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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

“Measures Meet for Every Sort”: The Social Dynamics of Late-Elizabethan Genre

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Caralyn Alyssa Bialo

Committee in charge:

Professor Louis A. Montrose, Chair  
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2011

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

## DEDICATION

For my husband, Rich Nickla: spork.

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Chapter 4, in part, has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Rice University Press). The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.



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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Measures Meet for Every Sort”: The Social Dynamics of Late-Elizabethan Genre

by

Caralyn Alyssa Bialo

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Louis A. Montrose, Chair

“Measures Meet for Every Sort” explores how genre shaped and was shaped by the discursive and material constructions of social status in late-Elizabethan England. While genre can be narrowly defined as a set of literary models that writers inherit from the past, my work asserts that generic meaning is also informed by writers’ and audiences’ extra-literary modes of knowledge.

Chapter One establishes that Elizabethans understood genre as socially positioned. Humanist literary treatises ranked genres according to the prestige of the poetic subject; social prestige, in turn, was conceptualized according to title based on lineage and land. I argue that in practice writers invoked the values idealized in the generic hierarchy while they used genre as a rhetorical strategy for positioning

themselves within historical conditions that were changing both the nature of social status and how status was implicated in textual production.

The subsequent chapters apply this framework to generically innovative texts. In Chapter Two, I show how Book VI of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* reconfigures the genres in which Elizabeth's court conventionally represented nobility—pastoral and chivalric romance—by foregrounding a georgic vision of courtesy. Spenser uses genre in an attempt to reconcile the courtly valuation of lineage with the value of self-cultivation that was central to his status as a colonial official and his plan for civilizing Ireland.

Chapter Three turns to the work of Thomas Nashe. Early in his career, Nashe identified with elite models of authorship; but his self-presentation was undermined by the fact that his work was printed in an inexpensive and widely circulated format. Later, Nashe merges elite and non-elite genres in the *Unfortunate Traveler* to create a witty, marginalized protagonist who appeals to yet advertises Nashe's independence from both humanist and popular audiences.

Chapter Four focuses on Shakespeare's use of broadside ballads to depict Ophelia's madness. The theater tended to reinforce associations between ballads and lower-status culture, because it conventionally employed lyrical song for comedy. Shakespeare, however, uses ballads for tragic ends. Exploiting the ballad's "lowness," Shakespeare encourages spectators to interpret Ophelia's madness as a critique of the Danish court.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a critical commonplace among scholars of English Renaissance literature that Elizabethan understandings of genre were related to ideas about social status. Arthur F. Marotti opens “Patronage, Poetry, and Print” with the decisive statement that “everyone acknowledged that literary communication was socially positioned and socially mediated: styles and genres were arranged in hierarchies homologous with those of rank, class, and prestige.”<sup>1</sup> Marotti’s assertion is widely supported by Elizabethan poetic treatises, which use the language of social status to depict poetry’s superiority over other forms of learning as well as to establish systems of rank for the literary kinds. William Webbe describes epic as the “princely part” of poetry, for example, while George Puttenham characterizes pastoral as “humble.”<sup>2</sup> It is clear that Elizabethan notions of genre were socially inflected; less clear is precisely how this social positioning affected literary thought and practice. How were poetic genres and Elizabethans’ historical experiences of status mutually mediating? How can we understand the coexistence during this period of a generic hierarchy, homologous to the status hierarchy, and a wide array of generic experimentation? In short, how did the correlations between genre and status contribute to the production of literary meaning and the practice of literary form?

At its most fundamental level, genre is a method of categorizing texts based on formal components such as imagery, tone, didactic intent, plot structure, and character. Categorization, however, is not a simplistic act of observation; it is always a form of

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, “Patronage, Poetry, and Print,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 1-26, esp. 1.

<sup>2</sup> William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (London: John Charlewood for Robert Walley, 1596), 1Er; George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 127.

intervention. By calling attention to similarities and differences among texts, generic categories can highlight and heighten the significance of certain conventions, while deemphasizing others, thereby setting a frame for interpretation.<sup>3</sup> For example, reading Sidney's *Arcadia* through the lens of heroic romance privileges the chivalric feats of the two princes and might lead to the association of the *Arcadia* with Tasso's *Gerusalem Liberata*. Reading the *Arcadia* as a pastoral romance, in contrast, privileges the disguises of the princes and the characteristics of the rustic shepherds. This reading might lead to the association of the *Arcadia* with Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. Generic categories thus produce meaning by aligning and differentiating texts. At the same time, generic labels participate in—and locate individual texts within—traditions of literary meaning that reach back to the classical world. Identifying the *Arcadia* as a pastoral romance, for example, suggests not only that Sidney's text shares conventions with other pastorals, but also that Sidney draws upon a Western tradition of pastoral writing.

Since genre is intrinsically concerned with literary form, generic analysis has naturally lent itself to formalist critical methodologies. From a structuralist perspective, for example, Claudio Guillén writes, "It is most useful to approach a genre, as Renato Poggioli suggests, from the perspective of the writer, as a 'traditional model or conventional pattern' exerting an influence on the creation of a work in progress."<sup>4</sup> Guillén sees genres as an inherited, bounded system of models that writers inherit from the past. Alastair Fowler is less dependent on Saussurean linguistics than Guillén, but he nonetheless addresses genre and literary discourse more generally as a rarefied form of

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<sup>3</sup> On this definition of genre, see Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, "Locating Genre Studies: Antecedents and Prospects," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 1-22.

<sup>4</sup> Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System; Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 73.



language distinct from “subliterary” or “popular” media. Like so much genre criticism, both Guillén and Fowler see genre as a tool of the writer, a vehicle through which the writer interacts with the literary past, rather than as a form of communication. Fowler describes the literary text as a “unidirectional link, since it offers no chance for questions or corrections ... like a speaker with a megaphone.”<sup>5</sup>

While Guillén and Fowler identify an aspect of genre that was undoubtedly crucial to the Elizabethans, the fact that Elizabethans understood literary kinds through socially inflected language calls for a formulation of genre that can account for its relationship to the broader cultural field. Genres certainly do operate by correlating texts with the past, but the meanings of the past as well as those of literary kinds and their constituent conventions are produced by individuals whose modes of knowledge and experience are conditioned not only by literature but also by other forms of ideology. Drawing upon the insights of formalist critique, I argue, with critics like Rosalie Colie and Hans Robert Jauss, that generic conventions accrue symbolic meaning from texts both past and present as well as from extraliterary communication and experience.

Jauss suggests that readers come to new textual experiences with a “horizon of expectations,” preconceptions about literary symbolic forms, including genre, that they have accumulated from the sum of their experiences with all cultural forms, literary and otherwise.<sup>6</sup> In Jauss’s view, every new text prompts a revision, expansion, and reevaluation of the “horizon of expectations,” which readers then bring forward into their next textual encounters. Rosalie Colie similarly situates genre within the broader cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 258, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.

field. She usefully characterizes genres as “values schematized into accepted literary forms and habits.” For Colie, “literary kinds are turned into metaphors—not reduced so much as compressed by this operation, like resonant adages and emblems.”<sup>7</sup> This theoretical formulation, which accounts not only for the writer’s engagement with the literary past but also for the reader’s reception of genre, is particularly appropriate to the English Renaissance context because Elizabethans understood poetry as an extension of rhetoric. Under the rubric of rhetoric, genre was considered a component of literary style, and style for the Elizabethans was dictated by judgments of social as well as literary value. In addition, since the reader was considered part of the process through which the poet determined style, the relationship between the writer and audience was central to the Elizabethan poetic imagination, as I will demonstrate throughout this project.

The sixteenth-century inherited its rhetorical understanding of poetry from the classical world. When early and mid-century humanists reformed English education, they adopted from classical, medieval, and Continental authors the principle that rhetoric was the foundation of learning and virtue. Humanist education aimed to teach eloquence, the resourceful and inventive, yet appropriate, varying of thoughts and ideas through the use of tropes and figures, with the goal of preparing students to use their rhetorical skills, ideally, as advisors to the prince.<sup>8</sup> As a form of discourse constituted by the concentrated use of tropes and figures, poetry was an ideal vehicle for this rhetorical training. Cicero,

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<sup>7</sup> Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 118, 112.

<sup>8</sup> Erasmus provides the canonical definition of eloquence in *De Copia*, which became a staple textbook for Elizabethan students. See Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas* (*De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*), trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1963). On Humanist education, Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) has proven especially useful.

Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, and the *Ad Herennium* all addressed poetry under the rubric of or in connection with rhetoric, and humanist educators followed suit.

When the Elizabethans produced poetic and rhetorical treatises of their own, in part to defend poetry against its detractors, they drew on the culturally recognized value of oratory to assert the nobility of poetry. In his *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), for example, William Webbe calls rhetoric and poetry “twins, by kind the same, by original of one descent.”<sup>9</sup> Working within this framework, poetics writers embraced the commonplace that poetry was intended to delight and instruct by moving its audience. Although this understanding of poetry was generated by humanist education, it was not limited to academic institutions. The reigning assumption of individuals involved in the production of literary meaning from printers and to the London city government, the court, and the antipoetic tracts was that poetry was meant to elicit physiological, moral, and social effects in the reader. This aspect of the reading experience was fundamental to the expectations of the reader and the working process of the writer.

Like other forms of poetic discourse, genre was understood as operating rhetorically. Praising poetry’s didactic value, Sir Philip Sidney writes of heroic poetry that “the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy.”<sup>10</sup> By representing elevated and noble men, heroic poetry inspires within the reader a desire to be noble. In a similar vein, Elizabethan printers advertised

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<sup>9</sup> Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, 228. Brian Vickers notes “Both poetry and prose have artistic style or diction in common, so rhetoric is the art proper for both, and verse is merely oratory given the added dimension of regular metres and rhyme.” See Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, rev. ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1989] 2002), 231.

genres to readers looking for specific experiences. In his epistle “From the Printer to the Reader” to Gascoigne’s *Hundredth Sundrie Flowers*, Richard Smith offers the text’s translation of Euripides to those who want moral lessons; for those who want to laugh, he suggests the comedy translated from Ariosto.<sup>11</sup> Elizabethan poets were aware that they were writing for culturally situated audiences about topics both literary and extraliterary.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the rhetorical bent of Elizabethan poetic thought, the language of degree with which Elizabethans articulated the generic hierarchy not only attributes value to poetic kinds in relation to each other; it simultaneously locates poetry as a form of social communication within a conservative vision of the social hierarchy based on inherited rank and degree. Elizabethan social life was governed by institutionalized inequalities that ordered daily and official life. Although, as I argue below, the historical reality of the Elizabethan social world was vastly more complex than the conservative vision allowed, the orthodox model of social organization expressed these inequalities in the form of a hierarchy of status, with the prince at the top, followed by gentlemen, and then the commonalty. Within each of these groups there also existed binary relationships of superiority of inferiority that determined to whom deference was due in a given situation. Thus, the prince should command obedience from his subjects as a nobleman should command deference from a commoner. By using socially inflected language to characterize genre, Elizabethans attributed the values schematized in the conservative status hierarchy to aesthetic forms.

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<sup>11</sup> George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. G. W. Pigman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Within Elizabeth’s court, for example, poetry was a form of political communication. John Guy reiterates the widely accepted view that “literature was the prevailing medium of elite political discourse, one which Renaissance convention recognized as a valid means of counseling the prince,” in *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 410.

Elizabethans identified genre through three primary textual criteria: a text's evocation of classical precedents; the topic or subject of the poetic work; and the means of expression, which for some authors included both meter and style according to the classical *genera dicendi* and for others simply denoted style. The relationship of style to "matter" was governed by the guidelines of decorum, or appropriateness, which prescribed how to choose a manner for talking about the subject at hand that was suitable for the poetic occasion. The writers of Renaissance poetic treatises saw themselves as upholding classical decorum when they directed poets to match their style to the status of their poetic subject. From this perspective, decorum dictates that the lives of elevated men like kings and nobles should be related in elevated genres like epic and tragedy. This version of decorum, when situated within the context of Elizabethan social discourses, paralleled the logic of the orthodox articulation of the social hierarchy by correlating noble poetic subjects, noble poets, and noble genres.

There was, however, another side of decorum in its classical articulation that the Renaissance also inherited, one which sees decorum as a rhetorical strategy through which the orator tailors his speech to move his particular audience. On this level, decorum dictates that form should be adapted to audience, rather than subject. The status of the poetic subject and the audience might coalesce nicely if, for example, a poet were writing an epic for a courtly audience. This, however, was often not the case in Elizabethan London, where, as I demonstrate below, historical conditions like the spread of print and the rise of the professional theater were bringing audiences and writers together in new ways. While these two aspects of decorum coexisted unproblematically in Greek and Latin texts, they produced two different, sometimes conflicting, visions of

the role of the poet and the use of genre in the Renaissance. I will argue in the following chapters, first, that the Elizabethan use of genre was conditioned by writers' attempts to negotiate between these two conceptions of literary form, and, second, that the Elizabethan practice of generic experimentation arose, in part, as writers used genre as a rhetorical tool to maneuver through the changing material conditions of late-Elizabethan life.

### Classical Decorum

As heavily as they drew from classical texts and ideas, Elizabethans arrived at a specifically English Renaissance articulation of decorum from which their historically specific understanding of social organization was inextricable. It is helpful to begin by looking at the classical foundations of decorum in order to pinpoint precisely how the Elizabethans adapted it to their own mental habits. In Aristotle and Cicero, the orator's use of decorum displays his verbal flexibility, as he keys his tone and rhetorical strategy to the occasion of his speech. Aristotle and Cicero individually recommend, first, that the speech should address a subject appropriate for its audience, and, second, that characters in the speech should speak and behave in believable ways. In their discussions, Aristotle and Cicero introduce the characteristics of audience, subject, and occasion that will become the foundations of the Elizabethan theory of decorum.

For Aristotle, the audience and the rhetorical subject should be evaluated according to their character and social stature, but character should always be valued above social rank. Under his section "Appropriateness," or "To Prepon," Aristotle offers suggestions for how the speaker can tailor his diction and topic to his audience's station

in life.<sup>13</sup> When he elaborates on which qualities of the audience the orator should consider, he focuses on age and moral character, “things like age (boy, man, old man; or woman and man or Spartan and Thessalian) and by moral state [*hexis*] the principles by which someone is the kind of person he is in life; 7. For lives do not have the same character in accordance with every moral state.”<sup>14</sup> The rhetor should assess his audience according to three criteria: character, constituted by “emotions and habits,” “age,” and “fortune,” which he identifies as “good birth.”

Whereas birth comes to signify moral value in conservative articulations of Elizabethan social status, birth is subordinate to morality for Aristotle. He spends two sections describing the effects of age on character before he moves on to fortune. When he does finally get to birth, he describes those of high rank as “contemptuous,” and he claims that many of the “wellborn” are “worthless.” Having separated morality from fortune, Aristotle makes it clear that the orator should be interested in “fortune” only insofar as it helps him mimetically to represent men in language that is suitable for their social station. He writes, “It would be rather inappropriate if a slave used fine language or if a man were too young for his words or if the subject were too trivial.”<sup>15</sup> Characteristic of Aristotle’s concern with mimesis, he suggests that the rhetor should consider fortune primarily as a way for making sure that he represents characters believably in his speech.

For Cicero, the treatment of “appropriateness” (*aptus*) is part of a larger discussion of style that spans most, if not all, of his work. In *De Oratore* he addresses

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<sup>13</sup> Notably, Aristotle does not identify the three styles of speech that become the backbone of Hellenistic and Roman discussions of decorum. The three styles of speech were first introduced in *Ad Herennium*.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle offers a full discussion of moral states in the *Nichomochean Ethics*, to which he refers here in *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, ed. George Alexander Kennedy, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 210.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 149, 153–54, 198.

decorum as a faculty of judgment.<sup>16</sup> He recommends that the orator choose a style appropriate for his speech by evaluating the nature of his case and the kinds of people it involves as well as his audience and his occasion. Like Aristotle, Cicero sees decorum as calling for the orator's flexibility and discretion. He writes,

It seems that there is really no rule that I could give you at this point, except that when choosing a type of speech—a fuller or a more slender or indeed the middle type—we should see to it that it is adapted to the problem at hand; and we may in each case employ approximately the same elements for imparting distinction, sometimes more energetically, at other times in a lower key.<sup>17</sup>

Cicero differs from Aristotle, however, in the specific aspects of the subject, audience, and occasion that he deems salient to the speech. Cicero's primary contexts are trials in the forum and debates in the Senate; accordingly, he judges people and subjects as important based on their relevance to the Roman state. Social rank—what Aristotle calls “fortune”—is therefore more important to him than it is to Aristotle when it comes to the subject of a speech, because men of higher rank conventionally hold more power. In the *Orator*, where he elaborates upon the three *genera dicendi*, he suggests that the orator take into consideration the “condition in life, or ... rank, position or age” of his subject.<sup>18</sup>

This valuation of social rank leads to an interesting dichotomy in the sources of moral and social value in Cicero's thought. Cicero's orator himself is not a member of the Roman upper ranks. The rhetor draws his value and authority from his philosophical

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<sup>16</sup> Judgment is a faculty cultivated by the orator's study of philosophy, the topic which most interests Cicero in this text.

<sup>17</sup> Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 290.

<sup>18</sup> Cicero, *Orator*, trans. Harry Mortimer Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).



training and his verbal dexterity, while the subject of the speech is evaluated according to his social position. Character and social status are two distinct yet not necessarily contradicting systems of value. While Aristotle directly addresses the possibility that character and fortune may not align—in fact, he is relatively certain that character and fortune rarely align—Cicero leaves unanswered the question of what style to use for a speech about a person whose social rank and moral character are at odds. This incongruity would, presumably, call for the orator to use his well-honed discretion.

When Cicero turns to the correlation between style and audience, he presents the *genera dicendi* as linguistic strategies for moving the auditors, and he associates each style with a rhetorical function. The orator is to use the plain style when he offers proof, the mean, or tempered, style when he aims to charm, and the elevated style when he seeks to persuade. He distinguishes between kinds of audience based on the reason that they are gathered for the speech. The audience for a court case needs to be addressed differently than the audience for a poem. In this, Cicero sees the nature of the relationship between the orator and his audience as determined by the institution that provides the occasion for the speech, and style is a strategy for moving the audience in accordance with the orator's intentions.

In the last classical text that I will examine here, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, we can identify less of the flexibility of style found in Aristotle and Cicero, and more of the Elizabethan concern for restricting certain subjects to certain genres. First, Horace instructs Piso to match the meter to the subject, as Homer and the Greek poets did: "In what measure the exploits of kings and captains and the sorrows of war may be written,

Homer has shown.”<sup>19</sup> The subject’s social status and activities are aligned here in Horace’s articulation of epic as poetry about elevated men doing elevated things.<sup>20</sup> Horace proceeds to assert that tragic and comic subject matters should receive different treatments: “A subject for comedy refuses to be handled in tragic verse; the banquet of Thyestes disdains to be rehearsed in lines suited to daily life and right enough for comedy.”<sup>21</sup> Comedy requires a low style, or daily language, while tragedy calls for the high style.

Yet, it becomes apparent that the alignment of specific meters and dictions with specific subjects does not result in absolute distinctions between genres. He writes, for example, that the iambus is appropriate to both tragedy and comedy: “rage armed Archilochus with his own iambus: this foot comic sock and high buskins alike adopted, as suited to alternate speech, able to drown the clamours of the pit, and by nature fit for action.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, he acknowledges that “At times, however, even comedy exalts her voice, and an angry Chremes rants and raves; often, too, in a tragedy Telephus or Peleus utters his sorrow in the language of prose, when, poor and in exile, he flings aside his paint-pots and his words a yard long, in eagerness to touch the spectator’s heart with his lamentable tale.”<sup>23</sup> While Horace opposes mixing dictions and genres, he admits that sometimes it is necessary for a tragic subject to be treated with comic diction, and vice versa. This flexibility reflects the Roman and Alexandrian practice by which one meter was traditionally used to compose poems about vastly different subjects, even as specific

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<sup>19</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica* (Latin and English), trans. H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1926] 1991), 456.

<sup>20</sup> See above, pp. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, 456.

<sup>23</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, 44.

meters were conventionally used to address specific subjects. Dactylic hexameter, for example, which Horace identifies as the correct meter for epic, was also the meter for pastoral and georgic.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while Horace suggests certain meters for certain subject matters, the choice is ultimately left to the discretion of the poet.

As it is for Aristotle and Cicero, *decorum personae* is important to Horace. He writes, for example,

If a speaker's words are out of gear with his fortunes, all Rome, horse and foot, will guffaw. It will make a world of difference whether a god or a demigod be talking; an old man well on in years of a stripling in the first flush of youth; a wealthy dame or some bustling nurse; a roving trader or a son of the soil, a Colchian or an Assyrian, one reared in Argos or in Thebes.<sup>25</sup>

Horace characterizes people based on stages of life and occupation in addition to their ranks. He advises Piso, for example, that characters must display appropriate behavior for their age: “the beardless youth, freed at last from his tutor, finds joy in horses and hounds,” while “with altered aims, the age and spirit of the man seeks wealth and friends, becomes a slave to ambition, and is fearful of having done what soon it will be eager to change.”<sup>26</sup> Horace is concerned with fitting poetic and theatrical types with their appropriate speech patterns, but he thinks about individuals as a conglomerate of characteristics including but not limited to social rank. He also, like Aristotle and Cicero, envisions *decorum* as central to the writer's relationship with the audience. As the quote above demonstrates, indecorousness will elicit the wrong response from the audience, in this case laughter when the poet did not intend for the audience to laugh.

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<sup>24</sup> James John Donohue, *The Theory of Literary Kinds* (Dubuque, IA: Loras College Press, [1943] 1949).

<sup>25</sup> Horace, *Epistles, Satires, Ars Poetica*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Horace, *Epistles, Satires, Ars Poetica*, 465.

### English Renaissance Decorum

The classical writers from whom the Elizabethans derived their ideas about style envisioned decorum as a flexible principle that aligns audience, subject, and language. They address people in terms of a range of characteristics, including moral character, age, and occupation as well as social rank and degree. They, furthermore, leave it to the discretion of the poet or orator to decide which characteristics of the subject or audience should be privileged at different moments. In comparison, English Renaissance articulations of literary and rhetorical decorum display a noticeable inflexibility with style and subject, and they tend to emphasize social rank over moral characteristics in their treatment of both audience and poetic subject.<sup>27</sup> In part because the project of English humanism was so readily adopted by the men of Henry VIII's court as a necessity for ruling, the Renaissance notion of decorum becomes the linguistic expression of order, including hierarchical social order.

In his 1553 *Arte of Rhetorique*, Thomas Wilson, tutor to Robert Dudley and later Elizabeth's ambassador to the Low Countries, sees decorum as the construction of *propositio* and *elocutio* to fit the subject matter and occasion of a speech. Wilson defines decorum as "words, that properly agree unto that thing, which they signify, and plainly express the nature of the same . . . . In weighty causes, grave words are thought most needful, that the greatness of the matter, may the rather appear in the vehemency of their talk. So likewise of other, *like order* must be taken."<sup>28</sup> Decorum is violated, Wilson says,

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<sup>27</sup> Wayne Rebhorn notes that in the Renaissance, "The orator is a ruler, not a participant in a give-and-take of parliamentary debate, even in Italian republics. . . . Proponents of rhetoric in the Renaissance praise it as the chief means by which the ruler controls his audience of subjects and thus establishes peace and order in the realm." Rebhorn, *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York: Garland, 1982), 332; emphasis mine. Wilson's text is a conglomeration primarily of Aristotle, Cicero, and Erasmus, but he follows Cicero's *De Oratore* most closely.

“by using words out of place and applying them to diverse matters without all discretion.” Wilson uses an example of the disruption of social decorum to explain his point. The inappropriate use of words is like “an ignorant fellow” who, “fitter to talk with sheep,” attempts to converse with a gentleman.<sup>29</sup> In Wilson’s mind, literary decorum becomes an expression of social rank. Wilson translates Aristotle’s “to prepon” and Cicero’s “aptus” as “apt,”<sup>30</sup> a precise translation of the Greek and Latin that in the English Renaissance meant “fit, meet; properly convenient”<sup>31</sup>— in other words, orderly. Linguistic order assumes the weight of social order.

When he christianizes Isocrates’ myth, Wilson imagines the civilizing orator as a member of God’s elect, someone chosen to reinstate order on earth after the fall. He emphasizes in particular the orator’s role in spreading true religion and instituting social organization in the form of ranks. He writes, “God still tendering his owne workemanship, stirred up his faythfull and elect, to perswade with reason, all men to societie” and “to frame them by reason to all good order.”<sup>32</sup> It is therefore the orator’s role to ensure political order through persuasion: what man, he asks, “would not rather loke to rule like a lord, then to lyve lyke an underlynge: if by reason he were not perswaded that it behoveth everye man to lyve in his own vocation, and not to seke anye higher rowme, then whereunto he was at the first appointed?”<sup>33</sup>

By envisioning the social order as invested with divine sanction, Wilson echoes the conservative Tudor articulation of social order manifested six years later in the Elizabethan Homily on Obedience. Although, as I demonstrate below, the reality of the

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<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 333.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (London: Henry Denham, 1578).

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 19.

Elizabethan social world was more complex than either Wilson or the Church of England acknowledged, the homily depicts a static social organization in which structural inequality is ordained by God. The heavenly order of angels is reflected in the earthly order of “every degree of people in theyr vocation, calling, and office... some kynges and prynces, some inferiors and subjects ... Maysters and Servaunts, Fathers and children, husbands and wives, riche and poore, and everyone have need of other: so that in all thynges is to be lauded and praysed the goodly order of god.”<sup>34</sup>

Wilson argues that the orator helps to produce this God-sanctioned order with persuasive speech that follows the same order. In his section “Of disposition and apt ordering of things,” he writes that *dispositio* is the “framing and placing an Oration in order, that the matter being aptly settled.” He supports this interpretation of *dispositio* with a connection between aptness and order: “And the rather I am earnest in this behalf, because I know that al things stand by order, and without order nothing can be.”<sup>35</sup> The orator’s use of *decorum personae* and *decorum dicendi* mirrors the rhetorician’s function to establish and assert divinely inspired social and political order.

The importance of order was no doubt impressed upon Wilson by the religious, political, and social conflicts associated with the Reformation. Although not all Tudor writers of poetic and rhetorical treatises were as insistent on order as Wilson was, Renaissance interpretations of decorum did by and large display particularly sixteenth-century concerns with reinforcing social and political classifications. As a result, some writers display a distaste for generic mixture, which represented to them a form of social mingling. This effect is clear in Thomas Drant’s 1567 translation of the *Ars Poetica*.

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<sup>34</sup> Church of England, *Homily on Obedience* (1559), printed in *Elizabethan Backgrounds: Historical Documents of the Age of Elizabeth I*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), 44-70, esp. 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, 351.

Drant makes subtle changes to Horace's text that emphasize social distinctions and the prohibition of generic mixing where no emphasis existed in the original. For example, as Drant translates Horace's description of the development of Satyr plays out of tragedy, he identifies Satyrs with the "ale house":

We may not so prayse Satyrists,  
 which sumptyes for a crashe,  
 Make many mery with their taunts,  
 and geve them leave to play,  
 So that both goods, and noblemen  
 in splendent vestures gay,  
 Shame not their garments, and themselves  
 with common ale house talke.<sup>36</sup>

For Drant, satyr plays display noblemen speaking indecorously in "alehouse talk."

Whereas Drant associates the ale house with shame, Horace had specifically insisted that the dignity of the stage was *not* reduced by the introduction of comedy. The corresponding passage in Horace reads as follows: "The poet who in tragic song first competed for a paltry goat soon also brought on unclad the woodland Satyrs, and with no loss of dignity roughly essayed jesting, for only the lure and charm of novelty could hold the spectator, who after observance of the rites, was well drunken and in lawless mood."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, while Horace insists that *knowledge of the genres* is necessary for every poet, Drant insists that *keeping order among the genres* is the work of the poet. For Horace's "descriptas servare vices operumque colores cur ego si nequeo ignoroque poeta salutor?", Drant translates "If I nor can, nor know to kepe an order one at all / ne coloure brave my writings, why, / sholde they me poet call?" Drant's interpretation of Horace

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Drant, trans., *Horace His Arte of Poetrie, Pistles, and Satyrs Englished, and to the Earle of Ormounte* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1567).

<sup>37</sup> "Carmine qui tragico vilem certavit ob hircum, mox etiam agrestis Satyros nudavit et asper incolumi gravitate iocum temptavit, eo quod illecebris erat et grata novitate morandus spectator, functusque sacris et potus et exlex" (468).

evinces how classical decorum could, in the English Renaissance, become a tool for the reiteration of social distinctions.

When, in the 1570s and 1580s, Elizabethans began to compose and, in some cases, publish poetic treatises in English with a new vigor, they reiterated Drant's and Wilson's articulations of decorum. The increased popularity of the vernacular poetic treatise arose in part because of the opening of the first purpose-built theaters, which sparked debates about the value of poetry; in part because the men who came of age during the first half of Elizabeth's reign were questioning how to use poetry in the service of the commonwealth; and in part because members of this same generation were determined to give the English what Spenser called "a kingdom of their own language." The period between 1570 and 1600 saw the production of, among others, Abraham Flemming's *Panoplie of Epistles*, Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*, Thomas Lodge's *Reply to Stephen Gosson*, Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, Angel Day's *English Secreterie*, William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie*, George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesy*, Richard Sherry's *Tropes and Schemes*, Henry Peacham's *Garden of Eloquence*, Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike*, and Francis Mere's *Palladis Tamia*, along with reprints of Thomas Wilson's *Rule of Reason*, Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*, William Fulwood's *Enemie of Idleness*. Of these writers, I will focus on Puttenham and Sidney because they most self-consciously engage the rationale behind poetic genre.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Although Puttenham has become a staple in the discussion of Elizabethan poetics, Peter Mack makes the point that since Puttenham was only published in two editions in 1589, we should be careful about how much we credit it as a paradigm of Elizabethan poetics. Mack suggests that Wilson's *Art of Rhetorique*, Angel Day's *English Secreterie*, Richard Sherry's *Tropes and Schemes*, and Henry Peacham's *Garden of Eloquence* are more representative of what Mack calls the Renaissance "book of style." While Mack's criticism is apt, Puttenham's text is nonetheless singularly useful to this project when it is read in conjunction with these more popular Elizabethan texts. See Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



Both Puttenham and Sidney view genre as determined primarily by the decorous alignment of style with the social status and activities of the characters being represented. Noble men should be depicted by noble genres, and genre reflects a status hierarchy that aligns virtue with birth. Both, however, also admit that the poet's goal is ultimately to influence his audience—to delight and instruct—and that the poet may therefore need to consider the audience in his generic choices. By privileging *decorum personae* over the value of adapting a poem to one's audience, both Puttenham and Sidney distinguish between aspects of genre that were interrelated for the classical writers. The result is that they present, on the one hand, a static vision of genre in which matter and style align and, on the other hand, a vision of genre that allows for the adaptation of this alignment to suit the needs of an audience.

Puttenham draws heavily from J.C. Scaliger, an Italian thinker who outlines a generic hierarchy based on the status of the poetic subject.<sup>39</sup> Puttenham, however, places even more emphasis on class and social hierarchy than Scaliger does;<sup>40</sup> whereas Scaliger is concerned with both moral and social types, Puttenham is primarily concerned with social types. Puttenham has essentially two lists of poetic forms; the first closely follows the Elizabethan canon of Greek and Latin genres, opening with heroic poetry, then moving on to lyric, and elegy; comedy, tragedy and pastoral; and finally, satire, epigram, and pantomime. In this section, genres are differentiated according to their subject matter and tone. In the following chapters, however, he takes a different approach, describing

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<sup>39</sup> Scaliger writes, “Among persons, God or the gods would be at the top, then very brave men, then heroes, then ordinary men—divided into groups from kings down to the humblest. This scheme serves as the basis for the determination of the order of ‘nobility’ of the genres.” J.C. Scaliger, *Poetics Libri Septem*, excerpted in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2: 743.

<sup>40</sup> Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy*. Whigham and Rebhorn note that Puttenham lifted entire passages from Scaliger (39). Scholars of Renaissance English literature have, I think, generally overlooked the importance of Scaliger, which is witnessed by the fact that there is no full translation of Scaliger into English.

the genres' historical development and explaining how each one arose to fulfill the social needs of a progressing civilization. Together, these two methods of categorization posit a generic hierarchy in which the poetic form and its dignity are determined primarily by its subject matter; and subject matter is determined by the status and activities of the individuals whom the poem describes. Historical poetry is thus the most elevated (secular) form because it praises the deeds of princes and noblemen; tragedy is, predictably, more elevated than comedy because it “meddled not with so base matters”; tragedy and comedy are both more elevated than pastoral, which treats the “meanest sort of men, as shepherds, haywards, and such like”; and epigram is a debased genre most appropriate for the common people who carve it into tables at taverns.<sup>41</sup>

This alignment between the generic and conservative status hierarchies is grounded in a logic that conceives of individuals' statuses as determining their potentials for virtue and therefore their utility as instructive examples. Puttenham insists that “the actions of mean and base personages tend in very few cases to any great good or example—for who passeth to follow the steps and manners of life of a craftsman, shepherd, or sailor, though he were his father or dearest friend; yea, how almost is it possible that such manner of men should be of any virtue other than their profession requireth?”<sup>42</sup> Puttenham cites decorum as the principle generating this association of subject, style, and genre: “In all decency,” he writes, “the style ought to conform with the nature of the subject.” Several pages earlier, he elaborates: “if his matter be high and

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<sup>41</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 129, 115, 116, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 130.

lofty, that the style be so too; if mean, the style also to be mean; if base, the style humble and base accordingly.”<sup>43</sup> He then reiterates the classical Elizabethan generic hierarchy:

The noble gests and great fortunes of princes and the notable accidents of time, as the greatest affairs of war and peace ... be all high subjects, and therefore are delivered over the poets hymnic and historical. The mean matters be those that concern mean men ... as lawyers, gentlemen, merchants, good householders and honest citizens ... as the civiler and better sort of men. The base and low matters be the doings of the common artificer, servingman, yeoman, groom, husbandman, day-laborer, sailor, shepherd, swineherd, and such like of homely calling, degree, and bringing up.<sup>44</sup>

Puttenham lays out strict rules for which type of subject matter should be handled by which style, and he used these rules to provide a rationale for genre.

He nevertheless concludes his section on decorum with the recognition that “by reason of the sundry circumstances that man’s affairs are, as it were, wrapped in, this decency comes to be very much alterable and subject to variety, insomuch as our speech asketh one manner of decency in respect of the person who speaks, another of him to whom it is spoken, another of whom we speak, another of what we speak, and in what place and time and to what purpose.”<sup>45</sup> Puttenham is thus forced into acknowledging that style is fluid and must be adjusted according to the conditions of the text, rather than simply aligned with the dignity of the subject matter. This idea of genre opens poetic form to the influence of audience. Puttenham writes, “And there is decency that every speech should be to the appetite and delight, or dignity of the hearer.” And finally, he admits that “the election is the writer’s, the judgment is the world’s, as theirs to whom the

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<sup>43</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 236, 234.

<sup>44</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 237.

<sup>45</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 349.

reading appertaineth.”<sup>46</sup> The fantasy of parallel generic and status hierarchies envisions the writer as controlling his meaning as he projects it outward. When generic categories are subject to the vagaries of material reality, Puttenham’s concession reveals, the interpretive world becomes broader and more ambiguous. The poet must admit to being held, to some extent, at the mercy of his audiences’ interpretation. Puttenham’s text therefore suggests a model in which genre and style are media of communication; as such, they are modes of social and, often, economic exchange. The “sundry circumstances” of “man’s affairs” that alter the performance of decorum point directly to the conditions of the poem’s production: who is speaking to whom, about what, at what time, in what place, and to what purpose. Decorum dictates that poetry ultimately needs to be adapted to these various circumstances.

Since he approaches poetry from a different perspective, Sidney’s treatment of genre and decorum is less explicit than Puttenham’s. As its title indicates, Puttenham’s *Arte* is an explanation of guidelines for a science or systematic practice of poetry; that poetry can be taught is essential to Puttenham’s project. In contrast, Sidney emphasizes the vatic nature of poetry in order to defend it against its detractors.<sup>47</sup> Whereas Puttenham writes to pull the poet “first from the cart to the school, and from thence to the court,”<sup>48</sup> much of Sidney’s text constitutes a meditation on the authority of poetry as a branch of learning, written for men of his social stature. We nevertheless find similarities in the assumptions about genre and decorum present in the *Arte of English Poesy* and the *Defense of Poetry*.

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<sup>46</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 349, 348.

<sup>47</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 242.

<sup>48</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 378.

While Sidney does not list genres in order of their nobility, he depends implicitly upon the concept of a generic hierarchy. One of Sidney's primary arguments in the defense of poetry is that it teaches virtue more thoroughly than any other branch of learning. Like Puttenham, he argues that since poetry is didactic, the highest virtue can be learned from the most virtuous men of action. Tragedy and heroic poetry thus stand at the apex of the generic hierarchy: heroic poetry is "the best and most accomplished kind of poetry." By comparison, "Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful."<sup>49</sup> The difference between comedy and tragedy lies not in the aim of the two genres, as both teach virtue, but in the types of people they use accomplish that aim. Epic and tragedy are noble genres because they tell stories about military leaders and princes; comedy teaches through images of the "scornful sort."

One of the most obvious contradictions in Sidney's text is that he appears both to denounce and to condone mixing genres. He first sanctions the mixture of kinds, arguing that if "severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful." Two pages later, however, he dismisses tragicomedy as one of the contemporary theater's "gross absurdities" because it "mingl[es] kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency nor discretion."<sup>50</sup> What appears to displease Sidney is not the act of mixing genres, per se, but the clown's disruption of the elevated nature of the tragedy. The clown represents comedy, as the king represents tragedy, and the violation of decorum is expressed as a social transgression.

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<sup>49</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 231, 229-230.

<sup>50</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poetry*, 229, 244.

When Sidney turns to the relationship between the poet and his audience, his comments reflect his elite social position. Again, a comparison to Puttenham is revealing. Puttenham's poet is a courtly aspirant; Sidney's poet is a high-born courtier. While Puttenham's aspirant must cater to his audience in a more obvious way, Sidney's established courtier can assume the role of leading his audience. In this way, Sidney's vision of the poet conforms to what Wayne Rebhorn sees as the Renaissance tendency to see the orator, and by extension the poet, as "above his auditors, who are represented as his inferiors and whom he aims to dominate."<sup>51</sup> Sidney describes the audience as submitting to the poet's instruction. Poets "imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved" (218); a poet's tale is so powerful that it "holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner" (227). And, unlike the philosopher, who speaks only to the learned, the poet's function is perhaps best fulfilled when he leads the unlearned to virtue; as Aesop's fables show, the poet is the "right popular philosopher" (223).

Yet, by foregrounding the affinities between poetry and rhetoric, Sidney alludes to the dependence of the poet's success, to some extent, on the approval of his audience. The *Defense* concludes with a meditation on eloquence that comprises brief practical guidelines for effective poetic style. Sidney directs poets to use figures of speech sparingly because if they overdo the figures, "well may they obtain an opinion of seeming finesse, but persuade few—which should be the end of their finesse." Like Cicero, he says, he advises poets that "with plain sensibleness they might win credit of popular ears (which credit is the nearest step to persuasion, which persuasion is the chief mark of

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<sup>51</sup> Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds*, 36.

oratory).”<sup>52</sup> By first asserting that the poet’s chief good inheres in the effect he produces on his audience and then by describing the relationship between the poet and audience in rhetorical terms, Sidney points to the flip-side of the image of the poet leading his audience: the poet’s success is ultimately dependent upon his audience.<sup>53</sup> Sidney imagines the poet as a divine conduit channeling virtuous instruction to his audience, but it is the audience’s reaction that determines the poet’s effectiveness. Like Puttenham’s *Arte*, Sidney’s *Defense* thus embodies two different visions of genre. In one, the generic system serves to reinforce a conservative social hierarchy; in the other, poetry is a form of communication between reader and writer that places the poet and his style, to some extent, at the whim of the audience.

In its most orthodox form, the conceptualization of parallel generic and status hierarchies imagined a poet speaking about high-born people doing important things in an elevated genre in which the gravity of language and literary tradition convey the moral value of the characters and their actions. The material conditions of late-Elizabethan England, however, did not lend themselves to the fulfillment of this ideal. Instead, the 1580s and 1590s witnessed ongoing debates about the bases of social status and virtue that belied any notion of a fixed status hierarchy. At the same time, the natures of authorship and audience were shifting as the spread of literacy, the expansion of the print market, and the rise of the professional theater brought poets, readers, and spectators together in new ways. While writers drew on the ideal of fixed genre, I argue that they

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<sup>52</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poetry*, 247.

<sup>53</sup> Rebhorn notes that “audience reaction, although certainly produced in some sense by the orator’s words, nevertheless exceeds his intentions and control.” Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men’s Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 82. Likewise, Whigham asserts that the centrality of decorum to Renaissance English thinking marked the ascendance of the audience as arbiter. Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*, 52.

simultaneously drew on an alternative view of genre as a rhetorical tool, as they altered, reinterpreted, and adapted the ideal in order to navigate the material conditions of literary production in late-Elizabethan England. The much-noted fecundity of generic forms in late-Elizabethan England arose as writers negotiated between these two visions of genre. Since London was central to the work of the writers whom I address in the following chapters, I will focus my discussion of late-Elizabethan historical conditions on the capital.

### The Social Contexts of Generic Practice

While the state and its church maintained that the social order comprised divinely ordained and clearly demarcated binary relationships between inferiors and superiors, descriptions of the Elizabethan social world suggest that in practice status was vastly nuanced and complex. Structural inequalities were indeed the foundation of the Elizabethan social order, as the Homily on Obedience suggests, but the attempts of men like William Harrison, Thomas Smith, and Thomas Wilson to schematize status into logical and consistent categories reveal that status was determined by an amalgamation of factors, of which noble birth was simply one, albeit an important one. Historically, the nobility and the commonalty were two discrete castes; birth was the only mode of entry into the nobility; and the gentility's wealth and power were founded on landownership. By the end of the sixteenth century, although the gentility-commonalty divide remained a fundamental principle of the social structure, people moved across the divide from both directions, and status was measured by birth and landownership in conjunction with



wealth, vocation, education, geography—whether someone lived in the city or country, the north or the south—and the holding of offices.<sup>54</sup>

In 1583, Thomas Smith included a generally conservative description of English society in his *De Republica Anglorum*.<sup>55</sup> He outlines four major groups: gentlemen, citizens and burgesses, yeomen, and a motley “fourth sort.” Gentlemen include the nobility, that is, barons and above, as well as the lesser nobility, including esquires and knights, and “mere gentlemen.” The greater nobility either inherit their titles through lineage or they are granted titles by the crown. Titles are indicative of virtue, but at the same time, ranks of nobility require money to support the ornament of noble living. Barons, for example, must have a yearly revenue of £1,000. The greater nobility are also those who serve in the House of Lords, although if a family falls into “decay,” their sons may retain their titles but be denied their seat in Parliament. In contrast to the titles of the great nobility, the rank of knight cannot be inherited; it is granted by the crown as a reward for military service to those who own land and are able to “maintain the estate.” “Mere gentlemen” are those without title who, simply, can “live idly and without manuell labor, and will beare the port, charge and coutnenace of a gentleman, he shall be called master.” Smith concedes that gentlemen “be made good cheape in England,” as men attain the title of “master” through education, specifically studying the law and obtaining

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<sup>54</sup> On the Elizabethan social order, I have relied most on Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 8, 23; Keith Wrightson, *English Society*, ch. 1; Mervyn James, *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and G.R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London: Methuen, [1959] 1969), 251-61. Anthony Esler argues that the Elizabethan period in fact witnessed a re-assertion of the ideals of nobility in reaction to the social fluidity of the earlier Tudors. See Esler, *The Aspiring Mind of the Elizabethan Younger Generation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1966).

<sup>55</sup> Smith’s description is based largely on William Harrison’s *Historicall Description of the Island of Britain*, which was prefaced to *Holinshed’s Chronicles* in 1577. Since Harrison was a preacher, he was notably more interested in the status of pastors and religious figures than Smith was. For the evaluation of Smith as conservative, see Elton, *England under the Tudors*, 251-52.

a masters of art from the universities.<sup>56</sup> Despite the minor scoff at “made” gentlemen, Smith is not opposed to social mobility.

He spends much less time on the subsequent three social degrees. Citizens and burgesses are freemen of the cities who have some substantial wealth. Yeomen are freeholders who hold office in the country. Although he ranks yeomen below citizens, Smith is effusive about his pride in the English yeomanry, who, he says, support the commonwealth with their labor. Yeomen are not gentlemen, but they live wealthily, hold office, and maintain a social preeminence similar to that of gentlemen. Furthermore, their sons may become gentlemen by graduating from the universities. The “fourth sort” comprises all others who “have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth and no account is made of them but onelie to be ruled, not to rule other.”<sup>57</sup> This fourth group includes, among others, all laborers, merchants, and artificers.

As this brief summary demonstrates, the criteria for Smith’s groups are internally inconsistent. Citizenship, for example, refers to a form of legal status, while nobility is based on wealth, land, and title. Simultaneously, Smith argues that title is derived from rewards given to an individual’s virtuous ancestry, while acknowledging that nobility requires a certain level of wealth to sustain. On the one hand, nobility represents a moral value; on the other, nobility is recognized as a material construct. Another contradiction exists in the fact that Smith ranks citizens and burgesses above yeomen because they are urban, but yeomen are wealthier and command more respect than their urban superiors. Artificers and merchants are ranked based on their occupation, regardless of their wealth and lineage, yet no other group is evaluated in the same way.

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<sup>56</sup> Sir Thomas Smith, *De republica Anglorum* (London: Henrie Midleton for Gregorie Seton, 1583), 39.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, *De republica Anglorum*, 46.

Beyond its internal contradictions, Smith's system is belied by historical evidence, which demonstrates that his categories are so broad as to include people of highly varied statuses. Between 1570 and 1646, for example, 12.6 percent of the young men apprenticed to London's companies were the sons of knights, esquires, and gentlemen.<sup>58</sup> Smith's "fourth sort," then, includes men of gentle birth. Similarly, a number of London merchants possessed great movable wealth, superior to that of some of the gentry, yet Smith lumps them in with day laborers. Furthermore, there were aspects of life, especially in London, for which Smith does not account but which affected the status of individuals. Certain of London's companies were wealthier and higher status than others, for example, the Mercers Company was ranked first while the Drapers were ranked third. Consequently, a member of the Mercers Company and a member of the Drapers Company were both citizens, but they commanded different levels of deference at official events.<sup>59</sup>

While Smith's description, like other contemporary descriptions, cannot be taken as an accurate portrayal of the social world, it does provide information about how Elizabethans thought about different aspects of their social existence within the broader framework of structural inequality.<sup>60</sup> Keith Wrightson proposes that we understand the fixed hierarchy described in such state documents as the Homily on Obedience as an "aspiration," noting that that "even at their most enthusiastic, protagonists knew very well that it was an ideal." As such, it provides us with a "scheme of values" more than a clear

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<sup>58</sup> Wrightson, *English Society*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 306.

<sup>60</sup> Wrightson provides a thorough analysis of Smith in conversation with other Elizabethan and Jacobean descriptions of the social order in *English Society*, ch.1.

picture of social existence.<sup>61</sup> As it had in medieval England, noble birth continued to command deference in Elizabethan daily and official life, both because it was bolstered by the weight of tradition and because, in the Elizabethan social reality, those of high birth were often wealthy and powerful. The value of birth, however, coexisted with other values, notably those of wealth, learning, and office-holding that ideally accompanied high birth but often enough did not.

As I have argued, genre was understood in two subtly different ways. In one conceptualization, the generic hierarchy paralleled the conservative status hierarchy, the values of which genre communicated through plot, tone, and character; from the other standpoint, genre was a rhetorical tool that could be adapted to the writer's relationship with the audience. Like the ideal status hierarchy, I argue that the generic hierarchy can be seen as an acknowledged ideal, but one that writers adapted as they tailored their work to their audiences. In order for genre to convey symbolic meaning, there must exist a conventional and generally agreed upon idea of how that symbolic meaning might operate. The ideal of the generic hierarchy provided this conventional understanding by integrating classical literary tradition with the schematized values of the conservative status hierarchy. The generic hierarchy was crucial to but did not exhaust the limits of the Elizabethan generic meaning. Writers drew on the generic hierarchy but adapted it according to the circumstances of their own lives and the specific occasions and audiences for which they wrote.

Those circumstances were shifting in the 1590s, which witnessed changes in the nature of authorship and audiences brought about by social mobility, colonial and economic expansion, the spread of literacy, the explosion of the print market, and the rise

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<sup>61</sup> Wrightson, *English Society*, 19.

of the professional theater. These changes brought the various components of decorum and the values of the orthodox social hierarchy into conflict. The status of authors and their audiences were increasingly more ambiguous, and print and the public theater conditioned the exchange between authors and audiences in new ways. Genre was a fertile ground for literary experimentation as writers used it to maneuver through these precarious conditions.

Elizabethan concepts of authorship were permanently altered when Spenser published the first edition of the *Faerie Queene* in 1590, offering to other writers the model of the laureate poet. Moreover, the 1590s were marked by alterations in the patronage system and the appearance of the first generation of professional writers for print and stage. As part of their efforts to fashion poetic and social authority, these writers, most of whom were born into the middling sorts, were particularly interested in the potential contradiction between the valuation of learning and that of noble birth. As Smith's description demonstrates, education was a route to achieving gentility. Poets thus aimed to achieve material advancement and social mobility up the hierarchy through their learning. At the same time, learning was symbolic of a larger system of values. The humanist insistence on learning as the avenue to virtue was fully naturalized by the 1590s. Whereas it had been necessary for Thomas Elyot in 1531 to labor to convince England's nobility to educate their sons, Spenser and his fellows in the 1590s were debating whether the value of learning could in fact surpass that of birth. As I will demonstrate in chapters two and three, on Spenser and Nashe, respectively, writers in the 1590s adapted the conventional generic hierarchy, in which men of noble birth were

considered the appropriate subject for noble genres, in order to accommodate learning as an alternative—even superior—basis of cultural authority.

Social mobility and the naturalization of humanist values in combination with the rise of a consuming culture also had the effect of shifting the composition of audiences. Writing in 1600, seventeen years after Smith, Thomas Wilson indicates that yeomen's sons were steadily entering the universities, and he laments that these low-born men then inappropriately assume the authority of nobly born gentlemen.<sup>62</sup> In many ways, social mobility disrupted the alignment of any specific value system with any social rank. A poet targeting an audience of gentlemen, for example, might find himself writing for a group of upstart yeomen. Additionally, while Wilson expresses an aristocrat's distaste for upstarts, he illustrates that education was spreading among populations that were traditionally uneducated. In humanist-established petty schools, even those among the lower orders were learning to read.<sup>63</sup> Nigel Wheale estimates that between 1500 and 1600 there was a 20-percent increase in male literacy and 9-percent increase in female literacy.<sup>64</sup> Boys in town were put into school at the age of four or five, and they were

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The State of England, Anno Dom. 1600*, by Thomas Wilson, ed. J. Fisher (London: Offices of the Society, 1936), 19.

<sup>63</sup> David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6; Peter Stallybrass, "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 42-76. This discussion of literacy is also informed by T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944) and Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*. Literacy was encouraged by the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, through which parishioners were advised to read the Bible individually and to read along with their ministers at services. Reading was also an important skill in the economic arena, especially for London's merchants, tradesmen, and artisans; merchants, for example, often kept their records in Latin because it was the international language. On literacy among merchants, see Edwin Haviland Miller, *The Professional Writer in Elizabethan England: A Study of Nondramatic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 33.

<sup>64</sup> Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print, and Politics in Britain, 1590-1660* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2. Along with Wheale, David Cressy, "Levels of Illiteracy in England, 1530-1730," *The Historical Journal* 20.1 (March 1977): 1-23; Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*; and Jennifer Lotte Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) provide thorough discussions of the challenges and pitfalls of assessing Elizabethan levels of literacy.

taught reading before writing; thus, those who couldn't write fluently were likely to be better at reading. Even poorer parents were encouraged to put their children into school by the age of eight. As a result, more people in Elizabethan England could read than in any previous period.<sup>65</sup> Expanded literacy meant that the work of writers in print was available to a relatively wide audience, one that extended beyond court circles, the universities, and the inns of courts where the writers themselves were often educated. Furthermore, literacy itself was not necessarily an impediment for the dissemination of the text into even more varied social contexts. Texts were often read out-loud by the literate to the illiterate;<sup>66</sup> “there were always ways of getting around obstacles to literacy.”<sup>67</sup>

Elizabethan authors registered this change by often identifying whether they wrote for “learned” or “unlearned” audiences. Both the “learned” and the “unlearned” could read; but while the “learned” comprised men in court, at the universities, and at the Inns of Court, the “unlearned” were those with just enough education to be able to string words together. As the population became increasingly literate, poets expressed a considerable amount of anxiety over the idea that if “unlearned” men were reading their works, their works themselves would be considered “unlearned” or they would be misunderstood. George Chapman, for example, is careful to distinguish between the mere “reader,” who could be anybody, and the learned “understander” in his prefatory epistles to his 1598 translation of Homer. As more and more of the population became literate, the educational elite came to use taste and literary form as a marker of status to distinguish between themselves and the unlearned. Certain genres came to represent

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<sup>65</sup> Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, 25-27.

<sup>66</sup> Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 36.

<sup>67</sup> Andersen and Sauer, *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, 6.

specific audiences. During the latter half of the sixteenth century, for example, rhyming was disparaged as appropriately only to ballads, and ballads, in turn, became associated with the lower, less educated sorts. Although there is evidence that Elizabethans of all ranks bought, read, and enjoyed ballads, by 1589 Thomas Nashe could write unambiguously that ballads “are straight waie diversely dispersed into every quarter so that at length they become the alehouse talke of every carter.”<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, authors and printers could also advertise their work as providing to the unlearned a view into the life of the elite. In his epistle to the reader, Richard Tottel says of his *Miscellany* (1557), “I ask help of the learned to defend their learned frendes, the authors of this work. And I exhort the unlearned, by reding to learne to be more skillfull, and to purge the swinelike grossnesse, that maketh the sweet maierome not to smell to their delight.” As *Tottel’s Miscellany* marked the first print publication of Surrey’s and Wyatt’s courtly poems, Tottel’s plea to the friends of the works’ authors, as well as the way that the text mimics manuscript circulation, suggests that Tottel addresses himself to courtly circles and nobility. This sense of exclusivity, however, is distinctly undermined by Tottel’s publication of these poems. Although Tottel separates the unlearned from his circle, he simultaneously invites them in by offering his *Miscellany* as access to an elite coterie.<sup>69</sup> As Tottel and Nashe show, genre became a vehicle through which writers—and printers—negotiated among audiences as more and more of the population became literate.

The spread of print combined with the spread of literacy to alter the nature of written, as opposed to dramatic, poetic exchange. Craig Muldrew estimates that the

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (London: J. Charlewood for Thomas Hacket, 1589), B4r.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur Marotti provides a reading of Tottel’s preface in *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 215.



number of published books rose 133 percent between 1534 and 1600, with a 70-percent increase between 1554 and 1600.<sup>70</sup> The expansion of the print market was part of a larger process by which England became, between the 1550s and 1620s, a consuming society. Joan Thirsk describes this transition as one from a world in which “people spared cash only for the purchase of substantial goods to maintain life and to facilitate work” to one in which “elegant clothes and ornaments about the house were catching on rapidly as money circulated more freely.”<sup>71</sup> Part of this developing commodity culture, printed books increasingly offered writers an alternative to manuscript circulation for disseminating their works. Print became the primary medium for publication outside of court and university circles.

As the market became an increasingly pervasive aspect of Elizabethan life, it caused a gradual shift from individualized relationships based on obligation, gift exchange, and physical presence towards an expanded, impersonal system of commercial exchange.<sup>72</sup> According to Craig Muldrew, the expansion of marketing activities meant that people entered into credit relationships with buyers and sellers who were physically

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<sup>70</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998), 19.

<sup>71</sup> Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 15. Chapter 4, “The Scandalous Phase, Part II, 1601–1624,” has proved particularly useful.

<sup>72</sup> On this aspect of sixteenth-century commercial development, see Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects*; Don Wayne, “‘Pox on your distinction!’: Humanist Reformation and Deformations of the Everyday in the *Staple of News*,” in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 67–91, esp. 69; Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 41–42; and Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*, 37–59. Agnew identifies the sixteenth century as the starting point of the alienation of the commodity from its use value. He writes, “What begins as a bounded process of the circulation of commodities through the medium of money ends up as the boundless circulation of money via the medium of commodities.” While Agnew’s discussion is thought-provoking, his transposition of modern concepts of commodity exchange onto the early-modern period does not align with the evidence presented in other studies such as those of Craig Muldrew and Joan Thirsk. Muldrew, in particular, conducts an in-depth study of sixteenth-century records; his conclusion ultimately supports Agnew’s assertion that the market process expanded during the sixteenth century, but he specifies that what occurred was not a fundamental change in the way that people saw and acquired commodities. It was, instead, an expansion of the scope of the marketing process, a type of commodity exchange that is distinct from modern capitalism.

more distant than they had been in the past; the result was that the system of credit, which was already a staple of early-modern marketplaces, became attenuated, as witnessed by the increase in economic litigation during the latter part of the century.<sup>73</sup> In this context, the relationship between the print writer and the audience was less personalized than that between the manuscript writer and readers. Manuscript circulation was based on personal agreements among a relatively limited group of copyists, text suppliers, and recipients, and it tended to reinforce established relationships and existing social groups. Harold Love argues that “the exchange of texts in manuscript [served] to nourish a shared set of values and to enrich personal allegiances.”<sup>74</sup> Printed books, by contrast, circulated widely among more or less anonymous audiences, and they were acquired through market exchanges.

As a result of their mode of circulation, printed texts became implicated in the questions of credit raised by market relations. The economic structure of the print trade contributed to the general distrust of print as a respectable form of publication.<sup>75</sup> Credit, both economic and social, was increasingly at stake with the printed text, a point that Jonson would satirize in the 1612 *Staple of News*. Status became more, rather than less, important in the assessment of the credit of a text and its author. In this system, the price and format of a text—whether it was printed in octavo, quarto, or folio—affected both the composition of the audience and the genre. Texts that were more ephemeral and considered less culturally valuable were printed in the smaller, less expensive formats

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<sup>73</sup> Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*.

<sup>74</sup> Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 177.

<sup>75</sup> Adrian Johns suggests that “problems of literary credit were often resolved, as a matter of everyday practice, into assessments of the people involved in the making, distribution, and reception of books. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 32.

and therefore available readers situated on the lower end of the socio-economic scale. It was not the writer who made these decisions, however, but the stationer, who was the economic prime mover in the book trade.<sup>76</sup> The literary form and the writer's relationship with the audience, then, were mediated by the stationer. In this context, genre became the frame for the text and for the author's self-presentation in print. It was a vehicle for imaginatively engaging questions of credit, for targeting a specific audience amidst the broad reading population, for making claims for poetic and personal authority, and for advertising the printed book over other commodities.

Alongside the rise of print, the professional theater was also flourishing in the 1590s. Popular theater had long existed in England as part of holiday celebration, and players had traveled around the provinces performing in local towns. When the first purpose-built stages were constructed in the late 1560s and mid-1570s, what had hitherto been a holiday pastime became commercialized. Audience members who were once co-celebrants became paying customers, and actors, who had long been considered marginal members of society, were getting rich by making a profession of holiday play. The construction of purpose-built stages and the institutionalization of the professional theater also altered the theatrical conditions of playing. Whereas itinerant troupes had performed on the backs of wagons or in inn-yards, London players in after the mid-1570s had a guaranteed platform.

