as women is frequent in the Hebrew Bible (Gordon and Washington 1995, 308). For the use of the language of warfare and military assault to describe rape in the Hebrew Bible see 308-325.

³⁷ Though the actual rape takes place somewhere between ll. 680-683, Tarquin's assault on Lucrece begins at l. 435, when he presses his hand down to her heart.

³⁸ For a full discussion of the issues of possession and dispossession in the poem, see Belsey (2001, 315-335).

³⁹ For the theological, legal and popular views on early modern suicide, see Clare in this volume (241-252).

⁴⁰ Painter's version of Livy's *Historia* reads: 'The bodie of *Lucrece* was brought into the markette place, where the people wondred at the vilenesse of that facte, euery man complainyng vpon the mischief of the facinorous rape, committed by *Tarquinius*' (1566, B2v).

⁴¹ The story of *Titus Andronicus* survives in three different versions: Shakespeare's play, a ballad which was entered the Stationers' Register in 1594, and a prose narrative account which is extant in a mid-eighteenth-century chapbook. Jonathan Bate supports the view that 'the play came first, the ballad was based on the play, and the chapbook was a re-expansion of the story based on the ballad' (1995, 83).

⁴² Both the three Quartos (1594, 1600, 1611) and the First Folio (1623) contain the stage direction, though with slightly different spelling and punctuation.

⁴³ The forest with its 'wide and spacious' 'walks' and its 'many unfrequented plots' is described by Aaron as 'Fitted ... for rape and villainy' (1.1.614-616), an outlying place where, 'shadowed from heaven's eyes', Chiron and Demetrius can 'serve' their 'lust' (1.1.630). However, if it is true that the forest is a place of perils for a woman, it is also clear that, despite a long tradition, handed down from the middle ages, which recommended that wives should be locked up, the house is no guarantee of security either, as *The Rape of Lucrece* shows.

⁴⁴ It should be noted in passing that the hunting metaphor has been widely used in (English) poetry to represent dynamics of amorous courtship and sexual chase. In *Titus*, not only does Aaron employ the age-old metaphor but more crucially he takes it, as it were, to the extreme by exploiting in full such elements as violence and destructiveness that are usually only partially activated in poetic contexts.

⁴⁵ For discussions on women's honour and dishonour in early modern England, see Gowing (1996), Walker (1996), and Pallotti (2012).

⁴⁶ Similarly, in sonnet 66, Shakespeare uses the verb 'to strumpet' to lament a characteristic of moral injustice: 'And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted' (6). Quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets are from *The Arden Shakespeare*, edited by K. Duncan-Jones (1997).

⁴⁷ There is probably an allusion here to Ephesians 5:18 which intimates: 'And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess ...'. In the Geneva Bible, the marginal note to this verse explains that by 'excess' is meant 'Every type of disorder, together with every manner of filthiness and shamefulnes'. For a fuller discussion of the texts considered in this section, see Pallotti (2012, 290-302).

⁴⁸ Most pamphlets containing narratives or mentions of rape belong to the second half of the seventeenth-century.

⁴⁹The depositions included in the Northern Circuit assize papers are of two kinds: the examinations of the defendants and the informations of the plaintiffs and witnesses (Chaytor 1995, 380).

⁵⁰From January 1679, 'the Court Alderman of the City of London ordered that accounts of the proceedings at the Old Bailey could only be published with the approval of the Lord Mayor and the other justices present' (Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker 2003-2012).

⁵¹The 'Ordinary of Newgate's Accounts' (1676-1772), that contain the lives of the criminals executed at Tyburn, shared the commercial success of the Proceedings of the Old Bailey.

⁵²See, for instance, Whitney (1567, A4v); Lanyer (1611, ll. 205-206; 211-212). Attacks on seduction are also found in the pamphlets by Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda, all published in 1617, which answered to Swetnam's *Araignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward and Vnconstant Women* (1615). The names of Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda are, as Diane Purkiss has shown, 'pseudonymous' (1992, 71).

⁵³'And I have shed for him so many a tear. / First when he took my body and made it his own / Although my heart was not yet won' (Mary, Queen of Scots 1992, 39). The authorship of Mary's writings has been seriously questioned. This and other issues are briefly discussed in Bell's introduction (27-29).

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‘Buried in the Open Fields’: Early Modern Suicide and the Case of Ophelia¹

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Abstract

Focussing on Ophelia’s suicide in *Hamlet*, as it is represented in the different texts of the play, this essay argues that the play mediates the diverse responses to self-murder in the early modern period. The social status of the suicide could determine the coroner’s verdict. Literary scholars have paid too little attention to the way the texts of the play are symptomatic of theological, popular and legal attitudes to early modern suicide. The culture of suicide resonates with the text in ways more complicated than some historians have assumed.

Keywords: Burial Practices, Early Modern Suicide, *Hamlet*, Popular View of Suicide.

1. *Understanding Early Modern Suicide*

The social and literary history of self-murder, which became known as suicide only in the mid-seventeenth century,² has been explored in a number of illuminating studies. Early modern historians and literary critics have engaged in fruitful dialogue about the extent to which the dramatic and poetic depictions of suicide might be said to be culturally representative, tapping into the sympathy or abhorrence of readers and audience, or whether such representations are rhetorically constructed and thus aesthetically distanced. In this short essay I aim to contextualize one literary suicide, that of Ophelia in *Hamlet*, which I will argue is a solitary example of a stage suicide which powerfully resonates with the meanings of suicide in the early modern period as described by social historians. In part, my argument follows that of Michael MacDonald (1986), but it gains fresh impetus from consideration of the variant texts of *Hamlet* and the differences in verbal nuances between these texts, together with the spectrum of responses to Ophelia’s death.

Work over the last fifty years or more has enabled detailed understanding of the meanings of suicide in various communities. The discovery of cases across Protestant and Catholic Europe, and across different social classes, has revealed remarkable similarities in the meanings attached to the act and its communal responses (Healy 2006, 909). The legal, the theological and the popular are useful contexts in which to examine early modern suicide. Common and canon law, together with popular ritual, all impinged on the social construction of suicide and in turn determined how the suicide and his/her

family were treated. As all these factors have a bearing on *Hamlet*, I offer a brief account of attitudes to suicide mediated through current historical scholarship before arguing their relevance to Shakespeare's play.

At common law – implemented through coroners, magistrates and jurors – the question was whether the suicide was *felo de se* (felon of himself) or *non compos mentis* (not sound of mind) or whether the death was accidental. If the suicide's death was attributed to insanity, it meant that his/her property may not have been automatically forfeited and in rare cases funerary rites may have been permitted. However, from the large number of cases of *felo de se* it would seem that coroners and juries returned verdicts of *felo de se* where it would have been impossible to prove that a suicidal rather than an accidental death had occurred, such as in instances of drowning. Coroners, drawn from the middling ranks of society, had no medical expertise and may well have been subjected to pressures that placed them at odds with the higher authorities or with the members of the jury. In cases of suicide goods were forfeited either to the Crown or to the lord or corporation. From 1510 in England coroners, until then unpaid, were paid one mark for every verdict of homicide returned, including verdicts of *felo de se* (MacDonald and Murphy 1990, 24). The fee was to be deducted from the forfeited property of the individual. Evidently there were inducements to return a verdict of suicide. On the other hand, juries – drawn from the community of the deceased – may have taken pity on a destitute family and determined on a verdict of *non compos mentis*. Juries did on occasions show independence, but more often than not returned verdicts of self-murder (MacDonald and Murphy 1990, 58). In general, ambiguous deaths were classified as suicide. A quarter of all deaths in Geneva from the 1540s to the end of the Republic were through drowning (a means of suicide commonly used by women), often on Lake Geneva or in the Rhone (Watt 2001, 36). The evidence can be variously interpreted. An obvious consequence of drowning was that it might appear an accidental death. For some latter-day historians, however, the number of drownings recorded as suicides seems suspiciously high. MacDonald and Murphy point out that in early modern England over one third of the deaths that were classified as self-murders were drownings, a number of which could just as plausibly have been accidents (1990, 57).

Across Europe suicides were denied burial rites, excluding them from the Christian community. In Geneva, for example, as early as 561, the date of the Council of Braga, ecclesiastical practice was to deny suicides burial honours (Watt 2001, 86). In England the Council of Hereford in 672 denied suicides funerals, including hymns and psalmody or 'rites of honourable sepulture' (MacDonald 1986, 19). In France the Synod of Nîmes in 1284 forbade the burial of all suicides in hallowed ground. Decades later, when it was learnt that a suicide had been erroneously buried in a cemetery, the Bishop of Mende requested the exhumation of the cadaver (Minois 1999, 35). Watt records

that of the 40 suicides documented in Geneva from the period 1542-1650 only one person was allowed to be buried with the traditional funerary rites. This one individual was André Caille, a wealthy merchant who suffered from 'melancholy' and shot himself in his room. Evidently, the family begged for mercy and the tribunal, the Small Council, decided that he should be buried with honour. The Council declared that his memory must not be sullied or marked with ignominy or suffer any reprisal whatsoever, permitting his relatives to bury him (Watt 2001, 81). Money as well as status must have been operative, since it is also recorded that Caille's relatives agreed to donate a hundred *écus* from his estate to the city's hospital. Caille's case was evidently atypical because he was a member of a prominent and wealthy Genevan family. If the deceased person came from a prestigious family, it appears that magistrates were reluctant to declare a death self-inflicted in spite of the evidence. In contrast, Watt cites the case of Jean Bovard, a 36 year old vinegar maker who demonstrated bizarre and violent behaviour. When attempts were made to disarm him, he kicked and tried to stab a soldier before jumping into the Rhone. Bovard's widow and mother pleaded 'alienation of spirit' – a less socially privileged form of melancholy – but the Small Council denied him funerary honours and ordered that he be buried behind the shooting range (2001, 21).

People of all social classes took their lives, although in a period in which poverty was a main cause of misery, the poor would have had more cause to do so. MacDonald and Murphy cite cases of destitute suicides (1990, 266). As with the case of the Genevan Caille, it was possible for noble or wealthy families to seek to present a suicide as an accidental death or as one which occurred because the balance of the individual's mind was disturbed. In France in 1578, François de Saignes, seigneur de La Garde and a *conseiller* of the higher court of the Parlement de Paris, who was suffering from an unidentified physical illness, drowned himself. He was declared insane to avoid confiscation of his estate, which had been bequeathed to the son of the *premier* president of the Parlement. De Saignes was buried in the choir of the Cordeliers church with full ceremony (Minois 1999, 60-61). Although they cite no case from the same period in England, MacDonald and Murphy also conclude that the nobility and members of the gentry were also more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt by juries or protected by bogus verdicts. Somewhat ironically, men and women of quality were more likely to be found *non compos mentis* than their social inferiors.³

Denial of traditional burial rites was often the minimum punishment for suicide. As C.M. Koslofsky has commented in his discussion of practices in early modern Saxony, burial location was a powerful and evocative symbol of inclusion even in a Lutheran community which rejected the concept of consecrated ground (2004, 52). In England, following the canons of the Anglican Church, ministers could not refuse or delay the burial of corpses brought to the church or churchyard, but they could decide on how to bury. R.A. Houston cites the

case of John Bradley of Thirsk in the North Riding, Yorkshire, who was buried '*non per ministerium* having drowned himself' (2010, 196).

Parish registers record different treatments of the ungodly dead. The Parish Register of Birstall, Yorkshire, for example, records amongst Burials that on 23 June 1586 William Grym had 'drowned himself in a pitt nere unto Adwalton Townes end and was buried on the top of the common' (Nussey, ed., 1983, 175). Practices varied from region to region and from rural to urban community. The corpse of a widow, Elizabeth Wickham, who had hung herself in November 1595 'upon a garden pale by her apron strings' in the parish of St. Botolph, Aldgate, London, was ordered to be buried in the same alley where she had killed herself, with a stake driven through her (Seaver 2004, 26).

Local customs and rituals often entailed further degradation for what was judged a terrible crime against God. Again, such desecrations varied from country to country as well as from region to region, but the strong popular abhorrence for suicide was reflected in these popular rituals. In Sweden bodies of suicides were taken to woods and burned unless they were deemed insane, in which case their corpses were buried outside the cemetery (Jansson 2004, 84). In Geneva, those guilty of suicide were at best to be buried after sundown outside the regular cemetery, typically being interred at the shooting range or in the cemetery for plague victims (Watt 2001, 81-82). According to Minois in his study of suicide in France, popular belief in the satanic origin of suicide and the pastoral role of the clergy colluded in the enactment of superstitious practices. Corpses were placed in the ground face down, lying in a north-south direction rather than in the south-westerly direction most favourable for resurrection. A further custom – *novaire* or *navoyer* – entailed the removal of the roof of the house in which the suicide had taken place and the practice of dismantling the walls on either side of the hearth was prevalent in certain French provinces, including Maine and Anjou (Minois 1999, 36). In some cases in Geneva, denial of funerary honours was deemed insufficient punishment and the corpse was dragged on a hurdle through the streets of the city or the body was strung up for all to gaze at. Occasionally the corpse was placed in a barrel and tossed into the river (Watt 2001, 82-83). In England burial took place by a highway with a stake driven through the body, although this was a practice unknown in Scotland and unusual in the North of England (Houston 2010, 6). The authorities in Zurich treated the body in accordance with the manner of death: those who had stabbed themselves had a wooden wedge driven into their skulls; those who had drowned themselves were buried in sand five feet from the water's edge while those who died in a fall were buried under a heap of stones, with large stones at their head, stomach and feet (Minois 1999, 35).

Attention to the treatment of suicides in the early modern period is revealing about mores and mindsets. In the disposal of those who took their lives, it was ritual – or the denial of ritual – rather than theology which mattered

to the populace. Even in reformed countries there was a reluctance to let go of rituals of death. In England, according to the Book of Common Prayer the burial would be preceded by a church service, a sermon, hymns or psalms, a procession to the graveyard or cemetery, prayers over the grave and burial in sacred ground. These were forfeited in the case of suicide, and replaced by other rituals, part pagan and part Christian, unless social privilege or insanity prevailed to mitigate sanctions.

