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"The rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues"  
Popularizing National Identity  
in Elizabethan Pamphlets and Plays

by

Christine E. Hutchins

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"The rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues"  
Popularizing National Identity  
in Elizabethan Pamphlets and Plays

by

Christine E. Hutchins

Adviser: Professor Angus Fletcher

In this dissertation, "'The Rethoricke of Pedlars, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues': English National Identity and the Popular Press in the Sixteenth Century," I examine the roles sixteenth-century writers and playwrights give to popular literary traditions in their visions of shared English culture. Many recent studies of early modern English national identity focus on icons of monarchic power, state institutions, and personifications of a unified England. I argue that the symbols early modern writers use to gather power into a center appear alongside equally compelling symbols that represent power as dispersed among the provinces and peoples of England. The nation is a

fundamentally popular concept. As such, sixteenth-century English writers' appeals to national bonds are also appeals to the popular politics and popular traditions that supposedly give the nation its authority and power. Through analysis of sixteenth-century print editions of the Works of Chaucer and the Medieval English Piers Plowman poet, Robert Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier, Robert Wilson's The Cobbler's Prophecy, Julius Caesar, and Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday, I show how Elizabethan writers use Reformation-inspired literary traditions to create an image of England as a country that defines itself through its popular traditions and its populace.

\*

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## Chapter One

### "The rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues" Rhetorics of National Identity in Elizabethan England

In 1589, the writer of a pamphlet entitled A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nations (hereafter "A Comparison") attacked chauvinistically patriotic speeches, especially speeches ridiculing foreigners, calling them "the rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues and such kind of people" (B4 v). The writer--"some learned French gentleman," according to the pamphlet's translator, Robert Ashley--attacks chauvinistic patriotism, associating it with lowest strata of society, because he is arguing in favor of an Anglo-French alliance against Spain. In order to support his argument, he tries to discredit English biases against the French--biases he earlier, tellingly, attributes to "popular errors"--claiming that only the lowliest of the populace are so narrowly patriotic as to use epithets such as "Frenchdogge" and other "unseemely speeches" attacking foreigners (B3).

In an age when writers often used "popular" as a pejorative, indicating something "common" in the worst sense of the word, it is significant that the writer associates the "Rethoricke" of his opponents with "popular errors" and

with poorer members of the populace such as "Pedlers, Tinkers, Cobblers, Rogues." The trades he lists were among the poorest itinerant trades in Elizabethan England. The 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, reenacted in 1598, expressly notes all but cobblers as frequent offenders of the vagrancy laws, authorizing English civil servants to separate out wandering "Pedlars Tynkers and Petye Chapmen" to be "adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars" (qtd. in Gurr 28; Dutton 110). The official definition of rogues and vagabonds omits cobblers, but popular sources frequently identify them as among the more notorious of this sort.<sup>1</sup> The writer of A Comparison uses cobblers, along with the itinerant trades the writers of the Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds list, as shorthand for the populace--the masses of commoners who owned no land and were not titled gentlemen or gentlewomen. The "Rethoricke" of these trades is, for this writer, synonymous with popular culture at its meanest and most common.

The writer's critique of popular culture is revealing of the ways sixteenth-century writers engaged current political issues, of the kinds of rhetorical strategies they used, and of the tacit assumptions they brought into play in

order to discredit their opponents and further their own arguments. His rhetorical strategy is to slyly manipulate his readers' assumptions about popular culture and the populace, trying to discredit the "rethoricke" of his opponents by associating it with popular patriotism. He implies that a pernicious and chauvinistic patriotism is an ingrained part of popular culture. Decrying the unenlightened and overzealous patriotism of the populace, he rejects popular patriotism for a more refined patriotism, what he calls "the language of honest and civill persons, such as we purpose to intreate of in this discourse." The writer's own rhetoric is deceptive, however, because while he claims to reject popular patriotism, he actually rehabilitates it and uses it to build his own, supposedly more far-reaching and savvy, brand of patriotism.

In this dissertation, I examine the patriotic rhetoric writers such as the writer of A Comparison associate with popular culture and the populace in Elizabethan England--the "Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues" he criticizes--as well as the patriotic rhetoric writers such as this one use to describe their own, supposedly more refined and discriminating visions, of England's cultural achievements

and its role in international affairs. In extant broadside ballads, pamphlets, and plays from sixteenth-century England, many writers agree with the writer of A Comparison in attributing a zealous patriotism to English commoners. Some of the most popular literature and plays of the period include characters who resemble the commoners the writer of A Comparison ridicules and the "unseemly speeches" he associates with them. For my analysis of the patriotic rhetoric of commoners and writers such as the writer of A Comparison, I have selected broadsides, pamphlets, and plays that were the bestsellers of their time--pamphlets printed in at least three separate editions and plays featured in the most popular playhouses.<sup>2</sup> I have also included works that contemporaries list as among the most popular. Of these broadsides, pamphlets and plays, works such as the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale (1535, 1542, 1545, 1561, 1598, 1602), Robert Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier (1592), Robert Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy (1594), William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar (1599) and Henry V (1599), and Thomas Dekker's The Shoemakers' Holiday (1599) characterize plowmen, peddlers, cobblers and other of the poorer commoners as avid patriots who comically, tragically,

or even heroically defend their country's honor.

The writers of these ballads, pamphlets, and plays alternatively criticize and praise English commoners for the ways they fulfill their duty to their country. Many also implicitly or explicitly contrast patriotic commoners with apathetic commoners who altogether ignore their duty to their country. The different popular works themselves are also often compared and contrasted, praised or criticized for their ability to correctly portray the people and the country they are supposed to represent. I examine these works as part of an isolatable trend in popular literature from sixteenth-century England. Many of these works are in dialogue with one another; others, while not directly in dialogue with one another, draw on well-established traditions in popular literature, shared cultural stereotypes and stock characters. The writers of these ballads, pamphlets, and plays use these traditions and stereotypes for different, and, in many cases, conflicting purposes. Taken as a group, however, these texts help to define a cultural model for the "good-hearted English commoner"--a character who was to become an even more recognizable type in later English literature. Ultimately,

these texts help to define a collective, if contested, sense of English national identity.

I build on the work of scholars of popular culture, on the work of scholars of English social and political history, and also on the work scholars have done across disciplines on the development and dissemination of national identity. English literary traditions and imaginative creations have both shaped and been shaped by the social and political realities they belong to, perhaps no creation more than national identity. Popular culture is the very stuff and substance of national culture. Popular literatures--works of fiction and earnest diatribes on political issues alike--provide a wider arena for the public conversations that create a sense of shared purpose in a nation, expanding the public sphere far beyond the reach of a town square or capital city.

My primary goal is to show the ways that sixteenth-century English writers draw on popular culture, with its vast store of traditions supposed to have been common to all English men and women, in articulating and elaborating English national identity. Many Elizabethan writers use traditions they take from English popular culture in order

to describe their sense of themselves as members of a unique country, with a shared culture and a social and political identity all their own. Until very recently, studies of early modern popular culture have been fairly general in scope.<sup>3</sup> Studies that use a more local approach have convincingly--even brilliantly--shown that close analysis of popular culture reveals unexpected nuances in a body of work formerly thought to have been merely commonplace or codified.<sup>4</sup> I hope to contribute to the study of popular culture by closely analyzing the ways popular traditions contributed to early modern English patriotic literature, showing that, in the sixteenth century, writers linked these traditions to a contemporary movement to define and construct a uniquely English social and political identity.

I also hope to contribute to our understanding of early modern political identity, and to our knowledge of the processes of nation formation. As Peter Womack has recently reminded early modern critics, "nationalism must contain a strand which is ineradicably, often inconveniently democratic" (94). Richard Helgerson's important and influential study of Elizabethan national identity, Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England, concludes,

along with Peter Burke's impressive survey of early modern European popular culture, that, "Popular revolt, and perhaps popular culture generally, was the theater's dark other, the vestigial egalitarian self that had to be exorcised before a more gentrified, artful, and discriminating identity could emerge" (212). However, popular revolt and popular culture were often the materials popular playwrights and pamphleteers used in constructing an English citizen and the English nation. Leah Marcus and D. E. Underdown have both shown that popular "pastimes" and traditions played an important part in the construction of England's political identity in the seventeenth century. The construction of a centralized culture and an authors' theater was not, as Burke and Helgerson claim, incompatible with the popular traditions that bolstered the construction of an English nation and consolidated England's vision of itself as a separate entity with a history of its own.

In her recent study of The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612, Claire McEachern argues, as I do, that Elizabethan writers increasingly include commoners in descriptions of their country's political identity. However, McEachern primarily focuses on centers of power.

In two out of four chapters, McEachern examines representations of the monarchical center, in the person of Queen Elizabeth and in personifications of England. With the exception of one chapter on William Shakespeare's Henry V, McEachern draws on literature written by and for elites and literati. I shift the focus of recent discussions of English national identity by looking at the popular roots of English national identity and the shapes Elizabethan popular writers give it. Popular literature and definitions of the popular were fundamental to Elizabethans' perceptions of their shared political identity. I argue that, if early modern writers' visions of the nation symbolically gather power into a center, focusing on icons of national power such as state institutions, the monarch, or England personified, they also represent national power as rooted in political institutions and cultural traditions they considered native to the English people, especially its lower strata. The nation is a fundamentally popular concept, one that claims to incorporate the full range of ethnicities and cultures present in its native people. Writers concerned to describe their nation place special emphasis on institutions and traditions they think are

common to its people, particularly its larger lower strata; as such, appeals to national bonds in sixteenth-century English literature were also appeals to the popular politics and popular traditions that supposedly gave the nation its authority and power.

In tracing the popular traditions sixteenth-century writers incorporated into their visions of England and its people, I focus on the conflicts and contradictions that spring up between different visions of English national identity, as well as on the collusions between writers that draw the works together. Many versions of English national identity coexisted in the sixteenth century, not only between different works by different writers, but also between different works by the same writer, and even within individual works. In addition, since the popular was itself a conflicted category in early modern England, viewed as both a storehouse rich with cultural information and a corrupting influence to be avoided at all costs, the shared culture that helped shape English national identity was subject to all the ambivalence sixteenth-century writers invested in the popular traditions they alternatively exploited and excoriated. Sixteenth-century English writers

often celebrate popular traditions as representative of true Englishness or as the remnants of a lost, utopian past, but they just as often reject them as representative of all that they consider common, low, uneducated, and corrupt. As shared, common culture, English national culture cannot avoid the taint of the popular.

I link the conflicts and contradictions I analyze in this study to three primary factors, factors that I think are intertwined in such complex ways that they can never be fully isolated. The first factor creating conflict and contradiction in English national culture is its hierarchical social structure. This hierarchy has been, throughout England's history, the organizing principle for its culture, a principle saturating its institutions and ways of thought, and perpetuated in each successive generation. In both theory and practice, early modern England was a divided society. Elizabethan social and political theorists hierarchically organized every man, woman, child, every living creature and every work of imagination and art in sixteenth-century England according to "order" and "degree." In A Comparison, the writer's contemptuous attack on the "popular errors" of his day

demonstrates the ways that Elizabethans applied social stigmas to works of art as well as to people: the writer condemns popular speeches along with the populace, conflating the two and vilifying both as creations of England's lower orders. In a society this divided, advocates of a shared, national culture must work hard to efface the differences dividing its population.

The second factor is a side effect of the process of nation building, which uses real or perceived differences and sometimes invidious comparisons to distinguish one homeland and population from another. Although members of a nation have a stake in presenting a united and harmonious front, nations evolve out of conflict and contradiction: they evolve through outright revolt and revolution, through carefully defined declarations of principles differentiating them from other nations, and through written and unwritten lists of characteristics thought to set their people apart from others. Benedict Anderson points out in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism that nations as we know them always separate out a certain number of people for exclusion from the nation: "even the largest of [nations], encompassing perhaps a

billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (7). Members of nations simultaneously preach unity and practice difference; they claim the nation is all inclusive, wholeheartedly embracing every member, but at the same time they carefully separate out enemies and foreigners, who are as likely to reside within the nation's geographical boundaries as without.

The third source of conflict and contradiction important to my analysis of English national culture stems from the fact that nation building is a collective project and, to some degree, an artistic project that uses all of the skills and strategies artists employ to enhance the power of their creations. As a collective project, the nation is always made up of many different, sometimes conflicting, accounts of the nation's characteristics and history. Along with the politicians and historians we generally look to for these accounts, visual artists, creative writers, and public speakers all consciously or unconsciously contribute to the collectively defined national identity. Because of this, the narrative

strategies and rhetorical models of writers such as the writer of A Comparison introduce their own conflicts and contradictions into the national identity they describe. These narrative and rhetorical conflicts, as with the conflicts that result from England's rigid social hierarchies and the exclusionary processes of nation building, divide members of the nation not only from members of other nations, but also from their compatriots.

Problems similar to those plaguing modern nations today--social and economic inequality, ethnic prejudice, religious factionalism--fragmented sixteenth-century England and divided its people. These problems surface in many of the productions of sixteenth-century English culture, including the ballads, pamphlets, and plays I examine here. The issues dividing English people from one another inevitably influenced English writers' visions of a unified and coherent English culture, shaping their plots, their narrative strategies, and their rhetorical models. Some sixteenth-century English writers, for example, attempt to incorporate the divisions between English people into their narratives by showing ways that the divisions may be overcome, or even showing that the divisions never really

existed in the first place. Hence, to give two examples, Prince Hal can "speak with every tinker in his own language" in Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I, overcoming apparent economic and social inequalities between himself and his subjects; the Welsh soldier in Shakespeare's Henry V, Fluellen, can count himself as good an Englishman as the next, even though he is marked with all the signs early modern audiences would recognize as indicating his ethnic Welshness: the accent, the hair trigger temper, the leek in his cap.

As a result of narrative strategies such as these, difference paradoxically becomes central to writers' representations of unity: writers use lowly commoners as examples because they are lowly commoners; notorious vagabonds such as the "Pedlers, Tinkers, Cobblers, Rogues" that the pamphleteer of A Comparison criticizes suddenly turn patriot; Robin Hood transforms from a bloodthirsty medieval bandit into a noble hero defending England from foreign invaders;<sup>5</sup> Long Meg of Westminster (c. 1590) and Thomas Heywood's Bess Bridges, "The Fair Maid of the West" (c. 1603) sail off to defend their nation's honor and their maidenly charms in distant lands; blunt Yorkshire residents,

along with numerous Scottish, Irish, and Welsh characters, join in the national comradeship by speaking in the provincial accents and broken English that mark them as England's ethnic and local color; the lowly, rebellious, and outcast become writers' signs of inclusion. Late sixteenth-century writers attempt to subsume hierarchical distinctions in a national unity based on common--in both senses of the word--Englishness that supposedly belongs to every character, regardless of status, gender, or ethnicity. These narrative strategies create contradictions in that they maintain distinctions and reiterate them even as they attempt to overcome them. The result is a contradictory inclusiveness that claims to subsume differences as it heightens them.

The rhetorical models Elizabethan writers employ reflect social and political realities dividing the English people; as with the narrative signs of difference, however, they too paradoxically provide grist for the national mill. When writers such as the writer of A Comparison attack the "unseemely speeches" of "Pedlers, Tinkers, Cobblers, Rogues, and such kind of people" in an effort to appeal to "the language of honest and civill persons," they evoke an oppositional lower strata only in order to construct their

own, "civill," audience (B4 v). This strategy of defining distinctive authors, works, and audiences by social rank is a familiar one, analyzed by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White as one that mobilizes already entrenched--although not immutable--high/low oppositions, and links them in a series of mutually determined relationships (1-26). As Stallybrass and White show, this binary opposition is necessarily unstable: the "high" knows itself as such only in comparison to the "low"; the "honest and civill" know themselves only by their opposition to "Rogues, and such kind of people."

The writer of A Comparison uses the instability of the binary opposition to his advantage. Although he adopts a contemptuous tone towards "Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues and such kind of people," his rhetorical purpose is not to exclude anyone in the pamphlet's audience from participating in its political commentary. On the contrary, the writer uses the contrast between "honest and civill persons" and the listed "Rogues" to carve out a space for himself and his audience in the relatively narrow and elitist forum for political commentary in sixteenth-century England. He excludes some commoners--the listed "Rogues"--only in order to argue that others--his new category of "honest and civill

persons"--should participate in his political commentary. The contrast he uses to separate out his audience is largely rhetorical, reproducing the elitist hierarchies of Elizabethan England only in order to transgress them.

Elizabethan writers often evoke the specter of England's supposedly refractory masses as a rhetorical ploy to discredit their opponents, fortify their own arguments, raise their credibility, or unmask noxious social or political causes. References to the "many headed monster" are so plentiful in sixteenth-century literature that it appears as the chief cause of nearly every social, political, and literary ill.<sup>6</sup> Helgerson and Rosemary Kegl have both commented on the use of insults and status slurs to effect exclusion in sixteenth-century plays (Forms of Nationhood 195-245; 253-78). Helgerson points out that, despite the largely artisanal composition of the Elizabethan stage, the most common insulting phrases in its plays are slurs that refer to provincials and commoners, the uneducated, impoverished, and unruly masses of Elizabethan society. Terms such as "villain" or "churl," which originally meant simply "peasant," are bandied about on stage without compunction. The playwrights, actors, and

audiences seem unaware that these are the very same terms city officials and puritan divines, in their unflagging efforts to close the theaters of England, applied to frequenters of the stages.

Helgerson concludes from this that Elizabethan drama "moves in the direction of greater exclusion", but his explanation of this movement suggests that the process of exclusion is more complicated than a simple rejection of commoners; instead, as Helgerson says, the increasing exclusiveness of the theater is based on playwrights' *claims* to higher status: by their attempts to "project themselves out of the base company of theatrical clowns and into the orbit of gentility," removing themselves from the "semiotic contagion" of audiences and play texts that acknowledge their associations with the public stage (204; 200-1). In other words, the common origins of playwrights, audiences, and texts did not change; their willingness to admit their origins did. Hence, as Helgerson points out, Ben Jonson's incessant abuse of commoners in his plays, his pretensions to literariness, his copious learned notes, and his handsomely printed "Works"--all this despite his status as a bricklayer.<sup>7</sup>

Although many popular writers from the late sixteenth century use disparaging terms for England's masses and represent them in singularly unattractive postures, these insults can complicate existing social and economic relationships, and work as mechanisms for inclusion as well as exclusion. In her essay on The Merry Wives of Windsor, Rosemary Kegl argues that insults such as those Helgerson discusses are "central to [the] process of naming the relationships among Windsor's inhabitants" (254). She shows that the insults create a spectrum of positions that represent the "shifting authority relations" and "the range of possible intersections between regional and national affiliations" (254). Kegl's reading of the play demonstrates that the insults the characters apply to one another delineate the variety of roles available to the "middling sort" who populate the play. By naming characters' social standings, ethnicities, and national allegiances, insults sort out the reputable English leaders among the characters (those who do not "make fritters of English," as does the incompetent Welsh clergyman) from the disreputable (270). As Helgerson says, in Elizabethan drama "the high declared itself high by spurning the low,"

mobilizing status slurs and grimly satiric mob scenes to debase the recalcitrant masses, and, by contrast, raise the legitimate beneficiaries of the nation--who are, as in The Merry Wives of Windsor, as often common as aristocratic (206).

In Helgerson's study of Elizabethan national identity, he shows that contrasts such as the ones I describe above were central to sixteenth-century English nation formation. He points out that, in general, members of a nation define themselves as a unique nation, with characteristics and a political system all their own, by contrasting themselves with other countries and other peoples: "Self-definition comes from the not-self, from the alien other" (22). Further, men and women of sixteenth-century England in particular defined their national identity by employing an "alienation that cuts still deeper," contrasting their present identity with an increasingly alien past (22).

Since sixteenth-century England defined itself around its recent break with Rome and the newly established Church of England, English national identity entailed a contrast not only between the self and the alien other, but also

between the self and its own alien past:

prompted by the cultural breaks of Renaissance and Reformation, sixteenth-century national self-articulation began with a sense of national barbarism, with a recognition of the self as the despised other, and then moved to repair that damaged self-image with the aid of forms taken from a past that was now understood as both different from the present and internally divided.

(22)

Sixteenth-century English men and women defined themselves in opposition to a past that, as they saw it, needed to be reformed and purified--made more English. For example, as Helgerson shows in Forms of Nationhood, English writers such as Edmund Spenser and Gabriel Harvey struggle to identify an English literary tradition by opposing England's "Gothic" Germanic past to the classical forms of writing used in ancient Rome or Greece. Roman and Greek classical forms had long represented true art to sixteenth-century English men and women of letters, and they therefore assiduously integrated them into the English literary canon. Since they considered medieval Gothicism uneducated or corrupt,

attributable to a "dark age" in literary and social history, they carefully separated it out as an embarrassing and unfortunate lapse in the English literary canon. Working within this paradigm, literary reformers sought to find the sole rays of light illuminating the "dark ages," or a prehistory that could partially fill this gap in the canon. The final outcome of the opposition between classicism and Gothicism was a literary movement that claimed to recover and recreate English traditions that could rival the classics.

The contrast sixteenth-century English literary reformers used in defining their uniquely English literary forms works in much the same way as the contrast the writer of A Comparison uses to differentiate "true" English patriots from misguided rogues. In both cases, the contrast is with the alien within rather than simply with the alien without. Also, both use divisions and conflicts that underlie the already existing social and political order to define the "true" model for English national identity as opposed to the false: the literary reformers and the writer of A Comparison similarly draw parallels between already accepted and defined categories--the low as opposed to the

high, the Gothic as opposed to the classic, the Papist as opposed to the Protestant--so as to create a new, still ambiguous and largely undefined, category of "Englishness."

These parallels create a complicated web linking social and political ideologies with literary practices. English literary reformers draw parallels between religious and political conflicts and literary conflicts. They contrast England's Roman Catholic past with Elizabethan perceptions of England's post-Reformation identity, Gothic medieval traditions with Elizabethan classicism, and literary forms inherited from the continent with forms thought to be more uniquely English. The inherited continental forms, according to English reformers, were largely products of Italy, the seat of the papal see and the source of England's religious corruptions as well as of its literary corruptions. In Roger Ascham's The Scholemaster (1570), perhaps the most influential Elizabethan handbook to suggest that English poets ought to purify English poetry by breaking with its Gothic past, Ascham argues that the corrupt Gothic traditions in the English canon are directly attributable to Italy. According to him, Gothic traditions were

brought first into Italie by Gothes and Hunnes,  
 whan all good verses and all good learning to were  
 destroyd by them, and after caryed into France and  
 Germanie, and at last receyved into England by men  
 of excellent wit in deede, but of small learning  
 and lesse judgement in that behalfe. (29-30)<sup>g</sup>

Ascham's account claims that Italy is the original source of the corruptions that beset English literature, just as Italy is the original source of the corrupt Catholic traditions that had supposedly infiltrated the English church. Had it not been for Italy, England would have inherited a pure church from the ancient apostles and pure literary traditions from ancient Rome and Greece.

In Ascham's literary reformation, he imposes conflicts between England's Catholic past and its Elizabethan "discovery" of more authentically English religious traditions onto literary history and used to contrast "true" classical versifying with what Ascham calls "rude beggerly ryming." His description of Italian influenced Gothic "ryming" as "rude" and "beggarly" hints at a link between these corrupt literary traditions and lowly vagabonds and rogues such as those the writer attacks in A Comparison; a

vagabond was technically a beggar apprehended wandering aimlessly with no obvious means of financial support, or soliciting alms without the license Elizabethan authorities issued to the "impotent" poor who were legitimately unable to work for a living.<sup>9</sup> Ascham tries to discredit "ryming" by associating it not only with corrupt Italianate Gothicism, but also with the lowly and impoverished masses. As in A Comparison, Ascham supports his argument by appealing to social and economic conflicts between England's higher and lower orders, contrasting the true English poet and patriot with the false rogue. In both cases the contrasts are largely rhetorical, even specious, because the end result is not to exclude but to include: the writer of A Comparison hopes to reach a wide audience of English men and women, arguing his case with all true English patriots and possibly reforming the rogues who err out of ignorance; Ascham and his fellow literary reformers hope to recover English literary traditions that earlier literati had excluded from the canon because they did not meet classical standards.

That the contrasts writers such as the writer of A Comparison set up are specious, and that many of the

reformation and recoveries men and women of sixteenth-century England used to define themselves and their nation were not English traditions at all, makes little difference to the process of nation formation. Many of the "recovered" literary traditions English poets claimed as English traditions are not English, but continental forms of writing, or even entirely new forms, such as the notoriously unAristotelian plays of sixteenth-century English playwrights.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, the reformers' quest for a uniquely English literary canon continued unabated. The traditions that men and women invent for themselves are as powerful as tradition itself, and the reforms they carry out in the name of tradition or custom are often innovation masquerading as rehabilitation. The English Reformation, for example, one of the most sweeping changes in English history, appears in contemporary apologies not as an innovation, but as a movement to restore an original, primitive, English church that Roman superstition and papal greed had corrupted.

Throughout this study, I am concerned with ideas, histories, and descriptions that are fictions, even when they most vehemently claim to be facts. Because a nation's

sense of its own identity is, as Anderson has pointed out, an essentially imaginary concept, the nation and its people always in some sense define themselves through fictions: people of nations define themselves as coherent, unified communities by telling themselves tales of a shared past, of political and cultural autonomy, of kinship or common birthright. While many of the tales nations tell themselves are fictions, these tales are also powerful shapers of reality.

The thin line that members of nations draw between national fictions and social and political realities is one of the most vexed issues in the study of nations and nation formation. On the one hand, we can define nations by looking at the material facts and concrete entities that have a visible impact on the social and political order: political institutions such as Parliament, government bureaucracies such as the courts, economic structures such as the banks, systems of taxation that bureaucrats use to distribute common funds throughout the nation, public printing offices. On the other hand, we can see that a national imaginary--charters, flags, maps, surveys, seals, personifications of the national character and other symbols

of the national bond--underpins these apparently material and concrete expressions of nationhood. The material aspects of nationhood and the national imaginary that explicates them are inextricably interdependent: the buildings and offices that make up the nation are incoherent without the ideologies that give them their reason for being. Unless there is an idea of mutual indebtedness and accountability among members of the community, for example, courts, banks, and systems of taxation inevitably fail, and the nation eventually dissolves.

The interdependency of material aspects of nationhood and the national imaginary raises many of the questions that continue to plague scholars of nations and nationalism. Not least among these are the questions scholars face when trying to define a nation and trace the processes of nation formation. The term "nation" is impossibly slippery. Scholars have alternatively defined it by pointing to the representatives of its material existence--political institutions and economic systems--or by pointing to its ideological existence--symbolic expressions of mutuality and shared purpose. Which is the more decisive marker of the nation? As a result of scholars' inability to establish a

priority of one aspect of the nation over the other, the process of nation formation is nearly impossible to trace. Which comes first, ideological awareness of the national community, or concrete representatives of the national bond?

Most modern theorists of nations and nation formation emphasize the material and concrete aspects of the nation over the ideological. This makes sense insofar as ideologies are more difficult to pin down. Also, these theorists have rightly pointed out that because nations are by definition collective phenomena, one lone person's expression of a national bond cannot make a nation. A government sponsored text exhorting fellow country men and women to join together in a common cause, an artistic rendering of shared national identity in the form of a flag or a poster, cannot make a nation, although these individual acts can certainly express a national ideology. To make a nation, the men and women who live in the country must believe that they share a common cause, must feel an affinity with the flag or be emotionally moved by the poster. The ideology of a nation must be compelling for a majority of the people who live in it.

The impact of this emphasis on the material aspects of

nationhood in scholarly work on nations and nationalism has been most profound on theories of nation formation. As a result of their focus on materiality, most modern political theorists and historians argue that nation formation started in Europe with the mechanization and bureaucratization of social and political systems following the Industrial Revolution. Walker Connor argues that since national consciousness is "a mass, not an elite phenomenon," and since mass culture did not reach its fullest development until travel, communication, and industry modernized, "claims that a nation existed prior to the late nineteenth century should be treated cautiously" (223-4). In Nations and Nationalism, Ernest Gellner similarly argues that national movements developed out of the combined effects of Enlightenment ideals and social dislocations that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. For him, national consciousness is the outcome of industrialism's standardization of everyday life through mechanized job sites, mass education, the proliferation of the products of mass culture, and the strong centrifugal forces improved communications and increased mobility exert.

Theorists such as Connor and Gellner have influenced

scholars of nations and nationalism to define nation-states as products of social and material forces we find only in highly industrialized societies. Following Gellner, some of the best studies of nations and nationalism, such as E. J. Hobsbawm's Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, accept the argument that national movements were impossible prior to at least the eighteenth century. Hobsbawm admits that "it would be pedantic to refuse [the label of modern patriotism] to Shakespeare's propagandist plays about English history" (75). He even devotes a chapter of his study to these earlier manifestations of popular patriotism, what he calls "proto nationalism." Nevertheless, he argues that since "we are not entitled to assume the groundlings [in Shakespeare's theater] read into [the plays] what we do," we must maintain the distinction between the patriotism of Shakespeare's plays and that of our own.

With the most recent resurgence of political communities claiming nationhood, scholars have become increasingly interested in exploring the origins of national movements, and correspondingly more willing to expand their studies of nations by examining the bonds that existed between members of the same country in earlier periods,

periods previously partitioned off as the prehistory of nations. The authors of several recent studies argue that the roots of modern national movements extend back to at least the sixteenth century. Linda Colley, Liah Greenfeld, Andrew Hadfield, Richard Helgerson, and Claire McEachern argue that national identities flourished in the early modern period. These critics understand national consciousness as a fundamentally ideological phenomenon, a product of shared histories, mythologies, and rhetoric as much as of the material forces of industrialization. Most of these studies draw on Anderson's Imagined Communities, an analysis of the development of national movements in the "Creole" states of the Americas, and in the older, traditionally dynastic Western countries. Anderson emphasizes the role of census taking, bureaucratic "pilgrimages" or business trips that regularly take officials outside their immediate areas of influence, and popular media such as newspapers, maps, and novels in the development of national identity. Anderson does not himself argue that national movements developed prior to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, but his definition of nations as "imagined communities" describes

national cohesiveness as a product not only of material bonds--shared infrastructures and joint economies--but also of ways of thought the members of nations develop and disseminate through word of mouth and shared texts. From this perspective, national identity no longer seems an exclusive feature of modernity.

In what follows, I define the nation as a self-identified collective entity, one that claims to represent the needs and interests of all the people who live within its boundaries. The majority of the people in the nation must feel that leaders and government officials take their needs and interests into account when they make important social and political decisions, regardless of whether leaders and government officials in fact take their needs and interests into account. Further, the nation must be understood as an entity separate from, and not always perfectly coincident with, state institutions and political leaders, although in many cases the nation may work in concert with these powers.

My definition of a nation very closely matches Anderson's definition of a nation as "an imagined community [...] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"

(6). As Anderson defines it, the nation is a community of people who imagine themselves linked in some kind of unique relationship. This community is limited insofar as the nation does not include all humanity in itself; it excludes some people in order to define its members as somehow separate and singularly connected to one another. It is sovereign because the nation imagines its people to be the rightful beneficiaries of all actions carried out in the name of the nation; theoretically, at least, the nation derives its authority from the people who live in it. This last addition to the definition of a nation explains why the nation is not always coincident with state institutions and political leaders. Sometimes the people of a nation decide that the state is not properly representing the needs and interests of the people, and they take action against it in the name of the nation.

In my own definition of a nation, however, I would add to Anderson's definition an addendum that stresses the fact that it is important to remember that imagination alone can not produce a nation; there must be a corresponding impact on reality and lived existence. A nation has material aspects as well as imaginary ones, concrete institutions

that give the collective bond solidity and permanence, as well as ideologies that give the collective bond structure and meaning.

Although I focus on the differences that divided the men and women of sixteenth-century England, and on the conflicts and contradictions that saturated nearly all of their cultural productions, I argue that there was a collective bond in sixteenth-century England similar to the one that modern scholars identify with nations. As Hobsbawm says, it would be pedantic to deny that there is a strong allegiance to England as a unique and sovereign entity--a nation--in the writings and other artifacts that survive from that period. In addition to evidence from readings of popular literature and plays from sixteenth-century England, the systems of mass communication that produced these broadsides, pamphlets, and plays provide other, more material, evidence supporting the argument that nations are not an exclusive feature of modern societies. Scholars who see mass culture as possible only after the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution do not fully take into account the impact of large-scale innovations introduced in the sixteenth century.

Sixteenth-century English men and women built a flourishing print industry, busy public theaters, and active traveling troupes. David Cressy shows that there were radical increases in literacy not only in London, but also in the English provinces (Literacy and the Social Order). Tessa Watt further points out that "available statistics on literacy should be taken as minimum figures, not as certainties" (7). In the early years of the reign of Edward VI, printers established presses in the provinces as well as in London (King, English Reformation Literature 101). Following the London Stationers' Company's virtual monopoly of print in the mid-sixteenth-century, enterprising entrepreneurs sold broadsides, pamphlets, and printed play texts in bookstalls, fairs, and markets, while traveling chapmen carried them out of London and the urban centers into provincial towns and villages. Watt's research on the distribution of broadside ballads provides evidence that "in England there can be no doubt that texts of one kind or another were familiar in all parts of the realm" (5-7). Popular print so saturated sixteenth-century England that English men and women were arguably able to imagine their community into existence without the use of telephones,

television, or mass transit.

Broadsides, pamphlets, and plays were probably the most important media for producing and reproducing the imaginary bonds that linked early modern English men and women together in common Englishness. Elizabethans sang, read, and passed around popular ballads and pamphlets in public meeting places such as ale houses and marketplaces, as well as in the houses of the middling sort of people and the gentry. Watt counts "roughly 3000 distinct ballads in the second half of the sixteenth-century, "the period when the register of printed materials the Stationers' Company published is most complete (7). One print run for an individual ballad produced about 200 copies. Laura Caroline Stevenson estimates that popular Elizabethan pamphlets sold on average 3750-4500 copies in ten years' time (12-3). The most popular might have sold as many as 27,000 in two decades of print runs. Stevenson further estimates that a single theatrical production in the public theaters may have attracted audiences of as many as 28,000 to 45,000 people (19). In London, craft guilds and other civic organizations performed Lord Mayor's pageants in the streets every year when the new Mayor took office--weather, plague, and

finances permitting.<sup>11</sup> As many citizens and visitors as could find a place in the crowded streets, windows, and rooftops of London attended these pageants. For those unable to attend the pageants, printers put out short pamphlets describing the celebrations. As these statistics demonstrate, there is an almost bewildering variety of sources, each one contributing its individual vision of England's people and England's political institutions.

With the flood of broadsides, pamphlets, and plays that followed print technology and increased literacy in sixteenth-century England, widely dissimilar and even opposed accounts of England's national character were inevitable. As appeals to national allegiance proliferated in England, so did differing visions of its government, its people, and its land. Because national identity is a collective concept, it is almost always imagined in a multitude of conflicted and contradictory ways. One person alone cannot imagine a nation into being, nor can a central state government establish the parameters and character of the nation and single-handedly force its vision unto its people. As a collective concept, a nation's understanding of itself and its people is usually messy, malleable, and

multifaceted.

The people who live in a nation are constantly in the process of defining and redefining themselves in relation to their concept of the nation. Different members of the nation create different visions according to their different purposes. This is especially true of the speakers, writers, and artists who try to represent the nation and its people in concrete forms that members of the nation can share and pass around, either by writing about it or by drawing it up as a map, flag, or some other symbol. Each one contributes to the collective concept, and each vies with the others to produce an authoritative description of the nation and its people. The result of this collective imagining is an entity that claims to be coherent and unified, but is made up of a tangle of descriptions, both factual and fictional, compatible and incompatible.

