

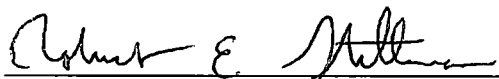
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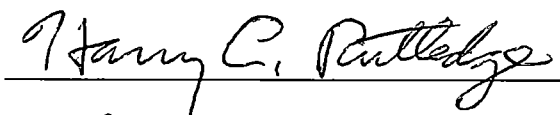
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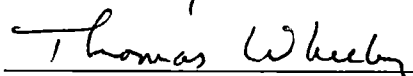


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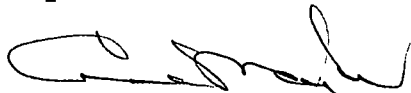
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and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

**FIGURING THE COMMONER-HERO ON THE
ENGLISH STAGE, 1588-1600**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Richard Lee Baskin
August 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my entire committee for their guidance, but I want to express special thanks to Allen Carroll for stepping in as my dissertation director when my original director became ill. I am also especially grateful to Robert Stillman, whose advice concerning literary theory was of great help to me.

Lastly, I thank my wife, Laura, for her patience and understanding.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on representations of commoners as significant characters in a group of English plays from the years 1588-1600. Of primary interest is the ways that these representations convey cultural values. This study looks at seven plays in detail, and takes into consideration the context within which they were written. The composition of the public theater audiences, socioeconomic turbulence, the marginal status of the theater in Elizabethan London, the backgrounds of the playwrights and the origin of many source materials in popular culture are examples of contextual concerns considered herein. The plays discussed are William Shakespeare's The Second Part of King Henry VI, the anonymous The Life and Death of Jack Straw, Robert Wilson's The Coblers Prophetie, Robert Greene's A Knack to Know a Knave and George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield, Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday, and Anthony Munday's The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington.

Perhaps the most striking broad conclusion drawn in this study is that, despite abundant evidence that the theater was one locus of the struggle for control of Elizabethan culture, these plays express conservative values, values that confirm and support the dominant moral, political, social, and economic hierarchies. The plays often appear to have been written to appeal to the prosperous commoners in the audience, those commoners who benefited most from the socioeconomic system. The commoner characters in the plays

help convey conservative values, but in two instances, a commoner represents the antithesis of those values, and the idealized representation of them is a gentleman, a figure whose social status was coveted by many prosperous commoners. Whether commoner or gentleman, the commoner-hero represents both intangible, moral virtues and tangible, socioeconomic rewards. This mix creates possibilities for ideological disruption as public theater audiences watched the plays, but none of these plays is subversive. The plays are remarkable, in part, for their support of the reigning forms of social order.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL TENSIONS	20
ECONOMIC RUPTURES	21
CONFLICT AND THE THEATER	25
PLAYWRIGHTS AND AUDIENCES	36
Playwrights	37
Audiences	38
CHAPTER 2: THE COMMONER-HERO AND POLITICAL REBELLION	45
POPULAR PROTESTS	45
<u>THE SECOND PART OF KING HENRY VI</u>	50
Jack Cade's Monstrous Perspective	50
Cade in Shakespeare's Sources	56
The London Audience and Jack Cade	59
Commoners and the Social Order	63
Conclusion	72
<u>THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JACK STRAW</u>	73
The Metamorphosis of Jack Straw	74
The Heroic Mayor of London	85
Conclusion	89
CHAPTER 3: THE COMMONER-HERO AND MORAL CORRUPTION	90
<u>A KNACK TO KNOW A KNAVE</u>	92
Honesty and the Morality Tradition	92
Restoring Community	102
Conflicting Values	106
Conclusion	108
<u>THE COBLERS PROPHECIE</u>	109

The War Theme	111
Ralph as a Moral Fool	114
Sateros and the Meaning of "Gentleman"	117
The General Significance of Socioeconomic Issues	120
Conclusion	124
CHAPTER 4: CELEBRATION OF THE COMMONER-HERO	127
<u>GEORGE A GREENE, THE PINNER OF WAKEFIELD</u>	129
Popular Sources and Their Socioeconomic Status	129
The Sources and Greene's Commoner-Hero	135
Socioeconomic Issues and the "Natural" Hierarchy	139
Minor Fractures in the "Natural" Hierarchy	148
<u>THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY</u>	150
Dekker's Perspective on Life in London	153
The World According to Simon Eyre	157
The Darker Side of Life in London	162
Holiday (Dis)Order	172
Eyre's Self-Interest	174
Conclusion	177
CHAPTER 5: THE NOBLE COMMONER	179
<u>THE DOWNFALL OF ROBERT, EARL OF HUNTINGTON</u>	179
Robin Hood's Cultural Significance for Commoners	181
Robin Hood's Significance for Nobility	189
Robin Hood in London	192
Ennobling Robin Hood	196
Munday's Hero	199

Stewardship and the Treatment of Wealth . . .	212
Conclusion	215
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225
VITA	246

INTRODUCTION

This study developed out of my interest in representations of commoners on the English stage, in the values that they convey, and in their reception by commoners in the audiences. Scholars who have examined the treatment of commoners in Elizabethan plays have done so in limited ways. For example, they may be interested only in Shakespeare's plays, or they only briefly discuss a play as it relates to a particular thesis. Furthermore, critical studies tend to focus on either the plays or on some aspect of the context in which the plays were produced, such as the composition of theater audiences. In this work I examine the relationship between the plays and their context, and I look carefully at representations of commoners as significant characters in a group of plays from the years 1588-1600. I am interested in what this collection of characters can tell us about Elizabethan culture.

On the professional stage, commoners tended to be represented as minor characters, often as anonymous members of a crowd or an army. The number of extant plays in which a commoner is one of the central characters, much less a heroic character, is quite small. Considering the importance of commoners in the economic, cultural, and even political life during this period, it is remarkable that commoners were not central to more plays. As this study demonstrates, representing commoners on stage at this time was a complicated endeavor, made so by a number of factors

and forces, each one itself complex, shifting, and integrated with the others to the point that divisions between them are often uncertain. As a result of these complexities, the representations of commoners lack the coherence that their authors may have intended, and are, therefore, sometimes ambiguous.

I have chosen to examine plays in the years near the end of Elizabeth's reign because a remarkable confluence of events and trends occurred then. England attained great glory, emerging as a dominant sea power and establishing a place of new significance in European politics. It was an age of heroes--Drake, Hawkins, Essex, and others--of a growing nationalism, and of an immense love of the people for their sovereign. Along with these causes of optimism there occurred rampant inflation, stagnant wages, severe crop failures in the mid-nineties, and the drain of foreign wars on resources of all kinds, especially lives. This mix of troubles hit the commons the hardest. On the other hand, expanded economic opportunities allowed some commoners, especially yeomen and merchants, to improve their social positions. Their sons entered universities and Inns of Court that had hitherto been reserved for gentlemen and nobility. Their assets often raised them, financially, above many noblemen. One result of this social advancement was a resentment in the upper levels of the social hierarchy that prompted the passing of laws intended to limit such advancement.

When a prominent stage character during this period is a commoner, signs of these various social phenomena and

attitudes appear, if sometimes unintentionally. Perspectives on socioeconomic conflicts, patriotism, food shortages, work, education, morality, and other topics of contemporary significance are represented in these characters. In addition, topics that were important in a specifically theatrical context are also signified in these commoners. A writer's use of conventional stage materials and concepts, for example, was related to the particular venue and its audience, as well as to the writer's own preferences, and these aspects are inextricable from a complex cultural context. The choice of a commoner as a central character was a choice contingent upon such factors. In short, the commoner on the professional stage constituted a unique site--but certainly not the only site--for the combination of cultural materials.¹

A key element in the context within which these representations occurred is the makeup of audiences in the public theaters, where all of the plays discussed here were performed. Evidence is given in the first chapter for the significant presence of prosperous commoners in these audiences--merchants, yeomen, and successful craftsmen--and their sons who had entered the gentle ranks. My analysis indicates that, with one exception, the plays that included commoners as important characters were written to appeal, in part, to this segment of the audience. The analysis also shows that all of the plays express a conservative

¹ My use of the phrase "cultural materials" is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea that ideology is material, that "philosophical views, beliefs, [and] even shifting ideological moods" can only be "realized in words, actions, clothing, manners, and organizations of people and things--in a word: some definite semiotic material." See P. N. Medvedev and M. M. Bakhtin, The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 18.

viewpoint. By the word "conservative" I mean the desire to preserve the existing order, whether it be social, moral, economic, or political. The application of this term to any group, even to an individual, is an admitted generalization. I have tried to use the word only where it can be applied with confidence, and the fact that "conservative" is a general term must always be kept in mind. The conservative viewpoint found in these plays surely appealed to prosperous commoners and their gentlemen sons. This study includes discussions of some of the abundant cultural evidence we have for that conclusion, and reason also tells us that, in general, commoners who materially benefited from the socioeconomic system would have supported the continuation of that system and of other cultural structures that were intertwined with it: the Church of England, commonly shared moral tenets, dress, language, and the monarchy, for example. For these reasons I often refer to this segment of the public theater audience as "conservative."² As varied as were the lives of these people, they share a number of qualities, one of which is their material success.

My work has come to center on what I call "commoner-heroes," figures in the plays who were written to appeal to a generally conservative audience, and to whom prosperous commoners would tend to have been drawn. The term "commoner-hero" draws on the classical meaning of "hero," as each commoner-hero in these plays is a central character, in

² "Conservative" can, of course, be generally applied to the nobility in the audience. As to the poorest commoners in the audience--cobblers and servants, for example--analyzing the relationship between them and the plays' conservatism is difficult for two reasons. One is that the views of this part of the London populace are underrepresented in the literature of the period. A second is that we are not sure how frequently and in what numbers they attended theatrical performances. See Chapter One for a discussion of this last issue.

a significant episode if not in the play as a whole. These characters are not, however, always commoners. In two plays it is the lowest levels of the gentle ranks that supply the commoner-heroes. The term also suggests the modern sense of "heroic," and these commoner-heroes embodied values celebrated by a large portion of the commons and represented the fulfillment of certain desires.³

I am interested in the way that cultural materials come together in and are related to these figures. I try to show how representations of commoner-heroes communicate socially, politically, and/or morally conservative perspectives. At the same time, these characters show the signs of mixed, sometimes competing interests: traditional moral values and materialism, anti-Catholicism and Christian virtues, elitism and popularism, antagonism toward the social hierarchy and loyalty to the Crown, individualism and community interests, and more. As a result, the perspectives communicated in these plays contain inconsistencies, conflicts, and gaps, which are sometimes present within the figure of the commoner-hero, sometimes in the dissonance between the figuring of the commoner-hero and some other element(s) of the play, including the representations of commoners.

My approach to these plays has been strongly influenced by the work of the new historicists, especially Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose. In Shakespeare Negotiations, Greenblatt describes art as the "collective invention" of a culture, and new historicists "look less at the presumed center of the literary domain"--the authority of the author

³ I only discuss commoner-heroes in plays from the period in which significant characters are commoners, but commoner-heroes certainly appeared in other plays

or the text--"than at its borders" (4). They are especially interested in an artistic work as a historically-grounded site in which such competing interests as those mentioned above are manifested. Art is a cultural process, and power is a central concern in that process. As Montrose has pointed out, new historicists argue against the "unproblematized distinction" between text and context ("Poetics and Politics" 18). Instead, they recognize the "historicity of texts, . . . the social embedment, of all modes of writing" (20).

New historicism takes on "some of the most complex, persistent, and unsettling" problems, among them

the possible configurations of relationship between cultural practices and social, political and economic processes; . . . the means by which subjectivity is socially constituted and constrained; the processes by which ideologies are produced and sustained, and by which they may be contested; the patterns of consonance and contradiction among the values and interests of a given individual, as these are actualized in the shifting conjunctures of various subject positions--as, for example, intellectual worker, academic professional, and gendered domestic, social, political and economic agent. (Montrose, "Poetics and Politics" 19)

In their studies of Renaissance drama, new historicists have paid careful attention to boundaries regarding such aspects of the culture as explicit political statements, gender roles, the composition of theater audiences, language, and theatrical costuming, and to the transgressions of those boundaries. To different extents, many human agents--playwrights, audiences, theater owners, city and national government officials, and others--are involved in this

cultural process.⁴

In understanding the nature of the conflicts over power that are integral to English Renaissance drama, Montrose has provided a useful adjustment to Greenblatt's interpretation of the conflict. In Shakespeare Negotiations, Greenblatt argues that Elizabethan power used subversion for its own ends, that the dominant power "involve[ed] as its positive condition the constant production of its own radical subversion and the powerful containment of that subversion" (41). Montrose counters that Greenblatt's "binary logic of subversion/containment produces a closed conceptual structure" that does not permit "social transformations."⁵ I find the flexibility in Montrose's conception more appropriate for an approach to the English Renaissance. Subversion produced for containment, as a method of reinforcing the hierarchy, certainly occurred and can be observed in the plays discussed here; but the complex, sometimes obscure process of establishing (and transgressing) cultural boundaries admitted the possibility that an oppositional individual or group could realize genuine gain. Greenblatt's approach sets in opposition centralized authority and the "royal subject" (65). The distance between them was maintained by authority, and any subversion that occurred was contained by that authority.

⁴ For a fuller explanation of the general concepts of new historicism, see Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespeare Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) 4-19, Louis Montrose, The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 1-16, and Montrose, "The Poetics and Politics of Culture," The New Historicism, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989) 15-36.

⁵ Montrose, The Purpose of Playing 10, for his full discussion of this topic, see 7-16.

But such a relationship would preclude change. Greenblatt's interpretation of Elizabethan society inadequately describes the complexity of what did occur, despite his appreciation for the abundant movements of cultural materials across boundaries and the "charges of social energy" such movement created (14).

The great strength and relative stability of the dominant hierarchy in early modern England meant that social transformation must be measured over a long period. As Chapter One of this study will show, the late sixteenth-century in England was a time of considerable turbulence, but the various kinds of protest that occurred, including numerous riots, did not cause immediate, dramatic change. Yet Elizabethan society was not static, and changes occurred, if in a fitful, nonlinear, and complex fashion. The creation of a middle class in England, for instance, did not "happen" in the sixteenth century, but numerous developments in that time, such as the increase in the number of yeomen and merchants who acquired great wealth, the creation of a "legitimate" popular theater, and the steps toward a more literate populace, were certainly important to the development of that class.⁶ Power, in its many cultural forms, is unstable and contingent, despite the appearance at times that the opposite is true. The story of Elizabeth's long reign provides ample evidence to support that statement.

Any approach to culture in early modern England should allow not only for the deep currents of change, but also for

⁶ The term "middle class" cannot be applied appropriately to early modern England. The term is discussed further later in this chapter.

the complexity of those changes. The recognition of a dynamic cultural process is consistent with the sometimes self-contradictory perspective of every human agency. Seemingly coherent perspectives and ideologies are marked by inconsistencies and conflicts. When cultural materials cross boundaries--when the court of Henry VII takes part in a reenactment of a Robin Hood tale, for example--trying to understand the meaning of the event for the individuals involved requires the recognition that a number of results are possible.

Because new historicists have shied away from theory, no systematic "new historicist" approach exists, and they have tended to use terms such as "ideology," "subject," and "subversion" without adequately explaining their meanings (Montrose "Poetics and Politics" 18). For the first two terms Montrose provides useful direction that takes into consideration the dynamic nature of Elizabethan culture. He notes that "ideology" has typically referred to the "articulated principles serving as an agenda" for a particular sociopolitical group (The Purpose of Playing 2). This definition suggests a coherent perspective for the group, as a unit, and for its members. Individual agency or power is subjugated to the larger, deterministic structure of the sociopolitical group. This use of "ideology" has been taken to its extreme in traditional Marxism. In recent years, many scholars have rejected this "closed and static, monolithic and homogeneous" definition of ideology for one that recognizes its "heterogeneous and unstable, permeable and processual" qualities (12). By "heterogeneous" Montrose

refers to the fact that an individual's ideology is formed, to a great degree, by the various roles the individual takes on. To use the example quoted earlier, a person may be an "intellectual worker, academic professional, and gendered domestic, social, political and economic agent" ("Poetics and Politics" 19). An individual's ideology is a composite, in which attempts at coherence are bound to fail.

Furthermore, that ideology changes. Its boundaries are "permeable": changes in roles and an individual's experience of events, literature, and news can motivate him or her to remove, add, or alter a value or belief. Therefore, "ideology" can be seen as a process that is contingent and has a high degree of uncertainty, despite insistent attempts to maintain coherency, or, at least, to perceive our ideologies as fixed and seamless.

The term "subject" has to be defined in relation to this understanding of ideology. The work of cultural materialists has been useful in exploring the impact of culture on the individual, or subject. Cultural materialism depends heavily on Marxist and Foucauldian concepts, in which the "subject" is produced by the struggle for material power. Jonathan Dollimore persuasively argues that the process of ideological change is not always even conscious (Radical Tragedy 12-13), which makes understanding the "subject" a more complicated and, ultimately, incomplete endeavor.⁷ Although new historicism and cultural

⁷ While Dollimore describes the role of the unconscious in the ideological process in Radical Tragedy Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (Sussex The Harvester Press, 1984), Steven Mullaney tends to stress ideology as a conscious process in The Place of the Stage License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1988)

materialism overlap considerably in their interests, concerns, and methods, one distinguishing characteristic is the greater emphasis placed by cultural materialists on the deterministic power of culture. New historicists tend to allow for more individual authority.⁸

Without question, culture plays a key role in forming the "social subject," but permitting culture sole authority in determining the subject, no matter how much complexity is granted that process, fails to explain the unexpected, the individual act or choice that could not be predicted, at least not on the basis of cultural determinism. Montrose calls on us to "resist the inevitably reductive tendency" to form "binary oppositions": "system, totality, [and] hegemony" versus individual "strategy, practice, or agency." It would be more accurate, he argues, to recognize such concepts "as mutually constitutive processes." Consider, for example, that "social systems are produced and reproduced in the interactive social practices of individuals and groups," that "collective structures may enable as well as constrain individual agency" (all from "Poetics and Politics" 21). Social structure "is itself transformed, as human agency acts, often subtly, unintentionally, and unpredictably, on conscious attempts at social formation" (The Purpose of Playing 2-3). For these reasons, Montrose uses the term "subject" to

⁸ Dollimore and Alan Sinfield counter "misrepresentations" of cultural materialism in an essay, "Culture and Textuality Debating Cultural Materialism," Textual Practice 4 1 (1990) 91-100. They distance themselves from the simplistic determinism of "vulgar" Marxism, in regards to both literature and the subject. At the same time, they deny the presence of the ideal or "essentialist" in culture, that which transcends historical contingencies. It appears that, for them, the subject is culturally determined.

suggest an equivocal process of subjectification: on the one hand, shaping individuals as loci of consciousness and initiators of action--endowing them with subjectivity and with the capacity for agency; and, on the other hand, positioning, motivating, and constraining them within--subjecting them to--social networks and cultural codes that ultimately exceed their comprehension or control. ("Poetics and Politics" 21)

I have adopted Montrose's meaning because it more accurately reflects the complexity of the processes involved.

The third term that I wish to discuss is "subversion." The word is often used rather loosely to describe statements, images, events, even thoughts that are not necessarily subversive. One of Greenblatt's main themes is that "subversive" material is produced on stage, but "contained" in various ways by the dominant power. "Subversive" is derived from "subvert," which means to overturn, to destroy at the foundation, and it seems to me too strong a term for some of the rather mild moments of dissonance Greenblatt describes. Certainly, scholars have spent some energy trying to figure out exactly what constitutes subversion.⁹ To simplify matters somewhat, I wish to distinguish between the "subversive" and the "disruptive." Genuinely subversive acts, statements, and images would clearly constitute or lead to an overturning of hierarchy, or intentionally threaten or are perceived to threaten the same. Disruptive moments in a play are merely incongruous. Boundaries are crossed and cultural materials are brought together in ways that create the potential for ideological changes, but changes that cannot be called subversive. For example, the author of The Life and Death

⁹ An example is found in Dollimore, Radical Tragedy, 13-25.

of Jack Straw, a politically conservative play, refers to a historical, instigating event of the 1381 rebellion, a taxcollector's improper body search of a commoner's daughter. This moral indignity is a legitimate cause for the father's anger in the play, and yet the father quickly is transformed into the embodiment of corrupt, self-interested rebellion. The conflict between moral and sociopolitical values is a potentially disruptive moment for audience members. The dissonance created cannot be directly linked to radical thought or deed, and the dissonance was probably not intended by the author; most of such moments in the plays I discuss appear not to have been intentional. Yet these moments are a part of the plays and become part of the energy of the culture. Disruptions contribute to the life and incoherence of ideology.

The plays and commoner-heroes discussed in this study tend to represent conservative perspectives. That is, the social position of commoner as willing subject to the crown is consciously supported in all the plays. Moral and ethical values that support the dominant socioeconomic structure are supported. Strong beliefs in national political and military strength, as well as in the superiority of the Church of England, are evident in some plays. Consequently, most of the discordance in the plays and in the experience of seeing the plays are of the disruptive rather than subversive variety. The perspectives represented in the plays are sometimes inconsistent and self-contradictory, and the signs of movement across boundaries are abundant. The most common conflicts and

transgressions originate in the tensions between socioeconomic classes, but they also involve morality, patriotism, ownership of land, military prowess, community, service to the Crown, education, language, dress, and other cultural materials. These discontinuities, contradictions, and movements across boundaries were the source of authorities' fears concerning the theaters.¹⁰ The figures of commoner-heroes always reveal gaps and inconsistencies. These representations can tell us something about commoners during a period of intense activity in the movement of cultural material, in the centuries-long, uneven developments that gradually brought commoners into more significant sociopolitical positions.

My approach is not teleological, not an attempt to portray these figures as evidence of a defined and clearly-directed political and economic movement, a "middle-class" evolution. To do so would ignore paradoxical elements in these representations and in Elizabethan life. Members of Elizabethan society may have wanted to present a seamless picture, and we may, at times, prefer to "read" the society in the same way, but the society may be better understood by focusing on the gaps and conflicts.

The term "commoner" suggests a unified perspective, but such was not the case, and its use during the years from 1588 to 1600 needs clarification. In the fifth chapter of The Description of England (1577, revised 1587), William Harrison described a society ordered into four descending

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of these fears, see Chapter 1 of this study. A recent work that provides a comprehensive view of the relationship between authority and theater is A New History of Early English Drama, eds John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

groups, separating the gentle from the vulgar, and establishing the internal hierarchy for each group as well. Harrison's account would appear to be accurate for the years that this study covers; it was generally accepted and borrowed from for at least thirty years (Stevenson 80).¹¹

At the top were the "gentlemen": the nobility--king, prince, duke, marquis, earl, viscount, and baron--followed by knight, esquire, and gentleman.

Just below these were the "citizens," a term of various usage, but which generally referred to Londoners, from the Lord Mayor and aldermen to the general citizenry. London officials were drawn from the "twelve great livery companies"; the companies themselves were composed of masters, bachelors, freemen, journeymen, and apprentices.

The "yeomen" were landowners, from the relatively well-off to the plain farmer.

The "artificers/laborers" group consisted of "day laborers, poor husbandmen, and some retailers (which have no free land), copyholders, and all artificers, as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons, etc.," and servingmen (Harrison 118-19). This group represented the greatest percentage of the population (Cook, Privileged Playgoers 13).