2. *Representing Suicide*

In his study of suicide and despair in Jacobean drama Rowland Wymer has convincingly argued that suicide is a dramatic convention which becomes fully tragic only when there is a balancing of opposed implications, for example, when dignity grapples with despair (1986, 156).⁴ Further, suicide produces definitive theatrical images for female virtue, passionate love or the honour of an 'antique Roman'. Prominent among such images are the suicide of Lucrece in *The Rape of Lucrece* and in Thomas Heywood's play of the same name, Mark Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Horatio's wish at the end of *Hamlet* to drink from the poisoned cup and follow his friend. To this commentary on the rhetorical construction of suicide, Wymer adds a telling caveat: 'In considering how an audience might respond more favourably to suicide than official morality and laws of the age would suggest, it is not enough just to draw attention to the competing philosophies of the Renaissance. There is also the more basic fact of ordinary human sympathy' (157).

The suicide in English Renaissance drama which most resonates with Wymer's statement is that of Ofelia in *Hamlet*, an act which evokes pathos rather than high drama. Unlike the tragic deaths presented on the Renaissance stage with their resounding or confident assertions of self – Antony, Cleopatra, Brutus, Bussy D'Ambois – we are offered no insights into Ofelia's motivation. The representation of her death is closer to the early modern records of distressed men and women who took their own lives than it is to the aesthetics of tragedy.

I approach the scenes alluding to Ofelia's death somewhat tangentially. As is well known, two editions of *Hamlet* were published before the Shakespeare Folio of 1623. The first printed edition (1603) is considerably shorter and much less literate than the 1605 text and that published in the Folio edition of 1623. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage with the many critical and bibliographical studies of the text. Suffice to say, that the first printed text is generally regarded as a performance text and its idiom is more popular than the more poetic texts which followed in 1605 and 1623. Until recently, the 1603 Quarto (Q1), has been ignored by editors as corrupt and spurious. Nonetheless, it has a clear stage dynamic affirmed by the testimonies of directors and actors in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁵ Its stage

directions – ‘Enter the Ghost in his night gown’; ‘Enter Ofelia playing on a lute, and her hair down singing’; and ‘Hamlet leaps in [Ofelia’s grave] after Laertes’ – which are present only in Q1, are especially illuminating about early performance.

In comparison with the more discursive and sustained psychological, philosophical and moral meditations of the later texts, Q1 can seem sparse and homely in its diction. Hamlet is ‘the joy and half heart’ of his mother; he appears to Ofelia with ‘his garters lagging down’; the Ghost walks ‘within his truncheon’s length’ of Marcellus and Barnardo. The opening line of the famous soliloquy ‘To be, or not to be – I there’s the point,’ has been quoted as proof that Q1 is a corrupted text.⁶ But the line is perfectly metrical and ‘the point’ has a sharpness and immediacy for a man contemplating suicide, anticipating the ‘quietus’ of the ‘bare bodkin’. As Robert Weimann has commented, in the brevity and directness of the Q1 soliloquy there is far more emphasis than in the received texts on the hardness of ordinary living (2000, 20).

It is probable that the text of *Hamlet* which is recorded in the second, more literary, quarto (Q2) is closer to Shakespeare’s composition, but that does not invalidate Q1 as a staged version of the play which edges closer to popular performance. The different texts of the play are independently and simultaneously valid. Indeed, critical interpretations of *Hamlet* which are historically inflected need to take into consideration the possibility that the illiterate playgoer may have known *Hamlet* only as it is in the Q1 text. For the literate, Q1 and Q2 were both available on the bookstalls. Reading the two texts side by side with their differently nuanced presentations of Ofelia’s suicide enriches perceptions of what suicide meant to ordinary people and within a community. The sequence of scenes which present Ofelia’s death and burial – the Queen’s report of her drowning, the clowns digging her grave, the funeral procession and burial – follows the same pattern in Q1 and Q2, but the scenes differ in expression. James Holleran has compared Gertrude’s account of the drowning as ‘exactly the sort of eye-witness testimony that would have been given to a coroner and his jury’ (1989, 76). But the Queen’s reporting of Ofelia’s drowning reads like a set piece in both plays and its lyrical meditation is at some distance from the idiom of a factual account. The Q1 version, however, gets much more to the heart of the matter. Instead of Gertrude’s delicate and ceremonious description familiar from the later texts, the first quarto simply and eloquently conveys the pathos of Ofelia’s death:

... the young Ofelia,
 Having made a garland of sundry sortes of floures,
 Sitting upon a willow by a brooke,
 The envious sprig broke. Into the brooke she fell,
 And for a while her clothes spread wide abroade,
 Bore the yong lady up: and there she sate smiling,

Even mermaide-like, 'twixt heaven and earth,
 Chanting olde sundry tunes uncapable,
 As it were, of her distress. But long it could not be,
 Till that her clothes, being heavy with their drinke,
 Dragg'd the sweete wretch to death. (H3v)

The lines are graphic and incisive, although scant in detail, even vague at times when compared to the two later texts, which are more explicit and elaborate: Gertrude in Q1 reports that Ofelia makes a garland of 'sundry sorts of flowers' whereas Q2 and the Folio name them individually and even discourse briefly on alternative names, evoking a contrast between maidenly and vulgar (male) usage:

Therewith fantastique garlands did she make
 Of Crowflowers, nettles, daises, and long Purples
 That liberall shepheards give a grosser name,
 But our cull-cold maydes doe dead mens fingers call them.
 There on the pendant boughes her cronet weedes
 Clambring to hang, an envious sliver broke
 When downe her weedy trophies and her selfe
 Fell in the weeping Brooke. (M1r-M1v)

There are no prettifying touches in Q1 to compare with the 'weedy trophies' and the 'weeping brooks' of the other texts.⁷ Q1, on the other hand, comes much closer to a spontaneous report.

At the same time, in both texts Gertrude is at pains to minimize any implications of suicide. Agency is transferred from Ofelia onto her clothes and the brook-side trees, implying accidental death. The envious sprig 'broke' and Ofelia falls. She is sitting not by a river with a torrent, as she would if contemplating drowning herself, but by an innocuous 'brook'. As she falls she is 'uncapable' of recognizing the danger and saving herself. In Gertrude's rendering of the scene, her death is an accident and the would-be suicide – to use the terminology of the time – 'alienated' from herself: an alienation we have already seen in the earlier court scene as she sings wildly and presents flowers to the courtiers. She is, in Laertes's words, a 'document in madness'.

Immediately following the Queen's poignant description of Ofelia's drowning, there is a bold scene change and with the entry of the clowns we encounter a different kind of dramaturgy. The 'gravediggers', designated clowns, are the only popular voices of the play. In Q1 they are presented *in medias res* debating whether Ofelia should be allowed a Christian burial or not. The first clown is definite that she should not:

Clown I say no, she ought not to be buried in christian burial.
 2 Why sir?

Clown Mary because shee's drown'd.
 2 But she did not drowne her selfe.
Clown No, that's certaine, the water drown'd her.
 2 Yes but it was against her will.
Clown No, I deny that, for looke you sir, I stand here,
 If the water come to me, I drowne not my selfe:
 But if I goe to the water, and am there drown'd,
Ergo I am guiltie of my own death:
 Y'are gone, goe y'are gone sir.
 2 I but see, she hath christian burial,
 Because she is a great woman.
Clown Mary more's the pittie, that great folke
 Should have more authoritie to hang or to drowne
 Themselves, more than other people. (H3r-H3v)

The clown's mock syllogism ('if I go to the water... *ergo* I am guiltie of my own death') also suggests some kind of stage business, an imitation of Ofelia's putative steps, concluding with the bathos 'y'are gone'. Beneath the clowning, there is a clear enough message: there is one law for the powerful and another for the commoners. Great folk have more authority to hang or drown themselves than 'other people'. In Q2 'greate folke' have liberty to drown themselves 'more than they even Christian': a reference clearly more religious in its overtones. Q2 has a more legalistic edge as the clown announces that the coroner has decreed that Ofelia should have a Christian burial:

Clowne Is she to be buried in Christian buriale, when she wilfully seekes her own salvation?
Other I tell thee she is, therefore make her grave straight, the crowner hath sate on her, and finds it Christian buriall. (M1v)

The clown mocks the coroner's logic: 'If the water come to him, and drowne him, he drowns not himselfe, argall, he that is not guilty of his owne death, shortens not his owne life'; and, in response to the other clown's quizzical response, 'Is this law?', he replies ironically 'I marry i'st, Crowners [in]quest law'. His companion takes his meaning, 'Will you ha the truth, an't, if this had not benee a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out a Christian buriall'.

In a seminal early work that sought to contextualize *Hamlet*, R.M. Frye argued that in deciding that Ophelia is to have a Christian burial, the coroner must have judged her *non compos mentis* and that the priest is indeed 'churlish', as Laertes claims, in disallowing full burial rites (1984, 248). Frye claims that no Elizabethan audience seeing the play would have found Ophelia guilty of intentional suicide and that it would have seemed only natural that the coroner's jury sitting on the case would allow Christian burial rites. But, according to R.A. Houston, coroner's juries seldom found suicides insane,

often preferring a mixed verdict which found the deceased reprehensible and insane (2010, 176). The coroner's verdict is as much a social pointer as to how the death should be viewed and dealt with, as a judgment about personal responsibility. Verdicts took into account the circumstance of the event, the character of the person, the likely outcome and the need for ideas of justice to be served (Houston 2010, 176). In Ophelia's case there is more than her alleged madness affecting the coroner's verdict, as the two texts testify.

As Hamlet and Horatio join the clowns in the graveyard, the mood created by their banter changes. Hamlet's musings on power, temporality and mortality are cut short by the funeral procession thus described in Q1: 'Enter King and Queen, Laertes and other lords, with a Priest after the coffin'. Laertes demands more ceremony, eliciting the priest's response that she has had as much ritual as the church will allow:

My Lord, we have done all that lies in us,
And more than well the church can tolerate.
She hath had a Dirge sung for her maiden soule:
And but for favour of the King, and you,
She had bene buried in the open fieldes,
Where now she is allowed Christian buriall. (I 1v)

Ofelia, in contrast at normal practice, has had a dirge sung for her. The 'dirge' here is a reference to the choral service which was adapted from the ancient office of the dead (*Officium defuncti*). Printed as one continuous service, its component parts consisted of evensong, matins and lauds (Wyatt 1918, 6). In asserting Ofelia's privilege, the priest evokes the fate of more vulnerable classes of suicide who would be 'buried in the open fields' away from hallowed ground.

The exchange in Q2 between Laertes and the 'Doctor' who takes the role of Q1's priest is differently nuanced and invites different staging. Ofelia is not coffined; the marginal stage direction reads simply 'Enter K. Q. Laertes and the corse'; and Hamlet knows immediately from the observances taking place that this must be the funeral of someone of fairly high social status who has committed suicide:

Who is this they follow?
And with such maimed rites? this doth betoken,
The corse they follow, did with desprat hand
Foredoe it owne life, twas of some estate . . . (M4r)

In response to Laertes's demand for more ceremonial, the Doctor bridles at further secular intervention, implying that in her 'doubtful' death, there may have been a mixed coroner's verdict. Again, the privileges granted Ofelia are set against the rituals that discriminated against suicides and their punitive burials:

Her obsequies have been as farre inlarg'd
 As we have warrantie, her death was doubtfull,
 And but that great commaund ore swayes the order,
 She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
 Till the last trumpet: for charitable prayers,
 Flints and pebbles should be throwne on her:
 Yet heere she is allow'd her virgin Crants, [garlands]
 Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
 Of bell and burial. (M4r)

'She should in ground unsanctified have lodged' replaces 'buried in the open fields': a more distant, less poignant evocation of popular rites of desecration. To Laertes's repeated urge for more sacred obsequies, the Doctor now invokes Christian burial:

No more be doone,
 We should prophane the service of the dead,
 To sing a Requiem and such rest to her
 As to peace-parted soules. (M4r)

The contrast with Q1 is curious. Ofelia in the earlier text is allowed a dirge; here she is to have no mass (requiem) sung for the repose of her soul.⁸ The Doctor's resistance is forced home when he invokes other hostile rites – throwing flints and pebbles – bestowed on those who, like Ophelia, had, in the terms of the time, put themselves down (Houston 2010, 23). Interestingly, the practice of throwing stones on the corpse – 'shards' are included in the Folio text – is not usually mentioned by historians.

Several critics have examined the treatment of Ofelia's suicide, yet without noting the arresting verbal and visual discrepancies between the *Hamlet* texts. Considerable emphasis has been placed on the 'maimed rites' of Ofelia's burial and Laertes's angry response to his sister's abbreviated funeral. For J.V. Holleran, 'maimed rites' are a motif of the play: no one is given a proper burial until the funeral motif comes full circle at the end of the play and Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be given a soldier's burial. Frye and Holleran assert that the Globe audience would for the most part have endorsed Laertes's view both emotionally and ethically (Frye 1984, 298-299; Holleran 1989, 70). Such a speculation has been contested by MacDonald, who has stressed both the popular abhorrence of suicide, regarded by many as diabolic possession, and the severity of the official responses to suicide before 1660 (1986, 311).

Close reading of the respective scenes in the two versions of *Hamlet*, in the contexts of attitudes to and the meanings of suicide in the early modern period, lead to rather different emphases than those of the above interpretations. At no time does the text reveal an abhorrence of suicide. Ophelia is a victim – a pitiful example of 'alienation from self' induced, it is intimated, by court politics. We

are left to guess at her motivation. At the same time, the levelling voices of the clowns, whose livelihood depends on burying the dead, represent shrewd commentaries on the social inequalities found even in death. As the clowns affirm, in preparing Ofelia's grave they are enacting their own subordination. To say that a Globe audience would have endorsed Laertes's view of the 'churlish' priest is to impose a totalizing view on an audience which would have been made up of men and women of different social status and mentalities. Besides, in imagining the reception of the play, we need to take into account not one but a number of different venues with differently constituted audiences. Q1 title page informs us that *Hamlet* was performed in London, at the universities and 'else-where'. To assume that this range of spectators uniformly sided with Laertes is greatly to over-simplify the diversity of possible responses to Ophelia's suicide, intimated within the texts themselves. Indeed, *Hamlet* offers a glimpse of communal perceptions of suicide at the turn of the sixteenth-century undisclosed in the archives.