The first twenty years of the professional London theater was marked by uncertainty, as playing companies rose and fell and the city contested the theaters'

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<sup>76</sup> On the structure of the print trade, see James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Booktrade, 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Peter Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 383-422; and Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 1.

existence. In 1594, however, after the professional companies returned to London from playing in the provinces, the conditions of playing stabilized, and the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men became the two dominant troupes. This stability allowed for the development of a more self-conscious dramaturgy on the public stage. As men trained at the universities increasingly became writers for the professional theater, they aimed to integrate the theatrical practices of the earlier popular theater with the generic structures that they inherited from the classical world. At the same time, however, they had to continue to account for the fact that they were selling commercial entertainment to a broad audience. Playwrights used genre on the public stage of the 1590s to negotiate between classical ideals and popular taste.

By examining three individual texts—a poem, a prose narrative, and a play—I will argue in the following pages that the generic fecundity of the late-Elizabethan period arose as writers used genre to maneuver through these changes in social existence, commercial exchange, and reading, writing, and theatrical practices. In chapter two, I examine Book VI of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Although Spenser advertised the court as his primary audience for the *Faerie Queene*, he wrote the poem from his estate in Ireland, where he was a colonial official. I assert that Spenser merges georgic, pastoral, and chivalric romance in Book VI in an attempt to reconcile the courtly valuation of noble blood with the promotion of self-cultivation that was central to both his status as a colonial official and his vision for civilizing Ireland. I argue, furthermore, that Spenser's generic mixture was conditioned by the fact that he was writing for multiple audiences: he dedicated his poem to the Queen, published it in London, and circulated it among his fellow colonial officials.

In chapter three, I investigate how Thomas Nashe used genre to navigate the early print market. Thomas Nashe was particularly interested in using his learning to claim authority in print, yet he wrote pamphlets, which were inexpensive and ephemeral texts that were widely available. I demonstrate that Nashe used genre to construct his relationship with a popular audience that he both resented and aimed to please. Tracing Nashe's career, from his debut in the Preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* in 1589 to the publication of the *Unfortunate Traveler* in 1594, I show that he uses generic mixture in his prose narrative to reject models of amateur authorship and to forward a socially marginalized poetic persona who is authorized by his superior wit.

In chapter four, I turn to Shakespeare and the professional theater. Although *Hamlet* is rarely considered a generically experimental play, I illustrate that the play is novel in its use of the theatrical practices traditionally associated with clowning for the purposes of constructing tragic characters. Following the history of the professional theater from the 1560s through the turn of the seventeenth century, I contend that the theatrical practices cultivated by the early theater became associated with lower status audiences as educational and courtly elites became increasingly invested in using aesthetic taste to mark social status. The poetic treatises' disparagement of clowning and popular audiences was reinforced by the London city government's concern over social control. The effect was that clowning was relegated to comedy. Shakespeare, however, undermines the alignment of comedy, lower status audiences and characters, and clowning when he creates of Hamlet and Ophelia tragic clowning characters.

In each of these chapters, I analyze how writers drew on the ideal generic and status hierarchies in order to create new generic amalgamations, as they used genre as a

rhetorical tool for managing the relationship between reader and writer in a shifting, anonymous, and complex late-Elizabethan world. My analyses thus illustrate that the meanings of genres and their conventions in specific texts were generated as the individuals involved in the production of meaning modified those expectations according to their lived experiences.

## CHAPTER 1

### Spenser and *The Faerie Queene*

*The Faerie Queene* recommends itself to the study of Elizabethan genre not only because the Elizabethans lauded Spenser as their poet laureate but also because Spenser was a remarkably deliberate poet whose life and oeuvre were shaped by many of the cultural forces animating literary production in late-Elizabethan society. Spenser was born into the lower orders but he achieved gentry status through his education and then a royal grant of land in Ireland, where he served as a colonial administrator. He self-consciously cultivated a tradition of English national literature, both circulating his work in manuscript and publishing it in print. And, most important to my argument, he intentionally used genre as a tool for negotiating his poetic vocation, subject matter, inherited literary traditions, and audiences.

Spenser identifies the court as his primary audience for the 1590 *Faerie Queene* by printing Books I through III together with an elaborate dedication to Queen Elizabeth, seventeen dedicatory sonnets, seven commendatory sonnets, and the “Letter to Raleigh.” Although the poem was printed in quarto, an inexpensive format that ensured its availability to a range of socioeconomically situated readers, Spenser labored to construct a text that was obviously located within court-centered traditions of poetry and courtiership. Just as the epic narrator describes the magnificence of Faerie Land as emanating from Gloriana herself, Spenser’s dedicatory sonnets position the poet as a mouthpiece for the court’s cultural accomplishments, as he balances praise of himself

with the exaltation of powerful courtiers.<sup>1</sup> By the second edition of the poem, however, Spenser's relationship with the court had changed subtly. The dedicatory and commendatory sonnets are conspicuously absent from the 1596 edition, which comprised Books I through III with the addition of Books IV through VI.<sup>2</sup> While he still dedicates the poem to the queen, and he certainly does not turn away from the court entirely, the overall effect is to disjoin paratextual praise for the poet from the courtly milieu on which it had been dependent in the 1590 edition. The 1596 *Faerie Queene* appears as an independent achievement, one that is attributable more concretely to the poet, instead of to the poet as an expression of the Elizabethan court.

The poetry that Spenser wrote between 1590 and 1596 similarly suggests that he was less focused on fashioning his poetry for court and as courtiership after his visit to London in 1589–1590. The 1591 *Complaints* laments the court's neglect of learning, while the 1595 *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* identifies Ireland, not England, as "home." Likewise, the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, also published in 1595, celebrate Spenser's relationship with Elizabeth Boyle, rather than the glory of Queen Elizabeth. William Oram argues that this shift away from court corresponds with a reorientation in Spenser's dedicatees, from powerful male courtiers to a female and more private audience: *The Complaints* (1591) are addressed to Mary Sidney and the three Spencer sisters, and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* is dedicated to Raleigh, a personal friend and Spenser's neighbor in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Oram, "Spenser's Audience, 1589–91," *Studies in Philology* 100.4 (2003): 514-32.

<sup>2</sup> The commendatory sonnets of Raleigh and Harvey remain in the 1596 edition.

<sup>3</sup> Oram, "Spenser's Audience," 522-23.



This turn in Spenser's poetry correlates with a turn in his personal life. Critics have characterized Spenser's poetry between 1590 and 1596 as more private and focused on his life in Ireland rather than the court in London.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one of the major shifts in Spenser's life between 1590 and 1596 was his increasing entrenchment in Ireland. Although he had taken possession of Kilcolman, his Munster Plantation estate, as early as 1588, he did not receive the official grant to the lands until he visited London in 1589-1590.<sup>5</sup> It was not until around 1590, then, that Spenser could legitimately claim membership in the gentry. Nevertheless, his claim to the land was avidly disputed by both the Old Englishman<sup>6</sup> Lord Roche and by Nicholas Synan, a fellow Munster landholder. The necessity for Spenser to legitimate his claim to the land may only have increased his attachment to it, as did, we can imagine, his 1594 wedding to Elizabeth Boyle.<sup>7</sup> One might argue that before 1590, Ireland was where Spenser made his career, while after 1590, as *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* so clearly demonstrates, Ireland was where he made his home.

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<sup>4</sup> See Louis A. Montrose, "Spenser's Domestic Domain: Poetry, Property, and the Early Modern Subject," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83-132; and William A. Oram, "Spenser in Search of an Audience: The Kathleen Williams Lecture for 2004," *Spenser Studies* 20 (2005): 23-47; John D. Bernard, *Ceremonies of Innocence: Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> "Spenser, Edmund," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 670. In my view, Spenser's possession of Kilcolman provides the historical basis for a challenge to the argument that Spenser was disillusioned with his rewards from Queen Elizabeth. See William Oram, "Spenser's Audience" for a complete scholarly evaluation of the poetic evidence that Spenser was materially disappointed by Elizabeth between 1590 and 1596. The most convincing evidence for Spenser's disillusionment is, of course, Colin's lamentation that at court "Arts of schoole have there small countenance, / Counted but toyes to busie ydle braines: / And there professours find small maintenance, / But to be instruments of others gaines" (703-6). Kilcolman, however, was a milestone for Spenser because his ownership of the land made him a gentleman, a fact that must be weighed against any expression of discontentment.

<sup>6</sup> The "Old English" or "Anglo-Irish" were the descendants of the Norman invaders of Ireland. See page 73 where I address the history of Elizabethan Ireland in more detail.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Boyle was part of an influential colonial family in Ireland. Her cousin, Richard Boyle, was the deputy escheator to Geoffrey Fenton when Spenser married her.

Between 1590 and 1596, then, the locus of Spenser's social status, personal interests, and poetic imagination shifted from London to Ireland. While Ireland is certainly an imaginative presence in the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, the last three books of the poem engage English colonialism in Ireland directly.<sup>8</sup> Book V's historical allegory overtly concerns the reconquest of Irish lands, and Book VI continues this engagement with Ireland as it addresses the project of civilizing reconquered lands through the virtue of courtesy.<sup>9</sup> Book VI is also the site of one of Spenser's most perplexing and widely discussed generic amalgamations. It is the only book in which the poem sharply changes its dominant generic frame, from epic romance to pastoral, when Calidore strays from his quest to subdue the Blatant Beast into the green world of Pastorella and Meliboe.

In light of the recent scholarly focus on Spenser in Ireland, critics have conventionally read Book VI's generic mixture and the pastoral episode as representing Spenser's retreat into a private Irish world, a turn away from the court. This argument would seem to make sense, given the shifting nature of Spenser's relationship to the court, but it is misguided in its ready of pastoral as intended to articulate a rejection of the court. In this chapter, I argue instead that while Book VI does generically register the shift in Spenser's relationship to the court, it does not do so by pitting pastoral privacy against epic public ideals. In fact, pastoral and epic romance are not, as many critics

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<sup>8</sup> For some years, it was popular to argue that Book V was most concerned with Irish issues, but critics such as Willy Maley, Thomas Herron, and Andrew Hadfield have demonstrated that Ireland is a pervasive subtext for the entire epic. Willy Maley, " 'To Weet to Work Irenaes Franchisement': Ireland in *The Faerie Queene*," *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 26. 2 (autumn-winter 1996): 303-19; Thomas Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work Poetry, Plantation, and Colonial Reformation* (Aldershot, Hants, Eng.: Ashgate, 2007); and Andrew Hadfield, *Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Savage Soyl* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Stillman, "Spenserian Autonomy and the Trial of New Historicism: Book Six of *The Faerie Queene*," *English Literary Renaissance* 22.3 (fall 1992): 299-314.

argue, genres that espouse opposing ideals in Elizabeth's court. Rather, both are genres through which courtiers imagined their relationships to the monarch as the center of power. In Book VI, Spenser reconfigures these courtly genres through a georgic framework, creating an amalgamation of the Virgilian genres that was uniquely appropriate to a New English official in Ireland because it accounted for the importance of labor in the social value of courtesy.

While the value of labor implicit in georgic was anathema to Elizabeth's courtiers, New English colonists, like Spenser and his close friend Lodowick Bryskett, embraced georgic as an appropriate expression of their ambitions and lived conditions. Working in courtly genres but animated by the New English experience and writing for both courtly and New English audiences Spenser adapts conventions that were associated with courtly pastoral, such as peace, self-sufficiency, and the retreat from worldly cares, into images of shepherding that are more closely aligned with georgic landowning than they are with pasturage. He simultaneously vexes the romance genre's ideology of noble birth by legitimating nobility attained through learning, which he imagines as a form of labor. Spenser's goal was not self-consciously to undermine the value of inherited nobility. He aimed, instead, to broaden the ideologies of the Elizabethan court by legitimating courteous labor through the received traditions of courtly poetry. He worked to expand courtly genres to accommodate labor. Nevertheless, the result is a generic mixture in Book VI that calls attention to the contradictions between the georgic espousal of labor and the epic romance espousal of noble birth. These generic incongruities indicate tensions at the heart of Spenser's attempt to inscribe his New English experience in courtly poetic genres.

### Imagining Courtesy through the Virgilian Progression

From the moment that Spenser announced himself as the “new poete” in the 1579 *Shepherdes Calender*, he used genre as a vehicle for merging his personal ambitions with the project of national poetry. As the first English poet to imagine himself as a laureate, he needed a figure on which to base his vision of native, vernacular authorship.<sup>10</sup> Naturally, he chose Virgil. For Renaissance readers, Virgil’s generic trajectory from pastoral through georgic to epic was a model for the development not only of the poet, but also of the nation, of the court, and of the individual human life. In his 1575 translation of the *Bucolics* and *Georgics*, Abraham Fleming explains that Virgil’s works “hath followed the order of his owne nature and life; first beginning with his Bucoliks or Pastoralls, as having kept sheepe upon the mountaines, etc: then his Georgiks or ruralls went in hand, as he fell in love with good husbandrie, and could practise it very well: lastly his Aeneids or Martialls kept him occupied, being a man of warre.”<sup>11</sup>

The Renaissance furthermore inherited from classical commentaries the tradition of associating each genre with a *genus dicendi* based on the poetic subject. Servius, for example, wrote that Virgil “has the lofty style in the *Aeneid*, the middle style in the *Georgics*, and the low in the *Bucolics* on account of the nature of the action and the characters: for here the characters are peasants, rejoicing in simple things, from whom

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> *The Bucoliks of Publius Virgilius Maro*, trans. Abraham Fleming (London: John Charlewood, for Thomas Woodcocke, 1575), 4Ar. All in-text citations to the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics* refer to this edition.

nothing more elevated should be demanded.”<sup>12</sup> In the *rota Virgiliana*, pastoral manifested the work of the fledgling poet, or young man, who addressed simple subjects in humble language; georgic represented adolescence, or the intermediary phase when the poet takes up the temperate style; and in the epic, the master penned the defining political myth of his civilization in correspondingly elevated language.<sup>13</sup> Richard Stanyhurst’s 1583 *Aeneid* opens:

I that in old season wyth reeds oten harmonye Whistled  
 My rural sonnet; from forrest flitted (I) forced  
 Thee sulcking swincker thee soile, though craggie, to sunder  
 A labor and a travaile too plowswains hartily welcoom.  
 Now manhood and garboils I chant, and martial honor.  
 I blaze thee captayne first from Troy cittie repairing.<sup>14</sup>

Stanyhurst imagines the *Aeneid* as the completion of a generic, individual, and national trajectory. Each Virgilian genre was, thus, informed, or conditioned, by the others. Despite their lowly subject matter, the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics* were legitimate models for imitation because they were written by the author of the *Aeneid*, the pinnacle achievement of both the poet and his civilization.

Spenser opens his career with a pastoral poem in which he advertises his intention to follow in Virgil’s footsteps. In the “October” eclogue of the *Shepherd’s Calendar*, Piers explains that Virgil

... left his Oaten reede,  
 Whereon he earst had taught his flocks to feede,  
 And labored lands to yield the timely eare,  
 And eft did sing of warres and deadly drede. (55-59)

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977), 127.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Neuse, “Milton and Spenser: The Virgilian Triad Revisited,” *English Literary History* 45.4 (winter 1978): 606-39.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Stanyhurst, trans., *The First Foure Bookes of Virgil’s Aeneis* (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1583).

Cuddye responds that only Colin Clout, Spenser's poetic persona, is capable of matching Virgil's flight. Spenser then famously opens the 1590 *Faerie Queene* with the announcement that, indeed, his epic is the culmination of a career begun in pastoral:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske,  
As time her taught, in lowly Shephards weeds,  
Am now enforst a farre unfetter taske,  
For trumpets sterne to change mine Oaten reeds:  
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds. (I.proem.1-5)

The fact that Spenser imagines his career through the Virgilian model, first in the *Shepherd's Calendar* when he was involved in the Sidney literary circle and then again in the *Faerie Queene*, tells us just as much about courtly tastes and expectations as it does about Spenser's conceptualization of the poetic vocation. Spenser makes use of genres and traditions well beyond Virgil,<sup>15</sup> blending a vast array of kinds and modes and drawing on native and Continental in addition to classical sources. The fact that he identifies with Virgil and that he announces his aspirations in an expressly Virgilian framework reveals that Virgil represented to courtly and humanist-educated elites an elevated literary language in which Spenser could make a claim for poetry as a noble pursuit that legitimated a laureate career.

True to the Virgilian generic framework, the *Calendar* is situated within the context of Spenser's humanist education. Pastoral was considered appropriate for schoolboys because of its simplistic matter, and Virgil's *Bucolics* and Mantuan's

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

*Eclogues* were standard grammar school texts.<sup>16</sup> Spenser's poem, published when he was only three years out of Cambridge, displays his thorough mastery of a genre that epitomized schoolboy life. When he moves to the *Faerie Queene* in 1590, significantly bypassing georgic, a point to which I will return, he remains firmly grounded in his humanist training, but he envisions himself speaking to and for the court. Spenser was an outsider, but he had been taught by his humanist education to aspire to use his rhetorical training to win a place at court, simultaneously satisfying his own ambitions and serving the commonwealth.<sup>17</sup> He intended the *Faerie Queene* to be a civilization-defining epic, as the *Aeneid* was, through which he could advertise his rhetorical skill in an elaborate act of courtiership, celebrating the achievements of the nation as an expression of the virtue of the queen.

When he takes up the topic of courtesy, the titular virtue of Book VI, he engages a social value that was central to the performance and rhetoric of courtiership. Over the course of the sixteenth century, refined manners and fluency in social ceremonies were coming to signify membership in the social elite. The period witnessed the flourishing of courtesy manuals, which provided an education in the disciplining of individual impulses in order to perform public niceties.<sup>18</sup> Social rituals were invested with the weight of the

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<sup>16</sup> In 1536, Thomas Elyot had recommended Virgil's *Bucolics* as an appropriate text for introducing young students to poetry because "no work so nigh approacheth to the common dalliance and manners of children, and the pretty controversies of the simple shepherds therein contained wonderfully rejoiceth the child that heareth it well declared." Quoted in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Spenser was the son of a weaver who matriculated to Cambridge as a "sizar," that is, a student whose tuition was offset by labor. He waited on his fellow, nobly born classmates to support his education.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 16. Exploring the implications of Norbert Elias's insights for sixteenth-century England, Bryson writes that "elementary good manners" were conceived "as control of bodily function and containment of aggression" (9). For the foundation of Bryson's Argument and a history of the term "civilité," see Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund

social hierarchy. “Courtesy is the right ornament of the gentleman, for of courtesy and gentleness he is termed a gentleman,” asserts George Pettie’s translation of Stefano Guazzo.<sup>19</sup> The division between the gentry and the commonality, made at the level of the “gentleman,” was the fundamental organizing principle of the Elizabethan social hierarchy.<sup>20</sup> As the socio-symbolic system of good manners, courtesy behaviorally manifested the distinction between gentles and commons. In the “Letter to Ralegh” printed with the 1590 edition of the poem, Spenser describes his project as “fashion[ing] a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline,” imagining the entire *Faerie Queene* as a fictional exploration of the topic of courtesy. Book VI’s titular virtue, then, represents the culmination of “vertuous discipline” at which the entire poem aims. Furthermore, courtesy was especially politically charged in the context of Elizabeth’s court, where social rituals were codes through which individuals interacted with superiors, inferiors, and peers. Courtesy provided strategies not only for addressing and, in the best of circumstances, winning the favor of the queen but also for positioning oneself within the social world of rival courtiers.<sup>21</sup> Courtesy was thus an important form of Elizabethan courtiership.

It was clear to Elizabethans that courtesy was a behavioral expression of nobility. Less clear was the nature of nobility itself. Before the middle of the fifteenth century, nobility was understood as a social station—membership in the warrior caste—inherited

Jephcott, rev. ed., ed. Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell (Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell, [1939] 2000), 47-72.

<sup>19</sup>Stefano Guazzo, *The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo, the First Three Books Translated by George Pettie, Anno 1581, and the Fourth by Barth. Young, Anno 1586* (New York: Knopf, 1925), 185. Guazzo was first published in Italian in 1574.

<sup>20</sup> See Keith Wrightson, *English Society: 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 23, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36; Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 33.



through one's family line. In the sixteenth century nobility became a social value whose source was contested. Following the model of Italian humanism, Henrician humanists encouraged the nobility to educate their sons in preparation for becoming leaders of the commonwealth. They emphasized the moral implications of nobility, arguing that learning was the avenue to virtue and honor and therefore as necessary to nobility as elevated birth was.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Henry VIII advanced young humanist-educated men of low birth to positions of power in his government. By 1583, when Sir Thomas Smith wrote *De republica Anglorum*, social mobility was seen as a pervasive cultural phenomenon, in part due to the success of the humanist education program.<sup>23</sup> As members of the landed aristocracy and humanist thinkers managed the rise of social mobility and the changing value of education, they produced courtesy texts that both codified manners and addressed the philosophical underpinnings of nobility by debating whether learning or birth was more fundamental to the attainment of nobility. Book VI constitutes Spenser's poetic analogue to a courtesy manual. He renders courtesy through Virgil's generic framework, but Book VI's version of heroic and pastoral poetry draw their meanings from the debates about elite birth and learning that unfolded in courtesy literature and the practices of Elizabethan courtiership. When Spenser modulates pastoral and epic romance through georgic in Book VI, he generically produces an alternative framework for understanding courtesy, nobility, and the nature of social status.

Although for the most part, courtesy literature endorses aristocratic ideology, many texts took the form of dialogues, often translated from the Italian, which gave voice

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<sup>22</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. R. C. Alston (Menston, Eng.: Scolar Press, 1970), fol. 1012 [112].

<sup>23</sup> Sir Thomas Smith, *De republica Anglorum* (London: Henrie Midleton for Gregorie Seton, 1583).

to alternative perspectives at odds with aristocratic ideologies, even as they ultimately maintain the superiority of noble birth. The corpus of courtesy literature is thus productively read not as straightforwardly didactic, but as an arena of debate into which Spenser enters with Book VI. Since the general corpus of courtesy literature has been thoroughly explored,<sup>24</sup> I will focus on those questions relevant to my discussion of Book VI: the definition of nobility, the nature of the gentleman's relationship to the court, as the center of power, and society at large, and the best course of life for the noble man.

For the Elizabethan court, Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* was the archetypal courtesy book.<sup>25</sup> Castiglione envisions courtesy as comprising affability and good manners as well as the mastery of courtly pastimes, like singing, dancing, and painting, and the study of the humanities including poetry and history. By displaying his competence in these courtly arts and his good judgment, the Courtier will win the prince's attention. The key to appropriately using his skills lies in discretion, or the "practicing things in due time and not out of season," and inheres in his ability to restrain his instincts, assess the moment and behave advantageously.<sup>26</sup> Having won the Prince's affection, the Courtier will please him with his learning, and the Prince will reward him by making him an advisor. A system of behavior ultimately grounded in the approval of the monarchical center of power, courtly manners and social rituals are the

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<sup>24</sup> For a complete exploration of discourses of courtesy, see Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*; Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; and Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*, 15, cites from Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England*, that Castiglione became for English courtiers "a second Bible."

<sup>26</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier, from the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione: Done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, Anno 1561* (New York: AMS, 1967), 110. Subsequent in-text citations refer to this edition.

vehicles through which the Courtier obtains political influence. Although the performance of courtesy may appear ornamental, it is inherently strategic.

Castiglione espouses a conservative view of the source of nobility and its relationship to courtesy. Although the Courtier is educated in the humanities, his “principall profession” is arms, and although he has worked to hone his social skills, he must behave as if his manners are gifted by nature. In Castiglione’s famous articulation of *sprezzatura*—translated by Hoby as “recklessness”—Count Lewis describes how a courtier can achieve this social “grace,” a term that implicitly connects divine sanction to personal elegance. “One rule that is most general . . . above all other,” explains Lewis, “And that is to eschew as Affectation or curiosity and (to speak a new word) to use in every thing a certain Recklessness, to cover art withal, and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it without pain” (59). The Courtier’s highly stylized manners must appear to be gifted by his noble birth. Lewis proceeds to expostulate that *sprezzatura* functions by simultaneously cloaking and revealing the labor invested in difficult tasks:

for in rare matters and wel brought to passe every man knoweth the hardnes of them, so that a rediness therin maketh great wonder. And contrarywise to use force, and (as they say) to hale by the hear, geveth a great disgrace, and maketh every thing how great so ever it be, to be little esteemed. Therefore that may be said to be a very art that appeereth not to be art, neyther ought a man to put more diligence in any thing then in covering it. (59)

*Sprezzatura*’s effect on its audience is created by a simultaneous recognition and disavowal of the labor invested in the Courtier’s demeanor. It is the ease with which the Courtier accomplishes tasks that are well known to be difficult that pleases his audience. Although every courtier knows that his peers have worked to develop their skills and that manners are an art, they continue to operate under the communal fiction that the

aristocracy is endowed with natural gifts reflecting heavenly sanction. As an instruction manual, the text clearly relies on the notion that courtesy can be attained and perfected; and yet, Castiglione espouses the notion that grace, the mark of the perfect courtier “is the gift of nature and of the heavens.” Emblematic of Castiglione’s text as a whole, *sprezzatura* has the effect of endorsing an ideology of noble birth and constructing an absolute, naturalized divide between nobles and commons. Nobility is an inherited quality expressed through personal comportment that is recognized by the courtier’s prince and peers. Equally important, this mystification of the source of courtesy is expressed through an aesthetic value, as aesthetics become strategic and ideological in Castiglione’s vision of the court.

In Stefano Guazzo’s *Civil Conversation*, learning plays a more central role in the social value of courtesy. Although he remains firmly grounded in the rhetoric of status and nobility, Guazzo opens the subject of courtesy beyond the court to a general consideration of human sociability among all types of people, whom he categorizes according to such qualifications as degree, age, kind, life, manners, and profession. He endorses *sprezzatura* but he is less insistent on the ideology of noble birth than Castiglione, and more invested in the benefits of learning to nobility. Thomas Pettie, Guazzo’s English translator, locates learning at the heart of gentility: “You wyll be but ungentle Gentlemen, yf you be no Schollers.”<sup>27</sup> Experience, Pettie writes, is a “blind guide,” but learning provides one with “eyes” (8). Guazzo similarly allows for a definition of nobility based more on individual virtue and learning than on inherited birth.

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<sup>27</sup> Stefano Guazzo, *The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo, the First Three Books Translated by George Pettie, Anno 1581, and the Fourth by Barth. Young, Anno 1586* (New York: Knopf, 1925), 8. In-text citations refer to this edition.

Anniball explains that “gentry increases as much via the virtue of learning as by the prowess of arms.... Gentry is the daughter of knowledge and knowledge gentelizes him who possesses it.”<sup>28</sup> Guazzo presents an alternative to Castiglione’s understanding of the relationship between nobility of birth and learning. Guazzo is also crucial for Spenser’s exploration of courtesy, which links colonial discourses with discourses of individual improvement, because he tangibly extends the domain of self-governance to the governance of others. Good manners require the disciplining of one’s impulses, and he who can discipline himself, Guazzo writes, is fit to rule others. Learned courtesy, then, becomes the foundation for civility, which is defined not simply as good manners but also as good laws and good order.

Envisioned as a behavioral code of nobility, the social system of courteous manners maintained a vexed relationship with the ideal of learning. On the one hand, even those who are nobly born must learn to control their impulses and work to acquire the skills to perform social rituals appropriately. On the other hand, the very idea that these skills can be acquired undermines the use of courteous manners to distinguish between the higher and lower born. Courtesy manuals ostensibly provide instruction for the nobly born but they also make courtly manners accessible to those born into the lower orders. In the late sixteenth-century, education and accumulated wealth were the primary means by which lower-born men were moving up the social ladder and finding place in Queen Elizabeth’s court. Spenser himself was a perfect example of someone with aspirations to this kind of social mobility.<sup>29</sup> The historical circumstances of the court

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<sup>28</sup> Guazzo, *Civile Conversation*, 184r.

<sup>29</sup> On Spenser’s social mobility, see note 17.

highlighted the slippery coexistence of the ideology of noble birth and the value of learning inherent in the social system of courtesy.

At the same time, manners accrued enormous political and social significance in the Elizabethan court culture. Elizabeth's courtiers had been instructed by their humanist teachers to use their rhetorical skills for the advancement of the commonwealth. Elizabeth, however, was notoriously chary with promotions, and the result was the accumulation of educated courtiers with no public outlet for their skills.<sup>30</sup> In an age of self-fashioning with little opportunity for action, manners, ceremony, and social ornamentation became a crucial means of constructing identity as well as vying for political position.<sup>31</sup> As a form of rhetorical wit that could be used for epideictic purposes, poetry became one of the social graces through which courtiers competed with each other and advertised their fitness for promotion. Poetry embodied well the aesthetics of *sprezzatura* because it could exhibit spontaneity and elegance, calling attention to the grace of the poet at the same time that it praised the queen and nation. The historical circumstance of the female prince also encouraged poetic expression, as courtiers merged the act of political courtiership with discourses of romantic courtiership.<sup>32</sup>

As a form of courtesy and courtiership that foregrounded learning, poetry was especially useful for socially mobile courtiers. George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesy*, at once a poetic treatise and courtesy manual, demonstrates both that poetry could

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<sup>30</sup> For a summary of this situation, see John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 379-460.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Whigham writes that "Every act [became] symbolically important to self-presentation" (*Ambition and Privilege*, 36). See also Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35. Daniel Javitch has argued that frustrated courtiers redirected the rhetorical skills that they had honed during their humanist education into using poetry for courtiership in *Poetry and Courtliness*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> On this see Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

mask the poet's humble origins. Puttenham directs his *Arte* at *arriviste* courtiers, teaching the "upstart" maker how to pull himself from the "cart to the school, and from thence to the court."<sup>33</sup> Learning how to write excellent poetry requires the same skills as learning how to become a courtier, which "is, in plain terms, cunningly to be able to dissemble" (379). Both poetry and courtiership depend on the skill of manipulating rhetoric for the purposes of self-presentation and the performance of grace or *sprezzatura*. For Puttenham, poetry is the epitome of courtesy.

As Spenser's own vehicle for relating to the court, the *Faerie Queene* embodies his personal investment in questions surrounding courtesy, nobility, and learning. He hoped to conventionalize his relationship to the center of power as well as gain the ear of the prince through his epic poem. As a text interrogating courtesy within a larger text that performs the work of courtesy, or courtiership, Book VI constitutes a self-reflective examination of Spenser's poetic project. The nature of nobility, however, is particularly complicated for Spenser, first, because he was an outsider at court, and, second, because when he obtained gentry status, he did so first by graduating as a master of arts from Cambridge and finally by becoming a landowner in Ireland. He may have been a gentleman in 1596 when Book VI was published, but he was a gentleman with property on the edge of power, in Ireland, rather than at its center, in London. Nevertheless, in Book VI, Spenser enters into discourses about courtesy through genres centered ideologically within the court. He merges Virgilian epic and pastoral with courtly romance and pastoral, genres through which the court imagined both the behavioral

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<sup>33</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 278-79.

expressions of nobility, skill at arms and courtly manners, and their relationships to the queen as the center of power.

*Courtly Romance and Pastoral*

Whereas Virgil sublimates romance to the heroic drive in Book IV of the *Aeneid*, Spenser adapts the epic framework to accommodate romance, making heroic romance his Elizabethan answer to the *Aeneid*. Virgil sings of arms and a man, while Spenser sings of “Knights and Ladies gentle deeds,” of “Fierce warres and faithfull loves” (I.proem.5, 9). As Spenser was well aware, from the standpoint of humanist didacticism, chivalric romance was a problematic genre. In the *Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham denounces Arthurian romances as the vestiges of “papistrie,” and he condemns the *Morte d’Arthur* for glorifying “open manslaughter” and “bold bawdry.” From within Spenser’s own work, E.K. dismisses the authors of Arthur stories as “fine fablers and lowd lyers” in the “Aprill” eclogue of the *Shepherd’s Calender*. Literary critics have tended to discuss the English humanist distaste for romance alongside Tasso’s subordination of romance to epic in his *Discourses*,<sup>34</sup> flattening the differences between the Italian and English contexts when they read the *Faerie Queene*.

Spenser’s contemporaries at Elizabeth’s court, however, were more interested in blending epic and romance than either their humanist peers or their Continental counterparts.<sup>35</sup> Despite Ariosto’s looseness of plot, Sir John Harington defends him by

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<sup>34</sup> James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of the Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 5–35 is the canonical discussion of Spenser in the context of Italian distinctions between romance and epic.

<sup>35</sup> Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn write that, in England, “Ariosto was attacked for combining features of romance and epic, although those attacks remained partial and fairly tentative.” Whigham and Rebhorn, “Introduction,” in *The Art of English Poesy* by George Puttenham, 37.



arguing that he subscribes to Aristotle's guidelines for elevated poetry.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, neither Sidney nor Puttenham distinguishes between romance and epic; following Aristotle, they used the more inclusive category of the "heroic," under which both romance and epic could fall. Sidney furthermore chose heroic romance—blended with pastoral—for his *Arcadia*, which exerted an immeasurable influence on courtly perceptions of romance and epic. For late-Elizabethans, romance could be didactic if handled in a heroic manner. Nevertheless, they generally agreed that Aeneas was the exemplary hero, and so epic was ultimately the more elevated genre. In his "Letter to Raleigh," Spenser acknowledges Aeneas as the most complete man because he combines exemplary private and public virtues, which Homer had separated into Agamemnon and Achilles. According to Spenser, neither Ariosto nor Tasso successfully imitated this model.

Living under a female monarch, Elizabeth's courtiers were more receptive to romance than either humanist educators or Continental literary theorists. On the one hand, love was deemed a frivolous poetic subject, unsuitable to serious learned men and ultimately renounced by the courtly amateurs who took up their pens in its exploration. On the other hand, however, the poetic treatment of love had important political implications in Elizabeth's court. The 1580s and 1590s witnessed an Elizabethan revival and reinterpretation of medieval images of chivalric romance.<sup>37</sup> Although there is some debate over whether Malory's *Morte* was one of Spenser's direct sources, it is indisputable that the strain of chivalric romance of which Malory was the pinnacle did

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<sup>36</sup> Sir John Harington, *Orlando Furioso* (London: Richard Field, 1591).

<sup>37</sup> The 1590s witnessed a surge in translation and popularity of Spanish prose romances; and the figure of Arthur also experienced a resurgence in popularity by 1590, which may account for Spenser's inclusion of him as a unifying figure for the *Faerie Queene*, according to Josephine Bennett, *Evolution of the Faerie Queene*.

influence Spenser.<sup>38</sup> The *Faerie Queene* echoes, among others, Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*, *Huon of Bordeaux*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Lybeaus Desconus*.

Whereas Spenser's medieval literary predecessors were interested in chivalric romance as an exploration of the ethos of the knightly caste,<sup>39</sup> by Spenser's generation, chivalry had become a literary and symbolic language for representing aristocratic honor, rather than a practical code of conduct. Chivalry was absorbed into broader ideals of gentlemanliness and courtesy that incorporated earlier notions of knighthood into the context of the contemporary court and statecraft.<sup>40</sup> Spenser's courtly audience had no intentions of riding off on a crusade to the Holy Land, but they could nonetheless see Spenser's titular knights as representatives of a privileged, noble caste, in the same terms in which they understood themselves.

Chivalric symbols constituted a repertoire for imagining political relationships as well as expressing personal ambition. Men like Sidney, Essex, and Raleigh could use the literary conventions of knight-errantry to imagine a meaningful place for their individual ambitions within the Tudor dynastic scheme, generally, and Elizabeth's imperial claims, specifically.<sup>41</sup> Conventional romance images were used by both Elizabeth and her

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<sup>38</sup> See specifically Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Evolution of the "Faerie Queene"* (New York: B. Franklin, [1942] 1960), who claims that Malory was not a direct influence on Spenser until he reached Book VI (208), and the disputations to this claim in Michael Leslie, *Spenser's "Fierce Warres and Faithfull Loves": Martial and Chivalric Symbolism in "The Faerie Queene"* (Cambridge, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> See Stephen M. Knight, "The Social Function of the Medieval Romance," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 99-122 for a rich analysis of how the chivalric form functioned to reaffirm the ideology of noble birth during the fourteenth century.

<sup>40</sup> Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1986), 69-79.

<sup>41</sup> Ferguson writes that the men of Spenser's generation "recognized in the romances just the kind of radically individualistic quest for honor, for reputation gained through feats of arms, that suited their egoism and their peculiarly extroverted personalities" (*The Chivalric Tradition*, 72). Francis Yates provides

courtiers to figure political courtship through narratives of romantic courtship,<sup>42</sup> which could be invested with national, eschatological, and cosmic significance, as the image of the virtuous virgin of chivalric tradition was conflated with any or all of Queen Elizabeth's mythical identities. She was simultaneously Protestant Virgin, Imperial Virgin, Cynthia/Diana, and the embodiment of Neoplatonic virtue.<sup>43</sup> The central narrative of the Accession Day Tilts, for example, imagined Elizabeth's royal knight defending his position as her champion. The Tilts served as state festivals celebrating the Queen and simultaneously provided opportunities for courtiers to advertise their own wished-for significance in national mythology by dint of their relationship to Elizabeth. By imagining the center of power through chivalric tropes, in which the noble estate's superiority is assumed to be naturally endowed, the chivalric form validates the ideology of noble birth. Spenser emphasizes this particular aspect of the chivalric romance by populating Book VI with personifications of the Fair Unknown, a medieval trope that underscored the aristocracy's natural nobility.<sup>44</sup>

The other dominant genre in Book VI, pastoral, was also used by Elizabethans to figure relationships between courtiers and the Crown and to imagine the ideology of noble birth. While chivalric romance exalts the Queen as the inspiration for quests of

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a wonderfully nuanced discussion of chivalric tropes in Elizabeth's court in *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> See Louis A. Montrose, "The perfecte paterne of a Poete": "The relationship between courtier-poet and Queen is idealized as a love that has been purified of physical desire ... The public ritualizations of intimate relationship in encomia of Elizabeth serve effectively as instruments of policy ... But they can also function as idealizations of the motives of courtier-poets" (12). See Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), for an exploration of "the conjunction between the two meanings of courtship and how they came to be related" (2). Also see Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977); Yates, *Astraea*; and Louis A. Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) on the iconography of Elizabeth.

<sup>43</sup> Strong, *Cult of Elizabeth*, 115, and Yates, *Astraea*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Tristram, the Bear Baby, and Pastorella are all redactions of the Fair Unknown.

honor, pastoral celebrates her as an embodiment of Platonic ideals. Since pastoral articulates a repudiation of worldly ambition,<sup>45</sup> shepherds' artless, recreative exaltation of the queen signifies nature's approval of her reign. Although courtly pastoral could use the rejection of ambition to critique the court, as Spenser does in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, critics such as Louis Montrose and David Shore have demonstrated that courtly pastoral could also use that repudiation to further courtly ends. In courtly pastoral, shepherds who are imaged as too simple to concern themselves with lofty pursuits spontaneously produce sophisticated poetry in ornamental courtly language. Pastoral thus places courtly speech in the mouths of society's humblest members. Montrose asserts that "literary pastoralization involves not only a process by which agrarian social relations are inscribed within an ideology of the country but also a process by which that initial inscription is itself appropriated, transformed, and reinscribed within an ideology of the court."<sup>46</sup> Sidney's *Arcadia*, for example, imagines a land that is so civil that even its shepherds produce magnificent poetry. Peopling the narrative alongside more properly rustic characters, like Dorcas and Mopsa, Sidney's signing shepherds are obvious manifestations of courtly manners.

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<sup>45</sup> William Empson has famously characterized pastoral as putting "the complex into the simple" (*Some Versions of Pastoral* [Norfolk, CT.: New Directions, 1950], 53); for genre studies of pastoral, see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Cooper, *Pastoral*; Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues: A Study of Virgilian Pastoral* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). For studies of specifically English Renaissance pastoral, see Hallett Smith, *Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning, and Expression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Shore, *Spenser and the Poetics of Pastoral*; Susan Snyder, *Pastoral Process: Spenser, Marvell, Milton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Richard Mallette, *Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Pastoral* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981); Louis A. Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form," *ELH* 50.3 (1983): 415-59; Louis A. Montrose, "'The perfecte paterne of a Poete': The Poetics of Courtship in the *Shepherd's Calendar*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 21 (1979): 34-67; and Louis A. Montrose, "Gifts and Reasons: The Contexts of Peele's *Araygnement of Paris*," *ELH* 47.3 (Autumn 1980): 433-61.

<sup>46</sup> Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds," 431.

Montrose has furthermore argued that the pastoral convention of gentle shepherds speaking in courtly rhetoric depends for effect on a manipulation of the distinction between gentles and commons based on labor. The requirement for gentry status was the ability to live without labor. By imagining a kinship between the *otium* of the shepherd and the leisured life of the gentleman, courtly pastoral effectively naturalizes both the constructedness of the social hierarchy and courtly manners.<sup>47</sup> Through literary pastoralism, the aristocracy imagined their economic conditions and their cultural aesthetics as thoroughly artless. The poetic shepherd is a generic convention that embodies *sprezzatura*; his simplicity is a literary inscription of rhetorical grace that mythologizes the labor necessary for the nobleman to acquire stylized speech and manners. Through the pastoral celebration of the monarch, courtiers could imagine their courtly manners as emanating from the civility of the queen herself, which is personified by her physical beauty. Pastoral enabled courtiers to disavow their political ambitions at the same time that they worked to fulfill them.

Appropriate to the occasion, Elizabeth's nobility often employed pastoral to celebrate her visits to their country estates on her annual progresses. In the Lords Chandos' entertainment at Sudeley in 1592, an "olde shepherde" summarized the characteristics of the pastoral shepherd: "Shephards and simplicity cannot part ... lowe spirites, but true harts; using plaine dealinge, once counted a jewell, nowe beggery .... The country healthy and harmeles ... where a black sheepe is a perilous beast; no monsters; we carry our harts at our tongues ends, being as far from dissembling as our sheepe from fierceness" (Nichols 3: 136-137). At Bisham, just days before, Elizabeth had

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<sup>47</sup> Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds," 418, 427.

been entertained by Pan and two virgin shepherdesses, one of whom proclaimed, “This way commeth the Queene of this Islande, the wonder of the world, and Nature’s glory, leading affections in fetters, Virginitie’s slaves: embracing mildness with justice, Majestie’s twins” (Nichols 3: 130-136). The Old Shepherd speaks on behalf of the Lords Chandos: his artlessness argues that their celebrations of Elizabeth are expressions of loyalty solicited by her beauty and virtue, rather than motivated by political interests. The shepherd emphasizes that the space she is about to enter is free from personal ambition and vice.

Although Spenser’s early pastoral work had been situated in the context of his humanist education, Book VI is located decisively within this courtly tradition of pastoral. Along with that of Sidney, Spenser’s early work helped to inaugurate the courtly vogue for pastoral. The *Shepherd’s Calender* had given literary commentators a work of native, contemporary poetic brilliance, and it was universally hailed as the English answer to Virgil’s *Bucolics*. While the *Calender* includes eclogues of a courtly nature, most notably “Aprill,” it is different from the pastoral episode in Book VI in that it is not primarily engaged with the court and courtesy. By the time Spenser wrote his later pastorals, his early work had helped to expand the Elizabethan understanding of the genre. The subject matter of pastorals was no longer considered appropriate only for school boys; pastoral was a sophisticated mode of allegory which “under the veil of homely persons and in rude speeches to insinuate and glance at greater matters.”<sup>48</sup> When Spenser returns to pastoral in the mid-1590s, with *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* and Book VI, he partakes in the courtly poetic practice that he and Sidney helped to shape.

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<sup>48</sup> Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 127.

Spenser remains true to the broad strokes of his Virgilian model, but within the poetic contemplation of courtesy, Book VI's heroic romance and pastoral draw their significance from their participation in poetic discourses through which the aristocracy imagined the sources of their nobility and their relationship to the monarchical center of power. As I demonstrate below, Spenser turns to the third Virgilian genre in order to reimagine nobility in a way that accommodates his own position as a New English landholder and his vision for civilizing Ireland.

### Spenser and Georgic

Virgil's *Georgics* is conspicuously missing from the Elizabethan courtly repertoire, even as poets, translators, and readers understood the *Georgics* as central to the *rota Virgiliana*. Georgic had been popular during the mid-Tudor period, when, writers and preachers employed the convention of the plowman to articulate the Reformation agenda of *sola fida* and *sola scriptura* and to condemn Catholic ornamentation. These writers found a literary precedent in Chaucer and *Piers Plowman* and biblical precedent in Jesus' parables about the sower of seeds and, especially, Matthew 13, which was recited during the Anglican service on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.<sup>49</sup> For mid-Tudor Protestants like Robert Crowley and Hugh Latimer, the plowman sustaining his neighbors with his labor encapsulated in one image Christian charity, the preacher, Scripture, and Christ himself.<sup>50</sup> Spenser employs this tradition of

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<sup>49</sup> Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by the University Press of Virginia, 1976), 101.

<sup>50</sup> Helen C. White, *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Octagon, 1965), 1-40; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Ch. 3: "The Shepherdes Calender: Prophecy and the Court"; and John

native Protestant georgic in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, as he sends his “little Calendar” “amongste the meaner sorte,” instructing it “not to match thy pype with Tityrus hys style, / Nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman played a while.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the name that Spenser adopts for his poetic persona derives from John Skelton’s *Colyn Clout*, a poem about a simple countryman.<sup>52</sup>

Elizabethans, however, were less interested in Protestant georgic than their Edwardian predecessors.<sup>53</sup> For the most part, Elizabethan poetic treatises simply ignore Virgil’s *Georgics*, which, Alastair Fowler has argued, was absorbed into a larger body of didactic literature in which husbandry manuals played an important part.<sup>54</sup> William Webbe, for example, addresses Virgil’s *Georgics* along with Thomas Tusser’s *500 Points of Good Husbandry* and Barnabe Googe’s *Four Bookes of Husbandrie* in the *Discourse of English Poetrie*. While he praises Tusser and Barnabe Googe, he admits that he cannot think of any direct translations of Virgil—he obviously hasn’t read Fleming’s 1575 translation of the *Georgics*—and he surmises that the lack of English georgic arises from

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King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), esp. 323-357. See also John King, *Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 28, 180-200;

<sup>51</sup> “Epilogue” to the *Shepherd's Calendar*.

<sup>52</sup> Critics examining georgic in Spenser’s oeuvre often read the Redcrosse Knight’s childhood as the foster-son of a plowman as an example of Virgilian georgic. I would argue, instead, that Redcrosse-as-St.-George is crucially animated by this native tradition of Protestant georgic. See Herron, *Spenser’s Irish Work*, 118-121; Low, *Georgic Revolution*, 40-41; Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 201-202; William A. Sessions, “Spenser’s Georgics,” *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 202-38, esp. 231-238.

<sup>53</sup> Crowley, for example, printed *Piers Plowman* in three quarto editions in 1550, but the text was published only once more in 1561 before disappearing from print until the 1800s. John King, “Robert Crowley’s Editions of *Piers plowman*: A Tudor Apocalypse,” *Modern Philology* 73.4.1 (May, 1976): 342-352, esp. 345.

<sup>54</sup> Alastair Fowler, “The Beginnings of English Georgic,” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 105-125.



the fact that other national literatures have provided plenty of georgic work.<sup>55</sup> Webbe may be referring to Continental writers, like Conrad Heresbach, whose text was translated by Googe, but he generally seems unconcerned with England's dearth of georgic writing.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, Elizabethans did not see georgic as a worthwhile pursuit.

Louis Montrose and Anthony Low have both attributed the court's distaste for georgic to the taboo against manual labor. Low writes that "the absence of georgic was a function of a fundamental contempt for labor, especially manual and agricultural labor, on the part of England's leaders."<sup>57</sup> The contempt for labor that enabled courtiers to imagine their ideas about courtesy and nobility through pastoral *otium* also prevented them from envisioning themselves through georgic generic conventions. Yet in Book VI, Spenser, ostensibly writing for a courtly audience about the virtue at the heart of courtliness itself, locates georgic—not pastoral or romance—at the center of the proem's vision of transcendent courtesy. The proem narrator describes courtesy as a flower in the garden of the muses, planted "From heavenly seedes" and cultivated by the gods "long with carefull labour" (VI.proem.3.7-8). It might be tempting to characterize the garden imagery here as pastoral, but the emphasis on long, careful labor modulates any pastoralism through georgic values. The proem, thus, raises a fundamental question that: why use georgic labor to represent an image of courtesy to a court that resents labor?

Low reads the georgic bent of Book VI as demonstrating that Spenser was an exception to the courtly distaste for labor. Characterizing Spenser as the "poet of work," Low argues that Spenser was unique among Elizabethan court poets for valorizing labor

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<sup>55</sup> Webbe, *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1Fr-2Fv.

<sup>56</sup> Wendy Wall provides an astute analysis of the nationalist rhetoric of husbandry manuals printed for the lower sorts (Wall, "Renaissance National Husbandry: Gervase Markham and the Publication of England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27.3 [1996]: 767-85).

<sup>57</sup> Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5.

that would strike any gentleman as demeaning. Building upon William Sessions's argument that Spenser's use of georgic elaborates on the labor involved in the epic project, Low asserts that "what is new" about Spenser is that "the new collective hero will utilize all aspects of labor, even the most trivial, for the single purpose of directing the forces of history."<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Andrew McRae argues that Spenser should not be counted as a georgic poet because he celebrates the allegorical meaning of labor at the expense of any realistic agricultural details. Focusing on Book I, McRae writes that "like many gentlemen of his time, Spenser endorsed the moral significance attached to labour by the previous generation yet saw no purpose in identifying with downtrodden labourers and reviving attacks on the covetousness of landlord."<sup>59</sup>

Both Low and McRae, however, make a fundamental assumption about Spenser's relationship to the court and his identification as a gentleman that requires qualification. Spenser was not a gentleman "like many ... of his time" and he was not straightforwardly a court poet. He was a planter in Ireland, writing as a New English official on the Munster settlement, through courtly genres and discourses that he necessarily adapted according to his own conditions in Ireland. By reading Spenser exclusively through court values and genres, Low and McRae overlook Ireland as a crucial component of Spenser's life and work. Spenser could never see himself as uncomplicatedly writing for or to the court, and his understanding of his own Englishness was necessarily affected by the fact that he was a colonial presence in Ireland.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Low and McRae, who overlook

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<sup>58</sup> William A. Sessions, "Spenser's Georgics," *ELR* 10 (1980): 202-38; Low, *Georgic Revolution*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> McRae, *God Speed the Plough*, 203.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Hadfield contends that "Spenser cannot be read as a straightforward English writer ... his work is defined by the Tudors' attempt to expand their boundaries and unify a nebulously conceived ideal of Britain, as well as exploit and subdue other nations and cultures... At the same time, Spenser's works participate in and reflect upon that enterprise in an active way, as Spenser himself participated in English

Spenser's Irish context, Thomas Herron reads Spenser's use of georgic exclusively within the Irish context, "as a radically opportunistic, apocalyptic and influential pro-military planter narrative."<sup>61</sup> His reading of Spenser's "planter aesthetic," or "heroic agrarian ideal," provides an enticing materialist argument that labor offered Spenser a vehicle for promoting the interests of the New English. Herron argues that the potential for material gain undergirded Spenser's fusion of native Protestant with Virgilian georgic to link the labor of the individual with the eschatological significance of England's success in civilizing Ireland. Herron argues that mid-Tudor biblical georgic legitimated the labor of the Protestant individual in service of England's triumph over Catholicism.<sup>62</sup>

Herron, however, tends too easily to negate arguments about Spenser's anxious colonial identity. Building upon Richard McCabe's study of the similarities between rhetoric about colonial Ireland and that about the Americas, he depicts the planters in Ireland as individualists like the colonists in America.<sup>63</sup> This translocation of American colonial ideologies directly onto Irish soil, however, ignores the ways in which the Irish context was distinctly different from the American context, particularly in Ireland's

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colonial expansion." Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience*, 13. Much of the critical work on Spenser in Ireland has read him as a "poet of exile" and focused on the ambiguity of identity fostered by his position as an English presence in a colonial land, where he made his home and where he finally decisively attained a gentleman's status. See Richard McCabe, "Edmund Spenser: Poet of Exile," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1993): 73-103. In *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), McCabe suggests that although Virgil's career progression appropriately advertised Spenser's aspirations early in his career, he later identified more with the Ovidian model of the poet in exile, which emphasized political uncertainty and discontent (3). McCabe focuses on Spenser's discomfort over his potential assimilation, and thus degeneration, in Ireland. Willy Maley and Christopher Highley have similarly read Spenser through post-colonial theories of fluid and ambiguous identity Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture, and Identity* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997); Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> In contrast, Nicholas Canny argues that the English applied what they had learned in Ireland to the American context, instead of vice versa. See Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established, 1565-76* (Terrace, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1976), 160-63.

proximity to England. Geographically, historically, and politically, sixteenth-century Englishmen thought of Ireland as close to England. England had been negotiating its sovereignty over Ireland for centuries by the time Spenser arrived, and Spenser and his contemporaries could travel back and forth between England and Ireland relatively quickly in comparison to the amount of time it took an English official to travel from Virginia to London.

On the one hand, the Old English and the Queen thought of the Pale as an extension of English society and law. In her 1580 instructions to Lord Grey, Queen Elizabeth reiterated that “we being interested alike in our subjects of both those realms, do carry like affection to them both, unless . . . they shall give us just cause to the contrary.”<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, administrative and military men in Ireland, including Spenser, depended on the Queen and the relationships among court factions for both their authority over the Irish and their own advancement within the English government in Ireland.<sup>65</sup> Captains and officials looked to their patrons at court, Walsingham and Leicester, for promotion, while Leicester and Walsingham were countered by the Thomas Butler, the Duke of Ormond, a member of the Old English and the Queen’s cousin.<sup>66</sup> The frequent letters written by administrators back to the court demonstrate that they saw themselves, to some extent, as their patrons’ eyes and ears in Ireland. Many, like Spenser, owed their positions to the Leicester/Sidney faction, and they understood their

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<sup>64</sup> Queen’s instructions to Lord Grey, July 1580, in Arthur Lord Grey de Wilton, *A Commentary of the Services and Charges of William Lord Grey of Wilton by his Son Lord Grey of Wilton*, ed. Sir Philip de Malpas Grey Egerton (New York: AMS, 1968), 74-76.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Canny argues that control in Ireland became a sign of power within the English court and thus members of the Privy Council took a special interest in Ireland less because they were concerned with Ireland itself and more because they were concerned with appearing powerful to their fellow court members (*Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 105).

<sup>66</sup> Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 84-94.

professional fates as directly affected by court politics. This point is evidenced by Spenser's reaction to the recall of Lord Grey. Grey himself petitioned to be recalled in a 1581 letter to Christopher Hatton.<sup>67</sup> Spenser, however, blames Grey's recall on "backbiting" jealous courtiers.<sup>68</sup>

Herron's argument, then, that Spenser's use of georgic bypasses the court taboo on labor because it is legitimized by Protestant individualism ignores how dependent upon court politics and discourses officials in Ireland actually were. As an extension of Herron's overlooking of this historical condition, he does not think about the relationship between Book VI and courtly traditions of pastoral. He elides the differences between pastoral and georgic altogether and conflates all images of "nature" in Book VI as georgic. For example, he refers to Meliboe as a "pastoral farmer."<sup>69</sup> While he is ostensibly correct, and georgic texts conventionally treat shepherding as a subtopic of husbandry, Herron appears to seamlessly conflate the image of the shepherd with that of the farmer, without noting how these different discourses activated very different sets of images and values for Spenser's audiences. Spenser's genres, however, like his life, must be read as produced by the interstices between the values of court and those of Ireland. His Book VI amalgamation of romance, pastoral, and georgic is animated by his condition as an Englishman living in Ireland, writing back to London.

Questions surrounding courtesy were central to the self-perceptions and lives of Englishmen in Ireland. As we saw with Guazzo, courtesy required the individual to govern his own impulses and therefore prepared him for the responsibility of governing

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<sup>67</sup> "Arthur lord Grey to Sir Christopher Hatton," July 1, 1581, in *A Commentary of the Services and Charges of William Lord Grey of Wilton*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Spenser's vision of Grey's destruction at the hands of jealousy courtiers is allegorized in the narrative of Artegal and the Blatant Beast.

<sup>69</sup> Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work*, 91.

others. In this way, courtesy was the social system that located the individual within discourses of cultural civility. Englishmen in Ireland saw themselves as vehicles of courtesy because they were integral to the project of civilizing Ireland. Scholars of Book VI who foreground Spenser's Irish experience have tended to focus on the cultural project rather than the role of the courteous individual. Reading Book VI in dialogue with the corpus of courtesy literature, however, brings to the foreground the role of courteous behavior and ideologies of nobility in Spenser's Irish world. The issues raised by courtesy literature in England about the role of learning, or labor, versus that of birth in the definition of nobility and the relationship between social status and courteous behavior assumed an exaggerated significance as they were reinterpreted in Tudor Ireland. There, claims to nobility through bloodline and claims to nobility through courtesy formed the basis for political and social struggles between the Old English and the New English.

The Old English were inhabitants of Ireland descended from the settlers who had arrived during and after the Norman invasion of the twelfth century. Old English settlements were clustered around Dublin and on the east coast in the Pale. Until the reign of Henry VIII, the Old English had more or less governed themselves separately from London, although they technically continued to owe fealty to the English king. Old English life in the Pale was structured around the powerful earls of Kildare and Fitzgerald, who governed the Pale and the surrounding border areas. For their parts, English monarchs were unconcerned with their Irish subjects, until the 1530s when the Catholic Old English rebelled in reaction to Henry VIII's break with Rome. This political turmoil initiated a period of renewed English interest and investment in Ireland that

culminated with Henry's appointment of English-born governors over the Old English. Over the course of the 1540s to the 1580s, when Spenser arrived in Ireland, various English-born governors engaged in brutal struggles with the Old English earls for power. One result of this protracted conflict was the migration of increasing numbers of English-born servitors, military officers, and administrators to aid the crown-appointed government. By the time Spenser arrived in Ireland as the secretary to Lord Grey, the English-born inhabitants of Ireland—the "New English"—had developed as a separate social class. During Spenser's first months in Ireland, the military conflict escalated with the second Munster rebellion led by the Old English earl of Desmond under the banner of Catholicism. Spenser witnessed Old English rebellion again a few years later with the Baltinglass rebellion.

The Old English claimed nobility on the basis of their bloodline, and they maintained an influential faction at court headed by the earl of Ormond. While Elizabeth continued to refer the Old English as her "loving subjects," Spenser was invested in delegitimizing Old English claims to noble authority on both a personal level and as a member of the New English class. When it became clear that the English would defeat the Munster rebellion, and that the escheated Desmond lands would be redistributed among loyal subjects, Butler fought to have the land redistributed among the Old English. Like other Old English families, he argued that common law was the most effective method for governing Ireland and that responsibility for the reformation of the country should be placed in the hands of loyal Old English governors. From the opposite side, Walsingham and Lord Grey argued that Munster lands should be rewarded to New English servitors and administrators. Making use of patronage to secure loyalty among

the military officers, Lord Grey had actually been promising escheated lands to English servitors in Ireland since the beginning of the 1580s. The availability of Munster lands escalated the conflict between Old English, who based their claims to authority on bloodline, and New English, who based their claims to authority on service. In the end, Cecil chose to grant the Munster lands to English-born gentry who were imported to Ireland. Once settlers from England arrived in Munster, they found themselves embroiled in long and costly law suits lodged by Old English families with claims to the escheated lands. One of only a handful of administrators granted land on the Munster plantation, Spenser himself was engaged in on-going conflicts with Lord Roche for almost all of his estate.

The value of bloodline, one of the central issues to the philosophy of courtly courtesy, then, assumed a specific meaning in Tudor Ireland. The Old English staked their claims to the land on their noble “English blood,” opposing themselves to those of “English birth” and the “mere Irish,” terms that were contested at every step in the settlement of the escheated Desmond lands. Ormond wrote to Walsingham in May of 1583 in order to defend his own “English by blood” against charges of neglect and degeneration levied by English soldiers and officials.<sup>70</sup> A debate over the wording of the letters patent for the settlement of Munster began with a draft that determined that “the inhabitants of every family shall be of the birth of England, and that in no family any mere Irish be maintained.” It was then amended, at the insistence of the New English-dominated Irish Council, to read “None of the English people to be there planted shall make any estate to any of the mere Irish not descended of an English name and

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<sup>70</sup> Cited in Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 102.



ancestor... the heads of every family shall be born of English parents, and the heirs female inheritable to any the same lands shall marry with none but with persons born of English parents or with such as descend of the first patentees.”<sup>71</sup> The distinction between descendants of English “name and ancestors” and those of “English parents” prohibited the Old English from being original patentees of the land but not from buying or renting the land from the New English settlers.