The writers and playwrights I discuss have different purposes for creating their images of the English nation and the English people, and, as a result, they imagine them differently. The writer of A Comparison, for example, appeals to national pride and national security so as to convince the members of his audience that they should

actively support the Anglo-French alliance against Spain. In order to make his argument compelling, he appeals to a unified audience of people who supposedly share his understanding of the political relationships between England, France, and Spain, and who believe both that the Anglo-French alliance is necessary to defend England against the military threat from Spain, and that they can help make the alliance a reality. He imagines the nation as made up of serious-minded people who are equally concerned to uphold their country's reputation and protect it, by force if necessary, against future harm.

In a play such as The Shoemaker's Holiday, however, Thomas Dekker's vision of English national identity and his reasons for appealing to it are less accessible than in the more overtly political argument of A Comparison. Dekker says in the preface to the printed edition of The Shoemaker's Holiday, issued in 1600, that he merely intends to entertain his audience with a "merrie-conceited comedie" in which "nothing is purposed but mirth." Critics of the play have noticed that the mirth in The Shoemaker's Holiday seems radically removed from the harsh realities of late sixteenth-century England, where economic hardship and

social discord were more prominent than the friendly industry that characterizes Dekker's English shoemakers. In his essay on The Shoemaker's Holiday, "Workshop and/as Playhouse," David Kastan argues that Dekker's play offers "utopian compensation for the alienation and fragmentation of Dekker's London" (151-63). As Kastan shows, rather than mirroring the realities of late sixteenth-century English society, Dekker's play offers an imaginary England epitomized in the plenitude and comradery of master shoemaker Simon Eyre's shoemaking shop. As social and political history, Dekker's play is misleading. As national history, however, Dekker's play adds one imaginary vision of England and the English people to the collectively defined concept that makes up the English nation.

It is this element of fantasy and unrealistic hyperbole in the patriotic sentiments of the sixteenth-century plays that makes Hobsbawm skeptical of the appeal of Shakespearean patriotism. Were the groundlings carried away by this exuberant burst of patriotic energy, or were they all too aware that wealthy men of high social standing had more cause to sing "God Save the Queen"?<sup>12</sup> Taken at its word, the exclusionary practices of Elizabethan England lend

credence to Hobsbawm's doubts as to the ability of even the most patriotic play to move the "groundlings" and create a real sense of comradery and commonalty in an Elizabethan playhouse. In the reading of A Comparison I end this chapter with, however, I hope to more fully explore the ways that Elizabethan writers, and perhaps their readers as well, circumvented the hierarchical distinctions of their day, and created a sense of shared purpose through subtle rhetorical ploys and outright contradiction.

A Comparison is an obviously biased anti-Spanish response to immediate crises in early modern European international affairs. In 1589, Spain was a powerful force to be reckoned with, although it was still struggling to reassert power over its rebellious subjects in the Netherlands. The wars of religion tore France apart, continuing until the Catholic League finally forced the French Protestant Huguenots to submit. England was politically and religiously more stable than France, still basking in the glow of its victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. Despite its recent military success against Spain, however, as a small and exposed island, England was always anxiously looking over its shoulder fearing that the Spanish

forces would recoup and renew the attack.

The writer of A Comparison's political or religious commitments stand at the intersection of English and French national concerns and Protestant religious concerns, demonstrating how flexible and multivalent political and religious commitments can be. An Anglo-French alliance would protect English and French national boundaries against Spanish aggressions, while also promising enhanced security for both countries' Protestant factions, who had reason to be afraid of a balance of powers that favored Catholic Spain. The writer's argument effortlessly encompasses and links a variety of positions on the political and religious spectrum, channeling them in one direction: according to him, all favor an Anglo-French alliance. In addition to gathering together a variety of political and religious positions, the writer potentially gathers together a varied reading audience. The English translation of the pamphlet was popular, going through two editions in one year, a rate of distribution unusual for print ephemera on current events (see Pollard and Redgrave 573 and Watt 86). Despite its expressed contempt for the "unseemly speeches" of artisan rogues, A Comparison caters to an inclusive audience of

savvy citizens able to understand--with the pamphleteer-- that England sometimes needs to make alliances with foreign powers--even powers, such as France, that had traditionally been England's enemies.

The writer's concerns are not particularly upper class: he argues in favor of policy making based on national welfare rather than on private or monarchical interests, and even unsettles the hierarchy established in the Elizabethan "Homily Against Disobedience and Wyful Rebellion," a homily read in all Elizabethan churches that based monarchical authority on the biblical commandment to honor parental authority. In A Comparison, the writer puts "the duty due unto our Countrie" above "any reverent respect of Parentes; or affection towards friendes, kinsfolkes, or allyes; or whatsoever else we holde deerest unto us" (A2). Indeed, this writer insists on rejecting all such self-serving distinctions in favor of a nation of English citizens all equally inspired by, as A Comparison says, "that courage which ought still remaine in our English harts" (A2 v).

The writer uses his narrative and rhetorical strategies to circumvent the strictures against public discussion of "state matters" that dominated sixteenth-century protocol.

The writer tries to legitimate his citizen audience by appealing to the elitist hierarchies that governed sixteenth-century English social and political systems. He claims that his audience rises above the lower strata of English society in order to insist that his audience, since it is "honest and civill," has a right to comment on political policy. Simply by its existence as a printed-- and, hence, widely available--pamphlet, A Comparison shows that it was possible for a writer to circumvent the strictures against public discussion of state matters.

Sixteenth-century English political theorists typically excluded the commoners who made up the lower strata of English society from the institutions that decided political policy. The majority of Englishmen and women theoretically had no official role in their country's political institutions. In one description of English society, De Republica Anglorum (1583), Thomas Smith divides the English people into four strata: "gentlemen," "citizens and burgesses," "yeomen," and "the fourth sort of people who do not rule" (46). The fourth group comprises the vast majority of English commoners, and these, Smith elaborates, "have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth, and no

account them is made of them but onelie to be ruled, not to rule other."

The only concession Smith makes in his description of England's silent majority is the added note: "yet they be not altogether neglected." By this, Smith means that rulers should not completely ignore the needs of the majority of English commoners, although the commoners themselves have no institutional right to voice those needs. In addition to excluding this fourth strata of English people from political institutions, Smith also describes his third strata of English people, "yeomen," the wealthier, landowning English commoners, as having only a very limited role in politics: "these tende their owne businesse, come not to meddle in publike matters and judgements but when they are called, and gladde when they are delivered thereof, are obedient to the gentlemen and rulers" (43-4).

In defining his "honest and civill" audience, the writer of A Comparison not only works against political theories that excluded the majority of English men and women from the institutions that decided political policy, but also against a system of censorship that barred most Englishmen and women from even commenting on political

issues. Only the most elite commoners had a seat and, consequently, a right to speak in Parliament. Crown and local authorities regularly punished commoners not sitting in Parliament--and at times even those sitting in Parliament--who were impertinent enough to comment on touchier issues of public policy. Although arguments periodically erupted in Parliament over freedom of speech for members of Parliament, these men based their right to free speech on their privileges as members of Parliament, and even they limited their right to free speech to times when Parliament was in session.<sup>13</sup> For those commoners not sitting in Parliament, censorship was the official policy. Laws suppressing unauthorized speakers and requiring public officials to license all publications and plays--enacted in 1551, 1553, and 1559--institutionalized censorship. These laws made it a punishable offense for any unauthorized person to openly discuss religious issues and matters of state in print or in informal public forums such as playhouses (Dutton 17-40).

As enacted in 1559, the law mandating censorship of plays leaves a loophole allowing "grave and discrete persons" to participate in discussions of religious issues

and government policy. The writer of A Comparison uses a similar loophole in order to legitimate his, and his readers', right to discuss current political issues. In A Comparison the writer justifies his right to discuss government policy by claiming to address only "honest and civill persons," the social counterparts of the censorship law's "grave and discreete persons." The phrase the writer of A Comparison uses to identify his audience is parallel to the wording of the 1559 censorship law:

And for the instruction to every of the sayde officers [of the state], her majestie doth likewise charge every one of them, as they will answere: that they permyt none [Interludes] to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the goveraunce of the estate of the common weale shalbe handled or treated, beyng no meete matters to be wrytten or treated upon, but by menne of auctoritie, learning and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience, but of grave and discreete persons. (qtd. in Dutton 22-3)

By labeling his audience "honest and civill persons," the writer of A Comparison identifies his readers as the same

audience of "grave and discrete persons" who, according to the censorship laws then in effect, could legally participate in current political commentary. The writer of A Comparison insists that his audience is the exception to the rule prohibiting English commoners from discussing religious issues and government policy.

Despite the writer of A Comparison's confident application of the exemption for "grave and discrete persons" to his own "honest and civill" audience, several material facts undercut his argument and expose the contradiction in his claim that he caters only to elite readers. First, since it is a printed pamphlet destined for public distribution, the writer of A Comparison would have had no way of selecting out his "honest and civill" audience. Once the printer paid his fee, the pamphlet was out of his hands. Further, the printer would have had everything to gain by distributing the pamphlet to as wide and varied an audience as possible. The booksellers and peddlers who marketed the pamphlet would also gain by distributing the pamphlet to as wide an audience as possible. The only control the writer, the printer, and the booksellers had over distribution of printed materials was

in pricing, and, as a relatively short pamphlet, A Comparison would not have been prohibitively expensive. In addition, as Watt points out about the broadsides she discusses, once purchased, many readers could pass the pamphlet around and share it with family, friends, and neighbors. Government officials had designed censorship laws in such a way as to identify and eliminate potentially controversial printed material *before* printing precisely because of this problem: there was no way to limit the distribution of texts once they were off the presses and into the marketplaces.

Along with these practical facts limiting the writer of A Comparison's ability to select an audience for his pamphlet, the ambiguity of the writer's terminology further clouds the issue and undermines his claim that his audience is made up of only a select few. The terms he uses to define his audience do not identify who is, and who is not, included in the writer's audience of "honest and civill persons." This ambiguity originates in the censorship law itself, since the law leaves a loophole excepting an undefined audience of "grave and discreete persons" from strict enforcement of the censorship laws. The writer of A

Comparison appropriates this ambiguity when he parallels the wording of the censorship law to define an authoritative audience for his political commentary. As with the legislators who drafted the 1559 censorship laws, the writer of A Comparison leaves the exact dimensions of his select audience open to interpretation. The writer of A Comparison appears to go further in defining his audience than the censorship law does because he contrasts his "honest and civill" readers, the equivalents of the censorship law's "grave and discrete persons," with the obviously unfit group of "Rogues." By setting his "honest and civill persons" alongside "Rogues," the writer tries to set a standard against which his audience can be measured: "Rogues" are the opposite of "honest and civill persons," and are therefore unfit for the measured thought required in political commentary; the remainder are those people who make up the writer's audience.

The remainder that makes up the writer's audience actually covers a very broad section of English society, commoners as well as gentry. Although the contrast the writer uses claims to offer criteria that sorts out the common "Rogues" from the "honest and civill persons," his

contrast is too ambiguous and too heavily weighted against the "Rogues" to cause even the most refractory commoner to count herself one of the "Rogues" rather than one of the "honest and civill persons". The writer's definitions are mutually determined: the "honest and civill persons" know themselves as such only in contrast with the undefined "Rogues." Although the writer lists certain occupations he associates with "Rogues"--"Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers"--his final slip into "Rogues and such kind of people" at the end of the list suggests that it is not occupation per se that determines whether a person is "honest and civill," but whether the person falls into the category of "Rogues" or not. This group of "Rogues" remains an elusive stereotype, never fleshed out beyond the implication that members of poorer and itinerant trades--such as peddlers, tinkers, and cobblers--are more likely to be "Rogues." "Rogues" threaten to slide into "honest and civill persons" since there is almost no way to distinguish one from the other. In the end, the writer's "honest and civill" audience knows itself as such only because of its willingness to embrace the language of the writer and reject the "rethoricke" of a conveniently oppositional group of "Rogues" (who are

presumably not reading the pamphlet).

The contradictions and ambiguities that the writer of A Comparison uses in defining--or in refusing to define--his audience allow him to create a unified audience that potentially includes all readers, following the letter of the censorship laws without reproducing the laws' exclusionary spirit. Theoretically the writer closes out supposedly unfit readers, but practically he brings together a varied paying audience and offends no one (except, perhaps, the peddlers, tinkers, and cobblers who take exception to his negative stereotyping of their trades). Although the pamphlet runs the risk of transgressing sixteenth-century ideas of decorum and social hierarchy by publicly addressing issues that common readers should not "meddle" in, it does so in a way that helps further the interests of not only its writer, but also its printer, its readers, and even the Crown.

The Crown may have preferred to curtail popular discussion of political issues, but the next best policy, and the only plausible policy, was to allow a limited public discussion that would, hopefully, sway popular opinion in the Crown's favor. The tactic the writer of A Comparison

uses--excluding "Rogues" from his audience in order to include a wider audience--is typical of the sixteenth-century English pamphlets and penny sheets on controversial religious and political issues that censors allowed into print. Writers invoke the elitist doctrine that English commoners should have no influence in public policy making, but do so not in order to reassert elitist presuppositions about the upper and lower social strata in sixteenth-century England or to enforce censorship laws, but to circumvent them.

In the case of A Comparison, Crown officials could hope for concrete political gains by publicizing the political issues discussed in the pamphlet. The writer argues that England needs an alliance with France in order to defend itself against the military strength of Spain and maintain a balance of powers in the western hemisphere. In the sixteenth century, particularly in the late sixteenth century when A Comparison was published, Spain was a very real threat to England's sovereignty. Only one year before, in 1588, English forces had defeated the Spanish Armada off the coast of England, with the help of a fortuitous storm at sea. Fearing another attack from Spain, many of Queen

Elizabeth's advisors argued, along with the writer of A Comparison, that an alliance with France was the obvious defense against further Spanish aggressions. In rejecting the chauvinistic "rethoricke" of the listed "Rogues," therefore, and arguing that "honest and civill persons" should set aside prejudices against the French, the writer of A Comparison hopes to gain public support for those factions among Queen Elizabeth's counsel who argued that an Anglo-French alliance best represented the interests of England.

The proposed alliance with France was highly controversial in late sixteenth-century England and the balance of powers between France and Spain a delicate political issue. Throughout the late sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth maintained an uneasy relationship with France by wooing the French Duke of Anjou, all the while placating Spanish ambassadors with reminders of England's past alliance with Spain. Her flirtations with the Duke of Anjou were enormously unpopular partly because the Duke of Anjou was Catholic and English Protestants were militantly against any alliance that might give a Catholic a claim to the English throne. Even the suggestion that Elizabeth

might marry the Duke of Anjou, as the historian R. B. Wernham says, "aroused vociferous and widespread opposition in England" (Before the Armada 362). Wernham describes the Crown's efforts to quell the public response to Elizabeth's proposed union with the Duke of Anjou as "[a]dmonitions, letters, pamphlets, poured in against it". In one of the more notorious punishments used to discourage critics of Queen Elizabeth's French policy, the writer John Stubbs had his right hand cut off for publishing his Discovery of a Gaping Gulf whereunto England is like to be swallowed by another french Marriage if the Lord forbid not the banes (1579).

Beyond Protestant fears of Anjou's Catholicism, the vast majority of English people objected to Elizabeth's marriage with Anjou simply because the English people were not eager to form an alliance with a country, such as France, that had been time out of mind an enemy. Even after Anjou's death in 1584 the Crown's attempts to solidify relations with France met with a cold welcome among many English men and women. Years of political poetry and propagandistic plays had ingrained popular prejudices against France in the English people. England's victory

over the French at the battle of Agincourt in the reign of Henry V was the subject of numerous poems and plays. These celebrations of England's victory over France had long symbolized the bravery of English soldiers.

Into this minefield of prejudices and political maneuvering, the writer of A Comparison inserts his own argument in favor of an Anglo-French alliance. In addressing the proposed Anglo-French alliance the printer, the translator, and the writer of A Comparison tread on potentially dangerous ground--recall the punishment authorities meted out to Stubbs. Given the political circumstances in the years surrounding the pamphlet's publication, however, censors most likely allowed the pamphlet because it supported the Crown's unpopular French policy and tried to influence popular opinion in the Crown's favor. Whereas Stubbs argued against Elizabeth's marriage to the Duke of Anjou, not only hurting relations with France but also touching on the weightier issue of the Queen's marriage, the writer of A Comparison argues in favor of the unpopular Anglo-French alliance and skirts more controversial matters such as the Queen's marriage prospects and her failure to produce a successor for the English

throne.

The writer of A Comparison also supports Crown interests by contributing to the energetic attacks on Spain that flooded the print market in the late sixteenth century, especially in the years surrounding Spain's attack on England in 1588. The writer says he wishes to "intreate of popular errors" by showing "the naturall amitie which is betweene these two Nations," England and France (B2 v-B4 v). He claims, in addition, to expose what he calls Spain's "vile viliacquerie," asking "I pray you what humanitie, what faith, what courtesie, what modestie, and civilitie, may wee thinke to finde amongst" the Spanish people, whom he colorfully calls "this scumme of Barbarians" (D2). The writer's goal is to inspire popular support for the war against Spain, as well as to convince readers that the alliance with France is necessary for England's continued safety.

The writer's attack on Spain is lively--livelier even than the "unseemely speeches" the writer attacks as being the "rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues and such kind of people." It is so lively that it is unclear whether his main purpose in writing the pamphlet is to

convince readers to favor the Anglo-French alliance, or to whip up popular support for the war against Spain. The urgency of the writer's attack on Spain nearly overwhelms his argument for an Anglo-French alliance. In the translator's preface to the pamphlet, Robert Ashley says that he has decided to publish his translation of the pamphlet and make it accessible to an unlearned audience, "stirr[ing] up" the courage in "English harts,"

that we do not degenerate from our noble Progenitors, but with an earnest emulation followe those happie footsteps of our famous forefathers: and learne to despise those magnificent Dom Diegos and Spanish Cavalieros. (A2 v-A3)

At the time the pamphlet appeared, in 1589, there were rumors that the Spanish were rebuilding their fleet for another attack on England. Despite the continued threat from Spain, however, popular support of the war against Spain was fading after many months of taxes and forced military duty. Wernham cites an entry in the State Papers dated July 18, 1588, in which Secretary of State William Cecil, Lord Burghley says, "I see a general murmur of people and discontented people will increase to the comfort of the

enemy" (Elizabethan State Papers, Domestic 212.63, qtd. in Wernham, Before the Armada 404).

In 1589, there was a pressing need for popular support of the continued war efforts and for alliances that would strengthen England's system of defense. Thus, while the writer of A Comparison may loftily claim that he addresses only the more elite of its readers, all parties stand to benefit if the pamphlet reaches a wide range of not so elite readers. The printer makes more money, the readers vicariously participate in the ongoing discussion over wartime strategies, and the Crown gets favorable publicity for its war against Spain and its proposed Anglo-French alliance.

As in the case of A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nations, many sixteenth-century English writers, playwrights, and speakers managed to initiate public discussions of the forbidden topics of religion and government policy, either surreptitiously or with the censors' tacit approval. Writers were able to get around the laws prohibiting public commentary of religion and government policy by using "a system of communication in which ambiguity becomes a creative and necessary

instrument," as Annabel Patterson says in her study of censorship in sixteenth-century England, Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England (11). Also, as Richard Dutton convincingly argues in his study of Elizabethan control of the theater, Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama, "there must have been a degree of complicity, as much as of antagonism, between the actors and those in power over them; they were mutually useful to one another" (25). Plays and printed texts could support the policies of those in power as well as undermine them. The Crown and its officials sometimes benefitted from public discussion of political issues, and it was impractical, even impossible, to censor all plays and publications. For these reasons, it made sense for Crown officials to allow greater flexibility than the censorship laws seem to allow for. Elizabethan authorities usually punished writers and playwrights only when they openly criticized an especially controversial state policy.

A Comparison reveals the extent to which popular literature from sixteenth-century England regularly violated the censorship laws and Thomas Smith's admonition that

commoners should not "meddle in publike matters and judgements," a standard political dictum in his day. The traditional social hierarchy and the censorship laws that supported it unequivocally denied commoners the right to address sensitive state matters in print. Yet, book sellers' stalls and peddlers' packs made many cheap pamphlets and penny ballads on current political problems available to ordinary commoners. Smith's added aside, "Yet they [the commoners] be not altogether neglected," becomes important given the realities of sixteenth-century society.

Sixteenth-century officials not only found that it was impossible to strictly enforce censorship laws, but also found that printed materials could help gain the cooperation and support of English commoners. To be effective, sixteenth-century governments needed the aid of commoners. Sixteenth-century England had no standing army; when needed, the army, as with the police force used for day-to-day law enforcement, was drawn from civilians of all social strata, including commoners. Since local officials were responsible for enforcement of laws and implementation of Crown policies, the ways that laws were--or were not--enforced often reflected the interests of local politicians as much

as the interests of the Crown.

If local officials shirked their duties, the Crown was virtually at the mercy of its subjects. Local officials could, if they chose, only partially enforce unfavorable policies, or even ignore them altogether. Slow communication and the lack of efficient transportation provided protection and alibis for truant officials. Many officials claimed that they had not received orders, or that the orders were imperfectly received. Sixteenth-century governments did not have the technologies that modern governments use in policing their states. Further, the Crown had no regular income except what little it earned from rent paid on its lands. Extra expenses--anything above daily expenditures for maintenance--had to be met with a subsidy voted on in Parliament. As with all government orders, local officials implemented these subsidies and collected the money Parliament voted on. If the subsidy was unpopular, the money would trickle all the more slowly into Crown coffers. The practical difficulties in sixteenth-century government ensured that the complicity Dutton describes in the relationship between censors and playwrights extended to the relationship between central

government, petty officials, and the commoners they ruled. Thus, while political theory factored commoners out of government, expedience factored them back in.

The disparity between theory and practice in the political roles of English commoners was a recognized fact of sixteenth-century government. The same contradictions that led sixteenth-century English writers to scorn common "Rogues" even as they catered to a common audience also created fissures in descriptions of the elitist hierarchies that governed sixteenth-century social and political institutions. For example, although in De Republica Anglorum Thomas Smith flatly states that the lowest strata of English commoners "have no voice nor authorities in our common wealth, and no account is made of them but onelie to be ruled," he also includes a lengthy encomium to English yeomen, the "better sort" of commoners. This encomium to yeomen has no parallel in Smith's description of England's upper strata. Following brief descriptions of the upper strata of English society--the lords and wealthy citizens who sit in Parliament--Smith's De Republica Anglorum has a lengthy passage proving that common yeomen "have the greatest charge and doings in the common wealth, or rather

are more travailed to serve in it than the rest" (42).

"These are they," proclaims Smith, "which in the old world gat that honour to Englande" (44). Smith insists that although yeomen do not hold political office or participate in governing institutions, their day-to-day activities, "grasing, frequenting of markettes, and keeping servauntes not idle," benefit the common wealth more than the activities of the upper strata who control political institutions (42-3).

Smith's description of English commoners, grandiose as it is, is fraught with all the tensions present in the writer of A Comparison's description of his "honest and civill" audience. Smith gives a more concrete definition of his praiseworthy English commoners than either the writer of A Comparison or the men who wrote the 1558 censorship law, specifically identifying the yeoman as a person who "may dispend of his owne free lande in yerely revenue to the summe of xl. s. sterling." However, while he names a specific yearly income for his "better sort" of commoner, Smith's definition also relies on the same unstable contrast found in A Comparison and the censorship laws. English yeomen, Smith says, are not only commoners who have a

respectable income, but are also "such as be exempted out of the number of the rascabilitie of the popular" (42-3). In other words, they are commoners who are not "Rogues."

Smith's description of the English yeomen balances unsteadily between elitist accounts of the social and political hierarchy that deny commoners any importance at all, and accounts that give commoners credit as the arbiters of day-to-day social and political life. In Smith's account the commoners have no real political power, since they have no role in governing institutions; yet, according to Smith, they nevertheless control the everyday activities necessary to the continuance of the commonwealth. Smith praises them, but carefully tempers his praise. He adds to the overall contradictoriness of his encomium to commoners by noting that their honor chiefly comes:

not that either for witte, conduction, or for power they are or were ever to be compared to the gentlemen, but because they be so manie in number, so obedient at the Lordes call, so strong of bodie, so heard to endure paine, so couragious to adventure with their Lorde or Captaine going with, or before them. (43-4)

Here, Smith's praise of English commoners seems to boil down to the simple claim that they excel in their obedience to the upper strata, who controlled England's political institutions. However, the eloquence of his earlier defense of English yeomen and the prominence he gives them in his description of the commonwealth result in a contradiction that places political power in the hands of English commoners even as it moves the centers of power out of their reach.

Smith's rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion reflects a very real instability in the supposedly sharp distinctions between the upper and lower strata of Elizabethan society, an instability that increased in the late sixteenth century when England faced its first prospect of war after twenty years of relative peace. Christopher Hill points out that "in the exceptional circumstances of 1588 military training was extended to the whole settled population" for the first time (The World Turned Upside Down 19). The threat of war was a constant concern in England from 1585 to the end of Elizabeth's reign. The war effort required taxes in excess of the normal burden. In addition to supporting the war effort, English commons were hit with several bad harvests

in a row. In response to these pressures, the popular presses flooded the market with ballads, pamphlets, and plays that carefully laid out the political crises of the day for ordinary men and women.

In the late sixteenth century, cheap print informed the populace, provided a forum for public discussion of issues that concerned England's citizens, and it created a sense of shared purpose among English men and women from geographically distant provinces and widely divergent social and economic backgrounds. Penny ballads described battles at sea; skirmishes in the Netherlands; earthquakes, fires, and floods in provincial towns and villages; miraculous births and other marvels; obituaries; and other ephemera (See Livingston). These cheap news bites drew England's far flung villages together by encouraging English men and women to share in the victories and hardships experienced by their compatriots in distant provinces. They also eased the work of England's growing bureaucracy, helping to mobilize troops, stoke popular patriotism during the war years, and aid charitable collections for towns and villages that had suffered disasters.

This burst of print activity was not simply a reaction

to crisis; it followed technological improvements that made printed ephemera more profitable; increases in literacy that enlarged the reading public; and, presumably, through cause and effect, it created a growing sense that the public had both an interest in and a role in the shifting fortunes of England's population as a whole: elite and common, urban and rural alike. And if this cheap print asked commoners to support government policy, acting at times as a tool of the state, in asking support it had also to give some of its power away: simply by indicating that the commoners were important to the state's political continuance, the state conceded that its continuance depended, at least in part, on commoners. Smith was wrong. For "witte," "conduction," and "power" the commoners of England often compared themselves to gentlemen in the sixteenth century; also, they were not always "obedient at the Lordes call;" because of this, the English government frequently found that it had to cater to popular opinion if it were to put its political policies into practice.

In the next chapter, I will examine some of the problems involved in defining a popular literary canon for sixteenth-century England. Based on numbers of editions, De

Republica Anglorum was a popular text--this in spite of the fact that Smith's usually dry discussions of English political theory, legal and bureaucratic history violate our sense of the pace and entertainment value of popular texts. Smith gives us anything but the "mirth" Dekker gives us in his popular entertainments. Yet, both Smith and Dekker arguably fall into the category of popular literature, whether we define popularity by numbers of editions, as Stevenson and Watt do, or whether we define it, as Burke does, by relating it to works we can read as championing the "little tradition" of English commoners over the "big tradition" of scholars and gentlemen and women.<sup>14</sup>

Another complication involved in defining a canon of popular literature, in addition to the fact that we sometimes find we must include works that seem dry, slow paced, or otherwise deserving of popular disregard, is the fact that sixteenth-century English readers often enlisted elite texts and texts printed as government propaganda for popular causes--causes very different from the ones their original readers, writers, and printers expected them to serve. In the early and mid-sixteenth century, scholars cited Chaucer, the premier English writer, in support of

Henry VIII's state centered government and top down Reformation of the English church. In Henrician editions of Chaucer's works, Chaucer became an avatar of popular religion and the symbolic property of the godly English populace and popular press. That elite, originally courtly, texts such as those Chaucer wrote could metamorphose into popular culture, and then back into elite, demonstrates the extent to which literary texts shifted, becoming available for many different political programmes. The many different appropriations of Chaucer's texts show how mixed even seemingly unmoveable or unequivocal literary categories could be in sixteenth-century England: Chaucer's texts moved between radically opposed poles, at times cited as popular literature and other times as elite, courtly literature.

I have argued above that popular culture and the populace in Elizabethan England were, paradoxically, both the basis for national cohesiveness and, as Helgerson says, the "dark other" that needed to be exorcised in order for the nation to cohere. The problem of the chapter that follows lies in determining the difference between this first vision of popular culture and the second--between "the language of honest and civill persons" and the "rethoricke"

the writer of A Comparison and Thomas Smith associate with "Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues and such kind of people" or "the rascabilitie of the popular." I will trace the vicissitudes of the popular and its place in the English literary canon by looking through the lens of Chaucer's works, showing the ways that popular, as well as scholarly and courtly, readers appropriated and absorbed his works. These readers inducted his works into a developing canon of popular works that they could then hail as the ordinary, common texts all England's people could share and appreciate.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. For discussions of cobbler's reputations for radicalism in early modern Europe, see Burke 38; Hobsbawm, "Political Shoemakers" and Primitive Rebels 109; the introduction to Reay; and Zagorin.
2. In selecting literary works among the most popular of their time, I am indebted to Stevenson's criteria for selecting popular Elizabethan works. Stevenson does not include A Comparison in her list of popular Elizabethan works. However, A Comparison was popular enough for the printer to put out two translations. John Wolfe published the French original, Discours Politique, tres-excellent pour temps present, in 1588; the first English translation, A Politike Discourse most excellent for this time present early in 1589; and A Comparison shortly afterward in 1589. Pollard and Redgrave say the second translation was necessary because the pamphlet was so popular that by April of 1589, when the second translation appears in the Stationers' Register, "the stock of its copies was nearly exhausted" (see Pollard and Redgrave entries #13100.5, #13101, #13102). Watt remarks that news bites on current affairs typically went through only one edition (82-6). That A Comparison went through more than one edition is noteworthy.
3. Most book length studies of popular culture cover vast geographical areas, broad sweeps of time, and a wide variety of genres and subject matter. Of these wide ranging studies, I am most indebted to Burke.
4. Davis' work on charivari and ritual misrule in early modern France is an excellent example of local study of popular culture. Throughout Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, Burke notes the importance of local variation in popular culture and the need for further study of local traditions.
5. Keen shows how sixteenth-century English writers transform Robin Hood from a medieval bandit into a noble patriot of England's green world. Throughout The Outlaws of Medieval Legend, Keen laments the fact that the majority of

extant Robin Hood legends are from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when "we find him becoming in tradition an outlawed Earl of Huntingdon, or a national hero who saves besieged London from a foreign enemy" (100). Munday's Robert Earl of Huntingdon (in collaboration with Chettle, 1598), The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon (1600) and The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon (1601) give Robin Hood an aristocratic title and make him a zealous English patriot.

6. See Hill's "The Many-Headed Monster in Late Tudor and Early Stuart Political Thinking."

7. Helgerson suggests that playwrights such as Jonson so vocally denounce the lower strata because their own "uncertainty of gentle status [...] may have lent special urgency to their claims" (Forms of Nationhood 200).

8. In Forms of Nationhood, Helgerson points out Elizabethans' contrasts between Gothic literary traditions and classical traditions owes much to Ascham's The Scholemaster (29-31).

9. Beier's is the most complete analysis of Elizabethan attitudes about vagrancy. Palliser includes a survey of Elizabethan poor relief (118-129).

10. Hadfield describes how English poets integrated the originally Italian sonnet into the English literary canon.

11. For descriptions of Lord Mayors' pageants and other London pageants, see Bergeron and Withington.

12. How the groundlings read Shakespeare is the subject of numerous studies. Tennenhouse reads the Shakespearean stage as a showcase for state propaganda, lending credence to Hobsbawm's fear that these plays do not represent the view of the "groundlings" in the theater. On the other hand, Patterson argues in Shakespeare and the Popular Voice that the Shakespearean stage was one of the means by which groundlings could have their say.

13. See Neale, "The Commons' Privilege of Free Speech in Parliament."

14. Burke follows anthropologist Robert Redfield in identifying popular culture with the "little tradition" practiced by nonelite, usually illiterate, men and women.

## Chapter Two

### Spenser's "Dan Chaucer, well of Englishe undefyled" and the Elizabethan Popular Press

The narrator of an anonymous sixteenth-century pamphlet entitled Greene's Vision (1592) reports how, in his dying moments, popular English writer Robert Greene confronted the spirits of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, two medieval English writers whose works sixteenth-century English readers and writers knew well. In Greene's vision, these two worthies initiate a lengthy debate over the value of Greene's vast corpus of popular printed literature, Chaucer arguing in Greene's favor, and Gower against. As they debate the merits of Greene's writings, Chaucer and Gower reveal two very different conceptions of the appropriate style and purpose of literature. Since these two writers are, as the narrator of Greene's Vision points out, "the tipes of Englands excellence for Poetry," their differences represent conflicts central to sixteenth-century conceptions of the English literary canon (212). For the narrator of Greene's Vision at least, these differences threaten to undermine the very foundation of the English literary canon. Chaucer, who is described as "blithe and merry," maintains that Greene's writings "serve as well to suppressse vanity,

as they seem to import wantonnes" (209; 218). "A pleasant vaine," according to Chaucer, "quips as nigh the quicke as a graver invective" (219). Gower, a "grave, sterne and grim" figure, insists, to the contrary, that writers should be "measured by the gravity of their sayings, not the wantonness of their sentences" (210; 216). "Had he not better," asks Gower, "have discovered his principles in some grave sort" (220)? Gower is the solemn, clerkly writer who edifies his readers; Chaucer, however, entertains his audience with pleasant tales, amorous lyrics, and witty but caustic satires.

The characters of Chaucer and Gower in Greene's Vision give concrete form to the ongoing debate in sixteenth-century England over the appropriate style and purpose of literature. This debate had roots extending back into the English Middle Ages of Chaucer and Gower's own lifetimes, but, for sixteenth-century readers and writers, the issues in the debate seemed to take on new urgency as the rapidly expanding market for print literature transformed the English literary canon. H. S. Bennett estimates based on extant titles that more than half again as many print works appeared 1580 to 1603 as in 1558 to 1579. Print titles

leapt from 2760 titles in the earlier period to 4370 in the later (269). The increasing popularity of printed texts in the sixteenth century opened the English literary canon to new kinds of literature and new kinds of writers, and also encouraged new readings of old writers. Printed editions of works by revered English writers such as Chaucer appeared alongside new works by writers who, like Robert Greene, were eager to make money and names for themselves as entertainers in the expanding book market. These new printed texts and competing interpretations of works by writers who formed the core of the English literary canon helped create an increasingly complex canon of English letters. New editions and new interpretations of renowned English writers such as Chaucer and Gower, "the tipes of Englands excellence for Poetry," resulted in innumerable visions and revisions of England's cultural identity in the sixteenth century.

The version of Chaucer the writer presents in Greene's Vision is strikingly different from the Chaucer we study today. Considering Chaucer's solidly canonical position in twentieth-century literary scholarship, and measured by twentieth-century notions of the style and purpose of literature, the portrait of Chaucer the writer paints in

Greene's Vision seems incongruous, an oddity of an overly zealous Elizabethan moralizer. Chaucer offends the writer of Greene's Vision not simply because his works are sometimes amorous or satirical--we might be able to understand the Elizabethan moralizer's distrust of the obviously amorous and satirical elements in Chaucer's works--but because they are light reading, popular in the worst sense of the word. The writer allies Chaucer with Robert Greene, a university wit turned hack and a hopelessly prodigal son of the Elizabethan popular press.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the Chaucer of twentieth-century literary scholars is a courtly writer, a poet of wealth and high social standing, a gentleman, a scholar, and a shrewd judge of character. He is sometimes bawdy, often satirical, but he is certainly not light reading and usually not popular reading.