¹ I retain the Q1 spelling 'Ofelia' when referring to this edition. All quotations are from the Scholar Press facsimiles of the first and second quartos of *Hamlet*.

² The term was coined by Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici*; see Langley 2009, 203. A common Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century phrase was 'putting down' oneself (Houston 2010, 23).

³ MacDonald and Murphy provide statistics: 67% of peers and gentlemen whose deaths were reported to the government during the Tudor and Stuart periods were convicted. 93% of their social inferiors met the same fate (1990, 127).

⁴ For a discussion of suicide connected with the 'dishonour' experienced by victims of rape, see Pallotti in this volume, 211-239.

⁵ See, for example, Loughrey 1992 and Thompson and Taylor, eds, 2006.

⁶ Bednarz 2001, 244. Bednarz takes the line 'along with all major modern editors of the play' that a text similar to the one behind F1 was memorially reproduced in Q1 (244-245).

⁷ As the Folio text follows closely Q2, it is not included in this discussion.

⁸ Both Q1 and Q2 convey a sense of more elaborate burial rites than those prescribed by the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559). The first edition of the latter (1549) follows the medieval *Officium defuncti* [The office of the dead], but the Elizabethan edition of 1559 gave a much more pared down version of burial rites. The processional element was removed; the office of the dead was eliminated; and there were no prayers at the graveside. See Cummings, ed., 2011, 716, 742.

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APPENDIX

The Cultures of the People

The culture of the people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. There are enormous difficulties in such an enterprise ... But to regard such forms as 'saying something of something,' and saying it to somebody, is at least to open up the possibility of an analysis which attends to their substance rather than to reductive formulas professing to account for them.

As in more familiar exercises in close reading, one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay ... within a single, more or less bounded form, and circle steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretation. One has only to learn how to get access to them.

Clifford Geertz, from *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973

1. General Statements

Giacomo Leopardi, from *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi (An Essay upon the Popular Errors of People in Past Times)*, 1815

It is mainly the common people, that is, the largest part of the human species, who are prone to absorbing errors and not easily disenchanted. Their small understanding is unable to comprehend the falsity of certain intimations and evaluate the evidence showing their falsity. Obstinate in their old customs, the common people are also persistent in their old opinions. Slaves by birth, they also choose to be slaves. The other classes of society, too, are deceived by the same errors, but these errors are called popular because they are especially rife among the common people. The history of popular errors, therefore, is the same thing as the history of prejudice.

Carlo Ginzburg, from *Il formaggio e i vermi (The Cheese and the Worms)*, 1976

The existence of different cultural levels within the so-called civilized societies is the premise of the discipline which has been variously defined as folklore,

history of popular traditions, anthropology, or European ethnology. However, the use of the term 'culture' to define the complex of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural codes, and so on, of the subordinate classes in a given historical period is comparatively recent and was borrowed from cultural anthropology. Only resorting to the notion of 'primitive culture' have we come to acknowledge that those people who were once paternalistically defined 'the common people of civilized societies' possessed a culture of their own. Thus, the bad conscience of colonialism has joined the bad conscience of class oppression. In this way, at least verbally, we have gone beyond not only the outdated notion of folklore as a mere collection of curious facts, but also the attitude of those who saw in the ideas, beliefs and world visions of the subaltern classes only a discordant mass made up by fragments of ideas, beliefs and world visions which had perhaps been elaborated centuries before by the dominant classes.

Umberto Eco, from *Apocalittici e integrati (Apocalypse Postponed)*, 1964

Then Gutenberg invented movable type and the book was born. A serial object, which must adjust its language to the receptivity of a literate audience which by now had grown (and was growing more and more thanks to the book) and which was vaster than the readership of manuscripts. In addition, the book, by creating an audience, produced readers which were in turn going to condition the book itself.

The first popular printed books of the sixteenth century repeat, on a secular level and using more sophisticated typographical methods, the formula of the *biblia pauperum*. They were produced by small printing houses for itinerant booksellers and mountebanks to be sold to the common people at fairs and in the public squares. These chivalrous epics, laments about political events or about real-life stories, jokes, jests or fibs, were poorly printed and often lacked mention of the place and date of publication because they had the first characteristic of mass-culture: ephemerality. Furthermore, of the mass-produced object they shared the foremost connotation: they offer sentiments and passions, love and death, made-to-measure according to the effect which they mean to elicit in the reader. The titles of these stories already contain an advertising blurb and an explicit judgement on the story they announce, almost the advice on how to enjoy the story: *Danese Ungieri, A pleasing and charming story of love and arms newly reprinted and augmented with the death of the giant Mariotto, which is not to be found in the other versions*; or, *'A new tale of the cruel and pitiful case occurred in Alicante, of a mother who killed her own little son and fed a dog with his interiors and her husband with his limbs'* ... Obviously, it is not possible to speak of mass culture in the sense we understand the term today: different were the historical circumstances, the relationship between the producers of those texts and the people, different was the divide between learned culture and popular culture, which was culture in the ethnological sense of the word.

T.S. Eliot, from *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, 1948

I have observed with growing anxiety the career of this word *culture* during the past six or seven years. We may find it natural, and significant, that during a period of unparalleled destructiveness, this word should come to have an important role in the journalistic vocabulary. Its part is of course doubled by the word *civilisation*. I have made no attempt in this essay to determine the frontier between the meanings of these two words: for I came to the conclusion that any such attempt could only produce an artificial distinction, peculiar to the book, which the reader would have difficulty in retaining; and which, after closing the book, would abandon with a sense of relief. We do use one word, frequently enough, in a context where the other would do as well; there are other contexts where one word obviously fits and the other does not; and I do not think that this need cause embarrassment.

...

The term *culture* ... includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people; Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. The reader can make his own list. And then we have to face the strange idea that what is part of our culture is also a part of a *lived* religion.

...

In the next three chapters I discuss what seem to me to be three important conditions for culture. The first of these is organic (not merely planned, but growing) structure, such as will foster the hereditary transmission of culture within a culture: and this requires the persistence of social classes. The second is the necessity that a culture should be analysable, geographically, into local cultures: this raises the problem of 'regionalism'. The third is the balance of unity and diversity in religion – that is, universality of doctrine with particularity of cult and devotion.

...

Neither a classless society, nor a society of strict and impenetrable social barriers is good; each class should have constant additions and defections; the classes, while remaining distinct, should be able to mix freely; and they should have a community of culture with each other which will give them something in common, more fundamental than the community which each class has with its counterpart in another society.

...

The unity with which I am concerned must be largely unconscious, and therefore can perhaps be best approached through a consideration of the useful diversities.

...

A national culture, if it is to flourish, should be a constellation of cultures, the constituents of which, benefiting each other, benefit the whole.

Michel de Certeau, from *Arts de faire (The Practice of Everyday Life)*, 1980

Many, often remarkable, works have endeavoured to study the representations of a society, on the one hand, and its modes of behavior, on the other. Building on our knowledge of these social phenomena, it seems both possible and necessary to determine the *use* to which they are put by groups or by individuals. For instance, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behaviour) should be accompanied by a study of what the cultural consumer 'makes' or 'does' during this time and with these images. The same goes for the use of urban space, the products bought in the supermarket, the stories and legends broadcast by the newspapers, and so on.

The 'making' in question is a production, a *poiēsis* – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of 'production' (television, urban development, commerce, etc.). and because the ever increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves 'consumers' any *place* in which they can express what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called 'consumption'. The latter is devious and dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through the *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic system.

For example, the ambiguity that subverted from within the Spanish colonizers' 'success' in imposing their own culture on the indigenous Indians is well known. Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals, representations and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors meant; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept.

Peter Burke, from *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 1978

The popular culture of early modern Europe is elusive. It eludes the historian because he is a literate, self-conscious modern man who may find it difficult to comprehend people unlike himself, and also because the evidence for their attitudes and values, hopes and fears is so fragmentary. Much of the popular culture of this period was oral culture, and 'words fly away'. Much of it took the form of festivals, which were equally impermanent. We want to know about performances, but what have survived are texts; we want to see these performances through the eyes of the craftsmen and peasants themselves, but we are forced to see them through the eyes of literate outsiders. It is hardly

surprising that some historians think it impossible to discover what popular culture was like in this period.

...

Historians are used to dealing with texts, with 'the documents', whether manuscript or printed. However, it is one thing to study a society such as Britain in the early twentieth century, in which most people were literate, through texts; quite another to study the craftsmen and peasants of early modern Europe, most of whom could not read or write. Their attitudes and values were expressed in activities and performances, but these activities and performances were only documented when the literate upper classes took an interest in them.

2. *Superstition, Magic, Witchcraft*

Reginald Scot, from *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, 1584

One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as know no religion: in whose drowsie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischiefe, mischance, calamitie, or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easilie persuaded the same is done by themselves; imprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination hereof. They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad divelish; and not much differing from them that are thought to be possessed with spirits; so firm and steadfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easily believe they were true indeed.

These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbours, and so feared, as few dare offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske: whereby they take upon them; yea, and sometimes thinke, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of humane nature. These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yeast, drinke, pottage, or some such reliefe; without the which they could hardlie live: neither obtaining for their service and paines, nor by their art, nor yet at the divels hands (with whome they are said to make a perfect and visible bargaine) either beautie, monie, promotion, welth, worship, pleasure, honor, knowledge, learning, or anie other benefit whatsoever.

Thomas Ady, from *A Candle in the Dark*, 1656

... people are now so infected with this damnable Heresie, of ascribing to the power of the Witches, that seldom hath a man the hand of God against

him in his estate, or health of body, or any way, but presently he cryeth out of some poor innocent Neighbour, that he, or she hath bewitched him; for saith he, such an old man or woman came lately to my door, and desired some relief, and I denied it, and God forgive me, my heart did rise against her at that time, my mind gave me she looked like a Witch, and presently my Child, my Wife, my Self, my Horse, my Cow, my Sheep, my Sow, my Hogge, my Dogge, my Cat, or somewhat was thus and thus handled, in such a strange manner, as I dare swear she is a Witch, or else how should those things be, or come to pass?

Scipione Mercuri, from *Degli errori popolari d'Italia (Of the Popular Errors of Italy)*, 1603

But we see nowadays why this maleficent art of witchcraft is more commonly practised by women than men; indeed, for every wizard or Necromancer, you find ten thousand women. This is a very curious question, because it cannot be answered without prejudice to the female sex. Therefore, we must turn to the wisest authors, lest women complain about me, but about those writers who debated this issue before me ... and I say that there are many more reasons for there being more women witches, more malevolent than men, and the first is the devil's astuteness, the second is the nature of women, who are most easily influenced in everything; the third is their gullibility, the fourth is vainglory; the fifth their love & hate; the sixth their unbridled sins.

...

I also add that if the world could do without women, our conversation would certainly be rid of the devil, because, apart from the other reasons mentioned above, you should add this one, that we would be without witches, and witches are women, and they are the devil's own instrument. And lastly, can we marvel that women so easily become witches when they could most easily lose the whole world?

Thomas Heywood, from *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, 1638

You have heard of Mother Nottingham, who for her time was prettily well skilled in casting of waters, and after her, Mother Bomby; and then there is one Hatfield in Pepper Alley, he doth pretty well for a thing that's lost: There's another in Coleharbour that's skilled in the planets. Mother Sturton in Golden Lane is for fore-speaking; Mother Phillips, of the Bankside, for the weakness of the back; and then there's a very reverend matron on Clerkenwell Green good at many things. Mistress Mary on the Bankside is for erecting a figure; and one (what do you call her?) in Westminster, that practises the book and the key, and the sieve and the shears: and all do well according to their talent.

William Bullein, from *A Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence*, 1573

Roger.

... what a worlde is this? 'i How is it chaunged, it is marueilous, it is monstrous. I heare saie there is a yong woman, borne in the toune of Harborough, one Booker, a Butchers doughter, whiche of late, God wote, is brought to bed of a cat, or haue deliured a catte, or, if you will, she is the mother of a catte. Oh God, how is nature repugnant to her self: That a woman should bryng forthe a verie catte or a very Dogge, &c. wantyng nothyng, neither hauyng more then other Dogges or Cattes haue: Takyng nothyng of the mother, but onely as I gesse, her Cattishe condition.

Ciuis.

It is a lie, *Roger*, beleue it not, it was but a Catte, it had Baken founde in the bealie, and a strawe. It was an old Catte, and she a yong Quene: it was a pleasaunt practise of papistrie, to bring the people to new wonders: If it had been a monster, then it should haue had somewhat more, or els lesse. But an other Catte was flaid in the same sorte, and in all pointes like, or, as it were, the self same: thus can drabbes do somtime, when thei haue murthered their owne bastardes, with the helpe of an olde Witche, bryng a Catte in place. A toye to mocke an Ape withall. *Roger*, it should haue been a kitlyng first, and so growne to a Catte: but this was a Catte at the first.

Roger.

Yet there are many one do beleue, it was a monster, ...

John Winthrop, from *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, 1825 edition (the passage quoted was written c. 1638)

The wife of one William Dyer, a milliner in the New Exchange, a very proper and fair woman, and both of them notoriously infected with Mrs. Hutchinson's errors, and very censorious and troublesome, (she being of a very proud spirit, and much addicted to revelations,) had been delivered of [a] child some few months before, October 17, and the child buried, (being stillborn,) and viewed of none but Mrs. Hutchinson and the midwife, one Hawkins's wife, a rank familist also; and another woman had a glimpse of it, who, not being able to keep counsel, as the other two did, some rumour began to spread, that the child was a monster.