Blood as a qualification of high social status, not simply national membership, was also at issue in Ireland, where the Old English, descended from noble families, were placed under the authority of New English soldiers, captains, and officials from lower-status families. Ireland did not recommend itself to English noblemen seeking to live out the courtly chivalric ethos. The courtly ideal was seen as unachievable in Ireland, where military tasks often entailed drudging through bogs and woods. Following bands of organized rebels did produce situations in which one could perform public and visible feats of chivalric bravery, like the earl of Essex’s storming of the Spanish fortification in Zutphen in 1586. In 1580, Edward Denny complained that his task to track rebels “in hidden places as bogs, glens, and woods ... might better fit mastiffs than brave gentlemen that desire to win favor.”<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Canny concludes that “normal service in Ireland, associated with monotonous garrison duty and an occasional skirmish with cattle raiders, held little appeal for English gallants whose principal ambition in taking up arms was to cover themselves with glory on the field of battle.”<sup>73</sup> Rather, winning reputation in Ireland was a nearly impossible task because of the nature of the military work there as

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<sup>71</sup> Cited in MacCarthy-Murrough, *The Munster Plantation*, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 76.

well as the court factions warring over Irish policy. In 1585, Sir Henry Wallop complained that even those with “great backing and friendship in court” could have their reputations “erased and disgraced within six or eight months by reason of the great credit [given at court to the] subtle and malicious ... informations of this nation.”<sup>74</sup> Even the president of Munster, John Norris, in 1585 expressed a preference for service elsewhere.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of the disinclination of the higher born to serve in Ireland, the military force there comprised primarily men of the lower sorts. Of twenty knights listed as having served in “Ireland, Netherlands, or Portugal” in 1589, only three had served in Ireland. Ireland proved lucrative for men of lower status for two reasons: they could make claims to available lands and they earned money from renting their lands to the Irish.<sup>76</sup> There were, in addition, more illicit forms of material gains to be garnered from service in Ireland. Justice Robert Dillon complained that the soldiers were demanding pay from the rural inhabitants of the Pale on behalf of the Crown and pocketing the money.<sup>77</sup> More important for the purposes of understanding Spenser’s representation of inheritance by blood, however, was the possibility for men of low birth to rise to powerful positions in Ireland. Nicholas Malby, for example, was the son of a London merchant who became the president of Connaught in 1576 and was granted the castle and lands of Roscommon in 1579.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 112.

<sup>75</sup> Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 84.

<sup>76</sup> Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 67.

<sup>78</sup> “Malby, Sir Nicholas,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17856](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17856), accessed July 18, 2010.

The Old English resented the power of upstart New Englishmen. The earl of Ormond, who controlled lands in Connaught, complained that someone of Malby's low birth retained authority over a nobleman like himself. The earl of Clanricard similarly lamented Malby's possession of formerly monastic lands. Sir Richard Burke of Mayo protested that his progenitors had "come out of England and ... out of the best houses there and [were] now used worse than any other inhabitants of this province whether English or Irish."<sup>79</sup> Old English objections against New English upstarts appear to come primarily from Ulster and Connaught, on the frontier of English control where New Englishmen were given more leeway than their peers closer to the Pale, the traditional center of Old English power. Both in the Pale and on the frontier, however, the overturning of the hierarchy of nobility was a fact of Irish life.

Spenser was in a bit of a conundrum regarding the ideology of nobility. On the one hand, he was clearly invested in promoting the class of New Englishmen; on the other, he was still personally invested in maintaining the inherited rights of the gentry, as he had just recently entered their ranks by acquiring Munster land. Furthermore, the plans for the Munster plantation attempted to recreate the English social hierarchy on Irish soil. The Crown advertised the plantation specifically to gentlemen born and holding land already in England. In their call for English settlers to Ireland, the government encouraged recruiters to have a "special regard ... the preferment and setting forth principally of the younger children, brethren and kinsfolk of gentlemen of good families and countenance, and then of those of inferior calling and degree."<sup>80</sup> The organization of the Munster seignories into varying hierarchical levels of land tenure attempted to

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 135.

recreate the institution of the English country gentleman. One of the few officials who received a grant to Munster lands, Spenser was a man of low birth settled in a community of men of higher birth. Of the original eighty-six potential undertakers, nine were knights, and the remainder were either esquires or gentlemen.<sup>81</sup> Spenser was thus invested in retaining the status hierarchy that placed him on par with his gentle neighbors, now that he had acquired his own land. Indeed, throughout his career, he labored to position himself within the system of noble birth by claiming a distant relationship to the Spencers of Wormleighton and Althorp.<sup>82</sup> He continued to understand himself in terms of the courtly paradigm of nobility.

As he negotiates among the multiple and often contradictory values of courtesy, learning, and birth in Book VI of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser's use of genre is nothing if not overdetermined. He is a member of the New English class writing from Ireland back to the court in courtly genres; he is invested in both social mobility and the conservative social hierarchy; and he takes up issues not only of individual courtesy and the philosophy of nobility but also of the national project of civilizing Ireland. The Book VI generic mixture of epic romance and pastoral modulated by Virgilian georgic embodies Spenser's attempt simultaneously to inscribe himself within and to expand courtly ideologies of courtesy.

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<sup>81</sup> McCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation*, 48.

<sup>82</sup> Colin Clouts Come Home Againe, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), ll. 537-38.

### The Georgic Cosmology and the Decay of Nobility

Georgic is an appropriate mode of expression for Spenser's vision of courtesy because the georgic cosmology presupposes a world of progress threatened by degeneration. The georgic modulation of chivalric romance in Book VI thus permitted Spenser to construct an ideology of courtesy that simultaneously valorized the labor of New English planters who were saving Ireland from decay and de-authorized the claims to nobility of the Old English, whom Spenser imagines as already decayed. In their discussions of Spenser's georgic, Anthony Low, William Sessions, and Thomas Herron imagine georgic as a version of epic. All three see georgic labor as an elaboration of the Herculean labor of founding Rome. This vision of the *Georgics*, however, implies a particular conception of linear time and progress. Herron, for example, writes that Virgil "created a patria, a mystical notion of the new imperial homeland to be labored over, fought for, and colonized by a virtuous community, both in the *Georgics* and in the colonial epic par excellence, the *Aeneid*." He furthermore argues that the "the forward-driving, organic ethos of Virgil's poetry (specifically the *Georgics*)"<sup>83</sup> is the framework through which Spenser justified his participation in the Munster plantation. The idea of the *Georgics* as "forward-driving," however, contradicts the poem's conception of time.

While the *Aeneid* admits the abstract possibility of failure, as Aeneas struggles to complete his quest, the gods' special care for the hero prevents any real threat of failure. In contrast, in the *Georgics*, the husbandman must work ceaselessly against the inevitable decay that Jupiter himself inaugurated. The seasonal nature of georgic labor means that it is, by nature, cyclical, and the poem constantly negotiates the narrative of improvement

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<sup>83</sup> Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work*, 103, 3.

with the possibility for degeneration. Indeed, cyclical time and regeneration are rooted in the poem's cosmology. The First Georgic retells the mythic inauguration of the Iron Age with Jupiter's triumph over Saturn and Astraea's departure from earth. The end of the Golden Age and the skills that humans developed in order to feed themselves are the foundation of art and civilization. But civilization arises only in response to decay and corruption, which always threaten to destroy the fruits of human ingenuity. Virgil writes:

[but father Jupiter] himself  
 Would not the way of tilling [land] should easie be [but hard]  
 .....  
 No husbandmen did dresse the ground before god Jupiter,  
 Ne lawfull was it for to marke or part the field with bounds,  
 But [men] in common living sought: the earth it selfe also  
 Did freely beare all things, no bodie willing [bidding] it.  
 He [Jupiter] gave serpents black ether venem [vile]  
 And he commanded wolves also to raven and to spoile,  
 The sea by failing to be stird, and he smit downe from leaves  
 [Of trees sweet] honie and [from use of men] put fire away ...  
 .....  
 And by devising beat out arts little by little. (5-7).

The purpose of Virgil's poem is to teach men how to cultivate the ground and themselves precisely in order to combat degeneration. Cultivation is a ceaseless process, intended by Jupiter to teach us art and care, and although the natural world can offer abundant rewards, it also threatens those rewards. Fleming translates:

I have seene seeds both chosen long, and with much labour tride,  
 Grow out of kind nevertheless: but that mans will and wit  
 Did yearely choose the largest [seed] and gather it by hand:  
 So have I [seene] all things by dest-nie fall into the worst  
 And fallen downe still backward driven, none otherwise than he  
 Which hard and skant doth forward drive his bote with rowing [much]  
 Against the streame, if he perhaps let go and ease his arms,

[And slacker hold doth take of ores by means of his strength decaies]  
 And so the channel in the floud descending with a fall,  
 Doth catch and carry him always hedlong into the deepe. (7-8)

The labor of cultivation requires constant vigilance because, ultimately, like the man rowing the boat, the world is too great a match for human strength. Autumn storms can wash away the furrows turned by the husbandman and his oxen (12), and the carefully constructed beehive may be destroyed “on the sudden” (74); so the work must be consistently done, year in and year out (32). In the Stone Age, fortune, or the natural world, can sabotage even the best-chosen seeds. The labor that guards against fortune is characterized as disciplining or taming the land, as the husbandman “make[s] pleasant the wild frutes by skilfull trimming” (19); he “often laboureth his land, and overrules his feelds” (4). The trees “will cast off their nature wilde, and so with trimming oft, / Will follow nothing flowe unto what practise thou canst call them” (20).

Virgil elaborated upon the potential for redemption of this narrative in the *Bucolics*. The Fourth Eclogue foretells the return of the Golden Age that will originate with the accomplishments of Solonius, Pollio’s son, whose birth was interpreted by the Elizabethans as a metaphor for Augustus’s reign. With Solonius’s birth, “the virgin [Astraea] come[s] again /.../ and the yron nation first shall cease and have an end / ... / The plowman now shall loose the yokes from strong and sturdy buls.”<sup>84</sup> The permanence of this *otium* distinguishes it from images of fertility and rest in the *Georgics*, where ill-

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<sup>84</sup> *The Bucolics of Publius Virgilius Maro*, trans. Abraham Fleming, 11-12. All in-text citations refer to this edition. Critics read the Renaissance conception of pastoral as a genre of *otium* and peace back to this conceit in the Fourth Eclogue. See Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 16-20; and Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D.S. Brewer, 1977), 4.

timed leisure can lead to destruction. The *Georgics* occurs in between the time of Astraea's departure and her prophesied return.

The potential for degeneration and the necessity of labor to prevent it is the organizing principle animating Spenser's use of the *Georgics* to frame his "plot" for reforming Ireland in *A View to the Present State of Ireland*. Written around 1595 and circulated in manuscript, *A View* relates a conversation between two humanist-educated Englishmen, Ireneaus, who has extensive knowledge about Irish history, life and customs, and Eudoxus, who has little knowledge about Ireland.<sup>85</sup> By the end of the text, Ireneaus has convinced Eudoxus that enforced famine and martial law are the only means for subduing Ireland successfully. The text's treatment of questions raised by courtesy literature about the sources of nobility and courtesy demonstrate that the *Georgics* provided a classical precedent through which Spenser could understand, express, and legitimize his conception of the civilizing project in a world in which mutability and fortune can lead backward as easily as forward.

Spenser's *View* is thus crucial to understanding the interconnections between Spenser's political and poetic thought. Aligning *A View* with the *Faerie Queene*, however, can seem deceptively simple. Acknowledging Willy Maley's warning that "The *View* ... is no easier to unravel than the poetic allegory it is used by some critics to

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<sup>85</sup> Ciaran Brady and Nicholas Canny have debated at length whether the violent measures that Spenser recommends for subduing Ireland indicate his recognition of the failure of humanist education. See Ciaran Brady, "Spenser's Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s," *Past and Present* 111 (May 1986): 17-49; Nicholas Canny, "Debate: Spenser's Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s," *Past and Present* 120 (August 1988): 201-9; and Ciaran Brady, "Spenser's Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s: Reply," *Past and Present* 120 (August 1988): 210-15 for discussions of Eudoxus as representative of traditional humanist learning. Ireneaus, whose name means "of Ireland," educates Eudoxus with his practical wisdom gleaned from his experience in Ireland.



inform,”<sup>86</sup> we can nevertheless read *A View* and Book VI as texts grounded in the same “enabling fantasies.”<sup>87</sup> The discourses that shape these fantasies include political and legal rhetoric and historical narratives, which are brought together with Virgil’s georgic model.<sup>88</sup> Spenser self-consciously invokes *Georgic* metaphors and imagery throughout. In a defining moment in the text, for example, when Spenser explains that the reformation of Ireland must be accomplished through “the sword,” Irenaeus reiterates Virgil’s metaphor of pruning wild trees: “for all these evils must first be cut away by a strong hand, before any good can be planted, like as the corrupt branches and unwholesome boughs are first to be pruned and the foule mosse cleansed and scraped away, before the tree can bring forth any good fruit” (93). For Virgil, trimming enables the trees to cast off their wild nature. Spenser transforms this image into a metaphor for the entire project of the reconquest and reformation of Ireland.

The project to populate Ireland with English and the convention of describing this project as “planting” offered to Spenser a fortuitous confluence of sixteenth-century political rhetoric with the conventional language of the *Georgics*. Tudor colonists almost exclusively used “to plant” and “plantation” to refer to English settlements in Ireland. In the 1572 tract “A Letter sent by T.B. Gentleman unto his very frende Mayster R.C. Esquire,” which purports to record Thomas Smith’s own description of his project for a settlement in Ards, Smith describes Strongbow as having “subdued ye kingdom, which is

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<sup>86</sup> Maley, “‘To Weet to Work Irenaeus Franchisement,’” 307.

<sup>87</sup> I take the phrase “enabling fantasies” from Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Mapping Mutability: or, Spenser’s Irish Plot,” in *Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of Conflict, 1534-1660*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield, and Willy Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93-115, esp. 95.

<sup>88</sup> Julia Reinhard Lupton elegantly describes, “the landscape of intertextuality, with its multiple sources, crossing currents, and shifting boundaries,” which “is reticulated and punctuated above all by the classical landmarks of literary history whose shifting contours subtend the motifs and motives of a particular political agenda” (“Mapping Mutability,” 94).

nowe called Leinster, which he possessed and held quietly, plantyng it with Englyshe inhabytants and placing Englyshe Lawes.”<sup>89</sup> This language arises in tandem with the English practice of imagining Ireland as a wasteland that would yield biblical milk and honey if only it were properly tended. English narratives about Ireland from the time of Gerald Cambrensis’s *Topographia Hibernica* (1188) and *Expugnatio Hibernica* (1189) conventionally advertised the fertility of the land, which was wasted by the barbarous Irish, who lacked “cultivation, both interior and exterior.”<sup>90</sup> As Spenser does in the mid-1590s, Gerald in the late-twelfth century condemns Irish pastoralism:

The Irish are a rude people, subsisting on the produce of their cattle only, and living themselves like beasts—a people that has not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life. In the common course of things, mankind progresses from the forest to the field, from the field to the town, and to the social condition of citizens; but this nation, holding agricultural labour in contempt, and little coveting the wealth of towns, as well as being exceedingly averse to civil institutions—lead the same life their fathers did in the woods and open pastures... This want of tilled fields arises from the neglect of those who should cultivate them; for there are large tracts which are naturally fertile and productive.” (27-28)

For Gerald, Ireland’s wasted agricultural potential evinces the Irish people’s lack of civility. The double meaning of “planting,” as both “tilling” and “supplanting,” or establishing a community, encapsulates for Gerald, as did later for Spenser, the connection between human sophistication and agricultural cultivation. Peopling the

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<sup>89</sup> T.B., “A Letter sent by T.B. Gentelman unto his very frende Mayster R.C. Esquire, wherein is contained a large discorse of the peopling and inhabiting the Cuntre called the Ardes ... taken in hand by Sir Thomas Smith ...” (1572), printed in George Hill, *An Historical Account of the Macdonnells of Antrim* (Belfast: Archer and Sons, 1873), 405-425, esp. 407. All in-text citations refer to this edition.

<sup>90</sup> Gerald of Wales, excerpt from *Topographia Hibernica* (1188), in *Strangers to That Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine*, ed. Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh (Gerrards Cross, Eng.: Colin Smythe, 1994), 25-29, esp. 26. In-text citations refer to this edition.

country with the civilized English would result in the flowering of both Irish land and civilization.<sup>91</sup>

By the time Spenser and his fellow Tudors applied the same conventions to Ireland, they were dealing with not only the “mere Irish” but also the Old English. The way in which the Old English had become just like the “mere Irish” necessitates an understanding of civility that accounts for decline. The *Georgics* offers Spenser a literary cosmology that provides a philosophical and moral explanation for movement backward. For the sake of emphasizing how Spenser accounts for the cosmological significance of decline, it is helpful to begin by looking at Thomas Smith’s very different treatment of the Old English in his advertisement soliciting English settlers for the colony at Ards. Smith justifies the need for a colony with many of the same conventions about Irish history with which Spenser justifies the need for reconquest in *A View*: the land was never fully subdued because of a lack of military force (405); the Wars of the Roses interfered with the English project in Ireland (405); the fertility of the land is going to waste (409);<sup>92</sup> Irish barbarity arises from the transitory nature of Irish land tenure and the lack of tillage (411); and the “planting” of English soldier-farmers in Ards will expand English dominance beyond the Pale and “replenish” the land with “building civill inhabitants and ... good order,” which will make Ireland “as pleasant and profitable as any parte of England” (413). Smith represents labor as a temporary necessity required by the current Irish conditions. In his vision, agricultural labor now will lead eventually to

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<sup>91</sup> For a thorough review of English representations of Ireland, see Hadfield, Spenser’s Irish Experience; Brendan Bradshaw, Andrew Hadfield, and Willy Maley, eds., *Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of Conflict 1534-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Hadfield and McVeagh, eds., *Strangers to That Land*; and Canny, *Making Ireland British*.

<sup>92</sup> See Andrew Hadfield, *Spenser’s Irish Experience*, for an analysis of how the English used language associated with the promised fertility of Israel to justify colonization of Ireland.

peaceful coexistence and rest from toil: the land “shall be furnished with a companie of Gentlemen and others that will live friendly in fellowship together rejoycing in the frute and commoditie of their former travaile, which (through noble courage) for estimation sake, and the love of their owne country they first enterprised, deserving ... to be crowned with garlands of honoure” (413).

Whereas Smith uses the language of degeneration to describe the Old English, the principle of degeneration does not inform his vision for Ireland as it does Spenser’s. For Smith, the Old English were forced to adopt Irish customs because the English monarchy, preoccupied with war in France and the Wars of the Roses, failed to support them. As a result, families like the Butlers and the Fitzgeralds were required to “buy their own peace” with the Irish, as they “alied and fostred themselves with the irishe, and the race so nourished in the bosom of the Irishe, perceiving their immunitie from law and punishment degenerated, choosing rather to maintain themselves in the Irish mans beastly liberty than to submit themselves and to live there alone” (406). Smith justifies Old English deterioration as arising from a strategic choice made in response to a specific historical and political circumstance.

For Spenser, in contrast, the Old English degeneration is the result of the movement of time in a fallen world; it signals the human potential for moral corruption against which only the cultivation of the land and the self can guard. Lacking civility on all fronts, Ireland exaggerates this potential for decay, which Irenaeus addresses specifically in reference to an individual’s moral constitution and behavior, national blood, and noble blood, hitting upon the pivotal questions about the value of noble blood and personal comportment raised by courtesy literature. Early in the dialogue, when

Irenaeus explains that the Old English have become like the “mere Irish,” Eudoxus is shocked that “an Englishman, brought up in such sweet civility as England affords, should find such likeing in that barbarous rudeness, that he should forget his own nature and forgoe his owne nation! how may this bee?” (54). Following conventional humanist thought, Eudoxus believes in the absolute value of national blood and courteous manners, assuming that both would ensure civility even in the face of Ireland’s savagery. In response, Irenaeus assures him that the corrupt nature of the country itself has the power to contaminate even those nurtured by English civility.

Later, Irenaeus blames the Old English deterioration on the corruptibility of each individual. Eudoxus concludes that the Old English are worse than the “mere Irish” because they have devolved from civility (143). Irenaeus agrees and teaches Eudoxus that

the bad minds of the men, who having been brought up at home under a straight rule of duty and obedience, being always restrained by Sharpe penalties from lewde behaviour, so soone as they come thither, where they see laws more slackely tended, and the hard restraint which they were used unto now slacked, they grow more loose and careless of their duty: and as it is the nature of all men to love liberty, so they become flat libertines, and fall to all licentiousness. (143).

Irenaeus explains that English superiority resides not in the blood of English stock, but in the strength of England’s laws, which are necessary because humans are by nature corrupt.

Eudoxus is particularly disturbed that men of English “great houses” would fall prey to this corruption because, he argues, noblemen should inherently be more civilized—courteous—than those of the lower orders. When Irenaeus relates that men of noble English houses have “degenred from their auncient dignities and are now growne

as Irish” (70), Eudoxus responds that “In truth this which you tell is a most shamefull hearing, and to be reformed with most sharpe censures, in so great personages to the terror of the meaner: for if the lords and chiefe men degenerate, what shall be hoped of the peasants, and baser people?” (70). Later, Eudoxus returns again to the notion that noblemen and gentlemen should serve as an example of civility to those of lower status. When Ireneaus explains that his plan for Ireland entails tithing individuals to their communities, so that each community is responsible for the behavior of its members, Eudoxus comments that this plan is fine for the commonalty, but not for the gentlemen. Ireneaus responds that “all the Irish boast themselves to be gentlemen” (138). Ireneaus flatly undermines the entire concept of a blood-determined hierarchy in Ireland. Eudoxus now understands that the humanist expectation that noblemen be more honorable than commoners does not apply to Ireland. He concedes that “this ordinance of tithing them by the pole is not onely fit for the gentlemen, but also for the noble-men, whom would have thought to be of so honourable a mind, as that they should not neede such a kinde of being bound to their allegiance” (138). It should not be so; the Irish nobility should be civil, first, because they come from English blood and, second, because they come from noble blood. “Yet it is so,” Ireneaus confirms.

Spenser is careful, however, to establish that nobility of bloodline and national membership function differently in England than they do in Ireland. In England, since there is no problem with the structure of nobility, there is no need for change. Ireneaus in fact insists on a policy of conservative innovation: “all change is to be shunned, where the affaires stand in such sort, as that they may continue in quietnes, or be assured at all to abide as they are” (92). This distinction is fundamental, not only because Spenser is

circulating his text at court, where he hoped to convince Elizabeth and her advisors to adopt more aggressive military tactics in Ireland, but also because Spenser had just become a member of the gentry. *A View* produces a philosophical system of nobility that delegitimizes Old English claims to aristocratic status in the Irish context while maintaining the value of that status in the English context.

Spenser weds georgic agricultural labor to the understanding of nobility outlined in courtesy literature by explaining that husbandry fosters self-discipline and therefore lays the foundation for the development of moral and civil behavior. Irenaeus insists that forcing the Irish to abandon pastoralism and take up farming will both ensure the productive use of fertile land and organize society into towns. Repeating Gerald's critique of Irish pasturage, Irenaeus disapproves of the Irish pastoral life with an especially sixteenth-century distaste for vagabonds.<sup>93</sup> He explains that the Irish inherited pastoralism from their ancestors, the Scythians. Instead of investing in a singular plot of land, they live in boolies, where thieves and murderers are "harboured from danger of law, or such officers as might light upon him. Moreover the people that thus live in those boolies, grow thereby the more barbarous, and live more licentiously than they could in townes" (55). In contrast, settling the country into farms would eliminate the communal itinerant life that conceals "rebels, and outlawes, that shall rise up in any numbers against the government" (84).

The first step is converting the Irish practice of tenancy to more permanent forms of land tenure. Because tenancy at will is so precarious, neither tenants nor landlords are invested in improving the land: "for that hee hath no such state in any his houlding, no

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<sup>93</sup> Spenser echoes the rhetoric of idleness and vagrancy through which English tracts condemned the migrant "able-bodied poor." See chapter three on the Shakespeare and the professional theater.

such building upon any farme, no such cost employed in fencing or husbanding the same, as might withhold him from any such wilfull course, as his lords cause, or his owne lewde disposition may carry him unto” (83). With more permanent land tenure, both tenant and landlord will benefit from the tenant’s efforts “to ditch and inclose his ground, to manure and husband it as good farmours use?” (83). Spenser imagines a world where the order enforced by husbandry on individuals’ farms is mirrored by the organization of public space so as to allow for the surveillance of “private abuses” (84). Organizing the country around husbanding towns would force the thief “first to bring forth and afterwards to drive away his stolne prey, but thorough the common high wayes, where he shall soone bee descryed and met withall: And the rebell or open enemy, if any such shall happen ... shall easily be found when he commeth forth, and also be well incountered withall by a few, in so straight passages and strong enclosures” (84).

Once the English have reconquered the Irish through martial law and organized them into towns, husbandry will teach the Irish and Anglo-Irish alike the self-discipline necessary for individual and cultural courtesy:

Husbandry being the nurse of thrift, and the daughter of industrie and labour, detesteth all that may worke her scathe, and destroy the travaile of her hands, whose hope is all her lives comfort unto the plough; therefore are those Kearne, Stocaghies, and Horse-boyes, to be driven and made to imploy that ableness of bodie, which they were wont to use to theft and villainy, henceforth to labour and industry. In the which, by that time they have spent but a little paine, they will finde such sweetnesse and happy contentment, that they will afterwards hardly bee haled away from it, or drawne to their wonted lewde life in theeuerie and roguerie. (149)

Husbandry will essentially guard against the necessity for further military involvement in Ireland because it will guarantee that the Irish internalize the values



necessary to develop a refined culture. Having invested in developing their own land and living in towns, the Irish and Anglo-Irish will go to school, where they will “grow up to civil conversation . . . For learning hath that wonderfull power in itself, that it can soften and temper the most sterne and savage nature” (151). Using Guazzo’s term for courtesy, “civil conversation,” Spenser weds the humanist and courtly genre of the courtesy manual to the *Georgics*, imagining Guazzo’s vision of courteous social intercourse as the outcome of agricultural labor. Spenser presents a world in which georgic labor fosters individual courtesy and courteous individuals constitute an ideal community. Guazzo’s translator, George Pettie, defines “civil conversation” as “an honest, commendable, virtuous kind of living in the world” (56). Guazzo imagines this kind of living as possible only through intellectual intercourse with other men, through which we attain “perfection.” Pettie’s epistle to Guazzo defines civility as “orderly laws, decent manners, comely apparel, delicate diet, curious lodging, and sumptuous buildings.”<sup>94</sup> Envisioning agricultural labor through the Virgilian narrative, which lauded husbandry as the mother of all civil arts, Spenser identifies husbandry as the source of manners and nobility as they were imagined by English courtesy literature.

While Guazzo depicts learning and noble birth as enhancing one another, as does Sir Thomas Elyot, there existed a strain of less conservative voices in the courtesy debates that went further toward exploring the potential of learning to disrupt the valuation of inherited nobility. Spenser, in fact, makes a direct intervention into the courtesy genre with a prefatory sonnet to William Jones’ 1591 translation of Giovanni Batista Nenna’s *Nennio; or a Treatise of Nobility*, a text that depicts nobility as a virtue

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<sup>94</sup> Guazzo, *Civil Conversation*, 11.

that is achieved through learning rather than inherited through birth. In Nenna's dialogue, the ethereal noblewoman Virginia offers a ring to whichever of two young gentlemen, the "upstart" Fabricio or the high-born Possidonio, is noblest. She then leaves Fabricio, Possidonio, and their party to debate the definition of "true" nobility.

Possidonio defines nobility as ancestry.<sup>95</sup> He insists that virtue, like other familial characteristics, is inherited through blood. Nature ensures that men are inclined to those qualities possessed by their progenitors: "the maners and prowesse of the father is conueyed from him unto the children, and so consequently his nobilitie" (7). Fabricio, in contrast, divorces this socially inscribed, hierarchical meaning of "nobility" from its metaphysical meaning: "It is true, and it cannot any waies be denied, that whosoever is descended of Noble blood, *wee call* him a Noble man, but generallie I denie this to containe a trueth ..." (31-34). Fabricio's critique of Possidonio's argument rests on the issue of mutability. The possibility for the degeneration of a nobleman's progeny from his original state of perfection precludes noble birth from defining nobility. Instead, Fabricio says the individual mind is immutable as God is immutable, and therefore the mind is the site of humankind's closest proximity to God. True nobility therefore attains in the virtues of the mind: "Man by the intellectual knowledge of his understanding, gaining the infinite grace and excessive love of Him, who in Himselfe is the infinite of goodness" (47). For Fabricio, learning is not merely an avenue to attaining virtue; the learning itself is the expression of virtue, of a desire to grow closer to God and perfection: "By virtue accompanied with worthie sciences, the mind of man is made noble and excellent" (52). He goes even further to equate the poet's accomplishments

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<sup>95</sup> Giovanni Batista Nenna, *Nennio; or a Treatise of Nobility* (1595), trans. William Jones (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1967), 18. All in-text citations refer to this edition.

with the knight's, rejecting the stigma against productive labor as denigrating to nobility. Instead, he elevates artistic labor as the essence of nobility.<sup>96</sup>

By awarding the ring to Fabricio in the end, Nenna stages a redefinition of "nobility" as Castiglione defined it. In *Nennio*, nobility of birth comes to represent only the external trappings of riches or reputation, but moral "nobility" that consists of virtue acquired through learning. Nennio mediates between the two positions by admitting the viability of Possidonio's definition of nobility, based on custom, but awarding the ring to Fabricio. Nennio, however, reminds both men that they represent less-than-truly-perfect embodiments of nobility: perfect nobility comprises birth, learning, and riches.<sup>97</sup> Still, he exonerates Fabricio's learning.

The dialogue's paratexts confirm Fabricio's conclusions. Jones's prefatory epistle asserts that it is better to be "born the sonne of a common Crier, with Horace; or of a Mason, with Socrates, or of uncertaine parentes with Euripides, and to be virtuous and learned: then the sonne of Nero, or of Domitian, and to be vitious."<sup>98</sup> Spenser's sonnet supports Jones's evaluation:

Who so wil seeke by right deserts t'attaine  
Unto the type of true Nobility,  
And not by painted shewes and titles vaine,  
Derived farre from famous Ancestrie,  
Behold them both in their right visnomy  
Here truly pourtray'd, as they ought to be,  
And striving both for termes of dignitie,  
To be advanced highest in degree.

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<sup>96</sup> Nennio, *Treatise of Nobility*, 57.

<sup>97</sup> For similarities to Guazzo, see *Civil Conversation*, 179-186.

<sup>98</sup> Nennio, *Treatise of Nobility*, 2A3v.

Spenser's disagreement with Possidonio rests, like Fabricio's, on the possibility for degeneration through time. Possidonio's claim to nobility is empty because he derives it "farre from famous Ancestrie," although he himself is not a virtuous or learned man. Nobility of birth is valid, but learning is the superior form of nobility. Spenser was writing his prefatory sonnet to *Nennio*, which was published in 1595, around the same time he was writing *A View* and composing the 1596 edition of the *Faerie Queene*. His intervention into the courtesy debates here aligns with his articulation of the insufficiency of noble blood to determine virtue in *A View*. In Book VI of the *Faerie Queene*, as in *A View*, he gives poetic expression to learning as a labor of self-cultivation through Virgilian georgic.

#### Book VI's Georgic Romance: Birth, Labor, and Fortune

Book VI unfolds primarily in epic romance and pastoral, the Elizabethan adaptations of Virgilian genres through which the court depicted ideologies of nobility and the relationship of the aristocracy to the crown. Writing from his Munster estate, as an upwardly mobile gentleman, Spenser composes the Book of Courtesy in literary language that was recognizably situated within the courtly world. He simultaneously, however, modulates these genres in an attempt to expand the courtly definitions of courtesy to accommodate the principles undergirding his vision for Ireland. The world of Book VI operates within a georgic cosmology, where fortune threatens to erode the progress of families and individuals. Underscoring the potential for decay, Spenser creates an ambiguous epic romance narrator who answers the question of whether learning or birth is more valid in multiple, contradictory ways. Then, when Calidore veers

from romance into the pastoral world, he abandons his quest in search of domestic peace that takes the form of georgic—not pastoral—*otium*. Spenser merges the pastoral life of leisure, the literary convention that enabled Elizabethan noblemen to imagine themselves as shepherds, with the labor of self-cultivation that he saw as characterizing nobility in the Irish context. The result is a book in which the genres jostle uneasily against each other as the poem attempts to elevate learning and labor while simultaneously both endorsing and undermining the ideology of noble birth.

Spenser begins by situating Book V firmly within the georgic cosmology of the Stone Age, and then emphasizing the linear connection between Books V and VI. Book V opens by reiterating the classical fall from the Golden Age. The proem narrator observes that in the “antique world ... / mans age was in his freshest prime,” but that “from the golden age ... / It’s now at earst become a stonie one” (V.proem.1-2). He specifically emphasizes the possibility for decline: men are now “backward bred” since Pyrrha and Deucalion, “and if then those may any worse be red, / They into that ere long will be degendered” (V. proem.2.6-9). The end of the golden age is, of course, central to the Book of Justice, as Astraea departs earth and leaves Artegall as her “instrument.”

The narrative of Book VI continues within this deteriorating world, where “being matcht with plaine Antiquitie,” the civility of the current age appears as “fayned shows ... / which carry colours faire, that feeble eies misdeeme” (VI.proem.4.7-9). The continuity between Books V and VI is reflected in the intimacy of Artegall and Calidore’s meeting in canto one. The two knights, “whenas each of other had a sight, / They knew them selves, and both their persons rad” (VI.i.4.6-7). The ambiguous diction of the lines emphasizes the extent to which Calidore’s quest is a continuation of Artegall’s. In

recognizing and conversing with Artegal, Calidore gains insight into himself and his own quest.<sup>99</sup> Books V and VI might be aligned with the two phases of Spenser's plan to reform Ireland as described in *A View*. Irenaeus explains that Ireland needs conquest then the planting of civility. Correspondingly, Artegal must rescue Irena with the help of Talus, the destructive iron man, and Calidore must enforce courtesy as he tracks the Blatant Beast through Faerie Land.

In this fallen world, the source of true courtesy is allegorized as the fairest flower in the garden of "learnings treasures" on Mount Parnassus, the "sacred nursery ... of virtue." The transmission of virtue from Parnassus to earth required "great pain" on the part of the gods, who "planted" virtue and "long with carefull labour nurst, / Till it to ripenesse grew, and forth to honor burst" (VI.proem.3). Even in the golden age, when the gods first placed virtue on earth, virtue was a form of divine learning, one that could only be realized on earth through labor. In the muses' garden, courtesy grows on a "lowly stalke," but it "brancheth forth in brave nobilitie, / And spreads it selfe through all civilitie" (VI.proem.4.3-5). The georgic metaphor of a fertile garden encapsulates the relationships among courtesy, nobility, and civility: courtesy, a form of learning, is the core virtue expressed in acts of nobility, and acts of nobility spread civility.

The stone age has exacerbated the need for learning and labor, as the transcendental ideals of courtesy and nobility have been perverted almost beyond recognition. Although "Virtues seat is deepe within the mynd," people mistakenly believe that nobility inheres in "outward shows" (VI.proem.v.8-9), seduced by ostentatious displays of wealth and empty social rituals at court. Earthly courtesy has become "nought

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<sup>99</sup> A similar dynamic obtains in the exchange between RedCrosse and Guyon at the opening of Book II.

but forgerie, / Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas," who "thinke gold that is bras" (VI.proem.5). As the most learned and gifted among men, only the poet has access to the vision of divine courtesy. The narrator characterizes his own poem as a "tedious travel," or "travail" (VI. proem.1.7), but he is invigorated by the sweet variety that the muses reveal to him. The *Faerie Queene* is itself the manifestation of heavenly courtesy. True courtesy, of which Book VI is the "trial," is located in learning and labor, expressed through georgic imagery, and not in the displays of courtly behavior.<sup>100</sup>

Spenser then endeavors to counterbalance this critique of courtly courtesy with praise for Elizabeth's court. The proem narrator manipulates the tropes of the golden and stone ages to exempt Elizabeth's court from his denunciation of earthly courtesy. The proem narrator asks "Where shall I in all Antiquity / So faire a patterne finde, where may be seene / The goodly praise of Princely curtesie" (VI.proem.6.1-3). Frozen in time, Elizabeth's court is the only place where true courtesy still obtains, where the georgic possibility for deterioration does not apply. The proem thus attempts to use images of time in order to reconcile two seemingly incompatible visions of courtesy. Elizabeth's court is a throw-back to the golden age, when courtly courtesy was not yet "forgerie" but was still an expression of virtue; yet the rest of the world operates in the stone age, in which outward shows and inward virtue do not align. In the queen's court, where internal conditions and behavior are still correlated, noble birth can predict noble behavior. In the rest of the world, however, noble blood is not a reliable source of courtesy. The two different avenues to nobility addressed in the courtesy literature, learning and birth, are

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<sup>100</sup> This connection between georgic labor and civility is reiterated throughout the book, as savage people are evaluated as more or less barbaric based on their ability to plough the ground.

thus associated with different conceptions of time and different understandings of the relationship between earthly and transcendent courtesy.

When the narrator opens canto one with the announcement that “Of Court, it seemes, men Courtesie do call, / For that it there most useth to abound” (VI.i.1.1-2), it appears that he has found an appropriate image of antiquity with which to figure Elizabeth’s court. He locates himself confidently in the generic world of chivalric romance, where courtesy emanates from the court and where noble blood is a reliable source of noble deeds. The canto one narrator’s celebration of court life, where in “princes hall / that virtue should be plentifully found, / which of all goodly manners is the ground, / And roote of civill conversation” (VI.i.1.3-6), is appropriate for the chivalric romance narrative. Yet, without divorcing the narrator from the generic assumptions in which his view of the court is grounded, Spenser obliquely reminds us of the potential for decay. Courtly behavior *should* be the root of civil conversation. Whether the court actually *is* the root of civil conversation, however, remains to be seen. The subtleties of the narrator’s language—the qualification of “be” with the modal “should”—allow Spenser to distance himself as the poet from the narrator. The narrator maintains the stance appropriate for Elizabethan chivalric romance, while Spenser constructs the romance narrative so as to throw doubt on the narrator’s confident assumptions about the source of true courtesy. The didacticism of Book VI operates by undermining the chivalric narrator’s assumptions that he is relating an image of the golden world. Thus, while the chivalric narrator remains invested in court-centered courtesy, the narrative itself reminds the reader that the present stone age continues to be measured against a lost golden age.



The narrator makes the distinction between learned and innate courtesy central to Calidore's superiority over all other knights in Faerie Land; Calidore is the model of courtly courtesy because his perfect manners are not learned but "planted naturall" (VI.i.2.4). As a decidedly Elizabethan knight, Calidore's manners, "comely guize," and "gracious speech" are bolstered by his renown for military prowess. Distinguishing between misguided courtly courtesy and Calidore's true courtly courtesy, the narrator insists that Calidore "loathed leasing, and base flattery, / And loved simple truth and stedfast honesty" (VI.i.3.8-9). The embodiment of the golden age court, Calidore is also an enforcing agent of transcendent morality on behalf of the Queen. Courtesy performed by a noble courtier is presented as the behavioral expression of the divine moral imperatives embodied in the benevolence of Gloriana's rule.

After first staking his claim with the ideology of noble birth in canto one, however, the narrator becomes increasingly ambiguous about the role of learning in the attainment of courtesy. He opens canto two by elaborating on how courtesy maintains social order. Here the moral authority of courtesy is channeled into the validation of the social hierarchy, as the narrator explains that courtesy is the virtue of "bearing" oneself "aright / To all of each degree, as doth behove" (VI.ii.1.3-4). The language in which he first describes this form of courtesy, a "great skill," suggests that it must be acquired and perfected (VI.ii.1.9). Nevertheless, he reassures us in the next stanza that "Thereto great helpe dame nature selfe doth lend" (VI.ii.2.1). The narrator proposes that although one may be naturally inclined to develop these skills, they are primarily learned. Immediately following, he contradicts this careful balance, stating matter-of-factly:

For some so goodly gracious are by kind,  
That every action doth them much commend,

And in the eyes of men great liking find;  
 Which others, that have greater skill in mind,  
 Though they enforce themselves, cannot attaine. (VI.ii.2.2-6)

In these lines, learned courtesy is inferior to natural courtesy. He then concludes the stanza with a gesture toward learned courtesy that seems like an afterthought: “Yet praise likewise deserve good thewes, enforst with paine” (VI.ii.2.9). Over the course of the opening stanzas to canto two, he has shifted positions, beginning by extolling skill and ending by elevating nature, without accounting for the shift in any way. The result is that learning and birth exist in a tenuous relationship to one another, undermining the confidence with which the narrator had trumpeted Calidore’s innate courtesy in canto one.

The narrator’s investment in the ideology of nobility is further undermined by the fact that although he insists that Calidore is a golden age image of courtesy, the world of Book VI operates in the stone age where the lives of men are vulnerable to changes in fortune. Fortune also plays a role in other books in the *Faerie Queene*, but in Book VI it assumes a particularly georgic nature. A comparison of the Legend of Courtesy to the Legend of Holiness is useful for illustrating the especially Virgilian nature of fortune in Book VI. In Book I, Redcrosse learns that fortune is an expression of providence, a tool through which God directs humans who will aid in the establishment of a divine kingdom on earth at Judgment Day. Fortune is a vehicle of the eschatological history related by Book I. Book VI, however, is concerned exclusively with human values and the human

world, not with the interaction between the divine and the human. In the Legend of Courtesy, fortune is not necessarily a tool of God, although it can be.<sup>101</sup>

This is not to say that Book VI is devoid of religious connotations; the human world is always to some extent a redaction—often a corruption—of the divine. Michael Tratner has persuasively argued that Spenser’s conception of courtesy aligns with, and perhaps derives from, the use of the word “courtesy” in 1 Corinthians in early sixteenth-century Bibles. The Coverdale, Bishops, Great, and Tyndale Bibles all translate Paul’s meditation on love as “love is courteous.” Tratner argues that human courtesy manifested in *caritas* is a reflection of divine love. Accordingly, William Perkins’ use of georgic imagery in “A Graine of Mustard-seed” (1597) connects Mid-Tudor biblical georgic with courtesy by portraying divine love, or courtesy, as planted in “tiny seeds of grace inside those who are saved.”<sup>102</sup> Tratner’s reading of Perkins demonstrates that although Elizabethans did not make wide poetic use of biblical georgic, as their mid-Tudor Protestant predecessors had, georgic imagery continued to retain powerful biblical associations.

This biblical georgic image of courtesy enriches Spenser’s treatment of the virtue, as it becomes clear during Calepine’s adventures that undergirding courtesy as the performance of chivalric feats and social graces is the more expansive concept of courtesy as innate human pity, or the human equivalent of divine mercy. For example, when the Salvage Man heroically defeats Turpine, who has violated every rule of

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<sup>101</sup> Dorothy Woodward Culp emphasizes that fortune operates differently in earlier books of the *Faerie Queene* than it does in Book VI, where the principle that “chance and fortune can radically affect men’s life in this world” is an important aspect of “Spenser’s total conception of a legend of courtesy.” Culp, “Courtesy and Fortune’s Chance in Book 6 of the ‘Faerie Queene,’ ” *Modern Philology* 68.3 (1971): 254-59, esp. 256.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Tratner, “The thing S. Paule ment by ... the courteousness that he spake of”: Religious Sources for Book VI of the FQ,” *Spenser Studies* 8 (1990): 147-174, esp. 149.

courtesy and chivalry, the Salvage Man is described as feeling “pittie” and “gentlesse” for the first time (VI.iv.3.1-2). The discerning reader is meant to understand that human sympathy is the bedrock of the social graces, and thus, the fundamental lesson that Arthur and Calidore teach is that courteous behavior inheres in protecting the weak from the strong. Perkins and Spenser read the “divine seed” as the individual Christian’s potential for grace, and they understand the community as a collection of its courteous or discourteous individuals. The book’s interest in Christian courtesy therefore overlaps, at times more explicitly than others, with its interest in courteous behavior and the socio-political community. The narrator asserts that both noble blood and social privilege as well as pity and divine grace are planted “naturall” in certain individuals.

The divine order of Book VI is thus not distinctly different from the one depicted in Book I, but since Book VI is about human and not eschatological events, the relationship between fortune and god is more ambiguous than it is in Book I. In Book VI, the emphasis on individual behavior devoid of the eschatological frame has the effect of focusing our attention on how the individual develops the naturally planted divine seed or noble blood. In this world, some courteous human actions are attributed to God; for example, when the Salvage Man motivated by his innate pity succors Serena and Calepine, they “thanked God for all, / Which had them freed from that deadly feare” (*FQ*, VI.iv.15.2-3). Three lines later, however, the narrator attributes their opportunity to rest to “fortune” (*FQ* VI.iv.15.5). Sometimes human courtesy is characterized as fortuitous, rather than attributed to God, such as when Calidore “by chaunce” finds the squire whom Briana has abused (VI.i.11.2). Even where the text refers directly to God, however, one of the book’s ruling assumptions is that fortune can destroy individuals, even those who

have natural pity or noble blood. The Brigands' attacking the pastoral community when "It fortun'd one day" that Calidore was hunting epitomizes this condition of Book VI (x.39.1). Civilizations and individuals can be undermined by fortune as easily as they can be bolstered by courteous deeds in Book VI. The existence of God does not preclude human degeneration.

This potential for individuals to move either forward or backward finds expression in the book's focus on children, both as burgeoning individuals with seeds of grace and as the representations of their family lines. Priscilla, Aladine, Tristram, the Bear Baby, Pastorella, and the Salvage Man are characters who bring to the fore the relationship between progeny and progenitors, inherited traits and the progression of time. When Calidore returns the wounded Aladine to his family home in canto three, the sight of the wounded boy inspires his father, Aldus, to meditate on the vicissitudes of fortune.

Is this the hope that to my hoary heare  
 Thou brings? Aie me, is this the timely joy,  
 Which I expected long, now turnd to sad annoy?  
 Such is the weakenesse of all mortall hope;  
 So tickle is the state of earthly things,  
 That ere they come unto their aymed scope,  
 They fall too short of our fraile reckonings,  
 And bring us bale and bitter sorrowings,  
 In stead of comfort, which we should embrace:  
 This is the state of Keasars and of Kings. (VI.iii.4-5)

The injury of his son prompts Aldus to lament the mutability of the earthly world. Hope is so easily extinguished by the passage of time.

In the face of fortune's ability to lay a family low, the narrator's insistence on the inheritance of nobility appears erroneous, like Possidonio's argument that nobility

inheres in his family name. If courtesy were transmitted primarily through bloodline, then families would not have the potential to degenerate, as Aldus and Fabricio both argue that they do. Spenser's narrator's emphasis on the value of birth over learning, or the individual's development of courtesy, aligns with the ideology of nobility of birth espoused at court and in the romance genre, but it is mediated within Book VI by the possibility for degeneration. Labor, then, must take more of a central role in the development of courtesy than the narrator's assessment of Calidore's innate courtesy initially leads us to believe. Spenser, thus, opens a conceptual space for not only the possibility of labor within the schema of courtly courtesy, but for its necessity to guard against changes of fortune. Labor as individual development thus works to expand rather than to undermine the importance of chivalric and courtly courtesy in Book VI.

The conflicting claims of the narrator—his insistence that courtesy is inherited through noble birth and his simultaneous admission that learning is important—and the narrative's emphasis on the possibility for degeneration assume the form of an internal dialogue about the value of nobility of birth versus that of learning. This dialogue takes place not only within the narrator's meditations on courtesy, but also between narrative events and the narrator's interpretations of them. Although Spenser is notorious for including a vast array of voices in his poem, this method of producing meaning dialogically is especially marked in Book VI, and it culminates in the generic dialogue between chivalric romance and pastoral. Spenser's engages with the genre of courtesy dialogues through a dialogic poetic form.

Following the tradition of reading Spenser as "our sage and serious poet," critics have tended to rely on the narrator as the unifying thread within and among the books of

*The Faerie Queene*. This tendency is fostered by the critical consensus that the poem is first and foremost an allegory, as Spenser indicates in his “Letter to Raleigh.”<sup>103</sup> I would argue, however, that the narrator functions differently in Book VI than it does in the earlier books. In the Book of Courtesy, the narrative strategy is best characterized as rhetorical rather than allegorical. While an allegorical reading would suggest teleological movement towards fulfilling a singular, totalizing meaning,<sup>104</sup> a rhetorical reading envisions the “narrator” as a tool of the narrative rather than a unified presence with an established system of values from which divergences indicate lapses. Understanding the narrative as rhetorical rather than strictly allegorical has important implications for reading Book VI’s treatment of the value of learning and birth to nobility. The narrator espouses both learning and noble birth as the sources of courtesy throughout the text. If we understand the book as unfolding rhetorically, we need not dismiss one of these viewpoints in favor of the other; rather, the rhetorical narrative strategy invites us to read them provisionally and dialectically. The narrator’s statements are open to being read ironically, and they may be qualified by events in the story, as the voices in a courtesy dialogue qualify one another.

The Bear Baby episode, for example, brings together fortune, Ireland, and questions over the nobility of learning and birth in an episode in which the narrator’s

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<sup>103</sup> For just a few of the many examples, see Paul Alpers, “Narrative and Rhetoric in the *Faerie Queene*,” *SEL* 2.1 (winter 1962): 27-46; Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of the “Faerie Queene”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Paul Alpers, “Narration in the *Faerie Queene*,” *ELH* 44.1(1977): 19-39; Harry Berger, Jr., “Narrative as Rhetoric in the *Faerie Queene*,” *ELR* 21.1 (winter 1991): 3-48; Harry Berger, Jr., “The Spenserian Dynamics,” *SEL* 8.1 (winter 1968): 1-18; Stan Hinton, “The Poet and His Narrator: Spenser’s Epic Voice,” *ELH* 41.2 (summer 1974): 165-81; Clare Regan, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Miller, “Spenser’s Poetics: The Poem’s Two Bodies,” *PMLA* 101.2 (March 1986): 170-85; Gordon Teskey, “Irony, Allegory, and Metaphysical Decay,” *PMLA* 109.3 (May 1994): 397-408; Kathleen Williams, “Vision and Rhetoric: The Poet’s Voice in the *Faerie Queene*,” *ELH* 36.1 (March 1969): 131-44.

<sup>104</sup> Like allegory, a rhetorical reading is substantiated by Spenser’s “Letter to Raleigh,” which famously announces Spenser’s intention to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.”

interpretation of events is not supported by the events themselves. After being rescued by the Salvage Man, Calepine leaves Serena sleeping and wanders off into the woods, where he comes upon a bear with a human baby in its jaws. He rescues the baby, only to find himself utterly lost and burdened by the screaming child. Then, “by good fortune,” he discovers Matilde, the wife of Sir Bruin, who is in the midst of bewailing the predicament of her childless marriage. She explains to the inquiring Calepine that her husband won his land by overthrowing a giant and now rules over a “peaceable estate.” But, Matilde laments, their “happy fortune” is matched by “cruel fate,” which has rendered them childless. Without an heir to their family line, “the gladfull blessing of posteritie,” they have no assurance of their continued “prosperitie” (VI.iv.31.3). The rhyme of “posterity” and “prosperity” emphasizes the necessity of children to perpetuate good fortune in the face of time. Matilde bemoans the fact that their land will revert to its former barbaric owner, the giant, unless she can produce a child: “for want of heires it to defend, / All is in time like to returne againe / To that foule feend” (VI.iv.31.6-8).

Matilda’s lament underscores the function of progeny in a georgic world in which time and ill fortune can cause decay. Ideally, the child would come from their own bloodline, but when Calepine offers Matilde the baby he has conveniently just rescued, she accepts the child and passes him off as her own. Calepine assures her that the baby is malleable and that she can raise him into whatever form she chooses:

What ever forms ye list thereto apply,  
Being now soft and fit them to embrace;  
Whether ye list him traine in chivalry,  
Or nourle up in lore of learn’d Philosophy.

And certes it hath oftentimes been seene,



That of the like, whose lineage was unknown,  
 More brave and noble knights have raysed beene,  
 As their victorious deedes have often shoven ..

.....  
 Then those, which have bene dandled in the lap. (VI.iv.35-36)

Calepine persuades Matilde that because human beings are moldable, children of questionable parentage can be trained to excel at chivalry. By imagining learning and birth as the avenues to nobility, Calepine participates in the debate over the source of courtesy to which the narrator has given voice. Whereas the narrator, however, has endorsed noble birth or alternatively wavered between birth and learning, Calepine espouses learning. Shortly after Calepine's speech, the narrator confirms that the child's future fulfills Calepine's projections. The baby was "in goodly thewes so well upbrought, / That it became a famous knight well knowne / and did right noble deedes" (VI.iv.38.7-9). This child learns how to be a noble knight, rather than inheriting nobility through his bloodline. Although it might be argued that since the child's lineage is unknown, Spenser means for it to be clear to the reader that the child hailed from noble blood to begin with, which is why he was able to excel at courtesy and chivalry. But the text specifically attributes his success to "goodly thewes," the same phrase that the narrator uses earlier to talk about how learning can complement birth, in canto one.

The reader, then, must pause when the chivalric narrator, having just substantiated Calepine's predictions for the Bear Baby in the final stanzas of canto four, opens canto five by confidently proclaiming, "O what an easie thing is to descry / The gentle blood, how ever it be wrapt / In sad misfortunes foule deformity" (VI.v.1.1-2). On the heels of the Bear Baby episode, any espousal of the idea that noble blood is manifested transparently in noble deeds appears tenuous. It is one thing to claim that noble blood can

lead to noble deeds; but it is quite another to affirm that it is easy to tell who hails from noble blood based on their actions. In light of the narrative events, the chivalric narrator's assessment of the source of courtesy appears unreliable.

The significance of the Bear Baby episode becomes even more evident when it is read as an historical allegory. Critics generally accept that the story of the Bruins provides an imaginative engagement with the Ireland. Hamilton explains that the name "Sir Bruin" is a play on the Irish "Fitz-Ursulas," or "bear's sons."<sup>105</sup> In *A View*, Ireneaus cites the Fitz-Ursulas as an example of an Old English family that has deteriorated into "mere Irish." He explains that "the Mac-mahons in the North, were aunciently English, to wit, descended from the Fitz Ursulas, which was a noble family in England and that the same appeareth by the signification of their Irish names" (68-69). They, "conspiring with the Irish, did quite cast off both their English name and alleagiance, since which time they have so remained still, and have since beene counted meere Irish" (69). In Spenser's historical reality, the case of the Fitz-Ursulas illustrates that national blood and family blood are not predictors of behavior. The progression of time, through fortune, has led to the degeneration of this noble English family.

The Bear Baby episode, however, imagines that learned courtesy is the solution to this potential for degeneration, and it does so through georgic imagery. The prosperity of the Bruins is represented by their transformation of wasted land into fertile land. Echoing the language of Fleming's translation of Virgil's *Georgics*,<sup>106</sup> Matilde explains that Sir Bruin "long ... did sweat and swinke" over the land, and that all of his labor will be in vain if the land reverts back to the ownership of the giant. Civility takes the georgic form

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<sup>105</sup> A.C. Hamilton, ed. *The Faerie Queene*, VI.iv.29, fn 4.

<sup>106</sup> See above, p. 82.

of agricultural improvement threatened by time. Courteous learning saves the Bruins, as the Bear Baby not only prevents decay but elevates their family name with his “goodly thewes.” The Bruins’ story is one of social advancement, from agricultural labor to knightly deeds. In Book VI’s mythological reconstruction of the history of the Fitz-Ursulas, the corruption of English civilization is prevented by georgic labor and courteous learning, which are depicted as analogous forms of work and self-cultivation.

Crucially, the narrator, who is steeped in the values of the genre for which he is a rhetorical tool, has misread the significance of the Bear Baby story because he is a mouthpiece for courtly chivalric romance. The relationship between the narrator and the narrative events is characteristic of the broader dialogic mode of Book VI. The poem produces meaning by weighing different versions of courtesy against one another, a strategy that enables Spenser to both endorse and expand the implications of the courtly genres in which he works. He does not negate the romance narrator’s claims about the value of noble birth; rather, he attenuates them by placing them alongside alternative renderings of courtesy. The pastoral episode in cantos nine and ten participates in this dialogic mode, presenting a vision of courtesy that functions in conversation with the chivalric romance narrative, as Spenser turns from one genre through which Elizabeth’s court understood and identified itself to another. Pastoral poetry inscribed courtly values—specifically *sprezzatura* and *otium*—within a rustic setting. The simplicity of the pastoral world throws into relief the corruption of chivalric romance characters like Turpine, Briana, and Crudor. The pastoral world is, furthermore, the home of Spenser’s poetic persona, Colin Clout. Like Spenser’s previous pastorals, the Book VI pastoral celebrates poetry as a vatic vocation and the foundation of a harmonious fellowship of

shepherds. Book VI is distinctly different from Spenser's other pastorals, however, in that it re-envisioned the pastoral world through a georgic framework: pastoral *otium* is transformed into georgic domestic peace, and the pastoral world, which is conventionally static, is threatened by georgic fortune. As he does with chivalric romance, Spenser uses Virgilian georgic to revise the conventions through which courtly pastoral figured nobility in order to accommodate the conditions of his lived experience in Ireland.

### Pastoral Courtesy

In canto three, Calidore, in hot pursuit of the Blatant Beast, disappears from the narrative, and he is absent from the central six cantos. When we meet him again in canto nine, he is exhausted and bedraggled and, it seems, no closer to completing his quest. Having tracked the beast from the court to the edges of Faerie Land, he finds himself amidst a company of shepherds whose leisurely life entices him to trade his heroic quest for a romantic one. He falls in love with Pastorella, the most beautiful shepherdess who, we find out later, is actually the daughter of a king. Donning shepherd's weeds in order to win Pastorella's love, Calidore abandons his pursuit of the Blatant Beast. At the allegorical heart of the pastoral episode, he spies Colin Clout, Spenser's authorial persona, piping to Venus's handmaidens, the graces, at the summit of Mt. Acidale. Colin's piping and the graces' dance provide Calidore with a vision of transcendent courtesy. Subsequently the pastoral world is destroyed by Brigands, who kidnap Pastorella. Calidore rescues her, defeats the Brigands, and deposits her with a royal couple who turn out to be her parents. Reinvigorated, Calidore once again takes up his heroic quest and succeeds in subduing the Blatant Beast—at least temporarily.

Critics have conventionally read the Book VI pastoral episode as Spenser's poetic retreat from public and nationalist epic into a private, self-reflexive world. Spenser uses pastoral metapoetically throughout his career, in both the *Shepherd's Calendar* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. As critics have noted, the return of Spenser's authorial persona, Colin Clout, in Book VI signals that this pastoral narrative constitutes a reflection on his poetic vocation. Colin's direct access to the muses and his instructions to Calidore, who is supposedly the embodiment of perfect courtesy, serve to assert the superiority of poetry over chivalry.<sup>107</sup> Critics, however, have been too eager to read Colin as a transparent representation of Spenser and to trumpet the Mt. Acidale episode as Spenser's rejection of public life. Richard Helgerson, for example, argues that once Spenser began to realize that Elizabeth's court was not the ideal he had imagined, he chose to escape into a private world in Ireland. For Helgerson, Mt. Acidale illustrates that "the poet finds the source of his inspiration in this private world.... Spenser comes home to the pastoral, personal, and amorous."<sup>108</sup> David Miller similarly argues that "[The] idealized view of the court is central to Spenser's conception of his work, and as he comes to abandon it late in his career—specifically in the last book of the *Faerie Queene*—his understanding of the literary enterprise changes. He comes to look on poetry as private and contemplative rather than as a form of public action."<sup>109</sup> Like Miller and Helgerson, Harry Berger and David Shore also argue that Calidore's interruption of Colin's piping confirms that poetry and public life are incompatible.