In addition to presenting us with a Chaucer whose style and purpose are strikingly incongruous when we compare him with the Chaucer we know from twentieth-century scholarship, Greene's Vision establishes a puzzlingly anachronistic link between Chaucer and the Elizabethan popular press. According to the writer, Chaucer is an early English popular

writer who foreshadows the innovations of print technology. Chaucer's quips and merriment, the writer suggests, cater to the kind of lowbrow readers who more than a century later will be frequenting the peddlers' packs and bookstalls print writers such as Greene will supply. Yet, Chaucer died in 1400, one hundred and fifty years before Greene was born and seventy-six years before William Caxton set up the first printing press in England. Chaucer should thus be firmly ensconced in the canon of writers who circulated their works privately, in manuscript, among a select coterie of royalty and courtiers.

Our twentieth-century Chaucer is a close ancestor of Edmund Spenser's more courtly Chaucer, the "well of Englishe undefyled" from the Faerie Queene (1590-96), Book 4, Canto 2. This Chaucer seems at first glance far removed from the Chaucer of Greene's Vision, and even further removed from the kind of popularity the writer of A Comparison (1589) criticizes under the rubric of "the rethoricke of Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues," the kind of popular literature I focus on in this study. However far apart they may seem, these different visions of Chaucer coexist in sixteenth-century English commentaries on Chaucer. Elizabethans--

including Spenser--read Chaucer simultaneously as court poet, scholar of classical and continental literature, "well of Englishe undefyled," social and political reformer, popular patriot, "pleasant" entertainer, hack writer, and as common rogue.

Although Chaucer was a court poet and a classical scholar, closely associated with the courtly love tradition and early English translations of classical and continental writing, sixteenth-century readers also knew him as the author of The Plowman's Tale, The Pilgrim's Tale, and Jack Up Lande, biting satires written in what critics of Reformation literature call the Protestant plain style.<sup>2</sup> These virulent attacks on Church abuses gained Chaucer a reputation as an early and especially revered Church reformer, and also branded him a radical anti-authoritarian whose racy satiric style "quips as nigh the quicke as a graver invective," as Chaucer's spokesperson says in Greene's Vision (1592). Out of this exegetical tradition, English readers and writers developed for Chaucer a full-blown reputation as a popular writer and a spokesperson for the English commoners. The plain style heroes of the pseudo-Chaucerian satires are unpretentious truth tellers of

humble origin. The Plowman's Tale is a frame tale in which a plowman, a pilgrim in the Canterbury Tales, describes his religious beliefs via a debate between a godly pelican and a griffin who represents the worldly Church of the pope. Jack Up Lande is a tract in which an "upland" country plowman attacks worldly and arrogant members of the Catholic religious orders. Sixteenth-century commentators describe the lost Pilgrim's Tale as a satire of Church abuses with a lowly speaker so blunt in his criticisms that editors omitted it from early editions of Chaucer's Works.<sup>3</sup> Based on the pseudo-Chauceriana's lowly satiric voices and their ostensibly anti-Catholic and anti-hierarchical sentiments, sixteenth-century commentators claimed that England's treasured national writer was an early proto-Protestant reformer who not only opposed Catholic tyrannies, but also satirized abuses of rank of all kinds and championed the cause of the commoners of England.

As a result of Chaucer's reforming reputation, sixteenth-century English readers and writers could choose between very different images of the native tradition as epitomized by Chaucer. For some, he was the elite, courtly poet whose style influenced later courtier poets such as

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt.<sup>4</sup> These humanists and courtier poets placed the learned and courtly images of Chaucer at the core of an English literary canon modeled on classical writers and masterpieces of early continental scholarship. Their elite, manuscript-identified versions of Chaucer upheld classical and continental standards and catered to England's learned few. For other readers, he was the popular writer par excellence and a plainspoken reformer writing on behalf of English commoners. Reformers used Chaucerian satire and plain style tracts to reach wide audiences of the faithful. Less scrupulous printers and editors appealed to the growing audience for cheap print, issuing scurrilous invectives, loose imitations of Chaucerian fabliaux, and colorful dream visions. These last works were ephemera and light reading of the kind that, according to the narrator of Greene's Vision, contributed to the downfall of writers such as Robert Greene and the dissolution of the less eminent readership he and his ilk catered to.

Editors and printers of early editions of the apocryphal plowman satires and Chaucer's collected Works issued them as Reformation propaganda, intending to garner

popular support for the Crown's break with papal Rome. At the height of the English Reformation, in 1535 and 1545, Thomas Godfray printed two separate editions of The Plowman's Tale, one folio and the other octavo. The applicability of Godfray's editions of The Plowman's Tale to Reformation England is readily apparent. The speaker in the tale attacks Catholic ritual and the gorgeous vestments of Catholic priests, as did advocates of the English Reformation: the tale's speaker scorns Catholicism's ritual "candles queynte and belles clynke" and priests' garments "golden gyrdles great and small" (Aii v; Av). Alongside Godfray's editions of The Plowman's Tale, readers could place the octavo edition of Jack Up Lande which John Gough issued between 1536 and 1540. Jack Up Lande's plowman hero also attacks abuses of religion strikingly similar to English reformers' complaints against the Catholic Church. The speaker in Jack Up Lande catalogs the misdemeanors of wandering friars and members of the Catholic religious orders, and argues that their orders lack scriptural authenticity. The speaker's appeal to scripture as the only acceptable guiding force behind Church structure was a tenet underlying many reformers' attacks on Catholic

organizations. In good Reformation fashion, the speaker of Jack Up Lande identifies his enemies with "Antichryst and his disciples" (Ai v).

Pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires infiltrated Reformation-inspired editions of Chaucer's Works in addition to appearing in individual volumes. In 1542, William Thynne integrated The Plowman's Tale into the second edition of Chaucer's Works, collating it into The Canterbury Tales. Thynne's 1532 and 1542 editions of Chaucer's Works had monarchic auspices, solidifying the link between Chaucer and King Henry VIII's program for religious reform. The preface by Sir Brian Tuke that begins Thynne's editions offer support for Henry VIII's supremacy over the English Church and Henry's refusal to subordinate himself to the pope. Tuke hails Henry VIII as "Most gracious / victorious / and of god most electe" (Geoffrey Chaucer: The Works 1532 Aiii).<sup>5</sup> Thynne's son Francis claims his father put together the edition in collaboration with Henry VIII, "beinge in great favore with his prince, [as manye yet lyvinge canne testyfy,)" [sic] (Animadversions 6). Andrew Wawn suggests that editors and printers who incorporated The Plowman's Tale into the Chaucer canon were part of the "Cromwellian

propagandist organization in the 1530s" ("The Genesis of The Plowman's Tale" 36). Wawn argues that Thomas Godfray, the printer responsible for the editions of The Plowman's Tale in 1535 and 1545 and for the first edition of Chaucer's collected Works in 1532, "was directly involved in the printing of Henrician propaganda" ("Chaucer, The Plowman's Tale and Reformation Propaganda 177). Wawn gives evidence showing that Godfray may have worked closely with the king's printer, Thomas Berthelet, perhaps even handling printing jobs for him. Whether Henry VIII directly employed Godfray or not, Godfray's editions of the pseudo-Chauceriana came out cannily timed to coincide with Henry's push toward Reformation.<sup>6</sup>

Despite The Plowman's Tale's monarchic auspices, both text and context have confusing, paradoxical pretensions to the popular. The tale addresses an imagined audience of simple truth seekers who, like the plowman, reject the pomp of pre-Reformation England. Although the actual audience for the tale as printed in the Works would have had to cover the price of Godfray's expensive folio volumes, the volumes' prefatory material and the tale itself indicate an audience willing to identify with the hero's claim that lowliness is

next to godliness. The Plowman's Tale opposes the godly pelican "withouten pryde" with a "grimme" griffon the speaker says "dyd plede ou [sic] the Popes syde" (Aiv). The pelican, according to the plowman, preached "of mercy and mekenesse / And sayd that Chryste so gan us teache" (Aiv). The pelican's followers "ben poore and pale [...] arayed all for the peace" (Aiii v). On the other side, the plowman describes the griffon and his followers, "Popes, cardynals and prelates" who live worldly lives, "paynted, portered al in pryde" (Aiii v; Av). Reformation propagandists clearly chose The Plowman's Tale, along with Jack Up Lande, because these tales sorted well with reformer's claims that the godly should live humble lives.<sup>7</sup> The Christ-like pelican in The Plowman's Tale argues, "Prestes, Peters successors / Beth lowlyche and of lowe degree / And usen none erthly honours" (Aiv-Aiv v).

The pelican's attack on the pope and his followers in The Plowman's Tale supports Henry VIII in his decision to break with Rome and assert his supremacy over the Church of England. The pelican explicitly attacks "The prude Pope" for his mismanagement of the Church, and asks the "kynge and lordes now thys amende" (Ci v). Thus far, the pelican's

argument suggests that the king should have supreme rule, especially over the pope. However, in supporting the "poore and pale" who are "lowlyche and of lowe degree" against the pope and his representatives, the pelican not only undercuts the pope's position of authority, but also suggests that the king should rule in consultation with godly commoners. The pelican sadly comments,

Wonder is, that the parlyamente  
 And all the lordes of thys londe  
 Nere to taken so lytell entente  
 To helpe the people out of her honde  
 For they ben harder in theyr bonde  
 Worse beate, and better brende  
 Than to the kynge is understande. (Ci)

The pelican implies that the king and lords need the aid of humble preachers and the poor in order to understand and correct the vices that have taken hold of their society. In addition, since the pelican attacks all worldly authorities who tyrannize the poor and oppressed, its criticisms as easily apply to tyrannies on the part of the king and his advisors as to tyrannies of the pope and his representatives. The pelican criticizes all "Christes

mynisters" who "rulen all in robberye [...] / Attyred all in tyrannye" (Avi v). The refrain of The Plowman's Tale, "All such falshed moste nede fal," applies not only to the pope's followers, but also to those among the king's ministers who let avarice and love of worldly power overtake them (Av).

Henry VIII and his advisors could read The Plowman's Tale as bolstering the Crown's supremacy over an ideally humble and unworldly clergy; however, the reformers he threw in his lot with could read in the image of the plowman a system that promises to disseminate power among the humble sowers of god's seed. Texts such as the Henrician pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale and its many spin-offs in the reign of King Edward VI simultaneously bolstered and undercut Tudor attempts to consolidate power in the English monarchy. As staples of English Reformation literature, these texts built into Henrician and Edwardian Reformation narratives a popular element that at times gave verisimilitude to the Crown's claim that it ruled by popular acclaim, and at other times came back to haunt it.<sup>8</sup> Because the texts alternatively support a commitment to Crown and to commons, and support reformers' wishes to define the Reformation as a popular movement, they are easy pawns for

reformers with widely different goals. Reformers unhappy with the Crown's and Parliament's handling of the religious Reformation had recourse to the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman's sad suggestion that the king and his advisors may need humble plowmen's help in ensuring religious integrity and social justice.

Along with the tales' reforming politics, the plain style satiric writing in The Plowman's Tale and Jack Up Lande had much to do with Chaucer's reputation as a popular writer. As literary defenders of social and political reform, reformers claim Chaucer's plowmen speak in the voices of the poor people of England. They insist that lowly readers find the Chaucerian plowmen's simple, unornamented prose and poetry accessible and appealing. The tracts' reforming politics, they claim, are panaceas for social ills afflicting the poor. Sixteenth-century plain style writers follow the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman tracts, addressing their suggestions for social and political reform to the same audience of simple readers. The writer of an Edwardian plowman tract, I Playne Piers Which Can Not Flatter (1550?), emphasizes the simplicity of the plowman's reforming style, announcing on the title page "My speche is

fowlle / yet marke the matter."<sup>9</sup> The plowman speaker of I Playne Piers claims to speak as and for simple commoners, whose speech may not be aureate, but whose common sense surpasses book learned wisdom. A later Elizabethan religious reformer, writing under the pen name Martin Marprelate, acknowledges the plowman's stylistic as well as topical influence when he reprints the plain style plowman tract I Playne Piers in 1589 as his "Gransier."

Marprelate, notorious for his quipping style, reinforces his connections to the plowman's plain style of writing by claiming in his Epitome that his style shows "I am plaine / I must needs call a Spade a Spade / a Pope a Pope" (2). Along with Chaucer, these writers of the Protestant plain style gain associations with simple commoners. Their audiences are the readers the plowman's reforming instincts supposedly speak to--the social equivalents of the plowman's religious, political, and stylistic devices--the common people of England.

Sixteenth-century pseudo-Chaucerian works were popular in terms of numbers of editions as well as in their imaginative identification with English commoners. The 1542 version of Chaucer's Works that included The Plowman's Tale

went through at least six printings in Henry VIII's and Edward VI's reigns, with more editions to follow in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>10</sup> Godfray's and Gough's separate octavo editions of The Plowman's Tale and Jack Up Lande made the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires available in cheaper, portable forms. In the years surrounding the English Reformation, editions of the pseudo-Chauceriana greatly outnumbered editions of Chaucer's elite courtly poetry. After fifty-five years of Caxton's, Pynson's, and de Worde's folio editions of Chaucer's courtly poems--The Parlement of Foules (1477; 1525?; 1530), The House of Fame (1483; 1526?), and Troilus and Cressida (1483; 1517; 1526)--printers in the 1530s suddenly began issuing pseudo-Chaucerian satiric tracts. English editors from 1532 to the end of the sixteenth century focused on Chaucer's supposed religious and political leanings almost to the exclusion of his courtly poetry. Once stock of Wynken de Worde's 1530 quarto edition of the Parlement of Foules ran out, sixteenth-century English readers could buy copies of Chaucer's courtly poetry only in the collected Works. The Plowman's Tale and Jack Up Lande, on the other hand, readers could find readily available in the Works and in the small

octavo volumes.

The pseudo-Chauceriana's authority in Reformation rhetoric gained added support in the equally ancient text of the fourteenth-century Piers Plowman, a dream vision that includes pointed satire of Church abuses. The movement from religious to social and political radicalism that reformers found in the pseudo-Chauceriana is also present in Piers Plowman. The Piers poet combines attacks on abuses of religion with commentary on the depredations of gross social inequities. Henry VIII never allowed the poem into print, probably because it was an especially pointed satire of abuses against the poor, and because sixteenth-century readers closely associated it with the heresies of the medieval English Lollard movement. However, the poem widely circulated in manuscript throughout Henry's reign, and, shortly after Edward VI took the throne, Robert Crowley issued not one, but three editions of The Vision of Pierce Plowman (attrib. Langland, 1550). Crowley's editions include printed marginalia declaring Piers Plowman a prophecy of Henry VIII's Reformation of the Church. Crowley's commitments are clear in his printed marginalia. He gives due allegiance to Henry VIII for his institution of

Reformation legislation and his dissolution of the monasteries, but the suffering and oppressed receive the most attention from him. Crowley highlights references to the impoverished masses in the text of Piers Plowman with marginal notes, in one note flatly declaring "Christ was pore."<sup>11</sup>

The popular and anti-hierarchical elements of the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman became more obvious as the English Reformation gathered strength. The Prayer and Complaynt of the Plowman unto Christ (London c. 1532), an English tract initially printed in Antwerp, is an early Henrician example of the flood of plowman tracts to come. On its title page, the tract claims to date back to 1300, more ancient even than Chaucer or the Piers Plowman poet. In the preface to The Prayer, the printer or editor argues against the censorship of government authorities who attack Reformation preachers for their religious convictions. These same authorities probably forced the printer of the pamphlet to issue it in Antwerp before London. In opposition to these authorities, the writer argues "God wolde open that unto the rude sorte whiche the relygyouse pharyses / the holy bysshopes / the vertuouse

preestes / the auncyent doctours / the great lerned lawyers  
 / and the wyse and sage elders knewe nat" ([4]). God gives  
 the lowly plowman insight into religious questions that  
 authorities fear to broach.<sup>12</sup>

Godly reformers in the reign of Edward VI, many  
 disenchanted with Henry VIII's reluctance to push the  
 Reformation further, followed this pamphlet's lead in  
 embracing the radical implications of the pseudo-  
 Chauceriana. Edwardian reformers began their own propaganda  
 campaign, picking up where the Henrician campaign had left  
 off. The pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman had a  
 central role to play in their machinations. Reformers  
 busied Edwardian presses with new copies of Chaucerian  
 plowman tales, Crowley's linked editions of Piers Plowman,  
 and entirely new texts built on the plowman tradition.  
 These tracts furthered the plowman's role as godly  
 politician, and heightened its claims that power should be  
 disseminated among the godly elect rather than resting  
 solely in the hands of one man. Luke Shepherd's John Bon  
 and Mast Person (1548?), William Copeland's Godly Dyalogue &  
 Dysputacyon Betwene Pyers Plowman and a Popysh Preest (c.  
 1550), the anonymous I Playne Piers Which Can Not Flatter

(1550?), Pyers Plowman's Exhortation, unto the Lordes, Knightes and Burgoysse of the Parlyamenthouse (pr. Anthony Scoloker, c. 1550), and Peres the Ploughmans Crede (1553) mine the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman for its political implications and add more direct appeals to the English commoners. All of these Edwardian plowman pamphlets praise the wisdom and piousness of the poor plowman. The speaker of I Playne Piers quotes scripture as saying "[Christ's] wordes sown in ryche mennes bryngeth furth no frute" (the speaker cites Mark as the scriptural source, Avii). The speaker repeats Crowley's printed marginal note to Piers Plowman praising Christ's holy poverty, stating "comfort ye plowmen, fyshers, tylers, and coblers Christe our King was a poore man" (Avii).

Pyers Plowman's Exhortation to the Parlyamenthouse completes the politicization of the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman.<sup>13</sup> The plowman speaker of Pyers Plowman's Exhortation to the Parlyamenthouse goes so far as to suggest bills for the Parliament to consider, making the plowman the political representative of commoners whose rights deserve notice (Aviii-Aviii v). The tract's audience includes privileged Members of Parliament, but the speaker

claims his beneficiaries are the common people of England.

"[T]here be," the speaker begins,

many fatte merchauntes which wold have no  
reformation in the comon wealth affirming that  
therin all things be wel, but he that will be  
conversaunt with the comen sorte of the poore  
comens, shal [...] both heare se & Percyve the  
case to be farre other wise. (Aii)

He argues, in opposition to these "fatte merchauntes," that scripture demands reasonably fair distribution of wealth, and all godly persons should join in redistributing the goods and property the king seized from the monasteries: "It is not agreeable with the gospel that a few parsons shall lyve in so great aboundaunce of wealth and suffer so many their christen brothers to lyve in extreme povertie" (Aii).

In support of lowly commoners without land, the plowman accusingly notes that "a greate parte of the sayde abbeylandes be eyther geven, solde or leasid unto suche lordes and Gentlemen as had landes before of their owne" (Aii v).

The plowman in Pyers Plowman's Exhortation to the Parlyamenthouse pointedly comments on his own common

pedigree and his plain style of speech, allying himself in politics, style, and personal attributes with the poor and oppressed. [A]ccepte this my rude boldnes," he asks the MPS (Avii v). "[V]ouchesafe to heare the devise of a simple Subject" (Avii v-Aviii). Throughout the tract he repeats his modest claim that, "I being altogether ignoraunt of the arte of rethorycke, have not conningly set furth this matter but onely layde before you the naked truth" (Bii).

Conversant with poor commoners and one of them himself, the speaker of the tract takes up their causes with MPs in "certeyne rude Bylles to be exhibited to you of the Parliamenthouse"; MPs hopefully translate complaint into political action (Aviii v). The pamphleteer's goal is to push the Reformation of the Church of England further along, frustrating the government officials whom the speaker implicitly accuses of collaborating with "fatte merchautes" who line their pockets and claim all is well. The writer's reformation is a more thorough reformation of not only the Church, but also the polity. The plowman warns,

our great enemy ye bisshop of rome & all his  
adherentes, insulte and triumph over us [...].

And so might it well be acompted / if we shuld /

when they were suppressed being satisfied and stayed with their worldly goodes, procede no further in redressing other abuses. (Avi v)

The religious Reformation is incomplete, according to the plowman speaker of Pyers Plowman's Exhortation to the Parlyamenthouse, until social and economic reformation follows.

The potentially radical implications of these plowman tracts are underscored by the fact that I Playne Piers later haunted the Crown in a very immediate way. Martin Marprelate's edition of I Playne Piers testifies to the plowman tracts' political efficacy. In 1589, in the reign of Elizabeth, a renegade printer put out the reissue of I Playne Piers with the title page declaring "I am the Gransier of Martin Mare-prelitte."<sup>14</sup> Martin Marprelate is the pseudonym of a radical Protestant writer who scandalized English authorities between 1588 and 1589 by publishing a series of energetic attacks on the English Church. Marprelate focuses the brunt of his attack on criticism of the English Church's hierarchical structure. He argues that hierarchy, except the political leadership of the Queen, is at odds with scripture. No member of the Church is higher

in the eyes of God, Marprelate insists, and therefore bishops should have no more authority than other godly Churchmen. As Martin's reprint of I Playne Piers shows, the plain style and populist sentiments that made the plowman tract a powerful symbol of Henrician unity and continuity could as powerfully work against the Crown's cause. In Marprelate's attack, the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman's appeal to a supposedly populist English past and its critique of Church leaders' worldly pomp works as easily to undercut Crown-instituted hierarchies within the Church as it had to undercut the graduated systems of legates who represented papal power.<sup>15</sup>

The pseudo-Chauceriana's claims to popularity mirror paradoxes of Reformation rhetoric that have long troubled Reformation scholars. Claims for the Reformation's popularity and for its supposed roots in ancient religious practices of the English people are important strands in Reformation rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> Reformation rhetoricians insist they merely institutionalize beliefs that had long flourished among the English people. Medieval English heretical sects such as the Lollards allowed advocates of the Reformation to claim that underground enclaves of

scripture-guided commoners had kept the true Church alive in the years before Henry VIII officially instituted the Reformation of the Church. According to these reformers, the Reformation had popular origins and popular spokespeople. The pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires, Piers Plowman, and the many other plowman satires reformers loosed on England were supposed to be evidence of this. Yet, despite reformers' claims, the Crown was a driving force in the Reformation's institution and implementation. Many of the reformers who issued the plowman tracts and similarly reforming pieces of literature were university educated and well-to-do. Most, perhaps all, of these writers were far from being naive commoners who bluntly state facts without rhetorical embellishment or propagandistic forethought. As a result, the tracts represent a dilemma in Reformation literature and Reformation politics. Their auspices and authors are elite, or at least well-to-do and educated, but their texts and heroes claim to have popular sympathies.

Reformation literary works such as the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman tracts so thoroughly mix elite and popular categories that it is difficult--even impossible--to tell if common people found them as accessible, appealing,

and representative of their interests as the works' heroes, authors, editors, and printers claim. As a result, modern historians are left questioning whether the Reformation of the Church of England actually began with the people of England and filtered up--as many sixteenth-century reformers claim it did--or, whether the Reformation began with Henry VIII's decision to break with Rome and with laws he enforced as a result of the break. Exigencies of their materials force Reformation scholars to grapple with the apparent contradictions of texts that claim to be both popular and monarchic, representative of a system that disperses power among the godly and of a system that consolidates power in the Crown. In response, Reformation scholars Richard Bauckham, Paul Christianson, and Katherine Firth suggest that Reformation politics in fact went in two directions at once, moving both toward dispersal of power among the people of England and toward centralization of power in the Crown. Christianson in particular identifies two major strands in English Reformation rhetoric: one, an imperial trope that emphasizes the godly ruler who upholds and enforces God's laws; the other, a popular trope that identifies God's laws not with imperial command, but with a chosen group of the

mEEK and oppressed. These tropes coexisted, at times one coming out more than the other.

A key example that shows the English Reformation's mixed auspices and divided sympathies is John Foxe's Actes and Monuments (1563-70). Foxe's compilation of the heroic lives and deaths of men and women who died professing Protestant religious beliefs was a seminal Reformation text, widely read in England for centuries. Foxe's descriptions of noteworthy religious martyrs reflect the dual tradition of the imperial and popular Reformation Bauckham, Christianson, and Firth describe. Foxe composed his Actes and Monuments while in exile during the reign of Catholic Queen Mary, expatriated because of his refusal to follow the laws of the Catholic monarch. Despite his own refusal to follow his sovereign's rules, in the Actes and Monuments, Foxe celebrates the rule of law Constantine initiated and the Tudor monarchs claimed to have reinstated. Alongside this sovereign-centered praise of true religion, Foxe celebrates the struggles and sacrifices of godly oppressed people suffering under cruel monarchs and cruel laws. Sandwiched into lengthy discussions of rulers' religious predilections and world history keyed to scriptural history,

Foxe gives detailed descriptions of humble martyrs who suffered for the Protestant cause. Critics have noticed that an inordinate number of Foxe's martyrs are common men, women, and children whose only claims to fame are piousness and their unwillingness to recant their religious beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Foxe's history of the godly oppressed counterbalances his history of imperial rule. In fact, many of Foxe's oppressed go to their deaths defying their sovereigns' rules. This part of Foxe's history is a sixteenth-century version of what Gerald Strauss, speaking in the twentieth century, calls "history from below" (130-49).

It is probably not a coincidence that Foxe integrated the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satire Jack Up Lande into his 1570 edition of the Actes and Monuments. The pseudo-Chaucerian precedent supports both the imperial theme in Foxe's account of the Reformation and the theme of the suffering masses. Chaucer's cultural cache and courtly connections gave Foxe's polemic official authority, while the exegetical traditions earlier reformers had developed around the lowly speakers of the pseudo-Chauceriana emphasized the populism of the Reformation's message. Pseudo-Chaucerian texts support both views of the

Reformation dispensation, the imperial and the populist. In combination with later editions of plowman tracts, sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer's Works and the pseudo-Chauceriana show that Reformation politics were a marriage of Crown centralization and populist appeal. As Reformation propagandists frame them, the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires recruit the voices of the lowliest commoners to create narratives that masquerade as popular, even in cases in which they intend to give due support to the monarchy's prerogatives. Reformation politics mixed Chaucer's literary prestige as an originary English writer with English patriotic chauvinism, Crown-led reform, and radical programs for religious and social change that reformers claimed had long fermented beneath the surface of English culture.

For later sixteenth-century English readers and writers, as for their early sixteenth-century predecessors, the reforming pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman traditions were current history as well as past. David Norbrook and John King argue that the waves of sonnet writing and courtly pageantry that accompanied Queen Elizabeth's succession to the throne in 1558 overwhelmed

Reformation literary traditions such as the ones writers had developed out of the pseudo-Chauceriana and Piers-style plowman tracts. Norbrook argues that "The old 'ploughman' tradition became overshadowed in the Elizabethan period by more courtly poetic modes" (47; see also King 26-8).

However, the courtly styles King and Norbrook point to in late sixteenth-century literature coexisted with Reformation literary styles rather than entirely overwhelming them.

Despite their arguments that the plowman traditions waned in the reign of Elizabeth, both King and Norbrook focus on Elizabethan continuations of the plowman traditions.

Norbrook concedes that "awareness of the older traditions was preserved, especially in Puritan circles" (47); also, "Elizabethan poetry is in fact more heavily influenced by Edwardian ideals than is at first apparent" (33). In

"Spenser's Shepheardes Calender and Protestant Pastoral Satire" and Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition,

King analyzes Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser's uses of Reformation traditions in The Shepheardes Calender (1579)

and The Faerie Queene. King and Norbrook both examine

Reformation literary traditions that extend into the later sixteenth-century. Their studies show the extent to which

these traditions remained important in Elizabethan literature and in Elizabethan perceptions of English literary traditions.

Through reprints of plowman tracts, imitations of their literary styles and themes, and through commentaries on England's literary history, the exegetical traditions that had shaped Reformation readers' interpretations of Chaucer as a writer of popular tracts continued into the late sixteenth century. Fresh editions of the pseudo-Chauceriana and Piers-style plowman tracts rolled off presses throughout Elizabeth's reign. Chaucer's Works, including The Plowman's Tale, remained in print in John Stow's 1561 edition and Thomas Speght's 1598 and 1602 editions. Each of these editions went through several print runs. John Foxe made Jack Up Lande widely accessible to Elizabethan readers by including it in his 1570 edition of the Actes and Monuments. Although Piers Plowman was an important source for literary plowmen references, the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman arguably loomed larger in the Elizabethan imagination. Piers Plowman went out of print with Robert Crowley's 1550 edition, while Chaucer's plowmen remained in print and popular throughout the late sixteenth century.

In poems, pamphlets, and plays, Elizabethan writers deliberately, even ostentatiously, imitate the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style reforming plowman traditions. Elizabethan writers added new plowman pieces to the traditions they had inherited from Reformation printers and editors. Although King and Norbrook suggest that courtly circles moved away from Chaucerian satires, not all courtly Chaucerians in Queen Elizabeth's entourage confined themselves to Chaucer's highbrow works or his translations of classics. Edmund Spenser, who had court-aspirations, draws on the archaic English and rough satire of the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires in The Shepheardes Calender and Prosopopoia: or Mother Hubberds Tale (1591).<sup>18</sup> In the envoi to The Shepheardes Calender, Spenser names Chaucer's plowman (and perhaps the pilgrim of the lost Pilgrim's Tale) as the poetic genius in whose footsteps he follows:

Dare not to match thy pype with Tityrus [Chaucer]  
                   hys style,  
 Nor with the Pilgrim that with the Ploughman  
                   playde a whyle:  
 But followe them farre off, and their high steppes  
                   adore,

The better please, the worse despise, I aske  
nomore.

Outside court circles, penny ballads and invectives modeled on pseudo-Chaucerian plowman precedents freely mingled with lyrics and solemn meditations on morality. Protestant preacher and Marian martyr Hugh Latimer's "Sermon of the Plow" turns the image of the godly plowman into a model for the reformed English clergy, and popularizes it in Elizabethan England in successive editions of his Fruteful Sermons (1571, 1578, 1596, and 1607); William Elderton's ballad "Prepare Ye for the Plow" (1570) casts Elizabeth in the role of the plowman, beginning "The Queene holds the plowe, to contineu good seede"; a beautifully illustrated broadside of "Death and the Five Alls" (1580) depicts the plowman as the subject who holds up the entire estate: "I feast them all, their hunger I appease / For by my toyle they feede even at their ease"; the anonymous Cobler of Caunterburie (1589) is a jest book whose writer claims to follow Chaucer's satiric style; in A Quip for an Upstart Courtier (1592), Robert Greene combines the frame-tale format of the Canterbury Tales with the social commentary of the plowman satires; Thomas Nashe patterns the sardonic

hero of Pierce Penniless (1592) on the heroes of the plowman satires, probably to the chagrin of writers and readers who valued the plowman's religious significance; Henry Chettle, in Piers Plainness (1595), uses a contemplative Piers figure to frame a tale of intrigue.

Many of Chaucer's Elizabethan editors, imitators, and commentators draw on his powerful associations with religious and social reform and with the English Reformation. Following earlier reformers, Elizabethans continue to link Chaucer, through the plowmen heroes of the apocryphal Plowman's Tale and Jack Up Lande, with religious reform, social and political agitation on behalf of English commoners, and with the merry quipping style of the satiric plowman. For commentators who find the reforming aspects of his reputation troubling, Chaucer's Reformation associations are at least forces they have to reckon with in their own readings. For Elizabethans, the Reformation was central to the creation of England as a separate isle, distinct from and not answerable to foreign powers such as the Roman papacy. The Reformation was also central to Elizabethans' revaluations of English literary traditions. Since the Chaucerian tradition was nearly synonymous with the English

literary tradition, the changes reformers made to his works parallel changes in their perceptions of English traditions. Elizabethan commentators' reactions to their Chaucerian sources and to English literary traditions vary, but, for nearly all, the reforming streaks that lay at the center of sixteenth-century editions of his works and Elizabethan histories of England are shaping forces.

Many aspects of the reforming streaks Elizabethans associated with Chaucer and with England's literary history were subjects of intense scrutiny. Medieval English literary traditions in general were bones of contention in Elizabethan literary criticism, primarily because they did not follow the classical or continental conventions highbrow readers traditionally expected. English literati had long subordinated plain style vernacular literatures to classical Greek and Roman and continental antecedents. As a result of the Reformation, however, late sixteenth-century English readers began to place Chaucer's plowman satires, Piers Plowman, and their plain style cohorts nearer the tops of their reading lists. Plain style English competed with classically inspired aureate literatures. Reformation revaluations of English history encouraged new admiration

for ancient English folk customs and the English Middle Ages. Reformers were eager to find English traditions they could claim derived from early, more purely English traditions that remained untouched during the years of Roman Catholic rule. They fought Catholic claims that they suborned innovation by publicizing the findings of their searches for ancient, supposedly authentically English proto-Protestant traditions. The most radical post-Reformation English commentators are so enthusiastic in searching for English works that seem opposed to Roman superstition as to almost completely overturn literary values based on the preeminence of classical models. Reform-minded commentators celebrate the rough, the plain, the common, and the popular. Qualities that earlier qualified as flaws become badges of honor. For these commentators, the previously civilized culture of Rome becomes the barbarian, while the barbaric culture of medieval England becomes civilized.

As a result of Reformation revaluations of standards for literary greatness, reformers' celebratory Chaucerianism coexists with classicists' apologetic Chaucerianism in Elizabethan commentaries on Chaucer. Praise of pseudo-

Chaucerian plain style reprints and imitations appears alongside impassioned diatribes against pseudo-Chaucerian invectives. Reform-minded Elizabethans cherish Chaucer's plainness and medievalisms. Highbrow literati dismiss Chaucer's works as roughhewn works of a less cultivated age or as folk tales. Yet other highbrow leaders plead for recognition of Chaucer's translations of classics and his imitations of continental Masters. In Renaissance Chaucer, perhaps the foremost source on sixteenth-century English readings of Chaucer, Alice Miskimin discusses the ambivalence with which Elizabethans faced their medieval heritage, and the effects this ambivalence had on Elizabethan readings of Chaucer. She points out that:

the Middle Ages were paradoxically both despised by Elizabethans as the primitive darkness of superstition and ignorance from which they had emerged, and yet honored, as the origin of uniquely English institutions, the common law, the English language, and the monarchy itself. (295)

Miskimin's discussion of sixteenth-century English attitudes towards English medieval history and Chaucer dovetails with

Richard Helgerson's discussion in Forms of Nationhood of Elizabethans' ambivalence over their linguistic and literary links to the Germanic "Goths" who occupied medieval England in its earliest years. Although Helgerson does not discuss Chaucer interpretation, his analysis of the ways that Elizabethan writers set classical and medieval, "Greek or Goth," against one another in their assessments of English poetry and the English legal system similarly shows the mixed reviews Elizabethan literati give medieval English traditions (23). They paradoxically disdain and revere them, declare them models of civility, and yet lament their barbarity.