...

It was a woman child, stillborn, about two months before the just time, having life a few hours before; it came hiplings till she turned it; it was of ordinary bigness; it had a face, but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an ape's; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp; two of them were above one inch long, the other two shorter; the eyes standing out, and the mouth also; the nose hooked upward; all over the breast and back full of sharp pricks and scales, like a thornback; the navel and all the belly, with the distinction of the sex, were where the back should be, and the back and hips

before, where the belly should have been; behind, between the shoulders, it had two mouths, and in each of them a piece of red flesh sticking out; it had arms and legs as other children; but, instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons.

...

The governor, with advice of some other of the magistrates and of the elders of Boston, caused the said monster to be taken up, and though it were much corrupted, yet most of those things were to be seen, as the horns and claws, the scales, etc. When it died in the mother's body, (which was about two hours before the birth,) the bed whereon the mother lay did shake, and withal there was such a noisome savor, as most of the women were taken with extreme vomiting and purging, so as they were forced to depart; and others of them their children were taken with convulsions, (which they never had before nor after) and so were sent for home, so as by these occasions it came to be concealed.

Agostino Lampugnano, from *La pestilenza seguita in Milano l'anno 1630 (The Plague which Occurred in Milan in the Year 1630)*, 1634¹

The enemy of our Lord, who is zealous about slaughtering the people, administers help to diabolic men, and teaches them to make compounds with contagious powders and pestilential unguents. And, since their wickedness was not content with the nature of the illness, which by itself was able to spread about and drain whole provinces, in order to increase it – as indeed happened – they rubbed unguent on the most publicly attended places and cast powders where people gathered most frequently.

Some think, however, that that day these modern Busirids only used powders; and they argue that during the preceding month, on 17th May, between Friday and Saturday in the morning it was found that almost all the city had been greased by unguents: the walls, the doors of private houses, the bolts, and such places and things; so that you could see that everyone was intent on sheltering from this unguent, which was yellowish, thick and greenish, by making fires with straw and other dead wood ...

That nightly unction was really monstrous, because it is indeed incredible that so many people in only one short night could dispense so much ointment without being seen or discovered. But some think that the devil had a hand in it, or that he alone performed the deed.

Alessandro Manzoni, from *Storia della colonna infame (History of the Infamous Pillar)*, 1840

On the morning of 21 June 1630, about half past four, an old woman called Caterina Rosa, who was unfortunately looking out of the window of an

overpass which was then at the top of Via della Vetra de' Cittadini on the side which ends in Corso di Porta Ticinese (almost in front of the columns of S. Lorenzo), saw a man approaching in a black cloak, hat lowered on his eyes and a piece of paper in his hand. *On the paper*, she says in her testimony, *he put his hands as if he was writing*. She was struck by the fact that, when entering the street, *he approached the wall of the house which stands immediately after turning the street corner and that he passed his hands across the wall*. Then, she adds, *I came to think whether he could be one of those who, in the past few days have been said to go about dabbing ointment on the walls*. Taken by this suspicion, she passed to another room from which she could see the whole street in order to keep an eye on the unknown man who was proceeding along the street; *and I saw*, she says, *that he kept touching the said wall with his hands*.

At the window of another house in the same street there was another spectator, a woman called Ottavia Bono; we do not know whether she conceived the same suspicion on first seeing the scene and by herself or only when the other started to spread the news. She, too, was examined and testified that she had seen the man from the moment when he entered the street, but she did not make mention of walls touched by his hands. *I saw*, she said, *that he stopped by the end of the wall of the Crivelli's house . . . and saw that he had a piece of paper in his hand, on which he put his right hand, so that I thought he was meaning to write; then I saw that, raising his hand from the paper, he scrubbed it on a white spot in the wall*. He probably did this to wipe some ink off his fingers, since it seems that he was really writing. Indeed, from his examination, which took place the day after, being questioned *whether his actions of the day before were connected with writing* he answered *yes, sir*.

3. *Medicine and the Body*

William Shakespeare, from *All's Well That Ends Well*, 2.1.152-185

Helena. Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;
 Of heaven, not me, make an experiment.
 I am not an impostor that proclaim
 Myself against the level of mine aim;
 But know I think and think I know most sure
 My art is not past power nor you past cure.

King. Are thou so confident? within what space
 Hopest thou my cure?

Helena. The great'st grace lending grace
 Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring
 Their fiery torcher his diurnal ring,
 Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
 Moist Hesperus hath quenched his sleepy lamp,
 Or four and twenty times the pilot's glass

Hath told the thievish minutes how they pass,
 What is infirm from your sound parts shall fly,
 Health shall live free and sickness freely die.

King. Upon thy certainty and confidence
 What darest thou venture?

Helena. Tax of impudence,
 A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame
 Traduced by odious ballads: my maiden's name
 Sear'd otherwise; nay, worse—if worse—extended
 With vilest torture let my life be ended.

King. Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak
 His powerful sound within an organ weak:
 And what impossibility would slay
 In common sense, sense saves another way.
 Thy life is dear; for all that life can rate
 Worth name of life in thee hath estimate,
 Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, all
 That happiness and prime can happy call:
 Thou this to hazard needs must intimate
 Skill infinite or monstrous desperate.
 Sweet practiser, thy physic I will try,
 That ministers thine own death if I die.

A Chart of the Rheims Metropolitan Charter, 1380

In the holy church of the illustrious city of Rheims, Clovis, then King of France, heard the preaching of the very glorious confessor, the blessed Remi, bishop of that famous town. There, when this baptized the said king together with his people, the Holy Ghost, or an angel, appeared in the shape of a dove, coming down from the sky and bearing a phial full of the licour of the saint chrim; it is of this chrim that the king himself, and after him all the kings of France our predecessors, and myself in turn, the day of consecration and crowning, God being propitious, we received the anointment, by which, under the influence of divine clemency, such virtue and such grace are bestowed to the kings of France that, through the simple touch of their hands, they cure the pescrofulous people; and this shows the evidence of fact, which is proved by innumerable persons.

Martin Luther, from *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*), 1566

We perceive something miraculous when we see that certain remedies – if I speak about this, it is because I am well informed about this matter – show their efficacy when they are ministered by the hand of great princes or lieges, while they are inef-

fective when ministered by medical doctors. I have heard that the two electors of Saxony, Duke Frederic and duke Jean, possess a water for the eyes which is beneficial when ministered by their hands, both whether the cause of the sickness comes from cold or heat. A doctor would never dare apply it. The same can be said of theology, where it is from the spiritual point of view that people are to be advised: one preacher has more grace when he comforts or instructs the conscience than another.

Alvarez Pelayo, from *Speculum regum*, c. 1340

It is reported that the kings of France and England possess a virtue; the pious kings of Spain, from whom you descend, possess a similar virtue, which has effect on the possessed and on certain sick people affected by diverse illnesses. When I was a young boy, I saw with my own eyes your ancestor, king Sanches, in whose household I was bred, put his foot on the throat of one possessed by the devil, who all the time covered him with insults, and read the words taken from a little book and drive the devil out of this woman and leave her only when she was healed.

Sir John Fortescue, from *Defensio iuris domus Lancastriae*, c. 1461-1463

... gold and silver, devoutly touched – according to the yearly costume – by sacred hands, by the anointed hands of the kings of England, on holy Friday, and offered by them, heal spasms and epilepsy; the power of the rings made up with such gold and silver and put on the finger of sick people has been experimented by frequent usage in many parts of the world. This grace is not conceded to queens, because their hands are not anointed.

W.W., from *A True and Just Recorde of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex*, 1582

... take hogg's dunge, and [chervil], and ... hold them in her left hand, and to take in the other hand a knife, and to pricke the medicine three times, & then to cast the same into the fire, and to take the said knife & to make three pricks under a table, and to let the knife stick there: and after that to take three leaves of sage, and as much herb John (alias herbe grace) and put them into ale, and drinke it last at night and first in the morning ...

A remedy to stop blood, from a Shropshire blacksmith's book, early nineteenth century

Our Saviour Jesus Christ was born in Bethalem was basptsed of Jon in the river of Jordan. God commanded the water to stop & it stoped So in his name do I

command the blood to Stop that run from this orrafas vain or vaines as the water Stoped in the river of Jordan wen our Saviour Jesus Crist was baptized in the name of the father. Stop blud in the name of the sun stop blood in the name of the Holeygst not a drop more of blud proceduth Amen Amen Amen – to be sed 3 times but if the case be bad 9 times and the Lords praier before & after holding your rithand on the place and marck the place thus † with your midel finger.

Gabriele Falloppio, from *Secreti diversi e& miracolosi. Raccolti dal Falopia, & approbati da altri medici di gran fama* (*Diverse Miraculous Secrets, Collected by Falopia and Approved by other Well-Known Medical Doctors*), 1578

The virtues of man's blood, and of a healthy and young man, until xxi years of age, and not more. This blood must be distilled in an alembic, and this water is good for all infirmities ... Of this blood another element is made which is called *elixir of life*, that is, vital fire ... And if one were dying, and could not speak, give him a little of this diluted with good wine and he will come back and will say things which he had not been able to say, as regards his will or other things which he had not said, and this remedy will help him. ... Also, if an old man drinks a little of this every day, it makes him become young and fresh and vigorously able to say and do ...

Lodovico Domenichi, from *Della nobiltà delle donne* (*Of the Nobility of Women*), 1549

Menstruation and other [women's] purgations ... are not a subject of ugliness, but of delicacy and gracefulness. Because, being men no less than women composed of four elements, and initially made up of mud, they must intimately share such terrestrial filth; but since men do not have, as women do, a way to excrete it, they end by being also less clean and neat. This is clearly shown by men's skin which, however washed and scrubbed, and even rubbed, ever produces soil; which does not happen in women, owing to their monthly purgations, which not only keep them cleaner and more delicate, but also protect them from many infirmities, which often affect men.

Pliny the Elder, from *Naturalis historia*, between AD 77 and 79

There is nothing more monstrous than menstruation in women. When it arrives, wine must become vinegar, gardens wither, the fodder that has been sown becomes barren. Buds die. Leaves and fruit fall off the trees where they are growing. Mirrors dazzle as happens also with the gleam of ivory. Cutting

blades thicken ... Iron and copper rust. The air smells bad. Dogs who smell it get rabies ... Ants perceive it and throw away what they are carrying and do not pick it up any more.

Tommaso Campanella, from *Del senso delle cose e della magia (Of the Meaning of Things and of Magic)*, 1636

[Old women] who do not have purgations have yet fetid exhalations from their mouths and eyes, so that, when they look into a mirror, they fog it up because that gross vapour clings to the cool mirror ... And threads, when touched by their spit, putrefy; and to sleep with old women robs children of life and increases theirs.

Daniel Defoe, from *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722

He never used any preservative against the infection, other than holding garlic and rue in his mouth, and smoking tobacco. This I also had from his own mouth. And his wife's remedy was washing her head in vinegar and sprinkling her head-clothes so with vinegar as to keep them always moist, and if the smell of any of those she waited on was more than ordinary offensive, she snuffed vinegar up her nose and sprinkled vinegar upon her head-clothes, and held a handkerchief wetted with vinegar to her mouth. But even those wholesome reflections ... had a quite contrary extreme in the common people, who, ignorant and stupid in their reflections as they were brutishly wicked and thoughtless before, were now led by their fright to extremes of folly; and, as I have said before, that they ran to conjurers and witches, and all sorts of deceivers, to know what should become of them (who fed their fears, and kept them always alarmed and awake on purpose to delude them and pick their pockets), so they were as mad upon their running after quacks and mountebanks, and every practising old woman, for medicines and remedies; storing themselves with such multitudes of pills, potions, and preservatives, as they were called, that they not only spent their money but even poisoned themselves beforehand for fear of the poison of the infection; and prepared their bodies for the plague, instead of preserving them against it. On the other hand it is incredible and scarce to be imagined, how the posts of houses and corners of streets were plastered over with doctors' bills and papers of ignorant fellows, quacking and tampering in physic, and inviting the people to come to them for remedies, which was generally set off with such flourishes as these, viz.: 'Infallible preventive pills against the plague.' 'Neverfailing preservatives against the infection.' 'Sovereign cordials against the corruption of the air.' 'Exact regulations for the conduct of the body in case of an infection.' 'Anti-pestilential pills.' 'Incomparable drink against the plague, never found out before.' 'An universal remedy for the plague.' 'The only true plague water.' 'The

royal antidote against all kinds of infection';—and such a number more that I cannot reckon up; and if I could, would fill a book of themselves to set them down.

Others set up bills to summon people to their lodgings for directions and advice in the case of infection. These had specious titles also, such as these:—

'An eminent High Dutch physician, newly come over from Holland, where he resided during all the time of the great plague last year in Amsterdam, and cured multitudes of people that actually had the plague upon them.'

'An Italian gentlewoman just arrived from Naples, having a choice secret to prevent infection, which she found out by her great experience, and did wonderful cures with it in the late plague there, wherein there died 20,000 in one day.'

'An ancient gentlewoman, having practised with great success in the late plague in this city, anno 1636, gives her advice only to the female sex. To be spoken with,' &c.

'An experienced physician, who has long studied the doctrine of antidotes against all sorts of poison and infection, has, after forty years' practice, arrived to such skill as may, with God's blessing, direct persons how to prevent their being touched by any contagious distemper whatsoever. He directs the poor gratis.'

...

But there was still another madness beyond all this, which may serve to give an idea of the distracted humour of the poor people at that time: and this was their following a worse sort of deceivers than any of these; for these petty thieves only deluded them to pick their pockets and get their money, in which their wickedness, whatever it was, lay chiefly on the side of the deceivers, not upon the deceived. But in this part I am going to mention, it lay chiefly in the people deceived, or equally in both; and this was in wearing charms, philtres, exorcisms, amulets, and I know not what preparations, to fortify the body with them against the plague; as if the plague was not the hand of God, but a kind of possession of an evil spirit, and that it was to be kept off with crossings, signs of the zodiac, papers tied up with so many knots, and certain words or figures written on them, as particularly the word Abracadabra, formed in triangle or pyramid ...