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<sup>107</sup> See especially Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*.

<sup>108</sup> Shore, *Spenser and the Poetics of Pastoral*, 146; Harry Berger, Jr., "A Secret Discipline: The *Faerie Queene*, Book VI," in *Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William Nelson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 35–75; Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*, 97–98.

<sup>109</sup> David Miller, "Abandoning the Quest," *English Literary History* 46.2 (1979): 173–192; esp. 173–174.

Andrew Hadfield summarizes this critical view as one in which Spenser is seen as “an embittered and disillusioned writer who had abandoned the dreams of political influence outlined in some of his early works and the first edition of *The Faerie Queene*, preferring instead to retreat into his own private world, signalled most clearly with the representation of the Graces in Book VI.”<sup>110</sup> As Hadfield, however, proceeds to assert correctly, the argument that Book VI constitutes Spenser’s retreat from public life is attenuated by the fact that it was precisely as Spenser was completing the 1596 *Faerie Queene* that he made his most incisive intervention into public life, with *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. Hadfield’s critique of what he sees as the scholarly desire to “circumscribe Spenser’s capacity for political action”<sup>111</sup> is supported by the fact that Spenser continued to write the *Faerie Queene* even after publishing the 1596 edition; Book VI was not the end of Spenser’s epic project.

Critics who read the Book VI pastoral episode as Spenser’s rejection of public life and embrace of private life pit pastoral, embodied by Colin Clout, against epic. But the assumptions both that pastoral is a genre of private expression and that “private” poetry is the antithesis of “public” poetry need to be reevaluated. Spenser conceptualizes Colin against the backdrop of the court, not as an entirely independent entity. In his later pastorals, Colin embraces Ireland as “home,” but as Louis Montrose has pointed out, domestic space is not necessarily private space divorced from the court. Montrose has argued that by characterizing Spenser’s later poetry as “private,” critics overlook how

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<sup>110</sup> Andrew Hadfield, “Was Spenser a Republican?” *English* 47.189 (1998): 169-82; esp. p. 169.

<sup>111</sup> Hadfield, “Was Spenser a Republican?” 169. Among other critics who question this narrative of Spenser’s career, see especially Thomas Herron, *Spenser’s Irish Work*, who argues that Spenser is better read as a poet of Ovidian exile rather than disillusionment, and Patrick Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight*, who argues that this view of Spenser’s career relies too heavily on the idea that Spenser intended to follow Virgil’s trajectory from pastoral through georgic to epic. Cheney contends, instead, that Spenser understood his poetic vocation through several different models for a Renaissance literary career.

Spenser's publication of poetry that is constructed as "private" constitutes a public act. Montrose instead reads Spenser's later poetry as focused on the "domestic," reiterating that the household was part of, not separate from, Elizabethan discourses about the political and social community. From his "home" in Ireland, Colin critiques the court by pointing to the court's distance from its own ideals, in its own language. Thus, while Colin may espouse domesticity and even privacy as ideals, the poetic construction of privacy always exists in a structural relationship to the public world generally and the court specifically.

Although Spenser depicts home as an Irish pastoral landscape in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, he had the text published in London in 1595. The court, in essence, was intended to overhear Colin's narration of his travels to the shepherds at home in Ireland. Written in a genre through which courtiers conventionally imagined themselves, Spenser's text upholds the key myth of courtly pastoral: his poetry is inspired by the queen's Neoplatonic perfection and beauty. He uses pastoral conventions of retirement to register a critique of the court, not to withdraw from it entirely, when he warns the innocent shepherds across the sea that while Cynthia's beauty is divine, her courtiers have perverted the ceremonies of courtesy for the sake of satisfying their ambitions. Careful first to praise Cynthia, Colin condemns her courtiers for "fained forgerie" and "faire dissembling curtesie." They outwardly perform gentility while inwardly plotting to destroy one another. Colin echoes the Book VI proem narrator when he laments that the court values only things that look beautiful and has no concern for what is truly courteous (721-722). This inverted value system is exemplified in the deplorable status of learning

and, presumably, poetry. Colin suggests that courtiers wield their rhetorical expertise to garner empty titles. As a result

Arts of schoole have there small countenance,  
 Counted but toyes to busie ydle braines:  
 And there professours find small maintenance,  
 But to be instruments of others gaines. (703-706)

The courtly fashion for learning has made of it a mere “toye” for courtiers’ gain. The word “toye” resonates with the Elizabethan court’s characterization of poetry as an occupation for idle youth. The shepherds, although not learned themselves, understand that the misuse of learning indicates a flaw in the courtly system.

In Spenser’s pastoral world, learning and poetry are valued appropriately, and Colin stands at the apex of the social order by dint of his poetic vocation. He holds a kind of poetic shepherds’ court that rivals but mirrors the authority of Cynthia’s court. Ireland and domestic space become, as Montrose has claimed, “a locus of meaning and value that is defined in part by its otherness from London, the court, and the Queen.”<sup>112</sup> Irish pastoral domesticity and privacy, then, do not operate independently of the court, and pastoral retirement does not constitute a rejection of public life in opposition to epic; rather, pastoral exists as an alternative way of imagining the relationship between public life and poetic production. Through pastoral, Spenser registers his discontent with yet ultimately upholds courtly ideology. Book VI similarly uses pastoral conventions to critique the court through its own imaginary, with the fundamental difference that Book VI is a georgic modification of pastoral.

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<sup>112</sup> Montrose, “Spenser’s Domestic Domain,” 109.



On Mt. Acidale, the allegory of transcendent courtesy is embodied in Colin's piping to the graces, who are dancing in concentric circles. Three of the graces, in particular, represent the source of all human civility. They teach us how to be sociable and pleasant, how to address ourselves to inferiors and superiors, and how to conduct ourselves openly. They are also the source of patronage and courteous gifts. The vision on Acidale is a redaction of the dancing graces from the "April" eclogue of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, except that on Acidale, the woman dancing in the center of the graces is Colin's love, not Queen Elizabeth. As Colin describes the allegory to Calidore, his voice shades into the voice of the poet, who apologizes to Gloriana for replacing her and begs her pardon that he, who has spent so much poetic effort praising her, now turns to praise his own beloved.<sup>113</sup> As does the Colin of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, the Colin of Book VI exchanges political with domestic images. Spenser very specifically identifies the domestic image as a departure from the political image, a move that makes the meaning of the domestic image inextricable from the political one.

Mt. Acidale is a purely pastoral milieu, not one that is modulated by georgic. Acidale is the domain of the literary shepherd, a conventional contemplation of the poet in the midst of the creative act. Appropriately, Acidale exists in perpetual springtime as a pastoral golden world. It is a redaction of the garden of "learnings treasure" on Mount Parnassus with which the proem narrator introduced the figuration of transcendent courtesy. Colin's access to the muses on Mount Acidale, therefore, identifies him as a version of the persona of the Book VI proem narrator and serves to fuse the georgic vision of courtesy nurtured by the gods with the vatic vocation of the pastoral poet. Like

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<sup>113</sup> *FQ* VI.x.28.

the chivalric romance section, the pastoral section of Book VI can be productively read as unfolding rhetorically rather than merely allegorically. In this light, Colin is one facet of Spenser's narrative voice in the pastoral section. He is the embodiment of the narrator as he appears in his own story, but he functions as an extension of both the proem narrator and the narrator to cantos nine and ten, who, in contrast to both the chivalric romance narrator and Colin, inhabits a georgic world.

The georgic narrator introduces the generic shift from romance to pastoral at the opening of canto nine by invoking Virgil's closing lines of the Second Georgic. Virgil uses the metaphor of unyoking tired horses to signal his rest from the labor of poetry: "And now it's time t'unlose the smo-king necks of sweating horssees" (36). Spenser transforms this metaphor of poetic and agrarian exhaustion into one of rejuvenation by inaugurating canto nine with the picture of a husbandman who is revitalized by the pleasure of his labor:

Now turne againe my teme thou jolly Swayne,  
 Backe to the furrow which I lately left;  
 I lately left a furrow, one or twayne  
 Unplough'd, the which my coulter hath not cleft:  
 Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and frutefull eft. (VI.ix.1.1-5)<sup>114</sup>

The georgic imagery of the proem and of the opening lines to the pastoral episode of cantos nine and ten serves to situate the pastoral vatic vision of Acidale within a georgic framework. As the proem narrator relates, the gods were only able to plant the divine seeds of courtesy on earth with careful georgic labor. Similarly, while the transcendent vision of courtesy in Book VI may take place in a hermetic pastoral milieu

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<sup>114</sup> The Latin *versus* signifies both a furrow and a line of poetry, emphasizing the alignment between the two that Spenser forwards here. Herron, *Spenser's Irish Experience*, 62. Also Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (London: Henry Denham, 1578), n.p.

that correlates to the muses' garden, the earthly manifestation of courtesy in the pastoral episode takes a georgic form, as Spenser uses the Book VI shepherds to reinscribe *otium* within an ethos of georgic domestic labor.

The pastoral world is a more perfect manifestation of that divine cradle of courtesy than the chivalric romance world that Calidore leaves behind, even as the chivalric narrator celebrated the court as the epitome of courtesy in canto one. The pastoral world in fact fosters the society grounded in innate human pity that the members of the chivalric world struggle to erect. This fellowship provides Calidore with a respite from the Herculean labors of his quest. Opening canto nine by retracing Calidore's path, from the court, where we first met him in canto one, to the cities, to the towns, to the country, to private farms, and finally to open fields, the narrator effectively begins the story again in a new, pastoral vein and a new generic perspective. From the pastoral viewpoint, Calidore has endured "Great travell," "toyle," and "restless paines," but the pure fellowship of the shepherds and shepherdesses dancing around Pastorella invites him to rest. This fellowship, we find, arises from a social organization in which individuals are the lords over their own small plots of land. Spenser makes this condition of the pastoral fellowship evident by drawing a distinction between the conventional migratory shepherds, on the one hand, and Meliboe and his community, on the other.

When Calidore moves from the private farms to open fields, Spenser takes the opportunity to recite conventional generalizations about literary shepherds. The open fields are where

... shepherds singing to their flocks, that fed,  
 Layes of sweete love and youths delightfull heat:  
 .....  
 He followed fast, and chaced him so nie,

That to the folds, where sheepe at night doe seat,  
 And to the little cots, where shepherds lie  
 In winters wrathfull time. (VI.ix.4)

The shepherds of the open fields sing love lays and drive their flocks home at night, tropes that had become a standard Renaissance redaction of Tityrus and Meliboeus's retirement at the close of Virgil's Eclogue One. These generalized shepherds wander with their sheep during summer and retire to their cots, or cotes, only during winter.

These are not the shepherds of Meliboe's community, however. The narrator begins a separate strain of thought in between the close of this general description in stanza 4, and the beginning of stanza 5, where he tells us that Calidore "on a day ... chaunst to spy a sort of shepheard groomes" (VI.ix.5.1-2). Meliboe and his community also sing love lays and retire with their sheep at night, but they live more like those with "private farms" than they do in open fields like the generalized shepherd in Spenser's description. Meliboe has a small house and a comfortable domestic life with a wife who encourages him to rest from his day and a daughter who helps to prepare the evening meal. Family is a topic of the *Georgics* and not of the Renaissance pastoral tradition. In courtly pastoral, shepherds are often rejected by their mistresses, and unrequited love serves as the impetus for male poets to compose lyrics of complaint, as Colin sings about Rosaline in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. In the *Georgics*, however, marriage plays a crucial role in the husbandman's success. Virgil's Second Georgic describes the huswife as an important member of the household. Fleming's parenthetical comment on the poem indicates that he understood the virtue of the wife as the bedrock for the virtue of the household. With "Sweet babes about [her] duges," the huswife "And honest house keep

honestie [chast huswife, household chaste]” (35). Like the husbandman in Virgil’s Georgic, Meliboe’s happiness rests in his family life, over which his is the lord.

What Calidore envies most about Meliboe’s life is the “small plot of [his] dominion,” that is, Meliboe’s possession of a peaceful domestic space over which he exerts authority (VI.ix.284). “Plot” signifies “A fairly small piece of ground” (OED).<sup>115</sup> Calidore’s use of the word may metaphorically refer to Meliboe’s plot in life or in the world, its concrete meaning is that he envies Meliboe’s lordship over his own plot of land—the type of lordship over his land for which Spenser fought so vehemently in Ireland. Meliboe’s dominion over his plot invests his personal autonomy in his possession of a piece of land and a family, not his sheep, as would befit a conventional courtly pastoral character. Meliboe’s humble lordship prompts Calidore to

Now loath great Lordship and ambition;  
And wish th’heavens so much had graced mee,  
As graunt me live in like condition;  
Or that my fortunes might transposed bee  
From pitch of higher place, unto this low degree. (VI.ix.28).

The simplicity and purity traditionally associated with the fellowship of shepherds are epitomized here by a domestic fellowship. Pastoral retirement consists of focusing on one’s household, on humble as opposed to great lordship. Calidore longs for Meliboe’s domestic existence, and while Meliboe’s home wears the guise of pastoral literary conventions, it is in fact a georgic construction, and through georgic labor Calidore is able to procure a “small plot” of his own “dominion.”

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<sup>115</sup> The word “plot” also has another meaning that is relevant to Spenser’s georgic vision of a civilized Ireland: “A map, a plan, a scheme” (OED). Julia Reinhard Lupton has explored the Irish implications of this second meaning in “Mapping Mutability.”

Calidore trades his Herculean quest for a domestic one, as he dons shepherds' weeds in an attempt to woo Pastorella. Calidore means "no more to sew / His former quest, so full of toile and paine" because he has "Another quest, another game in vew / ... the guerdon of his love to gaine" (VI.x.2.2-4). While the epic quest was "toile and paine" with only the reward of "courtly favour, fed with light report," his quest for Pastorella promises "happy peace" and "perfect pleasures" (VI.x.2.8; VI.x.3.5-6). This is not to say that his quest for Pastorella does not entail labor; it is simply labor of a different kind. He must woo Pastorella through agricultural labor once it becomes clear that she has no interest in his "courteous guize" (VI.ix.35.6). So Calidore dresses in shepherd's clothes, trading his spear for a shepherd's hook. He goes to the fields with her every day; he protects her sheep from wolves; and he milks the sheep (VI.ix.37), and in the end, his winning of Pastorella is characterized as reaping a harvest (VI.ix.38.6).<sup>116</sup> Calidore's rest, then, is characterized not by an absence of labor, but by a distinctly different type of labor than his epic quest. His stay with Meliboe and Pastorella is described within the conventional terms of pastoral *otium*, but his *otium* is marked by menial agricultural labor in pursuit of domestic fulfillment and a plot of his own dominion.

As discussed above, *otium* defined as the lack of labor was the convention that enabled Elizabeth's courtiers to see themselves as the shepherds of pastoral convention. Spenser, however, reconfigures *otium* as domestic peace built on georgic labor, revising the courtly pastoral tradition to accommodate his vision for Ireland. Book VI represents the reinterpretation of pastoral through a georgic framework in another way as well, that is, in the operation of fortune. Conventional pastoral worlds are static. As on the summit

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<sup>116</sup> Low, *Georgic Revolution*, 57, makes the same observation that Calidore's winning of Pastorella is described as a harvest.

of Mt. Acidale, time may move forward through the seasons but outside historical forces do not intrude into the pastoral world. The shepherds' primary concerns are wolves and unrequited love. In Book VI, however, Meliboe mistakenly believes that he lives in a static pastoral world, only to be murdered by Brigands who intrude from the outside to ravage the community. Meliboe falls to fortune.

Judith Anderson has pointed out that Spenser's Meliboe is an invocation of both the exile in Virgil's First Eclogue and the improvident husband in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*.<sup>117</sup> Although, as Anderson notes, these literary precedents are mutually complicating, I will focus here on Chaucer's Melibee as a victim of fortune. Chaucer's Melibee's wife, Prudence, accuses him of allowing himself to become the victim of robbery and abuse because he has "nat defended thyselff suffisantly agayns hire assautes."<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Spenser's Meliboe does not acknowledge the existence of fortune as an external force in the world that affects men's lives.

In their first conversation, Calidore's reflections on Meliboe's home life spark a discussion about the nature of men's lives. The exchange demonstrates not only that Calidore and Meliboe are miscommunicating but also that Meliboe's definition of "fortune" does not account for the possibility of deterioration. First, Meliboe uses "fortune" to mean earthly reward, or wealth, as he tells Calidore that he went to court because "For further fortune then I would inquire" (VI.ix.24.5). Calidore, in turn, understands Meliboe's story as a narrative about the futility of ambition. He responds by

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<sup>117</sup> Judith H. Anderson, "Prudence and Her Silence: Spenser's Use Of Chaucer's *Melibee*," *ELH* 62.1 (1995) 29-46. My discussion of Meliboe is also indebted to Anderson's *Growth of a Personal Voice: "Piers Plowman" and the "Faerie Queene"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

<sup>118</sup> Chaucer, *Melibee's Tale*, quoted in Anderson, "Prudence and Her Silence," 30.

praising Meliboe's life in the conventional topos of the pastoral rejection of worldly cares:

... Now surely syre, I find,  
 That all this worlds gay shows, which we admire,  
 Be but vaine shadowes to this safe retyre  
 Of life, which ere in lowlinesse ye lead,  
 Fearelesse of foes, or fortunes wrackfull yre,  
 Which tosseth states, and under foot doth tread  
 The mightie ones, affrayd of every chaunges dread. (VI.ix.27.3-9)

There is a slippage between Meliboe's use of "fortune" and Calidore's use of the term. For Meliboe, fortune means wealth or individual advancement. For Calidore, fortune encompasses the possibility of movement backwards, either at the hands of specific enemies or at the whim of time. He articulates the conventional pastoral rejection of worldly cares as a rejection of the possibility of fortune when he, albeit mistakenly, celebrates the pastoral world as exempt from fortune. Meliboe, however, is even more simplistic in his thinking than Calidore, and he does not even register Calidore's reference to historical time. He, instead, understands Calidore's use of "fortune" to mean "happiness," or state of mind, and he responds by advising Calidore that each man determines his own level of happiness (VI.ix.29.9). Meliboe can understand fortune as promotion and as happiness, but he has no conception of the possibility of historical time to intrude into the pastoral world.

While Calidore and the shepherds themselves may believe they are in the golden world, they cannot escape the georgic cosmology in which all of Book VI is set. Unlike the other shepherds, Calidore is equipped for changes in fortune. He has the providence, for example, to hunt and to protect Pastorella from an attacking tiger. He may look like the rest of the shepherds, with his shepherd's hook, but he still has the skills necessary to



manage in a decaying world. Meliboe does not. He explains that worldly cares do not his “minds unmoved quiet grieve” (Vi.ix.22.6). Meliboe’s personification of pastoral *otium* makes him vulnerable to attack by the Brigands. Thus Spenser renders the pastoral *otium* so highly valued by the court as a danger—a lack of preparation for changes in historical circumstances—while the peaceful life at which pastoral *otium* ostensibly aims is envisioned as the product of domestic georgic labor. Spenser’s rewriting of the courtly pastoral form negates the convention through which the court expressed *sprezzatura*. In the place of *sprezzatura*, Book VI elevates the labor of self-cultivation and preparation for the ravages of time. In combination with the proem and the ambiguous chivalric romance narrator, the georgic narrator and the ideal of georgic *otium* in the pastoral section of Book VI have the effect of revising the conventions through which court poetry traditionally figured the qualifications for nobility. Spenser offers instead a vision of noble labor validated by the Virgilian generic progression and the vatic authority of the poet.

#### Georgic *Otium* in the Work of Spenser’s Contemporaries

By looking at the literary production of Spenser’s fellow English gentleman in Ireland, we can see that Spenser was not alone in articulating the contradiction between the values of his lived experience and the values of the Elizabethan court through a mixture of pastoral and georgic generic conventions. It appears that the redefinition of the court-centered value of *otium* through georgic language was a strategy that characterized the work of English colonials in Ireland.

Spenser's close friend, Lodowick Bryskett, a fellow clerk to Lord Grey and landholder in Ireland, also imagined himself as enjoying *otium* through labor and similarly expresses this ideal through a treatise on courtesy envisioned as the conflation of manners with the project of civilizing Ireland. Bryskett's courtesy dialogue *A Discourse of Civill Life* professes to have the same goal of instructing the gentleman in moral philosophy as the *Faerie Queene*. Bryskett hopes "to frame a gentleman fit for civill conversation, and to set him in the direct way that leadeth him to his civill felicitie."<sup>119</sup> Bryskett's text is a translation and compilation of three Italian dialogues on courtesy and moral philosophy: Giambattista Giraldi's "Tre dialoghi della vita civile" from *De gli hecatommithi*, Alessandro Piccolomini's *Della Institutione morale*, and Stefano Guazzo's *Civil Conversazione*. Bryskett published his text in 1606, long after the success of the *Faerie Queene*, but he was writing the text as early as 1582.<sup>120</sup> In his dialogue, Bryskett replaces the original Italian interlocutors with a company of his influential friends in Ireland, including Spenser, who declines to participate more actively in the conversation because he has "already undertaken a work tending to the same effect, which is in heroical verse, under the title of a *Faerie Queene*" (22).

Bryskett's text provides a useful point of comparison with Spenser's Book VI for several reasons. Most obviously, Spenser is a character in Bryskett's dialogue who comments upon the topic and themes of the *Faerie Queene*. More important to my argument, however, is the fact that Bryskett wrote a courtesy dialogue that he characterizes as a georgic retirement from public life. Bryskett makes the connection

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<sup>119</sup> Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge, CA: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 6.

<sup>120</sup> Bryskett chose to retire temporarily from public life when the position of secretary of state for Ireland was given to Geoffrey Fenton in 1582.

between courtesy and georgic labor explicit in a way that Spenser's *View*, because it is a political treatise and not a courtesy manual, does not. Like Spenser's description of the *Faerie Queene* as "wilde fruit, which salvage soyl hath bred" in his dedicatory sonnet to Ormond, Bryskett refers to Ireland as "this barbarous country" (5). Bryskett both naturalizes the English conquest of Ireland and reveals the inherent contradiction in his experience as an Englishman in Ireland when he speaks of his text, written in Ireland but published in England, as a "delicious fruit" that will furnish "this our English soile and clime" (6). Bryskett assures Lord Grey, to whom the discourse is dedicated, that by translating classical philosophy into English, "we may with the lesse labour and cost henceforth have them to delight and nourish our minds, since we shall not be constrained to fetch them from Athens or from Rome, but may find them growing at home with our selves, if our owne negligence and sloth cause us not to foreslow the culturation and manuring of the same" (6). Bryskett couches courtesy and moral development in the unabashedly material georgic language of manure, as he imagines his work as a product of English fruitful soil intermingled with Irish barbaric soil. He describes the value that his companions will "reape" from his intellectual labors (23). Manuring our minds and achieving "civil felicitie" requires self-discipline of the kind that Virgil links with agricultural labor in the *Georgics*. Bryskett explains that

this felicitie is found to be of two kinds, whereof one is called civill, and the other contemplative: you shall understand that the civill felicitie is nothing else than a perfect operation of the mind, proceeding of excellent virtue in a perfect life; and is atchieved by the temper of reason, ruling the disordinate affects stirred up in us by the unreasonable parts of the mind ... and guiding us by the meane of virtue to happy life. (32)

Bryskett emphasizes the importance of education for “manuring” the good seeds in human nature and for preventing the degeneration of individuals into savages:

For if mans care and industry be not applied to manure the earth diligently, and to weed out the il weeds that spring among the good seed which is sowne, they would so choke the same as it would be quite lost. And even so, if the seeds of virtue be not holpen with continuall culture, and care taken to pul up the vices which spring therewith, and whereof the seeds are naturally as well in our mind, as those of virtue, they wil over-grow and choke them, as the weeds of the garden over-grow and choke the good herbes planted or sowne therein. (89)

Without continual work, the man who was “framed by nature mild and gentle ... he becometh of humane and benign that he was, more fierce and cruell then the most wild and savage beast of the field” (34).

Bryskett constructs his meditation on the georgics of education as a product of retirement from public life into georgic domestic space. Like Spenser and Lord Grey, Bryskett was a member of the Leicester/Sidney faction. Even after Geoffrey Fenton received the promotion to secretary of state which Bryskett had sought, Bryskett continued to work under Lord Grey until Grey was recalled in 1582, when a disappointed and disheartened Bryskett went into semi-retirement. In 1583, Bryskett came out of retirement when Walsingham and Grey secured for him the post of clerk of the Council of Munster, for which Spenser served as his deputy. Bryskett reimagines the contexts of his respite from public life in the opening lines of his treatise, which is framed as an extended letter to Lord Grey. Bryskett imagines that, instead of being forced into retirement by Lord Grey’s recall to England, both he and Grey were victims of ill will at court. In his narrative, Bryskett says that he chose to retire in order to pursue the peace and quiet of his studies. He depicts himself as freed “from that troube and disquiet of mind, and enjoying ... the sweetnesse and contentment of [his] Muses” (4), rather than

disappointed in his ambitions. Bryskett proceeds to describe his retirement in the language of pastoral *otium* as his choice to reject worldly toil in favor of a humble yet carefree existence.

When he greets his companions, who have travelled from Dublin just to visit him, they accuse him of leading a melancholy existence, far from company, having shirked his public responsibility to the state and denying the state the benefit of his talent and expertise. This accusation initiates a dialogue among the company about the importance of individual, domestic happiness as compared with one's duty to serve the commonwealth. Bryskett contends that the choice between private peace and public life, which serves primarily to gratify ambition, is obvious. In public life, he laments "the uncertaintie and vaine issue for the most part of those hopes that commonly draw men on into ambitious heaving and shoving for dignities and places of credit and commoditie; from which to be freed, little do men know or believe what gaine it is; as of things that, when they obtaine them not, vexe and torment their minds, and when they obtaine them, do soone glut and weary them" (11). Any reasonable man, according to Bryskett would prefer "that contentedness which a well tempered and a moderate mind doth feele in private life, employed to the bettering and amending of the principall part, which distinguisheth him from brute beasts" (11).

Private life and the bettering of one's mind, as we have already seen, are associated with georgic labor and the "manuring of virtue." Bryskett externalizes these values when he imagines himself as a literal husbandman, tending to the "care of my little building and husbandry" (11). Although Bryskett did not receive a grant for his own lands in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, until 1593, he imagines himself writing to Lord

Grey during his voluntary retirement of 1582 from his “little cottage near Dublin.” His reference to his own land must evidence a later revision, in which Bryskett purposefully foregrounds his domestic georgic existence and characterizes it in the language of pastoral *otium*. Like Spenser, Bryskett effectively revises the conventional language through which the court envisioned itself to accommodate his lived conditions in Ireland.

Bryskett’s text demonstrates that Spenser’s georgic modification of the courtly traditions of chivalric romance and pastoral participates in a cultural response on the part of Englishmen to their lived conditions of Tudor Ireland. Spenser began the 1590 *Faerie Queene* by speaking to the court and by trumpeting his epic an expression of the court’s cultural achievements. By 1596, the character of Spenser’s relationship to the court had changed, and this change is exhibited by the generic amalgamation of Book VI. By using georgic to modulate the genres through which Elizabeth and her courtiers traditionally imagined their own nobility of birth and manners, Spenser attempts to make room in courtly discourses for the value of labor. The result, however, is anything but a seamless generic mixture. The poem contradicts and doubles back on itself, as the romance narrator undermines himself, the georgic ethos of labor jostles against the romance elevation of birth, and the pastoral episode literally brings the romance narrative to a temporary halt. These incongruities are, I argue, generic expressions of the contradictions of Spenser’s project to validate self-cultivation through poetic practices designed to exalt noble birth. Nevertheless, these incongruities contribute to the generic abundance of Book VI. Spenser’s text exemplifies that Elizabethan writers generated new imaginative

forms as they mediated received genres to negotiate the circumstances of their lived experiences.

In the following chapter, I turn to the social dynamics animating the rhetorical use of genre in a very different context. Whereas Spenser wrote for the top of the social scale, Thomas Nashe ostensibly for wrote for the bottom. Elizabethan prose fiction was more generically experimental than poetry because the market for prose narratives was newly developing. Audiences had fewer expectations and writers had fewer literary precedents to condition their modes of expression. Like Spenser, Nashe was concerned with constructing a literary persona that allied him within the elite, even as Nashe published inexpensive ephemera. Throughout the course of his career, Nashe displays a heightened awareness of his relationship with his audience, and he self-consciously uses genre to stake claims for his authority in the print marketplace.

## CHAPTER 2

### Thomas Nashe and *The Unfortunate Traveler*

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the response of late-Elizabethan playwrights and players to the expectations of a wide audience shaped performance practices and by extension dramatic genres. In this chapter, I turn to another commercial medium in which writers adapted humanist ideas about decorum and genre to situate themselves in relation to a diverse audience. From his participation in the Martin Marprelate Controversy to the 1599 Bishops Ban on his work,<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nashe's career exemplifies the conditions faced by the first generation of Elizabethan professional print writers. Like Robert Greene, Nashe was educated in the universities but spoke to a wide audience through imaginative discourses that were considered ambiguous within the humanist model. The print market heightened this ambiguity by commodifying discourse in a way that unmoored the printed word from traditional sites of cultural production and reception. No longer granted only by the church, the crown, and the universities, the authority to speak was opened to the dynamics of the protocapitalist market, as the market itself became the prime mover of the production and circulation of discourse.<sup>2</sup>

In Elizabethan poetic theory, genre was a rhetorical tool through which writers used the conventions of respected classical and contemporary models to give expression to the connection among style, subject matter, and audience. By separating the printed

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<sup>1</sup> The Martin Marprelate Controversy was a pamphlet war between a secret Puritan press and the Anglican bishops in the late 1580s. Nashe was hired by the bishops to defend the bishopry. In 1599, the church banned Nashe's books along with those of Nashe's nemesis, Gabriel Harvey, because the texts were judged too satirical and biting.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1997, 4.



word from sites of cultural authority, the print market increased the pressure on genre to negotiate among authorial self-presentation, audience, and subject matter, but it also shifted how genre mediated those relationships. The Martin Marprelate tracts brought the issue of decorum in popular print to the foreground and modeled a strategy for using style to navigate multiple audiences and ambiguous authority in popular print. For the Marprelate writers and for Nashe, style is more flexible and localized and therefore a more useful tool than genre for constructing a popular print persona. In this chapter, I analyze how Nashe makes use of the narrative techniques that he developed during his participation in the Marprelate Controversy in order to construct a marginalized authorial persona and a prodigal style. Analyzing the “Preface” to Greene’s *Menaphon*, the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, and *Pierce Penniless*, I examine how this persona and style conditioned Nashe’s aesthetic choices, and, ultimately, how they undermined generic unity in the *Unfortunate Traveler*.

### The Learned Man in Print

Inaugurating his literary career with a preface to Robert Greene’s prose romance, *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe opened his address to Elizabethan readers with the words “To the Gentlemen Students *of both Universities*.” Nashe’s first move, then, is one of imagining an audience. Whereas London readers in 1589 inhabited a wide range of social positions and statuses, from maids who had learned to read in petty schools to barristers at Westminster Hall, Nashe chooses a very specific population: university students. The qualifier “gentlemen” is ambiguous in this phrase. On the one hand, anyone who graduated with a masters of arts was considered a gentleman, the lowest order of English

nobility. A yeoman's son with a Cambridge degree was, technically, a gentleman. At the same time, it had become fashionable for the sons of noblemen to attend the universities as a sort of finishing school, where they earned the patina of learning without taking degrees.<sup>3</sup> So the term "gentleman students" covered a wide range of socio-economic types who shared space at the universities. To the yeoman's son, the term might speak of inclusion into an elevated social group. To the sons of peers, it might appear as a mild scoff by lumping them in with lower sorts. To the sons of middling men, like Nashe himself, the term might be significant because it limned a boundary between them and London's literate apprentices, merchants, and craftsmen.

Greene also addresses his readers as "gentlemen" in the epistle to *Menaphon*, according to the custom of earlier print authors like John Lyly and George Gascoigne. Examining Greene's use of the term reveals the particularity of Nashe's address to "gentlemen students." Using the term "gentleman" in a general, customary sense, Greene enters into a relationship of courteous exchange with his readers. He, like Lyly and Gascoigne, uses the *topos* of humility both to submit himself to his readers' judgment and to remind readers of their responsibility to approach his works graciously. When used generally "gentleman," while it carried resonances of status, could operate within a nexus of value grounded in traditional gift exchange. Nashe makes something different of the term "gentlemen" when, writing from London, he locates it specifically within the contexts of the universities. For Nashe, the term serves as an attempt to delimit audience by calling upon a particular social group.

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<sup>3</sup> On this point, see Mark H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in Transition, 1558-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959).

I have opened this chapter by looking at Nashe's self-introduction to the London literary scene because it brings into focus how attentive Nashe was to the issues of audience, authorship, and the value of discourse in print. These are the issues that animate his aesthetics throughout his career. In the preface, Nashe locates himself within but on the margins of educational institutions in an attempt to parlay the authority conferred by his education into a literary persona in London. At the same time, he locates himself both within and on the margins of the print market, fashioning himself not, as Lyly and Gascoigne did, as a reluctant participant in print but as an indignant critic intent on rectifying the misalignment of cultural and economic values. He does all of this, of course, within a commodity text.

Like other writers who published in print during the 1580s and 1590s, Nashe was involved in a larger commercial process at work in late-Elizabethan England. As a result of social and economic developments concentrated in the second half of the sixteenth century, England had become over the course of two generations what David Baker has called a "consuming society."<sup>4</sup> Population growth in conjunction with the availability of land after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 began a process of engrossment and enclosure that eventually resulted in an increased accumulation of wealth among certain sectors of the society—particularly landed classes and merchants—who spent their money on goods and services.<sup>5</sup> Anxious that English money was being spent on consumer goods from the Continent, the government encouraged Englishmen to

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<sup>4</sup> David Baker, *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 11. Baker is building directly on the work of Joan Thirsk in *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Baker, *On Demand*, 5-7.

take up practical schemes, or “projects,” for generating domestic production.<sup>6</sup> The implementation of these projects created more occupations, which in turn created more potential consumers, as the demand rose for luxury items. Despite structural limitations to economic expansion, most importantly a high mortality rate, inflation, and a decline in the purchasing power of real wages, the economy continued to expand,<sup>7</sup> and Londoners continued to buy luxury goods, like finished cloth, Continental rapiers, and household furniture. Elizabethans understood the emerging commodity market through a moral framework. Complaining against the decline of traditional hospitality, moralists bemoaned English gluttony, avarice, and prodigality. William Harrison admonished those who would “for desire of novelty” trade English goods and resources for “halfpenny cockhorses for children, dogs of wax or of cheese, twopenny favors, leaden swords, painted feathers, gewgaws for fools, dogtricks for dizzards, hawkshoods and suchlike trumpery.”<sup>8</sup> The problem according to Harrison is that the English were fickle and had an insatiable appetite for novelty.

Books were among the consumer goods increasingly available and in demand in late-Elizabethan London. The number of total titles produced increased significantly between 1558 and 1600, sustained in part by rising literacy rates.<sup>9</sup> When Nashe sold his

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<sup>6</sup> Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Wrihston, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain*, New Economic History of Britain (New Haven: Yale University Press), 160.

<sup>8</sup> William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 147; quoted in Baker, *On Demand*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> On the number of books produced, see Michelle O’Callaghan, “Publication: Print and Manuscript,” in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 81-94, esp. 85; also Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print, and Politics in Britain, 1590-1660* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 6. For a full consideration of the data available for determining the number of titles produced, see D.F. McKenzie, “Printing and Publishing 1557-1700: Constraints on the London Book Trades,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume IV: 1557-1695*, ed. John Barnard and D.F. McKenzie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 553-567, esp. 553. I address literacy rates below; see note 19.

writing on the market, he entered into a complex of commercial relationships in which the author played a minor role. The notion of intellectual property did not exist, and the driving force behind the print market was not the writer but the stationer who provided the capital for publication. Publishing books was a risky venture and a long-term investment during the 1590s. It required a large initial investment, and Peter Blayney surmises that for a published playbook, it might take six years for the stationer to recuperate his original investment and begin to make a profit.<sup>10</sup> There was, furthermore, no guarantee of success with original work, as the stationer relied on his ability to read market demand.<sup>11</sup> In order to finance their publishing ventures, stationers relied heavily on networks of credit, and publishing was often not the primary vocation of the stationer. It seems that in the late Elizabethan bookselling business, diversification was crucial. Some publishers belonged to livery companies other than the Stationers and ventured into publishing to subsidize their regular incomes. Almost all were booksellers for the wholesale market; some also sold for the retail market. Additionally, because the native bookselling and publishing business grew out of the earlier trade in Continental books, many bookseller-publishers continued to trade in imports.<sup>12</sup>

Pamphlets like Nashe's and Greene's books, playtexts, and Philip Stubbes' puritan polemic were considered speculative ventures. Native publishing was still establishing itself during the second half of the sixteenth century. The men who acquired significant wealth through publishing did so by importing Continental books or by acquiring patents or privileges to publish the staple commodities of the book trade:

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks," 412.

<sup>11</sup> James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Booktrade, 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Raven, *Business of Books*, ch. 1.

Bibles, prayerbooks, psalms, ABCs, catechisms, law books, and almanacs.<sup>13</sup> By 1557, when the Stationer's Company became incorporated, the government had already sold the lucrative patents and privileges to these genres to a small number of men who dominated the new company. Towards the middle of Elizabeth's reign, however, the growing number of smaller printers challenged the monopolies over lucrative genres.<sup>14</sup> A 1580 report generated by the conflict separates textual material into "pamflettes, trifles, and vaine smale toies" and "great bokes of value and good to the church."<sup>15</sup> "Pamphlet" indicated any octavo or quarto book that ran to less than 96 pages, or between one and 12 sheets of paper. As the report makes clear, however, book format, economic value, and cultural value were closely linked in the minds of Elizabethan readers, writers, and printers. Pamphlets were considered disposable objects of little value as compared to weighty scholarly and religious texts, which could run up to thousands of pages.<sup>16</sup> Despite pamphlets' marginal economic value, printers published increasing numbers of pamphlets during the 1580s and, especially, the 1590s. Proposing a model of commercial organization that accounts for this pamphlet activity, Alexandra Halasz argues that ephemeral print—pamphlets and ballads—became the mainstay of the smaller stationers

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<sup>13</sup> These kinds of books comprised 40 to 50% of the early modern book market. See Raven, *Business of Books*, 34; also John Barnard, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. iv: 1557-1695, 1-25.

<sup>14</sup> This dispute found expression in the career of John Wolfe, a member of the Fishmonger's Company who, in the early 1580s, pirated the *ABC with the little Catechism*, patented to John Day. Wolfe eventually became one of the most powerful printers in the company. Barnard, "Introduction," 12; also Halasz, *Marketplace of Print*, 30-33.

<sup>15</sup> Halasz, *Marketplace of Print*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

who did not own patents or privileges because these formats required little initial investment. Pamphlets thus helped to sustain less influential printers.<sup>17</sup>

The market for smaller formats, indeed, exploded toward the end of the sixteenth century because they were convenient for readers as well as printers.<sup>18</sup> The question of precisely who was reading pamphlets like Nashe's is an open one, and there is, in the end, no way to arrive at a definitive conclusion. There is a critical consensus that the middling and upper sorts constituted the primary market for books. This would include, in Sir Thomas Smith's lexicon of sorts and degrees, everyone from yeomen and above.<sup>19</sup> The question of whether the lower sorts would have had access to literacy and books continues to be debated. Nevertheless, this question is crucial to Nashe's work and so it warrants informed speculation. A number of studies have demonstrated that vernacular literacy rates rose in the second half of the sixteenth century as a result of Protestant reformist and humanist efforts.<sup>20</sup> Reading was taught before writing, usually in the petty schools. While level of education was most directly determined by socioeconomic status, the separation of higher and lower status children did not occur until late in the petty school curriculum or even after the petty school, when the children of lesser farmers and laborers went to work while the children of the upper sorts continued on to learn writing

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<sup>17</sup> Halasz, *Marketplace of Print*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Tessa Watt's *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Methuen, 1981) remain the classic studies about the expansion of the ephemeral print market.

<sup>19</sup> Smith divided England into four "sorts": "gentlemen, citizens, yeomen artificers, and laborers." Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. L Alston (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> On literacy rates and education, see David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Wheale, *Writing and Society*, ch. 1; Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, "Introduction: Discovering the Renaissance Reader," in *Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Sharpe and Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-40. Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), provides an extended discussion of kinds of literacy.

and Latin at the grammar schools.<sup>21</sup> While education for the lower sorts was more intermittent, depending on whether and when the family needed the child as an extra wage provider, David Cressy estimates that English petty school children in the towns were likely able to read by the age of seven or eight and in the country by nine or ten, although education in the country depended more on harvest and season. Not counting for level of competency, then, basic reading skills were, in Cressy's estimation, likely more widespread than conventional studies allow.<sup>22</sup> What is clear is that socioeconomic status was not in itself an impediment to basic reading.

Socioeconomic status was, however, an impediment to book purchase. The price of books was determined by page length, and pamphlets could run up to 96 pages long, but most ran between 50 and 60 pages. With the exception of *Menaphon*, for example, all of Greene's work was between 50 and 60 pages long, as were most playtexts, and the Martin Marprelate Tracts. As for Nashe's work, *Pierce Penniless*, the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, and *The Terrors of the Night* were around 50 pages; the *Unfortunate Traveler* and *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* were both around 96 pages; *Lenten Stuff* was 84 pages; and *Have with You to Saffron-Walden* was 168 pages. Based on the estimates of Peter Blayney and Francis Johnson, books sold at a wholesale price of approximately .45 d. per sheet at the end of the sixteenth century, which was marked up 50% for retail.<sup>23</sup> At 56 pages, or 7 sheets, Nashe's shorter work would have sold for about 3-4d wholesale, and 5-6d retail, while *The Unfortunate Traveler* would have sold for about 5.5d

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Charlton and Margaret Spufford, "Literacy, Society, and Education," in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15-54.

<sup>22</sup> Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks," 41; Francis R. Johnson, "Notes on English Retail Book Prices, 1550-1640," *The Library* 5.2 (September 1950): 83-112.



wholesale and 8d retail. These prices are, of course, only meaningful if we can compare them to wage earnings. If we assume, with James Raven, that the annual income for artisans tradesmen, and lesser clergy, or the middling sorts, was around £38-£69 per year, it appears that even Nashe's longer works were accessible to the lower of the middling sorts.

Assuming that wage laborers earned significantly less than this baseline income appears to place them squarely outside of Nashe's potential audience. However, David Baker has recently extended the implications of domestic production, an aspect of early modern life that is widely accepted among economic historians, to the realm of consumer behavior and book-buying. Baker argues that the historical insight that households were acting as purchasing units should be extended to book consumption. Households often took subsidiary vocations like peddling and the small-scale production of items like stockings in order to earn the money to buy luxury goods.<sup>24</sup> As a result, we can assume that individuals even below the status of the lower middling sorts also potentially had access to Nashe's books.

The writer actually had no influence over whom the stationer sold his books to. Once the writer sold the manuscript to the stationer, usually for around £2,<sup>25</sup> he relinquished all rights to the text. There simply was no conception of a writer's intellectual proprietorship. In fact, if it so happened that a manuscript fell into a stationer's hands without the writer's consent, as, for example, in the case of the first edition of *Pierce Penniless*, he owed the writer nothing. Nevertheless, since strategies for

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<sup>24</sup> Baker, *On Demand*, 16; on the trend of taking subsidiary vocations to boost household income, see also Jeremy Boulton, *Neighborhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 72.

<sup>25</sup> Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks," 395.

marketing a book often entailed printing an epistle from the author to the readers, the target readership, as distinct from the potential readership, was a construction in which writer and stationer frequently collaborated. In the case of pamphlets, the marketing interests of writer and stationer overlapped to some extent; there were, however, important differences in the goals of a writer and a stationer for a book. Stationers were merchants, craftsmen, and citizens operating in an economic mode; the more books they sold the more profit they made. The writer, however, operated within a more circumscribed socio-cultural mode, in which wide distribution could be both beneficial and detrimental to his social credit. Widespread distribution could mean fame and popularity, but it could also mean infamy and notoriety. More important to Nashe, the broad potential readership of the pamphlet meant an association with lower-status audiences, which was shameful within the values of the traditional status hierarchy.<sup>26</sup>

To orthodox Elizabethans, print continued to be a medium of ambiguous credit, which they articulated through tropes of exposure and ambition.<sup>27</sup> To publish one's work in print was to open oneself to attack and back-biting and to make oneself vulnerable to the opinion of all, those both higher and lower in the social organization. At the same time, publishing could be seen as a manifestation of overreaching pride. In addition to the material rewards it provided, patronage was so important because a patron could protect a writer's credit. Some early-modern writers claim in prefatory and dedicatory epistles that work was published without their knowledge or that they were implored by friends to

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<sup>26</sup> On the trope of shame in the marketplace, see Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 31; Jennifer Anderson and Elizabeth Sauer, "Current Trends in the History of Reading," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Anderson and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), **1-14, esp.5**.

publish. The debate around the so-called stigma of print offers insight into the strategies through which Elizabethans managed this problem of authority. Courtiers were reluctant to publish poetry but less reluctant to publish culturally authorized texts like the Bible and translations of classical and Continental authors. That is, they were willing to speak in print through previously authorized voices, and they equipped their texts with ample dedicatory and prefatory material. In essence, Elizabethan writers attempt to combat the questionable nature of print by discursively locating their texts within the domain of established cultural institutions and by constructing authority within each individual text. Authority needed to be negotiated anew in every print endeavor.

The problems of status and credit are exacerbated in the widely circulated, inexpensive pamphlet format. In his early work, particularly in the “Preface” to Greene’s *Menaphon* and the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, Nashe foregrounds learning as the very basis of his writerly persona, authorizing his discourse by associating himself with humanist education and an elite cultural site. His claims, however, are undercut both by the availability of his text on the open market and by a distrust of rhetoric within the humanist educational model. Before turning to the complex interplay between authorship, audience, and genre in Nashe’s texts, it is crucial to understand how his claims to discursive authority are informed by the rhetorical ideals as well as reading and writing practices of his humanist education.

For Erasmus and his English heirs, the goal of education was eloquence, “a rich *copia* of thoughts and words overflowing in a golden stream.”<sup>28</sup> Whether they attended a grammar school or were with private tutors, Elizabethan students were taught how to

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<sup>28</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas* (De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia), trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1963).

speak persuasively and eloquently. They learned by translating classical texts and noting authors' use of rhetorical tropes as they went.<sup>29</sup> Reading and rhetorical analysis were inextricable for Elizabethan schoolboys. At the same time, they were given exercises of composition, which included writing on a particular theme presented by their tutor or schoolmaster, drafting epistles to imaginary recipients on a range of topics, and participating in oral declamations on controversia, exercises in which they were asked to argue *pro* or *contra* for an imaginary scenario crafted from historical paradoxes in Roman law.<sup>30</sup> Arthur Kinney offers the following example, taken from Seneca Rhetor: "A girl who has been raped may choose either marriage to her ravisher without a dowry or his death. On a single night a man rapes two girls. One demands his death, the other marriage. Speeches for and against the man."<sup>31</sup>

The emphasis on rhetoric continued for those who proceeded to the universities.<sup>32</sup> Students at Cambridge, for example, focused exclusively on rhetoric during their first two years of study. In their third year, they added dialectic; in their fourth, moral philosophy; and beyond their fourth year, they pursued topics relevant to medicine, law, and divinity.<sup>33</sup> The university curriculum was structured around two primary activities: the attendance of lectures and examinations in the form of public disputations, of which each student participated in four each year. Required to attend disputations, which were held

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<sup>29</sup> Erasmus, Plautus, Terence, Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, Lucan, Lucian, Juvenal, Athonius's *Progymnasta*, Hesiod, Quintilian, Livy, and Cesarius were standard texts in the grammar-school curriculum. T. W. Baldwin's *William Shakespere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1944), 1: 417.

<sup>30</sup> Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 28-30.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 20.

<sup>32</sup> M.L. Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain, 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Cambridge University Statutes of 1570*, quoted in Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 456n19.

every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at Elizabethan Oxford,<sup>34</sup> students were evaluated on their ability to best one another in live debates. The public nature of the disputations ensured that status within the university community was inextricable from academic achievement. The graduate emerged from his humanist education not only with a flexible use of language, but with the training to craft arguments *in utramque partem* on a variety of formal and informal subjects.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, Plato's complaints against rhetoric were not lost on humanist thinkers. In the *Gorgias* and *The Sophist*, Plato denounces the art of argument by accusing sophists of leading individuals into false belief. According to Plato, sophists have knowledge about how to make people believe things but not about truth itself.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian,<sup>37</sup> early Tudor humanists defended against the potential for rhetoric to belie truth in three ways that are particularly relevant to Nashe: first, they framed rhetoric education as a tool to be used in the service of God and the commonwealth.<sup>38</sup> In the founding statutes of St. Paul's grammar school, for example, John Colet asserts that his intent is "by this school specially to increase the knowledge and worshipping of God and our Lord Christ Jesu, and the good Christian life and manners in the children."<sup>39</sup> In the *Governor* (1531), Thomas Elyot, who had served as Henry VIII's ambassador to the court of Charles V, implored the English nobility to take

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<sup>34</sup> *Registrum Universitatis Oxon* (Register of the University of Oxford), 2 vols., ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1887), 2.1: 22.

<sup>35</sup> Altman, *Tudor Play of Mind*, 31-32.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 233c-d.

<sup>37</sup> Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the initial interest in humanistic studies among Englishmen arose alongside stirrings for religious reform. When Richard Fox, bishop of Durham, founded Corpus Christi College at Oxford with a curriculum based in Latin and Greek, he aimed to enable his students to read the Bible and church fathers in their original languages. Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 41-85, esp. 56.

<sup>39</sup> "Statutes of St. Paul's School," in J. H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet* (London: George Bell, 1887), Appendix A, 271-284, esp. 279; also quoted in Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England*, 55.

up humanist studies in order to profit both themselves and the developing English nation.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Cardinal Wolsey, the archbishop of York under Henry, and Thomas Cromwell, lord chancellor after More's resignation in 1552, actively patronized young scholars with the understanding that they would use their skills in the diplomatic services of the crown.

Second, humanist thinkers defended against the misuse of rhetoric by limiting it to the discursive field delineated by canonical classical authors. In the *De Copia*, Erasmus writes that "Elegance consists in partly in words used by suitable authors, partly in using the right word, and partly in using it in the right expression."<sup>41</sup> Erasmus' students are to draw their language from the works of "good" Latin authors. Similarly, John Colet stipulates that at St. Paul's, students will study "good authors such as have the very Roman eloquence joined with wisdom, especially Christian authors that wrote their wisdom with clear and chaste Latin."<sup>42</sup> By making pristine classical Latin the hallmark of education, humanist educators ensured that their students drew their language and ideas from approved authors. Thomas Wilson writes, "we must dedicate our myndes wholly, to folowe the most wise and learned menne, and seke to fashion, aswell their speech and gensturyng, as their wit or endityng."<sup>43</sup> Along similar lines, since *imitatio* constituted the humanist learning paradigm, students adapted classical and Christian examples for their own use. Behavior and speech were grounded in authorized models.

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governour* (1531) (Menston, Eng.: Scholar Press Limited, 1970), 16v-20r, esp. 19r.

<sup>41</sup> Erasmus, *De Copia*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> "Statutes of St. Paul's School," 279.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York: Garland, 1982), 30.

Third, humanism disarmed Plato's misgivings by linking the appropriate use of rhetoric to an individual's moral character through the concept of decorum. Eloquence is not only a manner of speaking or the vehicle of learned exchange, it is also the verbal expression of one's character. "Just as the fine appearance and dignity of the body are either set off to advantage or disfigured by dress and habit," he writes, "just so thought is by words" (18). In an age in which sumptuary laws attempted to regulate the wearing of certain fabrics and styles according to social status, clothing signifies an individual's position in the world, but more important, it demonstrates an individual's understanding of the rules of social propriety and thus speaks to his or her moral constitution. The orator's judgment in choosing his words and matter to suit the occasion demonstrate his understanding of "aptness," in Thomas Wilson's words. He writes, "An orators profession, is to speake onely, of all suche matters as maie largely be expounded for mannes behove, and maie with much grace be set out, for all men to here them."<sup>44</sup>

By the time Nashe was studying at Cambridge and writing in London, the Elizabethan heirs to the early humanists had naturalized their defenses of rhetoric; but the value of eloquence in the form of poetry, and original vernacular imaginative work more generally, was still hotly debated. The problem revolved around the question of whether original vernacular poetry could be considered profitable. Scholars have often followed J.W. Saunders in asserting that a "stigma of print" prevented court poets from printing their work. Steven May, however, has convincingly countered that Tudor poets did not experience a stigma of print, *per se*, but a stigma of poetry. Tudor courtiers and intellectuals did not demur from publishing religious texts, translations of canonical

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<sup>44</sup> Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 22.

classical authors like Virgil and even Ovid, and works of philosophy.<sup>45</sup> The fact that Tudor courtiers and scholars published translations of classical poetry but not their own reiterates a fact about Tudor court poetry that has been amply explored by scholars: court poetry was occasional, and it was widely considered trivial. Courtly writers were amateurs who disowned their imaginative works by claiming them to be the product of youthful fancy and prodigality.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, when it was transmitted in manuscript, poetic works were often collated with the poems of other courtly writers, a practice that grounded verse in its elite social context. Poetry was questionable, but poetry taken out of context was even more so. In print, the context is entirely absent—it is, in fact, recreated by the reader—and the text moves beyond the circle for which it was originally intended, which for members of the court included a close-knit and often delicately navigated network of inferiors, superiors, and peers.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of poetry and prose, which was considered simply an unmetred variation of poetry,<sup>48</sup> print necessitated that writers defend their positions and authority to speak, which they did most often by asserting the profitability of their texts and adopting Horace's dictum that be poetry be "aut prodesse ... aut delectare" as their motto. The poet needed to delight so that he could instruct, just as the rhetorician needed to entertain

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<sup>45</sup> J. W. Saunders, "The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry," *Essays in Criticism* 1.2 (January 1, 1951): 139-64; and Steven May, "Tudor Aristocrats and the 'Stigma of Print,'" *Renaissance Papers* (1980): 11-18.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). I return to the prodigal model of authorship below.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Marotti notes that "verse was embedded in specific social situations, and writers and audiences responded to it both within the immediate context and in terms of shared sociocultural assumptions... when social verse passed in the system of manuscript transmission beyond its original environments of production and reception, it was usually recoded and recontextualized." Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> In the *Defense of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney lists Heliodorus and Xenophon among excellent poets, commenting "and yet both these wrote in prose: which I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet." *The Defense of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 212-251, esp. 218.



in order to hold his audience's attention.<sup>49</sup> Within this cultural and intellectual milieu, the print medium appears to intensify the necessity for the writer to use decorum and genre to demonstrate the propriety of their rhetoric. The wide availability of print, however, posed specific problems for this understanding of decorum. According to humanist ideals, style should be determined by the nature of the relationship between a speaker and his audience. In print, however, that relationship was based on an economic exchange and the writer was never sure precisely whom he was speaking to. Instead of a means of finding the appropriate structure for addressing a specific occasion, genre became a tool for the writer to locate himself in relation to the realm of authorized discourse and simultaneously a way to carve out a community of readers out of the potentially very broad reading public. Poetry that advertised its use of Latin and its indebtedness to classical authors, for example, had the effect of limiting readership to the well-educated and demonstrating the writer's credentials. Similarly, texts with claims to cultural authority often included marginalia that reproduced the format of medieval manuscripts and reflected the humanist practice of mining texts for exempla. There were, however, few classical models for imaginative prose.<sup>50</sup> Sidney mentions only Heliodorus's *Aethiopian History* in the *Defense of Poetry*.

Writing prose pamphlets, Nashe works in a medium and presentational mode in their first stages of coming into being. He begins his career by adopting the traditional humanist persona of the learned man in print, and the pamphlet medium requires him to delimit his audience in ways that support this self-conception. Especially in the *Anatomy*

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<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> I use the term "imaginative" to denote texts that advertise their fictionality, in contrast to history, news, and social criticism.

*of Absurdity*, where he dedicates his catalogue of popular print to Lord Montjoy, Charles Blunt, the text exhibits the strains of Nashe's attempt to mediate among multiple audiences. His elite authorial persona is always attenuated by the pamphlet form and his need to circumscribe his audience. After his participation in the Martin Marprelate Controversy, Nashe takes a vastly different approach. While he retains a vexed relationship with both his desire for patronage and his wide readership, he resigns himself to the commercial market, an attitude that necessitates a marginalized authorial persona in the form of Pierce Penniless. This persona finds expression in an exaggerated, excessive style in which Nashe adopts Martin's narrative techniques. With the *Unfortunate Traveler*, Nashe attempts to channel that style into a temporally ordered, closed narrative, and the result is the generic unruliness of his "outlandish chronicle." The generic form of the *Unfortunate Traveler*, then, arises from Nashe's efforts to negotiate among multiple audiences that required different modes of authorship in the precarious format of the printed pamphlet.

#### The "Preface" and the *Anatomy of Absurdity*

In the 1570s and 1580s, native imaginative prose was a popular but controversial form. George Gascoigne had printed *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, a story about an English gentleman who has an affair and is ultimately rejected by a married woman. Gascoigne came under attack, however, for the story's licentiousness and when he printed it again in 1575, he had given the characters Italian names, claimed to be translating from an Italian novella, and added an extended moralized ending. In 1578,

John Lyly wrote the hugely popular *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, a romance which also drew on novella conventions and ended with the rejection of the protagonist by a fickle lover. Unlike the first version of Master F.J., however, *Euphues* was acceptable because it was set in Athens and it related the story of a prodigal youth who learns wisdom in the end. Lyly went on to publish a sequel, *Euphues and His England* in 1580. Whereas Gascoigne and Lyly were both courtly amateurs,<sup>51</sup> Robert Greene began his commercial career in the 1580s by writing romances based on Lyly's character. Gascoigne, Lyly, and Greene were the primary models for native imaginative prose until Sidney produced the *Arcadia*. Drawing on Heliodorus's *Aethiopian History*, Sidney merges the genres of pastoral and Greek romance.<sup>52</sup> The *Arcadia* was circulated in manuscript until 1590, when Fulke Greville published a copy of the *New Arcadia*. Sidney was, of course, a national hero by this time, and although the text may not have been widely read, it was widely known. A year before the *Arcadia* was printed, Greene drew on Lyly and Sidney to produce *Menaphon*, a text that imagines Euphues in Arcadia, in which Nashe makes his first appearance.<sup>53</sup>

Running 96 quarto pages long, *Menaphon* was a substantial pamphlet whose price likely excluded those in the lower socioeconomic sectors of the reading public. In

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<sup>51</sup> Although I make use of Helgerson's terminology for literary careers, unlike Helgerson I use the terms "amateur," "professional," and "laureate" as conceptual categories while acknowledging that, historically, these forms of authorship could and did overlap.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Mentz argues that while chivalric romance and Italian novelle were both dubious genres, Greek romance was acceptable to orthodox humanists because Melanchthon had contributed to a Latin translation of Heliodorus in 1556. Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2006), 59.