The ambivalence Elizabethans bring to Chaucer's works results in part from Elizabethans' typically troubled relations to Chaucer's medieval auspices, as Miskimin and Helgerson suggest, but they also reflect Elizabethans' reactions to the reputation for plainness and popularity reformers had cultivated for Chaucer as a writer of plowman satires. Reformers' editions of the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman invectives embroiled Elizabethan commentators in fierce disputes not only over Chaucer's medievalisms, but also over his popularity. They argue over his social

status, his imaginative sympathies for his common heroes and heroines, and over the political implications of the plain style plowman invectives Elizabethans read in single editions and among his collected Works. Reformers' abundant uses of print spread pseudo-Chaucerian plowman invectives and implicated Chaucer's satires in the dubious and lowbrow undertakings of printers for the popular press, at least in Elizabethan critics' eyes. For highbrow Elizabethans, plain style satirics along with print were marks of gross popularity, the kind of popularity that implies frivolity and lack of respect for hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> That an ordinary English writer was at the center of these controversies spurred critics to more zealous attacks or refutations in response to popularized versions of Chaucer. These controversies resulted in many commentaries praising, attacking, or revising Reformation interpretations of Chaucer. Alongside reprints of plowman satires and writers' imitations, these commentaries helped sustain Chaucer's reputation as a popular writer and augment his reputation for radicalism in the late sixteenth century.

Two of the most influential and widely distributed sources for Chaucer commentary in late sixteenth-century

England reflect the continuing importance of Reformation interpretations of Chaucer and controversies over Chaucer's reputation for popularity. Foxe's Actes and Monuments carries on Chaucer's Reformation reputation for plainness and popularity with little concern for classicists' and aristocrats' discomfort with these characteristics. Foxe's book, with the pseudo-Chaucerian Jack Up Lande appended to the 1570 edition, was a staple of Protestant thought and widely read among Elizabethans. The Elizabethan folio volumes of Chaucer's Works, another important Chaucerian source, reveal the conflicts that readings such as Foxe's plunged Chaucer studies into. One moment, editors of the folios praise Chaucer for being a popular reformer; in the next, they insist that Chaucer was an aristocratic court writer. The folio editions--John Stowe's 1561 edition of the Works and Thomas Speght's 1598 revised edition--were probably less popular reading material than Foxe's Actes and Monuments because they were pricey. However, any Elizabethan with a collection of books and an interest in English literary history was likely to have bought at least one of these editions. Elizabethan writers who show knowledge of Chaucer's works almost certainly read him in

the folio editions. Despite their high price tags, folio editions of the Works sold well; otherwise, printers would not have put out editions so closely spaced together, and would not have run off each edition in several separate printings. Through these two well-distributed sources-- Foxe's praise of popular, plain style Chaucer and the folios' conflicts and dissonances over his popularity-- arguments over Chaucer's reputation as a popular reformer continued to influence Elizabethan assessments of Chaucer and English literary history.

As a religious reformer himself, Foxe heaps praise on Chaucer's Reformation reputation and wholeheartedly accepts Chaucer in his guise as popular, plain style English writer. In the Actes and Monuments, Foxe makes much of Chaucer's supposed Protestant leanings, probably sealing Chaucer's Elizabethan reputation for religious radicalism. Foxe flatly declares Chaucer "right Wiclevian," allying Chaucer with John Wyclif, the fourteenth-century English critic of the Catholic Church who was England's answer to Martin Luther. Foxe can confer no greater praise on Chaucer than to associate him with Wyclif and the Protestant cause Foxe so fervently worked to further. In embracing Chaucer as an

emblem of Protestant zeal and plainness, however, Foxe must explain away Chaucer's amorous lyrics and bawdy fabliaux-- exactly the works a courtly Chaucerian might gravitate to. He assures his readers that "all his [Chaucer's] workes almost, if they be thoroughly advised, will testifie [to his piety] (albeit it bee done in myrth & covertly)" (Brewer 108; Spurgeon 105). This insistence that Chaucer works in "covert" ways, slyly hiding his true meanings under metaphors, becomes a refrain in Elizabethans' commentaries on Chaucer, although different commentators read entirely different works as the ones in which Chaucer hides his true meanings. For Foxe, Chaucer reveals his true intent in his plain style satires, and hides his meanings in his lyrics and fabliaux.

Foxe's Chaucer hides simple godliness beneath the veneer of the courtier and the artist's love of poetic art: "under shadowes covertly, as under a visoure, he suborneth truth, in such sorte, as both prively she may profite the godly minded" (Brewer 108; Spurgeon 105). As evidence of Chaucer's religious zeal and his love of plain style religious satire, Foxe points to the pseudo-Chaucerian Jack Up Lande and The Plowman's Tale. He chooses Chaucer's plain

style tracts over all other Chaucerian pieces, pointedly preferring them to Chaucer's poetic flourishes. Foxe asks, "For to omitte other partes of his volume, whereof some are more fabulous than other, what tale can be more playnely tolde, then the talke of the ploughman?" (Brewer 109; Spurgeon 106). According to Foxe, Chaucer's plain forthrightness, not his "fabulous" poetics, help him "pointe out more directly the Pope with his Prelates to be Antichrist" (Brewer 109; Spurgeon 106). Readings of Chaucer such as Foxe's bolster the reputation of Chaucer and medieval English literary traditions, press the claims of the plain style of writing, and encourage Elizabethans to read Chaucer as a popular writer who speaks to the common English man and woman. Foxe credits Chaucer with reaching the hearts of scores of English men and women through his plain style tracts and his covert religious commentaries. Foxe claims that "by readyng of Chauser's workes," many people "were brought to the true knowledge of Religion" (Brewer 109; Spurgeon 106). Foxe also claims that in his own enlightened sixteenth-century age, Chaucer's work is the property of the masses, "extant, for every man to read that is disposed" (Brewer 109; Spurgeon 107).

Elizabethans read Foxe's celebratory plain style Chaucer alongside the equally compelling folio volumes of Chaucer's Works. In the late sixteenth-century folio volumes of the Works, Chaucer is a writer curiously divided in his sympathies and in his literary styles. He is alternately plain style writer, scholar, or courtier. Probably because the folios are more upscale print works, their editors include more references to Chaucer as a courtly poet and classical translator than does Foxe's description of Chaucer as a plain style reformer. Folio editors do not try to explain away or neutralize Chaucer's poetic flourishes, as Foxe does. They revel in literary flourish as evidence of Chaucer's courtliness or his cutting edge poetics. They do not omit Chaucer's translations of classical and continental literature, works Foxe seems uninterested in. Nor do they fail to mention Chaucer's Reformation reputation. Folio editors revel in nearly every detail they can find to praise Chaucer, approvingly noting Chaucer's commonness along with his extraordinariness. As a result, folio editors' prefatory material, appendixes, annotations, and texts waver between visions of Chaucer as a homely plain style English reformer who writes ordinary

tracts for ordinary people and opposed visions of Chaucer as a serious and venerated author, comparable to Greek, Roman, and continental masters. At times, folio editors' descriptions of Chaucer's radicalism verge on the scandalous; at other times, Chaucer appears a grave moralist or a distinguished courtier who rises above all things worldly or mundane.

The folio volumes boosted Chaucer's reputation as a popular writer in Elizabethan England simply by appearing in print many times over. There were six editions of Chaucer's Works between 1532 and 1602, each printed many times: Thynne's editions in 1532, 1542, and 1550; Stow's in 1561; and Speght's in 1598 and 1602. Chaucer, more than any other medieval writer, remained in print and popular throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Given this wide print distribution, Elizabethans had grounds for attacking Chaucer as a popular print writer. Chaucer, in fact, became a product of print culture in sixteenth-century England. Gower, with a reputation for unceasing gravity, was out of print by the late sixteenth century, as was Piers Plowman.<sup>21</sup> Tightening Chaucer's connections to print, James E. Blodgett and Arthur Marotti point out that Chaucer was the first

English writer to have his works appear in single-author print format (36; 211, 236). Blodgett and Marotti both argue that early sixteenth-century folio collections of Chaucer's Works set the precedent for English writers who wanted to move into print. How much more precedent-setting, then, are the octavo editions of the pseudo-Chaucerian satires that reformers put out in the first half of the sixteenth century, financially within reach of a wider audience than the folio volumes of the Works.<sup>22</sup> Even a venerated author such as Chaucer no longer has purely elite status once his works become the property of commoners who read them as common. Reformers who put out apocryphal Chaucerian satiric attacks on the Catholic church had this commonness in mind when they issued small editions of these tracts. They hoped to sell Chaucer as an exemplary Englishman who cherished England's common religion. With their high rates of distribution, the folio volumes served similar functions.

Chaucer's reputation as a teller of popular tracts and witty tales grew as printers and editors of the folio volumes added new satires, merry tales, and amorous poems to the Chaucer canon. In successive editions of the folio

Works, Chaucer's connections to print culture increased as editors added to the canon of popular printed Chauceriana. Elizabethan printers of Chaucer's Works proudly advertised the new pieces their editors added to the canon of printed Chauceriana, drawing readers' attention to the additions. The title page to Stow's 1561 Works announces "divers addicions, whiche were never in print before." The title page to Speght's 1598 edition proclaims "In this Impression you shall find these Additions," followed by a list of new attractions "never before Printed."<sup>23</sup> Additions to the folio canons in the sixteenth century are so prolific and so varied that Walter W. Skeat comments in his edition of the Works, in 1894, "It is quite certain that *not less than* twenty authors are represented in the mass of heterogeneous material" (lxxxiii). Thomas J. Heffernan judges that by 1602 "virtually forty percent of the canon was spurious" (161). Heffernan notes the disparity of genres in the Chaucer folios: "between 1390 and 1540 Chaucer's reputation changed to embrace such polarities as the poet of *fin' amour*, of *contes moralises*, and finally that of religious heresy" (163). The popular tracts, witty tales, and amorous

poems editors attributed to Chaucer greatly expanded and diversified the canon of works Chaucer actually wrote.

Elizabethan commentaries on Chaucer's works present readers with a pastiche of conflicting poetic styles and political commitments because Elizabethan readers' folio editions, in fact, are pastiches of clashing styles and commitments.

The widely dissimilar pieces that Elizabethan editors added to the folio Works indiscriminately mix courtliness, scurrilousness, and seriousness. Additions to the folios, for the most part, fall into these three main categories: poems in the courtly love tradition, ribald tales and verses, and moral works and religious satires. The inconsistencies between pieces account for many of the inconsistencies in Chaucer interpretation that Elizabethan commentators wrangled over. Stow's 1561 edition, for example, adds works from all three categories: the courtly "Craft of Lovers" and "Court of Love;" two ballads Skeat refuses to print because he says one is a "scurrilous performance" and the other "of no merit," one entitled "An Other Balade" and the other "A Balade declaring that Wemens Chastitie"; and the salutary moral advice of "A Proverbe agaynst Covitise and Negligence" (Geoffrey Chaucer: The

Works 1532 n. pag.). Speght's edition of 1598 is similarly torn between courtly, ribald, and moral works, although Speght primarily adds to the folio collection courtly pieces such as "The Floure and the Leafe," a poem in the courtly love tradition.

In addition to adding a handful of verses to the hodgepodge of Chaucerian and pseudo-Chaucerian works in earlier folios, Speght adds extensive prefatory material: a dedication to Robert Cecil, a commendatory letter by Francis Beaumont, addresses to readers, a spurious Chaucer family tree that traces the poet's ancestry to John of Gaunt, a portrait of Chaucer's supposed heraldic arms, elaborate and fanciful biographical information, and hefty commentaries on the works themselves. As critics have noticed, the apparatus Speght includes in his edition of the Works gives Elizabethans a Chaucer who wields aristocratic authority and merits the reverence Elizabethans traditionally gave venerated Greek and Roman authors. Blodgett, Clare R. Kinney, Derek Pearsall, and Miskimin comment on the weightiness of Speght's edition, Miskimin noting its "grandeur" (36; 68; 75; 251).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, as Derek Brewer points out, a thoroughly neoclassical Chaucer did not

reign until 1600. At key points in Speght's edition, the imposing grandeur of Speght's apparatus dissolves into the "many different strands of tradition, from morality to ribaldry" (Brewer 3-7).

Despite its grandiose appearance, Speght's Works depicts a Chaucer who alternates between Foxe's populist reformer and the courtly writer that highbrow Elizabethan readers struggled to maintain. Taken as a whole, Speght's edition reflects all the ambivalence Miskimin and Helgerson say afflicted sixteenth-century Chaucer studies and evaluations of England's literary history. It has divided loyalties, uncertain of the popular monarchism of Thynne's Henrician editions, hinting at Chaucer's popular sympathies, but unable to consign Chaucer to an unquestionably common ancestry or unalloyed sympathies for common causes. Speght's Chaucer has traces of the bluff plainness of the plowmen, but he also has the courtly demeanor of the poet who rises above the common herd. Speght continues the popular Reformation image of Chaucer by embroidering Foxe's claim that Chaucer was "right Wiclevian," adding to it the spurious information that Chaucer was a schoolmate and close friend of religious reformer John Wyclif at Merton College,

"whose opinions in religion he much affected" (Geoffrey Chaucer: The Works 1532 Biii). On the one hand, this information gives Chaucer an elite college education. On the other, it maintains Chaucer's commitment to radical religious reform and his authorship of the plain style plowman satires. Endeavoring to prove that Chaucer was a member of the Inner Temple, Speght lets slip an indecorous Chaucer anecdote that links Chaucer to an irreverence more worthy of a jest book character than English literature's founding father. Speght tells readers, "Master Buckley did see a Record in the same house, where Geoffrey Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscane fryer in Fleetstreet" (Biii v). Chaucer's scandalously ignoble behavior and its decidedly public and lowbrow location in Fleetstreet works against the patrician dignity Speght tries to confer on Chaucer in the weighty presentation of his folio volume.

Speght's divided sympathies on Chaucer's elite status and his reputation as a popular reformer are evident in the details he chooses to include in his description of Chaucer's life. He could easily have left the anecdote about Chaucer beating the Franciscan friar out of his

biography, or argued against it as he does with other inconvenient facts. The beating is an unsubstantiated rumor that Speght could easily refute. Speght chose to include it and approve of it because, in spite of his desire for an aristocratic Chaucer, Speght is unable to give up Chaucer's reputation as a popular reformer. In his lengthy description of Chaucer's life, Speght attributes to Chaucer further brushes with rebellion and disobedience. Speght spends nearly a whole page describing Chaucer's connections to unspecified common causes and a supposed rebellion against King Richard II, a notoriously unpopular monarch. Based on dubious Tower records and "The Testament of Love," an apocryphal poem by Thomas Usk that appears in the folio as by Chaucer, Speght concludes that:

In the second year of Richard the second, The King tooke Geffrey Chaucer and his lands into his protection [arrested him]. The occasion wherof no doubt was some daunger and trouble whereinto he was fallen by favouring some rash attempt of the common people. (Bvi)

Immediately before this passage, Speght tells us that Chaucer

"doth greatly complaine of his owne rasheness in following the multitude, and of their hatred against him for bewraying their purpose." He allies Chaucer with the common people and with their rebellions against an unpopular king, and yet tries to extricate Chaucer from the populist implications by insisting that, later in life, Chaucer separated himself from the commoners and earned their hatred (Bvi).

The biographical anecdotes Speght gives detailing Chaucer's brushes with the law in the service of Protestantism and commoners ensure that Chaucer's reputation for popular reform and common causes continue in Elizabethan commentaries on Chaucer. That these anecdotes appear in the work of an editor as determined to sell Chaucer as an elite writer as Speght testifies to the prevalence of Chaucer's Reformation reputation in Elizabethan England. For Elizabethans trained to think of Chaucer as a popular reformer, these anecdotes are believable. Even at his most imposing and elitist, Speght displays decided uncertainty over Chaucer's claims to nobility, as well as awareness of Chaucer's conflicting claims to commonalty and commonness. In spite of the impressive family tree and arms Speght gives Chaucer, Speght tells us that "in the opinion of some

Heralds [...] hee descended not from any great house" (Bii). In fact, Speght says that Chaucer's family were vintners, lowly merchants of wine. Speght tries to mitigate the impact of this admission of the Chaucer family's commonness by insisting "wealthy no doubt they were and of good account in the common wealth," but Chaucer's common ancestry is painfully clear in Speght's text (Bii v).

The commendatory letter by Francis Beaumont that Speght includes in the prefatory material similarly reveals inconsistencies that mar Chaucer's record for nobility. Many of Chaucer's Elizabethan critics notice that, in addition to his possibly undistinguished ancestry, Chaucer's works are at times decidedly undignified. Beaumont takes on the accusations of ribaldry and lowness of style that Elizabethan critics leveled at Chaucer's works. He defends Chaucer's "hard" words, "broad" speeches, "incivilitie," and "lowe" style (Aiii-Aiv). Beaumont's main defense of Chaucer is that he merely followed rules of literary decorum that dictate different styles for characters from different social backgrounds. Beaumont explains that Chaucer, following decorum, gives lascivious characters bawdy tales and coarse characters low styles: "How much had hee swarved

from Decorum," Beaumont asks,

if hee had made his Miller, his Cooke, and his  
Carpenter, to have told such honest and good  
tales, as hee made his Knight, his Squire, his  
Lawyer, and his Scholler tell? But shewing the  
disposition of these meaner sort of men, hee  
declareth in their prologues and tales, that their  
chief delight was in undecent speeches of their  
own, and in their false defamations of others.

(Aiii v)

Having made excuses for Chaucer's plain style of writing, Beaumont still must defend Chaucer's choice of low characters. Elizabethan critics could complain that, had Chaucer wished to avoid broadness and low styles, he merely had to stick with dignified characters. Beaumont explains this seeming flaw by making Chaucer's choice of mean characters and low speeches a case of *ut pictura poesis*, or the writer's mirror to nature. Chaucer, Beaumont contends, merely describes the world and humanity as he saw it:

"purposing to describe all men living in those daies, how it had beene possible for him to have left untouched these filthie delights of the baser sorte of people" (Aiii v).

Beaumont adds to this defense the claim that Chaucer's broad tales and low styles are a public service. Chaucer's writing, Beaumont claims, helpfully exposes to readers the squalor, bawdry and lowness of different ranks of people: "His drift is to touch all sortes of men, and to discover all vices of that Age, and that he doth in such sorte, as he never failes to hit every marke he levels at" (Aiv).

Tellingly, Beaumont's elite sensibility seems not to allow him to comment on Chaucer's plowmen, characters who are commoners, speak in low voices, and yet have no "filthie delights." Beaumont's elitist defense of Chaucer's seeming "incivilitie" focuses readers on exactly the interpretation of Chaucer traits he wishes readers to overlook: Beaumont's apology highlights Chaucer's reputation for plainness and for commoner characters. Through the length and fervor of his argument, Beaumont shows that he believes there is a continuing need for highbrow commentators to make excuses for Chaucer's image as a patron of low styles of writing before praising him.

That Elizabethans were well aware of the inconsistencies that emerge in Speght's folio edition of the Works is evident in Francis Thynne's Animadversions uppon

the Annotacions and corrections of some imperfections of impressions of Chaucer's workes (1598), a printed review of Speght's edition of Chaucer's Works. Thynne draws readers' attention to Speght's inconsistent descriptions of Chaucer as a highbrow writer and yet a champion of English commoners' causes. He registers horror at Speght's suggestion that Chaucer came of common stock, and dedicates a full five pages to proving the contrary. He uses printed marginal notes to draw attention to these arguments, noting: "He [Thynne] differeth from Master Speight on Chaucer's family" and "Chaucer his arms unjustly undervalued" (9; 10). Thynne positively lashes out at Speght for claiming that Chaucer's family members may have been merchants: "you seme to implye by a conjecturall argumente that Chaucers auncestors sholde be merchants [...]. This is mere conjecture, and of no valydytye" (12-3). Thynne punctuates this argument with yet another printed marginal note, repeating, "The conjecture that Chaucer's ancestors were merchants, of no valydytye." Thynne tries to squelch the appallingly scandalous anecdote that claims Chaucer assaulted a friar in Fleetstreet. Following a printed marginal note that proclaims "Chaucer being a grave man

unlikely to beat a Franciscan Fryer but?," Thynne argues "Chaucer was a grave manne, holden in greate credyt, and employed in embassye [...]. I sholde judge yt strange that he sholde violate the rules of peace and gravytye yn those yeares" (16-7).

As with Speght, Thynne, too, is unwilling to give up all of Chaucer's Reformation reputation. Thynne repeats familiar details about Chaucer's radical religious convictions and his eagerness to take on common causes. Thynne links his discussion of Chaucer's religious radicalism to a detailed description of Thynne's own father's heroic efforts to bring the controversial plowman satires into the Chaucer canon in his 1532 and 1542 editions of the Works. According to Francis Thynne, Chaucer's satires are so radical that William Thynne had to risk life and limb to bring them to the English public, braving Henry VIII's displeasure and the wrath of the notoriously vengeful Cardinal Wolsey:

when kinge henrye had redde, he called my father unto hym saying William Thynne I dobte this will not be allowed, for I suspecte the Byshoppes will call the in questione for yt [...]. The Cardinall

caused the kinge so muche to myslyke of that tale,  
 that chaucer must be new printed and that  
 discourse of the pilgrymes tale [the lost pseudo-  
 Chaucerian Pilgrim's Tale] lefte oute" (6).

As Francis Thynne describes it, William Thynne was lucky to have been able to save himself from the dangers Chaucer's radicalism incurred: after a close call with the Cardinal, "by the kinges favor my father escaped bodelye daunger" (7). Thynne's story of the printing of the first editions of the Works makes Chaucer and William Thynne daring combatants who battle for freedom against tyrannical and corrupt authorities. Although Thynne refuses to accept some aspects of Chaucer's Reformation reputation for radicalism, insisting that Chaucer was not a commoner and that he could not have been so ignoble as to engage in tawdry street brawls, he romanticizes other aspects of Chaucer's Reformation reputation and attributes these also to his father. Thynne's Chaucer and his father fight the Reformation fight for English freedoms against the tyrannies of Catholicism, tyrannies represented in unnamed Catholic officials and in Cardinal Wolsey. Although slightly mitigated, Chaucer's Reformation reputation lives on in

Thynne's narrative.

Thynne's eulogy for Chaucer and his father as Englishmen who relentlessly defended the true faith and opposed Catholic tyrannies reflect values that became important in England during the Reformation and continued to influence writers throughout the sixteenth century. As a result of the Reformation, writers' claims that England supports the true faith and is a foe to tyranny become catchphrases for Elizabethan identity. Many Elizabethan commentators, along with Foxe, Speght and Thynne, praise the reforming sympathies and populism of literary works similar to the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman satires. These Elizabethans hope to show that, time out of mind, the English defended the true faith and resisted the supposed tyrannies of Catholicism and other English enemies. Elizabethan praise for the popular and anti-hierarchical elements in English traditions uneasily coexist with praise for hierarchy, order, and aristocracy. In the chapters to come, I examine Elizabethan literary works that reflect the same Anglo centric praise for popular and anti-hierarchical English traditions that is evident in editions of Chaucer's Works and commentaries on Chaucer. I argue that Elizabethan

writers draw on these popular and anti-hierarchical traditions because, following the Reformation, these traditions formed an important part of what came to be known to Elizabethans as the English tradition.

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. See Helgerson's Elizabethan Prodigals.
2. In my analysis of the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman tradition, I am greatly indebted to King's English Reformation Literature, his Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition, and Norbrook's Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance. Another important source is Kernan's discussion of Renaissance English satire. For discussions of the Protestant plain style, see Auksi, Graham, and King's English Reformation Literature 138-43.
3. The Pilgrim's Tale never appeared in the Works, according to Francis Thynne because its satire was too strong an attack on bishops even for Henry VIII's Reformation stomach; subsequent editors supposedly lost the tale (6). See Francis Thynne's Animadversions and Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of the Works. A later Chaucer editor, Tyrwitt, says the tale appeared in print c. 1540 with the now fragmentary edition of The Court of Love. (6). Although it came out in single editions early in the sixteenth century, Jack Up Lande did not join the collected Works until the last half of the sixteenth-century, in Thomas Speght's edition of 1602.
4. For discussions of Wyatt's uses of Chaucer, see Mason, Southall, Spearing, Thomson, and Watkins.
5. Blodgett, Brewer, and Heffernan say that the preface to Thynne's edition is by Sir Brian Tuke (35; Geoffrey Chaucer: The Works n. pag.; 164).
6. For a fuller description of Henry VIII's propaganda campaign, see Elton's Policy and Police.
7. King points out that the lowly speakers and popular pretensions of many Reformation literary texts support reformers' claims that the godly live humble lives.
8. Wawn and Heffernan concentrate on the monarchic aspects of the Chaucer apocrypha. Heffernan, for example, argues that "Chaucer now appeared as an early advocate of the independence of the Church of England, a royalist before a

Papist" (160).

9. Sixteenth-century editors attributed I Playne Piers to Langland, the same author they attributed Piers Plowman to.

10. Publication information is from Pollard and Redgrave.

11. Norbrook points out that Crowley's edition emphasizes the Piers poet's connection to programs for social and political reform (52-4).

12. The writer of The Prayer and Complaynt of the Plowman unto Christ supports the anti-hierarchical implications of Reformation literature. He compares authorities who censor preachers to the "bysshops / prestes / & laweyers" who attacked Christ and his disciple's teachings as "newe lernynge" and scorned them as "men neyther of auctoritye nor reputacyon / but laye men / ydiottes / fyshers / carpenters and other of the rascall sorte" ([4]).

13. Among critics who discuss the politicization of the plowman in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI are Heffernan, Hudson, King in English Reformation Literature, Norbrook, Thorne, Von Nolcken, and Wawn.

14. The title page to the Marprelate reprint of I Playne Piers reads: "A ploughman men me call / My speech is fowlle, yet marke the matter / How things may hap to fall / But now another Ile have for mee,? I think it as fit say, if any my name doo crave, I am the Gransier of Martin Mare-prelitte."

15. Elton, King, and Norbrook discuss collaboration between reformers and the Crown and the growing tensions in their relations in the second half of the sixteenth century. Collinson points out that, despite anti-hierarchical implications of Reformation literature, not even the most radical of reformers seem to have wanted a Church completely free of official control.

16. King and Norbrook both suggest that Henry VIII's agents tried to make the Reformation appear to be a popular movement. Hutton discusses the difficulty of determining whether the Reformation truly was a popular movement.

17. For discussion of the populism in Foxe's Actes and Monuments, see Helgerson's Forms of Nationhood (252).

18. For discussion of Spenser's uses of the plowman tradition in The Shepheardes Calender, see Esolen, Heatt, and Lane, along with King. For discussions of Spenser's use of Chaucer in Prosopopoia: or Mother Hubberds Tale, see Greenlaw's commentary on it in the variorum edition of Spenser's works and Oram's commentary on it in The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser.

19. On the "stigma of print" in sixteenth-century England, see Marotti, Saunders, and Wall. As an example of the ways print works reflect Elizabethan contempt for print and its associations with popularity, Marotti cites the title page to the 1593 edition of Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia: "Spiro non tibi," "I breathe forth [sweetness] but not for you" (215). The printer tries to counteract prints' associations with popularity by claiming that, although in print, the Arcadia is not for common audiences.

20. Bennett, Bonner, and Heffernan point out the evident popularity of Chaucer in sixteenth-century England, measured in numbers of editions and print runs (465; 277; 165).

21. Miskimin notes Chaucer's popularity in the sixteenth century in comparison to Gower; she points out that Gower was in print only in 1533 and 1553 (239).

22. Caxton's early editions of Chaucer, among the earliest works he printed, are small, but since print was new they were not within reach of ordinary consumers. Later single editions were cheaper and less highbrow, appealing to a wider audience.

23. Wall and Voss show that announcements about additions on title pages to printed works were advertising tactics printers and editors used to sell their products (173; 735-38).

24. Bonner and Miskimin mention the courtly love tradition in Chaucerian scholarship (465; 249). Lerer discusses Chaucer's evolution into a great writer from his own time to Caxton's editions.

## Chapter Three

### "Cobler's Philosophie" Dream Visions, Prophecies, and the Politic English Rogue in Robert Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier and Robert Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy

In the 1589 Marprelate press reprint of I Playne Piers Which Can Not Flatter, religious reformer Martin Marprelate announces himself a direct descendent of Lollard and Reformation literary traditions, buttressing his claim that he writes from within the English religious tradition rather than as an outsider and a rebel. Marprelate suggests that the precedents to his reforming tradition are the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale, Piers Plowman, the Reformation plowman tracts that followed in their wakes, and, ironically, a tract by his contemporary and opponent, John of London, John Aylmer's An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes (1559). Not all Elizabethan writers so directly advertise their Reformation lineages, as Marprelate does. Yet, I will argue, a significant body of Elizabethan literature draws on Reformation influenced literary traditions, especially traditions that Elizabethans associated with the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale and Piers Plowman, two works by writers they considered central to the English literary tradition and to England's reforming past.

The Elizabethan writers whose works I examine in this

chapter capitalize on tropes popularized in the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman traditions, creatively reinterpreting the traditions' goals of social edification and reform-minded satire. They use the works' plot devices, stock characterizations, and hallmark stylistic devices, such as the dream vision and the prophetic form. These Elizabethan writers employ their utmost creativity in reinterpreting the plowman tracts' godly commoner, whose humble honesty cuts through hollow rituals and corrupt institutions: in works I examine in this chapter, he becomes a pair of breeches, a crossdressing swords woman, a cobbler, and a soldier. Drawing on the quips of the plowman satirist, these Elizabethan writers create what the cobbling narrator of The Cobler of Caunterburie (1590) calls "Cobler's Philosophie": a complex satiric style in which the lowly speaker mixes jest with earnest, exposing upper echelons' failings and the social ills that result from them with roguish directness, "imitating herein *old father Chaucer*, who with the like Method set out his Canterbury tales" (2-3). Reformation writers use this quipping style to reform popish parsons; Marprelate uses it to battle insufficiently reformed Protestants; these Elizabethan writers turn the reforming streaks of the plowman traditions against a peculiarly Elizabethan pastiche of social ills: disdainful

courtiers, seditious nobles, unreasonable rents, cowardice, and effeminacy.

Most important for my purposes are the ways that Elizabethan writers use this satiric style to define Englishness. Elizabethan writers identify the plowman traditions as founts of English literature. Therefore, they extend the godly commoner's repertoire in order to promote not only godliness and social justice, but also patriotic chauvinism and Elizabethan war efforts. The plowman traditions, according to Elizabethan commentators, provide literary evidence proving that England, above all other countries, is unique in its defense of commoners' rights, and therefore enjoys a well-deserved popularity with its commoners. Elizabethan political commentators developed readings of English political institutions parallel to those that appear in these fictions. Both the political commentators and the fiction writers try to show that England's laws protect common Englishmen and women's liberties, and give Elizabethan writers grounds for trumpeting forth the benefits and blessings of the English commonwealth over all other countries.

Before moving to my discussion of the literary works I examine in this chapter, I should stress that I do not intend this to be a study tracing the influence of Chaucer

and the Piers poet on Elizabethan writers. Instead, I wish to trace a particular conception of English literary traditions and Englishness through early sixteenth-century editions of Chaucer and the Piers poet to Elizabethan writers' works. In addition, although I examine traditions sixteenth-century English readers and writers developed in interpretations of Chaucer and the Piers poet, I am not suggesting that readers and writers developed these traditions only through commentaries on Chaucerian and Piers-style literature. As I discuss in the next chapter, the traditions I examine pepper a variety of literary works from sixteenth-century England; the interpretive threads I follow show up in commentaries on Chaucerian and Piers-style literatures, in historical and political commentaries, and in other literary works.

Throughout this study, I hope that my discussion of the texts emphasizes the extent to which I believe that, in using motifs that appear in commentaries on pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style literatures, the writers I discuss are doing much more than imitating earlier literatures. The Elizabethan works I examine are not retrograde survivals of medieval and Reformation literary traditions. In every case, the writers so heavily reinterpret, reinvent, or even forge anew the earlier

traditions that their works reference medieval or Reformation precursors rather than reproducing them. This is so even in those works whose writers explicitly say they follow in earlier writers' footsteps. Critics who read stylistic or thematic similarities to earlier literary works as simple borrowings or falling back on traditional devices miss an important aspect of imitation and influence: however bold the writers' imitations or influences, they inevitably have their own spins on their originals, eccentricities of readings and representation, and distinct ideas about the literary or cultural cache of their models.

Critics accuse popular writers, especially, of retrograde tendencies; of piecing together old material so as to turn a quick profit; or, of appealing to groundlings who, as with the grocer couple Francis Beaumont satirizes in The Knight of the Burning Pestle, want something in the old style. Studies of popular culture, such as Peter Burke's study of early modern European popular culture, show that popular writers often use the same or similar motifs: Robin Hood, the sons of Amyon, and the knight who miraculously springs back to life reappear again and again in popular literature. However, even in these cases each interpreter uses the popular traditions in unique ways. Performers and writers deliberately evoke models and just as deliberately

depart from them. In addition, audiences, while often aware of works' precursors, view the works through their own lenses: new audiences, new settings, and new eras make of old works new creations. The works I examine here are very far from being imitations or repetitions of simple folk motifs. These writers bring to their literary works complex, interconnected interpretations of English literature, English history, and Englishness. They do not simply follow traditions; they create them, and perhaps then claim they follow them.

The writer of the first literary work I focus on in this chapter, Robert Greene's pamphlet A Quip for an Upstart Courtier (1592), self-consciously appeals to Chaucerian and Piers-style traditions. Robert Wilson, whose play I discuss later in the chapter, is less self-conscious than Martin Marprelate and Robert Greene about writing in Chaucerian and Piers-style traditions. Robert Wilson may have thought of himself as writing in the English tradition without reference to Chaucer, the Piers poet, or their heirs. Nevertheless, Wilson and Greene both draw on traditions that developed alongside and in concert with the sixteenth-century interpretations of Chaucer and the Piers poet I discuss in chapter two. Elizabethans were beginning to think of, and to shape, these traditions as important points

of origin for the English tradition.

Wilson's play belongs with a group of plays connecting lowly laborers--the politic rogues of my chapter title--with prophecy. The titles of the plays alone are sufficient to suggest parallels between them: Robert Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy (1594), the anonymous Pedler's Prophecie (1595) and A Pedlar's Tale to Queen Elizabeth (1578-90).<sup>1</sup> There are at least two possible explanations for these parallels: the playwrights were familiar with one another's works and deliberately drew parallels, or the playwrights wrote from a common tradition. I have space in this chapter to discuss only Wilson's play in detail. However, connections between the three plays illuminate the traditions the playwrights were working with. All feature main characters who, as with the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman, are wandering laborers with prophetic insights that help them correct social injustice and dispense advice to their social superiors. The plays have the reforming instincts and satiric thrusts sixteenth-century English commentators read into pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman literature. Wilson's Cobler's Prophecy, along with these other plays and Greene's A Quip, turn the plowman literature's criticisms of top-heavy political institutions and its tales of the

reforming powers of simple English commoners into celebratory descriptions of English traditions and English commoners' prerogatives. In this, they mirror sixteenth-century English commentators' descriptions of Chaucer and the Piers poet as English patriots and champions of English commoners. Greene's hero in A Quip, named Clothbreeches, and the cobbler and peddlers of the prophecy plays are equivalents and close relatives to the plowmen of the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale, Piers Plowman, and their plowman descendants. As with the Piers character, these characters are ciphers for ordinary English commoners.