These last three of Harrison's groups, along with beggars, are the "commoners." There remain, however, some difficulties with using the term. To begin with, the line between commoners and "gentlemen" was blurred by the fact that it was possible for prosperous citizens and yeomen to

¹¹ The nature of English social hierarchy in this period is not, however, entirely clear. Ann Jennalie Cook summarizes the problem in "Audiences: Investigation, Interpretation, Invention," A New History of Early English Drama, 316-17.

buy titles for their sons. Second, despite the unity implied by a single term, commoners' interests could be quite different at particular times or in reference to specific issues, as Jack H. Hexter has thoroughly demonstrated in Reappraisals in History (71-116). Such terms as "middle class" and "working class" that imply coherence may be suitable for the modern era, but are misleading when applied to Elizabethan England. We tend to think of a class of people as having common values and motivations. Such was not the case then, at least not to an extent to where "class" can be accurately used. Ann Jennalie Cook argues that "artisans," "yeomen," and "gentlemen" are more accurate terms than "middle class" or "working class" for describing the English in this period (The Privileged Playgoers 15).

"Commoner," then, signifies a loose set of ideals and interests. Ideology varies not only from one specific group of commoners to another, but also from one individual to another, and it changes over time for all. Therefore, exactly whose values are represented or criticized with a particular commoner-hero will be noted, as accurately as is possible, when relevant. On the other hand, the ideologies associated with the figures of commoner-heroes form a category with some distinctions from the ideologies of the gentles, although the categories overlap. There are times when broad statements about socioeconomic differences in perspectives can be accurate and useful.

Chapter One examines the most relevant conditions in which these representations of commoner-heroes were

produced, beginning with general socioeconomic factors and narrowing to pertinent concerns related to the theater: the place of theater in Elizabethan culture, certain characteristics of the theaters, the socioeconomic positions of the authors of these plays, and the makeup of their audiences.

The authors of the plays discussed in this study create commoner-heroes who are shaped in relation to conservative perspectives concerning specific issues. I have grouped the plays according to the type of relationship: the commoner-hero in relation to politics, morality, or economics. Admittedly, such categories are a simplification, as every play involves, to greater or lesser extent, politics, morality, and economics, and such categories are inseparable in life; but the characteristics shared by the commoner-heroes in each group provide a way to organize the material. In each play we find the attempt to form a coherent perspective that, despite its conservative nature, contains disruptive moments.

Chapter Two concerns William Shakespeare's The Second Part of King Henry VI and the anonymous The Life and Death of Jack Straw, both of which deal explicitly with politics and center on treason. The authors create figures of the political Other--self-interested rebellion set against interest in the common good--by adapting historical material. In each case, the leader of a rebellion, a commoner, is transformed into a "monstrous" figure and set in opposition to a commoner-hero who embodies the proper political (and other) sentiments.

The plays discussed in Chapter Three, Robert Wilson's The Coblers Prophetie and Robert Greene's A Knack to Know a Knave, are similar to those in Chapter Two in their conservative political perspectives, but Wilson and Greene emphasize moral virtue. Rather than draw on the chronicles, they bring material from morality plays onto the professional stage. Their commoner-heroes, who provide the moral voice in the plays and exhibit characteristics of the courtly fool, represent conservative positions.

I turn, in Chapter Four, to commoner-heroes taken from popular literature and ballads. George A Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield, by Robert Greene, and The Shoemaker's Holiday, by Thomas Dekker, support an economic tie between commoners and the crown. These two plays are notable, in part, for the optimistic, conservative outlook projected by their commoner-heroes. These commoner-heroes most vividly embody values shared by many prosperous commoners.

The final play discussed, Anthony Munday's The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington, stands alone in Chapter Five. Although it contains strong nationalist and Christian sentiments, it does not appear to be a serious attempt to promote either political or moral ideology. Originally performed at court, Munday's play drew on the pastoral tradition, and he seems to have only been interested in creating light entertainment. Another reason that the play does not properly belong in any of the above chapters is that it has no commoner-hero. I have included it in this study because Munday turned the most famous commoner-hero in England, the legendary Robin Hood, into a nobleman. This

attempt at total appropriation of a figure from popular culture into the genteel ranks provides unique opportunities. The play is a striking example of cultural material crossing boundaries, of the juxtaposition of dissonant materials, and of the resulting disruptions in ideology.¹²

Information about the authorship and staging will be included in each discussion, but little is known about these subjects for some of the plays. The discussions of the plays depend chiefly on close readings of the texts. However, cultural materials and practices from outside the text are discussed as they relate to the representations of commoner heroes: people and events alluded to in the plays, forms of popular cultural expression that provide source material for some of the plays, and practices for disseminating texts, to mention a few of the most significant.

¹² Of course, all of the plays display ideological inconsistencies and gaps

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL TENSIONS

Definitive analyses of the commoner-heroes in these plays is impossible, for we can never hope to see fully through the eyes of an Elizabethan.¹ Our own cultural makeup will always distort our interpretations. Yet we must attempt to understand the culture of which the plays were a part if we are to approach an understanding of the ideological inconsistencies and conflicts in the figures of the commoner-heroes.

This chapter covers those broad cultural tensions that bear on all of the plays. I begin with a summary of the socioeconomic conflicts in Elizabethan society that have relevance to the representations of commoner-heroes considered in this study. A discussion of the professional theater's position in that society follows. As that section will show, political, social, moral, and economic issues are central to that position. Finally, socioeconomic matters are considered as they apply to the writers of the plays and to the audiences they were writing for. Subsequent chapters include discussions of cultural materials relevant to specific plays.

¹ Whose eyes would we look through, if we could? An earl's? A grocer's? The Queen's? A player's? Each would "understand" the stage representation of a particular commoner-hero rather differently. Each would bring his or her own values, experiences, fears, and so on to the interpretation.

ECONOMIC RUPTURES

Historians of this century have emphasized different aspects of the Elizabethan economy, describing it as either a stagnant, limited economy or one that offered new opportunities (Stevenson 22-23). The degree of separation between these two extremes indicates the strength of the contrary forces at work.

Without doubt England suffered from severe economic limitations. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, the country's merchant fleet was small, only one large exportable industry existed (wool), and trade routes that supplied a large number of essential imports were limited (Clark and Slack 83). These conditions contributed to prices doubling during her reign, particularly grain prices, which increased twice as fast as wages (83). In addition, the practice of enclosure helped create an overwhelming "explosion" in vagrancy (Halpern 73). To worsen matters, the population of England increased dramatically in the years 1550 to 1650 (Stevenson 23). Strains on agriculture and industry caused by population and price surges made for a fragile economy, despite economic expansion that would seem sufficient to absorb extra population. A poor harvest or the plague was enough to tip the scales temporarily, and the poor starved in those locations hardest hit (24).

A few gentles starved, but the concern of most of them was retaining their social status in the face of these economic stresses. To a greater extent than usual in England, status was maintained by expenditure; "many families overreached themselves, fell heavily into debt, and eventually sold their patrimony and disappeared" (Stone 26).

In less dramatic ways, the demands of the economy eroded the social hierarchy. For instance, by enclosing lands and raising rents to help maintain their social rank, the nobility violated their own convention of noblesse oblige (26). In such ways as this, necessity disrupted fundamental social relations; or, since this was certainly not the first time for such conventions to be abused, it might be more accurate to say that contemporary perceptions of social relations were altered by economic stresses.

In a state of flux, opportunities exist. New trading companies were formed in the last three decades of the century to exploit old and new trade routes, which created new markets for English goods and employment for craftsmen associated with shipbuilding and for the trades supplying the goods. The population increase helped provide cheap labor. Lands became available because of the appropriation of church lands, and because some nobility and gentlemen were unable to maintain their property (Stevenson 24-25, 27). Land was sold, especially in the 1580s and 90s, more frequently than ever in England (Cook, Privileged Playgoers 36-37). In such a climate, commoners who were shrewd and hard working and could acquire capital could prosper.

Histories and legends of yeomen, merchants, and craftsmen are the sources for several plays discussed in this study; these were the principal groups of commoners who, in fact, profited from economic stresses. It is not accurate to say that a whole "class" of people was moving up in status, but it is true that a number of commoners swelled the ranks of the privileged (Cook, Privileged Playgoers 30).

Yeomen who could buy more land and further prosper were able to educate their sons at the universities, and their sons could eventually become gentlemen (31). Apparently, a considerable number of yeomen's and merchants' sons attended the universities and the Inns of Court and Chancery (37).

London had gradually increased its importance as a business and shipping center in England, and many commoners gained an economic and political importance little seen before the sixteenth century. The cloth industry is a prime example. In 1450, approximately half of the nation's cloth traded to other countries was shipped out of London; by 1550, that figure had ballooned to 90%. Of great significance for a healthy national economy, cloth, a finished product, had become a bigger export than raw wool. The Fellowship of Merchant Adventurers (cloth merchants), a national fellowship controlled by the minority of London merchants, became a wealthy and influential force, forming a symbiotic relationship with Elizabeth: they lent her money, and she protected their interests (Stevenson 25).

Wealth could translate directly into political power in the city. Artisans and "mere" merchants (no foreign business) could also become wealthy in domestic trade (Stevenson 28); along with the merchants, they supplied most of the London aldermen and mayors (28 and Cook, Privileged Playgoers 34). The size of their fortunes concerned the gentles. Many of the mayors and aldermen in the second half of the century were wealthier than any who had ever held those positions (Stevenson 26). They exhibited their prosperity in "the pageantry of civic government, Lord Mayor's Shows, and spectacular charities," making their

economic status "as visible . . . as that of the aristocracy" (26). Expenditure was an important status marker for commoners.

Nobility and gentlemen complained bitterly about the trespassing of commoners on their territory. When the numbers of commoners' sons in the universities and Inns of Court increased to something between one tenth and one fourth of the membership (Cook 39), John Ferne worried that

by that free access now permitted to yeomanrye and Merchauntes, to set their broode, to the study of common law, . . . places of high regarde . . . are now preoccupied, and vsurped. (The Blazon of Gentry, 1586, qtd. in Cook 39)

The number of coats of arms and titles being acquired by commoners led one man to make the exaggerated claim, in 1590, that "very neere the one half of the gentlemen in England" were "unfit" (40). Arms were sold to "a hosier living in Fish Street; Dungayn the plasterer, Parr the embroiderer," and so on (39-40). As early as 1559, nobility, feeling threatened, had proposed to restrict the amount of land the "vulgar, untitled persons" could buy (37).

Such remarks demonstrate that the economic stresses during the period sometimes translated into competition for social status. Boundaries were crossed, even altered or shifted, and ideologies changed under the myriad pressures of day-to-day experience. The comments by nobility, both in official capacities and in less formal discourse, demonstrate their fear that they were losing control of the socioeconomic structure. These socioeconomic tensions are important considerations when interpreting representations

of commoners and commoner-heroes.

CONFLICT AND THE THEATER

The theater, as a result of its peculiar position in sixteenth-century English society, contributes its own issues that bear on our interpretations: popular versus elitist tastes, the relationship between location and control of the theater, morality in both play content and audience behavior, political commentary on stage, and competition for consumers' money. The question of authority is always at stake, and the effort to control ideology is often involved. The root problem out of which these issues of authority arose was the uncertainty of the public theater's place in the culture. The theater, in all its aspects, represented a "cultural and ideological instability" that was unsettling to the formally constituted social order (Mullaney 51).

Elizabeth did not, however, appear to feel threatened to any great degree by the public theater. She enjoyed court performances by the same dramatic companies that were accustomed to performing on the public stage, and saw plays that featured commoner-heroes, such as The Shoemaker's Holiday. The plays discussed in this study offer no direct criticism of Queen Elizabeth's government. Indeed, their conservative perspectives are generally supportive of the

crown.² Yet the relationship was not without its tensions. The primary evidence of some conflict between the national government and the professional theaters are the edicts from the Privy Council. E. K. Chambers mentions a number of them, including a controversy in 1597 over a performance at the Swan of The Isle of Dogs. This play, now lost to us, earned author Ben Jonson a trip to prison and provoked the Privy Council to put restraints on plays at all theaters (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 150-57).

Some of the Privy Council's pronouncements came at the urging of city authorities, who had a far more contentious relationship with the public theaters. Professional public theaters in England were a sixteenth-century development, and their establishment involved the violation of established cultural boundaries and the creation of new ones. Their location, relative to the jurisdiction of London city authorities, was a significant factor in the resultant cultural uncertainty. The Theatre, the first permanent open-air stage in England for the general public, opened in 1576, and more followed: the Curtain (1577), the Rose (1587), the Swan (about 1595), and the Globe (1599).³ Permanent theaters helped establish play-going as a part of London life and a "social institution" (Bristol 3). The public theaters were a different sort of "institution" from

² In their studies of the place of professional theater in Elizabethan culture, Greenblatt and Montrose find a strong relationship between central authority and the theater. Greenblatt argues that the theater was "a primary expression of Renaissance power" (Shakespeare Negotiations 65), and Montrose states that the Queen saw the professional theater "both as an instrument for the aggrandizement of the dynastic nation-state and for the supervision and governance of its subjects" (The Purpose of Playing 29)

³ All of the plays discussed in this study were either written for the public theaters or, in the case of The Coblers Prophecie, likely appeared in a public theater after being produced at court. Most of these plays were staged at the Rose.

the indoor, "private" theaters, which seated fewer, charged higher admissions, and catered in their play selections to the well-educated and the gentles. The private theaters were mostly located within the jurisdiction of the Guildhall, and usually within the walls of the city, but the public theaters were located in the "liberties." Steven Mullaney describes the liberties as having been

free or "at liberty" from manorial rule or obligation to the Crown, and only nominally under the jurisdiction of the lord mayor. While belonging to the city, they fell outside the purview of the sheriffs of London and so comprised virtually ungoverned areas over which the city had authority but, paradoxically, no control.
(21)

The liberties had a history of becoming the home of "whatever could not be contained within the strict bounds of the community" (22). Mullaney is speaking not only of what the authorities might consider a corrupting influence on the community, but that which, for one reason or another, had its proper place outside the community: "alongside gaming houses, bear-baiting arenas, marketplaces, and brothels, stood monasteries, lazar-houses, and scaffolds of execution" (22).⁴ Professional players had long held an uneasy place in respect to the community. Such contrasting activities as holiday, whoring, thievery, laughter, moral tales, and laziness were all associated with the companies. This physical placement of the public theaters fit the ambiguous relationship between community and theater.

Their location thus reinforced the marginal status of the public theaters. Mullaney argues that from its position on the borderline, the stage gained new freedom to look

⁴ There were liberties inside the city walls, but most were located without.

critically at its culture (30). Such criticism did occur, but, as this study will show, Mullaney's words suggest more freedom than the theaters enjoyed or expressed. Because contemporary affairs did become suitable material for the popular stage (Gurr 141), it is more accurate to note that opportunities for potential ideological disruptions often occurred in dramatic material that dealt with current events and issues. As a result, these plays, and the theaters themselves, sometimes appeared to be subversive to authorities. Attempts to control the stage made it a battleground for the control of culture.

A couple of representative events demonstrate the long-standing tensions between city authorities and the theatrical companies. In 1574, the Lord Mayor and Council of London banned all plays in London, except private performances, unless they were licensed and sanctioned by officials (Murray 4). Then, with the establishment of public theaters in the liberties, city officials continued to try to control the theaters. On June 8 and 9, 1584, mobs, perhaps 1000 people in all, gathered outside the Theatre, which was near the Curtain (Murray 10). The reason for the gatherings is unclear, and nothing ties them to the theaters except their proximity. Nonetheless, on June 14 the Lord Mayor "sent ii aldermen to the Cowrt for the suppressing and pulling downe of the Theatre and Curten" (qtd. in Murray 10), a move that Burbage successfully resisted.

These sallies in the battle for authority originated in different, but related, issues. The city officials' reaction to the 1584 "riots" outside the theaters stemmed,

in part, from a fear of crowds, and there exist other written complaints of the throngs associated with the theater. Without a police force in London, officials would have been ever conscious of the fact that order was normally maintained more by willing adherence to the laws than by the physical force authorities might bring against such a mob (Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience 14). The place of city officials in that order rested largely on custom and other intangible forces that are integral to social structures. However, their motivation for eliminating the gathering places for crowds--that is, for shutting down theaters--came from more than one issue.

A second area of contention was economic power. One reason that Burbage built the Theatre was that he wanted to control access to the performances. The inn courtyards did not provide that control, and he had lost admission money. His effort to increase his profits appears to have been too successful for those jealous of the wealth being accumulated by the theater owners (Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience 15). Part of the problem was that their economic activity was only slightly and occasionally related to that of the city, as when they hired company carpenters to build a theater. The city had little control of the activity and could profit little. In addition, we have evidence in Thomas Nashe's Pierce Penilesse of economic competition between the theater owners and the "Vintners, Alewives, and Victuallers" who lost business to the theaters (214). But the concern for direct profit may have been no more important to authorities than the perceived harm being done to the idea of a work

ethic. The lord mayor and council, who themselves were businessmen, and many other businessmen in the city complained that play-going "encouraged idleness and unthriftiness" among the apprentices (L. Wright, Middle Class 606). To these men, the theaters threatened the economic system by undermining fundamental virtues.

City authorities often thought that other cultural values were being subverted in the plays and in the corrupting atmosphere about the theaters. It is useful to contrast the theatrical entertainments produced by the city with that by the professional theaters. The city pageants expressed the "official" desires of the commons, those that fit into and reinforced the hierarchy. Richard Mulcaster's The Quene's Majestie's Passage describes Elizabeth's inaugural procession in 1559. Both the procession itself and the plays and pageants put on by the people constituted a form of public theater; the queen's subjects simultaneously paid tribute to her and "subjected her, as it were, to didactic and even prescriptive allegories on the arts of government" (Mullaney 11). In a sense, roles were reversed and "the people" tutored the young queen. Elizabeth could ignore and did tolerate the instruction; the point is not that this public theater constituted subversion. On the contrary, it served to strengthen cultural ideology by portraying a unified perspective, and it reinforced ties between crown and commoners as well. The theatrical experience served as a device for the political and economic interests of the populace to be expressed and social structure to be re-played, its ideals made

"objectively present in the here and now" (Bristol 59).

This procession was an extension of a long English tradition of folk plays, moralities, and pageants that helped bolster social order.

The professional drama developing in the last few decades of the century, despite often pursuing similar moral and political ends, was largely outside the purview of city authorities, and anxiety about control of the culture ran deep. The lord mayors of London wrote to the government throughout the nineties in protest against the content of professionally-staged theater (Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience 6-7). A letter dated July 28, 1597 includes the comment that the plays contain

nothing but prophane fables, lascivious matters, cozeninge devises, & scurrilus beehaviours, which are so set forth as that they move wholie to imitation & not to auoydinge of those faults & vices which they represent. (qtd. in Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience 7)

This description hardly matches our perception of the plays that have come down to us (7).

While frequent battles occurred between city authorities and the theaters during this period, there were other people whose complaints about the theaters centered on the perceived disruption and subversion of cultural values, the apparent erasure of cultural boundaries. In his attack on plays and players in Playes confuted in Five Actions (1582), Stephen Gosson, an Oxford-educated, disappointed playwright, worried that the social hierarchy was being leveled:

We are cammaunded by God to abide in the same calling wheirein we are called, which is our ordinary vocation in a commonweale. . . . So in a commonweale, if priuat men be suffered to forsake theire calling because they desire to walke gentleman like in sattine & veluet,

with a buckler at theire heeles, proportion is so broken, vnitie dissolued, harmony confounded, that the whole body must be dismembred (216)

Gosson was a favorite of the Puritans, who could become apoplectic over the public theater. Philip Stubbes was a Puritan pamphleteer whose tract The Anatomie of Abuses (1583), like Gosson's, expressed concern for the dissolution of discrimination in status and gender roles, "the prophanation of the Lord his sabaoth," and the encouragement of "a great sort of ydle persons" (qtd. in E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage IV, 222). Stubbes did not excuse plays with a moral and religious message; the duplicitous nature of the stage made it the wrong place for faith to be expressed (IV, 222-23).

Anxiety over the status of cultural boundaries existed within the theatrical profession itself. During the first few decades of professional theater, a commoner could go to nearly any public theater (not closed by the plague) and see plays of great variety. Public theater was, by 1588, already a mixture of elitist and populist elements. In the opinion of some contemporary commentators, many of the public stage performances catered to the lowest tastes. Plays such as Common Conditions, The Conflict of Conscience, and Clyomon and Clamydes are examples of the plays scorned by certain critics of the theater.⁵ The educated Stephen Gosson, Philip Sidney, and John Lyly criticized such plays as being sentimental and simplistic (Gurr 116).⁶ At the same time, Lyly's high rhetoric and courtly subject matter

⁵ These plays were quite popular, if protests by the critics are to be believed.

⁶ Andrew Gurr has described this category of plays as an "ungainly medley of moral teaching and romantic escapism" in Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1987) 115-16

held its own on the stage in the eighties. He was just one of a number of playwrights concerned with classical concepts of the well-made play. The decline of interest in Lyly's plays in the nineties, however, signaled a preference for "rumbustious popularism" over a "gentlemanly repertoire" among the general theater-goers (132).

Lyly's decline on the public stage coincided with that of the boy companies, for whom he wrote his plays. The boy companies had once predominated in court performances, but with the expanding number of adult companies, who were sponsored by various noblemen, the boy companies became less significant at court and in public theaters, until they stopped playing about 1591 (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 4; III, 412).

This development was part of a gradual split in the theater along elitist-populist lines near the end of the century. Ben Jonson, most prominently among playwrights, wanted to pull the professional theater "up" away from some of its popular roots. His insistence on the classical unities is well known, and Bristol argues that Jonson was also deeply concerned with "ownership" of the play text. In Bartholomew Fair, for example, the stage-keeper, who speaks longingly of the days of Tarlton--"slapstick, leaping, capering, thrashing and mistaking words" (Bristol 118)--is expelled from the stage by the book-holder, an act that "objectifies the displacement of a popular, improvisatory and extra-official tradition" from the theater (119). In the popular tradition, folk plays were publicly "owned," so to speak. They were often transmitted only by performance

and memory, which gave the play "texts" an ephemeral quality and made them susceptible to alterations by the performers. The authors of folk plays were, after a time, unknown and unimportant to those participating and observing. It was the influence of the popular tradition on the emerging professional theater that Jonson and others wished to eliminate. In trying to legitimize the public theater, move it out of its marginal status, Jonson had to fight this history of "decentralized cultural production" (119).⁷

While some theaters continued to exhibit "infinite variety and robust vigor,"⁸ Louis B. Wright acknowledges that public theater was gradually, even then, in the process of losing that breadth and energy (Middle Class 607-8). From 1599 on, Gurr notes, a "stratified social scale" existed among the various playhouses (153). In 1599, the boy companies were revived. They performed in the private theaters that catered to the educated and well-to-do (Harbage, Annals 300). Over the next several years, their repertories were generally characterized by railing and satire, some of which was directed at citizens (Gurr 153-59). The plays as well as the customers distinguished the boy companies and private theaters from the adult companies

⁷ A number of playwrights were quite protective of the higher social status they had attained through education and literary accomplishments, and they liked to distinguish themselves from the "base company" with whom they had to associate in the theater. See Richard Helgerson, Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 196-202.