<sup>53</sup> It is not entirely clear how Greene became familiar with the *Arcadia*. H.R. Woudhuysen surmises that Thomas Lodge was the only possible link between Greene and Sidney, but there is little evidence that Lodge and Sidney were familiar. Woudhuysen suggests that Greene demonstrates a working familiarity with the text, while Katherine Wilson argues, instead, that Greene merely had superficial knowledge of the *Arcadia*'s existence. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 300-303; Katherine Wilson, *Fictions of Authorship in Late Elizabethan Narratives: Euphues in Arcadia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 5.

addition to Nashe's "Preface," it included a dedicatory epistle to Lady Hale and two poems in praise of the author, and it featured multiple woodcuts. These typographical and textual apparatuses suggest that Greene's publisher, Sampson Clarke, intended for *Menaphon* to appear as a more rather than less authoritative pamphlet and to cater to a higher status audience familiar with Lyly's and Sidney's work. Nashe's self-construction as a learned social commentator aligns with the kinds of claims to status and audience that *Menaphon* was making. As I noted earlier, by directing the Preface to the "gentleman students at both universities" he creates a geographically and socially homogeneous audience by eliding status distinctions between the sons of country gentry, yeomen, nobility, and urban professionals, all of whom attended the universities. Both the "Preface" and the *Anatomy of Absurdity* labor to make space in traditional humanist modes of authorship for a learned man in print. In order to accomplish this, however, Nashe has to demarcate a learned audience from the broad, potential pamphlet-buying population.

In *Romance for Sale*, Steve Mentz argues that both Greene and Nashe marketed their books to what Mentz calls a "middlebrow readership," a term he uses "to signal the mediated positions of readers and writers of prose fiction on the margins of elite culture. These writers define their audiences in terms that are neither purely elite nor popular... Elizabethan prose romance thus initiates middlebrow narrative in a particular sense: while these works were not purely elite, they signaled their cultural affiliations more with elite culture (in this case, classical humanism) than with what later became known as folk culture... They define their readerships in hybrid terms" (18). Mentz furthermore asserts that these writers "self-consciously imagine themselves in a middlebrow position:

indebted to but slightly outside of elite culture” and that they define themselves through professional rivalries with one another, rather than appealing to distinctions of gender and status (19). While Mentz acutely identifies the necessity of writers like Greene and Nashe to imagine their audiences in new ways, I would argue that they did so through an active and often vexed process of negotiating the existing values of various kinds of culture, elite and non-elite alike. The implication that the “middlebrow reader” was a stable identity or that these authors pursued the creation of a readership in ways that are identical to one another calls for complication. Lori Humphrey Newcomb has analyzed similarities between Greene’s self-presentation and that of Sidney, but the fact that they were writing under very different circumstances and for different modes of dissemination also needs to be taken into consideration.<sup>54</sup> How these authors determined themselves “outside of but indebted to elite culture” depended on how they drew upon the resources of elite culture to which they had access.

Donning the authorial robes of humanist learning, Nashe takes the occasion of Greene’s *Menaphon* to meditate on the state of poetry in English society and to produce in miniature a catalogue of worthy poets that imitates the work of more influential thinkers like Ascham and Sidney, who were themselves following the conventions of Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian. Nashe’s commentary is driven by the complaint that incompetent writers have surfeited the commercial market with bad rhetoric and, as a result, have cheapened eloquence and led to the cultural devaluation of learning. Throughout, he distinguishes between art as a manual craft and art as aesthetic mastery and a branch of learning, calling upon the fundamental distinction between the gentility

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<sup>54</sup> Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), ch. 1.

and the commonality—the ability to work without manual labor<sup>55</sup>—to dismiss incompetent rhetoricians as mere mechanicals. Appropriating the authority of the orthodox status hierarchy and the moral complaint against commercial enterprise, Nashe casts himself as a defender of traditional values in print. Greene’s pastoral romance also affords Nashe the opportunity to expound upon the importance of using the moderate style, as opposed to the high style, in print. His meditations on audience and authorship find expression in his recommendations for decorous style.

Nashe’s primary targets are tragic playwrights, clerks, and plodding pamphlet writers. Tragedians, he writes, have “no more learning in their scull, than will serve to take up a commoditie” (10), that is, they are usurers. In selling “over-wrought” eloquence, they have so debased learning that every “mechanicall mate ... abhorres the English he was borne too, and plucks with a solemne periphrasis, his *ut vales* from the inkhorn” (9). The “mechanical mates” are not only the laborers and apprentices in the audience but the players, most of whom were artificers. By making high eloquence a public commodity, tragedians have made it possible for lower status men to feign learning, thereby encroaching on the pedigree on which Nashe establishes his authority in print.<sup>56</sup> Nashe concludes that the tragedians are so incompetent that they must be serving men. Equally offensive, they are Noverints, or law clerks, who think that because they know a little Latin they can aspire to great art. They impersonate learning, having read enough Seneca to imitate him poorly on the stage but possessing no real understanding or wisdom. By dismissing playwrights, serving men, noverints, and artificers, Nashe not

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Halasz has written extensively on this in *The Marketplace of Print*; see chapter 3, “The Patrimony of Learning.”

only makes a point about the commercial use of rhetoric, he also reinforces the distinctions between the elite audience he imagines for himself and the potential pamphlet audience. Service was often a transitional phase for young Elizabethans who would later establish their own households;<sup>57</sup> in fact, it has been estimated that up to 60% of the Elizabethan population worked as servants or apprentices between the ages of 15 and 24. Similarly, apprentices in the households of citizen artificers and merchants might very well have access to Nashe's pamphlet. Nashe targets an audience that conceivably was reading his text but excludes them from his imagined audience.

Attacking the insufficiently educated, Nashe proceeds to attack the overeducated, as he lingers over the ineptitude of pedantic rhetoricians who so lack wit that they can only use their learning mechanically. These men slavishly imitate Continental and classical authors and therefore do nothing to advance the state of English poetry. Not "able in anie English vaine to be eloquent of their owne," these "apish" orators "must borrow invention of Ariosto and Countrey men, take up choise words by exchange in Tullies Tusculane, and the Latine Historiographers Store-houses; similitudes, nay whole sheets and tractats verbatim from the plenty of Plutarch and Plinie" (11-12). Nashe cites a textbook used in the upper forms of Elizabethan grammar schools—Cicero's *Tusculan Disuptations*—in order to demonstrate the simplicity of this method of composition.

Between the learned and the overlearned lies Robert Greene, onto whom Nashe projects his ideal of the print author. Praising Greene offers Nashe the opportunity to defend the importance of the writer's wit. He writes:

Let other men . . . praise the mountaine that seaven years brings forth a mouse, or the Italionate pen, that . . . affordeth the presse a pamphlet or

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<sup>57</sup> Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, 33.

two in an age, and then in disguised arraie, vaunts Ovids and Plutarchs plumes as their owne; but give me the man, whose extemporal vaine in anie humor, will excelle our greatest Art-masters deliberate thoughts; whose invention quicker than his eye, will challenge the proudest Rethoritian, to the contention of like perfection with like expedition” (11).

This passage is worth quoting at length because it constitutes the logic upon which Nashe will validate his own poetics throughout his later career. One of the five parts of classical rhetoric, *inventio* was, in Wilson’s terms, the “searching out of thinges true, or thinges likely, the whiche maie reasonably sette furth a matter, and make it appere probable.”<sup>58</sup> Invention was the process by which the rhetorician mined his stockpile of classical exempla, fables, moral *sententiae*, and syllogisms to discover arguments appropriate to one’s subject matter and audience. Agricola, whose *De Inventione Dialectica* was a standard university textbook, specified a list of twenty possible topics from which to begin the logical investigation into the qualities of things and ideas. For Agricola, the topics were a means of dialectical investigation into the nature of things, and thus the area in which logic and rhetoric overlapped.<sup>59</sup> Invention was closely linked to wit, which could mean general “mental acumen,” or, more specifically, ingenuity, judgment, and wisdom.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 31. The other four parts of rhetoric are disposition, elocution, memory, and utterance.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9, 67; William G. Crane, *Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 50. Ramism challenged the inclusion of invention and disposition under the rubric of rhetoric and argued, instead, that they properly belonged to the field of logic. Nashe was an avid Aristotelian, while his adversary, Gabriel Harvey, was a devoted Ramist. The classic study on Ramism remains Walter Ong, *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

<sup>60</sup> “Wit” had a range of meanings during the sixteenth century. It could denote the “five wits,” imagination, fantasy, common sense, judgment, and memory, and it could signify a tendency for humor. Murray W. Bundy, “Invention and Imagination in the Renaissance,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 29.4 (Oct., 1930): 535-545, esp. 541; Crane, *Wit and Rhetoric*, 9-10.



In praising Greene for his “quick invention,” Nashe countermands conventional humanist wisdom as exemplified by Roger Ascham, who vehemently asserts that a “hard wit” is preferable to a “quick wit.” Among a long list of faults, he charges light-witted men with a tendency to prodigality, mercurial changes of emotion, the inability to remain loyal to friends, and the incapacity to keep secrets. Ascham claims, “Such wittes delite themselves in pleasant studies, and never passe farre forward in hie and hard sciences. And therefore the quickest wittes commonlie may prove the best Poetes, but not the wisest Orators: readie of tonge to speake boldlie, not deepe of judgment.”<sup>61</sup> As William Crane has noted, John Lyly’s *Euphues* is a fictional amplification of the danger of quick wits that Ascham describes. Although he elsewhere lauds Ascham, here Nashe counters both Ascham and Lyly by making “quick invention” not only a measure of mental dexterity but the source of the poet’s superiority to the rhetorician. Nashe imagines Greene challenging “the proudest rhetorician” in a live debate, and he later uses the term “quick” again to describe the kind of language that was acceptable in the public disputations, or *controversiae*, which served as exams for university students. “I will not denie,” he writes, “but in scholler-like matters of controversie, a quicker stile may passe as comendable; and that a quippe to an asse is as good as goad to an oxe” (14). Arthur Kinney provides a telling description of the kind of verbal sparring that disputations entailed: “the opponent follows a plotted line of syllogisms designed to trap the answerer into a position where he may be logically forced, step by step, into admitting the exact opposite of his thesis.”<sup>62</sup> For Nashe, the pamphlet form is similar to the live performance

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<sup>61</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London: John Day, 1570), 5v.

<sup>62</sup> Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 22; also Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, 58-65.

of formal battle of wits in which Greene's extemporal invention wins him recognition and praise.

The valuation of wit serves yet another purpose for Nashe: it distinguishes the work of the poet in print from the labor of the "mechanical mate" whom he disdains. Nashe cannot avoid the fact that both he and Greene are producing for the market, essentially in a kind of service to stationers and readers. Both Nashe and Greene could claim the status of gentlemen because they had graduated from Cambridge, even though Nashe had only taken a bachelor's degree while Greene received master's degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford. Nevertheless, both labored for their living, a point that Nashe emphasizes when he calls Greene's work his "day labor." Thus, while both Nashe and Greene could claim the social status of the upper sorts in some ways, in other ways they were similar in status to the servingmen who had to work for their keep. The question of labor is a problem for Nashe. On the one hand, if he belittles poetic labor, he threatens both the cultural and transcendent value of poetry on which his claims to authority in print rest as well as his own position in the marketplace. On the other, commending labor threatens to eradicate the distinctions between Greene and "servingmen" that Nashe takes pains to establish. Nashe's claim that Greene's labor consists in his extemporal invention aligns Greene with the ideal courtier, whose apparently spontaneous and natural performances of *sprezzatura* in fact draw upon his long hours of studying the courtly and liberal arts. Greene is thus imagined as a scholarly equivalent of the courtier, engaged in a battle of wits for a direct audience of learned men, with the lesser sorts listening attentively from the margins.

Having advertised for the *Anatomy of Absurdity* at the end of the “Preface,” Nashe no doubt hoped to use Greene’s name to garner an audience for his first autonomous pamphlet. In the *Anatomy*, he perpetuates the learned, socially conservative persona that he established in the “Preface.” Nashe’s own pamphlet ran 46 quarto pages long, only half the length of *Menaphon*. It would have cost only about 4d and would, therefore, have been available to a lower socioeconomic potential readership. Nashe’s claim to learned authorship is, thus, more attenuated by the format of the *Anatomy of Absurdity* than it was by the format of Greene’s *Menaphon*. Nevertheless, he employs the same strategies of fashioning himself as a learned writer in print by delimiting his imagined audience, most obviously through his dedication to Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, but also through his advice to university students. With the exception of its meditation on the literary market, the pamphlet’s contents are entirely conventional. It opens with an accusation against writers who surfeit the market with incompetent rhetoric, moves on to attack specific kinds of pamphlets, proceeds to defend poetry, laments the decay of learning, castigates the court for its overabundant pride, and concludes with instructions for university students. From his praise of Blount as the ideal learned courtier through his admonition that students listen more than they speak, Nashe dresses himself in the authority of the courtly and learned traditions by echoing the work of Cicero, Erasmus, Sidney, Ascham, and Elyot. His treatment of contemporary models of authorship, however, is original. Independent work required Nashe to situate himself and his imagined audience within the literary milieu, which he does by simultaneously adopting and critiquing tropes of prodigal authorship and by providing a scathing commentary on the ephemera market.

When Nashe was writing, courtly amateurs had created a model of prose authorship that depended on the opposition of prodigality and profitability. Responding to the humanist dictate to use one's learning to profit the commonwealth, Gascoigne, Lyly, and Sidney had managed the "stigma of poetry" by imagining their poetry and prose as a rebellion against duty. For them, imaginative writing was a brief foray into youthful romance that they renounced at the end of their works, which ended with the protagonists' repentance for their frivolity.<sup>63</sup> These writers legitimated poetry by couching it as a rhetorical exercise through which they demonstrated their eloquence and thereby advertised themselves for positions of public responsibility. Greene was different from these men in that he was of lower birth, and he made his living by writing. As I have already demonstrated, however, he capitalized on the popularity of Lyly and Sidney, writing romances and following the pattern of repentance insofar as it suited him.<sup>64</sup> In their sonnets and their prose romances, these writers chose genres concerned with the influence of women on male emotions and actions, decisions that were no doubt influenced by the fact that they lived under a female monarch. They also often dedicated their books to women, a strategy through which they reinforced the frivolity of their poetic endeavors. Sidney claims to write the *Arcadia* for the pleasure of his sister and her ladies; Lyly includes in *Euphues and His England* a dedicatory letter to the "ladies and gentlewomen of England"; and Greene dedicates *Philomela* to Bridget Ratcliffe, Lady Fitzwaters. The association between romance and a female audience became

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Johnson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1983); and Helgerson, *Elizabethan Prodigals*, 5-6. Helgerson identifies three general phases of the poetic career of the amateur, "admonitory works, romances of successful love, and finally the works of disillusionment: repentance pamphlets, satires, and 'dark' romances" (*Elizabethan Prodigals*, 14).

<sup>64</sup> Greene repeatedly claimed repentance when it was a popular trend while simultaneously publishing texts that undermined those claims, like his rogue pamphlets of the early 1590s.

commonplace, even though critics have found little historical evidence that women were in fact the genre's primary readership.<sup>65</sup> Like prodigality, the invocation of female readership was a trope of authorship, as these writers used gender ideology in order to distance themselves from claims to serious poetic work.<sup>66</sup> Simultaneously, advertising female readership served to titillate the potential male reader by inviting him into a feminine domain.<sup>67</sup>

Nashe invokes the connections among prodigality, romance, and women in the *Anatomy of Absurdity* in order to reject romance and female influence. In his epistle to Mountjoy, he begins by attributing his embryonic text to the "circumstance of [his] infancy."<sup>68</sup> He adapts this trope, however, according to his audience. For Charles Blount, he is young and inexperienced; for the broader reading public, he is casting aside serious matters to castigate them in order to reform them. In the opening of the body of the text, he claims that he has "laide aside [his] graver studies for a season" and taken up this "trifling subject" in his vacation (9). Although he continues to profess humility throughout the text, his strident tone and the very nature of the project, to "take a view of sundry mens vanitie, a survey of their follie, a briefe of their barbarism, to runne through Authors of the absurder sort, assembled in the Stacioners shop, sucking and selecting out of these upstart antiquaries, somewhat of their unsavory duncerie" undermine any claim to inferiority. For Blount, he submits to conventions of social status; for the broad readership, he embodies the figure of the superior satirist.

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<sup>65</sup> Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>67</sup> Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction*, 11; Mentz, *Romance for Sale*, 125.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Anatomy of Absurdity*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1910), 1: 1-49, esp. 5.

Whereas prodigality for the courtly amateurs finds expression in love poetry, for Nashe it manifests itself in the complete rejection of romance and women. In both the dedicatory epistle and the body of the text, Nashe lambasts women and the writers who cater to them.<sup>69</sup> He begins by confiding in Lord Mountjoy that he wrote the *Anatomy of Absurdity* not out of ambition but out of melancholy, “whose obscured cause . . . hath compelled my wit to wander abroad unregarded in this satyricall disguise.” He then obliquely attributes his “pensiveness” to unrequited love. His prodigality takes the form of “armed” not amorous phrases. Later, in the text proper, after he has announced his intention to anatomize the follies on display at the bookstall, he begins with romance, critiquing first the spinning of romantic tales without any moral:

Were it that any Morall of greater moment, might be fished out of their fabulous follie, leaving theyr words, we would cleave to their meaning, premitting their painted shewe, we woulde pry into their propounded sence, but when as lust is the tractate of so many leavs, and love passions the lavish dispence of so much paper, I must needs sende such idle wits to shrift at the vicar of St. Fooles. (10)

He singles out but does not limit his displeasure to chivalric romance. Writers, he says, produce romances merely to ingratiate themselves with women. Imagining himself in a conversation in which Greene, whom he calls “the Homer of Women,” defends female virtue, Nashe enlists an array of ancient philosophers to defend his claim that women are “without exception, evill and ungratious” (12). Nashe thus rejects romance as a properly masculinist genre and eliminates feminine influence from his poetic process. He also declares his generic independence from Greene, on whose coattails he had first announced himself to the London literary market.

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<sup>69</sup> In fact, misogyny was one of the text’s selling points; the title advertises “a breefe confutation of the slender imputed praises to feminine perfection.”

This claim is not merely a rejection of the tropes and genres of amateur authorship; it is also a commentary on audience. While female readership bespoke the prodigality of their work for the amateur authors, when Greene employed the same tropes on the market, it bespoke the wide availability of his work to lower-status audiences. Composed within the context of the court, although later published for a broader audience, the appeals of Lyly, Gascoigne, and Sidney to female readership located their texts with an elite system of gender relationships, conventions of courtiership, and uses of poetry. The women to whom they appealed were generally idealized. Greene's appeal to female readership was never circumscribed by the court; it was always meant to shape his work within the marketplace, where his books became associated with a lower-status female readership. In the 1616 edition of his characters, Sir Thomas Overbury describes a chambermaid who "reads Greenes works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Myrrour of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to run out of her selfe and become a Ladie Errant."<sup>70</sup> Here, Greene is aligned with Margaret Tyler, the middling woman who published a translation of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* in 1578. Katherine Wilson makes the crucial point that associating Greene with lower-status audiences may have been a strategy used by elite readers of Greene to negotiate their own indulgence in his work. Wilson reminds us that the historical readership for prose romance was always diverse.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Nashe here invokes a perception of Greene, rather than an historical reality. Although we have no evidence from which to determine whether Greene had already obtained this reputation by the time Nashe wrote, Nashe's epithet is one indication that he had.

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted by Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, *Fictions of Authorship*, 4.

Rejecting a female audience is one strategy for demarcating an audience for his learned persona. Other distinctions on which Nashe depends are those between city and country and between mechanical and learned art. The common theme throughout his attacks on various forms of commercial literature is that they all abuse the unlearned, represented by the figure of the country bumpkin. Singling out Philip Stubbs for his *Anatomy of Abuse*, Nashe accuses Puritan social critics of lacking art, aligning them with stage players and jesters. These pamphlets abuse the unlearned in matters of divinity. The writers of ballads, almanacs, and pamphlets about monstrous births are artless liars who abuse the unlearned in matters of nature. In response to these stories about comets and monstrous births, “the country Plowman feareth a Calabrian flood in the midst of a furrow and the silly Shepherd committing his wandering sheep to the custody of his wappe, in his field naps dreameth of flying Dragons, which for fear lest he should see to the loss of his sight, he falleth a sleep” (24). Nashe imagines himself speaking to an educated, male, urban reader who is widely familiar with the London literary scene. Since this is a man who has enough leisure time to read multiple kinds of commercial literature, he has some social status based on gentility, occupation, or wealth, or some combination of all three.

This audience permits Nashe to embody the role of satirical social critic, because this is an audience capable of altering behavior and influencing culture in the ways that a conventional satirical mode demands of its readers. Nashe calls upon the transcendent value of learning to impress this audience with the importance of rectifying the cultural absurdities that lead directly to the devaluation of learning. The press, he claims, must be used to disseminate learning and virtue, and the corruption is intimately connected to a



misuse of the press. At the same time, he uses his position as a spokesman for transcendent learning to critique the court as the source of inverted values. If the court esteemed learning as it should, and if the presses were used for their appropriate purposes, learned men would reap their deserved financial benefits from the press and the misalignment between the economic and cultural value of the press would be rectified, along with other social ills like poverty. Of course, this vision of the press justifies Nashe's own text, as the social critique of a learned man. As in the "Preface," Nashe justifies his generic choice with an image of readership and authorship, as he imagines a market in which writers lead their learned readers.<sup>72</sup>

After the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, Nashe does not publish prose again until *Pierce Penniless* in 1592. As *Pierce*, his attitude toward his place in the market and his audience are drastically different. The questions are the same, but his strategies for imagining audience and authorship have shifted. In *Pierce*, rather than the authorized learned man in print, he is a marginalized, carnivalesque figure at the whim of the market and its consumers. The shift arose from Nashe's involvement in the Marprelate Controversy.

### Nashe and Martin Marprelate

The Marprelate Controversy was a pamphlet war that scandalized London between 1588 and 1590. It centered on seven radical puritan pamphlets printed by a secret press under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate. Martin did not merely critique the episcopacy, however; he satirized it. His complaints focused on the policies of John Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who in 1583 had initiated a series of reforms to

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<sup>72</sup> Of course, Nashe completely ignores the role of the stationer, with whom the substantial economic choices driving the market actually lay.

centralize clerical authority and enforce the prohibition on unauthorized preaching. In response to Whitgift's platform, Martin calls for the dismantling of the episcopacy and forwards a radical puritan program<sup>73</sup> grounded in preaching and a strict adherence to the local church organization exemplified in the New Testament. Initially, the Anglican institution responded to Martin's satire by publishing earnest refutations and then eventually resorted to hiring professional writers to compose Antimartinist pamphlets. Simultaneously, writers unaffiliated with either the secret press or the bishops threw their own voices into the mélange, some siding with the clerics and some denouncing both sides as fractious.<sup>74</sup> Nashe was hired by the bishops to write Antimartinist responses. Although he used a pseudonym, one pamphlet in particular, *Almand for a Parrot*, is generally agreed to be his.<sup>75</sup> More significant than the content of Nashe's Antimartinist text, however, is his adoption of central components of Martin's narrative style. Nashe took away from the Controversy a sharpened understanding of how to manage multiple audiences in print through a carefully crafted authorial persona.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> I have used the terms "radical puritan" and "presbyterian" interchangeably. Although the term "presbyterian" was not in use during the late sixteenth century, the term in its lower-case form is an adequate description of Martin's goals for the church, congregation-based governance. Martin called himself a puritan, but he was on the more radical end of the puritan spectrum. On sectarian terminology, see *The Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Modernized and Annotated Edition*, ed. Joseph L. Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xx.

<sup>74</sup> For historical background, I have relied on Black, ed., *The Martin Marprelate Tracts*; William Pierce, *An Historical Introduction to the Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Chapter in the Evolution of Religious and Civil Liberty in England* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908); Virginia Miller Cornell, "Understanding Elizabethan Laughter: The Martin Marprelate Tracts" (unpublished dissertation, Arizona State University, 1974; and Edward L. Arber, *An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy, 1588-1590* (London, 1879; rpt., New York: AMS Press, 1967).

<sup>75</sup> R. B. McKerrow makes the argument for Nashe's authorship in *Works*, vol. 5, 59-53.

<sup>76</sup> I am building here on an argument initiated by Travis L. Summersgill in "The Influence of the Marprelate Controversy upon the Style of Thomas Nashe," *Studies in Philology* 48.2 (April 1951): 145-60. Summersgill contends that Nashe borrows "certain stylistic devices, attitudes toward the reader, and concepts of the function of literature from the Puritan writer" (146).

The style of the Marprelate tracts was revolutionary. Rather than making a straightforward case for presbyterian governance in a tone of high seriousness, the Marprelate writers freely mix jests, puns, and scurrility with humanist rhetoric and scriptural logic in a satirical vein. Martin performs multiple personas, addresses the audience directly, and makes full use of typographical conventions. Equally important, he justifies his stylistic acrobatics by citing *decorum personae* and the decorum of audience. Antimartinist writers respond by adopting Martin's narrative tactics and by engaging in a public conversation about the appropriate use of print and the nature of the pamphlet-reading audience.

Martin opens this conversation in his first pamphlet, known as the *Epistle*. Although the *Epistle* presents itself as an advertisement for a forthcoming *Epitome* of the Anglican cleric John Bridges' *Defense of the Government Established* (1578), it constitutes a lengthy satirical attack in its own right. Martin opens with irony. In its full title, printed on the front of the pamphlet, the *Epistle* announces itself as a promotion of Bridge's book. Once the reader turns the page, however, the text promptly undermines its apparent praise of Bridges by opening with an address to "the right puissant and terrible Priests, my clergy masters of the Confocation House, whether Fickers General, Worshipful Paltripolitans, or any other of the Holy League of Subscription." It becomes immediately clear that the text is a mock-petition, as Martin begins with the conventional language of supplication before asking for permission to play the part of the fool:

May it please you to give me leave to play the Duns for the nonce as well as he [Bridges], otherwise dealing with Master Doctor's book, I cannot keep *decorum personae*. And may it please you, if I be too absurd in any place ... to ride to Sarum and thank his Deanship for it. Because I could

not deal with his book commendably according to order, unless I should be sometimes tediously dunstical and absurd.<sup>77</sup>

Martin claims that he has taken the part of the fool because Bridges's book is so ridiculous and incomprehensible that if Martin were to respond with high seriousness, he would be guilty of violating decorum. His argument is simple: the bishops themselves are so foolish that he must speak to them in their own language. In the *Epitome*, he claims that he must jest because he "deal[s] against a worshipful jester."<sup>78</sup> Although he occasionally postures as a plain man, he is no simple jester, though; he makes it clear by foregrounding performativity that he is assuming the role of a skilled artificial fool. He may use low language, but Martin takes pains to demonstrate that his style follows the tenets of humanist rhetorical training despite its popular bent. He uses inversion, irony, and jesting to best the bishops at their own learned game.

Performing as the artificial fool, Martin relies on his witty manipulation of rhetoric as the source of his writerly authority. His investment in his own wit is predicated on the Protestant ideals of *sola fida* and *sola gratia*, the notion that salvation occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of the individual and that man is saved through God's mercy alone. Justification obtains through an individual's conscience, the Bible, and preaching. Martin's beliefs that religious truth works through the individual and that the episcopacy violates biblical injunctions permit him to assume the role of an outsider without threatening the legitimacy of his own right to speak.<sup>79</sup> In *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, he defends himself by reasoning that "The Lord being the author

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<sup>77</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Epistle* (London, 1588), printed in Black, ed., *The Martin Marprelate Tracts*, 5-45, esp. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Epitome* (London, 1588), printed in Black, ed., *The Martin Marprelate Tracts*, 51-94, esp. 53.

<sup>79</sup> John S. Coolidge, "Martin Marprelate, Marvell, and Decorum Personae as a Satirical Theme," *PMLA* 74.5 (December 1959): 526-32.

both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful in itself for the truth to use either of these ways, when the circumstances do make it lawful. My purpose was and is to do good. I know I have done no harm, howsoever some may judge Martin to mar all” (115). Both his ideology and his authorial voice depend upon his marginality. Martin constructs himself as a witty David facing off against a corrupted Goliath.

Since Martin’s authority rests in his individual conscience, his rhetorical expertise, and his wit, as opposed to the status or religious hierarchy, his appeal to a broad pamphlet-reading audience does not threaten to undermine his credit. The more readers he reaches, the better. Martinist pamphlets targeted a range of book-buying audiences, from the very lowest to those accustomed to purchasing prose fiction. All of the pamphlets in the controversy, both Martinist and Antimartinist, were published in broadsheet, octavo, or quarto form, and none ran longer than 56 quarto pages. For Martinists, this engagement with a wide audience was a manifestation of radical puritan beliefs on three counts. First, they held that in a debate on the clerical hierarchy held in public, beyond the tight control of the bishops, the presbyterian platform of church structure based on New Testament models would prevail. They consistently accuse the bishops of refusing to answer puritan complaints on equitable, open ground. Second, their appeal to a wide audience accorded with their belief that church governance should lie in the hands of local congregations. Lastly, Presbyterians held that the word preached, as opposed to the word read, was the primary means to salvation, and Martinists viewed the wide circulation and colloquial style of their pamphlets as a printed form of preaching.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> In the *Epistle*, Martin writes that the bishops “are afraid that anything should be published abroad whereby the common people should learn that the only way to salvation is by the word preached” (31).

In *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, Martin makes radically departs from humanist convention when he cites the popular nature of his audience as a justification for his outlandish style:

The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defense of the one and against the other [bishops and Puritans]. I bethought me therefore of a way whereby men might be drawn to do both, perceiving the humors of men in these times ... to be given to mirth .... The circumstance of time, place, and persons urged me thereunto.<sup>81</sup>

Martin here once again echoes conventional humanist wisdom about fashioning a rhetorical argument. In his *Art of Rhetoric*, for example, Thomas Wilson suggests that the rhetorician use jesting in order to win his audience's good will.<sup>82</sup> He furthermore applies the principle of decorum in a manner and for an audience that humanist educators had never envisioned.

Reversing Martin's ironic stance, Antimartinists responded by claiming that Martin is not merely adopting the guise of the artificial fool; rather, his style indicates that he is in fact a fool. The author of *Martin Month's Minde* calls Martinist writers "fooles without any liverie."<sup>83</sup> In a similar vein, the Antimartinists figure Martin as the vice in a stage play, exhaustively associating him with Tarlton, with Scoggins, the protagonist of a popular jest book, with May Day misrule, and with William Elderton, a ballad writer infamous for his drunkenness. In *Mar-Martine*, the author characterizes Martin's style as "These tinkers termes, and barbers jestes first Tarleton on the stage," and he claims to pity "The common sort of simple swads ... /That will vouchsafe, or

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<sup>81</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, in Black, ed., *Martin Marprelate Tracts*, 101-38, esp. 115.

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 219.

<sup>83</sup> *Martin's Months Minde* (London, 1589), sig. 3Dv.

deigne to laugh, at libelles so unwittie.”<sup>84</sup> For Antimartinists, the stage represents a medium that is debased by its audience and style, one that targets “popular taste with colloquial language and irreverent scurrility,”<sup>85</sup> in direct opposition to Martin’s claim that his pamphlets comply with decorum by addressing a popular audience in their own language.

Yet, Martin was not writing just for the wide population, nor did the form of radical puritanism that he espoused forward strictly popular church governance. The appeal to the wide audience was couched within a direct address to the bishops; Martin imagines himself performing a debate or disputation with the bishops in plain sight of the reading commons. He also appeals to the learned sector of the commonalty, which would be won not through mirth alone but through his ingenious manipulation of rhetoric and the strength of his biblical arguments.<sup>86</sup> All three kinds of audiences are crucial to Martin’s project. At the same time, Martin announces that he is not a separatist or a “Brownist.”<sup>87</sup> He supports a state church that is governed by leading members of local congregations. Martin is thus holding a variety of rhetorical arguments and audiences in balance in his texts. He argues that the bishops are corrupt; he argues that the commonalty needs to understand that the word preached is the only path to salvation; and he argues that the church should be placed in the hands of the commonalty but specifically in the control of a religious elite. Since he forwards church governance by the consent of the congregation, at the same time that he asserts equality with his readers, he

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<sup>84</sup> *Mar-Martine* (London 1589), sig. A5v.

<sup>85</sup> Black, ed., *Martin Marprelate Tracts*, xxvi.

<sup>86</sup> Martin accepts that his style will cost him the loyalty of the more fastidious puritan contingent (*Epitome*, 53).

<sup>87</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Hay any Work for Cooper*, 123.

also argues that the commonalty should place church governance in the hands of other religious elites like himself.<sup>88</sup>

In order to maintain all of these arguments and audiences in balance, Martin adopts a flexible, performative, and multivalent. He merges the structure of formal academic disputations and humanist reading and writing with stage practices and jest books, addressing himself directly either to his clerical opponents or the reader,<sup>89</sup> laughing to himself, which of course takes the form of transliterating laughing sounds,<sup>90</sup> and narrating church corruption in the style of “merry tales.”<sup>91</sup> The pamphlet becomes a medium for Martin to “posture,” to use Travis Summersgill’s term,<sup>92</sup> as Martin shifts authorial personae from one moment to the next, sometimes writing as himself, sometimes as a calm-headed logic bishop, sometimes as an angry bishop, sometimes as his readers, and sometimes as impartial academic judges in the dispute. His texts are above all multivocal, as the narrator transforms into different characters.

The detailed analysis of one example will suffice as evidence. As I noted above, Martin’s first pamphlet, the *Epistle*, opens in the language of supplication. He addresses himself to the bishops as “most pitifully complaining Martin Marprelate” and he asks for leave to speak (7). After explaining that he will assume the role of the fool in order to match Bridges’ style, Martin launches into a conversational attack on the bishops for not

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<sup>88</sup> Joseph Black argues that the Martin Marprelate pamphlets were fundamental to the development of a public sphere in early-modern England. See “The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-89), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28.3 (1997): 707-25.

<sup>89</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Epitome*, 61, 53.

<sup>90</sup> Martin Marprelate, *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, 103, and *Epistle*, 8, 14.

<sup>91</sup> See Martin Marprelate, *Epistle*, 25, 27, and *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, 108, for just three examples.

<sup>92</sup> Summersgill, “Influence of Marprelate Controversy,” 149. On this aspect of Martin’s style, see also Raymond A. Anselment, “Rhetoric and the Dramatic Satire of Martin Marprelate,” *Studies in English Literature* 10.1 (winter 1970): 103-19.



answering the arguments of earlier puritan books, especially those by Thomas Cartwright. Throughout this passage, he invokes the physical presence of the bishops he rails against: “Ha, ha, Doctor Copcot, are ye there, why do not you answer the confutation of your sermon at Paul’s Cross. It is a shame for your grace John of Cant. [Whitgift] that Cartwright’s books have been now a dozen years almost unanswered” (8). Martin styles the pamphlet a conversation to which the reader is a witness, essentially placing himself and the bishops on stage for the reading public. He then calls upon the bishops for a “free disputation . . . about the controversies of the church,” yoking this conversational tone to the formal occasion of academic dispute. Martin lays out his major thesis, “Those that are petty popes and petty antichrists ought not to be maintained in any Christian commonwealth,” and the minor to this thesis that “every lord bishop in England,” and he lists them by name “are petty popes and petty antichrists.” (9).

Over the course of the following paragraph, Martin speaks as himself as well as ventriloquizing responses from the bishops and from a council of judges. “What say you now brother Bridges . . . can you deny any part of your learned brother Martin his syllogism? We deny your minor, M. Marprelate, say the bishops and their associates. Yea my learned masters, are you good at that? What do you brethren?” (9). In the discussion of Martin’s thesis that follows, the premises are laid out in italic print, centered on the page, and Martin defends each one at the same time that he attacks the bishops and ventriloquizes their responses to his logic. All the while, he peppers his prose with his original plea for supplication, which by now has assumed a thoroughly ironic and scoffing tone. The rest of the pamphlet proceeds in a similar shifting vein. His exempla take the form of *ad hominem* attacks that mimic the style of jest books; he cites and

refutes passages from Bridges' book in a highly literate and conventionally humanist fashion; he proceeds to a conversational debate about the authority of scripture; and he ends with a mock epitaph of Dr. Bridges and more tales.

Throughout, he makes use of the marginalia to embody still other voices, usually subsidiary voices of those being ventriloquized in the main text. In this, Martin adapts the use of marginalia in conventional humanist reading and writing practices. From their grammar school days, humanist students were instructed to note rhetorical figures, exempla, material to transfer into their commonplace books, and morals in the margins of their texts. Similarly, scholarly texts were published with references to authoritative commentaries in the margins. Accompanying the passage I have examined from the *Epistle* above, Martin places two notes. In one, the voice of a disgruntled, angry bishop responds to Martin's direct questions; "What malapert knaves are these that cannot be content to stand by and hear, but they must teach a gentleman how to speak?" asks the bishop. In the second, Martin uses the marginalia in the conventional humanist manner, to identify corresponding passages in Bridges' book. At other moments, Martin uses the marginalia to defend against potential counterarguments. One marginal note on Martin's claim that all bishops are petty popes reads "M. Marprelate you put more than the question in the conclusion of your syllogism" (10). Elsewhere he uses the marginalia to involve the reader directly in evaluating the topic at hand: "Is not this ambitious wretch at the highest, think you?" (29).

Martin musters all of the rhetorical, typographical, and popular resources at his disposal in order to fashion his encounter with the bishops as a battle of wits, and he refers directly to the forum of academic dispute as a battlefield and language as his

weapon. In one moment in the Epistle, he steps back from a logical point he has just won, and reflects “And have not I quitted my self like a man, and dealt very valiantly, in proving that my learned brethren the lord bishops ought not to be in any Christian commonwealth?” (12); in the *Epitome*, he asks the bishops, “Will you have any more of these blows, brethren?” (69); and on the title page to *Hay Any Work for Cooper*, he promises that in this pamphlet “worthy Martin quits himself like a man I warrant you, in the modest defense of his self and his learned Pistles” (99).

When Nashe takes up his pen in March of 1590 to defend the bishops against Martin, he matches Martin’s style and he adopts Martin’s language of an armed battle of wits. Martin’s polemical stance, in fact, aligned quite well with the image of the witty author that Nashe had envisioned in the “Preface” to Greene’s *Menaphon*. Although other Antimartinists had tried to outdo Martin, only Lily’s *Pappe with an Hatchet* had really succeeded.<sup>93</sup> Lily claims he would never use such underhanded rhetorical tactics of his own volition, but he needs to meet Martin on his own terms.<sup>94</sup> He furthermore accuses Martin of indecorum in using a low style to talk about the high matter of the church, and for the viewing of all sorts of people, no less. Martin has “put Religion in a fooles coat” (sig. 3Ev). Following in Lily’s footsteps, Nashe claims that he will join Martin in order to defeat him. Nashe proceeds to employ Martin’s tactics of direct address to the reader, direct address to the opponent—in this case, Martin himself—tale-telling, colloquial language, and railing. He is particularly offended by Martin’s encroachment into the writer’s field, saying that Martin “strives to outstrip our writers in witte and justle our

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<sup>93</sup> Gabriel Harvey attributes the text to John Lily in *An Advertisement for Papp-hatchett, and Martin Marprelate*, in *Pierce’s Supererogation* (1593), printed in *The Works of Gabriel Harvey, D.C.L.*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols. (London, 1884; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous [Lily], *Pappe with an hatchet* (London 1589), 2.

gouvernement forth of doors with a jest.”<sup>95</sup> Later, he challenges Martin to “write or fight” (356).

*Almond for a Parrot* is a stepping stone in the development of the style that Nashe will come to perfect in *Pierce Penniless* and which will determine his generic choices in the *Unfortunate Traveler*. Martin Marprelate’s stylistic innovations become really useful for Nashe when he returns to printing imaginative prose. Nashe learned from Martin how to use a marginalized persona to negotiate among multiple audiences, and how to use wit to animate that marginalized persona. The Nashe we meet in *Pierce Penniless* is very different from the earnest satirist we meet in the *Anatomy of Absurdity*. In *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe is a satirist who also revels in his outsider status; he is a learned writer appealing to yet scorning his popular audience; and he is a man in print who both exploits and rejects the value of the book as a printed object. Martin’s stylistic techniques are a response to the rhetorical conditions of his audience and medium; writing under similar material conditions, Nashe incorporates those techniques into his imaginative work.

### *Pierce Penniless*

*Pierce Penniless* was first entered in to the Stationer’s register for licensing in August of 1592 by Richard Jones. It was published in quarto and ran 43 signatures long. A second edition was also published in 1592, this time by John Busbie, in quarto, and it ran to 45 signatures. The Busbie edition reproduced the Jones edition but added an epistle from the author to the printer, a point to which I return below. Both copies would have sold for between 6d and 8d and been available to the readers who had bought the longer

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<sup>95</sup> Anonymous [Nashe], *Almond for a Parrot* (1590), printed in McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. 3, 339-76, esp. 349.

of Martin's pamphlets and Greene's romances. The potential audience for *Pierce Penniless* was equally as broad as that for the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, and Nashe remains concerned with invoking conservative social paradigms, delimiting his audience, and engaging with humanist models of authorship.

The questions that occupy Nashe's mind are, then, the same in *Pierce Penniless* as they are in the *Anatomy of Absurdity*. Nashe's strategies for dealing with those questions, however, are fundamentally different in *Pierce Penniless*. In the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, Nashe labored to connect himself with the court, through his letter to Lord Mountjoy, and the university, through his advice to students; in *Pierce Penniless*, by contrast, Nashe has given himself over to print. He adopts the persona of a marginalized figure, failed by the sites of cultural authority to which he had attached himself in the *Anatomy of Abuse*. Since the values of society are corrupted and learning is not as esteemed as it should be, wealthy men no longer patronage writers and poets. His only option, he says, is to "play the dolt in print."<sup>96</sup> No longer advocating for the reformation of the press into a vehicle for the learned to lead the simpler sort, he is resigned to his role as the producer of a commodity.

Or so he would have us believe. In fact, the marginalized persona of *Pierce Penniless* presents simply an alternative strategy for managing multiple audiences, claims to authority, and the conditions of print. He retains a vexed relationship with amateur models of prodigal authorship, neither whole-heartedly embracing nor entirely rejecting them. He capitulates to his dependence on a wide, book-buying audience at the same time that he uses the logic of the status hierarchy to imaginatively circumscribe his audience.

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless, His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), printed in R.B. McKerrow, ed., *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, 5 vols. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1904), 1.137-245, esp. 154.

Lastly, he makes a plea for patronage even as he denounces patrons. By employing a persona on the periphery of humanist learning rather than at its center, Nashe, like Martin, makes his wit the foundation for his writerly authority. Also like Martin, he displays his facility with humanist rhetoric by exaggerating tropes and figures, mixing genres, and embodying multiple voices. The result is an excessive style that exhibits his mastery of and therefore independence from humanist rhetoric. Nashe idealizes marginality as a kind of freedom in placelessness, which enables him to claim autonomy from both humanist traditions and the pamphlet-buying audience.

For the purposes of analysis, I will divide the text into four sections. The first, relatively short section comprises what I call framing narrative, in which Nashe describes his hopeless situation, laments the decline of patronage, and crafts a sonnet of complaint. The second section, the longest in the text, is a mock-supplication in which the primary narrative, an allegory of the seven deadly sins, shades into loosely related merry tales as well as a section of railing against Harvey and his brothers. The third section, which begins with the Knight of the Post's response to Nashe's letter, constitutes a humanist dialogue about the nature of hell, which digresses into a beast fable. In the final section, Nashe addresses the reader to explain the rationale behind the title and to praise the earl of Derby with a concluding sonnet. Although I have imposed structural divisions in order to facilitate analysis, the text's only typographical division frames the supplication text with a salutation and subscription. The supplication opens on a new recto page, leaving three-quarters of the corresponding verso blank, and the heading is printed in type twice the size of the body of the text. The supplication closes half-way down a recto page, the rest of which is left blank, and the following section of the text, what I have called the

dialogue, opens on the following verso with an enlarged first letter denoting a typographical division.

In the text's first section, what I have called the framing narrative, Nashe positions himself in relation to courtly and humanist models of authorship through the sonnet form and the thematic opposition of prodigality to profitability. By informing the reader that he turned from youthful folly to serious study only to find himself meagerly rewarded for his pains, he recontextualizes the model of the prodigal, amateur author within the commercial scope of the professional writer. For Nashe, in contrast to Gascoigne, Lily, and Sidney the turn away from youthful folly leads not to profitability for the commonwealth but to poverty. The result is that material concerns force him into a rejection of the rejection of prodigality and his concomitant resignation to the print market. This choice is a momentous one, as he rages and tears his hair, wracking his brain for an alternative. In the sonnet of complaint, he goes so far as to abjure writing altogether, only to retract his abjuration because he needs to eat. In the supplication to the devil, however, Nashe recontextualizes the model of prodigal authorship again, this time imagining commercial authorship as a professional battle of wits. Contrasting witless preachers with professional writers, he claims "should we (as you) borrowe all out of others, and gather nothing of our selves, our names should bee baffuld on everie book-sellers stall" (192). Building on the defense of invention that he had made in his Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, Nashe claims that success in the market requires originality. Marginality from humanist and courtly forms leads the validation of Nashe's wit on the market. The entire text is, of course, Nashe's testament to wit, and he was in fact

rewarded for it by widespread recognition.<sup>97</sup> *Pierce Penniless* was Nashe's most successful commercial text.

Without a dedication to a patron and having dismissed humanist and courtly models of authorship, Nashe seems puts himself at the whim of the pamphlet-buying readers who will declare his victory in the professional print market by buying his work. He uses none of the *Anatomy of Absurdity*'s formal tactics for constructing an imagined audience. Yet, Nashe's marginalized persona has an embattled relationship with his broad readership. Internally, the text depends upon the conventional logic of social degree and the distinctions between mechanical and learned labor to validate Nashe's claims for the status of his wit. Society's corrupted values are personified men of the lower sorts who have more money than he, a scholar, does: "the Cobler . . . worth five hundred pound, an Hostler that had built a goodly Inne, and might dispende fortie pound yerely by his Land, a Carre-man in a lether pilche, that had whipt out a thousand pound out of his horse taile; and have I not more wit than all these (thought I to my selfe)? Am I better borne? Am I better brought up? Yea, and better favored? And yet am I a beggar?" (158). He furthermore attacks wealthy yeomen's sons, mere farmers who live better than he does. Under the heading of the sin of Pride, he compares upwardly mobile farmers and artificers to maggots, "bred *Sine coitu*," and he blames upstart courtiers for the corruption of learning and the decline in patronage. Of course, wealthy artificers, merchants, and yeomen were precisely the middling sorts who were likely to purchase Nashe's pamphlet. By assuming a marginalized persona, Nashe relinquishes the authorial position from

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<sup>97</sup> Francis Meres calls Nashe "so brave a wit" in his *Palladis Tamia* (London: Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), 286r; and despite himself, Gabriel Harvey betrays that Nashe's work was "looked for with such a longing expectation" in *Pierce's Supererogation*, in *The Works of Gabriel Harvey*, ed. Grosart, 2.66.



which to delimit his audience to university men and patrons, but *Pierce Penniless* nonetheless accomplishes a similar kind of demarcation through different strategies. Nashe also attacks the court and the universities, but the tone of these attacks are distinctly different. At the universities, he targets Puritans. As for the court, his critique of courtly pride is conventional, echoed by other writers like Spenser and Ascham, and he moves quickly from a general denunciation to the condemnation of upwardly mobile courtiers, men with the values of the lower sorts who have finagled their way into the favor of the great.

Nashe thus finds a place for himself in the interstices between two competing value systems, the market and the conservative social hierarchy. The marginalized persona permits Nashe to resign himself to a book-buying audience, placing himself on a commodity-driven market, and then to use an alternative value system, that of the conservative social hierarchy, to condemn those readers to whose whim he has committed himself—all while continuing to address his readers as “gentlemen” and “gentles.” It seems that his ideal audience is similar to the theater audience that he describes, “men that are their owne masters (as Gentlemen of the Court, the Innes of the Courte, and the number of Captaines and Soldiers about London)” (212). These men are not youths and apprentices but gentlemanly consumers who use their monetary resources to seek out pleasure and wit. The ideal reader is an “unthrift abroad” who “exerciseth his bodie at dauncing scholle, fence schoole, tennis, and all such recreations: the vintners, the victuallers, the dicing houses... Suppose he lose a little now and then at play, it teacheth him wit ... Besides, my vagrant Reveller haunts Plaies, and sharpnes his wits with frequenting the company of Poets” (209-210). Nashe’s attitude toward plays has shifted

dramatically from the *Anatomy of Absurdity*. Changes in the status of playwrights may, in part, account for this new attitude, but it also arises from Nashe's newly adopted marginal persona. Whereas the persona of the *Anatomy of Absurdity* insisted on his authority by association with the universities, the marginal persona of *Pierce Penniless* authorizes himself through wit. Whether playwrights encroach on the territory of humanist eloquence no longer concerns the writer who stakes his claim on his wit rather than his learning. Nashe envisions a gentlemanly consumer who is master of himself and who values wit and experience; the kind of consumer, we can imagine, that Pierce Penniless would be if he were not quite so penniless. This "fine qualified Gentleman" is sophisticated but not a slave to learning, and he moves freely through the London social landscape. Nashe's ideal reader exhibits the freedom of placelessness, a benefit of his own marginalized position as he moves fluidly from Westminster to Paul's.

Nashe's interest in the general book-buying readership is accompanied by his interest in a specific contingent of the reading public: potential patrons. Throughout the text he rails at the decline of patrons, which he connects to the "Tragedy of Hospitality" perpetrated by Greediness. He frames the text with two warnings to fellow writers to abandon their quests for patronage, one in the framing narrative and one in the closing dialogue. He advises writers not to waste their time crafting brilliant dedications to ingrate courtiers who have no appreciation for the value of learning. Yet, he moves from this warning into an oblique encomium of and sonnet to the earl of Derby, who, he claims, is one notable figure in England's pitiful dearth of deserving patrons. As he does with the general pamphlet readership, he both submits himself to and asserts his independence from patronage. Nashe's complaint against patronage is also undermined

by the fact he enjoys the friendship of influential men like John Whitgift and Sir George Carey, the captain-general of the Isle of Wight. Nashe wrote a play, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, for a private performance for Whitgift in 1589. It has been conjectured that Nashe was staying with Whitgift in the country when he wrote *Pierce Penniless*, and it is known that shortly after composing *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe was staying with Carey on the Isle of Wight, where he wrote *Strange News*.<sup>98</sup> He furthermore went on to dedicate both *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593) and *Terrors of the Night* (1594) to the Carey family. While *Pierce Penniless* has justifiably been read as a thin veil for Nashe himself, Pierce's abject poverty is an exaggerated fiction. Nashe was certainly not rewarded as he would have wished. It appears that he had a falling out with the Careys after 1594 and that he died in poverty. But in 1592, he enjoyed the hospitality of at least two influential men. Pierce's marginalization, then, is a rhetorical construction, a strategy for creating a position in print grounded in Nashe's skillful and witty deployment of his humanist training for a broad reading audience.

Nashe's style, which has been described by critics as "eccentric," "excessive," and "prodigal," is the linguistic expression of his complex negotiation of audiences and authorship.<sup>99</sup> Like all humanist students, Nashe was taught that style needed to be

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<sup>98</sup> G.R. Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 19-21.

<sup>99</sup> Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe*, ix; Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 65; Hutson, *Nashe in Context*, 33-36. Peter Holbrook identifies Nashe's style as "extravagant" (*Literature and Degree in Renaissance England: Nashe, Bourgeois Tragedy, Shakespeare* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994], 34). Holbrook's project is similar to mine in that he takes the interaction between aesthetics and social existence as the foundation of his study. He, however, emphasizes aesthetic forms as "social symbols" and finds meaning through political allegories of aesthetic choices. Although Holbrook also sees Nashe as a marginal figure, and he insists on the "interplay" between popular and elite in Nashe's work, his argument is grounded in the claim that Nashe was trying to associate himself with the elite. As a result, Holbrook's analysis focuses on moments in which Nashe reinterprets elite rhetoric as a symbol of social belonging. Brown sees Nashe as exemplifying a generation of writers in the 1590s who "claim significance through forms of triviality, transgression, and paradox" (32). She argues that writers in the 1590s responded to a

adapted to the time, audience, and occasion. Rhetorical decorum trained the writer to think of himself as always socially and historically situated, as an individual-in-the-world. The book-buying public, both elite potential patrons and non-elite paying customers, was his audience, and both informed his understanding of his aesthetic choices. In *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe responds by adopting and digesting some of the strategies through which Martin Marprelate's pamphlets had negotiated the problem of multiple audiences in print. Like Martin, Nashe tends to exaggerate humanist rhetorical tools with the effect of both appropriating and abrogating the authority of humanist learning and simultaneously catering to and expressing superiority over his reading public. Although he maintains a more consistent persona than Martin, Nashe postures, shifting his tone abruptly and ventriloquizing voices that seem to intrude into the text. He also alternates between addressing his Elizabethan readers directly and addressing the fictional reader of his mock-supplication, the devil. Furthermore, he converts university exercises into the material for jests, and uses the marginalia to ornament the text. Two notable examples will suffice to demonstrate the similarity between Nashe's marginalized authorial persona and exaggerated rhetoric and those of Martin Marprelate.

As I noted earlier, Martin uses marginalia in innovative ways. Diverging from the traditional humanist use of marginalia to locate texts in learned critical traditions, Martin uses marginalia to interject tangential voices into the text. Nashe similarly mixes conventional and innovative uses of his marginalia, which he adapts to his various

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general perception that literary forms had decayed or become "ossified" by exaggerating and parodying the very conventions of the literary forms and ornaments that they inherited to create new forms, a stylistic technique that she terms "hyperconventionality" (26). Brown's assertion that Nashe creates innovation out of conventionality provides a useful framework, but she goes too far in underemphasizing the influence of the print market on Nashe's aesthetic choices, ignoring it almost completely beyond her introductory comments. Instead, I take as the starting point of my inquiry the assertion that the medium was an essential condition for the production of the style.

audiences. The mere fact that Nashe's text has marginalia, which was usually reserved for scholarly, religious, and didactic work, signals his self-conscious manipulation of humanist practices. In the framing narrative, where Nashe deplors the decline of patronage and most overtly addresses humanist authorship, the marginalia consist entirely of untranslated Latin, four references to Ovid and two to Horace. The combination of a courtly poetic form, Latin, and classical references establish Nashe as a learned author and limit full understanding of the text to equally learned readers. In the mock-supplication, however, the marginalia are entirely in English, with one exception. Some of them identify the primary points in the text, while others are colloquial addresses to the reader.

As Pierce begins his supplication, for example, he claims that he has received no reward for letting the devil play in his purse, an Elizabethan colloquialism for being poor. The marginal note reads, "No: Ile be sworne uppon a book I have not" (165). This comment not only presents the humorous image of Nashe swearing to the devil on a Bible, but it also demonstrates that the marginalia here operate on a different literary plane than the Latin quotations in the first section of the text. Here, the margin is a space for informal, intimate conversation, whereas in the framing narrative it was a space of classical formality. In another instance, the marginalia are the site for a pun. In his catalogue of national types, Pierce accuses the Danish of drunkenness, writing that they have "no sense but of that which they swallowe downe their throates." The corresponding marginal note reads, "And that sence often times makes them sencelesse" (180). Like Martin, Nashe uses the marginalia to layer the voices in the texts. Most important for my

argument, he changes his strategy for doing so according to the audience at whom a particular section of the text is directed.

This kind of typographical play is matched by verbal play. Echoing the epithets of Martin's invocation to the bishops in the opening of the Epistle, Pierce addresses his mock-supplication "To the high and mightie Prince of Darknesse, Donsell del Lucifer, King of Acheron, Stix, and Phlegeton, Duke of Tartary, marquesse of Cocytus, and Lord high Regent of Lymbo: his distressed Orator, Pierce Pennillesse, wisheth encrase of damnation and malediction eternall, Per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum" (165). In another example, he describes the kitchen of Greediness and Dame Niggardize in the following breathless sentence:

The verie spiders and dust-weavers, that wont to set up their loomes in every window, decayed and undone through the extreame dearth of the place (that afforded them no matter to worke on), were constrained to breake, against their wills, and goe dwell in the countrye, out of the reach of the broome and the wing; and generally, not a flea nor a cricket that carried any brave minde, that would stay there after he had once tasted the order of their fare. (168).

Nashe packs as many figures and tropes and as much wit and invention into each sentence as he possibly can, making of every clause a stylistic manifestation of his mastery of humanist eloquence. Yet this mastery is expressed precisely in its excessiveness and therefore its violation of humanist decorum.<sup>100</sup> In this sense, Nashe's style can be characterized as decorously indecorous. He suits his low style to the subject

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<sup>100</sup> In *Thomas Nashe in Context*, Lorna Hutson provides a fascinating discussion of the tension between the ideals of prodigality and profit in humanist rhetorical training, and my argument is informed by her analysis of Nashe's style. Hutson, however, ultimately reads Nashe's work through a limiting dichotomy of amateur and professional authorship, and she emphasizes Nashe's role in intellectual and aesthetic history without accounting for the material conditions under which he worked.

matter and audience, but does so in such an immoderate way that the result is a perversion of humanist principles.

Nashe is similarly decorously indecorous in his generic play. According to humanist thought, genre should draw on the conventions of canonical texts to align subject matter, audience, and style. As a native prose satire, *Pierce Penniless* had few generic precedents, and satire is itself a fluid genre.<sup>101</sup> In the Elizabethan generic lexicon, a satire was any form of social critique, and it was believed to have derived from Greek Satyr plays. Puttenham characterizes satire as a bitter comedy and conflates it with Old Comedy.<sup>102</sup> Nashe certainly invokes native and classical traditions of satire, but they do not provide structural models for his prose text.<sup>103</sup> Instead, Nashe produces a pastiche in which genre arises from style rather than serving as an organizing function. As the style is excessive, so is the generic mixture. Above I have outlined four sections of the text. Each of these sections is internally multigeneric, and the dialogue among the sections has the effect of layering genre upon genre. The conventional terms for generic mixtures, like “hybrid” and “anti-genre,” are inadequate in the face of this kind of generic layering. Both “hybrid” and “anti-genre” imply duality, and “anti-genre” suggests that two genres represent antithetical epistemological or experiential lenses. Nashe, however, writes by

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Anne Lake Prescott, “The Evolution of Tudor Satire,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500-1600*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 220-40.

<sup>102</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 120-21. In 1598, Francis Meres identifies *Piers Plowman*, Thomas Lodge, Joseph Hall, and John Marston as preeminent satirists, but with the exception of Langland and Lodge, these poets wrote after the printing of *Pierce Penniless*, and all wrote in verse.

<sup>103</sup> The critical conversation about satire in *Pierce Penniless* has centered on the issue of influence. Thomas Hibberd holds, for example, that Nashe mixes native and classical forms of satire, while Lorna Hutson argues instead that Nashe is best understood through the lens of Menippean satire. Alvin Kernan and Arthur Kinney both see Nashe as most strongly affiliated with Juvenalian rage. See Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe*, 64; Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context*, 127-51; Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale, 1959), 50; and Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 313. Nashe most directly associated himself with Pietro Aretino, but he refers to Aretino’s social role rather than his literary form.

melding multiple genres in uneven ways. Some genres are more salient than others but not consistently or predictably, and so any form of binary will insufficiently encapsulate how genres function in his work. Another term frequently used to characterize mixtures is “generic instability.” This term is more adequate than “hybrid” or “anti-genre” in that it allows for multiplicity; yet, “instability” assumes that stability is a normative generic function, and thereby invests “instability” with a deconstructive or alienating potential. Georgia Brown, for example, argues that the in 1590s texts are “characterized by generic instability, and contain elements of anti-genre which question and undermine their own assumptions, as one perspective is played off against another.”<sup>104</sup>

Instead, I would argue that stability, or the marshalling of meaning into an ordered structure, is only one result of one kind of generic usage. The internal and intertextual similarities and differences that constitute genres can produce meaning in a variety of ways within any given text and its relationship with other texts. In the supplication section of *Pierce Penniless*, for example, the diatribe against Harvey and the merry tales are generically different from each other and each has a network of relationships to a different set of external texts. Nevertheless, the genres of satire, libel, and jest book are more similar to each other than either one is to the humanist dialogue or sonnet. In order to account for the nuances of these relationships, I use “generic play,” a term that has the added benefit of registering the plenitude that I believe is the intended effect of Nashe’s generic mixtures. In each of the text’s individual sections and in the ways that the sections work together, generic play in *Pierce Penniless* arises from Nashe’s preoccupation with style, which in itself is produced through Nashe’s navigation

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<sup>104</sup> Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 29.



of the conditions of print and his multiple audiences. Generic multiplicity in *Pierce Penniless* generates plenitude rather than instability because the various genres are knitted together by Nashe's excessive style.