The prophecy plays introduce cobblers and peddlers, laborers similar to the plowman, into the circle of common Englishness. In Reformation literature, the figure of the plowman had never been alone in defending the true faith and the English Church from the corruptions of the popish empire. Along with the plowman, reformers' satiric tracts had, from their inception, included practitioners of other crafts, especially shoemakers and cobblers. Anthony Scoloker's translation of Hans Sach's A Goodly Dysputacion Betwene a Cristen Shomaker and a Popyishe Parson (1548) preceded William Copeland's A Godly Dyalogue and Dysputatcyon Betwene Pyers Plowman, and a Popyshe Preest (c. 1550) in England. In Luke Shepherd's Doctour Double Ale

(1548?), a poem in Skeltonics, a cobbler's boy upstages a popish parson. Contemporaneous with Doctour Double Ale, Shepherd printed a dialogue with a plowman combatant questioning a parson who defends Catholicism's rituals, John Bon and Mast Person (1548?). Plowmen and shoemakers, along with their cobbling counterparts, shared reputations in Reformation English literature as prophetic voices crying in the wilderness. In their plainness and simplicity, the heroes of A Quip, The Cobler's Prophecy, The Pedler's Prophecie, and A Pedlar's Tale to Queen Elizabeth stand for the plowmen, shoemakers, and cobblers who in earlier Reformation texts represent common English interests. In all these fictions, the plowman or lowly laborer in quest of truth meets a series of clerics or nobles. Although he treats them with due respect, these worthies simply are not able to live up to their titles. The simple commoner asks apparently unassuming questions that disarm corrupt social superiors into displaying greed, foolishness, and excessive pride. The earnestness and sincerity of the commoner character heightens the disgrace of the corrupt official.

As a result of these traditions in English literature, in many popular fictions from late sixteenth-century England, the dignified simplicity and commonness that mark the main characters of the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style

plowman tradition become the mark of Englishness. In The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, M. C. Bradbrook notes that Elizabethan comedies typically celebrate the commoner and the gentleman-dressed-as-commoner over the courtier. Dressing as a commoner is a way for a character who is of gentle birth to gain great virtue, if we are literal in our readings of Elizabethan popular fictions. "There was a firm popular tradition," Bradbrook points out, that

gaudy clothes were the sign of a fop or a gull, and that a plain attire indicated honest worth. From Duke Humphrey, in Woodstock, with his servingman's frieze jerkin to Edgar in the old countryman's 'best 'parel' and best accent, defying Oswald, the truly noble tended to such simplicity as amounted to a disguise. (87)

The gracious king disguised as a commoner is a hero in English fictions from the medieval Robin Hood tales to William Shakespeare's Henry V (1599) and on. Gentlemen and gentlewomen seeking love, fortune, or honor dress in the tunics and buskins of their social inferiors, and invariably come out successful.

As Bradbrook suggests, foppish and overinflated gentry

and peers of the realm appear as frequently in Elizabethan comedies as simple commoners. Critics point out that Elizabethans often satirize the foolishness of commoners, as Richard Helgerson argues in Forms of Nationhood (Chapter Five, "Staging Exclusion"). However, alongside satire of foolish commoners, Elizabethan writers place satire of foolish nobles. The laughably corrupt gentleman or woman is as much a stock type in Elizabethan fictions as the servile or foolish commoner. Often, the foolish noble provides Elizabethan writers with opportunities to praise the simplicity of English commoners. Many writers of late sixteenth-century popular fictions poke fun at foppish nobles in order to laud the valor of English commoners. Seeking ways to define their common Englishness, Elizabethan fiction writers turn to the figures of the foppish, foolish, or otherwise corrupt gentry or aristocracy; these characters' anti-types, noble commoners (or noble characters with the mien of commoners), provide writers with the measure of Englishness. For these writers, English commoners are the types of Englishness. Elizabethan writers who attack nobles suggest that the nobles' haughtiness, preening, and flattery are characteristics they learned in foreign courts rather than from their English peers. Their flaws come from being Italianate, Frenchified, or Spanish-

influenced: they are unEnglish. Ballads, pamphlets and plays celebrating English victories over France and Spain portray their enemies as hopelessly foppish courtiers, ruined by a court-centered government that prefers the effete. Top-heavy and tyrannical societies, according to Elizabethans, lead to greed, self-interest, pride, and, finally, effeminacy.<sup>2</sup> The Englishman who has fallen prey to these unEnglish vices is an abomination in these fictions, and the merely cowardly or braggadocio Englishman is no better.

Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier is one of the most popular Elizabethan pamphlets to use the simple commoner of the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style literatures as a model for Englishness and a scourge for haughty, and hence unEnglish, nobles. Greene's Quip went through six editions in 1592, the year it appeared in print.

In the introduction to the facsimile edition, Edwin Haviland Miller estimates the number of copies sold at about 7,000 (9).<sup>3</sup> Greene's A Quip combines Chaucerian references and nostalgic praise for an older and better England (a motif underlying sixteenth-century imitations and reprints of medieval and pseudo-medieval plowman literature) with the chauvinistic patriotism of the "Pedlers, Tinkers, Coblers, Rogues" who shout insulting epithets against the French in A

Comparison of the English and Spanish Nations (1589). The primary matter for debate in the pamphlet is the preeminence of the hearty English commoner, Clothbreeches, over the fatuous Italianate courtier, Velvetbreeches. The narrator of the pamphlet gathers a jury of tradespeople who witness the debate between Clothbreeches and Velvetbreeches and decide which of the two should have greater prerogatives in England, the commoner or the courtier.

Greene makes the definition of Englishness the main topic of his pamphlet, epitomizing it in the character of the commoner, Clothbreeches. Throughout the debate, the pamphlet's disputants focus on contrasts between Clothbreeches' native Englishness and Velvetbreeches' love of Italianate court customs, between Velvetbreeches' high social standing and Clothbreeches' personal virtues. Velvetbreeches claims to have precedence because of his wealth and high social standing. Clothbreeches rests his case on his Englishness. Clothbreeches declares "I belong to the old antient yeomanrie."<sup>4</sup> Velvetbreeches replies,

I [...] am sproong from the antient Romans, borne in Italy the mistresse of the world for chivalrie, calde into England from my native home (where I was famous) to honour your courtiers and yoong gentlemen here in England with my countenance

[...] I sit and dine with the Nobilitie. (B4 v)

The narrator of the pamphlet summarizes the dispute: "You sir, boast of your country and parentage, he of his native birth in England" (C v).

In keeping with the combatants' concern for English customs, Greene emphasizes the pamphlet's connections to older English literary traditions. Greene gives the pamphlet the trappings of the antique and references to ancient English literary traditions. The typeface, style and theme of the pamphlet all suggest its affinities to older English literary traditions. Miller points out that A Quip is based on "Pride and Lowliness," a poem written approximately 1570, shortly after the flood of pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman tracts. The text of A Quip is in archaic black letter type.<sup>5</sup> The title page advertises the pamphlet's antique style with the subtitle "A quaint dispute." A woodcut shows two characters, Clothbreeches and Velvetbreeches, debating. The rusticity of the hero, Clothbreeches, suggests that he is an "upland" countryman, peer to the plowman of the pseudo-Chaucerian Jacke Up Lande.<sup>6</sup> Clothbreeches is a homely countryman with clumsy boots, an overshirt tied with a rope, a "budget" or pouch hanging at his side, and a stave slung over his shoulder. Velvetbreeches, by contrast, is the

quintessential courtier. He wears slim cuffed leather boots, pantaloons, a doublet, starched ruff, and a feathered hat reminiscent of the rounded "eggshell" Hamlet ridicules courtly Osric for wearing (5.2.185).

One source for Greene's A Quip is Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Greene explicitly calls on Chaucer as a precedent for his pamphlet. Obvious Chaucerisms, together with the direct reference to Chaucer in the text of A Quip (E2), prompted Caroline Spurgeon to include Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier in her survey of Chaucer criticism.<sup>7</sup> As in the Canterbury Tales, in A Quip, Greene gives thumbnail sketches of some sixty tradespeople who wander into his pamphlet--an excess of pilgrims, unparalleled in Chaucer's character sketches. In both the Canterbury Tales and A Quip, pilgrims who ply different trades and occupy unequal social positions quarrel amongst themselves, air grievances, and hint that there are additional, unspoken, tensions. Along with Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Piers Plowman is also a source for Greene's pamphlet. Greene melds Chaucerian traditions with traits familiar from Piers Plowman, probably because Elizabethans intimately connected Chaucer and the Piers poet to one another through the figure of the plowman. In Elizabethan editions of Chaucer's Works, the plowman is a pilgrim who contributes to Chaucer's tales. Throughout A

Quip, Greene combines bits and pieces of Chaucerian poetry with reminders of Piers Plowman: Greene's tale begins in April, as does Chaucer's Canterbury Tales; the narrator falls into a dream and has a vision, as does the Piers poet and Chaucer's poets in The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame, and The Parliament of Fowls; A Quip imitates the alliterative poetry of Piers in lines such as "seeking to sollace my selfe I fell in a dreame" (B); while dreaming, the narrator wanders in a dale similar to the one in the prologue to Piers Plowman; upon beginning the dream sequence, the narrator launches into a five page catalog of flowers--daffodils, pansies, heartsease, fennell--similar to Chaucer's shorter catalog of trees in The Parliament of Fowls.

In addition to stylistic parallels to Chaucer's poetry and that of the Piers poet, Robert Greene's Quip presents readers with a tale that is the stuff of folklore and plowmen's tales: the poet's dream in A Quip reveals two pairs of breeches, Clothbreeches and Velvetbreeches, minus the bodies of the husbandman and courtier who ought to fill the breeches.<sup>8</sup> These marvelous breeches are comparable to the talking pelican and griffin who debate in the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale, a tale Elizabethans collated into

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. In A Quip, Greene similarly stages a debate, this one between the talking breeches. The Canterbury Tales' motley assembly of tradespeople gather at the scene of the debate and the fabulous breeches roundly denounce their quirks. Greene adds to the fabulous nature of the debate by breaking off midstream with a comic parable in which the Lord and Saint Peter seek food from passersby, are rejected by a group of greedy tailors (who have undoubtedly made their fortunes by clothing such as Velvetbreeches), and finally meet up with a good-natured "cruel" of shoemakers.<sup>9</sup> In all things, Greene outdoes Chaucer--comically so. Instead of the few lines cataloging trees in The Parliament of Fowls, Greene gives five pages of flowers; instead of the handful of pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales, Greene introduces crowds; in the places of the marvelous beasts in The Plowman's Tale, Greene puts headless trousers, a "most monstrous sight" that is more parody than imitation of the Chaucerian beast fable; as the poet in A Quip says, "never in any age such a woonderfull objecte fortun'd unto any man before" (B3 v). A Quip's comical urban characters outdo even the Chaucerian prioress's pretentiousness--into the pamphlet sashay a poet, player, and a musician "alias the Usher of a Dauncing schoole." A Quip is very nearly as parodic of the

Chaucerian tradition as Don Quixote is of chivalric romance.

In A Quip, Greene overdoes the stylistic effects and comedy, dispenses with the piety of his pseudo-Chaucerian and plowman precedents, and parodies as well as copies the satire of his sources.<sup>10</sup>

In transforming the religious quests of the pseudo-Chaucerian plowman tales, Piers Plowman, and the Canterbury Tales into a quest for social justice, Greene follows Elizabethan interpretations of Chaucer and the Piers poet. Sixteenth-century editions of pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman tracts place the lowly plowman over a corrupt and tyrannical clergy. Clothbreeches' championing of native English birth over wealth and social standing similarly pits the lowly English commoner against the wellborn courtier, and gives the commoner the victory. In A Quip, all things English prevail over even the most elite products of other cultures. Clothbreeches declares, in good plowman fashion,

I praye you what difference is betweene you and me  
but in the cost and the making, thooough you be  
never so richly daubde with goulde and powered  
with Pearle, yet you are but a case for the  
buttockes, and a cover for the basest parte of a  
mans bodye no more than I [...]. are you  
therefore my superiour because you are taken up

with Gentlemen, and I with the yeomanrie? Doth true vertue consist in riches or humanitie in wealth? is auncient honour tied to outwarde braverie? or is not rather true Nobilitie, a mind excellently qualified with rare vertues? (B4-B4 v)<sup>11</sup>

Velvetbreeches brags "thou art fayne to sue by means of supplication, and that and thou to so little regarded that most commonly it never comes to the Princes hand, but dies imprisoned in some obscure pocket" (B4 v). The pamphlet's position on the exchange between Clothbreeches and Velvetbreeches is clear: the printed marginalia next to Velvetbreeches' boast about his precedence at court comments "The more is the pitie" (B4 v).

When the pamphlet's jury comes back with a verdict, it decides in favor of Clothbreeches, "companion to kings, an equall with the nobilitie, a friende to gentlemen and yeomen and a patron of the poore, a true subject, a good housekeeper, and generall as honest as he is auncient." Velvetbreeches, by contrast, the jury labels "a raiser of rents and an enemie in the commonwelth," the secular equivalent of the corrupt and tyrannical clergy the plowman harangues in the plowman tracts (H3). The pamphlet jury's verdict in favor of Clothbreeches' prerogatives in England

suggests that Clothbreeches ought to set the paradigm for Elizabethan Englishness. The question the jury settles, then, is the nature of Englishness; the jury returns convinced that Clothbreeches is its representative.

Greene combines the satiric commentary on corrupt officials he takes from his pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style precedents with patriotic praise of England's social order. In Greene's pamphlet, the marks of Englishness that distinguish Clothbreeches from Velvetbreeches are also signs of the ancient freedoms of English commoners, and reasons why Greene's narrator thinks readers should place England above all other countries. The pamphlet's hero wears "white kersie [...] seamed with a little coventrie blew, such as in Diebus illis our grandfathers wore, when neighborhoode and hospitalitie had banished Pride out of England" (B3 v-B4). Clothbreeches wears the cloth that was Elizabethan England's most lucrative export, a chief staple of its economy. His seams are dyed the famous blue of the town of Coventry in England, once a thriving cloth town.<sup>12</sup> According to the narrator, the cloth and the colors represent the ancient values for humility and community that distinguish England from its velvet clad neighbors. Clothbreeches and the narrator fondly enumerate the virtues of England: "this

glorious Iland" (C), "a land of peace governed by true justiciaries and honorable magistrates" (C v), "my native home in Englande where I was borne and bred" (C v), and its past "good and blessed time heere in England" (C3 v), "when lowliness neighbourhood and hospitality lived in England" (E). In glorifying English custom, Greene uses variations on the word "antient" sixteen times and the *ubi sunt* motif "in diebus illis" three times. "England" he reiterates countless times, both by name and by fond allusion, as in "this glorious Iland." "England" when used as an appellation of praise stands out in the text in roman type rather than in the archaic black letter type, along with other important names and quotes. To cap off the pamphlet characters' praise of English freedoms, Greene has even Velvetbreeches grudgingly admit that the English jury system "allowe such large favour" that it is equally fair to a stranger such as himself (C2).

Greene's praise of ancient England and praise of Clothbreeches, the English yeoman commoner, combines with chauvinistic depreciation of Velvetbreeches' courtly Italian customs and Spanish clothes. Clothbreeches repeatedly returns to fears that corrupt and tyrannical nobles, under the influence of continental fashions, will lose the ancient English customs that defend England's commoners.

Clothbreeches claims that courtiers such as his opponent, Velvetbreeches, disregard English customs and love Italianate customs. Since Velvetbreeches imports Italian styles into England and makes them fashionable, Clothbreeches mourns the eventual loss of English customs that have existed unique and untouched in England *in diebus illis*. Clothbreeches denounces the courtier by citing all the sins more xenophobic Elizabethans associated with Italians: "abominable vices" such as "vaine-glory, selfelove, sodomie, and straunge poysonings;" "wherwith thou hast infected this glorious Iland," adds Clothbreeches (C).

Greene directs the sharpest edge of his satire against English nobles. In declaring the preeminence of the English commoner and country customs over Velvetbreeches and customs of the court, the narrator of A Quip ridicules the courtier, Clothbreeches verbally thrashes him, and the jury decides in favor of English commoners' prerogatives over the lesser prerogatives of the courtier. The attack on Velvetbreeches' Italianate behavior in A Quip is not only an attack on foreigners or foreign customs, but an attack on English gentry and aristocracy, whom Clothbreeches accuses of aping foreign customs. Velvetbreeches says he learned his manners in Italy, but the allegorical nature of his character allows for him to have roots in Italy without being merely an

Italian. He is an allegorical representative of the Italianate courtier, just as Clothbreeches is an allegorical representative of bluff Englishness. In A Quip, Greene is more concerned with foreign encroachments on Englishness than with foreigners themselves.

Textual evidence suggests that Greene's satiric target is the English courtier rather than the native-born Italian.

Greene includes in the first edition of A Quip a notorious section attacking his contemporary, Gabriel Harvey, a native Englishman. A ropemaker enters, says he lives in Saffron Waldon and has three sons--an exact description of Harvey's father. "For the elder [son]," Harvey's father says, "he is a Doctor [...] he was orderly clapt in the Fleet, but sir a Hawk and a Kite may bring forth a coystrell, and honest parents may have bad children" (E4). Harvey's fictional father insists on his own honesty despite his "bad children"--an insult that implicates his elder son Gabriel along with Gabriel's two younger brothers. Greene's attack on the affected Italianate customs of Velvetbreeches is almost certainly another dart Greene throws at Gabriel Harvey, in addition to his comic portrait of Harvey's father. Greene lampoons the overweening conceits of Harvey, and of Harvey as a type of the would-be courtier who hangs around the fringes of the court in order to gain favor or

keep up connections in court circles. Harvey clearly had courtly aspirations, referring in correspondence with Edmund Spenser to connections at court and plans to cultivate them through his writing. In printed verses, the Gratulations Valdineses, Harvey coyly dedicates a poem to his meeting with the queen, who reportedly commented that Harvey looked like an Italian (Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia 17-20; Stern 41).<sup>13</sup> Greene's satiric portrait of the Italianate Englishman is a poke at Harvey, the Englishman who fashions himself a courtier and a foreigner (and boasts about a private conference with the queen), rather than an attack on foreigners themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Greene directs his satire in A Quip against all who think themselves better than their English country folk.<sup>15</sup> Velvetbreeches' ego gets the better of him (as does Harvey's, Greene insinuates); he vaunts his right to privilege based on niceties such as social status, wealth, and manners; more important, he sneers at the country customs of his fellow Englishmen and women. Greene's representative English commoner, Clothbreeches, does not attack privilege per se in attacking the courtier; he attacks snobbish and unearned or overinflated privilege. Clothbreeches denounces Velvetbreeches' proud attire, but insists "so did I never grudge at bravery of any whome

byrth, time, place, or dignitie made worthy of such costly ornamentes" (C2 v). Velvetbreeches' gorgeous clothing and his insistence that he is titled is not his failing in Clothbreeches' eyes. Nor is his failing the fact that he is an upstart in the sense that he has leapt to privilege, from a common heritage to courtly eminence. Harvey took much ribbing, not least from Greene in A Quip, based on the fact that his father was a common ropemaker. However, exchanges between Greene, Harvey, and Thomas Nashe, Greene's self-styled defender, suggest that Harvey's main flaw, in his opponents' eyes, was not his common origins, but his pretentiousness. The "upstart" in Greene's A Quip for an Upstart Courtier is not necessarily the courtier who comes from a lower social status, but the courtier who rejects his common Englishness.

In Elizabethan fictions, part of the supposed superiority of ordinary Englishmen lay in their claims to humility and respect for fellow commoners, characteristics Greene praises in A Quip. They also lay claim to bluff, unornamented masculinity, characteristics evident in Clothbreeches' simple cloth breeches and energetic defense of his honor. Of seventeenth-century England, Linda Colley notes that:

There was a sense at this time--as perhaps there

still is--in which the British conceived of themselves as an essentially 'masculine' culture--bluff, forthright, rational, down-to-earth to the extent of being philistine--caught up in an eternall rivalry with an essentially 'effeminate' France. (252)

The same could be said of England in the sixteenth century, except that we should add Italy,<sup>16</sup> Scotland, and Spain as countries the English maligned along with France.

Elizabethan writers continually measure male representatives of other nations by English standards of masculinity, and find the foreigners wanting. According to these writers, the nobility of foreign courts lack the forthright courage of common Englishmen. The playwright of The Scottish History of James IV (1598) depicts the Scottish nobility cowering before their king, his sycophants, and a conniving Frenchman. They leave the court--and a helpless English princess--out of fear for their lives and goods. Finally, the English show up to ensure that justice and womanhood are preserved.

The French nobility provide comic relief in the anonymous Famous Victories of Henry V (1598) and William Shakespeare's Henry V (1599). The character of the French "Dolphin," or Dauphin, in all his fictional guises,

epitomizes the English stereotype of the effete foreigner. In The Famous Victories, the Dolphin breezily shrugs off his father's fears of war with the English, "Tut, my Lord; although the King of England be young and wildheaded, yet never think that he will be so unwise to make battle against the mighty King of France" (11.8-10). When Henry proffers an invitation to hand-to-hand combat with the Dolphin, however, the Herald informs us "my Lord and King his father will not let him come into the field" (12.26-7). The Dolphin, the play suggests, for all his fine talk, has yet to reach breeching age. In the end of the play, the Dolphin kisses Henry's sword as silently and obediently as Kate kisses Petruchio in the end of The Taming of the Shrew (1594?). Shakespeare's Dolphin in Henry V is equally breezy about the threat of war: "let us do it with no show of fear, / No, no more than if we heard that England / Were busied with a Whitsun morris-dance" (2.4.23-5). Later, we see the Dolphin prancing about with his horse and armor, bragging "When I bestride him, I soar, I am a hawk; he trots air [...]" (3.7.15-16). Later still, after another scene of bragging and no scenes of battlefield heroics, the Dolphin enters cursing. He has, as the Constable of France says, put on a "fair show," but little more (4.2.17).

Long Meg's conquests in The Life of Long Meg of

Westminster (c. 1590) add to the insults against nobles by suggesting that an Englishwoman is more man than the courtly or cowardly Englishman, who loses his masculinity as he sheds his gruff English exterior. Meg as soundly trounces an unnamed English nobleman as she does the Spanish Sir James of Castile and the French Dolphin's troops (98-9). Another Englishman, the braggart Huffing Dick, picks a fight with Meg, and ends it with "'Oh, hold thy hands!' quoth he, 'and spare my life.'" "Upon this," continues the tale, "she let him go, and carried him home with her, and dressed him full womanlike." Wearing the maid's petticoats, Huffing Dick waits on Meg for a day (109). Huffing Dick's experiences mirror those of the Spaniard, Sir James of Castile. Badly defeated in combat by Meg, Sir James cries, "'O save me sir,' quoth he; 'I am a knight and 'tis but a woman's matter; spill not my blood'" (91). As does Huffing Dick, Sir James submits to the indignities of serving Meg, having "all that supper time to wait on her trencher" (92). Fictional Englishmen such as Huffing Dick, shorn of the gruff exteriors supposed to go with their Englishness, are as susceptible to emasculation and dishonor as Spanish Sir James.

In A Quip, Greene similarly turns English criticisms of foreign effeminacy against the English nobility, suggesting

that their love for continental fashions and manners makes them no better than their foppish continental counterparts.

The length of the passage describing Velvetbreeches' attire alone conveys Velvetbreeches' delight in showy clothes--a characteristic that Elizabethans, as moderns, attributed to effeminacy:

a very passing costlye payre of Velvet breeches, whose paynes beeing made of the cheefest Neapolitane stufte, was drawne out with the best Spanish sattin, and marvellous curiouslye overwhipt with Golde twist, interseamed with knottes of Pearle, the Neatherstocke was of the purest Granado Silke, no cost was spared to set out these costlye breeches, who had gyрте unto them a Rapyr and Dagger gylt, point pendaunt, as quaintly as some curious Florentine had trickte them up to square it up and downe the streetes before his Mistresse. (B4)

His "curiousness"--Neapolitane, Spanish, Granado, Florentine--reveals that he has fallen prey to Italian and Spanish court cultures. Velvetbreeches' faults--foppishness, pride, jetting (walking in a showy manner), posing and pirouetting in a caricature of a fencing school usher--add up to the emasculation and effeminacy of the

fictional foreigner. By contrast, Velvetbreeches' critic, the simple pair of cloth breeches "soberlye marching," is Colley's bluff English commoner.

Robert Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy more clearly frames the preeminence of the commoner as a failure of the nobility than does Robert Greene's A Quip.<sup>17</sup> Wilson sets The Cobler's Prophecy in a thinly disguised England, the country of Boeotia, in which indolence and corruption run rampant.<sup>18</sup> He focuses the play on the dangers of its chief vice, Contempt, epitomized in the play's courtly characters.

This moral theme becomes the basis for the play's didacticism about the benefits of lowliness over contemptuous pride. In the play, haughty and ambitious nobles vie for preference; Mars sleeps away his martial power in Venus's bower; the Countrey Gentleman bleeds his tenants; and the overreaching Courtier plots to kill the Duke (a thinly disguised king) so that he can rule the country.<sup>19</sup> The gods send Raph, the cobbler-turned-reforming-commoner, to seek out Boeotia's ruler in order to advise him to root out the corrupt representatives of the nobility who threaten Boeotia's destruction. With advice from Raph and a timely blow from Raph's crazed wife Zelota, Mars revives, the Countrey Gentleman is routed, and the

overreaching Courtier dies a well-deserved death. The Duke of Boeotia emerges unscathed just in time to muster forces and ward off a threatened invasion by neighboring enemies. Wilson peppers the play with comments on the injustices commoners suffer under bad nobility and on social inequities in general. He incorporates into his play attacks on the upper echelons common to A Quip and the plowman literature, as well as those fictions' suggestions that commoners such as Raph represent the country's core identity. In A Quip, Greene defines Englishness in the commoner; in The Cobler's Prophecy, Wilson defines Boeotianess in the cobbler hero and his companion nonnoble, Sateros the soldier.

Wilson's attacks on the Boeotian nobility are cutting enough that critics have wondered how Wilson escaped censorship. Richard Helgerson and Richard Dutton comment on the radical nature of Wilson's satire. Helgerson, in Forms of Nationhood, calls the play "a genuinely radical expression of lower-class grievance" (218-9). Dutton says Wilson's plays are consistently sympathetic to simple people (69). Dutton discusses the play in his book on Elizabethan censorship because he finds it a good example of a play that shows the elasticity of Elizabethan censorship: that Wilson's satire of the Boeotian nobles' depredations and their governor's ineptitude remained uncut suggests that

Elizabethan censors were not overly hasty in cutting plays.

Although the play's social commentary seems radical, it appears not to have come under the censor's accusing pen; on the contrary, The Cobler's Prophecy may have played at court. Dutton concludes that Wilson's vision of Boeotian society fell within the pale of accepted Elizabethan opinion at the time it played. That such satire remained uncut, Dutton says

[demonstrates] that in the 1580s the drama available both to courtly and commercial audiences evolved a variety of ways of representing and reflecting the power structures which governed the country, the tensions within them, and their aspirations [...]. Wilson gives voice to a strain of militant Protestantism that was part of the developing national identity from the time of Edward VI to the Commonwealth and beyond. (72)

As Dutton suggests, the satiric portrait Wilson paints of Boeotian power structures reveals that Elizabethans were more flexible and willing to tolerate criticism of the upper echelons than we usually credit them with. Wilson builds on satiric traditions reformers established with the Protestant Reformation and strengthened in the reign of Edward VI, not least through their dissemination of plowman literature.

His play did not raise the alarm Helgerson and Dutton puzzle over because Wilson's visions of Boeotian society fit with what Queen Elizabeth and her court expected from certain strains of patriotic English literature. The popular literary tropes Wilson wields in his attacks on Boeotia's upper echelons are common in English Reformation literature.

His audience would have recognized in the Boeotian alliance of cobbler and Duke the same patriotic praise for England's monarchy and its commoner-friendly government that appears in the plowmen's tales and A Quip. As do the authors and editors of those works, Wilson uses satire of corrupt nobles and impotent leaders to create patriotic visions of monarchic equity and royal alliance with commoners.

Although Wilson's depiction of corrupt Boeotian nobles and reforming commoners draws on popular literary traditions that champion the commoners of England, the play itself may have had elite auspices. This suggests that the writer of a courtly Elizabethan play could as comfortably champion commoners and attack nobles as the writer of a popular pamphlet. Dutton, following Alfred Harbage, ascribes Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy to a courtly provenance based on details in the text of the play. The play appeared in print in 1594 with no record of performance history. Dutton and Harbage suggest, based on a reference in the play text

to audience members "who sit and see" and a stage direction telling Ceres to throw comfits to the audience, that the play's audience may have been elite, perhaps courtly.<sup>20</sup> The details in the play fit it for private performance before an audience wealthy enough to bear the costs of production, seating, and sweets. Following G. M. Cameron, Dutton conjectures that the play appeared at court in the 1580s in support of the Earl of Leicester's campaign to convince Elizabeth to send English troops overseas in support of Protestants in France and the Netherlands. In Cameron's and Dutton's readings, far from insulting court audiences with its satire of nobles and courtiers, Wilson's play meshes with court members' own opinions.

Cameron's and Dutton's conjectures that a pro-war noble such as Leicester sponsored the play are reasonably plausible considering that the play champions the martial prowess that chivalric aristocrats coveted as much as it does commoners' rights to live free of the oppressions corrupt courtiers bring to their country. The cobbler in the play travels with the usually taciturn soldier Sateros.

The soldier is a reformer in his own right, committed to reviving the martial spirit of his country, which lies, with its embodiment in Mars, dawdling in Venus's lap. If the play appeared at court, it certainly supported a pro-war

faction, whether or not it was Leicester's faction. The play's characters and plot consistently support martial valor. In the conclusion of the play, the Souldier, along with the Scholler, stands beside the Duke, who prepares to send out troops to defend Boeotia against the marauding neighbors. The last couplet of the play is the Duke's battle cry and a tribute to military endeavor: "with due praise to heaven let us depart, / Our State supported both by Armes and Art" (l. 1695-6). The Duke's final words proclaim the Souldier necessary to the state, rectifying the Souldier's complaints that members of the court previously scorned him.

Regardless of whether the plot of The Cobler's Prophecy played at court in support of a particular faction, Cameron's and Dutton's conjectures that a pro-war court faction sponsored the play suggest interesting possibilities: Wilson's play could sympathize with simple commoners, malign courtiers, and at the same time suit aristocratic, even courtly, aspirations. At first glance, the play seems contrary to the ends of an aristocrat: its plot enacts a patriotic merger between duke and commoner that cuts out scheming representatives of the upper echelons, especially courtly ones. Further, the Souldier seems an unlikely representative for an aristocrat, much

less a courtier. The Souldier is eloquent in his attacks on courtiers and insistent in his claims that he is a plain fellow. He argues, to courtiers' detriments, that "a souldier of desert (as with no other doo I consort) can be no lesse than a Gentleman, and some Courtiers are scarce so much." Turning to the Courtier in the play, the Souldier scornfully contrasts his own plainness with the Courtier's luxurious garb "in this plaine sute have I been, where you dare not with all your silkes" (1. 272-7).

Despite the seeming incompatibility of the Souldier's character and courtly ends, Bradbrook's formulation of the noble-with-the-mien-of-the-commoner and Colley's description of England's bluff Englishman make it entirely possible that a courtier, even one such as Leicester, might recognize himself not in the Courtier, but in the simple Souldier. Chivalric military ideals, along with the plowmanesque romanticization of the plain and the simple, enabled chivalrous Elizabethans to imagine themselves bluff commoners. In his study of sixteenth-century chivalry and court literature, Richard McCoy describes the curious combination of courtliness and bluffness that Elizabethan nobles developed in order to negotiate between their reputations as warriors and their subjection to the Queen. McCoy describes martial figures such as Sir John Perrot, who

cherished both his court reputation and his warlike bluntness, and consequently ended his life in the Tower (10). A bluff and pugnacious disposition, such as Perrot had, is useful on the battlefield, but a liability at court, where survival means pleasing the queen and maneuvering between factions. The most effective courtiers appear to have sustained a delicate balancing act between martial command and courtly pliancy. Yet, chivalric codes and pride of knighthood enabled Elizabethan courtiers to simultaneously manage that balancing act and still claim to be blunt soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

As an example of chivalric Elizabethans who flaunt their bluff commonness and anti-courtly attitudes, McCoy cites Sir Robert Naunton's recollection of Lord Willoughby de Eresby. Naunton says Willoughby insisted "as he was a great soldier, so was he of a suitable magnanimity and could not brook the obsequiousness and assiduity of the courtier" (12). Willoughby's contempt for courtiers equals the contempt of the Souldier in Wilson's play. Clearly, given Willoughby's example, the English aristocrat might imagine himself closer to the simplicity of Wilson's Souldier than to the sophisticated factiousness of the Courtier. Even those courtiers among Elizabeth's retinue who most pursued courtly preeminence might not have found Wilson's satire of

aspiring courtiers discomfiting. The most courtly of English courtiers, imagining themselves bluff Englishmen to the core, might feel unimpugned by attacks on their fictional counterparts in The Cobler's Prophecy. Because of this, the play could have appeared at court with few problems; Wilson's corrupt nobles and forthright commoners square with court-approved patriotic narratives championing the commoners of England and with chivalric codes giving preference to plainness.

As Greene does in A Quip, in The Cobler's Prophecy, Wilson uses medieval literary traditions and details from English popular culture to emphasize the patriotism and tacit Englishness of his characters and plot. Also as in A Quip, the medieval English and Elizabethan popular traditions Wilson uses in The Cobler's Prophecy have links to the reforming English plowmen and craftsmen who prophecy to kings and commoners in medieval and Reformation English literature. All are traditions that allowed patriotic Elizabethans to claim that England's history shows its commitment to social justice and its popularity with English commoners. By using recognizably medieval and popular tropes, Wilson grounds his play's predilection for commoners and plainness in medieval English dramatic conventions and English popular tradition. The play's medievalisms and

indebtedness to popular English traditions have struck nearly every critic who has commented on the play. W. W. Greg and Alfred Harbage suggest assigning the play an earlier date of composition than its entry in the Stationers' Register partly because of its archaisms.<sup>22</sup> Harbage argues that The Cobler's Prophecy, along with most of Wilson's plays, "embody the older traditions of spectacular display, familiar morality turned to a new use, and clowning [...] they have no independent poetic life, for at this stage the verbal aspect of playing had not yet asserted itself as the dominant one" (Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions 192). To Harbage, the play seems not sufficiently evolved from its medievalisms to have "independent poetic life."<sup>23</sup>

Among archaisms Harbage notes: Wilson opens the play with a pageant of gods that resembles the dumb shows common to earlier dramas. He includes dissembling vice characters directly out of the medieval English morality plays.<sup>24</sup> Contempt alias Content is the play's chief vice. Venus brings in minor vices--Follie, Nicenes, Newfangle, and Dalliance. These characters are identical to Mischeff, New-Guise, and Nowadays from the fifteenth-century English morality play Mankind. As writers of morality plays do,

Wilson layers allegorical meanings unto his characters' roles. The character he names "the Courtier" in the estates satire debate, he renames "Ennius" in sections of the play in which the character plays a part in the main plot.

Ennius has two roles in the play: he is the allegorical representative of courtiers (who seem to be a bad lot) and he is the character named Ennius who plots against the Duke of Boeotia. Wilson's Souldier similarly switches between his allegorical role as the bluff Souldier and his role as a character named Sateros, who saves Boeotia from its warlike neighbors.<sup>25</sup> Wilson draws his allegorical characters from medieval estates satires, inserting into the play a debate between the different professions and social ranks in the form of Ennius the Courtier, the Countrey Gentleman, the Scholler, Sateros the Souldier, and Raph the cobbler.

Other archaisms Harbage notes in The Cobler's Prophecy are popular literary traditions common in English literature both before and after the sixteenth century; they are not as closely linked to medieval traditions as the morality play elements Harbage comments on, but they are very closely linked to popular traditions Elizabethans associated with time immemorial. The antics of Wilson's cobbler hero recall the extemporizing of the traditional sixteenth-century stage clown.<sup>26</sup> The cobbler's prophecies, rhymes, riddles, and

other supernatural phenomena are common in medieval oral traditions as well as in sixteenth-century penny sheets. The structure of Wilson's play is the loose and episodic form of many popular fictions: Wilson leaps from estates satire to court intrigue, and then appears with Raph on the banks of Hell, where he chats a while with Charon, ferryman to the dead. The play has no formal divisions into acts or scenes, but rather continuous entrances and exits. These structural characteristics are common, as Harbage says, to traditional English adventure narratives and romances (Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions 192). M. C. Bradbrook responds by labeling the play an "utterly shapeless monstrosity" (68). Harbage more generously calls it "a medley" and suggests, as do I, that "the 'variety' might in itself be put forward as an aim, especially when the variety consisted of elements in themselves familiar" (Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions 189).<sup>27</sup> As Harbage says, the forms and figures in Wilson's play are familiar from the traditional pastimes of English popular literature (Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions 192).