⁸ Wright finds in Elizabethan drama "themes as kaleidoscopic as the life of the times"

[w]ild romance which took the Londoner to the Indies or the courts of Eastern potentates; dramatized history which re-created the past and magnified the deeds of English heroes; plays which glorified plain folk and homespun virtues, dramatic journalism which brought to the stage the latest murder or domestic triangle, properly moralized, clownery, boisterous and crude, which entertained playgoers not too critical. (Middle Class 607)

and public stages.⁹ Some public theaters, like the Globe, still staged plays that ran from what critics like Jonson considered "low" material to that which they thought palatable to refined tastes. However, the Red Bull, especially, and the theaters associated with the Henslowe companies--the Rose, Fortune, and, in 1613, Hope--primarily produced plays that appealed to citizens (Gurr 148-51). The repertoire of the Admiral's Men, who played at the Fortune from 1600 to 1603 (Harbage, Annals 297), exhibited a "decidedly conservative citizen attitude toward love and marriage" (Gurr 149).¹⁰

Michael Bristol argues that much of the criticism of the theater, both from within and without, was directed less against the literature than against the theater as part of the "popular culture" that led to a "dispersion of authority" and represented a "pervasive and tacit sanction of misrule in all the patterns of everyday life" (113-14). Bristol views play-going as a form of carnival:

The time of performance is a festive time in which play and mimesis replace productive labor. . . . A pragmatically illicit or unauthorized use of time (idleness) coincides with an altered representation of time (anachronism), leaving open the possibility of revisionary and therefore seditious misinterpretations of both past and present. (112)

I think that "seditious misinterpretations" more accurately

⁹ Gurr shows that the distinction is not absolute. In Playgoing, pages 153-64, he points out that the boy companies varied somewhat in their repertoires, and plays performed by the Blackfriars boys tended to be harshest in tone. In addition, the Globe produced Jonson's satire Satiromastix and others of his plays, and Paul's boys performed several citizen comedies.

¹⁰ Gurr oversimplifies when he uses the term "citizen attitude." He implies unity and coherence when ideologies were diverse, complex, overlapping, and self-contradictory. Yet his observation of a conservative bias in the repertoire of the Admiral's Men is useful.

describes a perception or fear rather than any substantial subversion, at least when considering Elizabethan drama in general. The theater did, however, provide acute moments of ideological ambiguity and disruption, as this study will show.

PLAYWRIGHTS AND AUDIENCES

The figures of the commoner-hero on stage must be considered not only as part of the milieu, but also as products of a specific writing situation that involves playwrights, companies, and audiences. Attempts at linking theatrical companies with a particular ideology are problematic. The companies of the eighties and nineties were a mixed bag, with actors from a variety of social and educational backgrounds. Many of the companies performed for the court and on public and private stages. The Queen had her favorites, the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 6), but that information does not help us connect these companies to a specific ideology; both companies' repertoires were quite varied, and, besides, Elizabeth was just as likely to see a citizen comedy like The Shoemaker's Holiday as a courtly pastoral. It might be most useful to remember that the companies tried to please their audiences for the purpose of financial reward.

Answering the question "For whom were the stage representations of the commoner-heroes created?" would, therefore, be more productive. Unfortunately, the limitation of incomplete or nonexistent records from the

period makes fully answering this question impossible. Likewise for the pertinent question, "Who created these representations?" Yet, what scant information we do have about playwrights and audiences offers some insights.

Playwrights

Understanding the writers as part of the writing situation is especially difficult. To begin with, a writer's intention is a tricky subject even when it is stated; none of these playwrights left such a record for these particular plays. Second, the author of one of the plays, The Life and Death of Jack Straw, is unknown, and we know less than we would like about the other writers. Of their socioeconomic backgrounds some information is available. William Shakespeare's father was a glover, who also dealt in wool, grain, and other goods. Records indicate that he was a good businessman, and his prosperity led to his holding several public offices in Stratford. Anthony Munday's father was a draper. Disputes about Robert Greene's parentage have led scholars to argue that his father was either a cordwainer or a saddler, but he may have been something else (Crupi 3-4). Thomas Dekker may have been the son of a London tailor (Rhys xi).

In short, these playwrights were all commoners whose fathers, it seems, were craftsmen and merchants. Yet, it would be wrong to read the writing situation simplistically. A given play is not the mirror of some coherent socioeconomic ideology. We know enough about the writers to see that they do not fit such a conceptualization of the drama. For instance, Munday rejected apprenticeship as a

draper and ran off to the continent. Writing romances and plays, which he did for many years, took him into a very different "world." Only after this career did he become a draper himself, at least officially, after which he wrote a number of pageants for the city of London (L. Wright Middle Class 42, 44). Dekker also wrote city pageants, and his plays were primarily produced at the Red Bull, one of the "popular" theaters, but he condescendingly referred to the "stinkards" and the "rude raskal rabble" in the audience (qtd. in Cook, Privileged Playgoers 263). These playwrights lived and worked with no less contrary desires and forces than the society in general. Born sons of shoemakers and clothiers, they chose to compete in the market of the theater. Because most plays ran no more than six to seven performances when they were new (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 148), new plays were needed constantly and professional opportunities existed. The playwrights' financial needs, their aesthetic concerns, their personal and cultural values, and the demands of the marketplace directly and indirectly influenced the figuring of the commoner-hero on stage.

Audiences

To this point in the study an assumption has underlain discussion of the writing situation: that many commoners could be found in the audiences at Elizabethan playhouses, without specifying the proportion of commoners in the audiences and the sorts of commoners who attended performances. Such matters are significant in this study,

as I argue for a relationship between representations of commoners in the plays and the playgoers who saw them, and they are still disputed.

The traditional view has been that many commoners, from all levels but the beggars, attended the public theaters. Alfred Harbage's Shakespeare's Audience expresses that viewpoint. Harbage argues that the price of a theater ticket was roughly equal to that of a movie today, and much cheaper than such popular entertainments as drinking, tobacco, and bear-baiting (which attracted gambling) (56-58). He believes that the ticket prices were calculated according to what workmen could afford to pay (64). The location of the theaters would not have been a problem for many London commoners; by 1601, nearly 160,000 people of all ranks lived within walking distance of the theaters (53-54). Having the time to see a play was the biggest problem for working men. Holidays and Sundays would have been the primary days for playgoing, but the extant complaints that the plays drew workmen from their work indicates that apprentices and laborers did manage to find their way to the playhouses, at least occasionally, during the week (67).

Harbage's conclusions are also based on recorded comments from the period. Sir John Davies described "a thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores, / Porters and serving men" leaving the theater about 1593, and Henry Chettle wrote of a similar social range in 1592: gentlemen, citizens, the servants of both classes, and apprentices (Davies' "In Cosmum", qtd. in E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 17; Chambers II, 14). Remarks culled

from a variety of contemporary sources further support the assumption that "apple-wives, chimney-boys, 'stinkards,' apprentices, fishwives, and others of the 'rude raskal rabble'" (Cook 263) attended the plays in significant numbers. Craftsmen, Harbage argues, with their wives, journeymen, and apprentices, constituted the largest group of playgoing commoners; tradesmen, from shopkeepers to wealthy tradesmen, were the next largest group; and a few laborers and servants would have attended (Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience 60-63). In Playgoing in Shakespeare's London Andrew Gurr generally agrees, particularly concerning the 1590s.

The view that commoners were a significant presence at the public playhouses is supported by the content of the plays themselves. Estimating the number of plays that reflected citizen tastes in the 1590s is difficult, as Philip Henslowe's diary is the only reliable record other than extant plays, and the diary concerns only his affairs (Stevenson 18). However, Gurr has made such an estimate, using the information available. He counts approximately 145 plays in the years 1594 to 1599 that reflect the interests and values of London citizens, that is, commoners above the level of plain artisan or laborer. The major types are Robin Hood stories, English histories, and citizen comedies (147). Even this list allows too narrow a scope for citizens' tastes. The list of bestselling books during Elizabeth's reign includes Venus and Adonis and Arcadia, and a study of the popular literature reveals that the tastes of commoners who could read covered "a broad spectrum of moral,

aesthetic, social, philosophical--and frivolous--concerns" (Stevenson 15). Certainly, the same is true of the plays, and we should not unnecessarily limit our expectations of what the commons enjoyed. The plays discussed in this study exemplify the variety of interests and concerns that drew commoners to the theaters.

In The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642, Ann Jennalie Cook departs somewhat from Harbage's view. She argues that the only consistent playgoers were the "privileged." This group, a minority in the society, "exhibited a tremendous variety in wealth, power, status, and accomplishment" and "ranged from the threadbare scholar or the prospering landholder, newly risen from the yeomanry, all the way up to nobility and royalty itself" (9). She does not deny the presence of all sorts of commoners in the theater audiences, but she concludes that they attended less frequently and in smaller numbers than Harbage and others have assumed.¹¹

Cook employs fuller demographic information than did Harbage and interprets it differently. After discussing the evidence that the privileged formed a significant presence in London during the period, she argues that the theaters were situated and built to cater to that presence. The playhouses were located within easy range for the privileged

¹¹ Cook notes that Harbage describes the "cleavage between the morality and the aesthetic worth of private and public drama, with the audience determining the nature of the plays in both cases" (5), and that his work has had a considerable influence on scholars. For examples she refers to Gerald Eades Bentley's The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941-1968) and volume two of Glynne Wickham's Early English Stages, 1300-1600 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972). See also Michael Shapiro, Children of the Revels: the Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and Their Plays (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). Shapiro assumes the characteristics of public theater audiences as Harbage has described them.

of London; indeed, the Theater and the Curtain were located near a traditional recreational area of the privileged. The theaters were obviously constructed so that the two and three pence seats outnumbered room for the groundlings at least two to one (186-87). Clearly, the money for the public theater owners was in the galleries.

Cook also presents some strong evidence that it was only on holidays and occasional Sundays that commoners in London attended plays in relatively high numbers. The work hours for apprentices and journeymen--five to seven in the summer, seven to five in the winter--and the pressure to keep them at work made it unlikely that they would more than rarely attend a play on a workday afternoon, when public performances were held (224-28). For a man who only took home three to seven pence a day and had to feed, clothe, and shelter himself and perhaps a family, the price of a ticket was, simply, too high (232). Cook discounts the diatribes against the theaters and their effects on commoners, and playwrights' comments about the commoners. She argues that they are biased, political, and, therefore, exaggerated and untrustworthy (263).

The chief complaint against The Privileged Playgoers has been that Cook is guilty of oversimplification. Both Martin Butler and Andrew Gurr criticize Cook for too easily dismissing those contemporary complaints and their significance, for ignoring additional evidence that less privileged commoners frequently attended the theaters, and for failing to sufficiently distinguish between the audiences of public theaters, much less between public and

private theater audiences.¹² Yet both scholars appreciate her evidence for the significant presence of the privileged in the public theater audiences, and Gurr acknowledges that "even a small section of the privileged in any audience might have exercised a disproportionate influence over the whole" (4). Those who had recently entered the gentle ranks from the commons--merchants and the sons of prosperous yeomen, craftsmen, and merchants--and any commoners with enough income and leisure time were among the privileged that Cook argues did regularly attend plays. I think that the commoner-heroes in several of the plays discussed herein were especially meant to entertain and/or instruct these commoners and recent commoners. With the obvious exception of Robin Hood in The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington, most of the commoner-heroes in these plays reflect certain interests of the commons in general, but of the upper economic levels of the commons most of all. All of the plays have a strong ideological conservatism revealed in a variety of conflicts.

The Elizabethans were not a passive audience, and the public theater as social institution was one means for these commoners to "actively engage in public life" (Bristol 57), to some extent as they had in the pageants and other public spectacles. Through hoots, whistles, and applause, by choosing one playhouse over another and buying tickets, even by their dress, imitations of aristocratic behavior, and other expressions of desires and values, commoners had a

¹² At least two reviewers of the book have also made this last point, John Leeds Barroll, in Modern Philology 81 (1984): 418, and Alan C. Dessen, in Comparative Drama 16 (1982): 374. For Butler's remarks see Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) Appendix II. Gurr's appear in Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 3-4.

part in the shaping and reception of the commoner-hero on stage.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMMONER-HERO AND POLITICAL REBELLION

The plays discussed in this chapter, Shakespeare's The Second Part of King Henry VI and the anonymous The Life and Death of Jack Straw, present politically conservative ideology that is expressed, in part, through the characterizations of commoners. In both plays, a commoner who represents an overturning of conservative values is vanquished by a commoner-hero who embodies those values. The ideology in these plays should be evaluated with the writing situation in mind. Each play appeared on the public stage before London audiences who were generally conservative, that is, who wished to preserve the current moral, social, economic, and political order. The plays appeared in the late 1580s or early 1590s, in the midst of an enduring period of social unrest in London and around the country. Before discussing the plays, it will be useful to gain an understanding of the nature of that unrest.

POPULAR PROTESTS

Much of the social unrest during this period centered on England's war efforts. The general patriotic fervor that came with the defeat of the Armada in 1588 soured somewhat with ensuing military campaigns against Spain. England attempted to aid Henry IV of France in his power struggle

with Spain by sending, in 1589, 1591, and 1592, men and money across the Channel. Both men and money were wasted. Between 1589 and 1593, England sent more than 17,800 troops into the conflict. Desertions ran high, and some criticized Elizabeth harshly, for the taxation burden as well as for the losses in men. Members of the London populace would hurl complaints during her processions through London (Somerset 490). Lord Burghley, one of Elizabeth's chief advisers, noted in 1592 that "the realm here is weary to see the expense of their people for foreign services" (qtd. in Somerset 490). The complaints by many commoners about England's war efforts were not based solely on the hardships and loss of life, but on differences in socioeconomic status as well. The practice by some nobles and prosperous commoners of paying people to take their places in the campaigns was bitterly resented by many commoners who lacked the money to take advantage of that practice.¹

Discontent over the war was compounded by crop failures and economic distress during this period. The commoners' complaints about economic troubles were not, of course, new. Price inflation, vagrancy and other problems created by enclosures, the surge in population, and the displacement of the rural commoners to the cities, especially London, had occurred over a long period of time. What is most pertinent to the writing and early performances of 2 Henry VI and Jack Straw is the role that artisans played in protests against government policies.

When economic conditions were harsh, they were hardest

¹ Literature from the period that refers to this practice includes two plays discussed in this study, Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday and Shakespeare's The Second Part of Henry IV

on the less prosperous commoners, the majority of whom were "artificers and laborers," according to William Harrison's The Description of England (1577). This group included, in part, "tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons, etc." who were not freemen, that is, members of the livery companies and citizens of London (Harrison 118). These artisans were in a more precarious position than yeomen, whose land provided a relatively stable asset, and most London citizens, who usually enjoyed some security because of their company affiliations.² Noncitizen artisans held no such security, depending entirely on their skills in an unstable marketplace for their employment and their sustenance. The sometimes extreme economic fluctuations and the poor harvests of the 80s and 90s meant that artisans especially suffered in comparison to these upper-level commoner groups (Sharp 6-7).³ Food riots occurred during these years in major ports and distribution centers such as Kent, Southampton, and Norfolk. In general, artisans, laborers, and groups of women attempted to gain control of grain shipments. The major insurrection of commoners in Hampshire in 1586 (as later, in 1596, in Oxfordshire) grew out of the misery caused by enclosures and high food prices, and, "almost to a man, the participants . . . were artisans drawn from the wide range of trades" in rural England (Sharp 13). These protests probably included craftsmen with company affiliations.

London citizens were generally loyal to the crown, but

² However, even freemen were not guaranteed employment in times of economic hardship. See Joseph P. Ward, Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) 57-72.

³ These severe conditions are described in Chapter 1 of this study.

London was the site of a large number of protests. Records show that "no part of England was troubled by popular protest to such a degree as London. Between 1581 and 1602, the city was disturbed by no fewer than 35 outbursts of disorder" (Manning 187). These 35 incidents in only a 20-year period constitute more than one-third of the popular disorders in the period covered by Manning's study, 1517-1640 (187). The identifiable causes of these 35 London protests can be traced to socioeconomic difficulties. Manning minimizes the economic basis, finding that "at the very most" twelve protests could be attributed to economic factors. Of the others whose causes are known, he says, twelve were against the administration of justice, four were against alien workers, and four against gentlemen and lawyers (187). The three categories that Manning considers to lie outside the realm of economics are, in fact, at least partly based on socioeconomic stresses. The protest against alien workers arose, it would seem likely, more from the increased competition for resources than mere national prejudice. Alien workers were popularly blamed for taking jobs that would have gone to native English, especially in London, where so many foreigners settled (Unwin 247). Differences in income and status also lie at the bottom of many commoners' complaints against iniquities in the justice system, as the plays discussed in this chapter demonstrate so well. The desire to possess what another has--money, land, security, status, justice, liberty, knowledge--or to keep wealth for oneself should never be far from our minds as we consider the values expressed in these plays.

In her book Shakespeare and the Popular Voice, Annabel Patterson argues that the protests during this period are the manifestations of England's cultural tradition of popular protest. Patterson thinks that literary scholars traditionally have read the incidents of popular protests through the perspective of the dominant elite culture. The protests have been seen as spontaneous responses to needs (hunger, for example) and wants (status), as if commoners were unable to formulate political goals and plan a sustained campaign. Patterson counters that assumption with convincing evidence and reasoning to support the view that the commons held a self-conscious tradition of protest "transmitted [in] symbolic forms and signifying practices, a history from below encoded in names and occasions, a memorial vocabulary and even a formal rhetoric" (38). An example of the tradition germane to this chapter is the allegorical adoption of the names "Wat Tyler" and, especially, "Jack Straw" by the leaders of many popular rebellions (Pettitt 8-9).

We must, however, read 2 Henry VI and Jack Straw in light of other contextual elements, especially the playwrights' artistic and material ambitions, the conservative bias of the London audiences, and the city and national governments' efforts to control the theater. The cultural materials related to popular protests underwent changes as they were adapted to the professional stage, to the point that these two plays cannot be categorized as "history from below," at least not without identifying significant qualifications to that "history." The stage was

a site for the reworking of materials and the incorporating of various ideological strands. In both plays, disorder and the fear of disorder are central; real-life popular protests offered the material for authors' thematic explorations with a conservative bent. Recent insurrections also heightened social tensions. The conservative gentles and prosperous commoners who may have dominated attendance at London public theaters could appreciate or identify with the plays' commoner-heroes and contrast themselves with the rebels, figures of chaos. To a large degree, these plays exemplify the containment of subversion by a centrally-controlled culture that Greenblatt describes.

This is not to say that the potential for disruptive moments did not occur as audiences watched the plays. The cultural tensions that occurred along social and economic lines contributed enormously to the complexity of ideological representations and the ways that they were perceived. As the discussions of the plays will show, cultural issues are not manipulated by the playwrights without ideological inconsistencies occurring.

THE SECOND PART OF KING HENRY VI

Jack Cade's Monstrous Perspective

The Jack Cade episode in 2 Henry VI has attracted considerable scholarly attention because Shakespeare "seems to take sides on a political issue of enormous importance, that real nightmare of the Tudor political establishment,

namely, rebellion" (Pugliatti, Shakespeare 155).⁴

Shakespeare's unique importance in Western cultures makes questions about his politics important. For example, where did he stand on such matters as social structure and the relationship between the individual and the government? These questions have tended to be conceived, although not overtly framed, in modern terms: was Shakespeare a conservative or a liberal?⁵

As Paola Pugliatti notes, the Cade episode has been used to support the contradictory views that Shakespeare was a populist and that he was an antipopulist (Shakespeare 155). Alexander Leggatt leans to the populist side, calling Jack Cade, in his better moments, "one of the most articulate social critics in Shakespeare" (Shakespeare's Political Drama 18). A sympathetic Michael Hattaway argues that

Cade's rebellion in Shakespeare's text is a political act and not a moral aberration or manifestation of base passion . . . or of duncical folly. . . . Cade's rebels seek reformation and liberty, not anarchy. . . . They are not simply reacting to violations of a time-hallowed order of landed society . . . , but are proposing a new egalitarian and libertarian order. (ed., 2 Henry VI 27-28)

Hattaway's statement gives Cade's rebellion an air of

⁴ Most scholars think that Shakespeare collaborated with at least one other playwright on this play, their opinions based on stylistic analyses and on hypotheses about the manner in which Shakespeare's career developed. See Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor's William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 72-74, for a summary of this view. It is possible that Shakespeare wrote 2 Henry VI by himself, and Michael Hattaway concludes that insufficient evidence exists to disqualify the assumption that Heminges and Condell were correct in establishing 2 Henry VI as essentially Shakespeare's (ed., 2 Henry VI 61).

⁵ In Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) 40-46, Phyllis Rackin succinctly describes the division in scholarly opinions on this question, from E. M. W. Tillyard's Shakespeare's History Plays (1944) to the views of new historicists and cultural materialists in the 1980s.

seriousness and sincerity that the text does not support. In an earlier article, Hattaway had argued with some success that "in the beginning of his career Shakespeare was not a pillar of the establishment . . . but was himself a radical" ("Rebellion" 15). Jack Cade does not, however, represent some sort of radical philosophy in Shakespeare's play. From the moment he appears on stage, every high-minded utterance of Cade's is undercut by the comments of his fellow rebels, by his own words, and by his actions. The legitimate raising of socioeconomic issues in the play occurs elsewhere than in the rebel figure Cade.

Many scholars have seen Cade's rebellion as a mirror of the nobles' self-interest; the play emphasizes the actions of the upper tiers of the hierarchy, not the commoners' insurrection. Dissension shakes "the whole frame of Respublica," leading to "the impious spectacle of the proper order reversed" (Tillyard 174, 183). The rebellion in the play is, in part, a product of the war with France, which is to say that the disorder begins at the top of the political hierarchy.⁶ While the rebellion has great thematic importance for the play, its action is confined largely to Act 4. Norman Sanders describes these scenes as "a dramatization of the destructive forces unleashed by division, stripped bare of their courtly trappings, the pretensions to civilized behaviour, and the semblance of the legal process" (33). Leggatt argues that

the explosive anarchy of Cade, threatening to blow the play apart, actually enlarges its vision so that we are made to think of lives beyond those of

⁶ Hattaway admits that "the political focus [of the play] is on the way the loss of empire breeds further insurrection by the colonized, by the nobles, and by the people" (ed , 2 Henry VI 6)

the nobles, and of questions that never enter the minds of characters like York and Warwick. (22)

We do "think of lives beyond those of the nobles," but those lives never take on a significance beyond their relationship to the central themes of the play. Without doubt, the primary importance of Cade's story is as a thematic extension of political intrigue by the nobility. Cade is meant to illustrate the frightening possibilities created by the pursuit of individual gain rather than common good, a theme shared by all of the plays discussed in this study.

Cade is the tool of the Duke of York, instigating popular unrest so that York can more easily usurp the throne (see 3.1.355 ff.).⁷ York's puppet is arrogant, ignorant, and cunning, ready to cross the boundaries of civilized behavior at a whim. Among Cade's sins in the play, he has the aged and well-meaning Lord Say beheaded, his head stuck on a pole and paraded before the London populace, "kissing" the head of his son-in-law. Cade makes himself a knight, and then kills a soldier shortly after for omitting his new title. The clerk of Chartham is slain for being able to do calculations and write his name. Among the list of what Cade calls "crimes" are honesty, intelligence, and doing one's duty to England; Cade crushes them with disdain.