As the section in which Nashe rejects the humanist and courtly rejection of prodigality, the framing narrative is dominated by courtly and humanist genres, specifically by composing a sonnet and invoking Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In addition to Sidney's *Arcadia, Astrophil and Stella* was for late Elizabethans the exemplary expression of courtly and humanist ideals. In 1591, Nashe had written a preface to Thomas Newman's publication of *Astrophil and Stella*.<sup>105</sup> By opening *Pierce Penniless* with a sonnet, Nashe draws upon his association with Sidney, but he alters the sonnet form in significant ways. As we saw in the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, Nashe denies love as a motive for writing. His sonnet complains not of unrequited love but of unrequited poetry. He thus crafts his attenuation of humanist and courtly models of authorship in an elite form. This rejection of the rejection of prodigality leads not to the embrace of prodigality, as it might logically do, but to an ambiguous relationship with both the market and elite institutions. At once he redefines the humanist conception of "profit" by applying this intellectual ideal to the market and generically asserts his fitness for the institutions which have rebuffed him.

Quoting extensively from Ovid, Nashe expresses this vexed relationship with elite forms by aligning himself with a classical author who embodied problems of interpretation and authority for Elizabethans but who also represented a conjunction of "quick invention" and marginality. Georgia Brown writes that "the *Metamorphoses* came

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<sup>105</sup> This version of Sidney's sonnets was subsequently pulled off the market by the Countess of Pembroke.

to epitomize literary creativity through its association with the metamorphic power of wit.”<sup>106</sup> Brown’s argument is evidenced by Thomas Lodge, who writes in his *Reply to Stephen Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse* that Ovid’s “promptness,” or quick wit, makes men “wonder at poetry.”<sup>107</sup> Arthur Golding similarly praises the text’s “invention” and “variety”,<sup>108</sup> and Francis Meres lauds Ovid’s “sweete wittie soul” in *Palladis Tamia*.<sup>109</sup> Yet there was a danger to Ovid, as well. Elizabethans were both delighted and daunted by text’s mixture of poetic skill with sexual explicitness and tales of miraculous transformations,<sup>110</sup> the *Metamorphoses* was the focus of a discussion about the value of dubious classical poetry. In the letter to the reader annexed to his translation, Arthur Golding took pains to justify Ovid’s eccentricities by drawing parallels between Ovid’s creation myth and that of the Bible. In his dedication to the earl of Leicester, Golding provides a moral gloss on each of Ovid’s tales, reassuring Dudley that Ovid’s true intent was didactic. Golding clearly believed that it was necessary to limit the text’s interpretive possibilities and to yoke its pleasures to Christian morality. If per chance the reader still insists on detecting lasciviousness, Golding resigns himself to the fact that each reader will see himself or herself in it.

Ovid’s narrative technique reflected the fecundity of his wit. The *Metamorphoses* is a narrative of romance and digressions that undermine the forward momentum of the text. In this, Ovid provided an alternative model to Virgil. Romance is an obstacle for Aeneas, as his relationship with Dido threatens to derail the founding of Rome, and

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 39. I’m going to have to add other critics here.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Lodge, *Reply to Stephen Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse* (1580?), in *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*, 4 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), page 11, which has been mispaginated as 15.

<sup>108</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: J. Danter, 1593).

<sup>109</sup> Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London: P. Short for Cuthbert Burthbie, 1598), 282v.

<sup>110</sup> Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 36-44.

Mercury must be sent to remind Aeneas of his duty. The narrative in the *Metamorphoses*, by contrast, interlaces digressions within digressions. The Elizabethans furthermore connected romance and digression with Ovid's exile. By placing himself in the Ovidian tradition, Nashe both affiliates himself with the classical model of poetic digression and displacement and yokes his rejection of the rejection of prodigality with the authority of wit. Through Ovid, Nashe grounds his rereading of Lyly's *Euphues* and prodigal authorship in the validity of classical authorship, even as he extenuates his connection to humanist and courtly literary modes. Although this first section of the text proceeds from sonnet to social criticism, the embedment of the sonnet within the prose critique provides for a seamless transition, as the two genres are held together by the values of wit and marginality.

The movement into the second section of the text, the mock-supplication, is abrupt, as the text typographically signals entrance into another narrative space. The style, however, matches that of the social commentary at the conclusion of the framing narrative and provides a sense of coherence. The mock-supplication is, of course, a continued meditation on the theme of social ills as exemplified by illiberal patronage. Failed by England's patrons, Nashe has turned to the devil, the master of the marketplace, and his suit is the commodity that the reader holds in his or her hand. Just as one would praise a patron, Nashe fills his supplication with ironic celebrations of the devil's accomplishments as he narrates a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. Although critics have mined this portion of the text for precedents in classical and medieval satire, one generic source that has been overlooked is popular theater, both pageants and plays. Gabriel Harvey clearly recognized the influence of the public theater when he compared

*Pierce Penniless* to Tarlton's play *The Seven Deadly Sins*.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Tudor morality plays invested the Seven Deadly Sins with imagery that were widely recognizable to Nashe's audience.<sup>112</sup> Dramatic practice developed around the tradition of identifying the personifications of the sins with particular props and costumes. Avarice, for example, was conventionally represented with bags of money.<sup>113</sup>

Spenser includes an Elizabethan rendition of this allegorical tradition in Book I, Canto IV of the *Faerie Queene*, when he describes the parade of Lucifera and her counselors. Nashe, in fact, defers to Spenser at one point, writing that he "a new Laureat hath saved [him] the labor" of discoursing on Gluttony (199). One of the primary differences between Nashe and Spenser, however, is that Nashe invests his pageant of the sins with the details of Elizabethan London. Spenser's Avarice, for example, wears a thread-bare coat and rides a camel with bags of gold at his side, while Nashe's Greediness is attired in a "Capouch of written parchment, buttond downe before with Labels of wax, and lined with sheepes fels for warmenes: his Cappe furd with cats skins, after the Muscovie ... for his breeches, they were made of the lists of broad cloaths, which he had by letters patents assured him and his heyres" (166). Greediness' written parchment and wax paper are legal instruments for writs of security, and each element of his apparel consists of a coveted commodity, either domestic or imported. Whereas Spenser dresses his allegories in the symbols of conventional iconography, Nashe dresses his sins in the materials of London consumer life, with special emphasis on paper and

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<sup>111</sup> Gabriel Harvey, *Foure Letters and Certeine Sonnets* (1592) (London: John Lane, 1922), 44.

<sup>112</sup> David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 125-27.

<sup>113</sup> Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300-1600*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), vol. 3, 83-123.

print. The generic mixture of satire and pageant with the earlier sonnet and social criticism, however, does not create generic instability because each of these generic frames is consistently rendered in Nashe's stylistic excesses. As a result, mixed genres do not undermine each other, but actually work to enhance one another.

Stylistic consistency also connects the personifications of the sins with Nashe's digressions into jest book tales and the diatribe against Harvey. Jest books or books of "merry tales" comprised concatenated anecdotes about a central character who plays verbal games and practical jokes. The anecdotes range in length from one paragraph to several pages, and there is rarely any continuity among them. Each one is presented as a separate, extractable anecdote headed by a descriptive title, for example "Howe the hostler dyd Byte Skeltons mare under the tale, for biting him by the arme" from *Merie Tales ... made by Master Skelton*.<sup>114</sup> The tales are structured so that the reader can easily move back and forth among them. The central characters in these texts are fools, either a natural fool, like Howleglass, or an artificial fool, like Skelton and Tarlton. The stories are sparse of details, usually giving the reader just enough information to understand why the pun or practical joke is funny. The genre turns on the narration of inappropriate, sometimes even cruel behavior, which is forgiven in the end; the jests make the reader laugh either at the expense of the natural fool who is their protagonist or at the expense of the targets of the artificial fool.

Nashe peppers his social criticism with jests, weaving humorous anecdotes about natural and artificial fools throughout his allegories of the Seven Deadly Sins, his

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<sup>114</sup> John Skelton, *Merie Tales ... made by Master Skelton* (1566-67) and *The First and Best Part of Scoggins Jestes* (1565-66), both printed in *Shakespeare Jest-Books*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, 3 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin 1964), 2.3-36.

parodies of London social types, and his *ad hominem* attack against Gabriel Harvey and his brothers. In one example, he tells a story about Tarlton. In another, he creates a “merry tale” about a butcher out of a university *controversia* that is worth pausing over. In the story, the butcher is driving two calves over a common, and the calves are yoked together with a piece of wood. In front of them stands a mare with a galled back. Walking one on either side of the mare, the calves inadvertently rub the mare’s back with wood. She is so sore that, lifting the two calves upon her back, she runs directly into a river and drowns them all. Now, Pierce tells the devil, the butcher is indebted to the owner of the horse, and the owner of the horse is indebted to the butcher. He ends with the punch line, “I pray ye, Timothy Tempter, bee an Arbitrator betwixt them, and couple them both by the neckes (as the calves were) and carry them to Hel on your backe, and then, I hope, they wyll be quiet.” Identifying the story as a “merry tale of a Butcher and his calves” in the marginalia, Nashe labels it with a tag from the jest books, and by adding a punch line, he creates a joke out of the material for a university exercise. Stylistic consistency, however, prevents these genres from destabilizing or undermining one another. They are all related with the same biting wit and attention to the details of contemporary life. At times the tone is more playful and at others more angry, but these oscillations do not produce moments of disjuncture because they are knitted together by Nashe’s signature style.

There is, however, a marked generic disjuncture as the mock-supplication ends and the text launches into a dialogue in which Pierce questions the Knight of the Post about the nature of devils. In this section, Pierce seems more divorced from Nashe than in the previous two sections, as he plays the role of the innocent interlocutor while the

Knight of the Post recites conventional wisdom about Hell.<sup>115</sup> The text effects another generic disjuncture within this section when the Knight embarks on a beast fable about greed and commodity culture. This entire section lacks the exuberant, ornamentalized quality of the first two sections. Indeed, the Knight of the Post does most of the talking here, and his tone is more controlled, bounded, and formal. In its structure and tone, then, as well as its reliance on classical exempla and its frequent use of Latin, this section invokes humanist rhetorical formality. The concept of formality, however, has been thoroughly ironized by this point in the text. This generic disjuncture has the effect of distancing the structurally more formal third section from the rest of the text. Even as Nashe ends the text with a narrative that ostensibly fulfills the humanist requirement of profitable discourse in that it imparts knowledge about the existence of devils, *Pierce Penniless* as a whole both asserts and undermines the humanist dictate for profitability. Similarly, the text vexes its own complaints against patronage by closing with the elaborate praise of the Earl of Derby.

While *Pierce Penniless* is multigeneric and the individual sections into which I have divided the text are internally multigeneric, the only moment in the text in which genre appears to undermine a sense of fullness is in the transition from the second to third sections. Otherwise, throughout the text, generic play produces plenitude and excess that demonstrate Nashe's fertile wit and imagination. Although he intends, I think, to use the value of wit to assert a form of independence from both Humanism and the pamphlet-buying public, he in fact attenuates claims to self-determination by stylistically exposing his reliance upon them. If decorum situated the individual in the world, Nashe attempts to

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<sup>115</sup> According to J.B. Steane, Nashe pulls the content from this section from *Isagoge* by Georgius Pictorius. Steane, ed., *The Unfortunate Traveler and Other Works* (New York: Penguin, [1971] 1985), 127n. 329.

use decorum indecorously in order to move freely between social worlds and therefore separate himself from them. That independence, however, is constructed in response to and out of a compromised position in which he is beholden to multiple worlds.

### *The Unfortunate Traveler*

In the *Anatomy of Absurdity* and *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe works in genres with flexible structures that are easily adapted to his style.<sup>116</sup> Presenting a snapshot of sixteenth-century London, these texts do not depend on literary structure to help endow them with meaning. Instead, they draw their meaning from their relationships with the reader's daily life and their satiric mode.<sup>117</sup> In *The Unfortunate Traveler*, Nashe forays into a new form: an imaginative, chronological, closed narrative, which he refers to interchangeably as a "history" and a "chronicle."<sup>118</sup> This mixture of fiction and chronology requires that genre function in different ways than it does in anatomy or prose satire.

In late-Elizabethan England, "history" and "chronicle" were inclusive terms used to categorize texts as structurally varied as John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Shakespeare's history plays, and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Despite the varied media and literary form of these works, however, each brings the narrative events into a meaningful order dictated by their subject matter. Hayden White has argued that history endows events of the past with meaning by placing them in a "structure of relationships by which

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<sup>116</sup> The two texts that Nashe published in between 1592 and 1594, *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* and *The Terrors of the Night*, have similarly flexible structures.

<sup>117</sup> This combination of satire and "reality" leads Neil Rhodes to term them "satirical journalism" in *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveler, or the Life of Jack Wilton*, in McKerrow, ed., *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, 2, 187-328, esp. 201.



the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole.”<sup>119</sup> Disparate events are brought into alignment by their organization in a cohesive structure. Significance depends upon the existence of a structure, and the nature of the structure depends on the subject matter. In *Henry IV*, part 1, for example, Shakespeare merges chronicle with tragedy and comedy, but these genres function together to narrate Hal’s, and England’s, triumph. In *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe indicates that English glory and divine justice are the two subjects worthy of representation on the public stage, and in *Christ’s Tears over Jerusalem*, he again imagines temporal events as a vehicle for divine justice. From this perspective, the ordering of events within a history or chronicle is arranged according to the meaning imparted by English honor and the narrative of sin and punishment.

History plays and prose romances dominated the market for imaginative pamphlets in 1594, when *The Unfortunate Traveler* was first published. Nashe’s text competed with the reprint of Greene’s *Arbasto, or the Anatomie of Fortune*; John Dicenson’s *Arisbas, Euphues amidst His Slumbers*; Laurence Twyne’s *Apollonius*, the translation of a Greek romance; and Sir John Ogle’s *Lamentation for Troy on the Death of Hector*; as well as playtexts including Shakespeare’s *First Part of the Contention*, Marlowe’s *Edward II*, the anonymous *Battle of Alcazar*, and Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, to which Nashe is believed to have contributed. Anthony Munday’s translations of Spanish romances and Thomas Lodge’s prose fictions were not published in 1594, but were also popular around this period. Prose fictions of the 1580s and 1590s overwhelmingly took the form of romances, and as I have demonstrated, they were

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<sup>119</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 9.

endowed with meaning by the pattern of prodigality and repentance. Sidney's and Greene's later work merged the prodigal-repentance narrative with the conventions of Heliodoran romance, which emphasized the work of Providence through fortune and rewarded heroes and heroines for patient faith.<sup>120</sup> Didacticism, religious ends, and the protagonists'—and by extension, the authors'—repentance directed the ordering of narrative events. In the discursive field into which Nashe entered the *Unfortunate Traveler* prose fiction is given meaning through the overarching values of the glorification of the state, the reformation of the prodigal, and the individual's patient faith in God. *The Unfortunate Traveler* courts and in fact marginally participates in all of these arch-narratives, but the text ultimately refuses to subject its style and the value of wit to the state or God.

The generic multiplicity of the *Unfortunate Traveler* is widely accepted among critics. Steve Mentz writes that the book “provides a *summa* of literary culture in Elizabethan London,” listing chronicle history, jest book, humanist satire, Petrarchan lyric cycle, travelogue, religious polemic, Italianate novella, and classical romance.<sup>121</sup> This generic collection has led some critics to assert, with G.R. Hibbard, that the text lacks any cohesive structure.<sup>122</sup> Others have approached the text through contemporary theory, claiming either that Nashe carnivalizes elite forms or that Nashe self-consciously

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<sup>120</sup> On Heliodoran romance and its influence on Elizabethan prose fiction, I have relied on Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale*.

<sup>121</sup> Steve Mentz, “Jack and the City: *The Unfortunate Traveler*, Tudor London, and Literary History,” in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 489-503, esp. 490. I would argue that equally important to chronicle history and romance is rogue literature, a genre that was related to but different from the jest book. I make this point below.

<sup>122</sup> Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe in Context*, 147.

deconstructs genre and challenges epistemology.<sup>123</sup> Still others have read Nashe as patently anti-humanist<sup>124</sup> or argued that his anti-humanism effects the democratization of literary form.<sup>125</sup>

All of these critiques arise from the perception that, as Ann Rosalind Jones phrases it, “something in Nashe’s situation prevented him from ordering those discourses into a seamless whole.”<sup>126</sup> Instead of searching for something that “prevented” integration, I would argue that Nashe uses generic multiplicity to assert the supreme valuation of wit that he developed as a means of situating himself in relation to his multiple audiences and contemporary generic forms. The self-conscious style and persona that Nashe developed in response to his writing conditions problematize generic unity. A crucial element of Nashe’s performance of wit and style is the fact that he uses each episode in the text as an occasion to display his rhetorical dexterity, a project in

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<sup>123</sup> Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context*; and Ann Rosalind Jones, “Inside the Outsider: Nashe’s Unfortunate Traveler and Bakhtin’s Polyphonic Novel,” *English Literary History* 50 (1983): 61-81, offer readings of Nashe and Bakhtinian Carnival, while Raymond Stephanson, “The Epistemological Challenge of Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveler*,” *SEL* 23.1 (winter 1983): 21-36, presents Nashe as undermining the certainty of knowledge.

<sup>124</sup> Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context*; Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*; Mihoko Suzuki, “‘Signorie over the Pages’: The Crisis of Authority in Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveler*,” *Studies in Philology* 81 (1984): 348-71; and Holbrook, *Literature and Degree*.

<sup>125</sup> Wendy Hyman, “Authorial Self-Consciousness in Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveler*,” *SEL* 45.1 (winter 2005): 23-41.

<sup>126</sup> Jones, “Inside the Outsider,” 73. Jones presents an interesting version of the argument that *The Unfortunate Traveler* is a picaresque. Arguing for genre as a critical categorization, rather than a rhetorical strategy as I contend, Jones writes that the text can be read as a picaresque of forms, in the sense that what unifies the text is its episodic movement through different literary forms. There is a strong critical draw to analyze the *Unfortunate Traveler* as a picaresque. The text’s episodic nature and its rogue hero prompted Alastair Fowler to label it as picaresque in his *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), 174. As she adapts this claim, however, Jones makes important arguments against this categorization. She argues that Nashe’s text differs from the picaresque in the level of distance it constructs between author and protagonist and the way that it lingers over each of its episodes. I would add to her argument that the only historical evidence that Nashe was familiar with Spanish picaresque is found in an oblique comment he makes in *Have With You to Saffron Walden* to “new-fangled Galiardos and Senior Fantasticos.” Mentz notes that this reference “recalls” Spanish picaresque, but I would argue that the reference is too passing to provide the basis for any historical argument for Nashe’s familiarity with that genre. Harvey, on the other hand, does compare *Pierce Penniless* to *Lazarillo of Tormes* in passing in *Pierce’s Supererogation*.

which he enlists diverse genres. As a result, the episodes are narrated in different genres. At the same time, the chronological structure of the text fosters the expectation that the ending will ultimately provide the story with meaning by integrating the preceding events into a cohesive narrative. Nashe, however, never subordinates the genres of the *Unfortunate Traveler* to an overarching narrative out of which the relationships between them can be given definitive shape. In the *Unfortunate Traveler*, Nashe perpetuates the style that he developed in *Pierce Penniless*, using it to manage his relationships with multiple audiences in print. Under the pressure of the chronological form of Jack Wilton's life history, however, that style produces a form of generic confusion rather than plenitude.

The potential audience for the *Unfortunate Traveler* was narrower than that for *Pierce Penniless*, the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, and *Terrors of Night* for the simple reason that it was longer. In fact, the *Unfortunate Traveler* ran the maximum length for a pamphlet, and it was therefore among the most expensive of ephemera available. It was almost twice as long as a playtext and all of Greene's romances with the exception of *Menaphon*. As I noted earlier, *Menaphon* represented a different kind of claim to permanence and authorship for Greene, drawn in part from the legitimacy of Sidney's *Arcadia*. Nashe, I would argue, makes a similar claim for legitimacy and similarly uses literary form to invoke Sidney. The size of the text, then, does some work in limiting its circulation to a more prosperous population. Yet, even more so than in *Pierce Penniless* or the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, Nashe dramatizes the division between elite potential patrons and book buyers in the *Unfortunate Traveler*'s dueling dedications. The first

edition includes a dedication to Lord Henry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton,<sup>127</sup> but the epistle is overtly parodic. He opens with the statement, “Ingenuous honorable Lord, I know not what blinde custome methodicall antiquity hath thrust upon us, to dedicate such books as we publish to one great man or other” (201). Having seemingly dismissed Wriothesley’s individual importance, Nashe proceeds to claim, nevertheless, that he will measure the book’s value by Wriothesley’s approval or disapproval. The dedication proceeds in hyperbolic language, the effect of which is fundamentally to elevate the poet as the creative source of the poetry and relegate the patron to a secondary but customary, passive role of approval or disapproval.<sup>128</sup>

Nashe’s tone changes markedly in the second formal paratext, the “Induction to the dapper Monsier Pages of the Court,” to whom he takes a conversational, colloquial, and energetic tone: “Gallant squires, have amongst you” (207). Presenting the book to the pages on behalf of Jack, Nashe depicts Jack as a member of a brotherhood of pages committed to pleasure. They play cards and false dice; they drink; and they duel. They are, in short, prodigals. To this audience, he insists on the materiality of the book as frivolous and transitory. Whereas he exhorts Wriothesley to prevent the book from becoming “waste paper,” he encourages the pages to use it as waste paper, for the toilet if they must but preferably for wrapping food or tobacco. Nashe offers them a first “tast to the text” (208), introducing them to Wilton’s youth and prodigality and his commitment to living “merrily” as he describes it (210). The conversational and extemporal tone

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<sup>127</sup> Shakespeare also dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* and the *Rape of Lucrece* to Wriothesley.

<sup>128</sup> Hyman, “Authorial Self-Consciousness,” 27, provides a similar analysis of the competing dedications to Wriothesley and the pages of court. While she identifies the induction to the pages as a form of “radical populism,” I argue that Nashe’s negotiation of his relationship with his audience was more nuanced, fraught, and frankly elitist than populist.

persists as Nashe entreats them to “jost a little nearer to the matter”, and he issues directions first, that they are to defend the book against any detractors; second, that when they swear men into their order, they are to use only his book; third, that it is lawful to play false dice on this “Acts and Monuments”; and lastly, that they take their caps off every time they pass a stationer’s stall because this text, their Capitano, lies there. He thus transfers the defense of the book from the potential patron to the book-buying readers, and he makes of his readers members in a fraternity of merriment and prodigality.

Through the two dedications, Nashe identifies Jack as a marginal figure. While it is tempting to read the irony in the dedication to Wriothesley as a rejection of patronage, it is important to remember that Nashe included it in the first published edition. Although it was subsequently omitted from the second edition, presumably because it incurred Wriothesley’s displeasure, it indicates Nashe’s continued construction of his authorial persona in order to market himself to an audience that he imagined as divided. Like the coexistence in *Pierce Penniless* of railing against patronage and the closing plea to the Earl of Derby, the dedication to Wriothesley mitigates but does negate its patronage suit. Another crucial difference from *Pierce Penniless* is that in the *Unfortunate Traveler*, Nashe identifies his reading public as comprising marginal figures like himself; they are pages at the court, figures who occupy the very lowest positions in the courtly world. These are gentlemen servingmen, a contradiction that Nashe highlights when he writes that Jack is a gentleman “at the least” (209). Like himself, Nashe images Wilton and his reading public as residing on the margins of sites of cultural authority. Whereas in *Pierce*

*Penniless*, Nashe had merely resigned himself to publication, here he celebrates it in an embrace of holiday play.<sup>129</sup>

The anxieties about audience and authority that prompted Nashe to produce the marginalized Pierce are also at work in the *Unfortunate Traveler*, and although Nashe embraces the peripheral status of Jack and his audience, he continues to be animated by social conservatism. Nashe prevents his celebration of holiday play from aligning him uncomplicatedly with his broad potential audiences in two ways. First, he insists on education as a marker of social status. In the induction, he figures the initiation into the brotherhood of pages by referring to a ceremony of undergraduate initiation at the universities.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Jack consistently calls upon imagery, language, and exempla from elite literary traditions, and he quotes Latin, sometimes translating and other times leaving the text comprehensible only to those who also read Latin. What's more, he sometimes mistranslates the Latin or includes Latin puns, playing a private joke with the grammar-school educated readers to the exclusion of the lower status readers. For example, he cites a grammar-school declension exercise: "I was my crafts-master though I was but yong, and could as soone decline Nominativo hic Asinus as a greater Clearke" (218). The Latin, of course, holds a play on words; Jack replaces "hic magister" [this teacher] with "hic Asinus" [this ass], but the pun is only meaningful for those with a similar level of education.

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<sup>129</sup> I make an important distinction between holiday play and Bakhtin's Carnival because Carnival always exists in a binary with and subverts hegemonic culture. Nashe's positioning in relation to high and low is more nuanced than the binary of subversion-containment allows. He maintains a fluid relationship with both higher and lower cultural forms and audiences.

<sup>130</sup> Steane, ed., *The Unfortunate Traveler*, 253n7.

Second, Nashe reveals a vexed relationship with his pamphlet-buying readership by distinguishing the characters in the text based on their status, and he invariably attacks those of lower status more harshly than those of higher status. Jack, for example, associates artificers with credulity and a lack of sophistication, explaining that the mechanical captain is easily fooled because he is uneducated. More significantly, he identifies the Anabaptists as “all base handicrafts as cobblers and curriers and tinkers,” and he proceeds to satirize their attempts to assemble armor out of the materials of lower-status life: “Perchance here and there you might see a fellow that had a canker-eaten scull on his head, which served him and his ancestors for a chamber pot two hundred years . . . another that had thrust a paire of drie olde bootes as a breast-plate before his belly of his dublet” (232-33). Nashe’s parody of their arms aligns with his distaste for their social agenda. What he interprets as their desire to level the social hierarchy becomes an opportunity for him to express his conservatism, as it becomes clear that the address to the pages does not indicate any form of “radical populism.” He uses similar techniques to satirize the citizens of Wittenberg, as their attempt to present an oration to the Duke of Saxony becomes an object of parody. It may be objected that Nashe also parodies elite life, in particular in his depiction of the earl of Surrey’s tournament at Florence. It is crucial, however, when reading a text like the *Unfortunate Traveler*, in which everybody, including the protagonist himself, is parodied to some extent, to keep in mind that parody and satire can invoke varying levels and kinds of critique. Wilton’s critique of the mechanical captain, the Muncers, and the Wittenberg citizens is biting, while his treatment of Surrey is better described as jesting.



Marginality affords Jack a kind of freedom of movement similar to that of the “unthrift abroad” in *Pierce Penniless*, and the text links the fluidity, travel, prodigality, and pleasure with wit and the mastery of rhetoric. Marginality may leave Jack with little social authority, but the world that Nashe presents does not depend upon authority figures.<sup>131</sup> Instead, it is a chaotic world, checked only by the prison and the gallows, where Jack literally lives by his wits. Travel is a continued state of dislocation, a fact that prompts the banished English earl who saves Jack from the gallows to lament that travel puts the traveler at the whim of everyone he meets. The world beyond England rewards not simplicity and honesty but eloquence: “Be his feature what it will if he be faire spoken he winneth frends: *Non formosus erat, sed erat facundus Ulysses*: Ulysses the long Traveller, was not amiable but eloquent” (299). Reiterating one Renaissance reading of the *Odyssey* that saw Odysseus as cunning, the earl depicts eloquence as a form of deception, but one that is practically valuable despite its moral uncertainty. Rhetoric allows Ulysses to master a fluid world. While he is attempting to dissuade Jack from travel for the sake of learning, he articulates an important organizing principle in the text: wit finds its highest expression in eloquence. Jack echoes this idea when he proclaims that poetry is a “supernaturall kinde of wit” (242).

The character of Jack is constructed on the principles that rhetoric is the height of wit even though it is ambiguous. Jack elaborates on this principle when he describes the necessary qualities of a good spy: “yet, whatsoever be wanting, a good plausible tongue in such a man of imployment can hardly be sparde, which, as the fore-named serpent with his winding taile fetchet in those that come nere him, so with a ravishing tale it gathers al

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<sup>131</sup> The one exception might be Surrey, who willingly trades places with Jack precisely so he can have more freedom.

mens harts unto him” (221). Prefiguring the banished earl’s reference to Ulysses, Jack lists Ulysses as one of the world’s greatest intelligencers. While the earl proposes that travel necessitates artful rhetoric for survival, Jack takes advantage of the fluidity of his social world by using artful rhetoric for his own pleasure and that of the reader. In this, Jack is unlike the heroes of any previous prose fiction. Instead, his generic roots lie in the cony-catching pamphlets that Greene published in the early 1590s. Nashe takes the dubious characters of Greene’s rogue pamphlets and makes them the protagonist of his prose fiction in order to validate the importance of rhetorical mastery.

The first of Greene’s pamphlets, *A Notable Discovery of Cosnage* (1591), claims to disclose the mechanics of the London underworld in order to arm the reader against petty criminals. Greene opens by assuring the reader that he has risked his life in order to bring the London underworld to light. Yet, while Greene proclaims his outrage against the petty thieves and tricksters who populate his pamphlet, the text lingers over stories about how the cony-catchers entice and beguile their victims. The second pamphlet lengthens the stories about victims being duped and minimizes the moral injunctions. By the third pamphlet, Greene is merely relating a series of jest book tales in which cony-catchers play the jesters. The stories invariably end with a halfhearted warning to the reader, but the pleasure and humor of the tales derive from the narration of how the clever cony-catcher tricks the foolish cony. Sympathy in these stories lies with the lawbreakers, a fact that crucially distinguishes them from jest book tales.

Cony-catchers are skilled practitioners, and their brilliance inheres in their ability to lure their victims with rhetoric, another important distinction from the jest books. The “taker up” of the cony-catching band has learned through experience how to speak on any

subject so he can insinuate himself into his victim's trust: "Talke of matters of law, he hath plenty of Casis at his fingers end ... Speake of grasing and husbandry, no man knoweth more shires than he ... Yea, and it shall scape him hardly, but that ere your talke breake off, hee will be your Countrey man atleast, and peradventure either of kinne, aly or stale sib to you."<sup>132</sup> Greene characterizes this skill as "rethoricall persuasions" (20), and he furthermore refers to the taker-up's opening speech as an *exordium* (43). He elaborates in the *Second Part of Conny-catching* that they draw "poore Connies into their laie, seeking with the Orators / *Benevolentiam captare*, and as they use rethoricall tropes and figures, the better to drawe their hearers with the delight off varietie."<sup>133</sup> Having warned readers against the cony-catchers' abuse of the tools of rhetoric, however, he launches directly into "A Pleasant tale of the Connie-catchers" (91).

Like the cony-catchers, Jack uses his rhetorical talents in extralegal ways for his own benefit and for the pleasure of himself and the reader. At least initially, the moral implications of his behavior are neutralized by the atmosphere of holiday inversion. He cozens men in the spirit of merriment, securing free cider for all of the soldiers from the cider-merchant and cross-dressing as a prostitute to dupe the lecherous Switzer. The real pleasure of his "ingenuous stratagems" arises not just from his puns, but from the elaborate narration of how he convinces his victims to do ridiculous things. The text lingers over his orations, as Jack employs the arsenal of humanist rhetoric for trickster ends. His deception of the cider-merchant is a textbook performance of a humanist deliberative oration. Jack puts to use Wilson's recommendation that the orator open by

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<sup>132</sup> Robert Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* (1591), in *The Life and Complete Works*, vol. 10, 1-61, esp. 10.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Greene, *The Second Part of Conny-catching* (1591), in *The Life and Complete Works*, vol. 10, 63-133, esp. 90.

praising his judges, as he vows his affection for the merchant, celebrates the merchant's nobility, and commends his magnanimity.<sup>134</sup> Jack proceeds to amplify with moral *sententiae* and classical examples and to ornament his speech with figures like *aposiopesis* and *catachresis*. The success of Jack's wit is manifested in the exaggerated response of the cider merchant, who "fell ... on his knees, wrong his hands, and I thinke on my conscience, wepte out all the syder that he had dronke in a weeke before" (213), and by the bacchanalia the following day when the merchant gives away his cider for free.

Jack's rhetorical performance for the cider-merchant is, of course, the material of another rhetorical performance, one which Nashe performs for the reader. Just as Jack revels in his rhetorical expertise, Nashe makes the display of his wit the driving force behind the first half of the text. Until Jack ends up in Rome, he wanders amidst historical events from the first half of the sixteenth century. From the battle at Turin to the Anabaptist rebellion at Munster to the orations of Luther, Jack finds himself wandering through the landscape of political, social, and religious ferment. While one might expect these events to draw their meaning from historical significance, we find instead that each becomes meaningful in the text because it presents Nashe with a rhetorical occasion to display his skill and to reflect on aspects of London life. The Anabaptists are a monstrous version of the radical puritans; the scholars at Wittenberg exemplify the worst of the London universities; and Tabitha the Temptress's house is filled with commodities available on the London market. Jack gleans few lessons from his participation in these historical moments; rather, Nashe luxuriates in descriptions of the events themselves,

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<sup>134</sup> Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 216.

using Jack's experiences as an opportunity to comment on the fabric of London life and to demonstrate his wit, which is, above all, encapsulated in his style and his use of genre.

In the context of holiday inversion in *Unfortunate Traveler*, Nashe's style of indecorous decorum becomes even more pronounced, Nashe intensifies his stylistic pyrotechnics. He mixes the language of elite education and commodity materialism with abandon, shifting abruptly between comic and tragic tones and between oral and literary modes, and so swelling the pages with language and imagery that one critic notes that the text "alienate[s] the reader with its peculiar narrative ambiguities and distortions."<sup>135</sup> I would argue that this characteristic of Nashe's style arises from his investment in a rogue hero intent on holiday inversion and his related commitment to varying his style to exhibit his wit. Jack's puns are the clearest example of the dual function of Nashe's unruly style. While the cider-merchant begs Jack to instruct him in recapturing the king's favor, Jack makes a pun to the reader: "I, being by nature included to Mercie (for in deede I knewe two or three good wenches of that name), bad him harden his eares" (213). Jack's pun engages the intimacy of the reader, much like a dramatic soliloquy or aside, and demonstrates that two interrelated rhetorical performances are in process—Jack's and Nashe's—both of which are motivated by pleasure and the display of wit.

This combination of rogue hero and holiday inversion has produced the aspect of the text that critics have consistently found most disturbing, that is, its seemingly offhanded treatment of extreme brutality. Indeed, once Jack leaves the army camp in France, he encounters events of almost unimaginable brutality, from the sweating sickness in London to the battlefield in Turin, the slaughter of the Anabaptists,

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<sup>135</sup> Stephanson, "Epistemological Challenge," 22.

Heraclide's rape, and Cutwolfe's torture and execution. Since Jack and Nashe approach this violence through the text's commitment to merriment and holiday inversion, the result is the production of a grotesque style, which has been examined at length by Neil Rhodes.<sup>136</sup> The *Unfortunate Traveler* lends itself to the grotesque because the response of holiday inversion to violence produces a mixture of shock, comedy, and bodily mutilation.

Jack's description of the plague in Rome serves as a useful example. Nashe writes, "The wals wer hoard and furd with the moist scorching steame of their desolation ... Some dide sitting at their meat, others as they were asking counsel of the phisition for theyr friends. I sawe at the house where I was hosted a maide bring her master warme broth for to comfort him, and shee sinke down dead her selfe ere he had halfe eate it up" (286-87). While this treatment of suffering has been termed as "bad taste," and Nashe certainly revels in the violence, I would argue he does so because he values the rhetorical opportunity more than the didactic or moral opportunity. The most violent or tragic scenes are also often the scenes in which Nashe uses the grotesque style to display the height of his wit. If Nashe's style is a strategy born out of his attempt to establish writerly value and authority under the historical conditions of print marketplace and the potentially anonymous book-buying public, then the more bizarre but brilliant his style is, the better. Rhetorical excess is pleasure, and the text's violence offers Nashe an opportunity to indulge in rhetorical extremes. This is not to say that holiday inversion is capable of containing the moral taint of violence, as I demonstrate below. Instead, this is to say that morality was not Nashe's primary concern.

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<sup>136</sup> Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, 18-62.

Genres offer Nashe a similar opportunity to display his rhetorical facility and his mastery of literary art. While Jack retains his affiliation with cony-catchers throughout the text, he moves from inhabiting a world structured around the conventions of cony-catching pamphlets in the war camp in France, to a world of religious polemic in Munster, to humanist debate in Wittenberg, to Petrarchan sonnets and Elizabethan romance in Florence, to Italian novella and Heliodoran romance in Rome. In each of these milieus, Nashe exhibits his proficiency at the dominating genre. In response to the Anabaptists, for example, he launches into a sermon, with which he is so transported from the German scene that he breaks the fiction of Jack Wilton and earnestly entreats his English audience: “Ministers and Pastors, sell away your sects and schisms to the decrepit Churches in contention beyond the sea” (237). He accounts for the shift in tone, from the satirization of the mechanical Muncers to grave exhortation, by asking for permission to “dilate a little more gravely than the nature of this historie requires” (234), but this is the only time in the text that he attempts to justify an abrupt shift between genres. Each new genre gives Nashe the opportunity to parody social types and display his skill. Through the oration of the citizen Vanderhulke, for example, Nashe parodies humanist oration. This “bursten belly inkhorn orator” exhibits his simplicity in a blundering speech in which he abuses rhetorical figures and tropes, opening with the inept invocation, “O orificiall rethorike, wipe thy everlasting mouth” (248). Vanderhulke conflates oratory, official, and orifice, choosing to dilate on the most bodily nuance of the conglomerate that he coins. He, of course, serves as a foil for Jack and for Nashe but simultaneously permits Nashe to demonstrate that he has so mastered rhetoric that he can distort it at will.

Jack's friendship with Surrey serves a similar function, although Nashe is much gentler in his treatment of courtly poetry and tournaments than he is in his satire of humanist scholarship or religious polemic. Surrey is introduced as the embodiment of heavenly poetry, and his joust is modeled on the persona and writings of Philip Sidney. As Jack, Nashe appropriates Surrey's voice and produces Petrarchan sonnets in his name. Ultimately, however, Surrey and courtly poetry are revealed to be ineffective because they are impractical. When Jack and Surrey compete for Diamante's affections in the Venetian jail, Jack says upon hearing one of Surrey's extemporal ditties—crafted, of course, by Nashe—"Sadly and verily, if my master sayde true, I shoulde if I were a wench make many men quickly immortall." Jack, instead, wins Diamante with "simplicitie and plainness" (163). Nashe similarly reproduces and undermines courtly ceremony in his description of Surrey's Florentine joust. Lavishing almost ten pages on the knights, the *impresa*, the armor, and the forms of jousting, Nashe takes great pleasure in punning and parodying this courtly romance ceremony. The knights employ such elaborate costumes, for example, that they are unable to move. One wears a mountain over his head and body, while another covers his armor with a hawthorn bush and impales nightingale on his helmet. The mottoes are likewise ridiculous; whereas they should praise women, they insult them. One knight had a shrewish wife, and so on his shield he imprinted "a man put into a sacke with a cocke, serpent, and an apte, interpreting that his wife was a cocke for her crowing, a serpent for her stining, and an apte for unconstant wantonness" (277).

Jack excuses these various narrative episodes as digressions from his main point, but it becomes increasingly clear as the text progresses that there is no main point. In his



digressions, generic mixture, excessive style, and rogue hero, Nashe produces a text that is the prodigal trope of the fiction of Lyly, Gascoigne, and Greene writ large. When Jack arrives in Rome, however, the text operates under increasing pressure to move towards a moment of repentance and conversion, the conclusion that Elizabethan readers would have expected and which would have potentially brought Nashe's disparate genres into alignment. While the text gestures toward repentance in its final paragraph, Jack's claim to reform appears provisional and thus fails to subsume the text's different generic lenses under the overarching structure of Heliodoran romance or providential history.

As Steve Mentz has demonstrated, the generic tenor of the text shifts once Jack enters Rome. The narrative remains episodic, but all of the Roman episodes are linked by their common location and their heightened engagement with the questions about God and fortune, the primary themes of the Elizabethan Heliodoran romance. Before Jack arrives in Rome, however, the text's treatment of fortune and providence are equivocal. Jack seems to accept the idea that God has some hand in human affairs but this idea sits uneasily with text's holiday inversion, exuberant style, and generic multiplicity. On the one hand, Jack justifies the practical jokes he plays by claiming that he is the vehicle of "God's scourge from above," sent to punish arrogant and immoral men (271). Yet, when he returns to Europe after the sweating sickness in England, he claims "It was my good lucke or my ill (I know not which) to come just to the fighting of the Battell" (231). Jack explicitly encounters the idea that God operates through in human world, however, in the form of the Anabaptists, whom he lambasts for thinking that they can read God's plan in the signs of daily life. Later he presents an outlook on morality that takes a lenient approach to human weakness, "Now I beseech God love me so wel as I love a plaine

dealing man; earth is earth, flesh is flesh, earth wil to earth, and flesh unto flesh; fraile earth, fraile flesh, who can keepe you from the worke of your creation?" And he proceeds to comment that this thought is tanderial, "dismissing this fruitless annotation *pro et contra*; towards Venice we progresst" (245). Jack sets aside theological considerations as fruitless, or perhaps too weighty for the lightness of the narrative. Nashe thus offers conflicting opinions on whether God works through human affairs. Nashe seems to think so, Jack will not commit to the idea.

This issue, however, becomes central to the text when Jack arrives in Rome, particularly when Jack witnesses Heraclide's rape. Esdras, the rapist, takes advantage of the plague to ravage abandoned maids and widows. When he breaks into Heraclide's house, she has lost 14 children to the disease and her husband's dead body lies on the floor. As Esdras is about to violate her, Heraclide presents a tragic oration in the elevated style about the nature of God, fortune, and punishment. She pleads with him to spare her, citing the recent plague as proof that God punishes human transgressions:

Gods hand like a huge stone hangs inevitably over thy head: what is the plague but death playing the Provost Marshall, to excecute all those that will not be called home by anie other meanes? ... so thinke the anger of God apparently visioned or showne unto thee in the knitting of my browes. A hundred have I buried out of my house, at all whose departures I have been present: a hundreds infection is mixed with my breath: loe, now I breath upon thee, a hundred deaths come upon thee. (289)

Esdras responds that he has escaped death too many times to count, and he has always been lucky so there is no reason for him to believe that God is working against him now. After Esdras rapes her, Heraclide presents an impassioned speech in which she doubts God's mercy. She bewails that God will be ashamed to look at her in heaven, and she

reasons that since she is the object of temptation, she should think of herself as damned, as the devil was damned. She then commits suicide, claiming that she will punish herself for her sins.

As Mentz notes, this passage brings to the forefront the concerns of Elizabethan Heliodoran romance with God's operation through fortune. While Nashe encourages sympathy instead of condemnation for Heraclide, she is nonetheless misguided. Her rationale that she can see God's hand working in the human world recalls that of the Anabaptists, and she assumes that because she is the object of sin she is therefore damned, reading the alignment between the material and spiritual worlds in an overly literal way. She is proven wrong when her husband, who seemed to be dead but was merely sleeping, is woken by the weight of her dead body falling on him. In one of the most jarring transitions in the text, the narrative moves abruptly from the heights of tragedy to farce. The result is to cast further doubt on Heraclide's already suspect logic. Both the Anabaptists and Heraclide become the objects of parody for overestimating their ability to understand God's intentions through the unfolding of the human world.

The Heraclide episode appears to be the moral center of the text, and Jack does in fact begin to attribute his luck to God more often than he did in the first half of the text. An equal number of fortunate and unfortunate events, however, occur without Jack's commentary on the supernatural. When the banished earl saves Jack from hanging, Jack makes no mention of God. Similarly when Juliana fortunately catches sight of Jack in the street and determines to acquire him for herself, the narrative is silent about punishment and reward. These circumstances ultimately attenuate Jack's final repentance after he hears Cutwolfe's confession. As he is about to be tortured and executed, Cutwolfe reveals

that he killed Esdras by forcing him to abjure God and then shooting him in the mouth. Jack sets the scene for him and the reader to have a moment of revelation, exhorting “Prepare your eares and your teares, for never tyll this thrust I anie tragecall matter upon you. Strange and wonderfull are Gods judgments, here shine they in their glory.” He then assures the reader that Heraclide’s rape has been avenged, and he advises suffering people everywhere to “Referre all your oppressions, afflictions, and injuries to the even balanced eie of the Almightye” (320). After Cutwolfe’s confession, Jack confides that he was so “mortifiedly abject and danted . . . with this truculent tragedie of Cutwolfe and Esdras” that he amended his life, married Diamante, and fled Italy.

In the end, though, this repentance does little to retrospectively order the events of the text because it appears conditional in light of the way that Jack has intermittently commented on providence and fortune. One page of the text is occupied with repentance while over 94 pages are occupied with prodigality. Furthermore, Nashe ends the tale by saying that if the book has pleased any, he will write more, making the ending of Jack’s tale unabashedly equivocal. Lastly, Jack never does in fact reach England. The book ends with him in the English army camp at Ards. God, repentance, and England are all raised as ideas that might bring the genres and style into order, but Nashe commits to none of them, and purposefully leaves the ending flexible so that he can write another book if this one is successful. Ultimately, Nashe is more interested in using genre as an expression of his wit and allowing his style to direct his narrative than in structuring the text under the banner of God or the state. Nashe begins his career by adhering to humanist theories of decorum. By the time he gets to the end of the *Unfortunate Traveler*, he has embraced a form of generic multiplicity and excessive style that make use of humanist theories of

decorum in order to undermine them. The fact that he dramatically shifts his approach to his audience, genre, and style after participating in the Martin Marprelate Controversy illustrates that experiments of genre and style in texts sold on the commercial market arose were prompted by writers' attempts to navigate a broad readership and the wide availability of the pamphlet format.

## CHAPTER 3

### Shakespeare and *Hamlet*

I have argued earlier that generic categories identify a text's form and style by pointing to its alignment with and differentiation from other past and current texts. I have also argued that the meanings of those forms as well as the significance of adherence to and deviation from generic codes arise from a dialogic process of cultural production and reception. Authors write in genres that are comprehensible to their audiences, and audiences understand a text within a milieu of contemporary texts that are both similar and different. When we turn from the published prose of Nashe to the drama of Shakespeare, we move from a form of relatively stable text to a form of notable fluidity. Whereas meaning in Spenser or Nashe cannot be said to be fixed or confined, their published texts were enduring material objects. A reader of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* will find the same words on the page every time he or she opens a given copy. It might be argued that each reading of a poem constitutes its own act of performance and production, but Shakespeare's plays were intended for performance of a conventionalized kind that bore a different relationship to the words on the page than does the reading of poetry or prose. In theatrical performance, scripted words work in tandem with costume, gesture, facial expression, tone of voice, stage blocking, music, scenery, and all of the other sensory details that converge to create meaning embodied in a specific dramatic event.

In her *Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, Jean Alter offers a useful critical vocabulary for discussing how different modes of theatrical performance contribute to the

production of dramatic meaning. Alter suggests that there is an “inherent duality of theatrical activity: on the one hand, its reference to a story that takes place in a mental space outside the stage; on the other, its display of real performances on the stage.”<sup>1</sup> She identifies the former as theater’s “referential function” and the latter as its “performant function.” Using Alter as a starting point, Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster further classify components of the performant function as “representational” elements that contribute to the “referential verisimilitude in mimesis” and “presentational” elements that constitute “a self-sustained display of the competence and appeal it takes to put the show across.”<sup>2</sup> The presentational mode operates through embodied practices that produce the performance as performance, the practices through which the expertise, “zest and gusto,” and “sheer energy” contribute to the audience’s experience of a dynamic theatrical event in the here-and-now. It encompasses both the means through which the performance makes audience members conscious of their participation and the “enunciating gestures” that contribute to the performance but do not necessarily further to the verisimilitude of plot, character, and story. Whereas the representational mode functions to actualize the scripted story, the presentational mode encompasses those aspects of dramatic meaning that exist only in performance.

The relationship between playscript and presentation has been the subject of debate among “traditional” literary scholars and performance critics over the past thirty years. W.B. Worthen has recently described literary critics and performance critics as standing in two camps. The former perpetuate a canonical privileging of text over

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Alter, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46.

performance, while the latter react by insisting that performance must be privileged over text. Performance studies, according to Worthen, do not imagine a new way of thinking about drama so much as they reverse the text-performance hierarchy while retaining essentially literary assumptions about theater. Asking critics to “read plays without conceiving stage performance as merely ministerial, ‘interpretive,’ derivative of the drama’s literary design,” Worthen challenges critics to deepen their understanding of presentational practices.<sup>3</sup> In *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*, he argues for performance as a “force” and site of inquiry of its own,<sup>4</sup> an appeal that has been echoed by Meredith Anne Skura and Tiffany Stern, who resist the canonical reading of Shakespeare as Bard by emphasizing his history as a player, and by Weimann and Bruster, David Bevington, David Bradley, and Marvin and Ruth Thompson, who have made stage practices the focus of their studies.<sup>5</sup>

Analyses of Shakespearean genres, however, continue to focus on the text as the primary locus of theatrical meaning. Lawrence Danson, for example, entitles one chapter of his book *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres* “The Genres Staged,” but the discussion focuses on literary precedents like Seneca and Plautus.<sup>6</sup> While critics may refer to performance conventions or stage directions in the study of individual plays, few take as

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<sup>3</sup> William B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 69.

<sup>4</sup> William B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004); Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*; David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare’s Language of Gesture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Marvin and Ruth Thompson, *Shakespeare and the Sense of Performance: Essays in the Tradition of Performance Criticism in Honor of Bernard Beckerman* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).



their starting point a sustained analysis of how text and performance operate in tandem to produce genre. Nevertheless, critics continue to defer to the commonplace that changes in the relationship between text and performance around 1600 had important implications for genre production. Richard Helgerson's *Forms of Nationhood* is the *locus classicus* of this argument.<sup>7</sup> According to Helgerson, in the 1580s, plays were written by players, and the stage was dominated by the clown, who, resisting the contingencies of script and plot, based his performance in spontaneous and vigorous, presentation-centered playing. In the 1590s, however, when an increasing number of university wits began writing for the public stage, the professional theater moved away from this players' theater toward what Helgerson calls an "authors' theater," in which the playwright and script were the dominating forces. Helgerson's argument about the popular stage is necessarily shaped by his larger interest in how the younger generation of Elizabethans constructed an image of the English nation. He therefore focuses on Shakespeare's history plays, asserting that as Shakespeare felt pressured by the success of the university wits, he became invested in elevating himself above the status of player and consolidating his authorial persona as the source of creative power.

Albeit gingerly, Helgerson posits a relationship between the decline of clowning and changes in generic practice on the public stage. As the clown became a marginal figure, he argues, "the national history play and romantic comedy gave way to satire, city comedy, tragedy, and eventually tragicomedy and romance" (198). Andrew Gurr makes a similar assessment, writing that it "is clear ... that the role of the clown in adult company plays had diminished markedly in value as plays began to offer more scope for the tragic

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

actors.”<sup>8</sup> The underlying assumptions are that clowning is incompatible with genres other than comedy and that the university wits subscribed in practice to theories of classical decorum in which clowning had no role.

Most critics, like Weimann and Bruster, David Bevington, and Ruth Lunney, agree with Helgerson that during the Elizabethan period, representational and presentational performance practices came to be seen by educational elites as distinct theatrical modes with different social values.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Helgerson envisions playwriting and playing—metonymically referred to as performance and text, playwright and player, and page and stage—as binaries in an inverse relationship, Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster have argued instead that the Elizabethan theater was a site of “bifold authority,” in which text and performance “stand for communicative media or tools of cultural production derived from diverse sources, traditions, or experiences.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than arguing for the disappearance of clowning at the turn of the seventeenth century, they investigate moments in Shakespeare’s corpus when text and performance mediate each other in interesting ways because they draw on different semiotic systems.

Building upon Weimann and Bruster’s flexible model of the relationship between script-directed representation and performance-directed presentation, my study

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89.

<sup>9</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*; Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*; David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe; Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 14. See also Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Weimann, “Bifold Authority in Shakespeare’s Theatre,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (Winter 1988), 401-17; Weimann, *Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theater*, ed. Helen Higbee and William West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Prologues to Shakespeare’s Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

investigates how the social values attributed to these performance practices influenced the production of genre on the public stage. Following different forms of discourse about playing, primarily poetic treatises, London government documents, and popular drama between 1560 and the turn of the seventeenth century, I argue that the marking of presentational performance as socially and poetically inferior did not correspond directly with the rise of the university wits as playwrights. It was, instead, a product of the 1570s and 1580s, when city anxieties over vagrancy and purpose-built stages converged with the interest of Elizabethan Humanist-trained scholars in classical drama. The classification of certain playing practices as elite and others as popular was part of a larger cultural process through which educational, courtly, and social elites came to view personal comportment and aesthetic taste as markers of social status. When university playwrights did become influential on the public stage, they denounced clowning in order to assert their own superiority, as Helgerson argues, but they also perpetuated these practices as they increasingly merged native clowning with classical theories of genre. The result was not the banishment of clowning, even among playwrights who most vociferously criticized it, but rather a reorganization of the relationship between presentation and representation that accounted for social valence.

The dramatic practices that resulted from this shift offered Shakespeare generic conventions through which to construct characters that mixed comic and tragic tones in new ways. The 1590s may have witnessed a narrowing of generic definitions, but it equally opened spaces within those refined definitions for new kinds of dramatic creations. Although critics often cite *Hamlet* as the play in which Shakespeare announces his neoclassical affinities, I argue instead that *Hamlet* is generically experimental because

it exploits the cultural meanings clustering around genre and status as it employs clowning to produce tragedy. Hamlet is traditionally the focus of discussions of the play's genre, but I demonstrate that Ophelia is also generically significant. Ophelia's madness, the moment that Samuel Johnson identified as the pathetic heart of the play, is in fact constructed out of the theatrical practices of clowning and comedy.

Since I am arguing for the gradual convergence in Elizabethan thought of clowning, comedy, and low status audiences, I have divided my discussion into three sections that separately cover the 1560s, the 1570s and 1580s, and the 1590s, and I end with an analysis of how these theatrical trends take shape in *Hamlet*. The history in which I am interested, however, resists strict periodization. All three nodes of my inquiry—the convergence of playing practices, discourses of status, and thinking about genre—are historically fluid, and by nature my critical method of using single texts to represent generalizeable trends appears to place unwarranted emphasis on the dates of particular plays and treatises. Nevertheless, I have chosen to follow loosely the conventional critical history of the theater, while acknowledging that the dates into which I divide the period are temporal estimations aiming to express general trends.

The theater history to which scholars customarily adhere begins in 1572, with a royal statute that protected licensed players from prosecution for vagrancy. The narrative then moves to 1574, when Leicester's Men were officially granted license to play in London, then to 1576 and 1577, when the first public theaters were built in Shoreditch. Skipping over most of the late 1570s and the early 1580s, the next crucial moment in theatre history is said to be 1587, when Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* introduced iambic pentameter on the public stage. The last important moment comes in 1594, when, after

two years of limited playing in London due to plague, the new Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men, the two companies that would come to dominate the theatrical scene until the late 1590s, began to play at regular playhouses.

I open my discussion in the 1560s, with an examination of how the conditions of itinerant and festive playing led to the cultivation of a theater heavily dependent on presentation. In the 1570s and 1580s, the construction of purpose-built stages brought native drama to the attention of Humanist thinkers and the London government. While professional playing companies continued to rely on presentation, courtly, academic, and pseudoacademic poetic treatises denounced native theater for failing to adhere to classical principles of decorum and genre. They argued that the companies violated decorum in order to entertain their audiences. At the same time, the London government associated spontaneous playing with lower status theater audiences. The result was that in the 1590s, the university wits, who had come of age during the 1570s and 1580s, self-consciously engage with classical genres and internalize the association of clowning with lower-status audiences, but, as I demonstrate, they nonetheless wrote plays that featured clowning in order to please theatergoers.

### Early Elizabethan Theater

One of the critical dangers inherent in the discussion of Elizabethan drama is the tendency to oversimplify the occasions and contexts of playing. This impulse is in fact a reaction against the overwhelming variety of theatrical activities in early modern England. From royal pageants, lord mayors' shows, court masques, royal Christmas revels, and university drama to itinerant professional troupes, parish-centered festive

drama, and local skimmingtons, forms of playing and personation pervaded early modern communal life. While some of these activities have been thoroughly explored and others remain underexamined, I will focus on the history of clowning practices that came to be understood as markers of status and their relationship with comedy and tragedy.

By the time Shakespeare was writing for the popular stage, clowning was associated with the lower sorts and comedy. In the 1560s, however, the practices that came to define clowning carried no such valence. In fact, the categories of comedy and tragedy had not yet taken distinctive shape. While the term “tragedy” referred specifically to a story about death, “comedy” was used interchangeably with “history” and “interlude” as general terms for a live performance. “Comedy” and “tragedy” as terms denoting specific conventions of style and form, with corresponding theories of dramatic meaning, belonged to Humanist poetic discourse, which was generally unconcerned with popular playing. Native playing was still considered a festive activity, even though it occurred increasingly outside of festive occasions,<sup>11</sup> and because it was simply sportful pastime, it did not arouse the interests of serious scholars.

In the mid-sixteenth century, before the construction of purpose-built stages, commercial playing was not sharply distinguished from the broader culture of holiday games and celebration out of which it grew.<sup>12</sup> The early phases of the Reformation had

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<sup>11</sup> A 1564 letter from Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London, to Lord Burghley indicates that “common playours,” that is players who perform for the public, “now daylye butt speciallye on holydayes, sett up bylles.” E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923; hereafter cited as *ES*), 4: 267.

<sup>12</sup> My discussion of the history of the professional theater and itinerant performance is indebted to Ingram, *Business of Playing*; Muriel Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962); Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*; Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*; E.K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*; Ruth Lunney, *Marlowe and the Popular Tradition: Innovation in the English Drama before 1595* (Manchester:

suppressed the Corpus Christi plays, but Elizabethans continued to observe Christmas and Easter as well as lesser holidays like Plough Monday with festivals in which interludes were a traditional and integral part. At court, Christmas plays were staged in a hall theater by the Children of the Chapel. At Oxford, Cambridge, and the Inns of Court, students and senior scholars wrote original Christmas plays, often in Latin, in which the whole community participated. In the provinces, Christmas and Midsummer plays were mounted at fairs, by local towns and parishes, and in the houses of noblemen. In London, interludes were also being produced at inns and victualling houses.

The roots of commercial playing lies in the provinces, with the entertainers attached to great houses and the amateur parishioners who participated in festival performances. Like medieval minstrels, some playing troupes were the licensed servants of noblemen who provided entertainment on major holidays but were free to travel through the provinces when the lords did not need them. Other, unlicensed troupes comprised players identified by their towns who traveled to perform in surrounding local parishes.<sup>13</sup> In plays mounted for Christmas, Shrovetide, and Midsummer festivals, these commercial players often joined with local amateurs, or “lads of the parish.”<sup>14</sup> It appears that licensed and unlicensed troupes operated commercially in the same manner. At the end of a play, one character, often the Vice or devil, was responsible for collecting money from spectators toward the end of the interlude.

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Manchester University Press, 2002); and Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1959).

<sup>13</sup> David Bradley warns against overestimating the number of itinerant troupes during the early Elizabethan period. He estimates that at most, provincial parishes may have encountered three per year. See *From Text to Performance*, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Bradbrook, *Rise of the Common Player*, 19.