Learned phisition, from *Present Remedies Against the Plague*, 1592

To take the infection from a house infected.

Take large Oynions, peepe them, and lay three or foure of them upon the ground, let them lie ten daies, & those pieled Oynions will gather all the infection into them that is in one of those Roomes: but bury these Oynions afterward deepe in the ground.

Another.

Take new milke and set it in a Bason in the middle of the infected Roome, and the milke will draw the Infectious vapour into it, letting it stand two daies in the saide Roome.

4. *Popular Religion and Spirituality*

Arthur Dent, from *The Plaine Man's Path-way to Heaven*, 1601

Tush, tush: what needs all this ado? If a man say his Lords prayer, his tenne Commaundments, and his beleefe, and keepe them, and say no body no harme, nor doo no bodie no harme, and doo as he would be done too, have a good faith to Godward, and be a man of Gods beliefe, no doubt he shall be saved, without all this running to Sermons, and prattling of the scriptures ... As long as I serve God, and say my prayers duly, and truly, morning and evening, and have a good faith in God, and put my whole trust in him, and do my true intent, and have a good mind to Godward, and a good meaning: although I am not learned yet I hope it will serve the turn for my soules health: for that God which made me, must save me. It is not you that can save me for all your learning, and all your Scriptures.

Carlo Ginzburg, from *Il formaggio e i vermi (The Cheese and the Worms)*, 1976

'I said that, as I think and believe, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water and fire all mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass was formed, just as cheese is made out of milk and therein worms appeared, and those were the angels; and the most holy majesty decreed that those were God and the angels; and among that number of angels was also God, created he too from that mass at the same time, and he was made lord, with four captains, Lucifer, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. That Lucifer wanted to make himself lord equal to the king, who was the majesty of God, and for his arrogance God ordered him driven out of heaven with all his host and his company; and this God later made Adam and Eve, and people in great number, to take the chairs of the expelled angels. And as this multitude did not follow God's commandments, he sent his son, who was seized by the Jews and crucified'.

Henry Barrow, from *Writings*, 1587-1590

After [women] have been safely delivered of childbirth, and have lain in, and been shut up, their month of days accomplished; then are they to repair to church

and to kneel down in some place nigh the communion table (not to speak how she cometh wimpled and muffled, accompanied with her wives, and dare not look upon the sun and sky, until the priest have put in her possession again of them) unto whom (thus placed in the church) cometh Sir Priest; straight ways standeth by her, and readeth over her a certain salm, viz. 121, and assureth her that the sun shall not burn her by day, nor the moon by night, sayeth his Pater Noster, with the prescribed versicles and response, with his collect. And then, she having offered her accustomed offerings unto him for his labour, God speed her well, she is a woman on foot again, as holy as ever she was: she may now put off her veiling kerchief, and look her husband and neighbours in the face again.

Battista Piergillii, from *Vita della B. Chiara detta della Croce da Montefalco, dell'ordine di S. Agostino* (*Life of the Blessed Chiara, called of the Cross of Montefalco, of the Augustinian Order*), 1663

[The nuns] went to the oratory and, with great reverence, undressed the holy body, and sister Francesca, although inexperienced, opened it as she could by means of a razor. Then, they began to extract the insides. She noticed that the bile's bag was white and, touching it, she felt that inside the bag there were three things hard as stone, round in shape, which, put together, made a triangular shape ... and, proceeding with extracting the insides, when she pulled out the heart, they all saw that it was of an extraordinary size, bigger than the head of a child. ... They rightly decided to put the heart aside, and this they did, and put the other insides in an earth jug, and they buried them in the same oratory where the holy woman had died, on one side of the altar, where it is said that they are still kept. Then, taking again the heart, sister Francesca said: 'Here is the heart in which God has done so many things'. And, putting it in a wooden bowl, they locked it in a chest; which done, they dressed the body and rearranged it.

...

On the Sunday evening ... sister Lucia, sister Margarita, sister Caterina and sister Francesca went to the room where the heart was locked in a chest; and, after taking it out, all knelt and sister Francesca, who was to open it, with great humility said the following words: 'Lord, I believe that inside this heart is kept your Holy Cross, although I know that my sins make me unworthy of finding it'. Having said this, holding the heart in one hand and the razor in the other, she remained uncertain about where to cut it, for the heart was all covered with fat ...: at last she decided to start cutting from the upper part, where the heart is larger, and cutting it through to the lower part, all the heart was opened with only one cut.

Owing to the abundant flow of blood, the nuns did not see immediately what was inside: they saw clearly that the whole heart was concave and divided into two parts, which were united only by the circumference; and

therefore sister Francesca felt with her finger that in the middle of one of the parts there stretched a nerve; and, by trying, she easily pulled it out, and they with extreme wonder saw the figure of the Cross, made of flesh, which was arranged in one of the heart's cavities, made of the same form as the cross.

...

The nuns were so amazed by the extraordinary novelty of these mysteries that they could only praise the Lord, maker of such miracles.

Anna Trapnel, from *The Cry of a Stone*, 1654

She was carried forth in a spirit of Prayer and Singing, from noon till night ..., lying in bed with her eyes shut, her hands fixed, seldom seen to move, she delivered in that time many and various things; speaking every day, sometimes two, three, four and five-hours together; and that sometimes once a day, and sometimes oftener, sometimes in that day only, and sometimes both in the day and night. She uttered all in Prayer and Spiritual Songs for the most part, in the ears of very many persons of all sorts and degrees, who hearing the Report came where she lay; among others that came, were Colonel *Sidenham*, a member of the Council, Colonel *West*, Mr. *Chittwood*, Colonel *Bennet*, with his wife, Colonel *Bingham*, Captain *Langdon*, Members of the late Parliament; Mr. *Courtney*, Mr. *Berconhead*, and Captain *Bawtrey*, Mr. *Lee*, Mr. *Feak* the Minister, Lady *Darcy*, and Lady *Vermuden*, with many more who might be named: The things she delivered during this time were many; of the four first days no account can be given, there being none that noted down what was spoken.

Anne Wentworth, from *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 1679

I am reproached as a proud, wicked, deceived, deluded, lying Woman; a mad, melancholy, crackbrained, self willed, conceited Fool, and black Sinner, led by whimsies, notions, and knif-knafs of my own head; one who speaks blasphemy, not fit to take the Name of God in her mouth; an Heathen and Publican, a Fortune-teller, an Enthusiast, and the like much more, whereof I appeal to God, to judge ... the Lord will also judge ... whether I am an impudent Hussy, a disobedient Wife ..., one that run away from her Husband, and the like ... I cannot deny the testimony of *Jesus*, but keep the Commandments of God, being obedient to all his Wills. And this is the thing, the only thing, that makes my Husband and a hundreds more, to be wroth with me, and endeavour to take away my good Name, in spreading abroad, that I keep Men company, and have my Rogues come to me, and live a scandalous life in an Alms-house ... So shall I wait in patience.

5. *Popular Festivities and Carnival*

Daniel Defoe, from *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 1724

On the other side of the heath, north, is Charleton, a village famous, or rather infamous for the yearly collected rabble of mad-people, at Horn-Fair; the rudeness of which I cannot but think, is such as ought to be suppressed, and indeed in a civiliz'd well govern'd nation, it may well be said to be unsufferable. The mob indeed at that time take all kinds of liberties, and the women are especially impudent for that day; as if it was a day that justify'd the giving themselves a loose to all manner of indecency and immodesty, without any reproach, or without suffering the censure which such behaviour would deserve at another time. The introduction of this rude assembly, or the occasion of it, I can meet with very little account of, in antiquity; and I rather recommend it to the publick justice to be suppress'd, as a nuisance and offence to all sober people, than to spend any time to enquire into its original.

Anonymous, from *Discorso contra il Carnevale (A Discourse Against Carnival)*, 1607

Some, during Carnival, owing to the great quantity and variety of foods, to the change of temperature in places now cold, now hot, to the long hours of vigil during whole nights spent in dance and comedies, for too much overstraining Venus, are so distempered in the stomach, tired and weakened in the limbs, that they must remain at home during the whole of Lent, not abstaining from forbidden food and cannot attend church, sermons and other holy offices: the fruits of Carnival.

Others you see who, owing to the discords spread in that most turbulent time, in those days which are devoted to penitence, overwhelmed by hate, engaged in brawls and quarrels, neither going to confession nor taking holy communion, fitting their behaviour to the proverb which says that Carnival sows discord and Lent gathers the blood: the fruits of Carnival.

Others yet, engaging in various and vain loves rooted in Carnival, keep neither taste nor memory of their souls because, since during Carnival their object of desire has become both more reckless and nearer, repressing reason, more easily moves their spirits toward lecherousness. Therefore, owing to the ease of seeing each other together in balls, of touching each other, of talking to one another, they find the opportunity of drawing up a thousand agreements; and, when Carnival comes to an end, the insanity of love does not end; in fact, from this that damned saying was born: that Carnival is for these their pander, and Lent (the time of Lent for these villains) is their whore.

Philip Stubbes, from *The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583

... all the young men and maides, olde men and wives run gadding over night to the woods, groves, hils & mountains, where they spend all the night in pleas-

ant pastimes, & in the morning they return bringing ... birch & branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withal ... But the chiefest jewel they bring from thence is their May-pole, which they bring home with great veneration ... This May-pole (this stinking Idol rather) which is covered all over with floures, and hearbs bound round about with strings from the top to the bottome, and sometime painted with variable colours, with two or three hundred men, women and children following it with great devotion. And thus beeing reared up, they straw the round rounde about, binde greene boughs about it, set up sommer haules, bowers and arbors hard by it. And then fall they to daunce about it like as the heathen people did at the dedication of the Idols.

Humphrey King, from *An Halfe-penny Worth of Wit, in a Penny-Worth of Paper*, 1613

Let us talk of *Robin Hoode*,
 And little *John* in merry Sherwood,
 Of poet *Skelton* with his pen,
 And many other merry men,
 Of May-game Lords, and Summer Queenes,
 With Milk-maids, dancing o'er the Greenes,
 Of merry *Tarlton* in our time,
 Whose conceit was very fine,
 Whom Death hath wounded with his Dart,
 That lov'd a May-pole with his heart.
 His humour was to please all them
 Hee talks and prates he knows not what,
 Of May-poles and of merriments
 That have no spot of ill pretence.
 But I wonder now and then,
 To see the wise and learned men,
 With countenance grim, and many a frowne
 Cries, Maisters, plocke the May-pole downe.
 To heare this news, the Milk-maid cries,
 To see the sight, the Plough-man dies.

The Archbishop of York's letter to the Mayor about the parade of St Thomas Day, 15 Nov., 1572

After our hearty commendations. Wheras there hath bene heretofore a verie rude and barbarous custome mainteyned in this cite. And in no other cite or towne of this Realme to our knowledge, that yerelie upon St Thomas Daie before Christmas two disguised persons called yule and yules wife should ryde throw the cite verie undecentlie and uncomelie Drawinge great concourses of people

after them to gaise, often times committinge other enormities fforasmuche as the sayd Disguysed (ydinge) and concourse aforesaid besides other enconuenientes tendeth also to the prophayninge of that Daie appointed to holie Uses and also with draweth great multitudes of people from devyne Service and Sermons. We have thought good ... to charge and commaunde yow, that ye take order that no such ryding of yule and yules wife be frome hensfurth attempted or used.

6. *Labourers*

Bertolt Brecht, 'Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters' ('Questions from a Worker who Reads'), 1935

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
 In the books you find the names of kings.
 Did the kings drag the lumps of rock?
 And Babylon, so many times destroyed,
 Who rebuilt it so many times? In what houses
 Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
 Where did the masons go
 The evening that the Great Wall of China was finished?
 Great Rome is full of triumphal arches. Who built them?
 Over whom did the Caesars triumph?
 Had Byzantium, much sung in songs,
 Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
 The drowning shouted for their slaves
 As the ocean drowned it.

Young Alexander conquered India.
 All alone?
 Ceasar beat the Gauls.
 Without even a cook with him?
 Philip of Spain wept when his fleet
 Was drowned. Was he the only one who wept?
 Frederick the Second won the Seven Years War.
 Who else won it?

A victory on every page.
 Who cooked the feast for the victory?
 A great man every ten years.
 Who paid the expenses?
 So many reports.
 So many questions.

Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd: or, the Insolence and Unsufferable Behaviour of Servants in England Duly Enquir'd Into. ... In Ten Familiar Letters. ...*, 1724; from Letter iv.

Justice. Come in Edmund, I have talk'd with your Master —.

Edmund. Not my Master, and 't please your Worship, I hope I am my own Master.

Justice. Well, your Employer, Mr. E—, the Clothier; will the word Employer do?

Edmund. Yes, yes, and 't please your Worship, any thing, but Master.

Justice. Well, but why will you not finish the Piece of Work you began?

Edmund. Does he say, I won't finish it Sir?

Justice. He says you don't finish it.

Edmund. There's much Difference, and 't please you, between don't and won't.

Justice. There's no great Difference on his side, the Damage is the same, for he wants the Goods, and that is a great loss to him.

Edmund. But there's a great deal of difference to me Sir; if I had refus'd to finish it, perhaps he might have had some Advantage on me.

Justice. All that you can say to that is, perhaps, that you have been too cunning for him, that he did not tye you to a Time, and take it under your Hand, that you would finish it by that Time; but Edmund, you must not neglect the Man's Work when you have undertaken it.

Edmund. It may be I should not; but as for must not, and 't please your Worship I don't understand that.

Justice. Why you must not, that is, you cannot, and be an honest Man.

Edmund. Why then if I do, he may call me Knave, that's all.

Justice. And it seems you do not matter that, Edmund?

Edmund. Not much, indeed, and 't please your Worship.