After the reading of charges against the clerk, Cade exclaims "O monstrous" (4.2.71). He ironically defines his own perspective. In Shakespeare's play Jack Cade is the monster, the force of self-interest unbridled by compassion for others. The one instance in which Cade appears to have

a conscience occurs during Lord Say's examination, but the

⁷ All references to lines in the play are to Michael Hattaway's edition of The Second Part of King Henry VI (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1991).

moment is immediately made absurd. In an aside, Cade says, "I feel remorse in myself with his words; but I'll bridle it: he shall die, an it be but for pleading so well for his life" (4.7.90-91). What slight restraint Cade exercises is in the wrong direction. The effect of unleashing desire is chaos.

Before Cade even appears in the play, any dignity that the rebellion might have had is undercut by the comic dialogue between Bevis and Holland. These two commoners make puns on the occupations of the tanner of Wingham, Dick the butcher, and Smith the weaver, creating a light mood. These named artisans then pick up the thread of pointed humor, and Cade's testimony regarding his (supposed) noble blood, leadership qualities, and political purpose appears ridiculous in conjunction with their running commentary:

CADE My father was a Mortimer--
 DICK [Aside] He was an honest man, and a good bricklayer.
 CADE My mother a Plantagenet--
 DICK [Aside] I knew her well; she was a midwife.
 CADE My wife descended of the Lacies--
 DICK [Aside] She was indeed a pedlar's daughter, and sold many laces.
 SMITH [Aside] But now of late, not able to travel with her furred pack, she washes bucks here at home.
 CADE Therefore am I of an honourable house.
 DICK [Aside] Ay, by my faith, the field is honourable; and there was he born under a hedge, for his father had never a house but the cage.
 (4.2.31-43)

Their play with language--Mortimer/mortar, Lacies/laces, and so forth--ridicules Cade by contrasting his noble pretensions with his base reality. The absurdity of the figure Jack Cade is also born out in his own bizarre, self-serving reasoning. One instance occurs when he finds out

that the clerk of Chartham's name is Emmanuel. This makes the case against the clerk even worse, in Cade's mind, because "they use to write it [Emmanuel] on the top of letters" (4.2.81). Cade would like to see all records and record keepers eliminated so that "all the realm shall be in common" (4.2.56). He really desires, as his actions have shown, that property will belong to those who have the power to seize it.

The combination of absurdities and extreme violence has led C. L. Barber, in Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, to liken Cade's rebellion to a saturnalia in which "release for impulses which run counter to decency and decorum" leads to "clarification about limits which comes from going beyond the limits" (13).⁸ A saturnalia permits rebellious impulses, containing them within the hierarchy; Shakespeare's dramatic structure contains the saturnalian moment within the larger story of political intrigue on the national and international scale.⁹ The play's structure is similar to that of Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday, in which a much more pleasant "saturnalia" for the commons is bounded by the concerns of a nobleman and the edicts of a king.¹⁰

When watching 2 Henry VI, the audience witnesses unbounded

⁸ Thomas Pettitt points out that Elizabethan audiences may have recognized that Cade's intention to have the populace wear one livery echoed the tradition of the Lord of Misrule, who invested his chosen men with liveries. See "'Here Comes I, Jack Straw' English Folk Drama and Social Revolt," Folklore 95 (1984): 10.

⁹ Michael Hattaway, who argues for a more populist Shakespeare, rejects Barber's reading of the episode by noting that 2 Henry VI "does not end harmoniously, and issues, if they are clarified, are not resolved" (ed., 2 Henry VI 23).

¹⁰ In Shakespeare the Historian (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), Paola Pugliatti notes that the humor in the Cade rebellion is "not the liberating and festive laughter of the carnival tradition; it [is] the grim, bitter, moralistic laughter that comes from the grotesque" (170). While the humor may not always be "grim," Pugliatti is accurate in recognizing that the rebellion is the target of the humor.

desire and its containment within the power structure, and "learns" from the experience.

Cade in Shakespeare's Sources

The process by which this monstrous perspective became part of the play involves some interesting choices by Shakespeare. Jack Cade's 1450 rebellion was part of cultural lore; one scholar has called him the "Elizabethan archetype of disorder" (Reese 122). Cade is, for example, represented in the 1559 edition of The Mirror for Magistrates, where he allows "the skyl God hath in Reason wrought" to be overcome by his own "lust and wil" (1.7). As Geoffrey Bullough and other scholars have shown, the direct sources for the play included the chronicles written by Edward Hall, Raphael Holinshed, and Richard Grafton, and John Foxe's Actes and Monuments of Martyrs, with all of the material relating to Cade's rebellion coming from the chronicles.

The chronicles did not, in effect, belong to the entire culture, for they were not accessible to all. One reason is that not everyone could read. Determining literacy in the culture is impossible, as studies have demonstrated, but research indicates that literate Elizabethans were the same people who frequented the theaters--gentles and the upper levels of the commons. This information supports the idea of a split in the culture, where written texts, with their accompanying values, circulated through reading and performance within only a portion of the populace. A second reason for limited accessibility to these texts was the cost

of the chronicles, printed in folio, at a pound or more each.

Although all four of these texts were connected to the popular culture, the shaping influence of the chroniclers' biases over all the material is apparent.¹¹ A representative instance occurs in Hall's chronicle in the 24th year of Henry's reign. Hall writes of a "greate insurreccion in Norwiche, against the Prior," for "certain newe exaccions, which the Prior claimed and toke of the citezens, contrary to their auncient fredomes and vsages." Despite this considerable injustice to the people of Norwich, the chronicle emphasizes the disruption of order. Hall writes that after the King restored "auncient fredomes," the leaders were punished and executed. The protesters had not taken proper recourse, but "erred and went out of the pathe, [and so] by punishement brought again to a very straight trade and the right waie" (208). Cade's Kentish rebellion fares no better. What credit Hall gives to their cause-- "the Kentishmen be impacient in wronges disdayning of to much oppression"--he immediately dashes--"and ever desirous of new chaung, and new fangelnes" (220). A conservative viewpoint dominates all three chronicles.

Shakespeare uses this bias as a starting point from which to develop a character representing unlimited desire. His representation of the story of Jack Cade ignores certain details in the chronicles that demonstrate some ability and credibility in Cade, despite his role as York's puppet, which the chronicles represent as being factual. The

¹¹ Chroniclers sometimes directly or indirectly relied on legends, facts, and tales derived from popular culture, materials which were combined with clerical records, manuscripts by scholars and nobility, and the oral traditions of the gentles.

Archbishop of Canterbury and Buckingham, sent by the King to talk to the rebels, "found [Jack Cade] sober in comunicacion, wyse in disputyng, arrogant in hart, and styfe in his opinion" (Hall 221). Cade is described as "a youngman of a goodely stature, and pregnant wit" (220). Upon entering Southwark, says Hall, Cade prohibited his men from "Murder, Rape, or Robbery" of the populace, although "open rapyn and manifest robbery" did occur after the deaths of Say and Cromer (221). These details of Cade's qualities and behavior contrast with the ignorant, greedy, vile character of 2 Henry VI.

Just as striking is the information that Shakespeare found in the stories of the 1381 Peasant Revolt and adapted to his play.¹² The campaign against men of law and the Inns of Court, the destruction of legal records and of books, and the setting loose of prisoners: all of these events belong to the uprising led by John Ball and Wat Tyler/Jack Straw, as described by the three chroniclers. Their actions threatened more than establishment of property ownership; they struck at language and law, two foundation stones of the culture. Shakespeare has Cade commit these transgressions.¹³

Notice, as well, the following speech by John Ball, as reported in Holinshed:

. . . to consider that now the time was come appointed to them by God, in which they might (if they would) cast off the yoke of bondage, & recover libertie. He counselled them therefore to remember themselues, and to take good hearts vnto

¹² Cade's rebellion occurred in 1450.

¹³ The differences between the play and Shakespeare's sources include changes to the characters of nobility similar to those Shakespeare made to Cade. See Pugliatti's Shakespeare the Historian 155-63

them, that after the manner of a good husband that tilleth his ground, and riddeth out thereof such euill weeds as choke and destroie the good corne, they might destroie first the great lords of the realme, and after the iudges and lawiers, questmoongers, and all other whom he vndertooke to be against the commons; for so might they procure peace and suertie to themselues in time to come, if, dispatching out of the waie the great men, there should be an equalitie in libertie, no difference in degrees of nobilitie, but a like dignitie and equall authoritie in all things brought in among them. (748)

Despite the violence in the speech, Ball's desire for "dignitie and equall authoritie," for freedom from those who oppressed them, might have appealed to even the most conservative London citizen. But Shakespeare reduces this impressive speech to the ridiculous promise, from Cade's mouth, of "seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny" and the brief rallying cry of "Now show yourselves men; 'tis for liberty. We will not leave one lord, one gentleman" (4.2.34, 157-58).

There is no question of Shakespeare's intended use of the figure of Jack Cade, in whom he assimilated all manner of violations of civilized boundaries. From various bits he created one monstrous perspective, unified by self-interest.

The London Audience and Jack Cade

Cade dies by the sword of Alexander Iden, a member of the gentry and the commoner-hero of the play. Like Cade, Iden lives in Kent, but he is Cade's anti-type, standing for everything Cade does not, representing values that many gentles, merchants, and tradesmen would have liked to see in themselves. He first appears walking in his garden,

thinking aloud:

Lord, who would live turmoiled in the court
 And may enjoy such quiet walks as these?
 This small inheritance my father left me
 Contenteth me, and worth a monarchy.
 I seek not to wax great by others' waning
 Or gather wealth I care not with what envy:
 Sufficeth that I have maintains my state
 And sends the poor well pleased from my gate.
 (4.10.14-21)

Iden's lack of ambition--Cade's "Fie on ambitions!" just before Iden's entrance emphasizes this quality--his desire to never profit at another's expense, and his charity contrast not only with Cade's desires, but with those of York, Suffolk, and the other grasping nobility.

Iden also comes off much better than King Henry. Like Gloucester, he is a man of action; in this case, he is the warrior who destroys the enemy of the state.¹⁴ The clarity of his accomplishment sharply contrasts with Henry's reluctance to take those steps that would solve England's problems.¹⁵ If many commoners identified with Iden, then his judgment and strength of will, superior to the King's, make him another of the commoner-heroes whose abilities are superior to those above him in station.¹⁶

¹⁴ Did the consciences of audience members register misgivings when brave Iden thrust his sword into a weakened Cade, who had not eaten for five days? Both Alexander Leggatt and Michael Hattaway believe that this part of the scene undercuts Iden's legitimacy as a representative of moral order. Leggatt argues that Iden "shows . . . no stoic calm, certainly no Christian forgiveness, just hatred" (*Shakespeare's Political Drama* 22). Hattaway adds that, if seen allegorically, Iden's greater size and strength are allegorically appropriate, but that, with Cade's death, a David and Goliath effect occurs, swaying our sympathy (ed., *2 Henry VI* 33). I think it likely that audience members skimmed over this rough spot if they noticed it at all. Cade has been made a monster, and his decline is inevitable punishment for his sins. Iden is a neatly-written champion of conservative values.

¹⁵ At least according to one perspective that many in the audience would share. It can be argued that Shakespeare's play suggests inadequacies in each perspective: Gloucester's, Henry's, York's, and so on.

¹⁶ Variations of this type of commoner-hero occur in other plays in this study, in Thomas Deloney's prose fiction of the 1590s, and in ballads and folk tales.

For London citizens, the polarized values represented in Cade and Iden would have resonated. The relatively high number of protests that occurred in London between 1581 and 1602 primarily involved artisans and laborers (Manning 187) who were not citizens and were especially vulnerable in economically unstable times. Apprentices, who occupied the lowest rung of London citizenship and had virtually no economic power, also took part in a number of disturbances. Socioeconomic differences among London commoners had much to do, then, with real social protest and with the ways audience members perceived and related to the characters in these dramatized rebellions.¹⁷ The prosperous commoners who likely made up a significant portion of the audience would have seen a vast difference between themselves--hardworking, moral, and loyal citizens of the great city, from their view--and the rural, crude, rebellious artisans from Kent. The play tells the story of a weak king and bad government; rebellion may have been understandable under such circumstances, but not acceptable to citizens solidly behind their Queen in the 1590s. Penry Williams, in his study The Tudor Regime, finds that, in general, London was "almost invariably loyal to the Tudors" (316). In the play, London citizens reject Jack Cade, as well. When Cade wins London Bridge, "the citizens fly and forsake their houses" (4.4.50, my italics).

Social and material status is also an important component in the commoner-hero Iden as well. He not only represents the moral and patriotic values that most, if not

¹⁷ The Londoners who joined the Kentish rebels in 1450 included prisoners. Grafton characterized these London rebels as "suche as had great envy at them that were riche" (Chronicle 130)

all, of the audience would consider their own, he also represents the socioeconomic fantasy of many commoners. Legendary tales of hard-working commoners attaining gentlemanly status and even knighthood lived in the ballads and folk tales; histories show that the fantasy was realized from time to time, and increasingly so in the late sixteenth century. Although he was not a particularly wealthy gentleman--"one so rude and of so mean condition," as he humbly describes himself before the King (5.1.64)--what Iden possessed--his estate and the King's gifts of knighthood and a thousand marks--citizens and yeomen could obtain, or so it seemed. For these reasons, many commoners, especially the materially well-off, would have viewed Iden as their champion, although he is a gentleman.¹⁸

The effect of Shakespeare's representation of Cade's rebellion is, in part, the creation of an "us against them" perspective in most of the audience, and the recent protests in London and across the country over economic difficulties would have intensified the audience reaction.¹⁹ Iden represents an ideology that links property with patriotism, moral behavior, humility, and bravery. Shakespeare created the character, and his presence in the play helps clarify the distinction between good stewardship and bad. Iden protects--his property, the poor, and his country--rather than destroy. As a low ranking member of the gentles, just above the commoners in the social scale, Iden provides a

¹⁸ Before the King rewards him with knighthood, Iden is an esquire, the lowest rank of the gentles

¹⁹ Conflict produced by difference in wealth and social status is refigured in the character Dick the Butcher, prominent member of Cade's rebellion in the play. He would probably have evoked memories of Kett's rebellion in 1549, the most prominent uprising of rural craftsmen in the sixteenth century, and one in which butchers played a major role (Hattaway, ed., 2 Henry VI 30).

counterexample to Cade, his social pretensions, his desire to disrupt civil order, and his selfishness. Iden does not pretend to be a gentleman, he is one, an idealized representation of the gentle ranks. The presence of Iden, the good steward, in the play is evidence of the opinion held by a number of scholars that 2 Henry VI supports the dominant position of the social strata that held most of the wealth in Elizabethan England.²⁰

Commoners and the Social Order

Commoners other than Jack Cade figure significantly in the ideology expressed in the play, as Shakespeare further develops the theme of self-interest versus the common good, which he applies to the entire realm, from top to bottom. These commoners and the socioeconomic issues that are related to them are not, as some would have it, Shakespeare the populist making a plea for the commons. The events that occur are less important in themselves than as symptoms of the general malaise. While a few potentially ideological disruptive moments occur in the scenes involving these commoners, the author generally demonstrates good control of

²⁰ David Bevington writes in Tudor Drama and Politics A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) that the play "ridicule[s] . . . Utopian communism" (239). In The Politics of Shakespeare (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), Derek Cohen argues that in Shakespeare's plays, "the poor person is represented as a defective rich person" (58). Of the poor in 2 Henry VI he says that "their sheer 'otherness' in the England of the play is that of dark, strange, bestial foreigners from whom the rest of society needs protection" (59). Also see Stephen Greenblatt's "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion," Representing the English Renaissance, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 1-29. Greenblatt sees Shakespeare's history play as a variation on heroic literature. In order to protect the dignity of the nobility, Shakespeare has a property owner rather than an aristocrat defeat the lowly Cade. In this way, "status relations . . . are being transformed before our eyes into property relations, and the concern, as in Sidney and Spenser, for maintaining social and even cosmic boundaries is reconceived as a concern for maintaining freehold boundaries" (25).

his material and a relatively coherent point of view.

In the play as a whole, Shakespeare carefully sets up opposing perspectives on order in society, politics, and morality. In Gloucester's conversation with his wife, Eleanor, he chastises her for her ambitions, saying, in part, "Hast thou not worldly pleasure at command / Above the reach or compass of thy thought?" (1.2.45-46). Gloucester believes in an ordered existence in which one has specific responsibilities. Thought has "compass" or limit appropriate to one's place in the order, and Gloucester has difficulty imagining beyond that limit. York, in contrast, conceives of an existence in which he determines order. For York, perspectives are malleable; Cade, as his agent, not only allows York to "perceive the commons' mind" (3.1.374), but also helps him alter it.

The commons' perspective is also polarized. Cade's monstrous perspective aligns with York's and dominates Act 4, but the muted voice of traditional social order in the commons is also heard in the play.²¹ Three episodes in 2 Henry VI that feature commoners especially demonstrate this second perspective: the petitioners' scene, the conflict between Horner and his apprentice, and the dialogue between Bevis and Holland. Gloucester's view is generally reflected by characters in these scenes, a view with which the citizens in the audience probably would have identified.

In the third scene of Act I, petitioners (commoners)

²¹ Edna Boris points out that, other than Cade and his closest followers, commoners in the first tetralogy "are consistently shown . . . to be loyal to the commonwealth, to be preoccupied with traditional rights and roles, and to be supportive of those who respect them." See Shakespeare's English Kings, the People, and the Law (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson, 1978) 128.

initially mistake Suffolk for Gloucester, Lord Protector, and Suffolk forces them to hand over their petitions. This scene principally contrasts the two men in their attitude towards the commons. Suffolk and Queen Margaret, like the other "corrupt" characters in the play--York, Eleanor, the Cardinal, and even Cade--scorn the commons, and their self-interest and arrogance come off poorly against Gloucester's belief in duty and compassion.

Suffolk cares not a bit about the first two petitions. Transgressions have been committed by "John Goodman, my lord cardinal's man" and Suffolk himself; in referring to these acts, the scene invokes the themes of social order and property rights. The first petitioner complains about Goodman's "keeping my house and lands and wife and all from me." An agent of the crown has violated this yeoman's rights of property and the legal bond of marriage. The second petitioner, who represents his town, delivers a grievance "against the Duke of Suffolk, for enclosing the commons of Melford," denying these people ancient rights and the material means of prospering, if not existing. The petitions are soon torn up with disdain by the Queen. In real life these complaints were not new. Most of the citizens in the audience would not have identified with Cade's crude rural artisans, but they would probably have sympathized with these long-standing complaints against misuse of power by the gentles. Note that the scene comes early in the play, making this kinder representation of commoners petitioning the government part of the exposition, establishing them, generally, as part of the social order long before Cade appears in the play. At the same time,

this scene helps establish the principles that will be violated when self-interest rules.

The third petitioner is Peter, the armorer's apprentice, who accuses his master, Thomas Horner, of treason. The conflict between Peter and his master, which does not conclude until 2.3, parallels the juxtaposed actions and words of the court and parodies the nobility's violations of social order. First, the false accusations against Gloucester are followed by Horner's confession of genuine treasonous remarks. Second, the ascribing of Peter's victory to God when Horner's drunkenness is the cause satirizes King Henry, who sees the will of God in all things, and his inability to see the the practical cause contrasts with Gloucester's perceptive exposure of Simpcox's fraud. Third, the antagonism between master and apprentice also parallels the dissension demonstrated in Margaret's striking of Eleanor and in the competition between York and Somerset over the regency in France.

The master/apprentice conflict would have presented an especially interesting dramatic situation, as so many in Shakespeare's audience would have belonged to one of the great London companies, and it is one of the most problematic episodes involving commoners in the play. The relationship between master and apprentice was not just a matter of law, it was also a critical link in the cultural organization of labor. Seeing an apprentice accuse his master of treason and then kill him in a duel would likely have raised conflicting feelings in the commoners watching the play. On the one hand, treason had been found out. On

the other lay the upsetting of the hierarchy.²² In his article "Treason in the Family: The Trial of Thumpe v. Horner," Craig Bernthal reasons that the conflict would have divided sympathies, with masters "form[ing] one cheering section and apprentices another" (50). Bernthal discusses the significance for this play of the Tudor fears of instability and the tying of family order to political order (44). The master/apprentice relationship had its familial aspects, and, therefore, Peter's killing of his master amounts to "a kind of patricide" (50). In summarizing the social ramifications of this conflict and its outcome, Bernthal underscores the deep and subtle fears that existed:

While the scene offers satisfaction in Horner's defeat, it also sets forth the disquieting reality that people are not safe to speak their minds even in their own homes, that loyalty to the family and loyalty to the state are in fact at odds, and that, while a state cannot exist without stability in the family, the state's very efforts to purge itself of treason could undermine the harmony of family life and, in the long run, the state itself. (50)

The dramatic situation is even more complex for the London citizen than Bernthal argues. He states that Shakespeare makes Peter as "innocuous"--"stupidly honest, disingenuous, and pious"--as possible to make him heroic (51). The result is that this part of the play has the "superficial" appearance of a David and Goliath story, with Peter representing David, which thereby validates the King's rule (44). I see two problems with reading the character in

²² Craig Bernthal points out that Q1, one of the quartos apparently used in contemporary performances, emphasizes this conflict. Upon Horner's death, the apprentices shout, "Ho well done Peter God save the King" they express loyalty to the crown rather than to their masters. See "Treason in the Family: The Trial of Thumpe v Horner," Shakespeare Quarterly 42 (1991) 50 These lines are not found in Heminges and Condell's folio

this way. To begin with, Peter comes off a bit cowardly and Horner strong and masculine when Gloucester decides on "single combat." Peter protests, "Alas, my lord, I cannot fight; for God's sake pity my case! The spite of man prevaiileth against me. O lord, have mercy upon me! I shall never be able to fight a blow. O Lord, my heart!" (1.3.208-10). Peter sounds nothing like the play's model of dutiful action, the good Duke of Gloucester; Peter displays little faith in the righteousness of his cause. His passivity reminds us too well of Henry's weakness as a ruler. The second objection is that the armorer's drunkenness taints the victory. The scene does not present even the shadow of Virtue defeating Corruption. Rather, with a quaking, blathering apprentice on one side and a drunken master on the other, the "single combat" is a joke. The scene does not even "superficially" support one "right" perspective. Instead, the master versus apprentice conflict likely evoked a confusing array of feelings in the London citizen. The episode parallels the conflicts within the noble ranks, and is another instance of humor directed at the commons, but it presents, as well, potential for ideological disruption.