The repertoires of these troupes varied widely according to geography and talent. While players were performing moralities, miracles, and chivalric romance plays by the mid sixteenth century, folk plays remained the most widespread form of interlude, and even the more sophisticated plays continued to bear the dramaturgical imprint of the folk play, especially in the Vice figure. Folk plays were seasonal entertainments. Christmas saw the production of mummings and sword plays, while May games often included wooing and Robin Hood plays. E.K. Chambers has shown that plough plays, wooing plays, and sword dances follow roughly similar outlines built upon the framework of the mummer's play.<sup>15</sup> In its most basic form, the mummer's play is an interlude in which St. George enters and fights with an antagonist. The antagonist is mortally wounded, and the presenter calls for a doctor, who appears and heals the antagonist. Three or four other characters also enter with the doctor, including a fool and Beelzebub, and they all dance a jig. The central features of these plays were mock sword fights, wooing scenes, and morris dances. Entering and exiting with little representational rationale, characters introduce themselves directly to the audiences with stock phrases like "In comes I" and brief descriptions of their identities. In the *Leicestershire St. George Play*, for example, Beelzebub emerges with the lines "In comes I, old Beelzebub; / Over my shoulder I carry my club."<sup>16</sup> Entertainment is produced not by the storyline but by dancing and physical play. Variants of the mummer's play performed for May games incorporated Robin Hood and Maid Marian into the narrative, yet retained this basic framework.<sup>17</sup> As this brief

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<sup>15</sup> E.K. Chambers, *The English Folk-Play* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964).

<sup>16</sup> *The Leicestershire St. George Play*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1924), 355-56.

<sup>17</sup> *Robin Hood and the Friar*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, 347-49. See also David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21.



summary demonstrates, folk plays depended almost entirely on presentational performance.

The commercial mechanism of the London troupes in the 1560s was not different in kind from that of the provincial troupes. In fact, through the late 1590s, London companies travelled in the provinces when the city closed the theaters because of the plague. In London, however, plays were mounted by fluid, informal acting troupes in venues arranged through individual agreements with innkeepers and the owners of victualling houses.<sup>18</sup> By the 1560s, London troupes were increasingly playing on days not designated as holidays, and they seem to have abandoned folk plays in favor of more elaborate moralities, mysteries, biblical stories, and chivalric romance stories. London professional also differed from that in the provinces because it was more significantly influenced by court and university drama. Some humanists like Thomas Preston, author of *Cambises*, and John Pickering, author of *Horestes*, collaborated with commercial actors to produce plays that retained the basic dramaturgical structures of the morality but expounded on classical or pseudohistorical themes.

In both the provinces and in London, early troupes relied on presentational dramaturgy that reflected the conditions and traditions out of which commercial playing developed. Troupes were small, from four to eight men, and their interludes were simple to stage, requiring them to transport only minimal stage props and costumes. Fashioning plays for makeshift stages, whether on the back of a wagon or a temporary structure

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<sup>18</sup> In the spring of 1566, the Lord Mayor demanded Robert Fryer, a goldsmith, sign a bond not to permit playing in his "mansion" for the rest of the summer. In 1569, the city government issued a proclamation that no household permit a play in his house except between the hours of 3 and 5, and the lord mayor required that a sum of £40 be taken from all relevant householders. Both quoted in Ingram, *Business of Playing*, 73.

erected in an innyard, they relied heavily on energetic physical displays like singing, tumbling, and dancing to hold audiences' attention in bustling public spaces. Plays performed by professional troupes in the 1560s have little formal dramatic structure. Similar to folk plays, characters tend to describe action more than they represent behavior, and they sometimes use the language of the dramatic entrances seen in the mummers' plays. Equally important, they constructed a fluid relationship between the world of the play and the world of the spectators, calling the audience's attention to their participation in the dramatic event by speaking to the crowd directly, asking the audience to sing along with them, and making references to local buildings and events. As Helgerson notes, the Vice was the center of this presentational energy. He retained the closest dramaturgical relationship with the audience, and he created an atmosphere of sport through pronounced physical performance.

Thomas Preston's *Cambises* provides a fitting example of commercial dramaturgy before the opening of permanent theaters. Written in rhymed verse, the play lacks act and scene divisions. It features a double plot in which the story of the corrupt Persian king and his vice-regent is offset by two groups of low status characters, the ruffian soldiers Huf, Snuf, and Ruf and the country clowns Hob and Lob. The Vice Ambidexter, whose defining characteristic is that he "play[s] with both hands," is the only character to move between the two levels of the plot.<sup>19</sup> As a personification of duplicity and an amoral generator of chaos, Ambidexter channels into the commercial play the festive celebration of disorder embodied by such traditions as the Christmas Lord of Misrule. When he first comes on stage, he introduces himself directly to the audience, and he parodies the high

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Preston, *The Life of Cambises, King of Persia*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1924), 638-666.

plot, in which the king has set off to conquer the Egyptians, by wearing a mock suit of armor consisting of “an old capcase on his head, an olde paile about his hips for harness, a scummer and a potlid by his side, and a rake on his shoulder” (643). Alone with the audience, he laughs to himself as he prepares to joust with a fly. He soon, however, ends up in a scuffle with Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, and this fight is only the first of the kinds of vigorous and physical playing in which Ambidexter participates. He also kisses a prostitute and weeps heartily one moment only to laugh the next.

Ambidexter serves simultaneously as a character within the play, a commentator on the action, and a master of ceremonies. He speaks directly to the audience, balancing the illusion of the world within the play with the reality of the spectators gathered for the occasion of the play. After *Cambises* has cruelly executed a child, for example, Ambidexter stands on stage alone and inquires of the audience “How like you Sisamnes?” He also jests with audience members, turning at one point to ask a spectator, “How say you maid? To marry me will you be glad?” (660). The performative possibilities in this line indicate the spontaneity of the Vice’s role. If Ambidexter speaks to a woman, the line gives his character a sexual dimension; if he speaks to a man, he is insulting. Direct interaction with the audience allows the performer of the Vice the flexibility to play to each audience and occasion.

As the play’s local lord of misrule, Ambidexter foregrounds the performant function of the drama by calling attention to his physicality and to his role as a player in a play. He inhabits the conceptual and physical stage space that Robert Weimann terms the *platea*, in which “the actor and the neutral materiality of the platform stage, tended to privilege the authority of what and who was representing [the play] world,” as opposed to

the locus, which was “associated with the localizing capacities of the fictional role and tended to privilege the authority of what and who was represented in the dramatic world.”<sup>20</sup> In early Elizabethan commercial plays, like *Cambises*, the Vice is the patron of the *platea*, both the initiator of disorder and the creator of an atmosphere of sportfulness. Both of these functions are inextricable from the Vice’s close rapport with the audience. As Weimann and other historians of the theater and clowning have noted, the later Elizabethan clown and fool are heirs to the Vice tradition, embodying a similar theatrical energy.<sup>21</sup>

While plays like *Cambises* merged theatrical practices from folk plays, minstrelsy, jugglers, and acrobatics, Humanist educators were thinking about drama in an entirely different context. For them drama was a classical literary form, and Plautus, Terence, and Seneca were staple textbooks with which they taught beginning grammar schoolboys how to read Greek and Latin.<sup>22</sup> Whereas the public plays depended on presentational modes of performance, Humanist educators foregrounded dramatic representation. In fact, a mimetic view of drama was fundamental to Humanists’ use of classical plays as didactic tools. Since Roger Ascham was the private tutor to Queen Elizabethan, his understanding of drama is worth pausing over as a representative of early Elizabethan Humanist thinking. Ascham’s book on education, *The Scholemaster*, was written in the early 1560s and printed in 1570. He opens by assuring his readers that he

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Weimann, “Bifold Authority in Shakespeare’s Theatre,” 410.

<sup>21</sup> In 1602, for example, Bishop Joseph Hall describes stage clowns as leaping and jesting in *Vergidemariam* (London: John Harison for Robert Dexter, 1602), 9v.

<sup>22</sup> Erasmus recommended the study of Terence and Plautus. For Philip Melanchthon, mentor to Philip Sidney’s mentor, Hubert Languet, Seneca was especially useful for schoolboys. See Marvin Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1950] 1964), 72. Robert Weimann makes the point that university and court drama adopted some of the theatrical devices of the public stage in the 1560s; nevertheless, commercial plays were regarded as different in kind from classical drama. Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 103.

wrote the book at the behest of Sir Richard Sackville, and he directs his advice to the sons of noblemen, whom he encourages, as Thomas Elyot had done 30 years earlier, to embrace learning as preparation to govern the realm.<sup>23</sup> He couches his entreaty to young noblemen in specifically classed terms, writing that education has enabled men of lower status to occupy great positions of power because gentlemen's sons have defaulted on their education (14v). Recommending that all gentlemen read Hoby's translation of the *Courtier*, Ascham encourages the nobility to embrace the liberal arts not only because they will gain practical knowledge and information about being good counselors but also because they will learn how to speak and behave with a refinement lacking in the lower sorts.<sup>24</sup>

Drama plays an important role in Ascham's educational program because it is a vehicle for instructing students in linguistic, and by extension social, decorum. Ascham establishes that comedy and tragedy should operate through mimesis: the "whole Doctrine of Comedies and Tragedies is a perfite imitatio, or faire livelie painted picture of the life of everie degree of man" (47r). Since drama represents a "picture of life," it teaches young men not only how to speak well but also how to conduct themselves in private and public affairs, helping to polish the "manners" of the elite. Ascham's term "manners" is derived from the Latin term for comportment or behavior, *mores*, which denotes moral as well as social behavior. Drama can only serve this goal, however, if it maintains decorum, or "comeliness," that is, if plays represent characters using the language appropriate to different topics and situations. As the foundation of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ascham, *Scholemaster*, 23v.

<sup>24</sup> Ascham recites a story about the four-year-old son of a gentleman who so lacked education that he could only "roundlie rap out, so manie ugle othes, and those of the newest facion, as som good man of fourscore years olde hath never hard named before" (16v).

individual's *mores*, decorum also provides the foundation of social and political order, which is simply an extension of an individual's decorum into the public realm. He writes, "Looke upon the whole course of both the Greeke and Latin tongue, and ye shall surelie finde, that, whan apte and good words began to be neglected, and properties of those two tongues to be confounded, than also began, ill deedes to spring: strange maners to oppresse good orders" (47v). Mimetic drama represents decorous language and manners, which the student internalizes and draws upon to perpetuate social order.

In the 1570s and 1580s, the Humanist emphasis on dramatic representation, exemplified by Ascham's *Scholemaster*, will come into conflict with the presentational practices of the public theater. When Ascham was writing in the early 1560s, however, his mind, however, was occupied solely with schoolhouse and university drama; nowhere does he acknowledge public and festive drama as similar kinds of activities. When he does address contemporary theatrical practices, he contrasts classical drama with university drama that is dissatisfying because it fails to follow Aristotle's mimetic precepts (57r). Nevertheless, his text usefully demonstrates the process through which elite audiences came to claim certain cultural forms when he contrasts sophisticated classical poetry, including drama, against printed vernacular poetry. Like other educated men in the second half of the sixteenth century, he attacks the "rude and barbarous" practice of rhyming, which he claims the English inherited from the Goths and Huns, and advocates instead for quantitative vernacular verse. He particularly disapproves of fourteeners, the meter commonly used in ballads and songs of minstrelsy (61v). He also critiques the judgment of poets who cater to popular audiences: "The worthie Poetes in Athens and Rome, were more carefull to satisfie the iudgement of one learned, than rashe

in pleasing the humor of a rude multitude (61v-r). For Ascham, elite drama is measured against popular poetry, because popular theater is beyond his scope.

Like Ascham, middling and elite Elizabethans were becoming invested in aesthetics and personal comportment as markers of status and were associating forms of play and poetry that, in practice, continued to be enjoyed at all social levels with the lower sorts, or the “rude and popular” in Puttenham’s terms.<sup>25</sup> Ascham can be seen as part of a process of “self-identification,”<sup>26</sup> in which the upper sorts used the language of low status to imagine practices that they shared with the commonalty. As I demonstrate below, this process of othering becomes a significant factor in the generic development of the professional Elizabethan theater. As Ascham was extolling the virtues of mimetic drama, plays like *Cambises* and Vices like *Ambidexter* were building a tradition of dramatic practice in which *platea* and presentation were privileged over *locus* and representation.

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<sup>25</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 175. On elite and middling sorts’ investment in aesthetics and personal comportment, see Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 198) and Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb writes that “Popular culture, especially as associated with festivals, was invented or produced by elite and middling sorts as a means of coming to their own self-identification” (*The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* [London: Routledge, 2006], p. 2). My definition of “popular culture” is also informed by Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Hants, Eng.: Scolar Press, 1994); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000); and Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

1570s-1580s

Conventional histories of the Elizabethan theater emphasize the momentousness of the establishment of Leicester's Men and the opening of the public theaters in the 1570s and hail Marlowe's 1587 *Tamburlaine* as the inauguration of the age of Shakespeare on the English stage. By examining the popular dramaturgy the 1570s and 1580s and in conversation with poetic treatises and London city ordinances, I demonstrate that the association of clowning with comedy and lower-status audiences occurred gradually and unevenly over the first two decades of institutionalized professional playing. Poetic treatises that espoused classically influenced theories of mimetic drama in which they disparaged clowning as low status and appropriate only for comedy, a perception that was reinforced by civic authorities, who were faced with the paradox of men making a profession of play. The effect of these intersecting forms of argument was the crystallization of a conventional complaint against the theaters that viewed the genre of performance-based comedy as representative of the ills of the theater because it catered to low-born, vulgar audiences. In 1587, when the *Tamburlaine* prologue articulates a vision of tragedy that is more consonant with classically influenced academic discourse than with popular stage conventions, Marlowe's play indicates that university educated playwrights were internalizing the claims of academic and civic discourses. *Tamburlaine* marks a dramaturgical trend that finds full expression only after 1594, when the commercial structure of playing became more stable and therefore allowed for a more self-conscious engagement with questions of genre. Rather than establishing *Tamburlaine* as a moment of definitive change in the theater, then, I see *Tamburlaine* as part of a complex and ongoing process through which conceptions of



genre are formulated in response to the changing conditions of professional playing. I therefore refer to the dates 1570s to late 1580s when discussing aesthetic issues, accounting for *Tamburlaine*, and the dates 1570s to early 1590s when discussing the material conditions of public playing.

The 1570s to the 1590s was a period of drastic if uneven change in the conditions of Elizabethan professional playing, beginning with the construction of the first purpose-built stage. In 1567, a scaffold stage was erected at the Red Lion Inn in Stepney; in 1575 and 1576, stages were built at Paul's Hall and Blackfriars Hall; and in 1576 and 1577, the Theater and then the Curtain opened stages to the public. Purpose-built theaters essentially institutionalized an activity that had heretofore been considered part of festive play and holiday behavior. London playing companies proliferated during these years, and players began to use discourses of professionalization in arguing for their right to perform. The first fifteen to twenty years of commercial playing on purpose-built stages was characterized by instability and inconsistency, of players, of playing companies, of playing houses, and of civic and royal statutes governing playing, as Elizabethan audiences, authorities, and actors managed a new and growing institution of commercial entertainment. Companies appeared and disappeared, changing names when their patrons died, breaking into or merging with other companies, or disintegrating simply because they ran out of money.<sup>27</sup> In addition to external circumstances, internal disputes among actors or between actors and owners of playing venues could also lead to a company's failure.

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Gurr, *Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); see also Ingram, *Business of Playing*.

During this period the Vice's theatrical energy became one of the formative impulses behind the stage clown, a figure who embodied topsyturvydom in the guise of the low-status country bumpkin.<sup>28</sup> As William Ingram notes, scanty literary evidence survives from the 1560s through 1594 from which we might evaluate the city's claims or categorize generic and playing practices. Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster argue that this lack of written and printed evidence is itself evidence that playing depended primarily on spontaneous and presentational shows.<sup>29</sup> We do know that the conditions of playing through the early 1590s did not change much from this milieu of instability. Companies were no longer performing on make-shift or temporary stages, which meant that they could use more elaborate props and costumes, but it does not appear that they took much advantage of this opportunity. Professional companies continued to stage moralities, hybrid moralities, romances, biblical stories, and histories.<sup>30</sup> With so few surviving professional playtexts, however, it is difficult to move beyond speculating about the intersection of performance practices and genre on the popular stage.

We do know that during the 1570s and 1580s, Richard Tarlton was by far the most renowned player, and he made his fame as a clown, incorporating the jesting of the Vice, the misrule of the holiday lord, and the dancing of the folk tradition into the image of a country bumpkin. Tarlton's clown persona was so influential that he became an iconic figure whom Elizabethans invoked long after his death. In 1590, an anonymous

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<sup>28</sup> Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ingram, *Business of Playing*, 74; Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> A comedy dating from 1569 tells the story of "the most virtuous and godlye Susana"; and Arthur Golding wrote an interlude entitled *Abraham's Sacrifice* in 1575. In 1576, a comedy *Common Conditions* was named after its Vice character, and George Wapull's *Tide Tarrieth No Man* featured a Vice named "Courage." Another popular play, *Three Ladies of London* (1581), was written by Robert Wilson, a player with Leicester's Men who specialized in clown roles. *Three Ladies* was likewise a morality, depicting the corruption of Lucar, Love, and Conscience.

author published the pamphlet *Tarlton's News out of Purgatory*, in which Tarlton's ghost returns to regale the narrator with satirical tales of sinners in purgatory. In his letter to the reader, the author laments Tarlton's death as a loss to all those who wished "to satisfie their eies with his Clownish gesture, their eares with his witty jests." Tarlton is described as "a fountain, of pleasing and merry conceits," and he is praised for his "extemporal invention."<sup>31</sup> From this description, it is clear that Tarlton's clown persona involved body-centered, physical playing (his "Clownish gesture") and spontaneous jesting with his audience (his "extemporal invention").

A record of Tarlton's antics, *Tarlton's Jestes*, first published sometime around his death in 1588, confirms this image of his theatrical persona. Tarlton elicited humor by engaging in one-on-one battles of wits and besting his adversary with clever one-liners. While he sometimes chose unwitting targets, as he became increasingly famous, spectators at the theater, visitors to his tavern, and people in the street would challenge him by throwing quips out to him. Tarlton spontaneously responded by one-upping his would-be opponents, making them appear foolish for their confidence in their own wits. In one example, a courtier who sees Tarlton emerging one morning from his room calls him "Didimus and Tridimus." When Tarlton asks him what the names mean, the courtier responds that Didimus and Tridimus are "a fool and a knave." Tarlton retorts, "You overloade me ... for my backe cannot bear both, therefore take you the one, and I will take the other; take you the knave and I will carry the foole with me."<sup>32</sup> On the public stage, audience members would interrupt the performance of a play in order to jest with

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<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, *Tarlton's Newes out of Purgatory* (London: T.G. and T.N., 1590), 2Ar.

<sup>32</sup> *Tarlton's Jestes*, printed in *Shakespeare's Jest-Books*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, 3 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1964), 2: 200.

Tarlton. In one story, a spectator at the Bull theater throws an apple at Tarlton, who pauses the scene to compose a jest about the spectator's wife. In another anecdote about Tarlton on stage at the Bull, he begins an exchange with a man in the audience about cuckoldry. Tarlton's form of clowning perpetuates the Vice's close and direct interaction with the audience.

His career also illustrates that clowning was not yet considered a low-status theatrical practice. In addition to plays and ballads, he wrote and printed a pamphlet entitled *Tarlton's Tragical Discourses*, only a fragment of which survives. The pamphlet's paratexts present the author as an elevated, if less-than-ideally-educated poet. It includes a letter to Tarlton's patron, Lady Frances Mildmay, and commendatory poems that praise him through the conventional language of the muses. The commendatory sonnet by T.A. makes an asset out of Tarlton's lack of education by representing him as an artless, natural poet. Although we can only surmise at the pamphlet's lost contents, the title advertises "sundry discourses and pretty conceits" without focusing on jests and merriment, and he opens with a defense of poetry against "Priscians," a contemporary term for Puritans.<sup>33</sup> It appears that Tarlton located himself as a performer and dramatist within the framework of learned poets. During the 1570s, Tarlton and the authors of his commendatory sonnets demonstrate, being a clown and writing a pseudoacademic treatise were not incompatible. Clowning had not yet become firmly established as a low-status performance.

The popularity of Tarlton's clowning demonstrates the primacy of presentation in Elizabethan drama of the 1570s and 1580s. These playing practices were incorporated

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Tarlton, *Tarlton's Tragical Discourses* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578).

into plays that were constructed around the principles of didacticism and variety.<sup>34</sup> The categorization of plays according to their moral and didactic content contradicted classically based understandings of comedy and tragedy. Unencumbered by the necessities of tragic or comic character or act divisions, playwrights mixed tones, styles, storylines, and generic labels.<sup>35</sup> This free-ranging form obtained in both courtly drama, often produced by university scholars and masters, and popular drama. The full title of *Cambises*, for example, is *A Lamentable Tragedie Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth Containing the Life of Cambises, King of Percia*. One court play, *Damon and Pithias*, performed by the Children of the Chapel in 1571, is similarly identified as a “tragical comedy” by its Prologue.<sup>36</sup> As a principle of composition, didacticism provided a wide berth for both comic and tragic subjects. George Gascoigne, who presented his *Glasse of Gouvernement* at the court in 1575, writes that he entitles his play a “tragical comedie” “bycause therein are handled aswell the rewardes for Vertues, as also the punishment for Vices.”<sup>37</sup> A play that dealt with tragic material might still be classified as a comedy if it concluded with the punishment of vices. Similarly, where variety was the goal, tones and subjects could be liberally intermingled. John Lyly, for example, appears distinctly unconcerned with his mixture of tones and genres. The prologue to *Endimion* insists that it is “neither comedy, nor tragedy, nor story, nor any thing but that whatsoever heareth

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<sup>34</sup> Madeleine Doran argues that the 1560s to early 1590s was a period in which the medieval traditions from which Elizabethan drama drew its material became increasingly subject to the conventions of academic theories of tragedy, comedy, and decorum. *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 102.

<sup>35</sup> Doran, *Endeavors of Art*; Muriel Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955).

<sup>36</sup> Richard Edwards, *Damon and Pithias*, in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1924), 571-608.

<sup>37</sup> George Gascoigne, *The Glasse of Gouvernement* (London: C. Barker, 1575).

may say this, Why here is a tale of the Man in the Moon.”<sup>38</sup> In the prologue to *Midas*, a play presented at court in 1589, Lyly writes that his players present “a mingle-mangle” and a “hodge-podge” because they must suit all, and the contemporary tastes are a hodge-podge.<sup>39</sup>

This kind of dramaturgy and generic organization, however, was coming under attack as the opening of the public theaters brought vernacular drama to the attention of Humanist thinkers in new ways. Whereas Ascham had ignored the popular theater altogether, academic and pseudoacademic writers in the late 1570s and 1580s measured native drama by classical precepts and rejected the form of presentational performance on which Tarlton made his career. The late 1570s and 1580s saw the emergence of the poetic treatise as a genre in its own right, in part in response to attacks on drama incited by the public theaters. Like Ascham, the poetic thought of writers like Sidney, Puttenham, Webbe, and Whetstone was constructed on Horace, Donatus, Terence, and Quintilian, and Aristotle’s *Poetics* when it began to be circulated in Latin in the middle of the sixteenth century. Elizabethan poetic treatises writers merged Humanist moral didacticism with classical thinking on the appropriate topics of comedy and tragedy and on the importance of dramatic decorum.

Classical writers often defined comedy and tragedy as opposites of one another. Horace, for example, wrote that comedy concerned itself with “daily life.”<sup>40</sup> The commentaries on Terence described comedy as dealing with mundane affairs and mildly

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<sup>38</sup> John Lyly, *Endimion, The Man in the Moone* (London: J. Charlewood for the widow Broome, 1591).

<sup>39</sup> John Lyly, *Midas* (1589), quoted in Doran, *Endeavors of Art*, 189.

<sup>40</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica* (Latin and English) translated by H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press [1926], 1991), 44.

threatening dangers.<sup>41</sup> In *On Comedy*, Donatus coined a description of comedy that he attributed to Cicero and which was repeated throughout the Renaissance: comedy is “the imitation of life, the mirror of custom, the image of truth.” For Donatus, comic characters “live in villages because of moderate circumstances, not in royal palaces as do tragic personages.”<sup>42</sup> For Elizabethans, this idea was exemplified in the stock characters of Plautan and Terentian drama. Ascham, for example, writes that comedy “is altogether within the compass of the meanest men’s manners, and . . . standeth chiefly in uttering the thoughts and conditions of hard fathers, foolish mothers, unthrifty young men, crafty servants, subtle bawds, and wily harlots.”<sup>43</sup> Tragedy, in contrast, told stories about stately figures, political and military affairs, weighty fears, and unfavorable outcomes.

The perception of comedy as concerned with low-status characters was reinforced by Renaissance readings of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Renaissance thinkers focused on Aristotle’s description of tragic catharsis and, especially, on his prescription that tragedy should be about men who are better than those of the present day and comedy should be about men who are worse. Renaissance translations rendered Aristotle’s Greek descriptors into “praestantiores” and “humiliores,” which fostered an understanding of tragedy as stories about noblemen and kings and comedy as being about men of humble origins.<sup>44</sup> Thomas Cooper’s *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae* renders “humilis” as “base; lowe; simple; poore; abject; vile; humble; of lowe condition.”<sup>45</sup> The terms that Aristotle set down as moral evaluations of character became descriptors of social status in

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<sup>41</sup> The commentaries on Terence’s comedies that were attributed to Donatus were in fact written by two authors, Donatus and Evanthius.

<sup>42</sup> Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century*, 59-60.

<sup>43</sup> Ascham, *Scholemaster*, 59r.

<sup>44</sup> Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century*, 60-61.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (London: Henry Denham, 1578).

Renaissance translations. For Elizabethans, Aristotelian mimesis required that comedy be not simply about men who were flawed but about men of humble birth.

In the 1570s and 1580s writers were prompted to defend poetry and drama against attacks provoked by the opening of the public theaters. These defenses, notably those by Sir Philip Sidney and Thomas Lodge, merged Humanist moral didacticism with classical generic distinctions to envision a drama that teaches through example. Sidney echoes Ascham's didactic theory of drama when he writes that "Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one ... this doth the comedy handle so in our private and domestical matters." Tragedy, on the other hand, "maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded."<sup>46</sup> Espousing mimesis as the guiding principle for all poetry, Sidney envisions dramatic genre as a rubric for aligning matter and theme, characters, and didacticism.

Like Ascham's dramatic schema, Sidney's instructional theater requires the adherence to decorum in order to teach effectively, and he turns to the popular stage to demonstrate how the principles of drama can be corrupted by the violation of decorum and genre. For Sidney, the vigorous playing of clowning interrupts the didactic potential of drama. He explains that contemporary plays are "neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters with neither decency

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<sup>46</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan Jones, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1989] 2002), 229-30.



nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness is by their mongrel tragic-comedy obtained.” Sidney does not disapprove of comedy. Nor does he, as it is often claimed, disapprove *carte blanche* of tragicomedy. Rather his concern is that comedy and tragedy, if they are integrated into one play, retain tragic and comic decorum at the appropriate moments. The problem is that the public theater aims to make its audience laugh through whatever means necessary, “so falleth it out that, having indeed no right comedy, in that comical part of our tragedy, we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears, or some extreme show of doltishness, indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter and nothing else.”<sup>47</sup> Since the clown plays with neither decency nor discretion, the play itself lacks the “right sportfulness.” Sidney unsurprisingly suggests following classical precedent, and he offers in opposition to “some extreme show of doltishness”—exemplified presumably by Tarlton—Terence’s *Thraso* and such classical comic types as “a busy loving courtier” and “a self-wise-seeming schoolmaster”<sup>48</sup> Sidney thus implies that the public theater gives primacy to clowning because it values entertaining its audiences, eliciting “loud laughter and nothing else,” above all else, and that this drive leads contemporary drama to violate the principles of “excellent” poetry.

Like Sidney, George Whetstone views vigorous, jest-based comedy as disruptive to the proper decorum and structure of serious dramatic narrative. Also like Sidney, Whetstone uses the popular theater as an example of how “right” comedy has been corrupted by its contemporary use. According to Whetstone, comedy itself is good but it has been discredited and mutilated by its misuse by “young, unadvised, and rash-witted writers.” These English writers, “many times, to make mirth, they make a clown

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<sup>47</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 244.

<sup>48</sup> Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 245.

companion with a king .... Yea, they use one order of speech for all persons—a gross indecorum, for a crow will ill counterfeit the nightingale’s sweet voice: even so, affected speech does misbecome a clown.” Yet the worst offense in contemporary comedy according to Whetstone is that “their ground is not so imperfect as their working indiscreet; not weighing, so the people laugh, though they laugh them, for their follies to scorn.” In true comedy, by contrast, “grave old men should instruct, young men should show the imperfections of youth, strumpets should be lascivious, boys unhappy, and clowns should speak disorderly: intermingling all these actions in such sort as the grave matter may instruct and the pleasant delight.”<sup>49</sup> It is acceptable, Whetstone says, for clowns to be disorderly, so long as they do not indiscreetly elicit laughter, a qualification that marks as inappropriate the kind of clowning embodied by Tarlton.

Writing in the 1580s, George Puttenham and William Webbe point to specific presentational practices associated with Tarlton’s clowning as low status. In his advice manual, George Puttenham informs would-be court poets that immoderate jesting is to be avoided at all costs because it is appropriate only to a “common jester or buffoon.”<sup>50</sup> Puttenham similarly categorizes singing ballads as low status by associating it with stage Vices. In his section on rhyming poetry, Puttenham writes that the courtly poet should eschew rhyme because it “for it showeth a certain lightness either of the matter or of the maker’s head.” Rhyming is fine for popular music, sung by “blind harpers or such like tavern minstrels that give a fit of mirth for a goat ... Also they be used in carols and rounds and such light or lascivious poems, which are commonly more commodiously

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<sup>49</sup> George Whetstone, *The Right Excellent and Famous Historye, of Promos and Cassandra Deuided into Two Commicall Discourses* (London: John Charlewood for Richard Jones, 1578).

<sup>50</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 340.

uttered by these buffoons or vices in plays than by any other person.”<sup>51</sup> Since Puttenham was a *nouveau arriviste*, writing for poets aspiring to courtly status, the distinction between popular and elite playing practices was one of his primary concerns. He makes explicit the connection between festive rituals, wandering minstrels, lascivious behavior, vigorous playing, and the comic Vice or buffoon on the stage. His denunciation of singing is echoed by William Webbe, who was writing for a wider audience, in his 1586 *Discourse of English Poesy*. Webbe claims that singing is “unchaste” for the public theater.<sup>52</sup>

Ascham, Sidney, Whetstone, Puttenham, and Webbe all operate under the similar assumption that comedy should represent a light-hearted story, one in which the main character proceeds from bad fortune to good, about lower-status men and contemporary manners. Tragedy, on the other hand, should represent stories about great men, like kings and generals, who fall from good fortune to bad, and who speak and behave in a noble manner. The writers of poetic treatises use Tarlton and the contemporary theater as a foil against which to construct these theories of mimetic, structured comedy, and in the process they mark presentational performance as low status.

In a separate site of cultural debate, the City of London was also characterizing clowning as low status. Whereas poetic treatise writers were invested in exonerating poetry as a cultural form, the City was concerned with governing players, audiences, and plays, as the London popular theaters commercialized a cultural activity that had long been considered appropriate only for times of play and festivity. The question of how to govern the companies and production of plays often, though by no means always,

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<sup>51</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 172.

<sup>52</sup> Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (London: John Charlewood for Robert Walley, 1586), 2Kr.

brought the city into official disputes with the Privy Council, with the courtly patrons of the companies, and with the companies themselves. In the process of settling these disputes, the city developed a conventional discourse about the theater that cited spontaneous playing as one of its most disruptive components.

For much of the twentieth century, the dominant view of the relationship between the theaters and the city held that the city opposed the theaters on purely ideological and moral grounds. It remains a critical commonplace that influential Puritan contingents of London opposed the theaters because they believed that theatrical representation, especially of biblical and religious figures, was idolatrous.<sup>53</sup> Although it is certainly true that the City expressed moral concerns over the theater, the idea that morality was the city's central concern has been revised by William Ingram, who directs attention, instead, to the city's commercial concerns. Ingram argues that the city was preoccupied during the 1570s with its responsibility to provide for the poor. He concludes that the city's drive to establish an increasingly complex system of fees for licensing plays and playing establishments provided an opportunity for the Aldermen to supplement the city's income.<sup>54</sup>

Acknowledging both moral and commercial concerns, I would like to focus on the city's need to maintain social order amidst a fluid population in the areas around the

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick Collinson writes that "the mimetic presentation of religion which came to an exuberant climax in the last generation or two of pre-Reformation England lacked absolutely, in protestant perception, any sense of what might be thought to constitute blasphemy and was almost totally neglectful of the Second Commandment. . . . The religious drama and pageantry treated divine things with a homely familiarity which was shocking and obnoxious to Protestants who had recovered their sense of God's awe-inspiring otherness" (*The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [Hampshire, Eng.: Macmillan, 1988], 99). In fact, as Collinson notes, early Protestant reformers did not oppose the theater; instead, they recommended using the theater as propaganda for the new religion and the crown. Puritan opposition to theatricality became especially vehement during and after the 1570s, when the construction of permanent theaters provided a focal point for their attentions.

<sup>54</sup> Ingram, *Business of Playing*, 125-30. Andrew Gurr, in contrast, sees the City's opposition to the theater as grounded in the Aldermen's ideological fear of the theater (*Shakespearean Playing Companies*, 7-8).

theaters. London's population was growing rapidly during the final third of the sixteenth century. In 1550, there were 120,000 inhabitants in London, as compared to 200,000 in 1600.<sup>55</sup> Since the mortality rate outstripped the birth rate, scholars have concluded that the only explanation for this immense growth in population was migrancy from the provinces.<sup>56</sup> Anxieties about mobility and vagrancy increased in the midst of this incredible movement from the provinces into the capital. Using the language of moral dissent, the city expressed apprehension over issues related to its inability to control and monitor the population around the theaters, such as the unruliness of large audiences, the communication of the plague, and the supposed attractiveness of the theater to vagabonds. These concerns culminated in the city's association of dramatic content with undesirable audiences.

The city's concern over vagabondage implicated both players and playgoers.<sup>57</sup> Since commercial players were thought to make their living from festive pastime, players occupied a liminal social space. Itinerant players were grouped together with minstrels, jugglers, and mountebanks, all of whom were considered little more than vagrants, and social commentators as well as city documents demonstrate the belief that men and women who were too lazy to work pretended to be licensed players in order to avoid being forced into it. Players everywhere were suspected of being "able-bodied" poor.

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<sup>55</sup> A.L. Beier and Roger Finlay, eds., *London 1500-1700* (London: Longman, 1986), 2; A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England from 1560 to 1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>57</sup> In 1531, for example, Henry VIII passed an act "concerning punysshement of Beggars and Vacagundes" (*ES*, 4: 260).

Section 5 of the 1572 “Acte for the Punishment of Vagabonds” defines the able-bodied poor as follows:

All and everye persone and persones beyng whole and mightye in Body and able to labour, having not Land or Maister, nor using any lawfull Merchaundize Crafte or Mysterye whereby hee or shee might get his or her Lyvinge, and can gyve no reckninge howe he or shee dothe lawfully get his or her Lyrvinge; & and Fencers Bearewardes Comon Players in Enterludes & Mynstrels Juglers Pedlers Tynkers and Petye Chapmen, shall wander abroad and have not Lycense of two Justices of the Peace at the leaste . . . shalbee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars.<sup>58</sup>

This piece of legislation is worth quoting at length for two reasons. First, it confirms that the conceptual alignment of players and plays with other forms of presentational theatrical practices such as juggling, fencing, and minstrelsy was a default assumption on the part of the Elizabethan government. Second, it illustrates the ambiguity of the status of the professional playing companies. The London playing companies who enjoyed patronage were exempted from laws punishing the able-bodied poor only by their status as the servants of noblemen. Having a courtly patron was the only circumstance under which players were considered legitimate. Before the establishment of the first permanent theaters, however, when licensed companies relied entirely on touring, this distinction must have appeared cosmetic. Even after the opening of permanent theaters, players were only marginally distinguished from the “able-bodied” poor.

According to the city, the questionable status of the players was mirrored by that of their audiences. The theater was said to draw large, unruly crowds. In May of 1583, for example, the Lord Mayor wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham complaining of “one very great and dangerous inconvenience, the assemblie of people to playes, beare bayting,

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<sup>58</sup>ES, 4: 269.

fencing and prophane spectacles at the Theater and Curtaine and other like places, to which doe resorte great multitudes of the basist sort of people.”<sup>59</sup> Whether it is historically accurate to say that low status Londoners attended professional plays in greater numbers than higher status Londoners, the rhetoric of the debates about the public theaters linked them with the lowest sorts. For the city, the objectionable qualities of these audiences inhere in their inferior bodies. A number of letters exchanged between the Lord Mayor and Council of Aldermen and the Privy Council are concerned only with the cessation or resumption of playing based on the threat of plague.<sup>60</sup> In 1583, the Lord Mayor is concerned that these base playgoers are sick, “many enfected with sores running on them.” This letter speaks to the city’s concern that by drawing together low-status spectators and pulling together audience members from different parts of the city, the theaters were responsible for spreading disease. The spectators’ lower status bodies make them undesirable.

The city lamented its inability to monitor large crowds of lower status people inside of the purpose-built theaters. This anxiety was intensified by the location of theaters in Middlesex, outside of the jurisdiction of the London Sheriff. On April 12, 1580, the Lord Mayor wrote a letter to Sir Thomas Bromley, Lord Chancellor, complaining of a “great disorder” at the Theatre. The Lord Mayor was particularly concerned that although he was responsible for the citizens of London who resorted to plays, the Sheriff of Middlesex was responsible for controlling the geographical areas

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<sup>59</sup> *ES*, 4: 294.

<sup>60</sup> Although the conventional critical narrative about the relationships among the Privy Council, the city, and the theaters holds that the Privy Council defended the theaters, based in part on the fact that members were patrons, while the city unilaterally opposed the theaters, it is important to nuance this narrative by recognizing that at times the Privy Council also called for the regulation of the theaters because of plague or because players were disregarding the prohibition against playing on Sundays.

that housed the theaters.<sup>61</sup> The playhouses were imagined as harboring enclaves of forbidden activity. In an Act of Common Council dated December 6, 1574, when plays were still mounted primarily at inns and victualling houses, the city was concerned about “the inordinate hauntinge of great multitudes of people, speciallye youthe to playes enterludes and shewes, namely occasion of ffrayes and quarrelles, eavell practizes of incontineneye in greate Innes, having chambers and secrete places adoiynge to their open stagies and gallyries, inveglynge and alleuryng of maides, especiallye orphanes and good citizens Children under Age.”<sup>62</sup> Plays are said to produce an atmosphere in which lower-status people indulge their basest instincts for violence and sex in “secret chambers,” which the city could not monitor.

This lascivious behavior is encouraged by the plays’ content, especially the spontaneous element of theater for which the censorship of playbooks could not account. Although this complaint is not original, the 1574 Act of Common Council marks the beginning of the city’s development of stock phrases describing the corruption of the theaters and their “vulgar” audiences in which they emphasize unscripted performance. The act prohibits “anie wourdes, examples, or doynge of anie unchastitue, sedicion, nor such lyke unfytt and uncomelye matter.” It reiterates the importance of censorship and licensing plays, insisting that

no Inkeper, Tavernkeper nor other person ... shall openlye shewe or playe ... anyie playe, enterlude, Commoditye, Tragidie, matter, or shewe, which shall not be firste perused and Allowed in such order and fourme and by such persons as by the Lorde Maior and Courte of Aldermen ... nor shall suffer to be enterlaced, Added, mynglydd, or uttered in anie such playe,

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<sup>61</sup> *ES*, 4: 279.

<sup>62</sup> *ES*, 4: 273-76.



enterlude, Comodye, Tragidie, or shew anie other matter then suche as shalbe firste perused and allowed as abovesaide.<sup>63</sup>

The act makes two points that are crucial to the development of thinking about genre. First, it informs us that the city took particular offense to spontaneous performance, those forms of presentation on which itinerant troupes relied to draw their audiences. The specific prohibition against material being added to “playbooks” suggests that spontaneous performance was a custom on the stage. Second, the act demonstrates that the city linked unscripted and spontaneous performance to the low status of play audiences. The government’s lack of control over the content of performances was conceptually linked with the audiences’ lack of control over their baser impulses.

Periodically over the following 20 years, authorities returned to the problem of unscripted performances. On November 12, 1589, the Privy Council addressed the tendency of players to “take upon them without judgement or decorum to handle matters of Divinitye and State,” even though players had been prohibited from addressing politics or religion as early as May 16, 1559.<sup>64</sup> On November 3, 1594, the Lord Mayor wrote a letter to Lord Burghley complaining of

the fruites and effects of the same [plays], conteining nothing ells but unchast fables, lascivious devises, shifts of cozenage, and matters of lyke sort, which are so framed and represented by them, that such as resort to see and hear the same, being of the base and refuse sort of people or such young gentlemen as have small regard of credit or conscience, drave the same into example of imitation and not of avoiding the sayed lewd offenses.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *ES*, 4: 274-75.

<sup>64</sup> *ES*, 4: 306

<sup>65</sup> *ES*, 4: 317.

Again, on September 13, 1595, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen wrote a letter to the Privy Council using the same kind of language: plays “conteyning nothing but profane fables, Lascivious matters, cozonning devizez, and other unseemly and scurrilous behaviours, which are so sett for the as that they move wholly to imitation and not to the avoiding of those vyces which they represent.”<sup>66</sup> In July of 1598, the same language appears in yet another letter from the Lord Mayor and Aldermen to the Privy Council. Apparently, the prohibition on unlicensed plays and playing was ineffective. Even more significant, however, is the attention to “cozening devices” and “shifts.” “Device” and “shift” meant trick or fraud but it they were also synonyms for “jests.”<sup>67</sup> The language developed by the city in response to the first 20 years of purpose built stages included a conventionalized opposition to public jesting of the sort that was integral to the performance of the morality Vice and on which itinerant troupes relied to draw in their audiences. The players’ use of this form of presentational performance perpetuated the connection between plays and other non-mimetic forms of commercial entertainment, like fencing shows and minstrels, and it was linked to unruly audiences, the corruption of morality and manners, and the “basest” sort of audience.

Poetic treatises and the London government produced two forms of culturally authoritative discourses linking clowning and presentational performance with lower status audiences. Nevertheless, the popular stage continued to cultivate clowning because it was commercially successful. By the end of the 1580s, university-educated playwrights who had internalized classical genre theory began to replace the player-playwrights, like Tarlton, who had earlier dominated the public stage. Critics have often cited *Tamburlaine*

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<sup>66</sup> *ES*, 4: 318.

<sup>67</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online.

as evidence that these “university wits” adhered to classical principles of decorum and rejected clowning in favor of representational dramaturgy. I would argue, instead, that *Tamburlaine* exemplifies its historical moment precisely because it claims to reject clowning even as it perpetuates presentational performance on stage.

Marlowe has clearly internalized the generic theories articulated by the poetic treatises. The prologue famously contrasts the stately scene of tragedy against the “iygging vaines of riming mother wits, / And suche conceits as clownage keeps in pay.”<sup>68</sup> Marlowe reiterates Puttenham’s characterization of clowning and rhyming as low-status theater and poetry, respectively. Clowning here is identified specifically with the jig, a point to which I return below. It is possible that Marlowe’s prologue refers to a jig that the players performed in 1587 directly before the prologue took the stage. In 1583, the Lord Mayor had complained to the Privy Council that although stage plays did not begin until the appointed time of 2 pm, audiences were problematically collecting in the theaters long before then. Perhaps, Marlowe’s reference to jiggging indicates that players entertained these early comers with jigs and clown shows before the play proper began. Whether this is so or not, Richard Jones, the play’s publisher, insists in his letter to the “Gentlemen Readers” that he has been forced “omit some fond and frivolous jestures ... farre unmeete for the matter ... though they have been gaped at by some vaine-conceited fondlings.” Jones’s letter suggests that the need to satisfy a reading audience, as opposed to theater spectators, may have influenced the characterization of stage clowning as low status.<sup>69</sup> More crucial to my argument, Jones’s letter indicates that despite the prologue’s

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* (London: Richard Jones, 1594).

<sup>69</sup> Preiss, “Infinite Jest,” explores this hypothesis by examining the printed work of notorious clowns like Will Kempe, Richard Tarlton, and Robert Armin.

disavowal of jiggling and clowning, on stage the play in fact featured presentational performance. Written and performed at the end of the 1580s, *Tamburlaine* manifests a disjuncture between commercial playing practices and classically influenced generic theory. In the 1590s, playwrights increasingly address this disjuncture. The theatrical strategies through which they attempted to bring native clowning into conformity with classical genre opened the conceptual space for Shakespeare to experiment with different alignments between presentational performance and genre. Hamlet and Ophelia are the products of this kind of experimentation, as Shakespeare makes use of presentational performance practices to fashion tragic characters.

### 1590s

The late 1580s and 1590s witnessed important changes in the material conditions of playing, as the commercial structure of the professional theater became more stable, especially after 1594. This stability permitted the new generation of university-educated playwrights to attempt to bring clowning practices into line with classical theories of decorum and genre. While this sharpened attention to genre altered the nature of clowning in important ways for which the groundwork had been laid in the 1570s and 1580s, it did not result in the banishment of clowning for which Helgerson has argued. Rather, stage clowning was generically reorganized over the course of the 1590s. At the beginning of the decade, even as the university wits echoed poetic treatises disparaging the clown, they wrote both plays that continued in what Lyly called a “hodge-podge” dramaturgy and plays that attempt to impose generic decorum on the clown. By the end of the decade, a second generation of university-educated playwrights had come to

prominence on the English stage. While these writers progressively contained clowning within comic subplots about low-status characters, in accordance with classical principles, they nonetheless perpetuated the practice of clowning because the popular audience demanded it.

### *Early 1590s*

The conditions that had given rise to vigorous clowning as the center of theatrical energy had shifted by the mid-1590s. In 1592 and 1593, playing in London was limited to the Christmas season due to plague. Those companies that toured successfully in the provinces returned to the city when year-round playing resumed in 1594. Touring was expensive, however, and the result of this hiatus was a reshuffling of playing companies out of which emerged the two companies that would dominate the London theatrical scene and eventually become royally licensed under James I: the Admiral's Men, which developed from a merger of the old Admiral's and Lord Strange's, and the Chamberlain's Men. This period also saw the development of the convention by which a particular company played at a particular theater, the Admiral's at the Rose and the Chamberlain's first at the Theater, then at the Curtain, and finally at the Globe in 1599. Stable playing conditions allowed for regular performances, which in turn fostered the development of a more self-conscious engagement with genre and poetics and a solidification of the alignment of certain playing practices with an elite audience and others with a popular audience.

The presentational mode of clowning had also shifted somewhat in late 1580s, with the death of Richard Tarlton and the ascendance of Will Kemp as the genre-defining

clown.<sup>70</sup> Kemp was originally a solo performer who was absorbed into the commercial structure of the companies when he became a member of Leicester's Men and eventually ended up with the Chamberlain's Men.<sup>71</sup> As a solo performer, he had relied entirely on the craft of presentation. Like Tarlton, Kemp played the role of the country bumpkin and was known for his extemporal wit, but he was also an athletic performer, famous for his somersaults and jigs. By the late 1580s, jigs had become a theatrical genre in themselves, as conventional afterpieces to plays, and they reached their height with Kemp's popularity.<sup>72</sup> In 1599, when Kemp left the Chamberlain's Men, in fact, he morris danced his way from London to Norwich and narrated his trip in a pamphlet, *Kemp's Nine Daies Wonder*, which emphasizes the physical stamina that his dancing required and the country people who came out to wish him well.<sup>73</sup> The pamphlet reveals that the primary attraction that Kemp held for viewers was his perpetuation of festive and folk practices. The morris dance was the staple of the mummer's plays, and it was especially associated with the summer lord. The dance itself holds no mimetic value, a fact which is highlighted as Kemp's pamphlet creates a narrative about the dancing, not through the dancing. With Kemp's jigs as the preeminent form of clowning of the 1590s, the popular stage continued to rely on presentational as opposed to representational performance.

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<sup>70</sup> David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Richard Preiss, "Infinite Jest: Performance, Authorship, and the Assimilations of the Stage Clown in Early Modern English Theater, 1588-1673," unpublished dissertation, Stanford University, 2005; Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng.: D.S. Brewer, 2009); and Bente A. Videbaek, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, ch. 4; and Charles Baskerville, *The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama* (New York: Dover, 1965).

<sup>73</sup> Will Kemp, *Kemp's Nine Dais Wonder* (London: A.B. for Nicholas Ling, 1600).

These changes in playing conditions and clowning contributed to the development of a different kind of relationship between player and playwright during the 1590s than the one that had obtained in the 1570s and 1580s. As Helgerson and others argue, over the course of the 1590s and early seventeenth century, the playwright gradually became more of an authoritative figure in the theater. One way in which playwrights asserted their authority was by increasingly structuring their plays according to classical generic conventions, a poetic move that both demonstrated their internalization of the principles espoused in the poetic treatises of the 1580s and implied that they were heirs to the classical tradition.

Most of the men writing regularly for the theater in the late 1580s and early 1590s had been born in the late 1550s to mid-1560s and had been granted degrees by the universities in the 1570s to mid-1580s.<sup>74</sup> Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe, and Anthony Munday came of age under Ascham's educational model. Born into the middling sorts, these writers attained social mobility and gentlemanly status by attending the universities. Shakespeare, of course, was similarly born into an artisanal family but did not obtain a university degree. The most vocal among this group of writers—Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe—claimed cultural authority based on their university educations. In printed pamphlets, Nashe and Greene discursively constructed authority by echoing the poetic treatise writers in their

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Greene, born in the late 1550s, was granted a BA from St. John's in 1580, an MA from Clare in 1583, and an MA from Oxford in 1588. Thomas Lodge, born in 1558, was granted a BA from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1577. George Peele, born in 1556, was granted a BA in 1577 and an MA in 1579, both from Christ Church, Oxford. Anthony Munday was born in 1560 and although there is no official record of his university attendance, he reported in the preface to *Mirroure for Mutabilitie* that his parents had spent liberally on his education. Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564 and was granted a BA from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1584. Thomas Nashe was born in 1567 and granted a BA from St. John's, Cambridge, in 1586.

association of rhyming, ballads, and clowning with lower-status writers and audiences. Robert Greene, for example, famously mocked Shakespeare for his lack of a university education.

Plays from this period demonstrate a new form of generic self-consciousness that speaks to the internalization on the popular stage of the classical emphasis on genre. Robert Greene's 1594 *Mucedorus* opens with an exchange between the allegorical figures of Comedy and Envy. Comedy, a woman, enters the stage "joyfull with a garland of baies on her hand," while Envy enters "his armes naked besmeared with blood." As they debate what kind of play they will present, Comedy announces that her intention is to make her audience laugh: "I doe hope to please: / Musicke revives, and mirth is tolerable, / Comedie ... make merry them that comes to joy with thee." While Envy tries to convince her to "mixe" her musicke with a "tragic end,"<sup>75</sup> she rushes him off the stage. In the prologue to the tragic *Warning for Fair Women*, first performed in the late 1590s, Comedy, Tragedy, and History debate their own merits. Tragedy spitefully shoos Comedy away, demanding "More cartwheelles craking yet? / A plague vpon, Ile cut your fiddle strings, / If you stand scraping thus to anger me."<sup>76</sup> Tragedy identifies comedy with cartwheels and fiddles, two aspects of the vigorous physical and presentational displays that characterized the Vice's role in earlier popular drama.

Nevertheless, despite proclamations of their distaste for clowning, the university wits did not consistently embrace in practice the classical theories of genre and decorum that they espoused in theory. Instead, while these writers gradually integrated more defined generic structures into their work for the popular stage, they continued to mix

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<sup>75</sup> Robert Greene, *Mucedorus* (London: William Jones, 1598).

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, *A Warning for Faire Women* (London: Valentine Sims for William Aspley, 1599).



genres, tones, and tragic and comic theatrical practices in ways that resisted decorum. By the 1590s, the nomenclature of the “tragical comedy” had fallen out of use. Although academic and courtly elites, like Sir John Harington in the Preface to his 1591 translation of *Orlando Furioso* and Francis Meres in his 1598 *Palladis Tamia*, continued to push for classically based generic models, the terms “comedy” and “tragedy” remained vexed in practice, especially as they were triangulated with the native form of the chronicle history play. While “history” could refer specifically to a play about a historical figure, the Renaissance interpretation of classical thinkers led to the belief that tragedies should be about historical figures, and so “history” could imply tragedy. At the same time, “history” also served as a synonym for story, and so some plays were designated as “comical histories.” The 1600 quarto of the *Merchant of Venice*, for example, announces itself as the “most excellent historie of the merchant of Venice” yet the play is grouped with the comedies in the 1623 folio.

In practice, both self-proclaimed tragedies and comedies make indiscriminate use of clowning in the early 1590s. From the perspective of a student of Elizabethan drama, it is nearly impossible to excavate presentational performances from playtexts; as printed artifacts, scripts by nature cannot transmit drama’s performative mode. In response to this difficulty, I have followed Weimann and Bruster’s method of attending to moments in which the scripted dialogue and stage directions exceed mimetic rationale. They focus on moments in which disguises or counterfeiting are unnecessary for plot or representational purposes, moments in which scripts foreground the theater’s transvestitism, and moments in which punning draws attention away from the drama’s mimetic function.<sup>77</sup> In plays

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<sup>77</sup> Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, ch. 4.

from the early 1590s, both high and low status figures participate in these presentational moments, despite the dictates of genre and decorum.

In Anthony Munday's *John a Kent*, first performed in the late 1580s and published in the early 1590s, for example, the two prime movers of the plot, John of Kent and John of Cumber, are cunning magicians who compete over their ability to toy with noblemen and –women in love. Both characters wear a fool's coat at some point in the play, and both wear multiple disguises to trick the nobles. These Vice characters are low status and nomadic, but they are not the play's designated country bumpkins. Instead, the "clowns and rustics," according to the *dramatis personae*, are a group of townsmen who have prepared entertainments for the joint wedding feast of Sidanen, the daughter of the prince of North Wales, and Marian, the daughter of the Earl of Chester. The townsmen fulfill two of the earlier Vice's functions: they play music and they make verbal jokes in the form of faux pas. These figures conform to generic principles about high and low status characters and vigorous comedy. The play, however, also includes a scene in which the nobility engage in physical displays: the Earl of Chester, the Prince of North Wales, the Earl of Morton, and the Earl of Pembroke perform antic dances and sing ballad-like love songs. The vigorous performance on the part of noblemen is a violation of both *decorum generis* and *decorum personae*, yet this play remained incredibly popular throughout the 1590s. It was staged as *John a Kent and John a Cumber* through the early 1590s and then a variant entitled *The Wiseman of West Chester* was one of the most successful plays staged at the Rose Theater between 1594 and 1597.

A similarly "hodge-podge" play, Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, was performed throughout the decade, both at court and at the Rose, and published in

1594 under the title of “an honorable history.” The plot is loosely similar to that of *John a Kent*: Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay are magicians who compete as they meddle in the love lives of noblemen. In this play, the “clown” is an artificial fool, Rafe, a servant to Prince Edward who foreshadows Lear’s fool. Rafe makes bawdy puns, berates the prince, and disguises himself as royalty. Yet the higher status characters also participate in the topsyturvydom. A spell renders Prince Edward incapable of withdrawing his sword, the sexual implications of which are not lost on Miles, a poor scholar who laughs at the prince for his impotency. Edward meanwhile is reduced to beating Miles over the head like a scolding wife. As in *John a Kent*, *decorum generis* and *decorum personae* are disregarded in *Friar Bacon*, even though Greene was one of the university wits who so vehemently associated clowning with lower status playwrights and audiences.

Although they continued to mix tones and theatrical practices, plays nonetheless gradually began to relegate the figure of the clown to comic subplots about lower-status characters. The most popular comedy of the decade, Greene’s *Mucedorus*, for example, relates the courtly love between a princess, Amadine, and a prince disguised as a shepherd, Mucedorus. The main plot ends happily but it features tragic moments. In the first scene, Amadine is chased by a ravenous bear, and later Amadine is almost eaten by a cannibalistic wild man. In the meantime, two characters die. This tragic tone, however, is counterbalanced by Mouse, a country clown whom Segasto adopts as his court fool. Mouse plays no major role in the storyline, and he spends comparatively little time on stage. Yet, the play’s title, *A Most Pleasant Comedie of Mucedorus, the Kings sonne of Valentia and Amadine the King’s daughter of Arragon, with the merrie conceites of Mouse*, suggests that Mouse is equally as important as the love story to the play’s generic

designation. The title also indicates that Mouse was a primary attraction for the audience, comparable to the love story in its power to draw paying spectators to the theater.

In the anonymous *Knack to Knowe a Knave*, the clown is similarly inconsequential to the plot but essential to the play's commercial success. The 1594 title page identifies the play as "A Most Pleasant and Merie new Comedie," and then in slightly smaller letters on the following line, it announces the title, *A Knacke to Know a Knave*. On a line directly below the title, text reads "*Newlie set foorth, as it hath sundrie tymes bene played by Ed. Allen and his Companie, with Kemps applauded Merrimentes of the men of Goteham.*" Although Kemp's name appears on a different line than Allen's, it is printed in letters of equal size, suggesting that Kemp was as much of a draw to playgoers and readers as Allen was. Kemp's role in the plot is minuscule. With fewer than 50 lines, he appears only in a brief scene in which Gotham laborers petition the king about small beer. Kemp's scene has no bearing on the storyline, and it appears forcibly interjected into a weightier discussion about how to tell a man's character by his looks.

David Wiles has argued that Kemp was given full reign of the stage during his jigs in order to compensate for his small part in this and other plays.<sup>78</sup> Wiles furthermore contends that relegating the jig to a dramatic afterpiece was one way that playwrights could maintain the popular attraction of the clown but create plays that more closely followed classical rules of genre and decorum. The attention paid to the clown by the title pages of *Mucedorus* and *Knack to Knowe a Knave* support Wiles' argument, indicating that even as clowning was gradually contained within jigs and subplots, it continued to draw both audiences to the theaters and readers to the book stalls. In fact, in the prologue

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<sup>78</sup> Charles Baskervill, *Elizabethan Jig*.

to *Warning for Fair Women*, Tragedy concedes to Comedy's claim that "But once a weeke if we [Comedy] do not appeere, / She [Tragedy] shall find few that will attend her here." While university-educated playwrights began to shift the emphasis of the popular stage toward classical principles of decorum, the public theater was a commercial enterprise in which the audience needed to be taken into account. And the Elizabethan audience demanded clowning.

### *Late 1590s*

The writers who came to dominate the stage during the later 1590s—Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, John Marston, and Thomas Heywood among them—had been born in the 1570s, and they attended the universities in the early to mid-1590s.<sup>79</sup> Their work demonstrates that they had internalized classical theories of drama and genre by the time they were writing for the public stage. More plays of the late 1590s evince classical generic influences, following a five-act structure, separating comedy from tragedy, promoting representation over presentation, and isolating clowning among lower-status comic figures. Expanding upon the dramatic precedents of the 1590s, these writers were self-conscious enough to write about genre ironically and to cultivate new genres on the public stage. The theater of the late 1590s was generically diverse, with the rise of city comedy and the comedy of humors, the perpetuation of romantic comedies, the revival of revenge tragedies from the late 1580s and early 1590s, the beginnings of domestic

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<sup>79</sup> Marston graduated BA from Oxford in 1594 and attended the Inns of Court. Heywood matriculated to Cambridge in 1591 but was forced to leave after his father's death. Jonson attended Cambridge briefly in the late 1580s but withdrew for financial reasons.

tragedy, the continued production of English history plays, and the perpetuation of plays gleaned from Italian novelle and chivalric romance cycles.