There are three archaic and popular literary tropes Wilson uses in The Cobler's Prophecy that Harbage does not note. First, Wilson's cobbling hero draws on popular traditions English writers attached to shoemaking and

cobbling characters. Hans Sach's A Goodly Dysputacion Betwene a Cristen Shomaker and a Popyishe Parson (1548) and Luke Shepherd's Doctour Double Ale (1548?) are two early sixteenth-century English works that feature shoemakers and cobblers in title roles. More followed in the late sixteenth century. Between 1587 and 1599, at least twelve extant English ballads, pamphlets, and plays besides Wilson's have main characters who practice these crafts, and numerous others have them as minor characters.<sup>28</sup> In addition to using the shoemaker-cobbler hero popular in sixteenth-century literature, in the meeting of the cobbler and the Duke, Wilson draws on English popular literature's long history of works allying kings with commoners. Ballads such as "A Merie Songe of the Kinge and the Tanner" (1584) and "A Pleasant New Ballad of the Mery Miller of Mansfield and King Henry II" (1588?) celebrate fictional monarch-subject meetings that are staples in Elizabethan comedy.<sup>29</sup> Last, Harbage lists popular traditions Elizabethans associated with prophecy, but does not note that the style of the prophecies Wilson gives the cobbler in The Cobler's Prophecy draws on prophetic forms familiar from the Piers Plowman poet and Chaucer, as well as the mythical Arthurian Merlin. The cobbler claims "a Prophet one of Merlins kinde I am" (l. 461-2). Geoffrey of Monmouth included Merlin's

prophecies in his celebratory history of Britain, Historia Regum Brittaniae (c. 1136).<sup>30</sup> At least one of the prophecies the cobbler speaks, the "Cobbler's Song" lines 320-345, uses the "when [...] then" formula of a prophecy in passus four of Piers Plowman (l. 323-30).<sup>31</sup> A prophecy in the same style appears in Chaucer's Works beginning with William Thynne's first edition of 1532.<sup>32</sup>

As with pseudo-Chaucerian plowman literature, in auspices, plot, and style, Wilson's play joins the elite with the popular. A possibly courtly audience watches the play's popular tropes. The plot combines an orderly hierarchy under the beneficent Duke of Boeotia with the unhierarchical heroization of the simple cobbling commoner.

The play's style is at once classical, scholarly, moral, and popular.<sup>33</sup> If Wilson wrote his play for court performance, it is a comic Elizabethan near-equivalent to Henry VIII's Reformation editions of the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman's Tale. In chapter two, I discuss these volumes' alliance between the simple plowman and monarchic supremacy.

Henrician editions of the plowman tales appeal to popular culture in order to claim the English monarchy as a popular institution, one that has the people's support in its battles with the papal empire. Both Wilson's play and the apocryphal Chaucer tales approximate the archaisms, rough

styles, and loose forms readers and writers associate with popular audiences and English literary history. In both, monarchy (or dukedom) allies itself with the humble commoner in order to overcome the ambitious overreacher, whether it is the pope or the courtier.

Earlier plowman literature had hinted at the thoroughgoing attack on the upper echelons that Wilson suggests in his opposition between the simple commoner and corrupt nobility in The Cobler's Prophecy. The plowman tales' corrupt clergy inevitably are powerful landowners or courtiers, and, while these villainous clerics may represent the pope, they are likely to hail from England. Reformation writers and political commentators bought England's popular roots at some expense to the reputation of the country's nobility. They typically cast the wealthy, ennobled, and office holding upper echelons as the villains of their pieces, alongside greedy, grasping, and corrupt papal representatives. Wilson gives his attack on Boeotian nobles vehemence, detail, and thoroughness present in the most radical plowman tales. The play's good humor is almost entirely at the expense of Boeotian courtiers and gentlemen. In the course of the play, not a single character of high rank aside from the Duke remains unimpugned. The play has a

happy ending, but the characters of highest social rank do not share in it. Wilson finds no redeeming qualities in the Courtier and the Countrey Gentleman. They drop out of the final scenes, silent and unwanted characters who have no further role in the play or in the country. In their places at the Duke's side, Wilson puts the cobbler, Sateros the Souldier, and the Scholler. The Duke's final speech celebrating the "Armes and Art" that uphold his state completes the excision of the Courtier and Country Gentleman. The Boeotian commonwealth has no use for them since they have neither arms nor art, only rank. In A Quip, Greene similarly excises the nobility, voting Velvetbreeches out of the commonwealth in the trial by jury.

The contempt that Greene depicts in Velvetbreeches rules Boeotia's upper echelons, literally, in the character of the chief vice, Contempt alias Content (l. 12-13). On first setting about his duties as prophet, Raph encounters the Courtier, the Scholler, and the Countrey Gentleman paying court to Contempt. Contempt immediately shows himself an impious version of Velvetbreeches, Greene's braggart courtier. Contempt boasts to the attending Souldier,

I am the admirest in Boeotia,

By honoring me thou shalt obtaine preferment

[.....]

I am of power more than all the Gods

To sit and rule the harts of all degrees. (l. 207-12) Velvetbreeches claims to have the same power to obtain preference at court: "thou art fayne," Velvetbreeches gloats to Clothbreeches in A Quip, "to sue by means of supplication, and that and thou to so little regarded that most commonly it never comes to the Princes hand, but dies imprisoned in some obscure pocket" (B4 v). In The Cobler's Prophecy, too, courtiers sue to the corrupt upstart whose audacity gives him the court's ear. The Countrey Gentleman, Scholler, and Courtier flock to court Contempt, flattering and cajoling:

CONTR.: Haile to Contents divinest excelence.

SCHOL.: Content our sweetest good, we doo salute thee.

COUR.: Though last I am not least in duteous kindnes

To thee Content although thou be no God,  
Yet greater in account than all of them.

(l. 217-21)

These would-be courtiers embark on an unfriendly competition for Contempt's preference that quickly leads to

shocking displays of disdain for country, commoners, and one another. In a dramatic estates satire, Wilson colorfully lays out the characteristics that make up Greene's Velvetbreeches: braggadocio, vanity, the high rents the jury blames him for, and overall uncommonwealth-like behavior. The Courtier lauds himself as "daily in my Princes eye," bragging of his "wealth, favor, credit, countenance: on me attend suters" (l. 256-60). He ends his self-praise with invidious comparisons between himself and the other men: he does wonders at court "while the Scholler sits all day inventing syllogismes, the Countrey Gentleman plodding among poor hinds, and this bare soldier here carrowsing among his prating companions" (l. 268-70). The Souldier leaps in with comparable attacks on the others and praise of his own craft. Soldiers, he extols, "bring Princes to thraldom, then triumphing over courtiers: are liberall to give: wherein for the most part they excell the Countrey Gentleman. In brief, they are the swords of heavn to punish: the salve of heaven to pitie" (l. 290-5). The Countrey Gentleman imperiously replies "Nay my life excelleth all, I in the Countrey live a King;" he proceeds to describe how he takes advantage of his tenants--his "vassailes" he calls them--taking their produce and livestock, forcing them into unceasing labors for his

profit, and mercilessly raising their rents (l. 298-318). The Scholler ends the debate with praise of himself: "What the Courtier dreamingly possesses, the Countrey Gentleman with curses, and the Souldiour with cares: I quietly enjoy without controll [...]. I contemplate what can be done in batels, & with my pen hurt more than thousands doo with pikes" (l. 348-52). By the end of the scene, the noble characters' brags have broken down into unseemly bickering as each vies for preference.

Because Wilson's cobbling hero is a wanderer like the plowman, he is able to survey the damage the nobles' corruptions have done to the commonwealth. Throughout the play and Raph's wanderings, the devastating effects of the upper echelons' failures are everywhere apparent. Raph stumbles upon Boeotia's muses, who struggle to find something to write about in a country that lacks art, learning, and bravery (l. 535-74). Raph finds Boeotian hell unfit for commoners: the impoverished Codrus begs Charon to ferry him into the underworld "to behold if greater torment be in hell" (l. 661). Voices cry "a bote, a bote, a bote," and Charon sadly informs Codrus that a large influx of wealthy Boeotians are on their way: "Codrus, I cannot helpe thee now, and yet I wish thee wel, / Theres scarcely roome enough for rich, / So that no pore can come to hell" (l.

662-7). In another scene, Mars's "lame Porter in rustie armour, and a broken bill" and a Herald overtake Raph in his travels, horrifying the cobbler with their disrepair:

Alas good father thou art lame,  
 To be a souldier farre unlustie  
 Thy beard is gray thy armour rustie,  
 Thy bill I thinke be broken too. (l. 738-41)

The Herald sighs at the cheapness of coats of arms in Boeotia: "For what cannot the golden tempter doe?" (l. 768-72). Mars himself lolls in Venus's court "a sleepe, / On Lady Venus lap" (l. 787-88). As he sleeps, Venus and Contempt "daunce and leap over Mars, and making hornes at everie turne, at length leave him" (l. 1021-2). In scenes with Mars, Wilson curiously displaces onto Mars the effeminacy and emasculation that other Elizabethan popular writers attribute to courtiers. Venus dresses Mars in women's clothing, much as Long Meg does her victims. "His Harnesse is converted to soft silke, / His warres are onely wantonings with her" (l. 23-4). Because Mars is, as Cameron says, "Boeotia's martial spirit," his emasculation suggests the depletion of not only the Boeotian gods, but also of the Boeotian knights (qtd. in Dutton 69).

The cumulative effect of Wilson's scenes of crisis and decay among the Boeotian nobility is cataclysmic. Greene

employs the milder tactic of displaying corruption and decay among the leaders of the commonwealth by having different characters enter and display vices. Justice in Greene's pamphlet revives through the appropriate legal channels. Wilson dramatizes and resolves leaders' depredations through overthrow of the corrupt nobles, a resolution similar to the plowman's total rejection of the papacy and its representatives. Wilson uses increasingly fast paced series of scenes to show Boeotia's disarray and breakdown. The Courtier plots against the Duke in the words of the stock overreacher: "tis for rule I cast and Princely throne, / The state of Prince, brighter than brightest starre" (l. 712-5).

Raph warns the Duke of the Courtier's plot, but the kindly ruler remains oblivious to his danger and pardons the courtier with mild admonishments: "Be true hereafter, now thou shalt not die" (l. 1190-1). Meanwhile, Venus gives birth to Contempt's appropriately named daughter Ruina. In typeface a quarter of an inch high, the play text reads "A cry within help, murther, murther, Raph comes running out, Ennius after him with his dagger drawen, after Ennius Zelota the Coblers wife" (l. 1324-30). Without a moment's pause "She stabs Ennius and he fals dead" (l. 1334). A second later, a messenger rushes in to inform the Duke that an enemy has invaded Boeotia: "They burne, wast, spoyle, kill,

murder, make no spare [...]. / The people fall before them as the flowering grass" (l. 1369-79). In the denouement, Contempt rejects a sobbing Venus, Ruina's cottage burns to the ground, Raph marches off to war with the inmates of the local prison, and the Countrey Gentleman unsuccessfully casts around for someone he can pay to take his place in battle. At the play's conclusion, the hoped for order and justice linger over the horizon, awaiting the end of the war.<sup>34</sup>

The destruction and despair Raph sees in Boeotia is enough on its own to impugn the play's nobles. However, Wilson strengthens his case against them by granting the cobbler enough credibility to give his satire teeth and enough foolishness to heighten the nobles' disgrace in needing his correcting influence. Harbage calls the cobbler a "bitter fool," acknowledging his satiric credibility as well as his role as the stage fool (191). As Harbage's epithet suggests, the cobbler marries the serious social commentator to the stage fool. His role combines the hierarchy of a gradated society with the equity and bluff commonness Elizabethans praise in their visions of England.

When the cobbler speaks with the Duke, his speech becomes appropriately grave. He explains to the Duke,

I that desire for so to explaine

The manner of your Graces paine.

Give counsell ere the deed be done,

That you may al deceiving shun [...]. (l. 1116-9)

The Courtier's enraged attack on the cobbler immediately following --"O that same Cobbling Rogue that raving runs [...]. Ile stab the slave"--is the more unjust and the more damning for the Courtier considering Raph's eloquent explanation to the Duke (l. 194-97). A later scene replays this one, with the Scholler displaying the same elitist disregard for the cobbler that we see in the Courtier. Raph and the Duke enter, the cobbler earnestly saying "Tis true O Duke, that I do say [...]" (l. 1308). After Raph's exit, the Scholler snorts "He raves my Lord, its ill advised of you / To suffer him so neere your Princely excellence" (l. 1321-2). The Duke, ever beneficent, if ill-advised, mildly replies, "His presence breeds me no offence" (l. 1323). These scenes show the Courtier's and the Scholler's elitism and their unwarranted disregard for the cobbler. The cobbler gives levelheaded and much needed advice to a ruler whose mildness threatens to throw his state into complete disarray. Meanwhile, the Duke's would-be advisors bask in their exaggerated senses of their own superiority.

The cobbler gains additional authority as one of four main characters in the play who have names, suggesting his

centrality to the plot of the play and the authority he has in it. The other three named characters--Ennius the Courtier, Sateros the Souldier, and Zelota the cobbler's wife--are also central to the plot, although the Souldier's name is less personal than allegorical, referring to Saturn, the planet governing warlike temperaments. Zelota's name indicates her zealously aggressive temperament. Raph and Ennius are the two characters with personal names, both absolutely central to the play's plot. Raph is the play's hero, the savior of his country. Ennius is its archvillain, the plotter who most directly brings on Boeotia's crises. The two commoners, Raph and Sateros the Souldier, gain added clout in the plot given that they are the two human characters in the play who move between earthly and divine spheres. They interact with Mars, Venus, and the Muses and resolve not only Boeotia's earthly tribulations but also the disorder among its divinities.<sup>35</sup>

The unashamed drollery Raph displays in his less serious moments undercuts his role as prophet and counselor, as Helgerson notes, but serves other purposes: it cushions the satiric blows to Boeotia's nobility and its ineffective ruler; it makes the upper echelons seem corrupt even in comparison to their supposed inferiors; and, it adds to the play the comedy of the stage cobbler (218-9).<sup>36</sup> Wilson

makes the cobbler's divinely ordained prophetic role a direct result of failures on the parts of his country's ruler and its officials.<sup>37</sup> The gods send down Mercury to correct problems the country's officials have created, and Mercury gives the simple cobbler the gift of prophecy. The Duke's grave speech in the final scenes of the play explicitly predicates the rise of the cobbler prophet on the failings of the country's leaders:

Now I see that this simple witted man,  
 This poore plaine Cobler truly did divine,  
 The Gods when we refuse the common meanes  
 Sent by their oracles and learned priests,  
 Raise up some man contemptible and vile,  
 In whom they breath the purenes of theyr spirits,  
 And make him bolde to speake and prophesie.

(1. 1385-71)

The cobbler's prophetic role is a case of role reversal, closely linked to Boeotia's earthly and celestial disorders.

Writers in the plowman traditions similarly couch their reforming characters' impertinent interventions into state matters as cases of role reversal, confronting the plowman's social superiors with his virtues and their failings.

Throughout the play, scenes in which the cobbler travesties his prophetic role highlight the unfitness of the

Boeotian nobles. That the upper echelons need a commoner to step in is bad enough in Elizabethan terms; that they need a cobbler is worse. Throughout the play, Wilson comically reminds his audience of the silliness of casting a cobbler (or a peddler, for that matter) as the play's prophet. As itinerant crafts, cobblers, peddlers, and tinkers were the vagabonds and rogues of Elizabethan statute. The 1572 law against vagrants names "Pedlars Tynkers & Petye Chapmen," as among the "Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars" Justices of the Peace should be on the lookout for (qtd. in Gurr 28).<sup>38</sup>

Elizabethan officials do not list cobblers in the statute, but cobbling was often an itinerant craft, and, therefore, members of this craft fell under the purview of the statute.

Wilson accordingly gives his cobbler-turned-prophet decidedly unleaderlike comedic characteristics that derive from the hero's popular roots. His antic disposition as prophet is a cover for the yet more antic disposition of the stage cobbler. Raph cobbler speaks in the confidential voice of the stage clown whose punning irascibility and antic behavior provides an ironic commentary on both the Boeotian nobles' failings and his own pretensions to authority.

Raph has innumerable comic asides on his own status as rogue and prophet. In his first appearance as prophet, Raph

enters the stage with an ironic, "Why ye proud Pagans and Panem nostrums, thinke ye no better of a Prophet than ye would of a Pedlar: and make ye no more account of me than ye doo of a Cobler?" (l. 236-9). "As thou art," Contempt replies (l. 240). Raph protests "No ye little Goosecap God, knowe that God Markedie made me a Prophet" (l. 241-2). Raph brings enormous energy, gusto, and comedy to his role as prophet. However, outside his prophetic and satiric abilities, his presumptions to authority inevitably fail. When his wife threatens to "course ye as I did a saterday," Raph dares her to try (l. 69). "Was not this lustily spoken?" he confides to the audience, "I warrant she dare not come out" (l. 72). The stage direction "Zelota enters" immediately follows. When Raph protests that Mercury has no authority to take a "free man of his companie" from his work, Mercury comments in disgust: "I must charme him asleepe, or he will still be prating" (l.133). Even when he has charmed Raph, Mercury must resort to promises of pots of ale to silence the irrepressible cobbler (l. 133-6). The authority Raph has in the play comes from his cheerful simplicity and his moments of divinely inspired prophecy.<sup>39</sup>

Most of Raph's comic moments are at the expense of the nobility. He is sometimes a fool, but he is also a prophet and a voice of reason in the play. The play has a clear

romantic ethos and Raph is its hero. Wilson typically uses the comedy of the cobbler character to deflate the self-importance of the play's villainous officials. When, in the estates satire, the Courtier brags of his credit at court, Raph comments that the Courtier never pays his creditors (l. 261). When the Souldier takes up Raph's insult against the Courtier, joking that the Courtier is in the Mercer's book of accounts, Raph takes him aside: "A word with ye Mas souldier [...]," helpfully pointing out that the Souldier is not in the Mercer's accounts because "the Mercer will not trust ye" (l. 279-84).<sup>40</sup> The cobbler rebukes the Scholler's pride, and the Countrey Gentleman's enormities evoke from him an ominous prophecy promising imminent destruction (307-45). Finally, disgusted with the tenacious vanities of the Courtier, Souldier, Scholler, and Countrey Gentleman, Raph exits. As he goes, he comments,

What, riding, running, braving, bralling,

I see ye pass not for a Prophets calling:

Therefore I will not bee so mad,

To cast Pearles to swine so bad. (l. 393-6)

The irony of the scene is that Raph is correct: the lowly cobbler casts pearls to swine if he tries to prophecy to these gentlemen.

In the conclusion of the play, even as the newly

redeemed Duke of Boeotia reinstates government and hierarchy, the Scholler and Souldier at his side, Raph continues to provide ironic commentary on the thin facade of respectability that distinguishes the higher born characters from the lowly cobbler. Raph exits the play shaking his head over Mars's unpunished sexual improprieties with Venus, "I, I, and great folke doo amisse, / Poore folke must hold their peace (l. 1660-1). The blunt cobbling commoner maintains his sense of his moral and ethical superiority, as well as his comic propensity for commenting on the carryings-on of great folk and their handling of matters of state. Perhaps The Cobler's Prophecy is a court entertainment, providing one of the Queen's more outspoken courtiers with a vehicle for commentary on English foreign policy; if so, this courtier identifies himself as one of his country's "Poor folke," a simple commoner who, despite his wealth and social standing, has the plainness and the commitment to his country's well-being that writers in the plowman tradition suggest come naturally to simple commoners.

## Notes to Chapter Three

1. Wilson's The Cobler's Prophecy appears in the Stationers' Register in 1594 and in print the same year. Greg, in his introduction to the Malone Society facsimile, and Harbage, in his Annals, both argue that Wilson composed the play earlier, perhaps c. 1589. In The Rival Traditions, Harbage dates the play c. 1590, company unknown (345; see also 189-92). The Pedler's Prophecie appears in the Stationers' Register earlier in the same year and in print in 1595. Again, Greg and Harbage argue that the playwright wrote the play earlier, this time c. 1560-3. We have no performance record for either play. A Pedlar's Tale to Queen Elizabeth survives only in manuscript. Colthorpe suggests that Queen Elizabeth saw the play at Heneage House, while visiting Sir Thomas Heneage, c. 1578-90.
2. Bushnell discusses the connections Elizabethan writers make between tyranny and effeminacy.
3. The Chamberlain's Men's play, Clothbreeches and Velvethose (1600) further testifies to the popularity of the tale. Harbage lists this lost play in his Annals.
4. This is the yeomanry Thomas Smith celebrates in De Republica Anglorum as "they which in the old world gat that honour to Englande," not by their wealth of social standing, but by their everyday duties, "grasing, frequenting of markettes, and keeping servauntes not idle" (42-3).
5. The printer's choice of old-fashioned black letter type is the more noticeable given that the prefatory letter is in roman type: the printer deliberately chose black letter for the text of A Quip.
6. Jack Up Lande, the satiric pseudo-Chaucerian plowman tale John Foxe printed with his Book of Martyrs in 1570, is contemporary with "Pride and Lowliness."
7. Spurgeon notes, "The whole substance of this pamphlet is taken from Francis Thynne's poem, Pride and Lowlines, c. 1568 [the poem is probably not by Thynne], and the character descriptions in both pieces are much influenced by Chaucer" (137).

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8. The pamphlet's woodcut misleadingly shows whole bodies, but the poet emphatically notes what the breeches lack: "I sawe an uncouth headlesse thing come pacing downe the hil...I could not descry it to be a man, although it had motion, for that it wanted a body" (B3 v).
9. Greene's willingness to digress into an unrelated jest in A Quip probably comes from Elizabethan conceptions of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales as a collection of jests. The compiler of The Cobler of Caunterburie (1590) purports to model the 1590 jest book on Chaucer's example.
10. A Quip is so far from the piety of its precedents that after the first, unexpurgated edition, Gabriel Harvey was able to accuse Greene of ridiculing religion in comic references to Christ and Saint Peter (Foure Letters). Subsequent editions omitted the passages that angered Harvey.
11. Clothbreeches argues his case using biblical precedent, classical references, and syllogistic logic.
12. On Coventry's history, see Pythian-Adams.
13. Thomas Nashe had enormous fun with Harvey's brags about his meeting with royalty. Nashe reports that, after Queen Elizabeth told Harvey he looked like an Italian, now he was an insulting Monarch above *Monarcha* the Italian, that ware crownes on his shooes; and quite renounst his naturall English accents & gestures, & wrested himselfe wholly to the Italian *puntillios*, speaking our homely Ilard tongue strangely, as if he were but a raw practitioner in it, & but ten daies before had entertained a schoole-master to teach him to pronounce it. Ceremonies of reverence to the greatest States (as it were not the fasion of his cuntry) he was very parsimonious and niggardly of, and would make no bones to take the wall of *Sir Philip Sidney* and another honourable Knight (his companion) about Court yet attending.... (Nashe's Works, ed. McKerrow, vol. 3, 73-7 qtd. in Moore Smith 19-20)
14. Ironically, Harvey himself has a poem attacking Italiante Englishmen. See his Letter Book (97-8).

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15. Although Greene's A Quip participates in the private feud between Greene and Harvey, it is not reducible to merely a personal attack on Gabriel Harvey. If Velvetbreeches' allegorical nature allows him to be more than simply an Italian, it also allows him to be more than Gabriel Harvey.

16. Jones comments on the "mixture of admiration and loathing" with which sixteenth-century English writers seem to have regarded Italy (in Staging the Renaissance, eds. Kastan and Stallybrass 251-62).

17. Although the courtier and a country gentleman have different ranks in Elizabethan England, I follow Sir Thomas Smith in his De Republica Anglorum in subsuming them both under the title of nobility (31-40).

18. Dutton comments that the play is "flimsily veiled in mythical 'Boeotia' and talk of classical 'Gods', but clearly refers to 1580s England" (68).

19. Wilson probably made the ruler a Duke rather than a monarch in response to the pressures of censorship: a subject plotting against a duke is less inflammatory than plotting against a monarch.

20. Dutton cites E. K. Chambers' conjectures about the auspices of The Cobler's Prophecy (69). In his Annals as well as The Rival Traditions, Harbage lists The Cobler's Prophecy as a court entertainment.

21. The play enacts a delicate balancing act of its own, depicting villainously factious courtiers to a possible audience of courtiers. If Dutton is correct in surmising that the play was a piece of propaganda in favor of sending English troops overseas, the play itself is the result of court faction. Elizabeth's court was often divided between factions that organized themselves around courtiers who favored or opposed England's participation in overseas wars.

22. Greg says, in his introduction to the Malone Society's facsimile edition of Wilson's play, "the style of the composition is certainly that of an earlier period" (vi). Dutton, however, argues that The Cobler's Prophecy is "without the antique stylisation" of Wilson's other plays, probably because he reads the play as closely connected to

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social and political events of the 1580s (68).

23. In Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions, Harbage says of Wilson, "His plays embody the older traditions of spectacular display, familiar morality turned to new use, and clowning" (14) and "they have no independent poetic life, for at this stage the verbal aspect of playing had not yet asserted itself as the dominant one upon the common stage" (192).

24. In his edition of selected works by Greene, Dickinson comments on morality play elements in Wilson's plays (Robert Greene x-xi).

25. Bradbrook notes that early sixteenth-century writer John Bale similarly uses semi-allegorical characters modeled on morality play characters. In Bale's King Johan, the allegorical character Seditio is also the fictional and historical character of Stephen Langton (The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy 109).

26. The tradition of the stage clown was in full force in late sixteenth-century England. The famed clown Richard Tarleton did not die until 1588.

27. It is worth noting that Kernan attributes the loose "hodgepodge" to Juvenal, too, although he insists that "the Juvenalian hodgepodge has a remarkable thematic unity" (74).

28. Cobbling and shoemaking characters appear in: a play, George a Greene the Pinner of Wakefield (1587-93); a ballad, "The Cobbler of Colchester" (1589); a jest-book, The Cobler of Caunterburie (1590); Greene's pamphlet, A Quip for an Upstart Courtier (1592); a play, Lochrine (1595); a lost play listed in Harbage's Annals, The Cobbler of Queenhithe (1597); Deloney's two pamphlets, The Gentle Craft, parts 1 and 2 (1597-98); a play, The Famous Victories of Henry V (1598); Dekker's play, The Shoemaker's Holiday (1599); Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar (1599). Peddlers and tinkers have some claim to popularity as well: in addition to The Pedler's Prophecie, The Pedlar's Tale to Queen Elizabeth, and The Tinker of Turvy, Harbage's Annals lists two plays, A Mask of Six Pedlars (1574) and The Tinker of Totness (1596); the Stationers' Register lists a ballad, "Alas the Poore Tynker" (1591).

29. Shakespeare draws on the traditional meeting between

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king and commoner for his "little touch of Harry in the night" in Henry V, having the disguised king visit his troops in the field the night before the battle of Agincourt (4.1). Keen discusses the tradition in The Outlaws of Medieval Legend (100-11). Among other fictions depicting meetings between monarchs and subjects: George a Greene the Pinner of Wakefield (1587-93), The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1590), Thomas Heywood's Edward IV (1592-7), Thomas Deloney's Jacke of Newberie (1597), and Thomas Dekker's Shoemaker's Holiday (1599).

30. For more on the prophecies of Merlin, see Rupert Taylor's chapter one and Thomas' chapter 13.

31. The fool in Shakespeare's King Lear speaks a prophecy he says is akin to Merlin's prophecies (3.4.91-5). Taylor calls this style "the paradoxical prophecy" (65).

32. Chaucer's prophecy appears among the "Balades" at the end of Chaucer's Works; it also appears in Caxton's edition of the sayings of Chaucer.

33. Wilson combines classical with English traditions. The scenes with Codrus in The Cobler's Prophecy can claim as a source Juvenal's third satire. Kernan suggests that the opposition between the simple man and the decadent modern I have looked at in English literature as far back as Piers Plowman is common to Juvenal as well as English literary traditions (76). Greg argues that the Robert Wilson who wrote The Cobler's Prophecy is the same Robert Wilson whom Lodge mentions in his Defense of Poetry (1580) for a play called Catiline's Conspiracy "a peece surely worthy prayse, the practice of a good scholler" (vi).

34. The open-ended conclusion of the play supports Dutton's conjecture that it is a prescriptive court play suggesting that Elizabeth should take military action against Spain for its encroachments on the Netherlands.

35. Harbage and Dutton point out the cobbler's and soldier's divine roles (Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions 190; 68).

36. Helgerson points out that playwrights very often place clowns at the heads of rebellions, probably to avoid the censorship they would risk if they showed a powerful leader successfully heading a rebellion: "clownishness would make

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what had been unacceptable acceptable" (219-22). For discussions of stage fools, see Bradbrook's The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy and her The Rise of the Common Player, Busby, Goldsmith, and Welsford.

37. Dutton points out that Raph's rise to power is a direct result of the Boeotian officials' failings (68).

38. Elizabethan officials passed a new act against vagabonds in 1598, showing increased anxiety and increased control, Dutton says (110).

39. In two scenes, Raph's clowning evokes the less innocuous clowning of William Shakespeare's commoner villains in Henry VI, part 2. Compare The Cobler's Prophecy (l. 307-14, 353-4, 474) to Henry VI, part 2 (4.7.83).

40. A smith, replying to Cade's brags in Shakespeare's Henry VI, uses the same asides to deflate the villain (4.2.31-63). The Cain and Abel play from the medieval Wakefield mystery cycle has a servant who similarly deflates Cain's pretensions.

## Chapter Four

"Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?"  
Rome as England and England as Not Rome in Julius Caesar

"Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?," Brutus challenges the Roman citizens in his speech following Caesar's assassination. "Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak, for him have I offended. I pause for a reply." The citizens, caught up in the excitement of Brutus's soaring expression of Romanness, cry "None Brutus, none." Brutus predicates Romanness and love of country on the citizens' refusal to be bondmen and their unwillingness to accept the yoke of obedience to Caesar. Leading up to these questions, Brutus asks, "Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen? [...]. Who is here so base that would be a bondman?" (3.2.22-35). His questions have obvious answers, both because of the way he poses them and because of what the audience has seen of Romans leading up to this moment: Romans are never bondmen, never rude, and never base; their identities as Romans and patriots are bound up in their proud refusal of yokes and slights and in their privileges as citizens of Rome. They strive, every man and woman of them, to be nobly and heroically Roman. They insistently remind their audiences that, as Romans, they bear no indignity without challenge, no infringement

without recompense.

Audience members, Elizabethan and modern alike, can not help but be aware they are watching proud Romans in Julius Caesar. The Romans will not let them forget, attaching "Rome" and "Roman" to every character and every action, and attributing their personal qualities to country of origin. Characters repeatedly point to characteristics they claim make them emphatically Roman.<sup>1</sup> In the first scene of the play, the tribune Murellus castigates revelers making holiday for Caesar's victory over Pompey's sons, exclaiming "You cruel men of Rome!" (1.1.366). Cassius moves Brutus against Caesar with punning appeals to Rome: "Now it is Rome indeed and room enough, / When there is in it but one only man" (1.2.156-7). Cassius speaks into the dark, "Who's there?" Casca answers, "A Roman" (1.3.41-2). Berating Casca for his fear of the ominous storm preceding the assassination, Cassius tells him "those sparks of life / That should be in a Roman you do want, / Or else you use not" (1.3.57-9). Long before Caesar falls, the audience has heard characters call one another "noble Roman" (1.2.197; 2.1.93), "noblest-minded Romans" (1.3.122), "secret Romans" (2.1.125), and "true Romans" (2.1.223). By the time Brutus appeals to his audience's Romanness, Shakespeare's audience has already learned that, according to these characters,

nobility, heroism, and pride ineluctably follow from Romanness--especially pride.

Following these characters' cues, some critics focus on the play's uniquely Roman characteristics--for example, the characters' republicanism, stoicism, epicureanism, or paganism.<sup>2</sup> Other critics argue that Shakespeare intended his audiences to see England in Rome; they note Elizabethans' love of edifying exempla, particularly classical exempla that teach Elizabethan orthodoxies; or, they point out suspiciously Elizabethan details in the play, such as references to "commoners" in places "plebeians" would better fit. These critics focus on the distinctly Elizabethan lessons audiences might learn from the Roman play--the horrors of regicide or tyrannicide, the inevitability of monarchy, or the folly of following bad leaders.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the play shows its Elizabethan audiences, along with these lessons, the measure of the differences between Romanness and Englishness, between Roman pride and English lowliness. When making Rome an Elizabethan example, Elizabethans were as aware of distinctions between England and Rome as they were of similarities. Elizabethan audiences watched Shakespeare's Rome as both type and anti-type, exemplary state and cultural other.

Descriptions of other countries' histories and political structures, such as Shakespeare gives in Julius Caesar, provide Elizabethans as many opportunities to define themselves and their unique political institutions as do descriptions of English history and English political structures. In learned tomes, short print tracts, and broadside ballads, Elizabethans describe England by describing Italy, France, and Spain. Englishness is the not-Italian, not-French, or not-Spanish.<sup>4</sup> Despite Rome's exemplarity, even because of it, Englishness is also the not-Roman. In examining Elizabethan perceptions of the differences between Romanness and Englishness, and the ways Shakespeare manipulates them in Julius Caesar, I examine Elizabethan print writers' descriptions of their own government and people; their descriptions of contrasts between themselves and continental powers, especially Rome and Spain; and their descriptions of Caesar's Rome. I primarily draw on print works accessible to a wide audience: short works, in plain English, on timely themes. These are more likely to have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience than the scholarly Elizabethan studies of Rome most critics discuss in connection to Julius Caesar.

Rome was, for Elizabethans, home to great literature, oratory, and nobility; but, it was also home to civil wars,

envy, ambition, pride, and, representative of all these, home to the Pope. Shakespeare's Elizabethan audiences, acutely aware of their Englishness and the characters' Romanness, would not be as eager to join Brutus in embracing Romanness as his fictional audience is. Elizabethans would recognize exemplary situations and characters in Shakespeare's play, and lessons or truths they might benefit from: the main characters and the historic moments Shakespeare portrays in Julius Caesar are favorite Elizabethan exempla.<sup>5</sup> However, they would also recognize the Romanness of the situations, characters, lessons, and truths in the play, and contrast to them their own Englishness. Fortified with the distinctions as well as the comparisons between Rome and England, Elizabethans could gather from Shakespeare's play not only the consequences of upsetting the delicate Tudor settlements in church and state, but also the dangers of emulating Roman traits to the exclusion of traits they thought of as English, and the smug satisfaction of measuring the distance between classical Rome's broils and Elizabethan England's relative peace.