The third episode involving commoners in which a faith in traditional order is expressed comes just before Jack Cade appears. The dialogue between Bevis and Holland has its place in a regressive view of the commons, from the humble petitioners to the rather complex master/apprentice conflict, to the attempted fraud by Simpcox and his wife: each representation of commoners moves closer to the unrestrained self-interest of Cade. The dialogue, which occurs at the beginning of the scene (4.2), prepares for

Cade's entrance by creating a light tone, with silliness, puns, and absurdities. The dialogue is short enough that it can be repeated here:

BEVIS Come and get thee a sword, though made of a lath: they have been up these two days.
 HOLLAND They have the more need to sleep now then.
 BEVIS I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it.
 HOLLAND So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say, it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up.
 BEVIS O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handicraftsmen.
 HOLLAND True: and yet it is said, "Labour in thy vocation": which is as much to say, as let the magistrates be labouring men; and therefore should we be magistrates.
 BEVIS Thou hast hit it: for there's no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand.
 [A drum heard approaching]
 HOLLAND I see them! I see them! There's Best's son, the tanner of Wingham.
 BEVIS He shall have the skins of our enemies, to make dog's-leather of.
 HOLLAND And Dick the butcher.
 BEVIS Then is sin struck down like an ox, and iniquity's throat cut like a calf.
 HOLLAND And Smith the weaver.
 BEVIS Argo, their thread of life is spun.
 HOLLAND Come, come, let's fall in with them.
 (11. 1-25)²³

As a number of scholars have noted, the lath sword was a prop associated with the Vice character in morality plays, and Shakespeare is clearly poking fun at the rebellion. Yet such a visual symbol is hardly needed. The first part of the dialogue alone sets the tone. Yes, the times are "miserable" in the play, and "the king's council are no good workmen." But some of the words these commoners utter--"it was never merry world in England since gentlemen came up"

²³ "Bevis" and "Holland" are the actors' names.

and "there's no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand," for example--sound much like aphorisms; they are typical, worn out complaints against the nobility, further trivialized by the silliness of the characters. The sentence, "O miserable age!" is trite and over dramatic. The suggestion that nobility should go around in leather aprons would sound absurd to most of the audience members, just as much as the suggestion that artisans become magistrates. Once again, the theme of order overturned appears. And Bevis and Holland's puns on the others' trades in the second part of the speech makes ridiculous what the characters (ostensibly) meant to sound threatening. The scene offers comic relief, and the commoners look rather silly.²⁴ Their dialogue is intended to be "a crude burlesque . . . of the peers' better-phrased concern for the state" (Sanders 33).

There are other moments in the play in which issues important to the commons are raised, but their existence in the play is not a result of subversive intent, and they seem unlikely even to be ideologically disruptive. For example, the war in France had cost many lives, a fact referred to by Gloucester in act 1, scene 1,²⁵ and the tax burden created by these wars is one reason for Say's death (4.7.16-18). Yet

²⁴ Charles Hobday argues that, by using metaphors of manual work, the Bevis and Holland characters, in a sense, temporarily control their subject through language, and the nobility are judged by the artisans' standard of productive labor. But there were probably few low-income craftsmen and laborers in the audience for whom the language would resonate with much power. Commoners in the audience with more property may have found the metaphors pleasing, but they were much more likely to aspire to the gentle ranks than to wish to upset the social order. See "Clouted Shoon and Leather Aprons: Shakespeare and the Egalitarian Tradition," Renaissance and Modern Studies 23 (1979) 69-78

²⁵ This point receives greater emphasis in Q1 (London performance): "What, did my brother Henry toil himself / And waste his subjects for to conquer France?" (11. 101-02).

Shakespeare does not develop this material further. Gloucester does not single out commoners among those who died in the war, and the protest against taxation is brief, conventional, and superficial. A counter example shows Shakespeare developing the theme of the proper use of wealth in a way that would appeal to his audience. The conspicuous consumption of wealth by Dame Eleanor (1.3.72-76) and Lord Suffolk (4.1.74) is a mark of their excess and a violation of the virtue of thrift, a virtue that commoners, especially the prosperous, liked to think that they held, as the literature of the day indicates.²⁶ It was one feature that they tended to believe distinguished them from many of the nobility. This theme had definite appeal for Shakespeare's audience.

The complaint against taxation is uttered in conjunction with Cade's outrageous harangue against Say's connection to literacy. Leggatt finds this last charge against Say to be significant, as there were men who could not legally defend themselves because they were illiterate (Shakespeare's Political Drama 18-20). Were this play being performed before a different sort of audience, Cade's words might provoke a sympathetic reaction. Again, Shakespeare does not develop this issue, and frames the charge in Cade's

²⁶ An example is "The Ladder to Thrift," a poem in Thomas Tusser's best-selling Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry

To get by honest practisy,
And keep thy gettings covertly
 . . .
To bear thy crosses, patiently,
For worldly things are slippery.
 . . .
These be the steps, unfeignedly,
To climb to thrift by husbandry.

ridiculous and bizarre language. To further reduce the significance of the charge, it is brought against a man who is portrayed to be honest, loyal, and noble in character. The episode becomes part of the characterization of Cade as an extreme figure who disrupts all kinds of social order.

Conclusion

Shakespeare was clearly writing to his London audience, appealing to values that they could identify with, against a background of popular unrest.²⁷ He wrote the play early in his career, when the financial success of his plays was more critical to his continued employment and before the more profound analysis in his mature plays.²⁸ Moreover, 2 Henry VI appeared during a time of great interest in historical dramas. Before the defeat of the Armada, "no popular plays on English history" had been produced," but many appeared in the next decade (Hattaway, ed., 2 Henry VI 5).

Those seeking the subversive voice of Shakespeare must look elsewhere than in this play. Shakespeare takes the leader of a commons' rebellion and degrades him beyond the extent found in the sources, to the point that Cade represents extreme self-interest, ultimately scorned by all.

The values that London citizens would have appreciated are

²⁷ We do not know for certain how the play was received, as no definite record of performances for 2 Henry VI exists. Henslowe's diary lists eight performances of "harey the vj" in 1591, six more in 1592, and two the following year (16-20). If "harey the vj" is part one of the Henry VI trilogy, its success suggests that part two may have done well. "Harey the vj" brought in approximately 27 pounds in its first 14 performances (Henslowe 16-20), which, as Hattaway notes, constitutes higher receipts than those earned by other plays in this section of the diary (ed., 2 Henry VI 64).

²⁸ The date of composition cannot be determined, but scholars have narrowed it to a three-year period, 1589-1591 (Hattaway, ed., 2 Henry VI 61). The first production of the play had occurred by the 1592 season (68). These dates place the play in the middle of the long period of unrest described earlier in this chapter.

figured elsewhere in the play, most acutely in the noble Gloucester and the landed Iden. The commoner-hero is not a commoner, he is the commoner's dream of social and economic position. The dominant socioeconomic structure is not subverted, it is expressed.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JACK STRAW

The Life and Death of Jack Straw is a less skillful attempt at the same kind of historical drama that Shakespeare created with The Second Part of King Henry VI.²⁹ The two plays share many of the same ingredients: commoners who violate civil and moral order, a benevolent king, a commoner-hero who defeats a leader of the rebellion, and a central theme of the threat that self-interest can pose to the commonweal. Among the differences between the plays, there are three of particular interest for this study. One is that Jack Straw lacks the presence of corrupt nobility. Second, the commoner-hero is a London citizen, unlike Shakespeare's Iden. The third is an apparent incoherency in Jack Straw that may have created an ambivalent response from

²⁹ George Peele is the choice by several scholars as author of this anonymous play, but the evidence is "highly uncertain," according to Irving Ribner in The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (Princeton, NJ Princeton University Press, 1957) 75. For discussions about authorship see also Frederick Gard Fleay's A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama 1559-1642, vol 2 (London: Reeves & Turner, 1891) 153, and Kenneth Muir, ed , The Life and Death of Jack Straw, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford University Press, 1957) v.

many audience members.³⁰ As this incoherency appears at the beginning of the play and affects our reading of the commoner-hero, I will consider it first.

The Metamorphosis of Jack Straw

The difficulty in understanding the meaning of the early portion of the play comes from the change that occurs in the titular character. For several reasons, Jack Straw, first called by his real name, John Tyler, in the play, probably would have received a sympathetic response at the beginning of the play. Yet he becomes a Jack Cade, a representation of extreme self-interest. In trying to interpret the ideology presented in the play, we must consider the possible reasons for this metamorphosis and its effect on the audience.

Following are the first 72 lines of the play:

Collector.

Now such a murmuring to rise vpon so trifling a
thing,
In all my life neuer saw I before:
And yet I haue beene Officer this seauen yeare and
more,
The Tyler and his wife are in a great rage,
Affirming their Daughter to be vnder age.

Iacke Strawe.

Art thou the Collector of the Kings taske?

Collector.

I am Tyler why dost thou aske?

³⁰ Irving Ribner has written that Jack Straw was "almost certainly . . . written for a city pageant" (The English History Play 75). The evidence is small and circumstantial. Ribner points out that Fleay lists Jack Straw under "Plays Acted by Queen Elizabeth's Men" without providing a reason, we have no record of a stage or court performance (75). While the play makes its points with a simplicity similar to many of the pageants, the plot and characters are more developed than in a typical pageant. Other scholars treat it as a stage play.

Iacke Strawe.

Because thou goest beyond the Commission of the
King,
We graunt to his Highnes pleasure in eevery thing:
Thou hast thy taske money for all that be heere,
My Daughter is not fourteene yeares olde,
therefore shee goes cleare.

Collector.

And because thou sayest so, I should beleeeue thee.

Iacke Strawe.

Choose whether thou wilt or no, thou gettest no
more of me.
For I am sure thy Office doth not arme thee with
such authoritie.
Thus to abuse the poore people of the Countrie.
But chiefest of all vilde villaine as thou art,
To play so vnmanly and beastly a part,
As to search my daughter thus in my presence.

Collector.

Why base villaine, wilt thou teach me what to do?
Wilt thou prescribe me mine office, and what
belonges thereto?

Iacke Strawe.

What villaine, dost strike me? I sweare by the
rood,
As I am Iacke Strawe, thou shalt buy it with thy
blood.
There lie and be well paid for thy paine.

Collector.

O helpe, helpe, the kings officer is slaine.

Enter Parson Ball, Wat Tyler, Nobs, Tom
Miller the Clowne.

Wat Tyler.

How now Iacke Strawe, doth any body abuse thee?

Iacke Strawe.

Alas Wat, I haue kild the kings officer in
striking rashly.

Tom Miller.

A small matter to reecouer a man that is slaine,
Blow wind in his tayle and fetch him againe.

Parson Ball.

Content thee, tis no matter, and Iacke Strawe
 godamercie,
 Herein thou hast done good seruice to thy country:
 Were all inhumaine slaues so serued as he,
 England would be ciuill, and from all such
 dealings free.

Nobs.

By gogs bloud my maisters, we will not put vp this
 so quietly,
 We owe God a death, and we can but die:
 And thou the fairest end of a Rebell is the
 gallowes,
 Yet if you will be rulde by mee,
 Wele so deale of ourselues as wele reuenge this
 villainy,³¹

The king God wot knowes not whats done by such
 poore men as we,
 But wele make him know it, if you will be rulde by
 me:
 Her's Parson Ball an honest Priest, and telles vs
 that in charitie,
 We may sticke together in such quarrels honestly.

Tom Miller.

What is he an honest man? the deuill he is, he is
 the parson of the Towne,
 You thinke ther's no knauerie hid vnder a black
 gowne,
 Find him in a pulpit but twise in the yeare,
 And Ile find him fortie times in the ale-house
 tasting strong beare.³²

David Bevington thinks that the "commoners rebel without
 any general provocation from their superiors," that "the

³¹ In the 1594 edition, the lines from this point down to Tom Miller's remarks are assigned to John Tyler, which makes for an abrupt switch in him to the rebels' perspective. W. C. Hazlitt, in his edition of Dodsley's Old English Plays, retained this assignment of lines, emending the comma after "wele reuenge this villainy" to a period. I believe these lines were given to Tyler by mistake, most likely in the print shop. This speech reads smoothly and sensibly as a continuation of Nobs's lines, and includes the character's tag line, "if you will be rulde by me." It makes more sense for Tyler to listen to what these men have to say, and then, after Parson Ball's long, persuasive speech, demonstrate his commitment to rebellion, as his words then indicate.

³² All references to the play are from The Life and Death of Jack Straw, eds. Kenneth Muir and F. P. Wilson, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

wrongdoing [in the opening scene] is an isolated abuse," and that, of course, "taxation is lawful and necessary" (236). Bevington fails to consider a couple of historical contingencies. First, a notable amount of public dissatisfaction with taxation occurred in the first years of the 1590s (more than usual, that is), and it provided a background to the play's performance (Albright 104-5).³³ As the lines above show, taxation was one cause of the 1381 revolt, and the issues related to taxation would have been in the air. London citizens watching the play would have, in general, been loyal to the Crown and more likely to support taxes, but the existing tension in England over taxation would have heightened the drama of the scene and given it more importance than Bevington ascribes to it. Second, he appears to assume an ignorance on the part of the audience of the prominent events in this rebellion. The 1381 revolt was considered to be "representative of popular revolts" in the sixteenth century (Bullough 91), and its story was part of the cultural lore. Most of those in attendance at the play probably would have had access to the chronicles, which contained accounts of the rebellion. It is clear from the way that the play is written that the author assumed the audience's knowledge of the tax collector's action that provoked John Tyler's response. The play contains only a reference to the search of his daughter

³³ We have no record of the play's performance. The evidence that scholars find for dating the play is merely suggestive, but the play appears to have been written early in the period of frequent popular unrest covered by this study. Fleay offers the earliest date, 1587 (A Biographical Chronicle 153). In The Elizabethan Stage, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923) 22, E. K. Chambers places the play about 1590/91, which scholars agree is the latest possible date. See also Ribner, The English History Play 75. The first extant published edition appeared in 1593.

and avoids the details.

Knowledge of these details is required for the drama of the scene to occur. Without it we do not appreciate the imperious attitude of the tax collector, the immorality of his attempted deed, and an audience's probable response to both. Failing to take this aspect of the play into account makes it much easier to see the play, as Bevington does, as a straightforward statement of support for the Tudors. Tyler's response to the actions of the tax collector would probably have seemed entirely natural and right to the commoners in the audience. What is Tyler's complaint with the way this collector operates? We hear of the collector "affirming their Daughter to be vnder age" and of Tyler's complaint that the King's agent would "search my daughter thus in my presence." An Elizabethan audience would have known something of what Holinshed tells us of the events leading to the insurrection:

[N]o small murmuring, curssing, and repining among the common people rose about the same [tax for each person sixteen years or more in age] and the more indeed, through the lewd demenour of some vndiscreet officers, that were assigned to the gathering thereof, insomuch that one of those officers being appointed to gather up that monie in Dertford aforesaid, came to the house of one John Tiler

[Y]oong persons . . . comming to the age of foureteene or fifteene yeares, haue commonlie haire growing foorth about those priuie parts, which for honesties sake nature hath taught vs to couer and keepe secret. The officer therefore not satisfied with the mothers excuse, said he would feele whether hir daughter were of lawful age or not, and therewith began to misuse the maid, and search further than honestie would haue permitted. (735-36)

The play begins just after this point, when Mrs. Tyler has

shouted for her husband. No doubt most of the commoners watching the play would have felt indignation along with Tyler. Moreover, in his words to the collector, Tyler expresses his loyalty to the King and his accurate sense of the limits of "authoritie." His denouncing the collector as being "vnmanly" and "beastly" reflects the idea that a right, godly civil order shuns such corrupt behavior. This metaphor appears later in the play when a nobleman compares the rebels to "a Beast of many heads" (line 188).

The audience would also probably be sympathetic to Tyler's next action. The tax collector, clearly in the wrong, commits further violence by striking Tyler. Tyler's outrage and returning blow are reflexive, and exactly what many in the audience would want to do. His contrition over his action, indicated in his first words to Wat Tyler, further develops him as a moral character. Irving Ribner agrees that an audience would initially feel sympathy for John Tyler, and sees in him "the author's crude attempt to create a tragic hero, for he has suffered great wrong" (72).

At this point the others enter. The scene that follows contains paradoxical elements, and the play clearly begins a shift toward a very different characterization of John Tyler. On the one hand, John Ball's words contain some pointed truths, the kind that would appeal to many London citizens. The lines "Were all inhumaine slaues so serued as he, / England would be ciuill, and from all such dealings free" accurately identify the incivility of the tax collector's deed. Shakespeare portrayed the popular rebellion in his play after he had set up the contrast between Gloucester and the corrupt nobility as the key to

the thematic framework. The author of Jack Straw places the offense against Tyler's family and Parson Ball's first remarks at the beginning of his play and thereby influences the audience's initial reaction towards the rebels.

Along with Ball's noble-sounding words we hear dialogue that begins to turn indignation into sarcastic laughter. The group treats the tax collector's death with light humor, a sharp contrast with John Tyler's reaction. Then Tom Miller's satirical remarks undercut the seriousness of Parson Ball's speech and the humor and silliness in all of Miller's comments inject a note of ludicrousness into the scene. By the time that Ball makes his impressive speech about the injustices done against the poor by the rich and describes a mythical, golden past in which there was no "difference in degrees," but only "communitie" (75-109), most of the audience is no longer receptive. Any poor commoners in the audience might have found the speech appealing. The inflation of the 1590s, the inability of wages to keep up, and "the embittered relations between classes" (Tawney, Agrarian Problem 184) would have made many commoners sensitive to the issues this passage raises. Those less than prosperous would have identified with

The Widdow that hath but a pan of brasse,
And scarce a house to hide her head,
Sometimes no penny to buy her bread,
Must pay her Landlord many a groat,
Or twil be puld out of her throat. (95-99)

But the well-heeled commoners sometimes were the landlords. Because, it appears, many of the commoners in the audience were prosperous, or relatively so, they would have been at less economic risk than those members of the populace

lacking affiliation with one of the livery companies. As Londoners, they could also enjoy contrasting themselves with the poor rural characters in the rebellion. And it could be that Parson Ball's fine words had become so well known that they had become conventional, and therefore trivial.³⁴ To cap the impression that we are left with by the end of the scene, Nobs makes his definitive comment: "Heres euen worke towards for the Hangman, did you euer see such a crue, / After so bad a beginning, whats like to insue?" (148-50).

From the point that Tyler joins the others, little doubt exists about the group's corruption.³⁵ This play does not have the disturbing violence of rebellion that 2 Henry VI contains, for the rebels are never as menacing--much of the destruction described in the chronicles never makes it into the play--but the author makes clear the confusion of their perspective. The same men who hope to level society look forward to making themselves lords (127), and John Tyler, whose just cause is the protection of his daughter, takes Sir John Morton's wife and child and threatens to kill them if Morton does not cooperate. The perverseness of the rebellion is underscored by the theme of unnatural rebellion against their king, an idea repeated numerous times in the play. The play's emphasis on young King Richard II as rightful heir probably refers to the many plots against Elizabeth by France, Spain, Scotland, and Catholics in

³⁴ Walter Cohen thinks that the play's author repeats Ball's persuasive and appealing speech "in the serene confidence that it will be contemptuously dismissed" by the audience. See Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 227-28.

³⁵ Ribner likens Tyler to the "typical morality play hero," who "makes, in fact, the same choice" and "undergoes much the same consequences" (The English History Play 76).

general, even after Mary's death.³⁶ But the plotting by Englishmen is worse. In a soliloquy, Morton expounds on this theme:

What meanes these wretched miscreants,
To make a spoile of their owne country men:
Vnnnaturall Rebels what so ere,
By forraine foes may seeme no whit so strange.
As Englishmen to trouble England th[us]
Well may I tearme it inest to the Land. (603-8)

The end of such an unnatural act must be disastrous. Morton goes on to say that "so long as they are glutted all with blood, they bathe therein" (613).

When Tyler joins the rebels, he becomes the Jack Straw figure that the audience knows so well. The name had enough cultural significance that the author has Tyler begin calling himself "Jack Straw" even before he strikes the tax collector, and has the others know him by that name as soon as they appear on stage. The histories indicate that Tyler did not assume the name until the rebellion began to take shape; this compression of time and events serves the author's dramatic purpose of getting on to more important concerns, and it is another instance of the author's relying on common historical knowledge. The nature of this cultural background informs the contradictory presentation of Jack Straw in the play.

References to Jack Straw occur in a wide range of English literature. He appears, of course, in many chronicles, but as well in a fourteenth century poem, "The Rebellion of Jack Straw" (Brie 107), Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale, and Jonson's masque of 1621, The Gypsies

³⁶ The King is unnamed in the dialogue. Bevington points out that identifying the King with Elizabeth's rule is, therefore, easier (Tudor Drama and Politics 238).

Metamorphos'd (a brief reference). Chaucer's allusion emphasizes the boisterousness of rebellion. When the women run after the fox and the barnyard animals become excited,

Jack Straw and all his followers in their brawl
Were never half so shrill for all their noise,
When they were murdering those Flemish boys . . .

That the Nun's Priest chooses to mention the murder of Flemings rather than attacks on English men and property turns the usually negative riotous violence into a positive, from the English standpoint, and treats the rebellion lightly, befitting the tone of the tale. Many of the references to Jack Straw display a decidedly negative attitude. Some of the chronicles, for example, convey stern disapproval. Of special significance was a pageant by Thomas Nelson, a printer and balladist, written in Mayor John Allot's honor and published in 1590. Allot had begun as an apprentice to a fishmongerer, as had Mayor William Walworth, the slayer of Jack Straw (Bullough 91). The pageant tells the story of the 1381 rebellion, emphasizing the mayor's heroic role. The pageant contains no ambiguity about Jack Straw. He is a villainous rebel to the core.³⁷

In the popular culture of rural England and the London lower classes, Jack Straw held an undeniably positive place. Thomas Pettitt writes that "there is every likelihood that 'Jack Straw' was the traditional name of a figure from seasonal folk revelry" (8), and he argues that the evidence suggests links between folk festival and popular rebellion,

³⁷ Pageants were enormously popular in London; they were a principal form of expression of cultural values, weighted towards the values of those prosperous commoners that likely dominated the public theater audience. There is no doubt as to where most citizens' sympathies lay on the issue of revolt.

in organization, movement, and behavior. When an uprising occurred, "festival traditions reach[ed] out beyond their accustomed function to essentially non-festive purposes, becoming for the moment . . . an autonomous 'concrete language'" (6). The name "Jack Straw" is just such an instance of this "concrete language" of rebellion. Pettitt demonstrates that in their manner of choosing and designating leaders, commoners adopted the pattern of festival, and the names as well. "Jack Straw" was one of a handful of popular pseudonyms.

How, then, are we to read the character of John Tyler, given the sympathy an audience might feel for him at first, his conversion to a villain, and the cultural history of the character? To begin with, the author may have consciously combined the morality and history genres in this play in an effort to show the moral and political lessons of history. An attempt to be historically accurate would explain the initially sympathetic portrayal of Tyler, and an attempt to moralize would explain the rather abrupt change in his nature. It also fits the binary opposition of corrupt rebellion and a noble, benevolent government. Such a motive does not, however, explain away the intrusion of justified complaints by the commoners, complaints that are not satisfactorily dealt with in the play. Responsibility for those elements in the play which might garner the sympathy of many in the audience--Tyler's moral outrage, his insistence on his rights as an Englishman, and his contrition over striking back at the tax collector, along with some accurate descriptions of conditions for the poor by Parson Ball and others--must lie with the author. The

ambiguous representation of John Tyler can be attributed to his insufficient control of the material, which leads to a difference between his intentions and the result. It seems unlikely that the author intended the audience to side at all with the rebels on these issues or sought temporarily to make Tyler a commoner-hero.³⁸ On the contrary, he depended on his generally conservative audience's knowledge of the rebellion and on their response to the figure of Jack Straw.

The Heroic Mayor of London

In William Walworth, the author of Jack Straw created a more coherent character than he did in John Tyler. Walworth, who was Lord Mayor of London at the time of the rebellion, is a hero. As was the case with Shakespeare's play, it is a simpler job to analyze the commoner-hero than the rebel.³⁹ The key difference between the two commoner-heroes, and it is important, is that Walworth is a commoner, while Iden is not.

