

## 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 poinctes 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*), 1634<sup>1</sup>

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 17<sup>th</sup> 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  
Hopedst 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 chrism; it is of this chrism 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 Stopped 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 verey 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 maillotins<sup>2</sup> 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, encreaseth 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 xx<sup>ii</sup> 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 Alhollanday 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 ougly 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 wewnt 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 thoughe 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 thoughe hée 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 alpargates, 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 *Discorsi 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', 'Fur-*

*fanti*, 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. Giacomo 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, an 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, Vvlgarely 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 hogthead 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 sée 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 sometimes 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.

<sup>1</sup>The 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.

<sup>2</sup>The rioters were called *mailloins* because they armed themselves with 20.000 lead mallets.