J. Leeds Barroll's and T. J. B. Spencer's studies of Elizabethan scholarship on Rome show that Elizabethans thought of classical Rome as a place of "garboyles," or civil wars, the outcomes of the Roman pride Shakespeare's

characters so emphatically insist on. Barroll points out that all Shakespeare's Roman plays involve civil strife; he also shows that many Elizabethan commentators describe Caesar as the epitome of pride, the chief deadly sin.<sup>6</sup> Spencer paints a similar portrait of Elizabethan Rome, showing that in Elizabethan histories of Rome's wars, such as William Fulbecke's An Historicall Collection of the Continuall Factions, Tumults, and Massacres of the Romans (1601), "[t]here is not much of the majesty of the Roman People" (5). Spencer cites the title page of a 1578 English translation of Appian, in which the translator castigates classical Romans for their "greedy desire to conquere others / Their mortall malice to destroy themselves [...]. / All the degrees of Sedition, and all the effects of Ambition" (qtd. in Spencer 5).

Barroll, Spencer, and critics who build on their work focus on the ways Elizabethan writers apply their visions of factious and proud Romans to Elizabethan politics. Critics typically seek similarities between England and Rome rather than differences because, despite its "garboyles" and pride, Rome had significant status in Elizabethan England. Barroll, for example, suggests that Caesar's excesses of pride are comparable to Bolingbroke's flawed authority after seizing the throne from Richard in Shakespeare's English

history plays. Spencer argues that Elizabethan writers are interested in the workings of the Roman empire because they see its history as reflecting monarchic patterns; “[r]epublican Rome,” Spencer says, “was not nearly so useful for models of political morality” as the empire (6). In Barroll’s and Spencer’s examples, as in the examples of most critics who examine Shakespeare’s Elizabethan Rome, we see Elizabethans grappling with their own political order by looking for England in a Roman mirror. There is another side to Elizabethans’ visions of Rome, however, a Rome that is purely Roman, and opposed to the English.<sup>7</sup> This Rome was an example as important to Elizabethans as the Englished Rome they considered exemplary. Against it, Elizabethans built a significant portion of the political self-image they claimed as wholly English.

Elizabethan writers of cheap printed pamphlets and ballads are vehement in their descriptions of the vices that accompany Roman virtue. Rome’s exemplarity made it an important target for Elizabethan propaganda defining England against other countries. In the sixteenth century, Rome was the country England had most to define itself against. Following England’s break with the Roman papacy in the first half of the sixteenth century, print literature on Rome abounded. Not all Elizabethan propagandists detached

classical Rome from papal Rome. During the years of war with Spain in the second half of the sixteenth century, English propagandists turned their attention to Spain, but retained focus on Rome; Spain, they claimed, acted as an agent of Rome. Elizabethans combined old saws about classical Rome with details they developed in comparisons of contemporary Rome, Spain, and England to create an increasing canon of tactics for international libel. The result, for Elizabethans, was an increasingly well-defined, if fanciful, sense of the differences between England and all other countries, and an equally well-defined, if equally fanciful, sense of the distinct qualities of Englishness.

Roman pride, as opposed to English lowliness, is a recurring theme in Elizabethan popular fictions and political commentaries. In A Quip, Greene's representative Englishman, Clothbreeches, celebrates English men and women for their love of common customs and their refusal to brag alongside vainglorious Italians. Clothbreeches accuses the Italianate Velvetbreeches of "a multitude of abominable vices," especially "vaine-glory" (C1). The English jury seconds Clothbreeches's opinion, unanimously voting Velvetbreeches "an Upstart [...] begot of Pride, nursed up by selfe-love" (H3). Attacks on Italianate braggarts such as Greene's are so common in Elizabethan literature as to be

an Elizabethan genre. Haughty Italian courtiers and crafty Roman emissaries from the Pope are favorite Elizabethan villains. Ascham devotes whole sections of The Scholemaster to the evils of Italians' vices and their effects on English imitators. "[T]en [English] *Morte Arthures*," Ascham claims, do not the tenth part so much harm as one of these bookes made in *Italie* and translated in England. They open, not fond and common wayes to vice, but such subtle, cunnyng, new, and diverse shiftes, to cary yong willes to vanitie, and yong wittes to mischief, to teach old bawdes new schole poyntes, as the simple head of an English man is not hable to invent, nor never was hard of in England before, yea when Papistrie overflowed all. (4)

Ascham argues that Italian writers' subtle appeals to readers' vanities are such that even one book does untold harm. By contrast, according to Ascham, the "common wayes to vice" of simple English writers are so unsophisticated as to be incapable of the vanities Italians encourage.

Many of the most popular Elizabethan writers share with Greene and Ascham the penchant for comparing vainglorious Italians with simple English men and women. In Euphues, which went through an astonishing eleven editions between 1578 and 1597, John Lyly stereotypes Italians as crafty and

vain courtiers who are well versed in the subtleties of court intrigue and eager to lure innocent English youths astray. In his misspent youth, Lyly's naive English hero travels to the continent. He rids himself of his Englishness, crying "What countryman am I not?" (1005). Among edifying things he hopes to learn over seas, the hero gaily says that, in Italy, "I can court it" (1005). This promise to "court it" in Italy he soon makes good on and repents.

Following the success of Lyly's Euphues, Elizabethan prodigal narratives regularly land thriftless English heroes in Italy, where they indulge a while in Italian court culture. Countless fictional English youths reject England's country customs, encounter vice and vanity in Italy, and return chastened to England. Richard Helgerson notes that a key characteristic of the Elizabethan prodigal narrative is the scene in which the hero embraces courtly, especially Italianate, manners (Elizabethan Prodigals 60-1).

The pride that leads to young Elizabethan heroes' falls typically originates in Italy. William Shakespeare's characterization of Pandulph, the papal legate in King John (1594-5?), similarly relies on Elizabethan stereotypes of Italians as savvy courtiers who are able to manipulate essentially honest English and French characters. Pandulph

also fits Reformation stereotypes of the savagely ambitious papal legate. Pandulph uses slippery rhetoric and outright treachery to manipulate the unwilling kings of England and France into warring with one another, and behind the scenes conspires with both kings as well as aspirants to their thrones.<sup>8</sup>

Classical Rome was not immune to these attacks on Italian vices and vanities. In The English Myrrior (1586), George Whetstones describes ancient Rome's destruction as a result of her people's vainglory:

manye shrewde spoyles shee receaved, by the envy  
of her owne people, especially by the civill  
contentions of Scilla, Marius, Carbo, Cinna,  
Pompeius, and Cesar, Brutus, and Cassius, Octavius  
and Anthonius, in sustaining of whose unnaturall  
quarrell, by Romanes, there were more Romanes  
slayne, then by strangers in conquering the  
kingedomes of the whole worlde. (34)

Whetstones claims that present-day Rome, the home of the Pope and Italians such as Velvetbreeches, "maye now be justly named the sincke of the worlde, for her filthy corrupt vices" (34). The ruined monuments of ancient Rome, Whetstones says, "shewe her further reproch," testifying to the pride, envy, and ambition that caused the city's fall

(34). Thomas Nashe's Pasquil, in The Returne of Pasquill (1589), turns from a description of contemporary Rome's iniquities to flaws that plagued classical Rome:

They that were wise prophecied long before of the state of Rome, that it should never decay but by division. Which came to passe. For when the factions of Sylla and Marius, Caesar and Pompey, Anthonie and Lepidus brake foorth, the flourishing Cittie beganne to cast her leafe. The great Empire of great Alexander, like a flame of fire in a heape of flaxe, when it was at the highest, did shed it selfe suddainly in the ayre, and came to nothing by the dissentions of those that succeeded. (76)

The cause of the civil wars Barroll and Spencer show Elizabethans associated classical Rome with, according to Elizabethan popular writers, was the characteristic Roman "envy," or pride. Barnabe Rych's Right Excelent and pleasaunt Dialogue, betwene Mercury and an English Soldier (1574) displays Caesar and Pompey in a pageant concretizing "Civyll dissencions;" the allegorical vices Warre, Famine, Mallice, Strife, Contencion, Discorde, Ruin attend the two Roman leaders; Envye is their wagon driver (B2-B2 v). Rych,

as with Whetstones, depicts Roman patricians' envy of others' personal glory and their proud insistence on catapulting over all other contenders as the cause of classical Rome's civil wars. Henry Howard similarly ascribes classical Rome's fall to Roman leaders' pride and greed for personal glory; in A defensative against the poyson of supposed Prophecies (1583), Howard warns readers:

Immoderate desire of honour, is the rest of a proude aspiring minde, [...] others with the venture of theyr whole estate, presume to scale the fortresse of forestalled honour, as Caesar did, and a third degree there is of those, which runne both horse and man into the lawes of Hel, with Decius: though not with that good minde, to reskewe or deliver, but to ransacke and destroy theyr Country. (Fii)

True to Elizabethan popular writers' descriptions of Elizabethan Rome as a court culture fraught with guile, hidden plots, and the "subtle, cunnyng, new, and diverse shiftes" that Ascham warns of, classical Rome is, in Elizabethan popular writers' descriptions, a place of proud, aspiring minds. Its patricians lay waste to their country in reaching for personal glory and take unwary innocents with them to their destruction.

In contrast to Elizabethan writers' descriptions of Roman pride and its attendant evils, writers of cheap print tracts and ballads frequently define Englishness in the commoner. These commoners have guileless minds, Ascham says, "not hable to invent" intrigue and pride comparable to the Romans'. Elizabethan popular writers describe their representative English man or woman as a simple commoner, similar to the bluff Clothbreeches in Greene's A Quip and the simple English man Ascham describes. They praise his or her virtuous humility, and point out the extensive liberties he or she has under English common law. The pamphleteer of A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nations describes the representative Englishman as,

generous, [...] farre from dissimulation [...] rather led by truth then by opinion [...] free in speech, loving his libertie, and easily forgetting injuries: [...] liberall, civill, curteous, and gentle: of all vertuous qualities [...].

(C1-C1 v).<sup>9</sup>

Elizabethan writers wax eloquent when they compare the many liberties English commoners have with the tyrannies and oppressions commoners suffer under the proud nobles of other countries. Hence, in A Quip, Greene's ordinarily contemptuous Velvetbreeches reacts with astonished awe,

marveling that "your lawe allowe such large favour" (C2).

Thomas Deloney's Strange Histories (1602), a popular collection of verse histories, relates the English folk history of English liberties under common law. Deloney describes how stolid English commoners in the time of William the Conqueror fought off their attackers, crying:

Let us not live like bondmen poore,  
to Frenchmen in their pride  
But keep our ancient liberties,  
what so ear betide.

And rather die in bloudie field  
in manlike courage prest:

Then to endure the servile yoake,  
which we so much detest. (l. 33-40)

Moved by the English people's valor and freedom loving natures, William the Conqueror magnanimously allows them to keep their age old liberties after the conquest, beginning the rule of English common law. Thomas Smith proudly notes, in De Republica Anglorum, that as a result of England's liberal laws,

The nature of our nation is free, stout, haulte,  
prodigall of life and bloud: but contumlie,  
beatings, servitude and servile torment and  
punishment it will not abide. So in this nature

and fashion, our auncient Princes and legislators have nourished them, as to make them stout hearted and couragious and souldiers, not villains and slaves, and that is the scope of almost all our policie. (106)

Popular pamphleteers and ballad writers contrast the proud boasts of the oppressive Spaniard and his Italian patron to the freedom and virtue of the English commoner. A Comparison's pamphleteer contrasts his free and virtuous Englishman to the "magnificent Dom Diegos and Spanish Cavalieros," "whose doughtiest deedes are bragges and boastinges, themselves (for the most part) shadowes without substance: whose affected *Monarchie*, is like to proove a confounded *Anarchie*" (A3).<sup>10</sup> Among oppressions Elizabethan writers attribute to Spain's "affected" monarchy are cruelty to the people of the Netherlands, attacks on England, and mistreatment of American Indians.<sup>11</sup> These criticisms of Spain's supposed tyrannies, known to modern historians as "the Black Legend," recur in nearly every commentary on Spain to appear in print in late sixteenth-century England.<sup>12</sup> Pamphleteers and ballad writers name Spain the "new Pharao," enumerate Spain's atrocities against the Indians, and add Spain's tortures of its own people to the list of Spanish evils. In An Answer to the Untruthes,

Published and Printed in Spaine (1589), the writer self-righteously informs the proud Spaniards and their Italian ally, "The pride of a *Pharao* in Egypt, God confounded by the waters of the red sea, as in *Exodus*. And the pride of your hautie Armada hath he confounded in the Ocean sea" (12). The pamphleteer of An Answer to the Untruthes prefaces the tract with a poem on the "powerfull hautie hand, [...] / Thirstie of ambition, [...] devoid of love and faith" ([A4 v]).<sup>13</sup>

Whetstones in The English Myrror, the pamphleteer of A true Discourse of the Armie which the King of Spaine caused to be assembled (1588), and William Cecil, Lord Burghley in his anonymous The Copie of a Letter Sent Out of England to Don Bernardin Mendoza (1588) describe how the Spaniards and Italians out of excesses of pride "vaunt" their powers.<sup>14</sup> The writer of A true Discourse calls Italy and Spain "our Italian Lamec and Spanish Nimrod," comparing them to two notoriously cruel tyrants (8). According to the pamphleteer, Italy "to small and greate threatneth death without cause" and Spain "like beastes hunted men with dogges in India, [and] would fayne use the like practice in England" (8). Cecil suggests in The Copie of a Letter Sent Out of England that even Spanish prisoners of war prefer English to Spanish rule. He describes the Spanish prisoners

cursing their ambassador and King, while "speak[ing] marvelously thereof" their captors "because they are well used by them" (31-2). The writer of a short verse tract called A Skeltonical Salutation or Condign Gratulation, and Just Vexation of the Spanishe Nation (1589) taunts England's foes as "pufte with pride" with "bragges, Genets, and nagges, / And mony bagges" (A2; A3 v). The author of A Skeltonical Salutation sums up Elizabethan views of Spain by labeling it, with Rome, "Master Inquisition" (A4).<sup>15</sup>

Elizabethan writers' libels of Spain and Italy suggest that England is a commoner's paradise, providing unheard of freedom and liberty to people of all ranks.<sup>16</sup> English writers' descriptions of freedom loving Englishmen and tyrannical Spaniards and Romans appear in pamphlets and ballads throughout the sixteenth century, not only in the years surrounding 1588, the famed English defeat of the Spanish Armada; English fears that Spain would repeat the attack busied English presses with propaganda against Spain and its Italian ally until at least the turn of the century.

In 1598, a year before Julius Caesar appeared on the boards, Francis Hastings repeated all the accusations against Spain and praise of England's freedoms under English common law in a lively print pamphlet entitled A Watchword

to All religious, and true hearted English-men. In 1599, the year the Chamberlain's Men presented Julius Caesar, they also performed Shakespeare's celebratory vision of English unity and valor in the reign of Henry V.<sup>17</sup> In a climate such as this, Elizabethans attending Julius Caesar were likely to think of their English freedoms when thinking of the strife filled politics of Rome. The sheer amount of late sixteenth-century English literature against Rome, along with Spain, suggests that Elizabethan audiences could not watch a play about classical Rome without some awareness of conflicts between England and Rome. An overwhelming number of the tracts and ballads flooding the English print market in the late sixteenth century were attacks on Rome.<sup>18</sup>

Elizabethans rarely report on Spain's tyrannies and atrocities without mention of the tyrannies and atrocities of Rome. In A Watchword, Francis Hasting joins Whetstones in arguing that, ultimately, Rome is the source of danger to England, not merely Spain. Hastings points out, "This proud Spaniard was backed with all the ayde that possiblief Rome and all the Romanists could afoord him" (52-3); based on this, Hastings concludes, "all these devices [plots] against her [Queen Elizabeth], and us, were plotted at Rome (64); hence he calls Spain "this Romish Pharaoh" (20). Other Elizabethan popular sources similarly connect Spain's

attacks on England to Rome, including Whetstones' The English Myrror, An Answer to the Untruthes, and A true Discourse. In a ballad on "the straunge and most cruell Whippes which the Spanyards had prepared to whippe and torment English men and women" (1588), Thomas Deloney compares Spain's evil practices to classical Rome's cruelties in lands it waged war on. He argues that England's Spanish and Roman attackers are direct descendants of classical Rome's bloodthirsty war hawks. Deloney reminds his audience,

Did not the Romans in this land,  
 sometime like practice use,  
 Against the Brittaines bolde in heart,  
 [.....]  
 And if these ruffling mates of Rome  
 did Princes thus torment:  
 Thinke you the Romish Spanyards now  
 would not shew their desent [descent]. (N. pag.)<sup>19</sup>

In addition to pointing to Rome's cruelties, Deloney's ballad picks up on Elizabethans' fondness for remembering that Julius Caesar had considerable difficulty battling the ancient Britains. Caesar describes his battles against the Britains in the Gallic Wars; Shakespeare reminds his audiences of them in the end of Cymbeline (c. 1608-10).

With these Elizabethan visions of a proud, tyrannical Rome and a liberal England in mind, the opening scene of Julius Caesar, which so many critics have interpreted as showing the inconstancy of the Roman mob, opens to new possibilities. The audience's first glimpse of Shakespeare's Rome in Julius Caesar reveals a tribune shouting at a knot of plebeians who have come to celebrate Caesar's victory over the sons of Pompey. Flavius commands the plebeians,

Hence! home you idle creatures, get you home!

Is this a holiday? What, know you not,

Being mechanical, you ought not walk

Upon a laboring day without the sign

Of your profession? (1.1.1-5)

The tribunes in this scene are angry because the plebeians celebrate Caesar's conquest of fellow Romans rather than foreign enemies, but their contempt for the plebeians goes beyond their cause. They disparage the plebeians as "basest metal," "the vulgar," and vow to "drive" them from the streets (1.1.61-71). Nearly every twentieth-century critic to comment on this scene follows Brents Stirling in arguing that it shows the fickleness of the plebeians, who will turn against Brutus and Cassius after the assassination of Caesar (Shakespeare and the Populace, cited in Blits 28).

Nevertheless, however inconstant the Roman people are in

forgetting Pompey for Caesar, the tribunes' vitriol in their speech to the plebeians is exceptional.

Jan H. Blits, David Kranz, Alexander Leggatt, Robert S. Miola, Michael E. Mooney, William and Barbara Rosen, Joseph Larry Simmons, and Vivian Thomas follow Stirling in seeing Julius Caesar's plebeians as representative of the fickle mob, or the Elizabethan many headed monster.<sup>20</sup> Blits argues that the opening scene in Julius Caesar shows the tribunes, "whose ancient office had been established to protect the people against the nobility's arrogance, now apparently forced to defend the Republic against the people themselves;" Blits concedes that the tribunes' attack on the plebeians "goes considerably further than one might expect," but points to the citizens' idleness as a reason for the tribunes' choler (22-3). Mooney argues that, while Elizabethan audiences may initially have identified with the plebeians, the tribunes' accusations would sever their sympathies for the plebeians: "The speech points out the citizens' fickle 'ingratitude' (l. 55) and insensitivity" (34). Thomas similarly reads the tribunes' attack on the plebeians as representative of the plebeians' "significant but unstable element in the political life of Rome," suggesting their unsuitability for rule (69-70). Gail

Paster and R. A. Yoder alone point out that the incivility of the tribunes' opening tirade suggests that the tribunes themselves contribute to the troubling tensions between the Roman leaders and the plebeians they supposedly represent (61; 319).

Critics read the first scene in Julius Caesar as Shakespeare's criticism of the plebeians, rather than of the tribunes, because modern interpreters expect Elizabethans to be uniformly anti-mob. They argue that Elizabethan audiences expected the upper echelons of society to be proud, even to a fault. They are quick to invoke Elizabethans' insistence on hierarchy to support the tribunes in their attack on the plebeians. However, the explanatory powers of Tudor theories of rule have limits. There was no one definition of good rule in Elizabethan England. Elizabethans mixed commonwealth ideals with absolutist theories, and were as quick to insist that their government was not an absolutist regime as they were to insist that the English monarch had supreme rule.<sup>21</sup> W. A. Armstrong points out that Elizabethan political theorists increasingly focused on castigating tyrants' sins against the commonwealth and enumerating the sufferings of the ruled (180). Elizabethans who compare their own government with those of other countries praise England by claiming that

English commoners enjoy more freedoms than commoners living in tyrannically absolutist governments such as Italy, France, and Spain. Elizabethans clearly believed English commoners deserved their freedoms.

Most Elizabethan political theorists argue that abuse of commoners of the sort the tribunes show the plebeians in the opening scene of Julius Caesar is inappropriate and contrary to good rule. Even in the most unremittingly absolutist interpretations of Tudor theories of rule, the qualities that Elizabethans claim make a good ruler include dignified concern for the common people. Whetstones, who is not an unusual or unique Elizabethan political theorist, cites proud nobles who are full of ambition and envy as "the worst humors in the Nobilitie, and the mortallest pestilence in a Common Wealth;" he cites Caesar and his fellow Roman patricians as examples of these failings (216-7). Charles Merbury's description of the English monarchy in A Brief Discourse of Royall Monarchie (1581) is typical of Elizabethan handbooks on leaders' responsibilities, stressing the care leaders should have for their people:

they love and cherish the poore people, procuring to make them live in good, and plentiful estate, defending them also from being injured of mightier, and richer than they: and above all

thinges they seeke to traine up their citizens,  
and subjectes: as they would doe their own proper  
children. (12)

As Deloney does in his celebration of English liberties in Strange Histories, Merbury cites William the Conqueror, who supposedly established the harmonious regime under which the English live:

William the Conqueror (A Prince of more justice)  
forbad (in his first arrivall here) his souldiers  
to hurte, or spoile any Englishman: saying that it  
should be a great sinne, and follie for him to  
spoil that people: which ere many dayes after  
were to like to be his subjectes. (10)

The rankest Elizabethan absolutists use a language of rule that relies on dignified rhetoric to foster social superiors' nurture and care of commoners. Accordingly, in Shakespeare's histories, English kings speak to their subjects in stately, paternal voices that have none of the vitriol of the Roman tribunes. Even Shakespeare's tyrannical King Richard III contrives to present his subjects with stately speeches upon taking the throne in Richard III. Richard instructs the Duke of Buckingham to explain his good intentions to the citizens of England, and himself "play[s] the maid's part" before the mayor, aldermen,

and citizens of London (3.7.45-51). Shakespeare's Roman tribunes, by contrast, show utter disregard for both verbal decorum and their country's common people. Even for Elizabethan audiences, accustomed to hierarchy and rule, Shakespeare's tribunes are shockingly haughty. The Roman leaders' smug awareness of their own high positions and their open disdain for fellow citizens are incompatible with Elizabethan ideals of governance. In the tribunes' choleric speech and their scorn for fellow citizens, Elizabethan attacks on haughty Romans who vaunt and rage have come home to roost. The tribunes' tirade fulfills Elizabethan expectations of proud and savage Romans, as described in Elizabethan political tracts on papal and classical Rome.

Throughout Julius Caesar, Roman leaders demonstrate utter disregard for the Roman people, in combination with voracious drives for preeminence, envy for any person who has power, and categorical refusal to subordinate themselves to any other.<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare's vision of Rome in Julius Caesar does not reflect the thoroughgoing hostility Whetstones shows when he calls Rome the "sincke of the world;" however, his characters' intractable mixture of soaring nobility and haughty contempt evoke an admiration and awe that amounts to alienation. Elizabethans' descriptions of England define Englishness in the commoner;

Shakespeare joins his contemporaries in defining Romanness in the patrician. In Shakespeare's dramatization of English history in Henry V, the royal hero rides alongside a multitude of commoners, each with a name and a personality.

In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare depicts Roman patricians who are larger than life and heroic to a fault, but leaves his Roman citizens faintly drawn and altogether unnamed. His patricians inveigh and speechify before the nameless cobbler and carpenter in the opening scene, and later address a mob of plebeians named 1. plebeian, 2. plebeian, and 3. plebeian.<sup>23</sup> This despite the fact that Caesar's Rome was a republic, and purportedly allowed citizens a significant role in governance. It seems that when Shakespeare and his contemporaries thought of Rome, they thought of its inexcusably proud patricians rather than its republic.

The patricians in Shakespeare's Rome possess unparalleled nobility and unparalleled flaws. Critics have long searched for a hero in Julius Caesar, noting the play's divided loyalties and its ambiguities in characterization.<sup>24</sup>

Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, Antony, and Octavius are alternately sympathetic and repellent. Caesar is regal yet bombastic.<sup>25</sup> Brutus speaks in highflown rhetoric while ecstatically smearing his hands with Caesar's blood: "Stoop,

Romans, stoop, And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood" (3.1.105-6).<sup>26</sup> Antony wipes away tears for "sweet Caesar's wounds" (3.2.225), and two scenes later negotiates his nephew's murder with Octavius and Lepidus (4.1.5-6). All the patrician characters are simultaneously heroic and criminal. None escape the taint of Romanness. Shakespeare's contemporaries similarly combine praise with blame.<sup>27</sup> They reverently cite Caesar and his compatriots for their pride and warlike abilities, even as they criticize them for their excesses of pride and bloodiness of purpose; these are the progenitors of papal Rome's vaunting minions.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Smith names Caesar, Pompey, Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus as examples of "perniciously" usurping nobles; he names Cassius and Brutus as examples of leaders of misbegotten uprisings, the causes, Smith says, "of many commotions in common wealths" (De Republica Anglorum 12-13). Whetstones cites Caesar as an example of princely courage and clemency, but he does so in passages describing tyrants who have rare merciful moments and nobles who are courageous, but have grasping and ambitious natures (204-5; 216-7). Although he admits Caesar's crimes, Whetstone cites Caesar's assassins as examples of envious upstarts (98).<sup>29</sup>

Brutus's speech to the citizens of Rome following Caesar's assassination, the passage with which I begin this

paper, illustrates one of many moments in the play in which Shakespeare reminds audiences that they are watching proud Romans rather than English men and women. Romans' fears of becoming bondmen are omnipresent in Julius Caesar, moving patricians and plebeians alike from the beginnings of the conspiracy against Caesar to the final battle scenes that are the death throes of the Roman republic. In the beginning of the play, Cassius eggs Casca on, encouraging him to join the conspirators by coyly adding to his tirade against Caesar the addendum, "I, perhaps, speak this Before a willing bondman" (1.3.103-13). In the final scenes, Brutus and Cassius fight, Cassius grinding his teeth because, he says, Brutus's accusations have him "Check'd like a bondman" (4.3.96-104). Antony taunts the two before battle, claiming they "bow'd like bondmen, kissing Caesar's feet" prior to killing him (5.1.42). Brutus's resolve to suicide rather than submit to defeat comes from his refusal to be a bondman, expressed to Cassius "Think not, thou noble Roman, / That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome; / He bears too great a mind" (5.1.110-12). In Brutus's speech following Caesar's assassination, he appeals to the citizens' Roman horror of being bondmen. Being a bondman appears to be the very worst thing Romans can imagine; it is contrary to all Romanness.

Shakespeare uses the word "bondman" almost exclusively in Roman settings. In The Comedy of Errors, set in Syracuse, Dromio of Ephesus is bondman to Antipholus (5.1.141). Hipparchus is Antony's bondman in Antony and Cleopatra, whom he says Octavius Caesar may "at pleasure whip, or hang, or torture" (3.13.149-51). In Titus Andronicus, young Lucius calls the villainous sons of Tamora, Queen of the Goths "base bondmen to the yoke of Rome" (4.1.109). Only once, in Henry VI, part 2, does Shakespeare use the word "bondman" in a play that does not have Roman auspices, and there it evokes the boundless pride of the Roman. Shakespeare puts the word in the mouth of the seditious English noble, the Duke of Suffolk, who accuses the hapless Duke of Gloucester of having made "all the peers and nobles of the realm [...] as bondmen to thy sovereignty" (1.3.126-7). Suffolk is among the worst in Shakespeare's pantheon of villainous and disdainful English aristocrats. His insistence on his rights as a peer of the realm is a cover for his ambition. Suffolk shares Queen Margaret's haughty regard for high station in the realm, and her disregard for the lowlier characters in the play. In Queen Margaret, English audiences could attribute these qualities to her French absolutism. She has recently come to England from her home in France.

When suitors from the English commoners offer Queen Margaret requests for relief from the depredations of greedy nobles, Margaret, with Suffolk at her side, rages, "Away, base cullions" (1.3.40). She scornfully asks Suffolk, "Is this the fashions [sic] in the court of England? / Is this the government of Britain's isle? / And this the royalty of Albion's king?" (1.3.42-9). Margaret's tirade is against a civil order that places her even minimally at the mercy of other characters. She rages against the Duke of Gloucester, Protector of the Realm, and the humble English supplicants who bring requests for relief to the English court. The answer to Margaret's question is clear in the play: this is the fashion in England. Gloucester serves as Protector of the commonwealth in Henry's minority and the commoners have right to redress. The liberties the lowly English supplicants in Henry VI, part 2 rely upon in approaching Margaret and Suffolk, their right to petition for redress from the wrongs of those higher on the social ladder, were among the most prized rights commoners had in Elizabethan popular fictions and political commentaries. The clothiers in Deloney's Jack of Newberie (1597) personally deliver a petition to a fictional King Henry VIII, and receive not only redress, but also a handsome welcome from him: "My Lords (quoeth the King) let these mens complaint bee

thoroughly lookt into, and their griefs redressed: for I account them in the number of my best Common-wealths men" (51). Similarly, when the commoners of England gather to seek an explanation for the Duke of Gloucester's death in Henry VI, part 2, mild King Henry replies,

Go, Salisbury, and tell them all from me,  
I thank them for their tender loving care;  
And had I not been cited so by them,  
Yet did I purpose as they do entreat;"

(3.2.279-82)

Only arrogant Suffolk comments, "'Tis like the commons, rude unpolished hinds / Could send a message to their sovereign" (3.2.271-2).

Elizabethan writers, Shakespeare included, make it clear that English royalty and aristocrats ought to have neither too much, nor too little of the pride that flaws fictional representatives of Rome, Italy, France, and Spain.

Suffolk, the English noble who refuses ever to be bondman to another, dies a fitting death in Henry VI, part 2, raging against a group of English ship men who happily cut off his rant against English lowliness along with his head. In his last moments, Suffolk bewails his human frailties and his executioners' commonness, "O that I were a god, to shoot forth thunder / Upon these paltry, servile, abject drudges!"

(4.1.104-5); "It is impossible that I should die by such a lowly vassal as thyself" (4.1.110-1); finally, in his last gasp before death, Suffolk calls upon the Romans,

A Roman sworder and bandetto slave  
Murder'd sweet Tully [Cicero]; Brutus' bastard  
hand  
Stabb'd Julius Caesar; savage islanders  
Pompey the Great; and Suffolk dies by pirates.

(4.1.135-8)

Suffolk shares with these Romans the excesses of pride that make them refuse to stoop or bind themselves to another; unlike the Romans, however, Suffolk does not share the majesty that accompanies Brutus's "insuppressive mettle of our spirits" (2.1.119). Instead, Suffolk is merely an ordinary, tawdry noble with aspirations above his station and impious presumptions to godlike powers. The English ship men easily dispatch him, showing that he is, like the Spanish "Dom Diegos" the pamphleteer of A Comparison disparages, an upstart "whose doughtiest deedes are bragges and boastinges, themselves [...] shadowes without substance" (A3).

The Romans' imperiousness in Julius Caesar combines the insufferable arrogance of Suffolk with the awe inspiring mettle that Brutus praises in Romans. Lapses in verbal

decorum similar to the tribunes' attack on the plebeians in the opening scene of Julius Caesar recur throughout the play. Patrician characters rant against their country folk and one another in tirades as petty and overplayed as Suffolk's against his ship men executioners. Plebeian characters, what little we see of them, share the patricians' peremptoriness. Roman pride and characters' refusals to be bondmen lead to the envy Elizabethan popular writers claim caused Romans' continual civil wars and Rome's final fall from power. These qualities also lead to the soaring rhetoric and outrageously daring feats of arms that made Caesar's Rome proverbial among Elizabethan writers for its people's prowess. Populated with majestic patricians who, unlike Suffolk, are able to go a long way towards fulfilling their boasts, Rome becomes a labyrinthine court culture in which the qualities that are most awe inspiring are also most alienating.

The disdain that suffuses Roman characters' verbal attacks on one another in the play is characteristic of their Roman pride. Brutus draws attention to a lapse in verbal decorum similar to the tribunes' in the scene in which Casca describes the Roman citizens' reactions to Caesar's rejection of the crown. Casca scornfully recites how, "as he refus'd it, the rabblement howted, and clapp'd

their chopp'd hands, and threw up their sweaty night-caps, and utter'd such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refus'd the crown" (1.2.244-75). Casca shows outright contempt for Roman plebeians and for Caesar for humoring them. Brutus comments on Casca's disdainful speech, "What a blunt fellow this is grown to be!" (1.2.295).<sup>30</sup> Cassius excuses Casca's manner of speaking, but admits that Casca's openly scornful description of the plebeians and their veneration of Caesar is a lapse in decorum: "This rudeness is a sauce to his good wit, / Which gives men stomach to digest his words / With better appetite" (1.2.300-2). Cassius himself speaks to Casca in the language of abuse, egging Casca on by denouncing Rome and Romans for subordinating themselves to Caesar. Cassius sneers,

The Romans are but sheep;

[.....]

What trash is Rome?

What rubbish and what offal? when it serves

For the base matter to illuminate

So vile a thing as Caesar! (1.3.105-11)

Although Brutus questions Casca's "blunt" speech against the plebeians and Caesar, he also has moments of pique and abuse for plebeians that rival Cassius's and Casca's most indecorous speeches. In his fight with Cassius over funding

for their war efforts, Brutus uses the same language of abuse we hear from Cassius and Casca earlier:

By heaven, I had rather coin my heart  
 And drop my blood for drachmaes than to wring  
 From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash  
 By any indirection. (4.3.72-5).

Potentially a generous impulse, Brutus's refusal to take taxes from the plebeians is, in his words, a snobbish refusal to take "vile trash" from "peasants." Brutus makes no show of covering his snobbery, nor does he show any sign of concern for the plebeians whom Cassius has been taxing in order to fund the war. A parallel scene in Shakespeare's Henry VIII reflects Elizabethans' official stance on taxes, and shows the differences between Brutus's snobbery and Elizabethans' perceptions of their own system's commitment to equity. In Henry VIII, the originally Spanish born but (Shakespeare suggests) Englished Queen Katherine petitions Henry VIII to relieve English clothiers of heavy taxes that Cardinal Wolsey has burdened them with (1.2.9-101). When the beneficent Henry hears of the taxes the Cardinal has levied, he registers shock at the idea of taxing his citizens, "Taxation? Wherein? And what taxation? [...]. / This is against our pleasure" (1.2.38-68). Henry explains to Wolsey, "We must not rend our subjects from our laws, /

And stick them in our will. Sixt part of each? / A  
 trembling contribution!" (1.2.93-5). English King Henry is  
 against the taxes Wolsey has levied on the English citizens  
 not because he scorns their money, as Brutus does in Julius  
 Caesar, but because he thinks it an unfair violation of  
 English citizens' rights.<sup>31</sup>

The disdain that comprises Casca's, Cassius' and  
 Brutus's verbal "rudeness," in Roman characters' descriptions  
 of Rome and Romanness, becomes an emphatically Roman trait,  
 shared among all the respectable people of Rome. Cassius  
 suggests that all Romans who are true Romans should react to  
 Caesar's rule over them with as much fury as he does. "Why,  
 man, he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus,"  
 Cassius complains to Brutus,

and we petty men  
 Walk about under his huge legs, and peep about  
 To find ourselves dishonourable graves  
 [.....]  
 The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
 But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

(1.2.135-41)

Norman Rabkin argues that the dark sides of the conspirators  
 in Julius Caesar, their murderous envy of Caesar and one  
 another, arise from "human ideals and the virtue of reason

set hopelessly against the fact of the human drive for power" (120). However, the characters themselves claim that their disdainful refusal to accept another's rule is only partly the result of humanity's fallen nature or individual character's flaws, and primarily the result of Roman pride.