As he did with Jack Straw, the author of the play could assume the audience's familiarity with the cultural significance of Sir William Walworth. After serving an

³⁸ Mary Adkins argues that the play emphasizes class conflict much more than does Holinshed's account, respect exists between king and commoners, but not between commoners and nobles "Not a single speech by a noble indicates the least comprehension that the rebels may have a just grievance " See "A Theory About The Life and Death of Jack Straw," The University of Texas Studies in English 28 (1949) 63) The King, on the other hand, gives the rebels credit for a "quarrell good and iust" (line 340), and wants to ascertain "any euill sustained" (420). The dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Treasurer, which occurs immediately after the scene between Tyler/Straw and the tax collector, does support Adkins's point, for these nobles appear insensitive to the causes of the rebellion Adkins ignores, however, the positive portrayal of the nobility throughout the play They want what is best for the kingdom This inconsistency is another instance of carelessness on the author's part, rather than a criticism of the nobility

³⁹ Of course, the reasons for that simplicity are different With Shakespeare's play, the complexity in discussing Jack Cade stems more from certain scholars' attempts to find the voice of populism in the play.

apprenticeship to a fishmonger, Walworth succeeded his master as alderman, eventually became sheriff of London, and served two terms as mayor.⁴⁰ A wealthy man, he contributed £200 to a loan the city made to Edward III in 1370, and he loaned money directly to the King. But what made Walworth stand out from other financially successful mayors was his wounding of Tyler. The Fishmongers' Company still has the dagger that Walworth is supposed to have used (Dictionary of National Biography). The author could draw upon the appreciation for this man that most, if not all, in his audience would have had.

Walworth appears in Act III, after Jack Straw and the others have shown disrespect to the King and to good Sir John Morton. Straw has repeated the ridiculous claim that "We will be Lords euerie one" (516), and the rebels have shown themselves to be, in the Archbishop's words, "a Beast of many heads" (188). They have entered Southwark. With these "wretched miscreants," Walworth contrasts sharply. Indeed, he becomes the central character in support of the King, more significant even than Sir John Morton, who bears the actions and insults of the rebels courageously. Several characters, including Walworth, advise the young king, but the Mayor of London is the only one who acts.

With the rebels at the gates of London, Act III begins with the King's lament for "a King to be thus hardly handled," and for "More heard mishap than had of like bin mine, / Had I not marked bin to be a King." In his response, Walworth recounts the sins of the rebels, finding

⁴⁰ The course of his political career was typical for London mayors, as was his wealth.

the greatest to be the insult of the King's honor in their treating him as if he "were a vassall not a King."

Walworth's advice, as had been the Archbishop's at the end of Act I, is that the King "beare the minde in this afflicted time, / As other Kings and Lords hath done before": act like a king. He demonstrates the practicality of a man of action when he turns to the topic of the King's defense:

Why comes your Grace into Smithfield neare the
crew,
Vnarmed and garded with so small a traine.

King.

If clemencie may win their raging minds,
To ciuill order, Ile approue it first.
They shall perceauie I come in quiet wise,
Accompanied with the Lord Maior here alone,
Besides our Gard that doth attend on vs.

Maior.

May it please your Grace that I shall raise the
streets,
To Gard your Maiestie through Smithfield as you
walke.

King.

No Lord Maior, twill make them more outrageous,
And be a meane to shed a world of blood:
I more account the blood of Englishmen than
so

Scholars have pointed out that the benevolence of the King was meant as admiring comment on Elizabeth's rule (Bevington 237, Adkins 70). As important as is the goodness of the King in this play, the actions of the rebels to this point suggest that his decision is unwise. While his approach works with the Essex men, the Mayor's caution proves correct with the Kentish rebels. The King foolishly orders Sir John Newton, his sword-bearer, to give in to Straw's demand and hand over the King's sword, only to realize his mistake when Newton is threatened. This king is not a weak king as is Henry VI in Shakespeare's play, but the contrast between

action and passivity receives more emphasis here than is the case with Iden and Henry.⁴¹

The two varying accounts of Straw's death recorded in Holinshed, the author's primary source (Adkins 65), have Walworth striking the first blow, and other people continue the attack and finish Straw off. The author of the play not only gives sole responsibility for Straw's death to the Mayor, but gives him far more words, and importance, than can be found in the chronicles. In addition to the speeches referred to above, Walworth has patriotic speeches late in Acts III and IV. The author further emphasizes the Mayor's role by ending the play with the awarding of a knighthood and coat of arms to William Walworth and his mayoral successors.

The pageant quality of this play stems from this elevation of and focus on Walworth.⁴² The play emphasizes the values--the "unmistakably orthodox" position on rebellion and "the divinity of kingship" (Adkins 61)--that define, in part, London's relationship with the royal house and the differences between citizens and the rural peoples, at least from the idealized perspective of Londoners. The author has Walworth repeatedly making references to the past for examples of proper behavior, evoking memories of Roman virtue. The intent is not only to appeal to conservative tradition, but to further distinguish the mayor from the rebels by his education.

Because of his actions, Walworth is also distinguished

⁴¹ Bevington and Adkins focus on the unnamed King's strengths so that they can show how the plays flatter Elizabeth, but they ignore the King's passivity revealed in this part of the play.

⁴² This quality is probably another reason that Ribner believed that the play was written for a pageant. See The English History Play 75.

from the nobility. The nobility are of good moral and political character in this play. Their advice to the King is generally wise, but they are better at talking than acting.⁴³ The play seems to say that, at such times, it takes the vigor of a commoner to resolve the problem, a theme that appears in George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield and The Shoemaker's Holiday. Walworth knows when to talk and when to act (although he talks throughout his slaying of Jack Straw).

Conclusion

The commoner-hero of Jack Straw may appear to indicate subversive ideology in the play, in that Walworth stands out even from the nobility. But the suggestion that a commoner may have a value to a king that the nobility do not have could not be milder. The nobility in the play are portrayed as being pure in motive and strong in character. Like Shakespeare, the author of this play uses the genre of historic drama to appeal to the conservative values of the majority of his audience, keeping in mind that the government is paying attention. English audiences in the latter part of the sixteenth century were interested in stories about the strength of their increasingly powerful nation. Shakespeare's play is more complex in its analysis of the issue of selfishness versus the welfare of the community, but both authors use a commoner to embody the chaos of rebellion and self-interest, and both contrast that character with an ideal representation of conservative values.

⁴³ Morton cannot prevent his family from being taken hostage.

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMONER-HERO AND MORAL CORRUPTION

In the plays discussed in the last chapter, representations of commoners were situated along a scale in which anarchy was at the bottom and political order was at the top. In A Knack to Know a Knave and The Coblers Prophecie, the scale measures moral behavior, but morality in these plays is nevertheless related to politics and the ability to wage war. Commoners are not demonized as they were in the plays about rebellion; but, as in The Second Part of King Henry VI, they occupy positions along this moral scale, as do the nobility.

Each play presents a commoner who has clearer moral perception than do the other members of his society, and it is the transcendent abilities in these commoners that create the possibility for disjunctions and conflicts, as they attain a kind of authority over their social betters. In this respect, the role these commoners play is analogous to that of the traditional courtly fool. The fool was a source of entertainment, in part because he was allowed some degree of freedom to wittily critique the conduct and attitudes of those above him in the social ranks.¹ We find in these two

¹ Robert Weimann discusses the tradition of the fool in European literature, which dates back to the Classical era, and focuses on folk plays in his Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, ed Robert Schwartz (Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 11-14. He then looks at the role of the fool in plays produced on the professional stage. In the "nonrealistic" inversion that occurs--of values, of social order--the fool "becomes an excellent vehicle for the criticism of reality" (14)

plays a similar form of critique, wherein the inversion of authority that results is contained within the established social hierarchy. For their plays filled with moral didacticism the authors drew on the moral interlude tradition, and the significance of this popular dramatic form for the plays is discussed later in this chapter. Hence, these commoners may be termed "moral fools." The commoner-heroes in these plays are clearly meant to support conservative positions that appeared to be threatened in the late sixteenth century, at least to the authors. The playwrights use the moral fool characters to criticize society's deficiencies, the apparent waning of moral strength and, in The Coblers Prophetie, an accompanying martial weakness.

In castigating society--at all levels--for its sins, the plays also display an allegiance to the social structure and to the Crown, and these dual purposes are sometimes contradictory. As this chapter will show, it is the social structure, to some extent, that leads to the behavior criticized: the abuse of power and the desire for money as a means of rising in the social ranks, to cite two examples. The resulting disjunctions in the play could become sources of ideological disruption for an Elizabethan audience, especially as audience members had their own complex mixtures of beliefs and desires. While such points in the plays have the potential to disrupt attempts at ideological coherency, they do not constitute subversion. They are much too mild, subtle, and uncertain in their effect.

A KNACK TO KNOW A KNAVE

Honesty and the Morality Tradition

Honesty, who has the "knack to know a knave," is the commoner-hero in the play, the voice of morality and of the commons. His social status is made clear when the King disdainfully calls him "base peasant" (p. 507) and Honesty calls himself "a plain man of the country" (508).² Many commoners watching the play were probably London citizens who had attained elevated economic and social positions and who may have wished to distance themselves from the more common sort. One can imagine such distinctions being temporarily forgotten when the hero was a commoner.³ However, the line dividing right and wrong in the play does not always coincide with social demarcations. Honesty is a figure representing clear perception and moral judgment who is, to some extent, outside or beyond the social hierarchy. He appears in the first scene as what amounts to the King's fool. He shows up here and there throughout the play to advise, foil the plans of the corrupt, and provide choral commentary and wit. He has the last lines in the play, as severe judge of the accused and moral adviser to the audience, and judges corrupt commoners as well as nobles. Still, at times in the play Honesty appears to represent the

² References are to the edition in A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. W Carew Hazlitt, 4th ed., vol 6 (published by Robert Dodsley, 1744; London: Reeves & Turner, 1874) Because Hazlitt does not supply line numbers, I refer to page numbers

³ Knack was performed at the Rose, a public theater, by Lord Strange's company (Harbage, Annals) In his diary, Philip Henslowe records June 10, 1592, as the first performance date of the play, and he describes it as being new ("ne") (Henslowe 19)

idealized solid morality of the commons, as perceived by the commoners, versus the debauchery of the elite. In his role as fool, Honesty speaks the "truth" to his social superiors that, in the real world, might be censored.⁴

In this play, the most significant cultural influence on Robert Greene is the morality play tradition, from which he derived the character Honesty.⁵ Honesty's dominant function in the play is to act as moral corrective. His allegorical name, the generic names of characters in the second plot, and the general didacticism in the play mark Knack as a part of this dramatic form. The complex nature of the morality play tradition has significance for our reading of the play. The origin and development of the morality play were marked by distinctions between socioeconomic groups and by reinforcement of social hierarchies. Understanding these aspects of the morality play tradition helps us understand the significance of that tradition to the role of Honesty in

⁴ Scholars have given little attention to this character, despite his being the central character and the force for moral right. Scholars formerly tended to focus on the Edgar-Alfrida plot, until the interest in sociological criticism spurred attention to the Bailiff and his sons. Most of Paul Esmond Bennett's general discussion of the play centers on these knaves, but he barely mentions Honesty's functions. See his introduction to A Critical Edition of A Knack to Know a Knave, diss., U Pennsylvania, 1952 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1953).

⁵ The authorship of this play has been disputed. Bennett's argument for Greene is comprehensive and thorough. See his Critical Edition, 89 ff. For Greene as sole author, see also Charles Mills Gayley, Representative English Comedies (New York: Macmillan, 1930) 424-26. G. R. Proudfoot states that Edmond Malone, "in a note prefixed to his copy," assigned authorship to Greene. See his introduction to the play, a reprint by The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) v. For Greene as collaborator, see Richard Simpson, The School of Shakespeare, vol. 2 (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1878) 383, Arthur Freeman in "Two Notes on A Knack to Know a Knave," Notes and Queries 9 (1962): 326-27, and Hanspeter Born, The Rare Wit and the Rude Groom: The Authorship of A Knack to Know a Knave in Relationship to Greene, Nashe, & Shakespeare, Swiss Studies in English, Band 64 (Bern: Francke, 1971). H. Dugdale Sykes argues for George Peele as sole author in "The Authorship of 'A Knack to Know a Knave,'" Notes and Queries 146 (1924): 389-91, 410-12. Frederick Gard Fleay thinks that Peele collaborated with Robert Wilson and Will Kempe, as he argues in A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559-1642, vol. 2 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1891) 310-11.

the play and to his popular appeal.

The roots of the morality play lie in the mystery plays, which were developed, in part, because twelfth-century commoners could not read the Bible or understand Latin church services (Moses vi). Commoners did not have mastery of the language that served, at least in part, to bolster the hierarchy, and so a visual and auditory means was developed to serve the Church's purpose of religious instruction. Yet the Church was unable to control entirely its own cultural production. The commons, in effect, appropriated these cultural artifacts. As the plays became part of the popular culture in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, the increase in "vulgar" speech in the plays concerned the clergy--so much that some of them wrote Latin "scholar" plays for themselves (Moses xvii-iii). They tried to control language and learning as a means of exerting power and of discriminating among hierarchical levels. We see this aspect of social power in Knack, but from the commoners' perspective. Honesty distinguishes himself from the learned elite when he notes that one does not have to be a physician or an astronomer to know a knave, merely an "honest man," "a plain man of the country, like me" (508).

While the mystery plays tell the biblical stories that relate to the redemption of humanity, the morality plays "comment on human existence, explain man's motive for his action, and discuss the consequences" (Wickham vii). With the center of the plays being the average person's activity in this life, it is not surprising that secular material increasingly made its way into the plays or interludes. By

the sixteenth century, authors of the morality plays had generally turned from strictly moral matters to secular issues, with religion remaining important. Salvation might be political or social (Schell and Shuster vii). In contrasting the moralities with the mystery plays, Robert Weimann points out that the moral interlude

readily adjusted to economic, social, and political shifts, and actually thrived on the transition from a lay to a professional theater; at the same time, it easily received the new national, Protestant, and humanist ideology. (98)

The morality play tended to support the dominant power structure, but it was a site for voicing a variety of social concerns, one rich with possibilities for ideological conflict and contradiction.

The interludes were popular with both nobles and commoners in the sixteenth century (Wickham viii-ix). For example, The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom, which was written in the 1570s (Wickham 163), was still appearing in the public theaters as late as 1590 (164). The interludes were important not only in their own right, but important as well to the developing professional drama in their impact on other dramatic forms. A review of the plays written in the 1580s demonstrates the importance of the morality tradition to the "moral, social, political and aesthetic values" of the theater in this decade (Wickham v). Sylvia Feldman has identified a number of what she calls "morality-patterned" comedies that appeared between 1590 and 1613 in which spiritual welfare was "fused" with the well-being of the individual in this life and with the welfare of society (91). These observations confirm both the popular market

for moral instruction on stage during the late sixteenth century and the undeniable influence of secular concerns on that instruction. Greene's Knack to Know a Knave is part of this fusion of morality play with other dramatic forms.

Greene knew how to write for his audience. He is well known for doing, as John Clark Jordan wrote, "what no man before him in England had done so extensively: he wrote to sell" (5). He published over thirty prose pamphlets, his favorite genre; contemporary comments on his efforts indicate that he had "remarkable success" (Crupi 13). While we know that he wrote certain plays, there is much that we do not know about his dramatic efforts--how many plays and when he began writing them, for example--but it is clear that "Greene became at some point one of the many London writers who supplied the stage with its daily fare" (21), and that he was never dependent "on patronage or court appointment" (17). With Knack, Greene tapped into the demand for heavy moral content on the professional stage and produced a play full of moral and political didacticism.

One of the two plots in the play concerns the fall of the head of state into the abyss of lust. Greene took this story from either a popular ballad or a chronicle, but he

gave the story a moral dimension and national implications.⁶ The central issue is the degradation of the commonwealth through moral corruption. In the opening speech of Knack, King Edgar proclaims his virtuous rule, comparing himself to Vespasian, the Roman emperor renowned for restoring civil order and for living simply. Edgar declares that he is "God's viceregent," appointed "to cut abuses down" that "make the land infectious" (505). He goes on to warn that England might become another Sodom if sins are not punished. This speech establishes his perception of himself as God's right hand man sent to protect the commonwealth, thus unifying religious and political aims. The honorable Bishop Dunstan, the King's own right hand man, pledges to "study daily" so that he can help "root sins from the flourishing commonwealth" (506).

But these gentles do not accurately perceive where the sin lies. The author has made two key changes to the story as he found it to help make this point, and has turned a simple tale of betrayal into a "morality-patterned" comedy. In the story as it appears in several popular sources, the King wishes to marry Alfrida. He sends Ethenwald to woo her for him, but Ethenwald decides to court her himself. While

⁶ J. Payne Collier believed that this plot was based on Thomas Deloney's ballad "A Song of King Edgar, Showing how he was deceived of his Love," from his The Garland of Good Will ballad collection (A Select Collection 26). As Deloney's Garland did not appear until 1593, Collier's assertion at first appears to be inaccurate, but, in fact, may be partly correct: many of the ballads in this collection had been in broadside circulation (Mann 563), and some were quite old. Or the play's author may have read one of the chronicles in which the story appears, for it can be found in Grafton's and Holinshed's chronicles and in Foxe's Acts and Monuments, and in histories written earlier in the century by Fabian and Vergil (Bennett 4). Deloney's ballad follows Grafton's chronicle exactly. The author may even have had the story from the oral tradition upon which much of the material in the chronicles rests. There is no doubt that the plot originates in stories belonging to the general culture.

hunting, the King kills the treacherous Ethenwald, and he later marries Alfrida. The last four lines of Thomas Deloney's ballad, a possible contemporary source, read

Thus he that did the King deceive,
Did by desert this death receive.
Then to conclude and make an end,
Be true and faithful to thy friend.

This ending absolves the King of blame. Greene, in contrast, makes King Edgar the object of moral criticism. His Edgar has immoral designs on Alfrida, whose exceptional beauty has been reported to him; he will make her his concubine, even against her wishes (513-14). In the first scene, Dunstan is as yet ignorant of the truth, and the King, judging by his later comments, seems to be more consumed with lust than deliberately deceitful. When he tells Dunstan of his plan a few scenes later, he is straightforward. To him, she is nothing more than "sport"; and despite the King's statement that Dunstan, "virtuous councillor," is to him "as the North-Star light, / That guides the sailor to his wished port" (506), he ignores Dunstan's suggestion that he marry the woman (513). By the end of the play, the King comes to his senses, when he, "though late, at last . . . call[s] to mind / What wretched ends fell to adulterers" (584). Finally, he sees clearly. To intensify the contrast between being blinded by lust and seeing the moral truth, the King of our play spares the life

of Ethenwald and forgives him.⁷

The commoner Honesty, however, always has "the knack." He enters just after the King vows "to maintain justice, were it on himself, / Rather than . . . / . . . see subversion of his commonwealth" (506), and Honesty immediately asserts that "sins, like swarms, remain" in Edgar (507). In part, the King is guilty of "trusting everyone that speaks him fair" (507), of being unable to see the truth consistently. Edgar's subsequent question demonstrates his limited perception. He asks of Honesty, "what art thou?" The simple inquiry into Honesty's nature represents his insufficient understanding of this virtue.

In both his wit and his role as adviser to the King, Honesty plays the moral fool, assuming a certain amount of authority. In the first scene, Honesty names the courtier Perin as a knave and makes him look silly. The King does not, of course, see what Honesty has made plain, and continues to favor Perin. On three more occasions, all as part of the play's second plot, Honesty tutors the King. In this plot, the corrupt Bailiff of Hexham teaches his four sons, a Courtier, a Priest, a Coney-catcher, and a Farmer,

⁷ The text appears to be corrupt in this scene and, perhaps, in other places, which raises questions about the soundness of some conclusions formed in a close analysis of the text. The only early edition of the play dates from 1594. Bennett, in his Critical Edition, mentions "the badness of the blank verse" (74), among other signs, as indications that the text we have is a memorial reconstruction by the actors. His argument is thorough and convincing. Yet I am confident that the text is an accurate enough reflection of Greene's play. Much of the 1594 text is fairly well written. In respect to the quality of the verse, numerous passages of fourteeners and blank verse are competently written. The use of language, particularly in the satirical mode, is sophisticated. And, until late in the text, the characters are properly motivated and the play is well structured, with effective parallel scenes and characters. Finally, the author has developed the main character Honesty, in part, as a means of binding the plots together. The text we have, then, seems likely to be a fairly good reconstruction of the original, except for the reconciliation of Edgar and Ethenwald, a plot development that has minor significance for this study.

how to profit at the expense of others. Honesty teaches Edgar how to catch a knave when, disguised, he and the king trap the Coneycatcher (536-43). Later in the play, Honesty charges the Farmer with sins against the commonwealth, when the King had counted the Farmer as an "honest friend" (560-61). In the final scene, Honesty delivers up the last two sons of the Bailiff, the Priest and courtier Perin. By this point, the King is prepared to see the knavery in Perin. Not only has a commoner taught the King, but Edgar now makes Honesty judge of the knaves, handing over to a "base peasant" the elite responsibility of pronouncing civil punishment.

Without doubt, as Weimann points out, the nature of the dramatic fool lies in the "unity of fantasy and realism, . . . social criticism and utopian prophecy" (11), and Honesty embodies these functions. The public audience watching this inversion of authority probably included a number of gentles, but, for several reasons, it seems unlikely that the gentles would have been offended. The fool's role is a contained inversion of social order, allowed by the dominant power as a controlled means of criticism in literature. Second, the nature of "playing," of pretending, removes the content of the play at least one level from "real life" and tends to soften any criticism. Third, in this play, Honesty's education and criticism of the King merely help return Edgar's behavior to the ideal social norm. The King's desire for Alfrida violates moral and religious values. Because Alfrida is the daughter of an earl (570), socioeconomic issues do not figure into this

plot. Conservative social and moral order is maintained, not threatened.

Finally, even though Honesty is a commoner, essential differences between him and others subvert an attempt to read the play as an ideological statement that originates in conflicting socioeconomic levels. No one in the play matches Honesty's ability to perceive knavery; no one is as "true" as he. Honesty is superhuman in his knowledge and purity, which distances him from the commons as well as from the gentle ranks. Moreover, limited moral vision is not confined to the elite. Honesty reports that when he landed on the coast of England, the "poor, lame, and blind," the shepherd, peddler, soldier, and others came to see him, but fled when they heard his name (511-12). And the Bailiff and his sons, the most corrupt characters in the play, represent the upper levels of the commons. Honesty exists on a plane above the other characters, who are flawed to varying degrees.

This social equality in sin is balanced by equality in virtue. Of the central characters in the play, the person most resembling Honesty is a member of the gentle class, Bishop Dunstan, a fallible but very good man. This kind of balance also appears in a small subplot that focuses on the author's perception of a decline in hospitality. The characters Piers Plowman and the Knight are emblematic; both represent the best of their kind from the past. Thus, the dividing line between good and bad moral behavior does not coincide with socioeconomic differences, except in the character Honesty. To some extent, this fact reduces the

significance of Honesty being a commoner. Although many audience members might identify themselves with Honesty based on his commoner status, he is above both the gentles' and commoners' immoral behavior. In addition, despite King Edgar's lapse, the King repents, while the Bailiff and his sons do not. The tie between social status and moral behavior is, therefore, ambiguous.