Although, as I demonstrate below, Shakespeare created space for tragic clowning, by the end of the 1590s, clowning was in general no longer being incorporated into newly written tragedies, and in comedies and histories it was increasingly allocated to subplots about lower-status characters.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, clowning was not in and of itself eliminated precisely because it remained popular with public theater audiences. Jonson satirizes this demand as late as 1626, in *The Staple of News* when he personifies the proverbial popular audience with four “gossips” who sit on stage and comment on the play. In the intermean after the first act, Censure expresses her dissatisfaction that Jonson’s play lacks the traditional comic personas: “Why this is duller and duller! Intolerable! Scurvy! Neither devil nor fool in this play!”<sup>81</sup> By mocking his fictional gossips for their lack of sophistication, Jonson evinces both the alignment of clowning with unrefined, lower-status audiences and the extent to which playwrights felt the need to cater to theatergoers’ tastes. In the late 1590s, Jonson and his fellow playwrights were responding to the tension between they perceived between the poetic integrity of classical genres and the demands of public theater audiences.

One solution to negotiating the commercial success of clowning and the principles of decorum was to have high-born characters disguise themselves as low-status characters and thereby make space in an essentially high plot for decorous clowning. In

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<sup>80</sup> Even clowning in tragedies was not absent from the public stage in the 1590s, as theaters continued to produce tragedies that were written in the 1580s and 1590s. *Tamburlaine*, for example, continued to be a favorite at the Rose, as was Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, in which preeminence of the Devil and the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins rely heavily on presentation and created space for vigorous playing. *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. 3: 1576-1613, ed. J. Leeds Barroll et al. (London: Methuen, 1975).

<sup>81</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, edited by Anthony Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

Thomas Heywood's history play *Edward IV*, for example, the king rests from his management of civil military affairs by disguising himself as a villager and questioning Hobs the tanner of Tamworth about his loyalty to the throne. Hobs' presence in the story is limited to four scenes, in which he employs the traditional presentational practices of the Vice and Clown. He plays the role of the benighted country bumpkin; he makes puns and faux pas; and he sings and calls for a jig.

Similarly, in Thomas Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, first performed around 1599, the role of the master of ceremonies is performed by an artisan, Simon Eyre the master shoemaker.<sup>82</sup> This play represents three different social strata: noblemen, citizens, and artisans. The noblemen and Lord Mayor maintain status-appropriate linguistic refinement, with the exception of Sir Rowland Lacy, who disguises himself as a German shoemaker. In contrast to the high-status characters, Simon Eyre speaks in the bawdy and punning idioms of the clown. For example, he repeatedly calls his wife a "bombast-cotton-candle quean," and he refers to his journeymen in epic language, calling them "my mad Hyperboreans" and "mad Mesopotamians" in a high-spirited, festive tone. Eyre depends on presentation throughout the play, as he consistently rouses the shoemakers to drink and celebrate as well as work. The festive atmosphere he engenders is confirmed as he becomes Lord Mayor and declares Shrove Tuesday a holiday for shoemakers, and the play is punctuated by the journeymen shoemakers' performance of a morris dance for the Lord Mayor. Rather than painting morris dancing as unsophisticated, the tone of the play celebrates the morris dance as a demonstration of the traditional fraternity of artisanal guilds. The play does, however, maintain *decorum personae* and *decorum generis*.

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), in *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 365-408.

While plays like *Edward IV* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* built upon the trend of centralizing presentational performance and clowning in characters of the lower sorts or characters of the upper sorts pretending to be of the lower sorts, Ben Jonson fostered a different kind of comedy altogether, the comedy of humors, in which he attempted to translate classical generic principles more directly onto the English commercial stage. Jonson endorsed more or less strictly neoclassical ideals of genre and decorum. Satires of late-Elizabethan social types, Jonson's comedies follow Ascham's ideal of a genre depicting stock character types and reinforce the triangulation of comedy, vigorous jesting, and lower-status audiences. Jonson introduces his first humoral comedy, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, with a frame dialogue between the figure of the author, the social critic Asper, and two fictionalized audience members, Cordatus and Mitis. Asper claims that the audience will see "a mirror, / As large as is the Stage whereon [they] act, / Where they shall see the times deformity, / Anatomiz'd in every Nerve and Sinew" (Br). As Mitis and Cordatus discuss the comedy they are about to see, they elaborate on the play's self-conscious engagement with classical generic thought. Mitis questions whether the play follows the "laws of comedy": Terentian storyline and tone, the division into acts and scenes, and temporal unity.<sup>83</sup> The paratexts of the 1600 quarto demonstrate the role assigned to clowning, jesting, and vigorous playing within this classical framework. A brief description of the play's characters describes Carlo Buffone, the jester, as "a publike-scurrulous, and prophane Iester, that more swift than Circe with obsurd simele's [similes] will transforme any person into Deformitie. A good Feasthound or Banket-beagell" (A2r). Jonson's depiction of the buffoon merges the traditional roles of the

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<sup>83</sup> Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humor* (London: Nicholas Ling, 1600).



travelling performer, the Vice's jesting, and the popular nature of the theater, signified by Jonson's use of the word "publike" in the sense of "open to all," and the characterization of the clown as scurrilous and indecorous.

In other plays and his work of literary criticism, *Timber, or Discoveries*, Jonson argues that audiences with refined senses of judgment would prefer poetry over spectacle, dialogue over physical playing, and that dramatic taste is a measure of sophistication.<sup>84</sup> In his epistle to Lord Pembroke in the 1611 quarto of *Caitiline*, he blames the play's commercial failure on the public theater audiences. "In these jig-given times," he writes, few will "countenance a legitimate Poeme."<sup>85</sup> He accompanies this epistle with two others, one to the "Ordinarie Reader," in which he scathingly informs the general public that he disdains their ignorance, and one submitting himself to the discretion of the "Extraordinary Reader." *Bartholomew Fair* reiterates this distinction between the sophisticated—and literate—spectator and the clown-loving dimwit. The Prologue takes the form of a conversation between the Stagekeeper, representing the judgment of the groundlings, and the Scrivener, who sets out articles of agreement between the author and the audience. In the vein of the early Vice figure, the Stagekeeper confides in the audience that they are about to witness a bad play because it has no "Sword," "Buckler man," "little *Dauy*," "Iugler with a wel-educated Ape to come ouer the chaine, for the *King of England* , and backe againe for the *Prince*," or "Hobby-horseman." He proceeds

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<sup>84</sup> Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries: Made upon Men and Matter* (1640), in *Ben Jonson's Literary Criticism*, ed. James D. Redwine, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

<sup>85</sup> Ben Jonson, *Caitiline, His Conspiracy* (London: Walter Burre, 1611).

to inform the audience that he kept the stage when Tarlton performed, and if Tarlton were in this play, the play would delight the audience with clowning.<sup>86</sup>

Despite his espousal of neoclassical principles and his denunciation of the low tastes of the penny-paying spectators in the yard, however, Jonson's work was never devoid of the kind of clowning that he derided. The prologue to *Bartholomew Fair* suggests that Jonson felt that a play could not be successful on the popular stage without fulfilling the audience's expectations for clowning. Instead, Jonson mocked presentational performance even as he incorporated it into his plays. In *Every Man out of His Humor*, Carlo the buffoon presents the play's prologue, albeit drunkenly, in which he rails against the author. Cordatus responds by commenting that Carlo will "profane" even the most holy topics in order to make the audience laugh, thereby reiterating Sidney's critique of clowning as indecorously eliciting laughter rather than fulfilling the more properly comic function of celebrating delight. Later Carlo encourages the audience to laugh at a biting and justified satire of Sogliardo, a court upstart who asks Carlo for advice on behaving like a proper gentleman. Carlo is thus both the object and vehicle of satire, simultaneously a de-authorized and legitimated voice. By satirizing Carlo and the audience who appreciates him, Jonson ensures that clowning remains a central feature of his play even as he denounces it.

Jonson stands at one, neoclassical extreme of what can be seen as a dramaturgical spectrum on the late-Elizabethan stage. Over the course of the 1570s, 1580s, and early 1590s, the London government and the writers of poetic treatises had increasingly

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<sup>86</sup> Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: John Beale, James Dawson, Bernard Alsop and Thomas Fawcet for Richard Meighen and Thomas Walkley, 1641). Satirizing himself was one of Jonson's favorite stage devices.

associated the performative practices of the clown with vagabonds, with the jig, with lower-status, unsophisticated audiences, and with legally marginal forms of commercial entertainment like minstrelsy, ballads, and fencing. Until the late 1580s and early 1590s, playwrights for the popular stage show few signs of having adopted this thinking into their dramaturgy. Over the course of the 1590s, however, playwrights became increasingly invested in classical decorum on the popular stage, and they began to relegate the clown or Vice to subplots about low-status characters. At the end of the 1590s, Jonson becomes the representative figure for a new form of satiric comedy of humors that defines itself against the clowning of Tarlton. Jonson's continued exploitation of the popular entertainment value of clowning, however, indicates that this period saw not the banishment of clowning from the popular stage but instead a shift in dramaturgy, one in which the association of clowning-based comedy with low status and unsophisticated audiences became an internal mechanism in plays. The continued use of clowning throughout late-Elizabethan drama, even by writers like Jonson, suggests that it was necessary because it was demanded by audiences. In fact, Jonson's denigration of the popular audience's taste can be seen as a form of clowning in itself, similar in tone to insulting quips that Tarlton had exchanged with his audiences during the 1580s. While the increasing association of clowning with lower-status audiences and characters laid the foundation for new forms of comedy, it also allowed for a recontextualization of the relationship between tragedy and presentational playing. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare both invokes and problematizes neoclassical dramatic principles when he constructs tragic pathos through the presentational playing of Hamlet and Ophelia.

### Shakespeare, Clowning, and Genre

Shakespeare is one of the few playwrights whose career spanned the entirety of the 1590s. Like other major playwrights from the decade, he hailed from artisanal beginnings, but unlike them he did not attend the universities. Shakespeare participates in the general trend of associating clowning with unsophisticated audiences while he simultaneously exploits the dramaturgical potential of clowning and its popular associations. While Jonson and Heywood increasingly isolated clowning within comedy, however, Shakespeare uses the theatrical practices associated with clowning to shape his tragic figures. He displays a flexible understanding of generic conventions and a willingness to mix genres and tones in ways that differed from the hodge-podge dramaturgy of the 1580s and 1590s. Instead, Shakespeare draws both on the move toward neoclassicism and on the morality Vice tradition in order to create complex, morally questionable but theatrically powerful protagonists. Shakespeare first experiments with this character type in the history plays, producing such figures as Richard III, Faulconbridge, and Hal.<sup>87</sup> As I noted earlier, however, because history plays were a native invention, they remained more flexible in their mixtures of comic and tragic practices as classical principles of decorum were becoming more prominent on the public stage. The use of presentational performance by higher-status characters in tragedy represents a more pronounced and deliberate manipulation of neoclassical genre. *Hamlet* appears to stake its claims with mimetic playing, which the Prince characterizes as elite and sophisticated. That investment, however, is undermined as Shakespeare employs

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<sup>87</sup> Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, chs. 2 and 3, discuss both Richard and the Bastard, and Michael Mooney, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Transactions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), ch. 2, addresses Richard at length.

presentational practices associated with clowning in order to construct the pathos of Hamlet and Ophelia. In both characters, Shakespeare demonstrates that even as the move toward neoclassical dramaturgy limited the scope of clowning, it simultaneously opened new possibilities for the meaning of presentational performance

Unlike Jonson, Shakespeare has left us with no concise articulation of a dramatic theory. In this absence, critics have read Hamlet, whose verbal and philosophical dexterity closely resembles our contemporary image of the Bard, as a transparent representative of the author himself.<sup>88</sup> Hamlet's comments on popular audiences and acting styles, especially regarding clowning, have been taken as expressions of Shakespeare's own views on the commercial theater. Richard Helgerson, for example, makes Hamlet the cornerstone of his argument about the history plays. Although Helgerson engages most thoroughly with the Jack Cade's rebellion in Shakespeare's 2 *Henry IV*, Hamlet's instructions to the traveling players constitute the only direct evidence about playing from Shakespeare's work. Citing Hamlet's instructions to the players to claim that Will Kemp left the Chamberlain's Men in 1599 over an ideological dispute with Shakespeare about the role of the clown, Helgerson generalizes his conclusions to the rest of Shakespeare's work. If, however, we read Hamlet, first, within the context of Elizabethan debates over representational and presentational playing and, second, as one component in the play's larger performative system, it becomes clear that the play mitigates Hamlet's neoclassicism through its insistence on perpetuating the forms of performance that Hamlet associates with clowning and lower-status audiences.

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<sup>88</sup> Annabel Patterson, for example, writes that "*Hamlet* is the play in which Shakespeare invested his own conception of the popular theater, and by making Hamlet both playwright and director, made articulate the degree to which Hamlet's introspection resembles his own" (*Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* [Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989], 99–100).

To borrow Weimann's phrase, *Hamlet* encapsulates a "bifold" sensibility toward clowning.<sup>89</sup>

As Helgerson and others argue, the Prince does, in fact, assert a neoclassical view of drama. When the City Tragedians arrive in Elsinore, Hamlet requests that they perform a monologue from a dramatic rendition of Book IV of *The Aeneid*, explaining that the play "was never acted ... for [it]... pleased not the million, 'twas caviar to the general. But it was—as I received it, and others whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes set down with as much modesty as cunning." The Prince then quotes the opinion of one of these learned critics: "I remember one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affection, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine."<sup>90</sup>

Both Hamlet's choice of Virgil and his description of the play demonstrate that his understanding of drama is grounded in his university education. The *Aeneid* was a staple in Elizabethan grammar schools, and Book IV had been a favorite as far back as St. Augustine's school days. Hamlet situates himself in the role of elite critic by establishing the difference between himself and the general playgoing population.<sup>91</sup> Whereas he and other sophisticated critics praised the play for its modesty and discretion, a dramatic style that the university-educated writers of poetic treatises espoused, the "millions" clearly have no patience for "honest" playing. We can presume that they, instead, would

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<sup>89</sup> Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 42-44.

<sup>90</sup> *Hamlet*, ed. G.R. Hibbard, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2.2.426-37. Subsequent in-text citations refer to this edition.

<sup>91</sup> I am expanding here on Louis Montrose's identification of Hamlet as a representative of the elite critic. See Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42-44.

preferred in a play in which the lines *did* savour of sallets, one that was more fine than handsome. Here Hamlet enacts the process by which educational and courtly elites claimed status and social authority by differentiating themselves from the tastes of the lower sorts, which they characterized as popular.

Later, when Hamlet directs the Players in *The Murder of Gonzago*, he once again espouses a classically based, mimetic view of drama similar to the one that Philip Sidney had articulated twenty years earlier. He requests that the players speak their lines

trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier had spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand ... you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. (3.2.1-13)

While Hamlet would not have the players overact, he also warns them against “being too tame.” They must represent humanity naturally and mimetically; they must “suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature” (3.2.15-20). He concludes with a warning about spontaneous performance and clowning: “Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too” (3.2.36-41). In the First Quarto, Hamlet continues to rail against clowning, saying:

And then you have some again that keeps one suit of jests, as a man is known by one suit of apparel and gentlemen quote his jests down in their

tables before they come to the play as thus: “Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge?” and “You owe me a quarter’s wages” and “My coat wants a cullison” and “Your beer is sour,” and blabbering with his lips and thus keeping in his cinquepace of jests, when God knows the warm clown cannot make a jest unless by chance, as the blind man catcheth a hare.<sup>92</sup>

I have quoted Hamlet at length not only because these comments constitute the core of a conventional argument that Shakespeare resented the popular audience for which he wrote, but also because, taken as a whole, Hamlet’s comments form a cohesive neoclassical dramatic theory that is less apparent when it is read piecemeal. Like Sidney and Ascham, Hamlet insists on a mimetic understanding of drama in which the player’s body is a vehicle for telling a story; he privileges representation over presentation. Like Jonson, he describes those who delight more in spectacle than in poetry as unsophisticated. Like Webbe and Puttenham, he sees the theater within a historical framework that reaches back to the classical world. Like the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, he resents the clown’s spontaneous performance, which he identifies in the First Quarto with the “cinquepace of jests,” an image of simple, repetitive movements that merges Kemp’s jiggling with Tarlton’s jesting. Hamlet’s critique of clowning arises as much from the clown’s unnaturalistic representation of “real” country folk as it does from the clown’s lack of authentic verbal wit. The clown’s hackneyed jests have no correlation to “warm,” or living, clowns who are in reality dull-witted.

Hamlet’s commentary, however, does not necessarily reflect Shakespeare’s opinions; rather, Hamlet must be read within the context of Elizabethan stagecraft, which

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<sup>92</sup> *The First Quarto of Hamlet*, ed. Kathleen O. Irace, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.17-28.



constructed individual characters as dramatizations of social types.<sup>93</sup> When Hamlet welcomes the City Tragedians, for example, he catalogues the types of the lover, the knight, the lady, and the clown, who “delight[s] those who laugh easily” (2.2.317-22). The significance of individual characters’ dispositions on the Elizabethan stage was produced by their adherence to or deviation from their given dramatic and social types. Shakespeare’s characters are mixtures of different types. Hamlet is, in Ophelia’s terms, a courtier, a soldier, and a scholar (3.1.152). As far as Hamlet is concerned, however, he is more scholar than courtier or soldier. He resents the deceit of the court, and he lacks the fiery temperament of the soldier. Furthermore, the blackness of his mourning clothes that Hamlet wears when he first enters the play would have visually identified him to the audience as melancholic, a humoral disposition thought to be prominent among intellectual men. Hamlet fulfills the character type of the ruminating intellectual.

It is reasonable, then, to read Hamlet’s neoclassical view on poetry as a means for constructing his character, rather than as a transparent expression of Shakespeare’s own opinions. This is not to say that Shakespeare necessarily disagreed with Hamlet or that there is no part of Hamlet’s dramatic theory to which Shakespeare subscribed. Instead, I mean to argue that Hamlet must be read as a dramatic construction fashioned from contemporary dramatic practices. As such, he participates in a conglomerate system of meaning that the play produces, in dialogue with other characters and with the overarching methods of presentation and representation employed within the play. Taken as a whole, the play mitigates Hamlet’s neoclassical elitism, and it does so, first, by

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<sup>93</sup> Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 64; Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 124; Bevington, *Action is Eloquence*, ch. 3; J.L. Styan, *Shakespeare’s Stagecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 28.

presenting characters who disrupt the status-based stereotypes of audiences to which Hamlet subscribes and, second, through the use of performance practices associated with clowning—precisely those forms of “handsome” playing that Hamlet disparages—in order to create tragic gravitas.

Hamlet is not the play’s only poetic and dramatic critic. Polonius is also at pains to flaunt his discriminating taste to the court and the theater audience. He critiques Hamlet’s love poetry to Ophelia; he so bedecks his speech with rhetorical ornaments that Gertrude pleads for “more matter with less art”; he announces that he acted when he was at university; and he displays his so-called sophistication by praising the City Tragedians as the best players for “either tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy nor Plautus too light” (3.3.391-95). Shakespeare satirizes this exhaustive list of genres, implying that Polonius possesses more empty knowledge than skill. Polonius’s interest in generic labels recalls the poetic treatises of Webbe and Puttenham, whom Sir John Harington mocks for being overly officious and short on talent.<sup>94</sup>

Although Polonius is a university-educated nobleman, the kind of spectator who should possess poetic discrimination according to Hamlet’s stereotypes, Polonius’s education serves only to emphasize by contrast his lack of judgment. Whereas Hamlet praises the player reciting Aeneas’s speech in 2.2, Polonius complains that the monologue is too long. Like the “millions,” Polonius has no patience for playing that is more “handsome than fine.” Hamlet responds by instructing the players to ignore

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<sup>94</sup> Sir John Harington, *A Brieffe Apologie of Poetrie*, in *Orlando Furioso* (London: Richard Field, 1591), iiiir.

Polonius, who, he says, “is for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps” (2.2.491). Using the conventional language of critiques of clowning, Hamlet associates the jig with indiscriminating audiences in order to deflate Polonius. Hamlet’s reading of Polonius is astute; Polonius’ pomposity renders him a clown figure in and of himself. He is essentially a mixture of comic types, at once the *senex* of New Comedy and the father obstructing the marriage in a romantic comedy as well as the “busy loving courtier” and “the self-wise-seeming schoolmaster” whom Sidney mentions. As he becomes the target of Hamlet’s puns, he displays the dullness of wit that Hamlet associates with theatrical and historical clowns. Polonius thus disrupts both Hamlet’s status-based generalizations about dramatic taste as well as the neoclassical tenet that clowns should be lower-status figures.

In *Hamlet and Ophelia*, Shakespeare goes further toward complicating neoclassical genre, as he uses comic conventions and the discourses of status with which they intersected to produce tragedy. Robert Weimann, among others, has argued that Hamlet plays the role of the Vice in his own play. Weimann proposes that Hamlet’s antic puns constitute *Hamlet*’s equivalent of the comedic subplot, as Hamlet parodies the philosophical themes of his own tragic story and criticizes Elsinore from the audience’s perspective and in plebian language.<sup>95</sup> Hamlet also occupies the *platea*, the dramaturgical and conceptual space from which the morality Vice spoke directly to the audience. As Hamlet’s closest confidant for the first three acts of the play, only the audience shares with him the knowledge of Claudius’s guilt and so only the audience is privy to the full range of irony in Hamlet’s puns. Furthermore, Hamlet is the only character who speaks in

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<sup>95</sup> Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 125-33.

soliloquies during the play's first three acts. As a result, Hamlet inhabits the clown's traditional role as an intermediary between the representational world of the play and the extrarepresentational world of the audience.<sup>96</sup>

Less often commented upon is the fact that the presentation of the role of Hamlet calls upon the skills of clowning and vigorous playing. As Weimann and others note, one important presentational component of Hamlet's clowning is his punning, which is at odds with a representation marked by 'reason, propriety, and truth.'" By disrupting the transparent alignment of sign and signified, Weimann and Bruster assert, punning resists the verisimilitude necessary to construct characters that function mimetically. "All of these topsy-turvy elements point to a performance practice that refused to fall in with what was reasonable, cogent, and appropriate to the 'necessary question of the play.'"<sup>97</sup> Another important presentational component of "Hamlet" is the energy and vigor required by his assumed madness. In the scenes in which Hamlet is "maddest," the tempo of his language becomes fast-paced and his thoughts change direction abruptly. After Hamlet's first encounter with the ghost, Horatio is shocked by his "wild and whirling words" (1.5.137). If Burbage, who first played Hamlet at the Globe, were suiting the action to the word, we can imagine that the gestures and movements that accompanied this linguistic velocity were equally rambunctious.

Indeed, Hamlet describes his performed madness as "antic," a theatrical term of art that denoted vigorous comic playing. In Munday's *John a Kent*, "antic" is the stage

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<sup>96</sup> On the clown as intermediary, see Bente A. Videbaek, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). On Hamlet as occupying the *platea*, see Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 130; Mooney, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Transactions*, ch. 4; Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 185; and Janet Hill, *Stages and Playgoers: From Guild Plays to Shakespeare* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 145.

<sup>97</sup> Weimann and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 18.

direction for the dancing noblemen. Its association with clowning is made clear by Marlowe, in whose *Edward II*, Gaveston tells the audience that for the king his “men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns, / Shall with their goat feet dance an antic hay.”<sup>98</sup> Gaveston refers to the origins of comedy, as Renaissance thinkers understood it, in Dionysian Satyr plays. Similarly, Robert Greene uses the term to denounce player-playwrights as unsophisticated in his *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit*, where he writes of “antics garnisht in our colours.”<sup>99</sup> As Janet Hill points out, Hamlet also uses the language of physical jesting in reference to himself. He greets the City Tragedians by facetiously asking, “Com’st thou to beard me in Denmark?”. Later, frustrated with his inability to conjure the “motive and cue for passion” to revenge, he responds to his own self-denigration by exclaiming, “Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across, / Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face, / Tweaks me by th’ nose, gives me the lie i’ th’ throat?” (2.2.560-62). Hill observes that Hamlet directly invokes the conventional pranks in the clown’s physical repertoire.<sup>100</sup> As he does so, Hamlet reinforces the association of clowning with submission and low status.

Although his behavior throughout the play is only sporadically antic, Hamlet envisions himself as a dancing, clowning, cowardly madman. While the Prince informs the audience that he assumes his “antic disposition” as a disguise, Shakespeare uses the comic and low-status implications of clowning in order to deepen the tragic impulse of the play. As he will do later with *Lear*, Shakespeare employs the practices of clowning to convey a tragic perspective on human existence. When Hamlet first sees the ghost of his

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<sup>98</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.1.58-59.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Greene, *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* (London: William Wright, 1594), 2Fv.

<sup>100</sup> Hill, *Stages and Playgoers*, 145.

father, he laments that the apparition makes “night hideous, and we fools of nature” (1.4.32). Hamlet ostensibly refers to the debilitating fear that the ghost inspires, but he also invokes the figure of the natural fool. Shortly later, he laments, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in our philosophy” (1.5.175). Taken together with his later ruminations on the afterlife, these two lines suggest that Hamlet, once the confident scholar, has become dwarfed by the limitations of human knowledge. In the tragic perspective, humans are the playthings of nature and action is futile. Indeed, one aspect of his father’s death that most troubles Hamlet is the speed with which Old Hamlet has been forgotten, especially by Gertrude. Haunted by his own impotence and mortality, Hamlet refers to himself ironically as God’s “only jig-maker” (3.2.116).

When Hamlet comes face to face with the clowns in the graveyard scene, the play juxtaposes comic and tragic clowning. The First Clown, played originally by Robert Armin, employs the dramatic practices conventionally associated with clowning; he sings as he digs Ophelia’s grave and he uses the mode of speech—punning—that has hitherto characterized Hamlet’s own clowning. Unlike Hamlet, however, the First Clown is unselfconscious about death. His treatment of death as mundane reality serves to critique Hamlet’s distress over mortality by mirroring one of the presentational modes through which Hamlet expresses his tragic understanding of the world. This configuration of comedy and tragedy is given concrete symbolic representation in the dramatic emblem of Hamlet holding Yorrick’s skull. A young man holding a skull was a common *memento mori*, which Hamlet reproduces on stage when he takes Yorrick’s skull from the First Clown. Appropriately for the *memento mori*, Hamlet’s meditation on the skull focuses on

the brevity of life and the ubiquity of death. The verbal image he constructs, however, is one of merriment and jesting: “Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? No one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady’s chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that” (5.1.179-86).

Comic clowning here is the vehicle for tragic meditations, as Yorrick’s jesting is made to appear anemic. That which Yorrick valued so highly during his life and which Hamlet valued as a child has become meaningless. In his next thought, Hamlet asks Horatio if he believes that Alexander the Great’s decayed body looks like Yorrick’s. Despite his renown and his exceptional accomplishment, Alexander has ended up like Yorrick, as simply one more “fool of nature.” Through Hamlet, Shakespeare enlists clowning for the expression of a tragic worldview, not through the “hodge-podge” dramaturgy evident in the 1570s, 1580s, and early 1590s, but by drawing upon the neoclassical separation of clowning from tragedy in order to recontextualize the generic significance of presentational performance.

### *Ophelia*

As I have demonstrated, Hamlet’s instructions to the players and his own mad clowning participate in a process by which Shakespeare exploits the tension between clowning and neoclassical dramatic theory as well as the contemporary associations among clowning, comedy, and low status and in order to produce tragic weight. Ophelia also participates in this process. When she goes mad, Ophelia enacts comic fertility rituals, and she sings ballads. Singing was traditionally the clown’s domain, and ballads

were grouped with clowning as inferior and unsophisticated entertainment by those writers and thinkers interested in defining superior taste. Balladselling was also a form of popular entertainment that was propinquitous with the theater. Minstrels, balladmongers, and players shared a history in itinerant performance culture, and balladmongers plied their trades in Southwark alongside the theaters. Shakespeare appropriates balladmongers' performance idioms for Ophelia's madness when she sings on stage and invites the audience to sing along. Mary Ellen Lamb has argued that, through Ophelia, Shakespeare "others" oral culture by associating it with women and advertises the theater's superiority to festive and popular forms.<sup>101</sup> While Shakespeare does indeed delegitimize ballads in this way, he simultaneously relies on the practices that his theater shared with ballad performances in order to produce the theatrical weight of Ophelia's madness. Ophelia's ballads establish a privileged rapport between her and the audience and they are capable of articulating a gender-based critique of Elsinore's corruption precisely because they embody theatrical practices associated with lower status audiences. Although Ophelia's madness is critically acknowledged as a scene of almost unbearable tragedy, it is produced through the performance practices of clowning.

As we have seen, playing, minstrelsy, and balladselling were historically and conceptually entangled in Elizabethan culture. When professional playing arose in the fifteenth century, interludes, which included music, were not considered different in kind from minstrelsy, which included mimesis. When the two forms began to be differentiated, "minstrel" was coming to denote musical entertainers of the lowest status,

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<sup>101</sup> Lamb, *Popular Culture*, xvii.



those lacking formal training and skill.<sup>102</sup> With the rising popularity of broadsides, balladselling developed as a trade that was distinct from but overlapping with minstrelsy. Whereas the minstrel's repertoire included songs circulated as broadsides, balladsellers sang excerpts of broadsides to entice passersby to purchase their printed texts.<sup>103</sup> While balladsellers were often apprentices, petty chapmen, and peddlers for whom balladselling was a secondary vocation, both balladselling and minstrelsy were considered kinds of mobile performance comparable to wandering playing.

Ballads were ubiquitous in Elizabethan society, enjoyed by individuals from all levels of society, from the queen down to vagrants. Nicholas Bownde's 1595 *Doctrine of the Sabbath* informs us that ballads were as present in the "houses of great personages" as they were in "the Shops of Artificers, and cottages of poore husbandmen."<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, like the status of itinerant players, the status of balladsellers and the genres in which they worked also came under attack as Elizabethan anxieties about vagrancy rose and as educational and courtly elites became increasingly invested in aesthetic taste as a mark of social distinction. Henry Chettle and William Harrison both asserted that "masterless men" used minstrelsy and balladselling as a way to avoid real work.<sup>105</sup> Even though the London playing companies were officially distinguished from these "Comon Players, ... Mynstrels Juglers Pedlers Tynkers and Petye Chapmen" under the 1572 "Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes,"<sup>106</sup> the status of professional players continued

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<sup>102</sup> Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 12; Watt, *Cheap Print*, 15.

<sup>103</sup> Watt, *Cheap Print*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> Nicholas Bownde, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (London, 1595), 240–41.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Chettle, *Kind-Hart's Dreame* (London: William Wright, 1593), sig. 3Cv-r; William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1968), 129.

<sup>106</sup> Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes and for Relief of the Poore and Impotent (14 Eliz. c. 5), 29 June 1572, printed in *ES*, 4: 269–71.

to be contested, in part because of the stigma of vagrancy, which found potent expression in the image of the minstrel. Stephen Gosson accused players of having “bene eyther men of occupations, which they have forsaken to lyve by playing, or common minstrels.”<sup>107</sup>

Like other lyrical forms, ballads were seen as both music and poetry. As a mode of musical performance, they were increasingly associated with those who lacked skill, and as poetry, they were characterized as doggerel. Particularly among educated elites, the low status of the balladwriter and -seller symbolized the genre’s lack of sophistication. Thomas Nashe, for example, attacks the “stitcher, weaver, spendthrift or fiddler [who] hath shuffled or slubberd up a few ragged rimes.”<sup>108</sup> Ballads were attacked by university graduates, like Nashe, determined to carve out a respected space for themselves and for English poetry in courtly and intellectual life. For these writers, the discrimination necessary to produce poetry that would ennoble the English language inheres in following rules that were mastered at the university, or through the treatises themselves, and the lack of a university education was used to separate the “rude rhymers” from the poets. George Puttenham describes the “rhymers” as someone “that will be tied to no rules at all, but range as he list.”<sup>109</sup> In 1597, Nicholas Breton equated ballad-makers with “poor scholars” like “pettifoggers,” or quibbling lawyers, and “quaksalvers,” or charlatans peddling fake medicines.<sup>110</sup> This characterization of balladsellers extended to the ballad audience. Since ballads required no rhetorical

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<sup>107</sup> Qtd. in *ES*, 4: 318.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Nashe, *Anatomie of Absurditie* (London: J. Charlewood for Thomas Hacket, 1589), STC 18364, sig. Cv.

<sup>109</sup> Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 165.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Hyder E. Rollins, “The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad,” *PMLA* 34.2 (1919): 258–339, esp. 266n3.

expertise to create, they could be appreciated by people who were likewise ignorant of rhetoric.

When Ophelia first appeared on the Globe stage, the traditional proximity of minstrelsy, balladry, and playing was perpetuated in Southwark. The suburb was hospitable to the population likely to become balladmongers for some of the very reasons that it appealed to the professional theaters: civic and guild administration was slow and ineffective across the river. With a fluid population of migrants and an economy grounded in small-time trading and victualling, Southwark became home to what Natasha Korda calls an informal theatrical economy. “Female hawkers, foreigners and aliens, who were excluded from the formal economy” worked alongside “theater entrepreneurs and professional players, many of whom were freemen, but who nonetheless sought to profit from unregulated commerce.”<sup>111</sup> Players and playwrights, minstrels, balladsingers, pawnbrokers, and bear-wardens were mutually dependent. Balladsellers helped create the festive atmosphere that drew Londoners to the Bankside.

As peddlers and balladmongers worked the crowds around the theaters, they relied on showmanship to attract spectators, as itinerant players had traditionally done. Direct evidence about balladselling is sparse and is found primarily in the work of its detractors; nevertheless, there is evidence that it entailed vigorous vocals and physical displays. Puttenham describes balladsingers as standing “upon benches and barrel’s heads,” and Henry Chettle describes a family drawing “whole heapes to hearken to their

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<sup>111</sup> Natasha Korda, “Gender at Work in the Cries of London,” in *Oral Traditions and Gender in Early Modern Literary Texts*, ed. Mary Ellen Lamb and Karen Bamford (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 117–34, esp. 119. On Southwark’s economy, see Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*.

inquinated cries,” as they “roar” and “carrowle out” tunes.<sup>112</sup> To the extent that the material conditions of balladselling necessitated showmanship to entice buyers, it participated in the mimetic forms that the theater inherited from itinerant playing and which Hamlet associates with the groundlings: ostentatious and exaggerated display.

Shakespeare draws upon this performative mode to fashion Ophelia’s madness. This fact in itself is not notable; we need look no further than Hamlet’s antic disposition to see that one strain of stage madness entailed vigorous playing. What is notable, however, is that Shakespeare constructs Ophelia’s madness as a performance-within-the-play, creating a metatheatrical moment in which he calls attention to the relationship between body-centered and scripted playing. Horatio opens this framing by describing Ophelia as wandering alone, gathering spectators whose interest is piqued by her erratic gestures: she “winks,” “nods,” “beats her heart,” and “hems.” His depiction provides internal stage directions, and we can presume that the boy-actor continued to gesture energetically throughout the scene.

Horatio further reports:

Her speech is nothing;  
 Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
 The hearers to collection. They aim at it,  
 And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts. (IV.vi.4–10)

As Horatio emphasizes the interplay among Ophelia’s gestures and words and her onlookers’ interpretations, he structurally aligns her “hearers” with the audience of the

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<sup>112</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 172; Chettle, *Kind-Hart’s Dream*, sig. 2Cr.

Globe. Directing the audience's attention to their own roles as interpreters, Horatio makes of Ophelia's madness a dramatization of the theatrical experience.<sup>113</sup>

Once Ophelia enters the court, Horatio, Claudius, and Laertes become the hearers who "aim" at her "words." When Claudius conjectures that her songs are "conceit upon her father" (IV.v.44), she interjects: "Pray you let's have no words of this. But when they ask you what it means, say you this," and she launches into another song (IV.v.45–6). Everybody, including Ophelia, is anxious to determine her meaning. Ophelia's desire for self-explication points to the roots of her madness in gendered restrictions on her behavior, a point to which I will return. On the level of performance, Claudius and Gertrude's inability to explain Ophelia's meaning emphasizes that, in this moment, Ophelia exists outside of the representational form that Hamlet has identified as elite, that is, scripted play. Her madness cannot be rhetorically encapsulated; it must be performed and witnessed.

When Ophelia begins to sing, her performance-within-the-play mimics the idioms of balladmongers around the theater. Balladsellers opened their songs with invitations to passersby to stop and listen and closed with invocations to buy the broadside text.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> This performativity proves to be the most disruptive aspect of her madness, as illustrated by Gertrude's anxiety that Ophelia may "strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (*Ham.* 4.5.14–15). Gertrude worries that Ophelia will incite public suspicion. The incendiary potential of obscure language and its unauthorized interpretation evokes a threat that was familiar to Elizabethan subjects. George Puttenham, for example, culminates his list of the "vices and deformities in speech" with *amphibologia*, or "when we speake or write doubtfully and that the sence may be taken two wayes ... we call it the ambiguous, or figure of sence incertaine." Amphibologic language can be politically disastrous when the masses are left to interpret it for themselves. Puttenham adduces popular rebellions inflamed by prophecies, like those of Jack Straw, Jack Cade, and Robert Kett, to demonstrate his point. Since equivocal language cannot be pinioned to one specific (or hegemonic) meaning, prophecies "carryeth generally such force in the heads of fonde people" who are easily misled into violence (Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 346). Gertrude's fear of the public's "dangerous conjectures" fixes Ophelia within the purview of the political threat that Puttenham describes, as Ophelia's ambiguity leads her "hearers" to their own conclusions.

<sup>114</sup> My discussion of the ballad draws upon Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Watt, *Cheap Print*; Patricia Fumerton, "Not Home: Alehouses, Ballads, and the Vagrant Husband in Early Modern England," *Journal*

Music and lyrics were used simultaneously in multiple ballads, and balladmongers asked their audiences to sing along with well-known refrains. Similarly, Ophelia enters the court demanding audience attention, specifically from Gertrude, and she departs with a formal adieu: “Good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night” (IV.v.70). In the meantime, she demands that her on-stage, and by extension Globe, audience participates in her burdens: “*You* must sing ‘A-down, a-down’: and *you* ‘Call him a-down-a’” (IV.v.171–3; italics mine). Globe spectators were likely familiar with Ophelia’s “snatches of old tunes” and able to hum along in their places. They may even have strolled among peddlers singing precisely Ophelia’s refrains as they entered the theater.

By echoing on stage the audience’s experiences from just outside the theater, Ophelia becomes an intermediary between the audience’s reality and the stage fiction. As she thus moves from the *locus* to the *platea*, the dramaturgical plane in which the extradramatic and fictional worlds most manifestly animate one another,<sup>115</sup> Ophelia foregrounds a process of meaning-making that Shakespeare’s theater inherited from Tudor popular plays and which it shared with the ballad. From the morality interlude *platea*, the Vice spoke directly to the audience, referencing local people and buildings and parodying the interlude’s spiritual themes by placing them in a mundane framework. By calling the audience’s attention to their own embodied reality as they watch the play, the Vice encourages the audience to apply the lessons of the psychomachia to their own

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*of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3 (2002): 493-518; Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini, eds., *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain: 1500-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Natascha Würzbach, *Rise of the English Street Ballad, 1550–1650*, trans. Gayna Walls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Robert R. Smith, “Female Impersonation in Early Modern Ballads,” in *Women Players in England, 1500-1600*, ed. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 281-304.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Weimann, “Bifold Authority in Shakespeare’s Theater,” 409.

lives.<sup>116</sup> Balladsingers similarly merged narrative and extra-narrative worlds when they asked audiences to help invent the fiction by singing along. When audience members intoned the lyrics in their own voices, they literally embodied the ballad's personas. When Ophelia, likewise, entreats the audience to participate in her songs, she situates them simultaneously within and outside of *Hamlet*.

Like dancing, singing was a staple of the clown's repertoire.<sup>117</sup> Puttenham in fact invokes the figure of the stage Vice to demonstrate the scurrility of ballads when says that rhyming is only fit for "small and popular musics sung by these cantabanqui upon benches and barrel's heads... or else by blind harpers or such like tavern minstrels that give a fit of mirth for a groat" and for "carols and rounds and such light or lascivious poems, which are commonly more commodiously uttered by these buffoons or vices in plays than by any other person."<sup>118</sup> Jigging, the expertise of Shakespeare's clown Will Kemp, was essentially a dance set to a ballad song. Kemp and other famous clowns, including Tarlton, George Attowell, and Robert Wilson, wrote and published ballads. Kemp had only recently departed the Chamberlain's Men when *Hamlet* was first performed. Armin, Kemp's replacement, was not a dancer but a singer, and he likely performed the only vocalist role in *Hamlet* other than Ophelia, that of the grave-digging

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<sup>116</sup> Weimann's writes that the Vice "reflects a dramatic and social position that rejects the assumption of the mythical or heroic theme in favor of the common sense attitude of a plebian or secularized audience" (*Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, p. 13). On Tudor interludes and the *platea*, see also Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 15-16; Mooney, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Transactions*; and Hill, *Stages and Playgoers*.

<sup>117</sup> For a historical study on music in clowning, see Baskervill, *Elizabethan Jig*. Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 70-72, also addresses the conjunction of clowning and singing. For general studies of music in Shakespeare, see H.B. Lathrop's essay, "Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Song," *Modern Language Notes* 23.1 (January 1908): 1-5 and Peter Seng, *Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare; A Critical History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>118</sup> Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 172.

First Clown.<sup>119</sup> Mirroring the folk songs of Armin-as-First-Clown within the play and echoing the musical performances of Kemp, Ophelia rehearses a form of subtle clowning. Of course, Ophelia does not leap and jest the way that Kemp might have. The character is, after all, still a noblewoman. Nevertheless, Ophelia's madness is constructed through clowning practices.

Ophelia's subtle clowning is encapsulated in a dramatic emblem in which she enacts the fertility rites of May Day, a festival in which sexuality and flowers were linked in a celebration of spring renewal. While the festivities through which individual towns celebrated May Day varied, events generally focused on Robin Hood folk plays, the gathering of may, or hawthorn, from the woods, the erection of a maypole, and the crowning of a May queen. Villagers might also gather flowers and place them at their neighbors' doors,<sup>120</sup> and May Day mummer's plays centered around the morris dance. Although May Day festivities were attacked by Protestant reformers, they remained more or less widespread through the end of the sixteenth century, and they were celebrated by members of all social orders. More important than the actual historical practice of May Day festivities, however, is the fact that May Day was one of the holidays from which Shakespeare drew his comic repertoire.<sup>121</sup> When the boy-actor playing the mad Ophelia entered onto the original Globe stage, he held a collection of flowers that Ophelia distributes to the members of the court in an ironic May Day ritual. Tiffany Stern

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<sup>119</sup> Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Knight, 1841), 1: 255-57; E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 1: 160-79; Henry Machyn, *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. John Gough Nichols (New York: AMS), 20.

<sup>121</sup> Francois Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1963).



comments that Ophelia in her mad state mistakenly thinks she is in a comedy.<sup>122</sup> The impact of the flower distribution, however, is not simply to advertise Ophelia's madness. Rather, the image of Ophelia holding and distributing flowers constructs a theatrical emblem of May Day celebrations of the promise of marriage and spring.

In 1612, in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare uses the dramatic emblem of flower distribution again, when Perdita serves as queen of the sheep-shearing festival. Florizel makes the reference to May Day explicit when he calls her Flora, the Roman deity thought to have originated May Day celebrations. In this instance, springtime, May Day, and Flora are likewise associated with ballads, sung by the trickster Autolycus as the play transitions from its tragic first half to its comic second half. Ballads, spring, and Flora are not simply accoutrements of comedy in *The Winter's Tale*; they are the theatrical conventions by which Shakespeare announces the play's generic transition.

Bridget Gellert Lyons persuasively argues that the imagery of Flora in the iconography of Ophelia is ambiguous.<sup>123</sup> In one version of the Flora myth, she was a Roman prostitute who paid to have a temple erected in her honor and who was then celebrated as a deity by a Roman government that was eager to mask the questionable origins of May Day. This is the version of the Flora myth that Thomas Hall recites when he calls for the abolition of May Day and its lewd fertility rites.<sup>124</sup> The imagery of Ophelia's mad comic rites, then, is both celebratory and suspect. The ambiguity of the imagery, however, arises because Ophelia is rehearsing comic festivities in order to

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<sup>122</sup> Stern, *Making Shakespeare*, 82.

<sup>123</sup> Bridget Gellert Lyons, "The Iconography of Ophelia," *ELH* 44. 1 (spring 1977): 60-74.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Hall, *Funebria Florae, the Downfall of May Games* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1661).

express her personal tragedy. The tragedy inheres in the fact that, in Ophelia, rituals that speak to the audience of springtime promise come to convey destruction.

Since Ophelia embodies, at the play's outset, the elite ideal of the silent, chaste, and obedient woman, the lewdness of her mad songs and ironic fertility rituals likely elicited shock and pity from the Globe audience. This effect is wrought not simply by the presentational mode of her madness but also by the association of ballads and clowning with the lower sorts. Like the morality Vice's contrariety and Hamlet's antic puns, Ophelia's mad ballads serve to articulate a critique of the play's high plot by inviting the audience to see Elsinore through an alternative perspective, one grounded not in aristocratic values but in the material concerns of the broadside ballad. This critique emerges in the interstices among Ophelia's "high" birth, the "low" status of the genre and theatrical practices through which she speaks, and the circumstances of lower-status life imagined by the ballad.

Capitulating to Polonius's directive to reject Hamlet's advances, Ophelia initially conforms to patriarchal expectations and subjugates her own desires. The model of female behavior that Polonius advances fails, however, and Ophelia ends up with no father, no brother, and no husband. In her response—her madness—she internalizes the voices of lower-status ballad women as a vehicle for expressing her own desire. By placing these voices in the mouth of a noblewoman, who was earlier committed to the prescriptive model, Shakespeare fashions a character in whom an alternative pattern of behavior registers the prescriptive ideal's failure to effect the transition from daughter to wife. The ballad offers Ophelia the expressive resources of a non-elite form telling stories

about lower-order women who modify gender expectations according to their circumstances.

Historically, readings of Ophelia have focused almost exclusively on gender.<sup>125</sup> Both on stage and off, however, class and gender are mutually mediating facets of identity. As Laura Gowing writes, “Gender is always in contest, and gender relations are constantly renegotiated around certain points.” Gender prescriptions are actualized by individuals who reiterate but also adapt them to their own circumstances.<sup>126</sup> Although cultural authorities touted the “silent, chaste, and obedient” model for both lower- and upper-status women, this ideal was particularly important for noblewomen, on whose chastity the primogeniture system depended. Women from the lower orders were more likely to negotiate gender restrictions both because they were more likely to work alongside their husbands or outside of the home and because it was more acceptable for them to be sexually active before their weddings.<sup>127</sup>

The differences in the culture’s anxieties over the sexualities of lower-status versus upper-status women were conventionalized within the ballad. The ballad displayed an abiding interest in gender because it lent itself to female participation. Since a ballad’s

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<sup>125</sup> For example, Valerie Traub, “Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: The Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare’s Plays,” in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps (New York: Verso, 1995), 120–41; Carol Thomas Neely, “Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism: Compensatory, Justificatory, Transformational,” *Women’s Studies* 9, 1 (1981): 3–15; and Elaine Showalter, “Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 77–94.

<sup>126</sup> Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 28. I use a performative concept of gender grounded in the work of Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993). On early modern gender, see, among others, Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Ilona Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Politics of Courtship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>127</sup> Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Bell, *Elizabethan Women*, 46.

success proceeded from its ability to please customers, including women, broadsides were relatively attuned to female perspectives.<sup>128</sup> While they often reiterated patriarchal norms, they also provided space to imagine antipatriarchal attitudes. The ballad women who displayed the most insistently antipatriarchal sentiments were from low sorts. In particular, dialogic love ballads often narrated stories about lower-order maids who articulate a blunt desire for sex and are rewarded with happy marriages; by contrast, elite ballad women resist desire, and if they do submit to their lovers, they end up pregnant and abandoned. In her madness, Ophelia rehearses both the expression of desire and the abandonment.

Ophelia's first ballad, an excerpt from the "Walsingham Song," presented Elizabethan audiences with a tune and text through which they would recognize the love ballad genre. Walsingham was a conventional setting for narratives about abandoned lovers, and Ophelia opens with a well-known line from the Walsingham Song variants:<sup>129</sup> "How should I your true love know / From another one?" (IV.v.23–4). In one version, a dialogue unfolds between a traveler whose beloved has forsaken him to go to Walsingham and a pilgrim returning from the shrine; in another, a palmer questions a female pilgrim who has rejected his advances.

Critics usually label Ophelia's next song—"He is dead and gone, lady" (IV.iv.29)—as a dirge, primarily because they read it as a reference to her father. While it certainly does express mourning, this song is closer in tone to mournful love ballads than

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<sup>128</sup> Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 25; and Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

<sup>129</sup> Seng, *Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare*. Ophelia's line survives in song variants in Thomas Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets*, 3 vols., 5th ed. (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1812), 2: 345–46.

it is to dirges in ballad form. Ballad dirges were most often written as epitaphs for public figures; although they might use the rhetoric of private grief, they are essentially public memorials. In contrast, Ophelia's song conveys a sense of private bereavement by focusing on the grave and corpse: "At his head a grass-green turf, / At his heels a stone / ... White his shroud as the mountain snow" (IV.v.31–5). This language is very different from, say, the "Epitaph on the death of the Right honourable and virtuous Lord Henry Wrisley [Wriothesley]," which uses Wriothesley's mortality to philosophize about how even the powerful, "the duke, the earle, the lord and knight," eventually succumb to death.<sup>130</sup>

In the next three lines Ophelia sings,

Larded with sweet flowers,  
Which bewept to the grave did not go  
With true-love showers. (IV.v.37–9)

Here Shakespeare makes explicit the romantic context of her lament. Flowers carry a double meaning in mournful ballads, symbolizing love's fragility and its inextricability from the tragedy of human mortality. Gertrude uses flowers in this way when she says over Ophelia's grave, "I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid, / And not t'have strewed thy grave" (V.i.235–6). The ballad of this type that is most pertinent to Shakespeare's work is Desdemona's "Willow" song, as I discuss below. In the song's broadside version, the lover dying of a broken heart recalls "The willow wreath weare I since my love did fleet; / a garland for lovers forsaken most meet" (57–9).

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<sup>130</sup> "Epitaph on the death ... of Lord Henry Wrisley," in *A Collection of Seventy-Nine Black-Letter Ballads and Broad-sides, Printed in the Reign of Queen Elisabeth, Between the Years 1559 and 1597*, ed. Joseph Lilly (London: J. Lilly, 1867), 260–66. See also "An epitaph on the death of the earle of Southampton," "An epitaph of the death of ... the Ladie Maiorresse," and "Mournfull dittie on the death of certain judges," all in Lilly, *Seventy-Nine Black-Letter Ballads*.

The wreath equally expresses his despondency and the beauty of his love.<sup>131</sup> Ophelia's use of this imagery demonstrates that grief for her father is entangled with grief for Hamlet, and she uses the love ballad to express both.

By having Ophelia sing love ballads, Shakespeare evokes a narrative tradition that was comparatively permissive with female sexuality because it represented lower-status life. Whereas the sonneteer, for instance, uses Petrarchan blazons to negotiate between desire and Neo-Platonic virtue, the balladeer composes blazons to flatter his beloved into sex. One balladsinger admits that he aims with Petrarchan language to "urge" his beloved into surrendering her chastity. In "Fond love, why dost thou dally," the singer will

praise [his beloved's] goodly tresses  
Shining like gold, as all the Gods confesses,  
And eke the splendor of [her] comely face. (28–30)

But the blazon soon becomes a plea for sex, as he solicits her to "yield that treasure, which who so knows / knows a blisse" (111–2): "Come, sweet! Sit thee downe by me, / And pay just tribute for our true love" (44–5).<sup>132</sup>

Another ballad, "Constant, faire, and fine Betty," compares Betty's hair to "threads of gold" (18), extolling her "cherry cheekes / and sweet corral lips" (32–3), her "skinne white as snow" (48), and her "brest soft as doune" (49). In chastity, Betty equals Diana; in beauty, she outshines Helen. Fair and "chaste" Betty, however, proceeds to beg her lover to marry her so they can consummate their relationship:

Sweet, when shall we marry,  
Long I cannot carry

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<sup>131</sup> "A Lover's complaint," in Percy, *Reliques*, 1: 193–96.

<sup>132</sup> "Fond Love, why dost thou dally?" in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. William Chappell and Joseph Woodfall Ebsworth, 8 vols. (Hertford: Stephen Austin & Sons, 1869-1901; rpt., New York: AMS, 1966), 1: 374–79.

Not my maiden-head. (96–9)<sup>133</sup>

Despite her forwardness, Betty proves a faithful wife. Another song, “In the merry month of May,” tells of a “swain” who sang to his beloved from beneath her window. Initially she rejected him, but, “at last, his smoothing tongue / her chamber did attaine,” where “fairelye did they playe” (stanzas 3-4). In conclusion, the maid imparts the ballad’s moral:

Most maidens nowe and then  
will doe as I have done.  
Although they crye fye! Fye!  
in troth they will be wonne. (stanza 9)<sup>134</sup>

This song demonstrates not only that will women eventually yield, but that their protestations are part of the courting game.

This attitude toward female sexuality has a specifically classed component. The women who most eagerly engage in sexual relationships are identified as members of the lower orders. One song, “The Miller in His Best Array,” relates “the mery miller’s wooing of the Baker’s Daughter of Manchester.” At first, the Baker’s Daughter insists on the inviolability of her chastity and spurns her suitors, a tailor, a tanner, and a glover. In the end, though, her protestations are just a ruse. The miller wins her with “40 pound in gould,” and she resorts with him to his mill where they “will merrye be” and “daunce a downe” (stanza 9), a common euphemism for sex and the refrain that Ophelia invites her audience to sing with her. The maid decides that dancing “a downe” is “the prettiest sport in all this towne” (stanza 11). Similarly, “Mother Watkins Ale” tells of a maid who

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<sup>133</sup> “Constant, faire, and fine Betty,” in Chappell and Ebsworth, *Roxburghe Ballads*, 1: 207–8.

<sup>134</sup> “In the mery monthe of May,” in *The Shirburn Ballads*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 29–31.

feared a single life, to which a young man replies that he would give her a taste of “Watkins ale ... ‘Tis sweeter farre than suger fine, / And pleasanter than muskadine” (17–8). “When he had done to her his will,” she was so pleased that she asked for more, and soon she was pregnant.<sup>135</sup> In contrast, elite ballad women who become pregnant serve as warnings to other women. “The Lady’s Fall,” for instance, relates “how a young gentlewoman through her too much trust, came to her end”; she and her newborn die when her lover abandons them.<sup>136</sup>

In her madness, Ophelia appropriates these voices to imagine relationships among lovers. Her songs take the form of dialogues between courting couples that allow her to personify both wooing male lovers and female beloveds. When Ophelia sings her famous condemnation of false lovers, “Young men will do’t if they come to’t, / By Cock, they are to blame” (IV.v.59–60), she plays the role of the woman scorned. When she recites the conversation between this woman and her lover, however, it becomes clear that, in fact, the woman pursued the sexual relationship:

Quoth she before you tumbled me,  
 You promised me to wed.  
 So would I’a’ done, by yonder sun,  
 An thou hadst not come to my bed. (IV.v.59–64)

The woman begins the exchange by accusing the man of postcoitally breaking their betrothal, implying that he deceived her, a credulous young virgin, into surrendering her maidenhead. The phrase “before you tumbled me” points to the woman’s passivity, as if she had finally submitted to a marriage proposal after being aggressively wooed. The

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<sup>135</sup> “The miller in his best array,” in Clark, *Shirburn Ballads*, pp. 116–20; “Mother Watkins Ale,” in Lilly, *Seventy-Nine Black-Letter Ballads*, 251–55.

<sup>136</sup> “The Lady’s Fall,” in Clark, *Shirburn Ballads*, 116–20.



next two lines, however, register a shift in speaker. The line “So would I’a’ done” belongs to a male respondent; the 1604 quarto prints the parenthetical phrase “(He answers),” presumably a remnant of the original ballad text, flush left of Ophelia’s line.<sup>137</sup> The man acknowledges his broken promise but clarifies that it was the woman who initiated the sexual relationship; he would have married her if she had not “come to [his] bed.”

Ophelia inhabits the voice of a woman who has either acquiesced to or instigated a sexual relationship, while she also imaginatively rehearses the consequences against which her father warned her. The ballad woman has sex with a man whom she believes loves her, as Ophelia believed Hamlet loved her, and the result is that he leaves her deflowered and broken, as Polonius feared Hamlet would leave Ophelia. The male respondent’s matter-of-fact tone implies that the woman deserves to be abandoned; but when this logic is read under the rubric of the song’s moral that young men are duplicitous, the woman is pardoned for her boldness. Ophelia’s song thus permits her both to lament her predicament and to vindicate her own desire in the face of her father’s injunctions.

Ophelia’s next song functions similarly. Although the play never reveals whether she lost her virginity to Hamlet, her ballads intimate that she wanted to. She sings,

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,  
 All in the morning betime,  
 And I a maid at your window,  
 To be your Valentine.  
 Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,  
 And dugged the chamber door;  
 Let in the maid that out a maid

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<sup>137</sup> *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare* (London: J. R. for N. L., 1604).

Never departed more. (IV.v.47–54)

An Elizabethan holiday of inversion when women pursued men, Valentine's Day enables Ophelia to envision herself free from the dictates of marriage and chastity. Like Ophelia's previous ballad, the woman here initiates the sexual encounter. By the fact that he must rise and get dressed, we can deduce that the man has not actively been pursuing her. The ballad's transition from first-person to third-person narrators, from "I, a maid" to "let in the maid," permits Ophelia to inhabit multiple subject positions. In the song's second movement, she evaluates the maid's behavior from the perspective of an omniscient observer. The closing lines bear the finality of an ending, making the loss of virginity symbolic of death. The abrupt shift from first- to third-person narrators allows Ophelia both to embrace and to distance herself from her own sexual urgency. She is at once the lower-status character expressing desire and the upper-status woman being punished for capitulating to her lover.

By broadening the scope of the play's discourse, Ophelia's ballads admit into *Hamlet* a culture of non-elite jests that, as Pamela Allen Brown has shown, made room for antipatriarchal attitudes, especially when they were performed for an audience that included women.<sup>138</sup> Some ballads had the potential to foster female alliances because they rehearsed concerns common to women living in a patriarchy. Desdemona's ballad proves instructive here. On the night of her murder, Desdemona sings "Willow, Willow" and explains that Barbary, her mother's maid, also sang the song when Barbary's lover failed her. In the same scene, Desdemona vows her continued loyalty to Othello, while

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<sup>138</sup> Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*. On women at the Globe, see Richard Levin, "Women in the Renaissance Theater Audience," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.2 (Summer 1989): 165-74.

Emilia maintains that opprobrious husbands are culpable for their own cuckoldry (V.i.84-8).<sup>139</sup> Emilia reads Desdemona's suffering, expressed by the song, as an instance of patriarchal abuse, and then Emilia sings "Willow, Willow" shortly afterward, when she, too, suffers at her husband's hand. Emilia's commentary makes of the song a symbol for female alliance and the vehicle of counter-voices to Iago and Othello's relentless misogyny. Ophelia's ballads operate similarly, if not for the distracted singer then for the audience. By locating Ophelia in the *platea*, Shakespeare encourages the audience to become her ally. Holding the audience's sympathy, Ophelia speaks in a form that registers her voice as one among other female voices, allowing for the reading, presumably appealing to at least some women in the audience, that Ophelia's tragedy is produced not only by Elsinore's corruption but by a patriarchy that demands her unmitigated submission.

Shakespeare thus uses popular performance practices to admit a spectrum of cultural voices into the play. Ophelia's ballads demonstrate that even as Shakespeare reiterates the neoclassical characterizations of popular performance, he never refuses the theatrical possibilities that it affords. Like Hamlet, who plays both the antic and the anti-clowning elitist, Ophelia holds in unresolved tension Shakespeare's tacit acknowledgment of the dramatic force of popular traditions on the Globe stage and his participation in a movement to limit those traditions to low-status, comic figures.

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<sup>139</sup> *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Chapter 4, in part, has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* (Rice University Press). The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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