Cassius emphasizes the Romanness of his refusal to subordinate himself to any other. Leading into his tirade against Roman "sheep" and "trash," Cassius argues that Romans lose their Romanness in subordinating themselves to Caesar's rule:

Romans now

Have thews and limbs like to their ancestors;  
But woe the while, our father's minds are dead,  
And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits;  
Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish. (1.3.80-4)

In his earlier speech to Brutus, Cassius similarly suggests that Romans lose their Romanness in swallowing their pride and accepting a ruler: "Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods! [...] / Now it is Rome indeed and room enough, / When there is in it but one only man" (1.2.151-57). Brutus's reply to Cassius identifies Romanness with a pride so violent that it allows no one to take a higher position of power:

Brutus had rather be a villager  
Than to repute himself a son of Rome  
Under these hard conditions as this time  
Is like to lay upon us. (1.2.172-5)

Brutus suggests that under the hard conditions of Caesar's rule, in allowing someone to rule over him, he would no longer be a legitimate son of Rome. Cassius's and Brutus's descriptions of their motives for acting suggest that their drives for power and ascendancy result from an emphatically Roman pride that brooks no rulers.

The Roman plebeians in Julius Caesar, however beset with indignities the patricians thrust upon them, are no more sympathetic than their leaders and share their flaws. The tribunes' abuse of the plebeians in opening scene is shocking because of its violence and because it is the opening scene: it is our first glimpse of Romans, and the tirade the tribunes loose on the unwary citizens is puzzlingly unexpected and apparently unjustified. However, later scenes in the play show the plebeians not so much benighted citizens as themselves guilty of excesses of pride. They suffer from the same mettlesome spirits that plague their leaders. In funeral speeches for Caesar, Brutus and Antony knowingly appeal to the plebeians' Roman pride, using their pride to sway them to one and then the

other side. Although critics argue that Brutus typically relies on the cold, clear reasoning of his stoic philosophy, his speech in the forum appeals to the citizens' pride more than to their political or philosophical convictions.<sup>32</sup> Brutus insists that the plebeians, too, should comport themselves as proud Romans who brook no rule:

Had you rather that Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all freemen? [...]. Who is here is base that would be a bondman? [...]. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? [...]. Who is here so vile that will not love his country?" (3.2.23-33)

He does not build an argument in favor of republican policy or explain Caesar's violation of republicanism. Instead, he challenges plebeians who would submit to Caesar's rule to admit that they are rude, base, and vile bondmen rather than Romans. Given the way Brutus frames his questions, what proud citizen could answer in the positive, admitting vileness and reneging Romanness?

Antony's speech, too, appeals to the Roman plebeians' pride, along with their greed. Critics have long noted Antony's speech for its affective appeal to the Roman citizens: he lists services Caesar rendered to the Roman people, displays the body, and reads the will that deeds

gardens and drachmaes to all citizens.<sup>33</sup> He reminds the plebeians of the glory Caesar brought to Rome with his conquests, along with the financial gain they reaped from those conquests: "He hath brought many captives home to Rome / Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill" (3.2.89-90). He caters to the Roman plebeians' pride in their abilities to reason through the conspirators' motives and judge their actions. Antony, suggests, as Brutus did before him, that listeners who arrive at conclusions contrary to his own are debased Romans: "O judgement! Thou art fled to brutish beasts / And men have lost their reason" (3.2.104-5). The plebeians' responses to Antony's appeals are clear in their comments on his speech. Antony pauses after accusing the plebeians of being worse than "brutish beasts," ostensibly to get control of his emotions. 1. Pleb. uses the moment of silence to prove that he, at least, still has the reason Antony accuses the crowd of having lost: "Methinks there is much reason in his saying" (3.2.108). 2. Pleb. And 3. Pleb. immediately jump in to add reasons of their own (3.2.109-10). The success of Antony's speech relies on his appeal to the plebeians' pride in their abilities to reason and judge, and their desires for personal gain: he reminds them of the benefits of belonging to a proud empire with a conquering hero such as Caesar; of the drachmaes they receive from

Caesar, both when he is alive and when he is dead; and of their senses of themselves as important members of the republic who have a say in its proceedings.

The Roman plebeians' mutiny after Caesar's funeral satisfies modern critics' expectations of Elizabethan mob scenes and probably influences their readings of the opening scene of the play. Critics interpret the plebeians who congregate in the opening scene as a revolution in a teacup because they assume that these citizens foreshadow the mutinous citizens who rage through Rome following Caesar's funeral. However, the opening scene more clearly demonstrates the incivility of the tribunes than of the plebeians. The forum scene demonstrates the incivility of the plebeians. As Mooney says,

Driven wild, the plebeians carry off Caesar's body with an angry universal shout. They shortly drag away Cinna [the poet] in a terrifying display of blind, indiscriminate rage. No one in the theater could identify with them. (46)

Miola points out that the rioting plebeians mirror the proud, scheming patricians we have watched throughout the play: "In the arbitrariness of their will the plebeians are the exact counterparts of the feckless Senate, the conspiring patricians, and, most important, the ambitious

Caesar" ("Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 288).

The plebeians merely share with the patricians flaws endemic to Romanness: pride, cholera, and indifference to their own destructiveness.

Because the plebeians in the forum scene are so unsympathetic and unstable, some critics look to Rome's patricians for firmer ground. However, the patricians in Julius Caesar are easily as feckless as the plebeians, and certainly wreak more havoc. Innumerable critics point out the envy and factiousness that characterize the patricians in Julius Caesar. Cassius describes his refusal to accept Caesar's rule in words that reveal a savage pride that refuses the idea of subordination to another. L. C. Knights observes, "What nags at him is simple envy of Caesar" (42; see also Thomas 72, Tricomi 406, and Yoder 310). Cassius complains to Brutus,

this man

Is now become a god, and Cassius is

A wretched creature, and must bend his body

If Caesar carelessly but nod on him. (1.2.115-8)

Cassius moves others to join his conspiracy by appealing to their equally outsized egos. To Casca, Cassius complains that Caesar is "A man no mightier than thyself, or me" (1.3.76).<sup>34</sup> Brutus, critics note, begins to chafe at

Caesar's rule primarily because Cassius plays upon his exaggerated sense of pride.<sup>35</sup> Cassius slyly asks Brutus, "what should be in that 'Caesar'? / Why should that name be sounded more than yours?" (1.2.142-3). When Brutus succumbs to Cassius's persuasions, Cassius gloats over his success in words that make it clear that Brutus has suffered a fall: "For who so firm that cannot be seduc'd?" (1.2.312).

Those patricians who do not display their pride by joining the conspiracy against Caesar hardly need pride to bring them down. Antony's, Octavius's, and Lepidus's savagery upon joining in the triumvirate makes the conspirators' murderous envy of Caesar seem insignificant by comparison. Critics point out that, even before securing their power, the triumvirs plan the murders of fifty senators, including Cicero, divvy up the spoils, and plot to unseat one another.<sup>36</sup> G. Wilson Knight claims the characters in Julius Caesar act out of love, citing as evidence their many professions of love for one another. Thomas similarly claims that Antony and Cassius have softhearted sides to their personalities, which they express through friendships with Caesar and Brutus (90-1). Leggatt points to Brutus's tender moments with Lucius, his page (Shakespeare's Political Drama 152). Nevertheless, as Yoder says, despite all the characters' professions of love for

one another, "their love is a cold constancy at best, treachery at worst" (320). Although Cassius says he fears that Romans have become soft and "womanish" in the reign of Caesar, even the female characters in Julius Caesar are brutally prepared to carry through their worst intentions. To prove her mettle, Portia cuts her thigh and suicides by swallowing hot coals. "Constancy for her," Yoder points out, "is not love or faithfulness but firmness, clenching her teeth and tightening her lips" (321). Romans have few, if any, truly warm moments in the play.

Wayne Rebhorn argues that the patricians in Julius Caesar lock in the kind of fierce competition that Elizabethan politicians castigated in their own society as "factiousness." Barbara Bono, Stuart Kurland, Mooney, Irving Ribner, Mark Rose, Spencer, and the Rosens suggest that Shakespeare's Rome mirrors late sixteenth-century English aristocratic disputes, especially the fierce competition between the Earl of Essex and Robert Cecil, and the general jockeying for power among courtiers concerned over the uncertain succession. Rebhorn argues that the patricians' love for one another in Julius Caesar is a version of aristocratic respect that Elizabethan observers of aristocrats such as the Earl of Essex labeled "emulation," the desire to better one another's greatest

feats. In Elizabethan society, taken to its extremes in the Earl of Essex, this aristocratic competitiveness had tragic consequences: in 1601, Essex was convicted of treason and executed for challenging the Queen herself.<sup>37</sup> In Julius Caesar, the patricians' competitiveness results in valiant battlefield heroics, but the outrageousness of the patricians' feats of arms verges on the horrific and grimly comedic.

Cassius's killing of his ensign for retreating in battle exemplifies Roman patricians' belligerence in battle.

In the final skirmish with the triumvirs, Cassius enters with the information that his forces are retreating in fear, "look the villains fly!" (5.3.1). Cassius matter-of-factly informs Titinius, "This ensign here of mine was turning back; / I slew the coward, and did take it from him" (5.3.3-4). In Elizabethan armies, the ensign was the man entrusted with the company's banners. His was a prestigious office, in rank immediately below that of the lieutenant, and offered only to men of noble blood (Cruickshank 54-60). Iago, in Shakespeare's Othello, is an ensign. In Henry VI, part 3, characters show their bloodiness of purpose by vowing never to turn back, or, in one instance, vowing to kill fellow soldiers who turn back. Richard says to Warwick, noted for his battlefield prowess: "methinks I hear

great Warwick speak. / Ne'er may he live to see a sunshine day / That cries "Retire!" if Warwick bid him stay" (2.1.186-8). In killing his retreating ensign, Cassius actually carries through on a deed Warwick merely threatens to do. Cassius heightens the bloodiness of his act by making his victim an ensign rather than a common footman. Cassius's is a bold act, and one befitting the valor of a Roman, but it is also a reckless act that takes Elizabethan codes of valor to their farthest extremes.

Roman characters' uses of the word "factious" in Julius Caesar measure the distance between English and Roman codes of honor. Simon Adams points out that when Elizabethans used the word "factious," they referred to "the dark side of the system of personal loyalties and dependence [...] it was something one's opponents did: faction was a term of abuse" (34). Throughout the three parts of Shakespeare's Henry VI, aristocratic characters hurl accusations of factiousness at one another, each time using the term as an insult. In the midst of aristocrats' deadly wrangling in Henry VI, part 2, Gloucester dares Cardinal Beauford to "Make up no factious numbers for the matter, / In thine own person answer thy abuse" (2.1.39-40). In Henry VI, part 3, King Henry VI demands of the rebellious Richard Plantagenet, "factious Duke of York, descend my throne, / And kneel for grace and

mercy at my feet" (1.1.74-5). In both English examples, "factious" is a term of abuse that characters use to insult rivals. In Julius Caesar, on the other hand, Roman patricians use the term to describe themselves and their confederates. Casca joins Cassius in the conspiracy against Caesar with a friendly, "Hold, my hand. / Be factious for redress of all these griefs" (1.3.117-8). Brutus uses the same term to describe the conspirators he joins. He is aware of the term's negative connotations, but no less willing to number himself among the factious. Brutus waits for the conspirators to come to him with the ominous words,

Let 'em enter.

They are the faction. O Conspiracy

Sham'st thou to show thy dang'rous brow by night,

When evils are most free? (2.1.76-9)

When the conspirators arrive he greets them with a warm "they are all welcome" (2.1.97). Roman characters in Julius Caesar, able to use the term "factious" as a term describing themselves and their friends, are working with an altogether different code of ethics than the English characters in Henry VI.

Envious dispositions and factious natures seem, for these characters, part of the landscape of Rome and part of its people's customs. Their words and actions fit

Elizabethan descriptions of classical Rome and Elizabethan libels of Rome and Spain. The denizens of Elizabethans' Roman court culture are brazen in their factionalism and freely take advantage of openings in the network of privilege that dominates their government. Accordingly, Julius Caesar ends with the characters forming new factions.

Over Brutus's body, Octavius announces "All that serv'd Brutus, I will entertain them" (5.5.60). Negotiations for a new system of patronage instantly begin. Octavius turns to Brutus's servant Strato and friend Messala:

OCT. Fellow, wilt thou bestow thy time with me?

STRATA. Ay, if Messala will prefer me to you.

OCT. Do so, good Messala.

MES. How died my master, Strato?

STRA. I held the sword, and he did run on it.

MES. Octavius, then take him to follow thee,  
That did the latest service to my master.

(5.5.60-67)

With Brutus gone, his friends cordially prefer one another to their former enemy, now new patron, creating fresh factions and envies that carry over into Antony and Cleopatra (c. 1606).

## Notes to Chapter Four

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1. Foakes points out that Shakespeare uses the words "Rome" and "Roman" seventy-two times in the play (qtd. in Thomas 68); as Thomas says, "there is a pulsating sense of Rome" in the play; the audience "is made aware of the peculiar atmosphere of Rome" (71).
  
  2. Bathory and Cantor examine Shakespeare's representations of Roman republicanism. Yoder points out the ways that characters' stoicism affects plot developments. Buhler looks at Cassius's epicureanism. Simmons analyzes the play as Shakespeare's portrait of a pagan society.
  
  3. Many scholars examine the Englishness of Shakespeare's Rome. Miles points out that Shakespeare raises questions more typical of Elizabethans than of Romans; he shows, for example, that Shakespeare uses words such as "honorable" and "noble" that have no exact corollaries in classical Roman vocabularies (275-7). Spencer notes that Shakespeare's plebeians are suspiciously Elizabethan. Spencer's and Barroll's studies show that Shakespeare's vision of Rome draws on Elizabethan scholarship on classical Rome and peculiarly Elizabethan ideas about Roman society. Anthony Miller and Phillips point out similarities between Shakespeare's concept of the state in Julius Caesar and in conventional Tudor thought (180). Hartsock and Schanzer notice the ambiguity with which Shakespeare approaches the problem of regicide, an acutely sensitive topic in Elizabethan England. Velz examines Caesar's resemblance to Elizabethan descriptions of tyrants. Miola's "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" is an impressive analysis of Elizabethan discussions of tyrannicide and how they might influence our readings of the play. In Shakespeare's Rome, Miola argues the other side of the case, that Shakespeare focused on the specifically Roman qualities of his play, depicting "a pivotal moment in history" rather than elaborating Elizabethan political theories (77). Many critics discuss "Caesarism" in the play and in Elizabethan thought, whereby political chaos inevitably resolves itself in the rule of a single strong leader: notably, following MacCallum's 1910 Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background, Blits, Hartsock, Simmons, and Myron Taylor. Kurland, Rebhorn, Ribner, Rose, and the Rosens directly link the factional politics of the play to Elizabethan court

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factions and anxieties over the successor to Elizabeth's throne.

4. Giddens argues that nations nearly always develop in larger systems of nations, one nation defining itself against the others.

5. Caesar was a favorite illustrative Roman among Elizabethan writers. Several scholars examine non-Shakespearean Elizabethan treatments of the exploits and fall of Caesar, among them Kurland, Anthony Miller, and Tricomi.

6. In opposition to readings of Caesar as regally proud, Barroll argues, "Caesar's pride cannot be explained solely as Renaissance love of self-inflation" (341).

7. When we collapse all political plays, regardless of setting, into English politics, we miss the extent to which Englishmen and women compare their own country to other countries; Shakespeare's reflections on Rome, for example, are as likely to reflect on Rome as papal Rome or Rome as war-torn France as on Rome as England.

8. An example of Pandulph's slippery rhetoric is his speech convincing the French king to declare war on the English:

The better act of purposes mistook  
Is to mistake again; though indirect,  
Yet indirection thereby grows direct  
And falsehood falsehood cures. (3.1.274-77)

Critics have long noted that slippery rhetoric is a hallmark of Romans in Julius Caesar, as in Brutus's speech describing his reasons for joining in the conspiracy against Caesar despite the fact that, as Brutus says, "to speak truth of Caesar, / I have not known when his affections sway'd / More than his reason" (2.1.10-34). aristocratic respect that requires "emulation," the desire to better one

9. The speaker in A Comparison concludes the passage praising the English: "I should speake of a thing but too wel knowen throughout all the worlde, if I should spend manie words in discoursing of their magnificence and liberalitie." The English translator of the pamphlet, Robert Ashley, is happy to point out that this praise comes from a French author (A2).

10. As the title page of A Comparison promises, the author's

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descriptions of Englishmen and Spaniards are "lively decyphered"; he attacks the Spanish for their "vile viliacquerie" (D2-D2v); asks such rhetorical questions as, "I pray you what humanitie, what faith, what modestie, and civilitie, may wee thinke to finde amongst this scumme of Barbarians?" (D2); and exclaims, "O new Pharao, by thy miserable death make an end of the waylings of so many desolate persons" (D4).

11. The pamphleteer in A Comparison conjectures, Christopher Columbus...in my judgement would never have undertaken this voyage, if he had thought that the [Spanish] men whom he brought thither...should straightways be transformed into Lions, Panthers, Tigres, and other savage beasts. (D4)

Later in the pamphlet, he adds to his criticism of Spain's treatment of the American Indians:

How many sighes and groanes do we thinke that the poore Americans, (being by such a fervent fever so long tormented) cast foorth, which mount up to the eares of him that holdeth the sterne, of the matters of this world? (F3)

12. On the "Black Legend" and Spain, see Julian Juderias' La Leyenda Negra y las verdades historicas, Charles Gibson's The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and the New, W. S. Maltby's The Black Legend in England, and K. Swart's "The Black Legend During the Eighty Years' War" in Britain and the Netherlands, eds. E. H. Kossmann and J. S. Bromley.

13. Most Elizabethan popular writers claim that Rome and Spain attacked England not because they were concerned to reestablish the Catholic religions, but because of their greed for power and their envy of England. Whetstones argues that Spain's excuses for attacking the Netherlands were merely "coloured with the maintenance of the Romish religion" (96).

14. Conyers Read says that a draft of The Copie of a Letter Sent out of England to Don Bernardin Mendoza in Cecil's handwriting is extant in the Cecil Papers. This pamphlet went through three editions in 1588, the year it was printed.

15. See the following Elizabethan pamphlets for these libels

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against Spain: on the treatment of Indians, A Skeltonical Salutation and Cecil's The Copie of a Letter Sent out of England; on the inquisition, A Skeltonical Salutation and Hasting's A Watchword; Spain as Pharao, A Comparison, A Skeltonical Salutation, A Watchword, and An Answer to the Untruthes ; on excessive taxation, A Watchword. Whetstones claims that not only England, but Protestants in general are more careful of commoners' liberties than Catholics; he says Spanish soldiers killed many Catholics in the Netherlands mistaking them for Protestants because of their virtues and value for liberty:

the Spaniards mistook these noble men for Protestants, because they were of honourable dispositions, maintainers of their countries liberties, and lovers of vertue, which are not the ordinarie markes of Papists.  
(96)

16. In The Copie of a Letter Sent out of England, Cecil praises England for allowing its people complete freedom of religion, punishing only those recusants who are also traitors. In the Declaration appended to Cecil's anonymous tract on England's treatment of religious dissidents, The Execution of Justice in England (1584), the writer also claims the English people have complete freedom of religion; the writer supports this, however, by noting that a notorious Catholic, Campion, was never so badly racked that he could not walk or write within the week (46).

17. Julius Caesar 1599, by Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain or Globe; Henry V 1599, by Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain or Globe (Gurr); Thomas Platter records seeing a play about Caesar in September 1599 (cited in Richard Wilson). Bono points out that Henry V probably appeared sometime before July 1599, when Essex's defeat in Ireland became apparent (452).

18. Sources for Elizabethan print titles are Pollard and Redgrave and the Elizabethan Stationers' Register of works printed in England. Stevenson lists the most popular Elizabethan titles in the appendix to her book, among which many are religious works and attacks on Rome.

19. Deloney's full title is "A new Ballet of the straunge and most cruell Whippes which the Spanyards had prepared to whippe and torment English men and women" (1588). Woodcuts show two whips, one labeled "Whippes for the women" and the

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other "Whippes for the men"; Deloney warns of "What the Pope and Spanyards both, prepared for our gayne" (N. pag.).

20. For descriptions of Ju;ius Caesar's plebeians as representatives of the fickle mob, see Blits 22-8; Kranz 374-5; Leggatt, Shakespeare's Political Drama 157-8; Miola, "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 288; Mooney 34-46; the Rosens 109; Simmons 100-2; Thomas 69-70.

21. For descriptions of the range of political theories available to Elizabethans, see Allen and Sommerville; for a reading of Julius Caesar as an embodiment of the Tudor myth, see Phillips.

22. Critics who focus on "Caesarism" in Julius Caesar, the theory that Julius Caesar's Roman republic moves progressively closer to tyranny as patricians jostle for power and plebeians degenerate into mobs, acknowledge the Roman patricians' glaring flaws (Blits). Critics intent on showing Caesar a victim of unprincipled or corrupt conspirators, those who note the factiousness of the Roman politicians, and those who comment on the predatory power politics of Rome similarly note the indecorously proud behavior of the Roman patricians (Anthony Miller 179, 187-8; Miola "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 277-8, 280-2, 283, 287-8; Paster 71-85; Rabkin 119-20; Rebhorn; Yoder 322-5).

23. Leggatt notes, "Shakespeare's Roman commoners, unlike his English ones, have no names, only numbers." However, Leggatt attributes this fact to Shakespeare's desire to show the plebeians as dangerous members of the many headed monster. "Even in moments of relaxation," Leggatt concludes, "they [the plebeians] are halfway to becoming that single organism, the mob" (Shakespeare's Political Drama 157).

24. Hartsock and Schanzer lay out the issues that make the play's sympathies seem hopelessly divided between characters. They conclude that Shakespeare intentionally leaves his audience torn between sympathies; other critics who conclude that Shakespeare intended the play to be ambiguous are Miola, Mooney, Rabkin, the Rosens, Simmons, and Velz.

25. Blits, Miola, Peterson, Rabkin, Velz, and Ribner comment on Caesar's imperiousness (63-6; "Julius Caesar and the

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Tyrannicide Debate" 280-2; 24-8; 111; 111-4; 55-9).

26. Knight, Knights, Rabkin, and Yoder comment on the strange ritualism of Brutus bathing in Caesar's blood (49-50; 47; 105; 325).

27. Miola, in "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate," points out that "Caesar evoked the full spectrum of Renaissance opinion and so did his assassination" (272).

28. Cassius's speech to Brutus as he tempts Brutus to join the conspiracy against Caesar may contain an ironic reference to the Pope's rule of Rome in the sixteenth century:

O! you and I have heard our fathers say  
 There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd  
 Th' eternal devil to keep his state in Rome  
 As easily as a king. (1.2.156-61)

Elizabethans thought of the pope as ruling Rome, and good Protestants viewed the pope as the devil, or at least as anti-Christ. Whetstones says historical Rome might have overcome its cruel beginnings and civil wars if "the ypocrisy of the Bishoppe of Rome, had not so compassed, or rather overcome her Emperours with an ignorant devotion" (34).

29. Rych's A Right Exelent and pleasaunt Dialogue, Merbury's A Brief Discourse of Royall Monarchie, and Howard's A defensative similarly cite Caesar and his murderers as both heroic and criminal (B2-B2 v; 2, 24; Fii, Fiv).

30. Blits, Miola, and Mooney note Casca's scorn for the plebeians (66-9; "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 278; 35).

31. In Henry VIII, Queen Katherine, distinct from the contemptuous Queen Margaret's reception of the petitioning commoners in Henry VI, part 2, aids the commoners in petitioning the king.

32. Leggatt argues that Brutus relies on "abstraction and theory" in his forum speech (Shakespeare's Political Drama 156). Simmons argues that Brutus uses "the conviction of reason," unaware of the emotions that move mobs (100-2).

33. Most critics who discuss Brutus's philosophical nature

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contrast his argumentative style with Antony's emotional appeal. Mooney builds the argument that Antony's speech as an appeal to the plebeians' emotions rather than to their reasoning (45).

34. Thomas argues that Shakespeare emphasizes Cassius's envy by leaving out details about Cassius's political convictions that appear in his source, Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's Lives. Plutarch says that Cassius, "even from his cradell could not abide any maner of tyrans" (qtd. in Thomas 49).

35. For critics who note that Cassius appeals to Brutus's pride, see Leggatt, Shakespeare's Political Drama 152; Blits 43; Anthony Miller 179; Miola, "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 283; Rabkin 111-9.

36. For critics who comment on the triumvirs' perfidy, see Knights 49; Kurland 59; Miola, "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" 283, Shakespeare's Rome 78; Mooney 46; Rabkin 116; Myron Taylor 306; Thomas 79-80; Yoder 323.

37. On the dire consequences of Essex's brand of emulation, see Adams 37-9; James 416-66; MacCaffrey, Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603 418-30, 453-536; and McCoy 79-102.

## Conclusion

"be he ne'er so vile, This day shall gentle his condition"  
Henry V, The Shoemaker's Holiday, and the Realities  
of Elizabethan Popular Political Identity

Brutus's soaring rhetoric of Romanness in Julius Caesar meets its match in Henry V's battlefield rhetoric in Henry V. The Chamberlain's Men performed both Julius Caesar and Henry V in 1599. In Henry V, Henry V's speech on Saint Crispin's day immediately before the battle of Agincourt is a soaring appeal to his soldiers' common Englishness. Whereas Shakespeare's Brutus, Cassius, and Casca argue for the selectness of Romans, Shakespeare's King Henry V argues for the inclusiveness of the English. Henry V levels the differences between himself and his men, claiming that their common Englishness and his bluff soldierliness make them into "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers." Henry promises his soldiers, "he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, / This day shall gentle his condition" (4.3.60-7). Meanwhile, in the same year, a rival company, the Admiral's Men, performed Thomas Dekker's Shoemaker's Holiday. Dekker's play celebrates the harmonious wartime work of a crew of English shoemakers and cobblers who stay behind in England while the

shoemakers and cobblers who stay behind in England while the king and his troops fight in France. The catch phrase of The Shoemaker's Holiday, repeated numerous times by the play's hero Simon Eyre, is "Prince am I none, yet am I nobly born, as being the sole son of a shoemaker" (3.1.56-8; 3.4.189-90; 3.5.18-9; 5.1.26; 5.5.19-20). Simon Eyre's praise of shoemakers and his mercurial rise to fame as a Mayor of London level the differences between craftsman and gentleman, as does Henry's praise of his soldiers and his wartime comradeship. Henry and Eyre both suggest that hierarchical distinctions are unimportant compared to shared Englishness.

Few plays as clearly show the complexity of Elizabethan popular political identity and its literary representatives as Henry V and The Shoemaker's Holiday. Shakespeare's promised gentling of common soldiers and Dekker's evocation of English wartime unity in a crew of noble shoemakers, as with other Elizabethan writers' celebrations of English lowliness over unEnglish pride, give English national identity a popular character. Shakespeare's and Dekker's plays define Englishness in the commoner. They show

commoners as representative English citizens, and describe England as a place of unique freedoms for commoners. They use a rhetoric of inclusiveness, a fiction of bluff commonness, and a social hierarchy that allows more flexibility than the rigid Elizabethan hierarchy that many literary critics and historians depict. However, even within Elizabethan fictions such as Henry V and The Shoemaker's Holiday English, inclusiveness bumps elbows with exclusivity of rhetoric and reality. Shakespeare's Henry V retains the ugly adjective "vile" as a prefix to his description of the lowliest members of his troops. The lowliest members' fictional representatives--comic characters such as Fluellen, Gower, Jamy, and MacMorris--mirror the adjective in their personality quirks and behaviors.

In raising up English lowliness, Elizabethan writers of fictions such the ones I examine did not primarily intend to ennoble their lowly characters, increase their income, or even, perhaps, give them higher status within their communities. Critics often read Henry V and The Shoemaker's Holiday as tales of middle class rise or false appeals to

audiences' fantasies of social mobility. Shakespeare and Dekker probably did not intend Henry V and The Shoemaker's Holiday to be realistic stories of English subjects' middle class mobility or the success of England's market economy.<sup>1</sup> Eyre, his cobbling and shoemaking crew, and Henry V's common soldiers become English folk heroes not for their reverent dispositions, but for their reputations as English ruffians who nonetheless celebrate their Englishness. Dekker's shoemakers and Shakespeare's commoners share with the pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman, Greene's Clothbreeches, and Wilson's cobbler their reputations for lowliness and irascibility. These characters become symbols of England's commonwealth and its supposed national unity precisely because of their associations with oppositional and anti-hierarchical popular traditions Elizabethan writers claim were peculiar to England.

Dekker's Shoemaker's Holiday is an example of a fiction in which the writer evokes Elizabethan popular culture's lowliest rogues in order to build a vision of English lowliness. Almost every critic who has commented on The Shoemaker's Holiday has argued that Dekker wrote the play in

order to ingratiate himself with a historical newly enriched artisan class in Elizabethan England. However, Dekker's shoemakers are unlikely craftsmen to choose as representatives for a rising artisan class. No shoemaker ever became Lord Mayor of London. The historical Simon Eyre was a clothier. In The Shoemaker's Holiday, Dekker follows his source, a two part pamphlet series by Deloney entitled The Gentle Craft (1597-1600), in inexplicably changing the historical Eyre from a clothier into a shoemaker. The change is a telling one because the plots of Deloney's pamphlets and Dekker's play would not suffer in any obvious way if Eyre were a clothier. Making Eyre a historically correct clothier would give his sudden rise to the office of Lord Mayor credibility. Making Eyre a shoemaker, Deloney and Dekker insert into the tale a character whose fame depends not on his rising social status, but on his reputation as a member of the shoemaker's guild. This is the craft guild notorious in Elizabethan popular fictions for their inability to rise and for their roguery.

In Elizabethan England, shoemakers, along with their cobbling cousins, remained close to the laboring masses in social status. The shoemakers' guild was not one of the

twelve major livery companies in London. The guild marched in holiday processions in a place of lesser dignity. Its members were barred from holding higher offices; thus, they could not serve as mayors. In addition to holding a lower positions in the craft hierarchy, shoemakers had a longstanding tradition in popular fictions as characters whose irascibility earned them the ironic title "the gentle craft." The gentle craft tradition that gives Deloney the title for his pamphlet series The Gentle Craft spans the sixteenth century in English literature.<sup>2</sup> Elizabethan gentle craft fictions depict shoemakers and cobblers as merry and hospitable, but nonetheless roguish.<sup>3</sup>

Sources for the gentle craft tradition in Elizabethan popular fictions revel in the notoriety of shoemaking and cobbling characters. The anonymous Famous Victories of Henry V (c. 1586), a source for Shakespeare's Henry plays, features the famed comic actor Tarlton in the battlefield antics of Derrick, an ignominious carrier of parcels who apprentices himself to a cobbler in the opening scenes of the play. In the anonymous George a Greene the Pinner of Wakefield (1587-93), the shoemakers of Bradford brawl with the kings of England and Scotland and with Robin Hood and

his merry rout until the King knights them, grants them special privileges, and feasts with them. The pamphleteer of A Comparison cites pretentious cobblers as stock comic characters, along with Spanish nobility:

I pray you what man is there so melancholy, that could forbear laughter, seeing a burden-bearer, a cobbler, or a carter, to call himselfe Cavaliero: or else to see a Cavaliero of Spaine, going thorough the fields, to carrie the fragmentes of his dinner in a budget, and to play a thousand other peasantly partes? (D4 v)

In A Quip, Greene relates a tale showing the gentle craft's penury: wishing to reward the shoemakers for their hospitality and fellowship, Christ mistakenly grants that "they may ever spend a groat afore they can yearn two pence" rather than the opposite (F1 v). Slightly later, the anonymous playwright of Lochrine (c. 1591) staged the misadventures of Strumbo the cobbler and his apprentice, Trompart, as they slog through the battlefield with dinner in hand. The cobbling character drafted on behalf of his nation's honor seems to have provided many an amusing moment on the early modern stage.

Based on these sources for the "gentle craft" tradition in Elizabethan England, the conclusion that seems most plausible is that Deloney and Dekker deliberately chose comically lowly shoemakers and cobblers for canonization as representative London commoners and as Elizabethan patriots. Why else change Eyre from a respectable clothier into a jocular but lowbrow shoemaker? Dekker, Deloney, and other authors of late sixteenth-century English gentle craft fictions use shoemakers and cobblers as comic examples of patriotic and good-hearted ruffians and rogues because of their lowliness--because their roots, as with English folk hero Robin Hood's, are in vagabondage and misrule.

Elizabethan creators of these roguish Elizabethan heroes uniformly place them in a mythical England whose uncertain history depends on its ability to transform both its oppositional lower echelons and its decadent nobility into functional English citizens. Dekker places his shoemakers in recent English history, probably the 1415 battle of Agincourt that Henry V famously fought on Saint Crispin's day, the patron saint of shoemakers. The authors of pseudo-Chaucerian and Piers-style plowman tales set their lowly heroes in pre-Reformation or Reformation England.

Greene's *Clothbreeches* is an Elizabethan commoner who harks back to better days in England's history. Wilson's cobbler is a Elizabethan commoner battling the corruptions that threaten England during its years of war with Spain, circa 1583 to 1599. The cobbler in act 1, scene 1 of Julius Caesar is an Elizabethan anachronism in classical Rome. He brings with him the irrepressibility of the popular Elizabethan cobbling commoner: "all that I live by is with the awl," the cobbler claims, punning on the awl that cobblers used as a tool to ply their trade. He suggests that the lowly cobbling character represents the popular voice of the "all." In these pamphlets and plays, writers incorporate commoner characters with reputations for misrule into historical narratives that reconstruct the history of an England popularly ruled. The writers self-consciously draw on rogue figures from English popular culture as examples of English lowliness and popular consent, expecting the audience to recognize them for the rogues they are in Elizabethan popular fictions.

The patriotic "rethoricke" of these Elizabethan rogue characters is the rhetoric of English lowliness and English unity, despite a reality of hierarchy. Dekker, in The

Shoemaker's Holiday, deliberately refers to Simon Eyre's roguish roots near the pinnacle of Eyre's rise to fame. A noble character in the play knowingly says to the king, speaking of the newly elected mayor, shoemaker Simon Eyre:

Your grace will think, when you behold the man, he's rather a wild ruffian than a mayor.

Yet thus much I'll ensure your majesty: In all his actions that concern his state he is as serious, provident and wise, as full of gravity amongst the grave, as any mayor hath been this many years. (5.4.3-9)

The fictional English king, who rules by popular consent and with the lowliness of the English, responds with as much merriment as the now grave Eyre musters up in matters of state. The king jocularly declares, "t is our pleasure / That he put on his wonted merriment" (5.3.14-5). Eyre, born ruffian, recreates himself as a gentleman; the king, born gentle, recreates himself as a ruffian. The fictional characters' claims that they raise up the lowly, ennoble the common, and make common the noble are unrealistic. What these pamphlets and plays do, however, is make popular

culture and the populace central to English national identity, declaring the character of Englishness the commoner character.

## Notes to the Conclusion

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1. Ayers, Dollimore and Sinfield, McEachern, and Neill point out the conflicts and contradictions in the leveling politics of Henry V. Kastan, Maynard, and Straznicky show the tensions underlying the harmonious London of The Shoemaker's Holiday. Stevenson focuses her book on the paradoxes that unsettle Elizabethan writers' praise of commoner characters.
  2. For discussions of the shoemaker's reputation as the "gentle craft," see Burke 28, Camp 13, Stevenson 183, and Unwin's Studies in Economic History 313.
  3. E. J. Hobsbawm points out cobblers' reputations as rebels. "Who says Cobbler," according to Hobsbawm, "says radical" (Primitive Rebels 109).

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