Restoring Community

Explicit economic conflicts do exist in the play, and Honesty swoops down from his lofty position to resolve them. In the contrast between the Knight and Walter Would-have-more, the farming son of the Bailiff of Hexham, a conflict between economic systems occurs (always with a moral tinge). As Bennett has pointed out, all sins of the Bailiff and his sons are directly or indirectly economic in nature (8), but the Farmer-Knight contrast foregrounds a fundamental issue in the play: business opportunities and practices that benefit the individual at the expense of the community. Honesty is the only character in the play who can restore the proper order.

The Farmer represents the worst aspects of the economic trend toward self-interest. Honesty brings the following charges against him:

First, he hath conveyed corn out of the land to feed the enemy.

Next, he hath turned poor Piers Plowman out of doors by his great raising of rents.

Next, he is known to be a common disturber of men of their quiet, by serving writs upon them and bringing them to London, to their utter undoing.

Also, he keeps corn in his barn, and suffers brethren and neighbours to lie and want; and

thereby makes the market so dear, that the poor
can buy no corn. (561)

The first charge accuses the farmer of an unpatriotic, although not technically illegal (Bennett 43), activity. Walter Would-have-more "buys up all the corn in the market, / And sends it away beyond the seas, and thereby feeds the enemy" (559). This practice had been of interest to the English public for many years. Elizabeth had issued proclamations against engrossing grain in 1562 and 1566; considerable protests against that business activity appeared in print in the decades before Knack was written (Bennett 28-33).

Yet it is not the legality of the practice that is the point, but the effect it has on the community. The rest of the charges indicate the theme of this part of the play, and, in a broad sense, the play as a whole: the knave breaks the bond of trust between himself and another individual, thereby disrupting community. The opening scene of the play points to the welfare of the "commonwealth" as the central concern; the Farmer's crimes are specifically economic.

Long before his breaking of the written law is revealed, the audience sees that he breaks the unwritten covenant of community. When he enters the stage in the company of the Knight and the Squire, we learn that the Farmer is a bad host. Hospitality was, of course, considered to be fundamental to a good community, and had been so from the Middle Ages. By finding a cook that will work for only thirty shillings a year, by keeping few servants, by serving weak beer, and by feasting at Christmas-time only those

"such as yield you commodity" (545), the Farmer demonstrates that he puts himself before his guests. As the scene continues, we hear him say, "learn to provide for yourself; let God provide for the poor" (546). He deals fraudulently with two of his neighbors, seeking to profit at their expense, threatening to take one's house. He lies about his wealth to Perin, a courtier. And, finally, the Farmer refuses to invite Honesty to dinner, for doing so offers no profit (547-53). In short, he is the epitome of material selfishness and profiteering, a subject to which contemporary writers devoted much sermonizing (Bennett 9-10). One can imagine members of the audience shaking their heads in disgust.

The Knight represents everything the Farmer is not. In the play's mingling of moral and socioeconomic issues, the Knight represents the union of piety and good citizenship. His perspective is fundamentally different from the Farmer's:

Why, neighbour, my goods are lent me to no other
end,
But to relieve my needy brethren; but God, I hope,
hath in store for me. (545-46, my italics)

His land and his wealth (such as it is in his reduced state) are not his, but God's, and are to be used accordingly. Therefore, he does his best to be the good host. He pays off the debts of the Farmer's neighbors, lends the King as much as he can, and invites Honesty to "take part of a piece of beef" (553).

The differences between Farmer and Knight are part of the play's contrast between an idealistic view of the fading communal economy and an equally simplistic view of the

growing capitalistic system.⁸ Many Elizabethans preferred stability to change. They idealized the medieval relationship between subject and community (Tawney, Introduction 14-15), and the contrast between the golden past and the harsh present is a prominent theme in this play. The first scene includes references to the Roman emperor Vespasian, wise Solomon, and sage Nestor. When King Edgar finally rejects his own lust for Alfrida, he compares himself to Locrine, eldest son of Brute, who had no self-control in similar circumstances (584). As the Elizabethans were so fond of showing again and again, history instructs the present.

Other than Honesty, the only characters who unswervingly utter the truth are three static characters connected to the past. While some characters in the play are out-and-out bad, and the King and Dunstan learn from experience, these three characters don't have to be taught what has been lost over time. One of these is Philarchus's father, who initially compares the King to the ancient heroes Alexander and Vespasian (521). The father has suffered at the hand of his son, who has "disobeyed both the laws of God and nature" by scorning his father's poverty and striking him (525). The father, speaking from a perspective based on standards now largely gone by the wayside, is as rigid in his sentencing as is Honesty at the end of the play: he orders permanent banishment of his son.⁹ Bennett is wrong when he writes that this subplot involving Philarchus and his father

⁸ J. H. Hexter reveals the complexities of this centuries-long transition in Reappraisals in History: New Views on History and Society in Early Modern Europe, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 71-116.

⁹ As he will do with Honesty, King Edgar has handed over the power to judge to Philarchus's father.

does nothing more than "demonstrate Edgar's essential humanity" and Dunston's influence (51). The father and Honesty represent the moral certitude and strength that Edgar and the present age lack.

The Knight and Piers Plowman are also emblems of the right order that has passed. The values that the Knight represents, described above, were learned from his father (544). Piers Plowman, whom the King remembers his own father describing as "one of the best members in a commonwealth" (560), "in diebus illis" owned a coat "of good homespun russet cloth," and his household "had no want" (560). These three characters represent the idea that in the ideal past the commonwealth worked for everyone.

Conflicting Values

Inevitably, attempts to form a coherent, consistent ideology are difficult, if not futile, and the conflict of economic systems in Knack presents contradictions, at least before an audience of commoners with economic power. The representations of Farmer and Knight contain cultural values. Along with greed, the Farmer expresses some common-sense ideas about production and conservation of capital that many in the audience would probably have found agreeable. He counsels the Knight:

You must learn to leave so great a train of men,
And keep no more than needs of force you must . .
. . (545)

What could make more sense, especially to the prosperous commoners in the audience, than to be frugal? And as for being prepared in case of need:

And if ye will keep retainers towards you,
 Let them be farmers, or rich husbandmen
 (545)

The Farmer later espouses a basic tenet of successful businessmen:

. . . 'tis good for a man to trust to himself now and then; for if you be down, and bid God help you up, and do not help yourself, you may fortune lie and perish . . . (546)

The author of the play appears to be exposing these chestnuts as part of the individualism the play denounces, but most of the commoners in the audience would probably find his prudence appealing. The placement of such good sense in a character the audience is meant to despise unintentionally creates an opportunity for an ambiguous response from audience members.

A similar conflict of values occurs in the representation of the Knight. As overwhelmingly noble as he is, the Knight is unable to husband his resources in a manner sufficient for the times. He declares that he has no idea why "housekeeping is decayed within this thirty year" (544), why his father could keep a bountiful table for "all comers in general" and he cannot (544). The merchants, yeomen, and craftsmen attending the play may well have felt a twinge of antipathy towards the Knight's failure to adequately provide, no matter the cause. In the practical matter of surviving in the material world, the Knight is far less successful than the Farmer. The advice that comes from the Farmer's mouth sounds much like the wisdom in Thomas Tusser's Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry, a

bestselling book during Elizabeth's reign (Stevenson 16), and other popular texts of the period that dwelt on matters of economy and morality in commoners' lives.

These instances of conflicting values disrupt attempts at ideological coherency in this conflict between right and wrong socioeconomic perspectives. Yet the potential effects of this incoherency are, in the end, negligible. The nostalgia for a community-based economy, the moral truisms, and the commoner-hero Honesty would have strongly appealed to a public theater audience.¹⁰

Conclusion

Greene uses Honesty to solve the explicit problems in the play, and perhaps even to gloss over the subtle conflicts I have just described. He gives Honesty the kind of transcendent nature seen in some morality play characters, and Honesty rises above his beginnings. He is clearly labeled a commoner. He fills the traditional role of the fool, tutoring the King in an inversion of authority. As the play progresses, however, distance is created between Honesty and his commoner identity. In his role of moral fool, he transcends normal human limits to resolve the situation. Moreover, he is not pinned down to a specific time and place of origin. Unlike the Knight, the Father, and Piers Plowman, he is not identified with the past, and,

¹⁰ The play's opening run lasted eight days (non-consecutively), which means, according to Chambers's study of Henslowe's diary (II, 148), that the play was successful. J. Payne Collier, in his introduction to A Select Collection of Old English Plays, states that the play was popular in print as well, and "must have been a profitable speculation to the publisher" (25). Bennett reasons that the play "had enough appeal to have its title lifted for A Knack to Know an Honest Man [1594], and [that] no theater-wise playwright would name a new play after an old flop" (A Critical Edition 86).

other than occupying the real time represented on stage, he has no particular tie with the present, as most of the others do. His general rootlessness reinforces his timelessness. He has no geographical base--he "came . . . ashore" from nowhere in particular (511)--and, unlike the other good characters in the play, he never mentions England or appears to be patriotic. His interest is in a moral and economic system that is, itself, as the play suggests, timeless. In *Honesty* the past and present merge. He helps restore the world of the play to a perspective that is morally, socially, and economically conservative. Greene offers to us a commoner-hero that both is and is not a commoner.

THE COBLERS PROPHEISIE

Like A Knack to Know a Knave, The Coblers Propheisie leans heavily on the morality tradition and features a commoner who is a voice of morality and plays the role of fool, upbraiding his betters. Ralph, the cobbler turned prophet, is, however, substantially different from *Honesty*. Ralph never attains the status and power of *Honesty*, and his role is less ambiguous. He is instrumental in helping convey a martial theme that, as in Knack, draws a straight line from private morality to public welfare. Sateros, a soldier and a gentleman, is the character who exemplifies those qualities which the play espouses: bravery, determination, honor, and self-denial.

As the play was probably performed before different kinds of audiences, we should take this fact into account when reading these characters. The Coblers Prophetie appears to have been written for a court audience, but it is also likely that it appeared on the public stage.¹¹ The play expresses a mocking tone towards the few commoners that appear, especially towards the cobbler, but when the play crossed the boundary into the public theater, we can feel confident that the commoners were perceived somewhat differently and that Ralph became a commoner-hero for some members of the audience. For most of the commoners attending a performance of the play, however, the possibility of ideological disruption was probably slight. The values conveyed through Ralph and Sateros support the dominant social and political hierarchy. At court, Sateros represented the dutiful, loyal member of the gentry and a force for moral good. In the public theater, those same characteristics also made Sateros a commoner-hero for the upper levels of the commons, much as Iden was in The Second Part of King Henry VI.

¹¹ Louis B. Wright has called The Coblers Prophetie "more courtly allegory than morality" ("Social Aspects" 108), certainly the play can be both, but his emphasis on courtly allegory is understandable. The play begins with all the gods entering the stage, although only Mercury and Ceres speak. Other than naming the gods, no directions are given, but the occasion surely called for a procession modeled on the courtly spectacle. The Mars-Venus allegory would, of course, have been characteristic of courtly tastes in general, although we should keep in mind that Elizabeth's taste in plays was broad. Another suggestive sign is that, unlike many plays written for the popular stage, the big battle scene (there is only one) takes place off stage in the classical fashion. In addition, as E. K. Chambers has pointed out, the "reference to an audience who 'sit and see'" and the author's directing Ceres to toss "comfits" to the audience suggest a court audience (The Elizabethan Stage III, 516). Finally, Robert Wilson, the author of the play, had experience in writing for the court.

The War Theme

The primary message of this allegorical play, which was first performed about 1589-90, is that England needs to shun its preoccupation with physical and material pleasures, which breed contempt for such essential qualities as Sateros represents. England, the play suggests, should prepare itself for war by practicing the moral virtues. Robert Wilson, author of the play, seems to have been responding to developments after the defeat of the Armada.¹² Despite that huge victory, England had accomplished little militarily over the next two years. In an attempt to finish off the Spanish fleet, Elizabeth sent a force to the coast of Spain in the spring of 1589, only to see the expedition largely fail. England lost somewhere between 3,500 and 11,000 troops, mostly to disease (Somerset 477), and expended over £49,000 from an already depleted treasury (480). Later that year she sent a smaller number of troops and less money to support Henry of Navarre in his struggle for the throne of France, but Elizabeth placed strict limits on their use (482), and nothing came of the effort. The next year saw no major military action by the English. The post-1588

¹² Questions still remain about the identity of this writer, the primary question being, "Was there one man or two in the theater of the 1590s named Robert Wilson?" One Robert Wilson was a comic actor of considerable talent and a writer in Leicester's company, the Queen's men, and Lord Strange's company. Another man, or possibly the same man, was a hack writer for Henslowe from 1598-1600 (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage II, 350). Among the scholars who have considered the problem, E. K. Chambers believes that there was only one Wilson, Frederick Gard Fleay and the Dictionary of National Biography argue for two (Fleay, A Biographical Chronicle vol. 2, 279, 283, DNB 594-96). The question poses little problem, however, for the purposes of this study. Whether there were two Wilsons or one, the play was certainly written by the writer of and comic actor in two other plays that were influenced by the morality tradition, The Three Ladies of London (1584) and The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London (1590). We have little other information about Robert Wilson(s), and, perhaps, only one bit of information that seems useful to a discussion of The Coblers Prophecie—one Robert Wilson had experience in writing for the court.

popularity of war dramas that criticized authority, of which Wilson's The Coblers Prophetie is characteristic (Bevington 194), indicates dissatisfaction with the way events were unfolding, despite the lingering euphoria of the 1588 victory at sea.

The call to arms appears both in the Mars-Venus story and in the second, linked plot of the human characters. In the first allegory, Mars has become so infatuated with the pleasures of Venus, who represents only the idle, lustful side of love, that his armor has been replaced with silks and he spends his days with his head in Venus's lap. To the cobbler he looks more like a Morris dancer than the god of war, and Sateros does not recognize Mars. Mars's porter wears rusty armor and carries a broken bill.¹³ Herald's used to be "esteemd" and "held companions for the greatest Kings," but his herald complains that now they are

faine to wait who growes to wealth,
And come to beare some office in a towne,
And we for money help them vnto Armes,
For what cannot the golden tempter doe? (ll. 669-72)¹⁴

The herald refers, of course, to the selling of coats of arms and their subsequent devaluation. Rather than being manfully prepared for war, Mars, like English society, has become preoccupied with vanities. Matters become so bad during the course of the play that Venus's attendants, Follie, Niceness, Newfangle, Dalliance, and Jealousie, dance and leap over the sleeping Mars and ridicule him by "making hornes at eurie turne" (1021-22).

¹³ This latter detail is as symbolic of Contempt's cuckoldry of Mars as of Mars's lack of readiness to fight

¹⁴ Line references are to The Malone Society reprint of the 1594 edition, ed A C Wood (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1914).

The meaning of the allegory for England is hammered home by the scene in which the three Muses appear. Clio, the muse of history, fondly remembers the great Roman and Greek heroes, but has no such men to write about now. The same is true for the tragic muse Melpomene, who scorns that "on geeres and gestic the world is onely set" (550).¹⁵ The world is fit only for the pen of Thalia, the comic muse, who writes her pageant with an "estridge" quill because, like the ostrich, the current race of men is "greedy" and "foolish" (535-46).

Sateros, the soldier, is the only virtuous human character in the Mars-Venus allegory, excepting the Duke. His first words indicate the unappreciated sacrifices he has made for his country:

Thus have I serued in my Princes warres,
Against the Persian and the Asian Powers:
The cole-blacke Moore that reuels in the Straights
Haue I repelled with my losse of blood.
My scarres are witnes of my hard escapes:
My wrinckles in my face (made old by care,
When yet my yeres are in their chiefest prime)
Are glasses of my grief, lights of my languor,
That liue disgracde, and haue deserued honor.
(198-206)

Sateros's struggle to be respected for his efforts in battle ends only when Mars is brought to his senses and dons his armor. Only then are the talents and valor of the soldier put to use defending Boeotia against the Argives and Thessalians, who most likely represent the Spanish and French. A priest says a prayer of repentance before a fire symbolizing purification, and the cabin of Contempt, a key character, is burned. The Boeotians are then victorious in battle.

¹⁵ "jeers and jests"

Ralph as a Moral Fool

While the moralizing in the play is conventional both for the time and for Wilson's allegories, The Coblers Prophecie, more than Wilson's other plays, emphasizes the tie between morality and the ability and readiness to wage war. An absorption with pleasure, with gratifying one's self, leads to contempt for all things, especially the virtues. Such moral decay is symbolized by the gods and demonstrated in human society.

Ralph, the cobbler, is a central moral voice in the play. Like the court fool, his position in the hierarchy is low, but he is granted the opportunity to tell the truth. In his first prophetic vision he looks down upon the sins of the world:

Below me [I] thought there were false knaves
 walking like honest men verie craftely:
 And few or none could be plainly seene
 to thrive in the world by honestie. (175-78)

His prophecy can be apocalyptic, as when he warns the several gentlemen in the play to

Marke the Coblers song.
 The hie hill and the deepe ditch,
 Which ye digd to make your selues rich,
 The chimnies so manie, and almes not anie,
 The widowes wofull cries,
 And babes in streete that lies,
 The bitter sweate and paine
 That tenants poore sustaine,
 Will turne to you bane I tell ye plaine,
 When burning fire shall raine,
 And fill with botch and blaine
 The sinew and each vaine. (320-31)

No one else among the humans has his prophetic perception. Even the wise Duke, the brave Sateros, and the learned

Scholar do not see through the flattery of the courtier Emnius, who plots to kill the Duke, as does Ralph.

A representation of subversion must be legitimate in the eyes of the audience if it is to be perceived as a threat in any way. For a court audience, Ralph is not a threat. Wilson suppresses any serious subversive potential in the figure of Ralph in a couple of ways. First, despite the accuracy of his prophecies, Ralph lacks authenticity as the voice of morality. His power is derived directly from the god Mercury, so that the cobbler has no authority of his own. Ralph is, essentially, a tool used by the gods, as is his wife, who becomes the instrument for bringing about the death of Emnius, the Courtier. Ralph's personal insignificance is underscored by the fact that he is not carefully chosen for the job of prophet: he is simply the first man that comes along. As in Knack, the ability to perceive, to see through knavery, is an important theme in the play. But whereas Honesty's keen perception contributes to his extraordinary quality and status, the cobbler's ability is lent to him for a short time, like the "prophet's sute" of clothes he is given by Mercury (123). On his own, Ralph doesn't recognize Mercury at first, and later he gets his name wrong, calling him "Markedy." The Country Gentleman, the Scholar, and the Courtier ignore his prophecies, for he is nothing to them. Even when the play was performed in the public theater, the continuous emphasis on Ralph's low status would have made him a legitimate spokesman for only the small portion of the audience that identified with his status.

Ralph's legitimacy is further undermined by his silliness. From Ralph's first scene, we know that the foolish cobbler has little dignity, and we are frequently reminded of the fact throughout the play. His first words are a humorous little work song. Next, in a stock comic scene, his shrewish wife, Zelota, dominates him to the point that he hides under a stool.¹⁶ The contrast between the silly cobbler and his lofty mission, which is to deliver Mercury's message to Mars, is the source of much of the play's humor. A prime example is his scene with the Muses. Next to these mythic characters Ralph is just a clown, foolishly pursuing Echo.

We must also remember that having the low-born tutor the nobility is a convention at least as old as the biblical story of Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dreams. While the convention can be used for subversive purposes, when told from the perspective of the gentle ranks this inversion of authority tends to become a lesson in humility rather than an affirmation of the strength of the oppressed. In other words, the focus is on those in authority, not on the low-born.

Ralph's status as moral prophet is continually devalued by his status and silliness. With respect to this commoner, the play is a good example of Elizabethan drama as perceived by Greenblatt, who sees the drama as "a primary expression of Renaissance power, [that] help[ed] to contain the radical doubts it continually provoke[ed]" (Shakespeare Negotiations 65). Rather than subvert the hierarchy, Ralph is a character intended to reinforce that hierarchy.

¹⁶ Wilson may have written the comic part for himself

Sateros and the Meaning of "Gentleman"

The soldier Sateros has all the dignity, authority, and power that the cobbler lacks. Because of these innate qualities, Sateros is an authentic voice in the play for moral, social, and political order. He rejects Contempt, who boasts that he is "of power more than all the Gods" (211), and vows to honor only the gods and his prince (209). When he meets the lustful Venus, Sateros regards her with respectful caution. He shows the proper understanding of moral and social duty when he ridicules the Country Gentleman for his niggardliness in the face of his poor tenants' generosity: "their bread and cheese is seldom denied to anie, when your small beere is scarce common to manie" (376-77). Through his words and actions he proves to be the moral and social scourge in the play, as his speech on the role of the soldier indicates:

But for the noble souldier, he is iust
To punish wrongs, protect the innocent,
Weaken the tyrant and confirme the right,
Want cannot make him basely mutinous,
Wealth cannot make him proudly insolent,
In honourable thoughts dwell his content,
And he is foe to all that loue contempt. (440-46)

Sateros and Ralph are allies of a sort, but their frequent appearances on stage together only heighten the contrast between them, and Sateros's social rank as a gentleman becomes significant.

At first, Sateros's social standing may appear to be confused--he calls himself a gentleman, but he is plainly dressed and is scorned by Emnius, the Courtier--but careful consideration of evidence from the play as well as of the

historical context indicates that Sateros belongs in the gentle ranks. To begin with, Contempt groups him with the other gentlemen--Emnius, the Scholar, and the Country Gentleman--early in the play (225), and if Sateros were of common origin, it is never mentioned in the play. The emphasis on Sateros's plain appearance does not mark him as a commoner; it is related to the play's criticism of self-indulgence. In response to Emnius's scorn, Sateros declares, "How ere despised, yet am I a Gentleman" (285). His essential qualities, including his selflessness, and his deeds in war contrast with the superficial, indulgent, and lazy life epitomized by Emnius. The Courtier despises Sateros for his "bace apparell," and Contempt perceives Emnius's attitude at once, "though the Courtier speake him [Sateros] faire" (231-32).¹⁷ The Courtier's attitude soon becomes apparent to all when he disdainfully refers to Sateros as "this bare souldier" (270). The ensuing dialogue expands on the central theme:

Soul:¹⁸ Why a souldier of desert (as with no other doo I consort) can be no lesse than a Gentleman, and some Courtiers are scarce so much. Desert I denie not is oft preferd, but oftner flattrie. Because I am homely clad, you hold me dishonorable: but in this plaine sute haue I been, where you dare not with all your silkes.
Emn: Why I haue been where thou darest not come.
Soul: I thats in the Mercers booke, where I will not come.¹⁹ (272-79)

¹⁷ The 1594 edition has this observation assigned to Sateros, which makes no sense. The remark clearly comes from a third party, probably Contempt, who has demonstrated an ability to recognize easily the contempt in others. I attempted to consult an edition of the play produced by Sarah T. Sisson for her doctoral dissertation (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1943), but the edition is not available from University Microfilms, Inc., and the University did not respond to my request for a copy.

¹⁸ "Souldier" (Sateros).

¹⁹ "Mercer": A dealer in cloth and silks.

Clothing becomes a symbol for the differences between them, but these lines should not be taken as signifying conflict between commoner and gentle. The phrase "souldier of desert" is telling. It might appear to refer to any worthy soldier, but it is spoken during an argument about the nature of being a gentleman, and it indicates social status. Sateros goes on to compare himself, through his actions in battle, to the Scholar, Courtier, and Country Gentleman, and insists that he is "nothing inferiour to anie of these Gentlemen" (294-95).