Justice. Nay, I confess he that don't matter being a Knave, may do a great many wicked things, and yet not be liable to every Magistrate to take hold of him.

Edmund. Your Worship is pleas'd to mistake me, I did not say I did not matter being a Knave; but that I did not matter his calling me so ...

Vladimir V. Majakovskij, 'Poèt rabočij' ('The Poet is a Worker'), 1918

They cry to the poet:

'Before a turning-lathe we would like to see you!

What are verses? Useless words!

You certainly turn a deaf ear to work'.

We, maybe, prize work

More than any other activity.

I, too, am a factory.

And if I lack chimneys,

maybe, without them,
 more daring is needed.
 I know: you don't like idle sentences.
 When you cut the wood, it is to make logs.
 And are we not ebonists?
 We engrave the wood of blockheads.
 Fishing is certainly respectable.
 To draw the nets and in the nets probably sturgeons!
 But the poet's work is not less valuable:
 It is fishing men, not fish.
 It is an enormous exertion to burn in the blast furnaces,
 To blend the whizzing metals.
 But who will dare to call us lazy?
 We file brains
 With our sharp tongue.
 Who is better: the poet or the technician
 Who gives practical advantages to people?
 They are the same. Hearts are also motors.
 The soul is a clever engine.
 We are the same. Companions of a working mass.
 Proletarians in body and spirit.
 Only united we will embellish the universe,
 Marching we will set it in motion.
 Against the tide of words let us raise a dam.
 Let us set to work! To a new and living work!
 And the lazy orators, to the mill! To the millers!
 That the water of their speeches
 may set the millstone in motion.

7. *Popular Revolt and Resistance*

Eustache Deschamps, Ballade: 'Révolte des maillotins² à Paris, 1er Mars 1381'
 ('A ballad on the Sedition of the *maillotins* in Paris, on March 1, 1381'),
 1382 (?)

The year thirteen thousand and eighty one
 The first day of the uncertain month of March,
 A great wind arose of plunderers and rogues,
 Who thronged to Paris from every part.
 At the Halles was their painful venture.
 Then, the Châtelet was sacked
 By the prisoners. Then a foolish person told me:
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

I was dismayed: from there I came to the woods;
 For I would not stay in Paris for a hundred marcs;
 But, with God's help, I took horse and armour
 And ran away as a coward hare.
 There I saw the king's men scattered
 Who ran away sideways and longwise
 To clear out. Then the boys cried:
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

Prelates, the nobles' council, chased by the rogues
 Leave Paris, fly away like foxes,
 One by the Seine, another by other routes.
 One, a gouty man, bounced like a leopard,
 He fears hot water, who has been brave;
 The cane must be bent by force,
 And when time comes, as some rakes say,
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

In the end their purpose will end badly.
 On these things the prince must keep eye,
 And no favour or friendship or fine gold
 Be a shield against his honour, or a shaft
 For these scoundrels; they must only
 Be hanged or their head cut out on a block
 To show the example to these idlers.
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

Because they did more damage than the Saracens;
 Saint Germain have assaulted the great fools
 They destroyed the goods and gulped down the wines,
 Homes destroyed, innocent people dead,
 Closed their main doors, and confiscated the coaches
 Of the king's uncle, the duc de Bourgogne. And,
 According to what I see, that is, since my departure:
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

Envoy

Prince, I tell you, by bowing to you,
 That for a long time justice had no friends
 That everything went aslant
 In the city where you were baptised.
 Punish those who committed these crimes and said:
 'Run away! Run away! For the mallets are of lead!'

The Cutty Wren

(An English song that dates from the 1381 Peasant's Revolt)

Oh where are you going said Milder to Moulder
 Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
 We're off to the woods said John the Red Nose
 We're off to the woods said John the Red Nose

And what will you do there said Milder to Moulder
 We'll shoot the Cutty wren said John the Red Nose
 And how will you shoot her said Milder to Moulder
 With bows and with arrows said John the Red Nose

Oh that will not do said Milder to Moulder
 Oh what will you do then said Festel to Fose
 Great guns and great cannon said John the Red Nose
 Great guns and great cannon said John the Red Nose

And how will you fetch her said Milder to Moulder
 Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
 On four strong men's shoulders said John the Red Nose
 On four strong men's shoulders said John the Red Nose

Ah that will not do said Milder to Moulder
 Oh what will you do then said Festel to Fose
 Great carts and great wagons said John the Red Nose
 Great carts and great wagons said John the Red Nose

Oh how will you cut her said Milder to Moulder
 With knives and with forks said John the Red Nose
 Oh that will not do said Milder to Moulder
 Great hatchets and cleavers said John the Red Nose

Oh how will you boil her said Milder to Moulder
 In pots and in kettles said John the Red Nose
 O that will not do said Milder to Moulder
 Great pans and large cauldrons said John the Red Nose

Oh who'll get the spare ribs said Milder to Moulder
 Oh we may not tell you said Festel to Fose
 We'll give 'em all to the poor said John the Red Nose
 We'll give 'em all to the poor said John the Red Nose

C.G. Winstanley, from *Fire in the Bush*, 1650

You oppressing powers of the world, who think that God hath blessed you because you sit down in the chair of government out of which former tyrants are gone: do you remember this? Your overturing, overturning, overturning, is come on to you, as well as your fellow break-promises that are gone before. You that pretend to be saviours of the people, and to seek the peace of the whole nation; and yet serve yourselves upon the people's ruins, not regarding the cry of the poor: surely you must have your overturnings too.

Belper Street Song

(An English song that dates from the 1817 Pentridge Luddite rising)

The Levelation is begun
And Belper's where this song is sung
So I'll go home and get my gun
And shoot the Duke of Wellington.

We do not hear the bugle's note
We hav'n't even got the vote
So for the likes of you and me
The Government opposed must be.

We've had enough of Kings and Queens
Our jobs are taken by machines
Our children starve for want of bread
Pray tell me how they should be fed.

Pentrich isn't far away
Where those poor lads did sport and play
Betrayed they were in a cruel game
And Oliver we know your name.

Don't look to us for new recruits
For we are not just slavish brutes
And 'til you let us have our say
We're over Cow Hill and far away.

8. *The Poor*

Piero Camporesi, from *Rustici e buffoni (Peasants and Jesters)*, 1991

Street, marketplace or tavern singers, social places of encounter and therefore of elaboration and diffusion of popular culture as were the stables, the

mills and the barges of slow river navigation. Symbolic, in their even sliding on the waters, of a time and of a social life which was slow in its progress; a low-voltage, hypotensive life, where even personal desperation and collective tragedies belonged to an agrarian time-measure ...

G.B. Spaccini, from *Cronaca modenese (Modenese Chronicle)*, 1919

... the poor, so as not to see their children starve to death, go away roaming in the world, as happened a few days ago in Reggio, that a farmer with his wife, so as not to see their children starve to death before their eyes, locked them in the house and went away trying their luck. After a few days, their neighbours, not seeing them, decided to batter down the door and found two of the children dead and one dying with straw in his mouth, and on the fire they had a pot with straw in it, to moisten it and make it doughy for eating ...

Daniel Defoe, from *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 1722

It must be confessed that though the plague was chiefly among the poor, yet were the poor the most venturous and fearless of it, and went about their employment with a sort of brutal courage; I must call it so, for it was founded neither on religion nor prudence; scarce did they use any caution, but ran into any business which they could get employment in, though it was the most hazardous. Such was that of tending the sick, watching houses shut up, carrying infected persons to the pest-house, and, which was still worse, carrying the dead away to their graves.

Fra Paolo Bellintani, from *Dialogo della peste (A Dialogue on the Plague)*, 1584-1590

'How should prostitutes, the poor and like persons be managed [during the plague]'

FRIEND – What should we do with these people? Are you suggesting that they be lost? They, too, must live, so long as the Divine Majesty wants them to live, and they should not be driven to desperation, but their souls must be saved, whenever possible.
 FRA PAOLO – I am of the same mind as you, that they should not be driven to desperation, but save them when possible. But we cannot allow the others to die owing to them. Therefore, one must find a place outside the city, well fastened, and there these whores will be placed, guarded by good watchmen, so that they may not go out, and feeding them with bread and water. If they want to eat something else, they will have to earn it. It would be wise to give them some work to do and not allow them to remain idle, so that they can earn something to eat with their bread. But if no convenient place is found, they may be confined in some district of the city, one of the most remote

ones, guarded by good watchmen, in such a way as neither can they go out or others get in; and being careful not to put sheep in charge of a wolf.

The poor beggars we mentioned before will be managed in the same way, by placing them in a well-guarded hospital.

Those vagrants who are not of the place must be sent away as soon as possible and those who are of the place will be kept ready to be sent to the lazaret, that they may be useful if need arises.

Jonathan Swift, from *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland, from Being a Burden on Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick*, 1729

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads and cabbin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country, to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.

I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the common-wealth, would deserve so well of the publick, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars: it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years, upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of our projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true, a child just dropt from its dam, may be supported by her milk, for a solar year, with little other nourishment: at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging; and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding, and partly to the cloathing of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their

bastard children, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expence than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

...

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most, on the exchange; which cannot turn to account either to the parents or kingdom, the charge of nutriments and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust.

I do therefore humbly offer it to publick consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increaseth to 28 pounds.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

9. *Beggars and Vagrants*

Piero Camporesi, from *Il libro dei vagabondi* (*The Book of Vagabonds*), 1973

The History of 'false beggars' is substantially literary, and therefore fantastic, highly unreal, tendentious and classist. Men like Teseo Pini and Rafaele Fri-anoro ... cannot but transmit an altered, misleading and, in the final analysis, factious image of pauperism and mendicity. The 'vagabonds' trade' was almost invariably the outcome of hard need, not of a free choice: perfidy, simulation

and satanism were the necessary and direct consequence of the cruel 'state of necessity' which compelled the poor, the disinherited, the unemployed and the beggars to continuous disguises, to a painful whirl of new inventions in order to survive and to carry on in one way or another.

Edward Hext, from a letter to the Privy Council, 1596

... And I may iustlye saye that the Infynyte numbers of the Idle wandrynge people and robbers of the land are the chefest cause of the dearthe, for thowghe they labor not, and yet they spend dably as myche as the laborer dothe, for they lye Idley in the ale howses daye and nyghgt eatinge and drynkinge excessively. And within these iij monethes I tooke a thief that was executed this last assises that confessed vnto me that he and too more laye in Alehouse three weeks in which tyme they eate xxⁱⁱ fatt sheepe wherof they stole every night on, besydes they breake many a poore mans plowghe by stealing an Oxe or too from him and not being able to buy more leaseth a great parte of his tyllage that yere, others leese ther sheepe owt of ther folds by which ther grounds are not so frutefull as otherwyse they wold be.

Eustache Deschamps, 'Balade contre les mendians' ('A ballad against Beggars'), 1299 (?)

Flee away, beggars, rogues and rascals,
Whoremistresses, prostitutes, renegades.
Lame women, sorceresses and fortune-tellers,
Criminals, reprobates, who live an idle life,
From these churches where you ask for alms.
Thieves to God, who feign many diseases,
Be dragged by the tails of horses
And then be hanged on a gibbet!
Watch up, bailiffs and seneschals,
Catch and hang and it will be well done.

One says he has dropsy;
Another gets beaten with straps
As if out of his mind, another falls on his back
As for epilepsy. By thirty sicknesses
They are tormented, and in many abbeys
And in monasteries, so the rogues say
Deceivingly, they whine in many ways,
For each of them feigns a different disease.
Watch up, bailiffs and seneschals,
Catch and hang and it will be well done.

They steal from God and the people at last,
 Women beggars practise panderism
 While they beg, carrying their basket,
 And to steal they many times turn spies:
 They prattle more than starlings, quails or magpies.
 In the woods they assault the good merchants,
 They rob and kill; in churches, before the portals,
 They are too troublesome; one cries, the other screams.
 Watch up, bailiffs and seneschals,
 Catch and hang and it will be well done.

Envoy

You who go to church in the morning
 Nobleman, bourgeois, merchant and pilgrim,
 Give each of these villains two strokes
 With a big cudgel, to send them their way:
 They will no more be inclined to beg
 But will flee away, barefooted.
 Watch up, bailiffs and seneschals,
 Catch and hang and it will be well done.

Miguel de Cervantes, from *Don Quixote*, 1605

... [Don Quixote], lifting up his eyes, saw about twelve men a-foot, trudging in the road all in a row, one behind another, like beads upon a string, being linked together by the neck to a huge iron chain, and manacled besides. They were guarded by two horsemen, armed with carabines, and two men a-foot with swords and javelins. As soon as Sancho spied them, 'Look ye, sir', cried he; 'here is a gang of wretches hurried away by main force to serve the king in the galleys'.

'How!' replied Don Quixote; 'is it possible the king will force anybody?'

'I don't say so', answered Sancho; 'I mean these are rogues whom the law has sentenced for their misdeeds, to row in the king's galleys'.

'However', replied Don Quixote, 'they are forced, because they do not go of their own free will'.

'Sure enough', quoth Sancho.

'If it be so', said Don Quixote, 'they come within the verge of my office, which is to hinder violence and oppression, and succour all people in misery'.

'Ay, sir', quoth Sancho; 'but neither the king nor law offers any violence to such wicked wretches; they have but their deserts'.

By this the chain of slaves came up, when Don Quixote, in very civil terms, desired the guards to inform him why these people were led along in that manner.

'Sir', answered one of the horsemen, 'they are criminals, condemned to serve the king in his galleys: that is all I have to say to you, and you need inquire no farther'.

'Nevertheless, sir', replied Don Quixote, 'I have a great desire to know in few words the cause of their misfortune, and I will esteem it an extraordinary favour if you will let me have that satisfaction'.

'We have here the copies and certificates of their several sentences', said the other horseman, 'but we can't stand to pull them out and read them no; you may draw near and examine the men yourself: I suppose they themselves will tell you why they are condemned; for they are such honest people, they are not ashamed to boast of their rogueries'.

...

With that the officer, provoked by the slave's threats, held up his staff to strike [the slave]; but Don Quixote stepped between them, and desired him not to do it, and to consider that the slave was the more to be excused for being too free of his tongue, since he had ne'er another member at liberty. Then addressing himself to all the slaves, 'My dearest brethren', cried he, 'I find, by what I gather from your own words, that though you deserve punishment for the several crimes of which you stand convicted, yet you suffer execution of the sentence by constraint, and merely because you cannot help it. Besides, it is not unlikely but that this man's want of resolution upon the rack, the other's want of money, the third's want of friends and favour, and, in short, the judges perverting and wresting the law to your great prejudice, may have been the cause of your misery. Now, as Heaven has sent me into the world to relieve the distressed, and free suffering weakness from the tyranny of oppression, according to the duty of my profession of knight-errantry, these considerations induce me to take you under my protection. But because it is the part of a prudent man not to use violence where fair means may be effectual, I desire you, gentlemen of the guard, to release these poor men, there being people enough to serve his majesty in their places; for it is a hard case to make slaves of men whom God and nature made free; and you have the less reason to use these wretches with severity, seeing they never did you any wrong. Let them answer for their sins in the other world; Heaven is just, you know, and will be sure to punish the wicked, as it will certainly reward the good. Consider besides, gentlemen, that it is neither a Christian-like nor an honourable action for men to be the butchers and tormentors of one another; principally, when no advantage can arise from it. I choose to desire this of you, with so much mildness, and in so peaceable a manner, gentlemen, that I may have occasion to pay you a thankful acknowledgment, if you will be pleased to grant so reasonable a request; but if you provoke me by refusal, I must be obliged to tell ye, that this lance, and this sword, guided by this invincible arm, shall force you to yield that to my valour which you deny to my civil entreaties'.

Charles Lamb, from 'A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis', in *Essays of Elia*, 1823

The all-sweeping besom of societarian reformation – your only modern Alcides' club to rid the time of its abuses – is uplift with many-handed sway to extirpate the last fluttering tatters of the bugbear Mendicity from the metropolis. Scrips, wallets, bags – staves, dogs, and crutches – the whole mendicant fraternity with all their baggage are fast posting out of the purlieu of this eleventh persecution. From the crowded crossing, from the corners of streets and turnings of allies, the parting Genius of Beggary is 'with sighing sent'. I do not approve of this wholesale going to work, this impertinent crusado, or bellum ad exterminationem, proclaimed against a species. Much good might be sucked from these Beggars.

...

The Mendicants of this great city were so many of her sights, her lions. I can no more spare them, than I could the Cries of London. No corner of a street is complete without them. They are as indispensable as the Ballad Singer; and in their picturesque attire as ornamental as the Signs of old London. They were the standing morals, emblems, mementos, dial-mottos, the spital sermons, the books for children, the salutary checks and pauses to the high and rushing tide of greasy citizenry –

...

These dim eyes have in vain explored for some months past a well-known figure, or part of the figure, of a man, who used to glide his comely upper half over the pavements of London, wheeling along with most ingenious celerity upon a machine of wood; a spectacle to natives, to foreigners, and to children. He was of a robust make, with a florid sailor-like complexion, and his head was bare to the storm and sunshine. He was a natural curiosity, a speculation to the scientific, a prodigy to the simple. The infant would stare at the mighty man brought down to his own level. The common cripple would despise his own pusillanimity, viewing the hale stoutness, and hearty heart, of this half-limbed giant. Few but must have noticed him; for the accident, which brought him low, took place during the riots of 1780, and he has been a groundling so long. He seemed earth-born, an Anteus, and to suck in fresh vigour from the soil which he neighboured. He was a grand fragment; as good as an Elgin marble. The nature, which should have recruited his reft legs and thighs, was not lost, but only retired into his upper parts, and he was half a Hercules. I heard a tremendous voice thundering and growling, as before an earthquake, and casting down my eyes, it was this mandrake reviling a steed that had started at his portentous appearance. He seemed to want but his just stature to have rent the offending quadruped in shivers. He was as the man-part of a Centaur, from which the horse-half

had been cloven in some dire Lapithan controversy. He moved on, as if he could have made shift with yet half of the body-portion which was left him. The os sublime was not wanting; and he threw out yet a jolly countenance upon the heavens. Forty-and-two years had he driven this out of door trade, and now that his hair is grizzled in the service, but his good spirits no way impaired, because he is not content to exchange his free air and exercise for the restraints of a poor-house, he is expiating his contumacy in one of those houses (ironically christened) of Correction.

Was a daily spectacle like this to be deemed a nuisance, which called for legal interference to remove? or not rather a salutary and a touching object, to the passers-by in a great city? – Among her shows, her museums, and supplies for ever-gaping curiosity (and what else but an accumulation of sights – endless sights – is a great city; or for what else is it desirable?) was there not room for one *Lusus* (not *Naturae*, indeed, but) *Accidentium*? What if in forty-and-two years' going about, the man had scraped together enough to give a portion to his child (as the rumour ran) of a few hundreds – whom had he injured? – whom had he imposed upon? The contributors had enjoyed their sight for their pennies. What if after being exposed all day to the heats, the rains, and the frosts of heaven – shuffling his ungainly trunk along in an elaborate and painful motion – he was enabled to retire at night to enjoy himself at a club of his fellow cripples over a dish of hot meat and vegetables, as the charge was gravely brought against him by a clergyman deposing before a House of Commons' Committee – was this, or was his truly paternal consideration, which (if a fact) deserved a statue rather than a whipping-post, and is inconsistent at least with the exaggeration of nocturnal orgies which he has been slandered with – a reason that he should be deprived of his chosen, harmless, nay edifying, way of life, and be committed in hoary age for a sturdy vagabond?

Thomas Harman, from 'A Counterfeit Cranke', in *A Caueat or Warening for Commen Cvrsetors, Vvlgarely Called Vagabonds*, 1566

Apon Alhollenday in the morning last Anno domini. 1566, or my booke was halfe printed I meane the first impression, there came earely in the morninge a Counterfet Cranke vnder my lodgyng at the whyte Fryares wythin the cloyster in a lyttle yard or coorte where aboutes laye two or thre great Ladyes beyng without the lyberties of London where by he hoped for the greater gayne: this Cranke there lamentably lamenting, and pitifully crying to be relieued, declared to diuerse there hys painful and miserabile disease. I being risen and not half ready, hard his dolful words and ruful mournings, hearing him name the fallen sicknes, thought assuredlye to my selfe, that hee was a deepe dissembler: so comming out at a sodayne, and beholding his

ugly and yrksome attyre, his lothsome and horrible countenance, it made me in a maruelous perplexity what to think of him, whether it were fained or tryueth, for after this maner we went he: he was naked from the wast upward sauynge he had a old Ierken of leather patched and that was lose about hym, that all his bodye laye out bare, a filthy foule cloth he ware on his head being cut for the purpose hauing a narowe place to put out his face with a bauer made to trusse vp his beard and a stryng that tyed the same downe close aboute his necke with an olde felt hat which he styll caried in his hande to receaue the charytye and deuotion of the people for that woulde he hold out from hym hauynge hys face from the eyes downe ward all smered with freshe bloud as though he had new falen and byn tormented wyth his paynefull panges his Ierken beinge all be rayde with durte and myre, and hys hatte and hosen also, as though hee hadde wallowed in the myre: surely his sight was monstrous and terrible.

Miguel de Cervantes, from 'Rinconete y Cortadillo', in *Novelas Ejemplares (Exemplary Tales)*, 1613

At the Venta or hostelry of the Mulinillo, which is situate on the confines of the renowned plain of Alcuia, and on the road from Castile to Andalusia, two striplings met by chance on one of the hottest days of summer. One of them was about fourteen or fifteen years of age; the other could not have passed his seventeenth year. Both were well formed, and of comely features, but in very ragged and tattered plight. Cloaks they had none; their breeches were of linen, and their stockings were merely those bestowed on them by Nature. It is true they boasted shoes; one of them wore alpagates, or rather dragged them along at his heels; the other had what might as well have been shackles for all the good they did the wearer, being rent in the uppers, and without soles. Their respective head-dresses were a montera and a miserable sombrero, low in the crown and wide in the brim. On his shoulder, and crossing his breast like a scarf, one of them carried a shirt, the colour of chamois leather; the body of this garment was rolled up and thrust into one of its sleeves: the other, though travelling without incumbrance, bore on his chest what seemed a large pack, but which proved, on closer inspection, to be the remains of a starched ruff, now stiffened with grease instead of starch, and so worn and frayed that it looked like a bundle of hemp.

Within this collar, wrapped up and carefully treasured, was a pack of cards, excessively dirty, and reduced to an oval form by repeated paring of their dilapidated corners. The lads were both much burned by the sun, their hands were anything but clean, and their long nails were edged with black; one had a dudgeon-dagger by his side; the other a knife with a yellow handle.

These gentlemen had selected for their siesta the porch or penthouse commonly found before a Venta; and, finding themselves opposite each other,

he who appeared to be the elder said to the younger, 'Of what country is your worship, noble Sir, and by what road do you propose to travel?' 'What is my country, Señor Cavalier', returned the other, 'I know not; nor yet which way my road lies'.

'Your worship, however, does not appear to have come from heaven', rejoined the elder, 'and as this is not a place wherein a man can take up his abode for good, you must, of necessity, be going further'. 'That is true', replied the younger; 'I have, nevertheless, told you only the veritable fact; for as to my country, it is mine no more, since all that belongs to me there is a father who does not consider me his child, and a step-mother who treats me like a son-in-law. With regard to my road, it is that which chance places before me, and it will end wherever I may find some one who will give me the wherewithal to sustain this miserable life of mine'.

'Is your worship acquainted with any craft?' inquired the first speaker. 'With none', returned the other, 'except that I can run like a hare, leap like a goat, and handle a pair of scissors with great dexterity'.

Fabio Glissenti, from 'Delle astutie de' mendicanti, pitocchi e forfanti ...', in *Di-scorsi morali dell'eccellente Signor Fabio Glissenti ...* ('Of the Ruses of Beggars, Rogues and Vagabonds ...', in *Moral Discourses of the Excellent Mr Fabio Glissenti ...*), 1596

What would you say if you saw me fall down for the 'ugly' or epilepsy, whose effects I imitate to perfection? When I with great clamour fall down and lie prostrate or, reversing, with extravagant movements, twisting my eyes, my mouth foaming, move all who are present to come to my aid? Then I feign that I will not recover unless a cross or a blessed coin is placed in my hand and then – as if by a miracle I had recovered my sanity, with a deep sigh I open my eyes and then little by little recovering I find that those who have seen me in this pitiable spectacle generously pay me.

...

Here are two acorns: those I put in my mouth and they make my voice blurred and faltering; and when I place them against the palate they make it feeble and trembling. Sometime I place them on one side of my mouth, and then it looks as if my cheek were swollen with an abscess. I carry about me, under the hobnail, some dyings, with which I smear my face according as the time and occasion require ... This is cummin powder, that makes the skin yellowish; this is soot mixed with white lead that makes it palish. A whole egg is good to feign an ulcer: broken on a bandage it looks like pus. Resin smoke makes my flesh livid, and unguent of white lead smeared on the livid flesh gives credit to the fact that you have been beaten, or that you have fallen on the ground, which people believe has happened to me out of my utter weakness.

Il dilettevole esame de' Guidoni, Furfanti o Calchi, altrimenti detti Guitti nelle carceri di Ponte Sisto di Roma nel 1598 (A Pleasant Examination of 'Guidoni', 'Furfanti', or 'Calchi', otherwise called 'Guitti', in the Jail of Ponte Sisto in Rome, in 1598)

Die 4 Februarii 1595. Roma

Examinatus fuit in carceribus Pontis Sixti coram et per me Notarium infra scriptum Pompeius de Trivio Spoletanae diocesis aetatis annorum sexdecim in circa et cui delato giuramento de veritate dicenda et interrogatus de nomine, patria, exercitio et causa suae carcerationis,

Respondit: *my name is Pompeo, I was born in Trievi of Spoleto, I may be sixteen years old more or less, I have no craft, I was taken by your officers in S. Jacomo degli Spagnoli because I was begging in the church, while mass was being celebrated.*

Interrogatus an sciat et cognoscat alios pauperes mendicantes in Urbe, et an omnes sint sub una tantum secta an vero sub diversis sectis, et recenseat omnes praecise,

Respondit: *Sir, among us poor beggars there are various secret companies and they are different, because they have different activities and different clothing. I will tell you all, as I remember them.*

...

Interrogatus an pecuniae acquistae sint ipsius quaerentis an vero quilibet teneatur illas consignare suo superiori secundum cuiusque sectam illorum. Respondit: *Sir, those who earn money keep it for themselves . . . at least I speak for myself, for I belong to the company of the 'sbasiti', and our Chief is Giuseppe da Camerino, who gives to all. I have heard it say that the 'fogliaroli' and the 'burattini' keep all in common and that they often meet at inns, or where they like better, and do their businesses and offices; and my companion, who fled away so as not to be captured, said that last week he was together with two 'guitti', two 'fogliaroli' and two 'burattini', about eight people more or less, who gathered in a tavern near the Bridge to have a good time and they asked the innkeeper to bring a lot of food, good food and very good wine, with many eatable things as at a nobleman's meal. And after this eating the innkeeper presented the bill and said that the whole meal cost twelve scudi, which immediately the Chief of the 'farfugli' paid cash in Silver, without saying a word; and if I remember well, he also said that they were joined by the Hangman, who brought flasks of moscatello. And they had a great time together, because among them there always is money, especially among the Chiefs of our companies.*

Et ad opportunam Domini interrogationem dixit: *our company gathers in piazza Navona, at the Bridge, in Campo dei Fiori and at the Rotonda.*

Interrogatus an soleant singulis annis confiteri peccata sua et recidere Sanctissimum Eucaristiae Sacramentum iuxta preceptum Sanctae Matris Ecclesiae et audire missas statutis diebus,

Respondit: *Sir, there are few who do it among us because, to tell the truth, most of them are worse than Lutherans.*

Ex tunc Dominus dimisit examen et animo etc.

Thomas Harman, from *A Caueat or Warening for Commen Cursetors, Vulgarely Called Vagabonds*, 1566

The vpright Cose cateth to the Roge
The vpright man speaketh to the Roge

VPRIGHT MAN.

**Bene Lightmans to thy quarromes in what lipken hast thou lipped
In the darkemans, whether in a lybbege or in the strummell.**

Good morrowe to thy bodye, in what house hast thou lyne in all night,
whether in a bedde or in the strawe?

ROGE.

I couched in a hogshhead in a Skypper thiss darkemans.

I layd me downe to sléepe in a barne this night.

VPRIGHT MAN.

I towre the strummel trine vpon the nabchet and togman.

I séc the straw hange vpon thy cap and coate.

ROGE.

**I say by Solomon I will lage it of with a gage of bene bouse then cut to
my nose watch.**

I swear by the masse I will washe it off wyth a quarte of good drinke, then
say to me what thou wilt.

VPRIGHT MAN.

Why hast thou any lowre in thy bonge to bouse.

Why, hast thou any money in thy pursse to drinke?

ROGE.

But a flagge, a wyn and a make.

But a groate, a penny and a half penny.

VPRIGHT MAN.

Why, where is the kenthat hath the bene bouse.

Where is the house that hath the good drinke.

ROGE

The morte here by at the signe of the prauncer.

The good wyfe here by at the signe of the horse.

VPRIGHT MAN

Butte it is a quyer bowse, I bowsd a flagge the last darkemans.

I say it is small and naughty drinke, I dranke a groat there last night.

ROGE

But bowse there a bord, and thou shalt haue banship.

But drinke there a shilling, and thou shalt haue very good.

Towre ye, yander is the ken, dup the gyger and maunde that is beneship.

See you, yonder is the house, open the doore, and aske for the best.

VPRIGHT MAN.

This bowse is as good as Rome bowse.

This drinke is as good as wyne.

Now I tower that bene bowse makes nase nabes.

Now I see that good drinke makes a dronken head.

...

Martin Luther, from *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation (To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation)*, 1520

... each town should support its own poor and should not allow strange beggars to come in – whatever they may call themselves: pilgrims or mendicant monks. Every town could feed its own poor. ... As it is, they have to support many knaves and vagabonds under the name of beggars ... There is no occupation, in my opinion, in which there is so much knavery and cheating as among beggars. If a man will be poor, he should not be rich; if he will be rich, let him put his hand to the plough, and get wealth himself out of the earth ... It is not right, that one should work that another may be idle, and live ill, that another may live well, as is now the perverse abuse.

10. *Popular Theatre*

Edward Gordon Craig, from *Scene*, 1923

3rd Drama. Italian. The Commedia dell'Arte. Believing all things. The unities of place, time, and action return and are found valuable.

This Drama performed in the streets.

It is Profane – Grotesque Comedy.

Still not 'comfortable' Drama.

The same elements go to making it – only all these are seized on spontaneously – nothing deliberate – little planned – improvisation.

The language of the common people used.

It spreads like fire over Europe.

...

The third scene which appeared in Europe was genuine ...

It was the plain wall of a street, or a cellar wall, - a loggia of a townhall, or some minor façade or wing of a palace.

All is still well with us. It is not revolution – it is a beginning. We have given in a little – but we have seized other chances open to us.

The *troubled* tones – movements – looks which had forced an entrance to our Drama in the last development of our Drama had come to be a strain on our nerves. We were growing peevish and troubled too. We did not forget the triumphant ‘Tollite portas’ ... but we shuddered because ... dare we say it ... the bleeding face and torn body of the Son was too much – too many such faces and bodies were brought to us to see – all torn bodies, all drawn mouths, - all grief and pain – all – and the incense suffocated us, ... the gloom was coming down on us.

We will go out – we try to find the door – we go out – we get out – fresh air – ‘thank God’.

And for a time we do without the old tragic play altogether: never mind it: let it be forgotten: ... it was all too terrible to remember ... it had been made too terrible to see. Nothing else – the thing itself, once so severe and noble and so severely treated thrilled us – but *cheapness* entered into the way of doing it ... good-bye.

And now sitting at our door in the sun one day we see over the way against the yellow-grey wall three strange figures – we peer at them with our eyes shaded. Are they not rather like No, that was only a terrible fancy, to be forgotten ... let us go in.

Next day the same – and laughter too, and people watching too – and laughing. I go out. I draw nearer. The same three strange figures leaping and gesticulating ... not *really* at all like those images with the torn faces and broken knees – and now I am nearer still I see how absurd my notion was ... they are laughing all the time. Misery and agony does not laugh: ... only the victorious laugh – yet till I sleep I seem to see the woebegone vision of a martyr.

These are the new performers, - we the new, rather terrified, grinning spectators – our theatre the street – our scene the mound of earth in front of the yellow-grey wall – our seats our own heels or a stone.

The Commedia dell’Arte was borne.

Thomas Coryat, from *Crudities*, 1611

I hope it will not be esteemed for an impertinencie to my discourse, if I next speake of the Mountebanks of Venice, seeing amongst many other things that doe much famouse this Citie, these two sorts of people, namely the Cortezans and the Mountebanks, are not the least: for although there are Mountebanks also in other Cities of Italy; yet because there is a greater concurse of them in Venice then else where, and that of the better sort and the most eloquent fellowes; and also for that there is a larger tolleration of them here then in other Cities (for in Rome, &c. they are restrained from certain matters as I have heard which are heere allowed them) therefore they use to name a Venetian Mountebanke *κατ’εξοχήν* for the coryphaeus and principall

Mountebanke of all Italy: neither doe I much doubt but that this treatise of them will be acceptable to some readers, as being a meere novelty never before heard of (I thinke) by thousands of our English Gallants. Surely the principall reason that hath induced me to make mention of them is, because when I was in Venice, they oftentimes ministred infinite pleasure unto me ... The principall place where they act, is the first part of Saint Marks street that reacheth betwixt the West front of S. Marks Church, and the opposite front of Saint Geminians Church. In which, twice a day, that is, in the morning and in the afternoone, you may see five or sixe severall stages erected for them ... These Mountebanks at one end of their stage place their trunke, which is replenished with a world of new-fangled trumperies. After the whole rabble of them is gotten up to the stage, whereof some weare visards being disguised like fooles in a play, some Women (for there are divers women also amongst them) are attyred with habits according to that person that they sustaine; after (I say) they are all upon the stage, the musicke begins. Sometimes vocall, sometimes instrumentall, and sometimes both together. This musicke is a preamble and introduction to the ensuing matter: in the meane time while the musicke playes, the principall Mountebanke which is the Captaine and ring-leader of all the rest, opens his truncke, and sets abroach his wares; after the musicke hath ceased, he maketh an oration to the audience of halfe an houre long, or almost an houre. Wherein he doth most hyperbolically extoll the vertue of his drugs and confections:

Laudat venales qui vult extrudere merces.

Though many of them are very counterfeit and false. Truly I often wondred at many of these naturall Orators. For they would tell their tales with such admirable volubility and plausible grace, even extempore, and seasoned with that singular variety of elegant jests and witty conceits, that they did often strike great admiration into strangers that never heard them before: and by how much the more eloquent these Naturalists are, by so much the greater audience they draw unto them, and the more ware they sell. After the chiefest Mountebankes first speech is ended, he delivereth out his commodities by little and little, the jester still playing his part, and the musitians singing and playing upon their instruments. The principall things that they sell are oyles, soveraigne waters, amorous songs printed, Apothecary drugs, and a Common-weale of other trifles. The head Mountebanke at every time that he delivereth out any thing, maketh an extemporall speech, which he doth eftsoones intermingle with such savory jests (but spiced now and then with singular scurrility) that they minister passing mirth and laughter to the whole company, which perhaps may consist of a thousand people that flocke together about one of their stages ... I have observed marveilous strange matters done by some of these Mountebankes. For I saw one of them holde a viper in his

hand, and play with his sting a quarter of an houre together, and yet receive no hurt; though another man should have beene presently stung to death with it. He made us all beleeve that the same viper was linealy descended from the generation of that viper that lept out of the fire upon S. Pauls hand, in the Island of Melita now called Malta, and did him no hurt; and told us moreover that it would sting some, and not others. Also I have seene a Mountebanke hackle and gash his naked arme with a knife most pittifully to beholde, so that the blood hath streamed out in great abundance, and by and by after he hath applied a certaine oyle unto it, wherewith he hath incontinent both stanchd the blood, and so throughly healed the woundes and gashes, that when he hath afterward shewed us his arme againe, we could not possibly perceive the least token of a gash. Besides there was another black gowned Mountebanke that gave most excellent contentment to the company that frequented the stage. This fellow was borne blind, and so continued to that day: he never missed Saint Markes place twice a day for sixe weekes together: he was noted to be a singular fellow for singing extemporall songes, and for a pretty kinde of musicke that he made with two bones betwixt his fingers. Moreover I have seene some of them doe such strange jugling trickes as would be almost incredible to be reported ... These merry fellowes doe most commonly continue two good howres upon the stage, and at last when they have fedde the audience with such passing variety of sport, that they are even cloyed with the superfluity of their conceits, and have sold as much ware as they can, they remove their trinkets and stage till the next meeting.

Thus much concerning the Mountebankes.

Giovan Domenico Ottonelli, from *De la christiana moderazione nel teatro* (*Of Christian Moderation in the Theatre*), 1646

Is the apparition of real women, or ordinary comedians, on the stage illicit? The modern and mercenary stage theatre looks to me like a tempestuous sea, fraught with many spiritual shipwrecks, when women, ordinary comedians, appear in it ... to arouse a thousand spiritual tempests in the soul of unvirtuous spectators.

The apparition of real women, or ordinary comedians, on the Stage or on the *Banco*, talking of lascivious love in the midst of a public audience, where they know that, at least some whom they know, are of weak spirit and that they will commit sins, is a scandalous obscenity, and therefore is – practically at least – illicit.

By ordinary Comedian I mean one of those women who go wandering through many and various towns accompanying the groups of mercenary *Comici* or charlatans; these women are either young girls who are brought up for the Theatre or they are the wives of the same *Comici*; or else, they are Whores; and they are all usually very quick, very crafty, and highly trained in the treatises of scenic love: and they appear on the stage quite assured, quite daring and some-

times even impudent. ... but I do not believe the same of all of them; for indeed there are some who are good; but I say that a professional *Comica*, whether one who leads a bad or good life, when she appears adorned to entice and amuse and speaking of love for sheer delight, it is morally impossible that she should not induce those who look at her and listen to her with little store of virtue – or, indeed, with great inclination to dishonesty – to commit sins. From which I conclude that such an apparition is a scandalous obscenity.

Tommaso Garzoni, from *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (*The Universal Square of All the World's Professions*), 1585

As they enter one city, it is soon announced by drum-beating that such and such *comici* have arrived, the lady dressed in male attire with a sword in her hand going about mustering people. And the people are invited either to see a comedy or a tragedy or a pastoral in a palace or at the Ostaria del Pellegrino, where the plebeians – by nature yearning and anxious to see new things – soon hurry to fill the room. One is admitted to the room which has been prepared by paying a fee. And here you find a makeshift stage, scenery painted with coal which makes no sense at all; and before the show begins you can hear a concert of donkeys and hornets, a prologue by a busker; an awkward intonation like Fra Stoppino's; actions unpleasant like a disease; interludes to be punished by a thousand gibbets; a Magnifico worth less than a penny; a Zani who looks like a goose; a Graziano who shits his words; an insipid and silly woman Pander; a Lover who, when speaking, sounds disheartening to all people; a Spaniard who can only say *mi vida* and *mi corazón*; a Pedant who each moment shifts from Latin to Tuscan; a Burattino who cannot make any other gesture except putting his cap on his head; a Lady who is an ogre in diction, death in speech, sleeping in gesture, who is in permanent enmity with graces and has a capital hostility with beauty. So that the whole audience leaves dissatisfied and outraged by these actors, and keep in their memory the very nasty things which have been said, and the following evening they would not spend a cent to hear again such blunders which have already been spread and trumpeted about. So it follows that, owing to the abuse of these bad actors, respectable men are also condemned and endure offenses which are not equal to their merits.

Claude-Louis Berthaud, from *La ville de Paris en vers burlesques* (*The City of Paris in Burlesque Lines*), 1608

Meeting point of charlatans,
Of frauds and of impostors,
Pont-Neuf, ordinary theatre

Of sellers of unguents and poultices,
 Dwelling site of tooth-pullers,
 Of junk dealers, booksellers and sticklers;
 Of singers of novel songs,
 Of young ladies' gallant panders,
 Of cutpurses, of *argotiers*,
 Of masters of dirty trades,
 Of surgeons and chemists,
 Of doctors of sparigyric medicine
 Of crafty dice-players,
 And of poulterers ...

A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on Sunday the thirde of November 1577, in the time of the Plague, by T.W. [Thomas White?], 1578

Looke but uppon the common playes in London, and see the multitude that flocketh to them and followeth them: beholde the sumptuous Theatre houses, a continuall monument of Londons prodigalitie and folly. But I understande they are nowe forbidden bycause of the plague. I like the pollycie well if it holdee still, for a disease is but boded or patched up that is not cured in the cause, and the cause of plagues is sinne, if you looke to it well: and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes.

¹The following two texts refer to the plague spreaders who, during the plague epidemic which took place in Milan in 1630, were believed to anoint houses, walls and public buildings with an ointment which propagated the sickness and were sentenced to death when found guilty of this crime.

²The rioters were called *mailloins* because they armed themselves with 20.000 lead mallets.

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Opere pubblicate

*I titoli qui elencati sono stati proposti alla Firenze University Press dal
Coordinamento editoriale del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Comparate
e prodotti dal suo Laboratorio editoriale OA*

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