The contrast between Sateros and the other gentlemen touches on the ongoing controversy in England over the increasing numbers of commoners entering the gentle ranks. By the late sixteenth century, the office of Herald was willing to sell coats of arms and the right to the title "gentleman" to those who could afford it (Durant 141). In his Description of England, William Harrison commented that anyone who

can live without manual work and thereto is able and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman, he shall for money have a coat and arms bestowed upon him by heralds (who in the charter of the same do of custom pretend antiquity and service and many gay things), and thereunto being made so good cheap . . . [is] reputed for a gentleman ever after. (114)²⁰

Some in the gentle ranks were in severe financial difficulty, and many were upset about the wealth being accumulated by a minority of commoners and about other, related blurrings of the demarcations between gentlemen and commoners.²¹ Mars's herald raises this issue in the play

²⁰ "port" bearing, manners, "charge" expense.

²¹ See Chapter 1 of this study

when he complains that, in these times, heralds must "wait who growes to wealth" and, then, "for money help them vnto armes" (769, 771). Some of the gentlemen and prosperous commoners in a theater audience might have found this moment to be rather uncomfortable, as many of them had gained or hoped to attain greater status in this way.

Nevertheless, these socioeconomic concerns help us see what Sateros signifies: a virtuous gentleman whose virtues are presented in opposition to the wealth and self-interest of the Courtier and the Country Gentleman. Like Iden, Sateros is an ideal character. His bravery and loyalty would have appealed to the audience, and his status as gentleman would have been coveted by commoners.

The General Significance of Socioeconomic Issues

The most likely moments in the play in which conflicts in ideology could occur are found in the introduction of socioeconomic issues that affected commoners most directly. When the play was brought before a public theater audience, there are points at which the raising of such issues could clash with the affirmation of social hierarchy that the play presents, but such moments were probably not intended. David Bevington states that The Coblers Prophetie "is sturdily pro-monarchist, but only because it pleads for a realignment of power emphasizing the mutual interests of throne and commons" (194). Bevington can make this claim because he gives the socioeconomic issues addressed in the play a different significance than Wilson did, making the play much more radical in its ideology than it would have

been even on the public stage, much less at court.

When Wilson brings such concerns into the play, they are always secondary, at best, to the play's chief theme. The topic of fair exchange--wages for labor--arises early in the play when Ralph asks

But heare ye God Markedy, haue you retoritie²²
To take a free man of his companie,
And hinder him to be your Prophet speaker,
And when ye set him a worke giue him nothing for
his labor. (129-32)

But the potential for any seriousness is undercut by what follows. Mercury handles the silly man with a skill that implies Mercury's superiority: "I must charme him asleepe, or he will still be prating. / Ile please thee well, I pre thee Raph sit downe" (133-34). And to further reduce the significance of the issue, we learn that the real object of Ralph's desire is only a "pot of ale" (135). Ralph and his question are portrayed as trivial, the source of humor and an oblique reference to the play's criticism of materialism.

Wilson usually introduces socioeconomic concerns as part of his campaign against self-indulgence and its debilitating effects on moral fortitude. Ralph's apocalyptic warning to the gentlemen that both their riches and the woeful conditions for the poor "will turne to your bane I tell ye plaine" is followed by his description of the consequences:

Then these poore that crie,
Being lifted vp on hie,
When you are all forlorne,
Shall laugh you lowd to scorne. (332-35)

The metaphor in which the poor are lifted above the rich cannot be taken seriously as subversion. It is a

²² "authority "

conventional warning to the well-to-do that focuses on their sins and on their punishment in the afterlife. Wilson is not suggesting an overturning of the social hierarchy. He is not even very interested in the commons in this play.

Late in the play, the potential exists to make ideological profit out of the contrast between the Country Gentleman's unwillingness to serve in the army and the commoners' entry into the army, but that is not Wilson's objective. This episode is another chance for Sateros, the moral scourge, to rectify the situation. The commoners have been released from prison so that they can go to war, but they were imprisoned fairly according to the law, as far as we can tell: one man was caught stealing a horse, and even Ralph, who had done nothing wrong, was only jailed under suspicion, until "tride for cleerness or consent" for the death of Emnius (1354).²³ The situation offers the opportunity for the commoners to be reminded of their duty to a just social order, as Sateros sternly charges them to "liue and serue as true men should," having been given "life and libertie" rather than "deserved death" (Ralph excepted) (1471-2, 1478). He deals as strongly with the wealthy and cowardly Country Gentleman, forcing him to be ready with "horse and furniture" to go to war the following day or die (1441-46). The commoners are not any more virtuous or oppressed than the gentles in these juxtaposed scenes. The lessons are that justice deals equally with all, and that all must contribute to preserving the commonwealth.

Like the scenes just discussed, those that mention the

²³ Because the Duke suspects that the gods, not Ralph's wife Zelota, are responsible for Emnius's death, the couple are never in serious trouble.

Country Gentleman's treatment of his tenants are not part of an attack on the social hierarchy, but part of the general moral chastisement with which the play is concerned. The Country Gentleman's contempt for the poor is just one among many kinds of contempt in the play. Ralph's prophecy to Mars's porter and herald must be considered in that respect as well:

You thinke it is a pleasant iest,
To tell the times of peace and rest,
But hee that liues to ninetie nine,
Into the hundreds shall decline,
Then shall they speake of a strange time:
For it will be a woondrous thing,
To see a Carter lodge with a King.
Townes shall be vnpeopled seene,
And marketes made vpon the greene (801-9)

The prophecy refers to the enclosure of common lands and the interest in profit, and is, therefore, an entirely unpleasant prophecy, for this play, like Knack, looks backward to past strengths as solution to the present moral malady. Instead of seeking a "realignment of power emphasizing the mutual interests of throne and commons," as Bevington put it, the play despairs of a future in which the hierarchy is scrambled and the "Carter lodge[s] with a King."

Despite Wilson's intentions, it is still probable that the social and economic issues raised in the play were perceived by some commoners as disjunctions in the ideology represented in the play. Especially for those commoners in the audience down low on the social scale, the persistent support for the dominant hierarchy would conflict with legitimate complaints about the socioeconomic structure. To those people with little, if any, economic power, the silly

cobbler might well have become something of a hero, scoring hits against those above him in the hierarchy.²⁴ Yet there appear to have been few such audience members. Most commoners in the theaters had some measure of authority and status, and were more likely to identify with Sateros than Ralph.

Conclusion

Like A Knack to Know a Knave, The Coblers Prophecie inverts authority as a means of delivering its message, but Cobler is more directly supportive of the dominant socioeconomic structure than even the conservative Knack. The difference is due, in part, to the simpler characterizations in Cobler. Whereas Greene made King Edgar a somewhat problematic figure, a good ruler blinded by his own interests, Wilson de-emphasizes the Duke's initial inability to perceive the duplicity of the Courtier, Emnius. His correct suspicion of Zelota's innocence in the murder of Emnius and his general quality of being above the fray relieves him of blame. Nor is he guilty of the moral corruption which infects society and leaves it vulnerable to attack, as is the case with King Edgar.

Sateros is a clearly drawn character, and Knack has no true counterpart for the soldier. Dunstan, King Edgar's right hand man, is of the gentle ranks, but does not have the authority that Sateros acquires, nor does he draw the same interest and compassion from the audience. Like

²⁴ In 1587, William Harrison stated that the artificers and laborers "have neither voice nor authority in the commonwealth, but are to be ruled and not to rule other" (Description of England 118).

Sateros, Honesty is a commoner-hero, but his duality in being a commoner and more than human makes him a more complicated figure.

Sateros and Ralph are clearly contrasted characters. In them Wilson draws the line between gentleman and commoner, each with his conventional characteristics, from the perspective of the upper levels of society. Ralph is a foolish, low-ranking member of society with no authority of his own. Sateros represents not only the ideal behavior of a gentleman, but also the social status to which many commoners in the public theater audience aspired. The moments of potential ideological disruption are mild.

Both plays establish the social subject by defining the relationship between subject and social hierarchy in conservative terms. The playwrights draw on the morality play tradition, and the plays' themes point to an idealized past for solutions to current problems. By using the figure of the moral fool to help convey those themes, each playwright, to different degrees, displaces moral authority from the commons. Ralph's moral authority is given to him on a temporary basis, and that authority has nothing to do with any essential qualities in his character. He is a buffoon meant to entertain a court audience, and performing the part on stage would have done little to elevate his status. Although Honesty's moral authority is innate, and his social status is initially important, his social identity gradually becomes less significant. Greene effectively positions Honesty outside the social hierarchy. This displacement of authority is remarkable in light of the

fact that the plays are written by commoners. Greene and Wilson appear to have been interested in making a career for themselves, of surviving and moving up in the socioeconomic hierarchy, not in subversion. They wrote for their audience.

CHAPTER 4

CELEBRATION OF THE COMMONER-HERO

George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield and The Shoemaker's Holiday are different from the plays previously discussed in a number of ways, but chiefly in their exuberant celebration of the commoner-hero. Both plays feature a commoner who is heroic in both senses: he is the central character and his deeds earn him elevated status in the eyes of other commoners. George a Greene and Simon Eyre espouse and represent the values of commoners, especially of prosperous, politically conservative commoners, more vividly than any other commoner-heroes in this study.¹

An important factor in this celebratory mood is a treatment of economic materialism that is somewhat different from that in the other plays. In the moral and political values expressed, George a Greene and The Shoemaker's Holiday uphold the traditional relationship between subject and crown supported in the plays already discussed. Like the other commoner-heroes, these characters correct self-interest that threatens the kingdom or community and demonstrate their loyalty to the king. But in the political rebellion plays, rebellious commoners destroy property or are greedy for that which is not theirs. And in the plays

¹ The representation of Mayor Walworth in The Life and Death of Jack Straw is the only other commoner-hero discussed in this study that comes close to George a Greene and Simon Eyre. He is the ideal commoner from the perspective of upper-level London citizens, but he is not as central or celebrated a figure in the play as are these commoner-heroes.

that focus on moral corruption, love of material things is one of the key sources of that corruption. In these first four plays, characters who are concerned about obtaining property and the status associated with property ownership are negative characters, people who violate the correct social, political, and moral order. In contrast to them, Gloucester and Iden are content with what they have, the Soldier scorns material comforts, and Mayor Walworth's wealth is never mentioned; rather, he is marked by good judgment and loyalty to the king.

The commoner-heroes in the plays discussed in this chapter are connected in a positive fashion to the maintenance or acquisition of property. George's role in the community is to protect its property, and one of the plots in The Shoemaker's Holiday is the story of Simon Eyre's rise in society through his attainment of considerable wealth. The optimism and good feeling in these two plays are linked to a more favorable view of the function of property in society than is presented in the first four plays. In combining conservative moral and political virtues, heroism, and a positive materialism in the figure of a commoner, these plays provide us with the strongest representations of the values of upper-level commoners.

GEORGE A GREENE, THE PINNER OF WAKEFIELD

Popular Sources and Their Socioeconomic Status

In George a Greene we find a play that was written to appeal to citizen tastes by providing a voice for their values. Before examining the play, it is instructive to consider the cultural status of Robert Greene's source materials.² Such a consideration helps us understand citizens' attitudes toward the material when it appeared, with Greene's alterations, on the professional stage.

English tradition supports the existence of a person called George a Greene, a pinner (one whose office is to impound, or "pen," stray beasts and, thus, protect the grain) of the town of Wakefield; but most, if not all, of the story combines legend with adapted historical material.³ Greene found the story in popular culture, a romance and a ballad his principal sources (Pennel, "Critical Edition" 65-

² More than one scholar has suggested that Robert Greene wrote the play. The only external evidence is a note on the title page of one copy of the earliest extant edition, published in 1599. Charles Pennel discusses the authenticity of this note in "The Authenticity of the George A Greene Title-Page Inscriptions," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 64 (1965) 668-76. In the first chapter of his critical edition of the play, Pennel describes the difficulties that scholars have had in establishing authorship through a stylistic analysis. See "A Critical Edition of George a Greene, The Pinner of Wakefield," diss., University of Illinois, Urbana, 1962, 105-25. Pennel argues persuasively for Greene as author.

³ There is, for example, "no authority or pretense whatever" for placing George and Robin Hood in the same period (Hazlitt A Select Collection 417). Other events that appear to supply historical verisimilitude are inaccurate. Pennel points out that "there was . . . no rebellion by the Earl of Kendal, no victory by the Musgroves, no northern journey [by the king]" ("Critical Edition" 77). The story of the Earl's rebellion may have originated in Holinshed's account of a conspiracy to murder James I of Scotland, led by the Earl of Atholl. Clarence Wentworth has found that the prophecy that the king would doff his cap to the Earl, the rebellion, the Earl's capture, and the ironic fulfillment of the prophecy are elements shared by Atholl's rebellion and the romance that supplied much of the material for the play. See "A Probable Source for 'George A Greene,'" TLS July 4, 1936 564.

83).⁴

Both ballads and prose tales of commoner-heroes ranked low on the literary scale. Unlike the morality plays, they were initially circulated in printed form, and they constituted a nascent popular literature. They came from and were meant for commoners, they reflected the interests and tastes of commoners, and they were often inferior in style to the texts written for the gentles, although a perusal of Child's collection of ballads or of a book of broadside ballads reveals instances of accomplished versification. The Elizabethan definition of the word "ballad" was not, however, always equivalent to ours. Frank Egbert Bryant argues that, except for outlaw ballads, such as Robin Hood and George a Greene, "ballad" in the sixteenth century generally referred to broadsides, or "stall" ballads, which were complaints, moral advice and proverbs, love poems, and news. In 1579-80 Philip Sidney commented favorably on the poem "Chevy Chase," which we would call a ballad, in his "An Apology for Poetry": "I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet" (94). He goes on to say that the category of historical poetry is the "best and most accomplished kind," for it "teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth" (95). Yet in this apparent exception to the general criticism of ballads, Sidney does not use the term "ballad," and "Chevy Chase" does not appear to qualify as a ballad in Elizabethan customary usage.

⁴ Which came first is uncertain. A. E. Horsman, editor of the 1632 jest-book, The Pinder of Wakefield, speculates that the jest-book, the prose romance, and the play "all perhaps have grown out of the ballad which recounts the one incident they have in common"--George's fight with Robin Hood (viii). Pennel demonstrates convincingly that the romance and ballad must both have been sources for the play

Bryant writes, "there is absolutely no proof that to any of the Elizabethan writers the term 'ballad' connoted a poem of the Child type" (32-33).

The word had definite cultural significance, marking a large group of texts as being unfit for the educated and the gentle ranks. By the time of Elizabeth's reign, "the term 'ballad' or 'ballet' was distinctly plebeian, suggesting as a rule the 'poetry of the people'" (Bryant 31). Any lyric poems that "had any claim to literary merit . . . were likely to be called by some other name than ballad. The word 'sonnet' often now did service" (31). Most literary people scorned anything called a ballad (Hodgart 144). Jonson's treatment of the ballad singer in Bartholomew Fair is a good example. Jonson lumps Nightingale, the balladmonger, in with the rest of the riffraff at the fair. Not only is Nightingale partner to the cutpurse, pointing out those in the audience with money and distracting them while they are robbed, but he sells such illuminating ballads as "The Windmill blown down by the witch's fart." George Puttenham, a contemporary, wrote that ballads

haue none other audience then boyes or countrey fellows that passe by them on the streete . . . [and are] made purposely for the recreation of the common people at Chrismasse dinners and brideales, and in tauernes and alehouses, and such other places of base resort. (96-97)

Puttenham's words are typical of the attacks, which focus as much on the audience as on the texts (Achinstein 317).

The often acrimonious criticism of ballads and their writers and audiences sounds much like the attacks on the stage; the English were busy developing a "national

literature," and the control of such a significant cultural force was at stake. Sharon Achinstein shows how, in defining their literature, the English formed the opposing camps so similar, at times identical, to those struggling over control of the stage: on one side were government, moral, and self-named literary authorities, who, in various ways, sought to impose controls on literature; on the other side were "figures from the margins of the social order as authors and distributors," including ballad writers, "who engaged an undesirable audience" and made literature difficult to control (313).

Just as the public stages were located in the physical margins of the city, where control by authorities was more difficult to maintain, the speed and mobility of printing and distributing chap books and broadsides provided some freedom from constraints that legitimate booksellers did not have. Efforts by the Company of Stationers to license the printers and sellers, and governmental acts that attempted to limit the production of ballads, met with little success (Achinstein 318-22). As usual, popular culture had a flexibility and vitality that made it difficult for the upper levels of the hierarchy to restrain or profit from.

The popular prose romances held a less controversial position in the culture of sixteenth-century England, but, perhaps, only because prose narratives that celebrated commoners were a newer form of literature, and were less common. Thomas Deloney is the best-known author, to us, of such stories. His "novels," as scholars often now call them, were published from 1597 to 1600 and sold well, yet

the books, which usually glorified commoners and their values at the expense of the gentle ranks, never seem to have attracted much official attention. The books might appear to us to be harmless, but so do most of the ballads considered dangerous by those in power.

The probable reason for the lack of government interest is that Deloney's success seems to have been unusual. To begin with, the ballads were cheaply and easily produced, and were, therefore, all about; Deloney's longer and more costly books, which disseminated from the established printers and booksellers, would have been less available. Literacy may have also played a part. The ballads could be read aloud on the streets and in homes to those who could not read; longer texts would have been more difficult to manage in this way. Although the size of the reading audience composed of commoners was becoming three times that of the gentles, this new phenomenon was only beginning to be appreciated (Stevenson 57), and the audience for commoners' prose fiction was in its nascent stage. Merritt Lawless has noted that "all four of [Deloney's] novels immediately became so popular that the early editions of them were read completely out of existence" (xi). The relative scarcity of the form may have helped account for Deloney's success. In the next century, concerns over the cultural position of novels and their economic value would grow with the form itself; for now, the commoners' prose romances were, for the most part, beneath the concerns of authorities.⁵

⁵ Richard Helgerson discusses the inclusion and exclusion of commoners in several genres of Elizabethan literature. His analysis includes such factors as retail prices of books, social mobility, and thematic content. See Forms of Nationhood, 10-11 and passim

Greene, who had considerable success as a writer of popular literature and plays,⁶ skillfully tailored his ballad and prose romance source material to the public stage in the early 1590s.⁷ As he had with A Knack to Know a Knave, Greene pleased London audiences dominated by citizens and gentles,⁸ but in this case he took advantage of the burgeoning market for popular literature. While many in the audience would have been familiar with the stories he adapted, he made them more ideologically acceptable for his specific audience; that is, as the next section in this chapter will show, he eliminated potentially objectionable material and created a fairly coherent representation of values shared by his audience members.

In doing so, Greene also lifted material from the lowest level of professional writing and brought it to the stage; writing plays was considered by many in the culture to be at least a notch above ballad writing. Aesthetic concerns in writing for the stage, which were linked with the desire to make the play commercially successful, also drove Greene's efforts to form a coherent character and smoothly written

⁶ See Chapter Three for a brief description of Greene's success

⁷ Joseph Quincy Adams, editor of Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Cambridge, Mass. Houghton Mifflin, 1924), thinks that the play could have been written as early as 1588 (691 n), but Pennel dates the play about 1590-91, when Greene was "beginning to turn to London realism for the subject of his pamphlets" ("Critical Edition" 136) We do not know when Greene began writing plays, and Charles W. Crupin states that we have no hard evidence that he composed any before 1592 See his Robert Greene (Boston Twayne Publishers, 1986) 17 The first performances of record were given by the Earl of Sussex's Men, five performances between December 29, 1593, and January 22, 1594 (Henslowe's Diary 20)

⁸ The Earl of Sussex's Men performed at the Rose at the time of this play (Harbage, Annals 302) Henslowe's diary shows that the play brought in 7£ 11s (20), a respectable sum that indicates a favorable reception by the public

play.⁹ Because the professional stage ranked higher in the culture than Deloney's "novels" or the ballads, it was an even more contentious site for control of the culture, and we should keep this factor in mind when considering Greene's adaptation.

The Sources and Greene's Commoner-Hero

Greene's figure of the commoner-hero is close to that in the sources, but with some significant differences relevant to socioeconomic values, along with those that clearly stem from aesthetic and commercial concerns. The resultant figure resembles Robin Hood, the best known of England's country heroes, in his bravery, fighting skills, and loyalty to the king.

To reinforce George's association with this popular hero, Greene includes their meeting, which appears in the ballad.¹⁰ The ballad begins,

In Wakefield there lives a jolly pinder,
In Wakefield, all on a green; (*bis*)¹¹
"There is neither knight nor squire," said the
pinder
"Nor Baron that is so bold, (*bis*)
Dare make a trespassse to the town of Wakefield,
But his pledge goes to the pinfeld." (*bis*)

Robin and his men, who overhear the boast, are warned to return to the king's highway, for they have ridden through

⁹ Greene had no illusions about drama's cultural position. In his Never Too Late and A Groats-Worth of Wit,

the writing of plays parallels the feeding of swine in the story of the prodigal son. Greene's references to drama take for granted its low social status and sometimes show particular scorn for playwrights' lack of his own university education. (Cruik, Robert Greene 20)

¹⁰ The ballad is number 124 in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Francis James Child, vol. 3 (1880, New York: Folklore Press, 1956).

¹¹ "bis" twice

the grain. They fight with sword and buckler "a long summer's day," until swords are broken. Robin is impressed, and twice he asks George to join his band, promising George "a livery twice in the year." George first replies,

If Michaelmas day were once come and gone
And my master had paid me my fee,
Then would I set as little by him
As my master doth set by me.

George entertains his new friends with bread and cheese. When Robin asks him to join a second time, George promises to go to the greenwood when Michaelmas comes. This encounter, which appears in slightly different form in the play, cannot be found in the romance.

In the prose romance, "The History of George A Green, Pindar of the Town of Wakefield,"¹² George's story becomes a framework filled out with "pretty Histories, Songs, Catches, Iests, and Riddles," as the title page tells us.¹³ Greene streamlined the story, eliminating some characters and other details, altering motivation, and retaining, altering, and adding characters and subplots relevant to George's story, including the Robin Hood narrative from the ballad. The result is a more unified story, although the play suffers from having two main plots that are imperfectly joined.

In the first plot, George, with his wit, bravery, and skill, single-handedly thwarts rebellion by the Earl of Kendal and his followers, who have conspired with James of

¹² "Pinner" was spelled variously in the sixteenth century, "pindar" and "pinder" were among the other spellings

¹³ Charles Pennel, who studied the sixteenth-century manuscript held by Sion College Library in London, tells us that the plots of the prose romance and play are similar, but that the play gives much more attention to the comic character Jenkins. In addition, the romance has a broader historical scope, owing to its basis, in part, on the chronicles, although "the foundation is factual and the main narrative is pure fiction" ("Critical Edition" 77). For example, James I appears in the play, but not the romance, apparently as thematic balance to Edward.

Scotland against King Edward. Kendal sends the pompous Sir Nicholas Mannering to Wakefield for the purpose of seizing provisions. The townspeople stand up to Mannering, and George forces him to eat the wax seals on the commission. Meanwhile, Grime entertains Kendal and his men, although he doesn't like it, and his daughter, Bettris, George's true love, cleverly avoids the advances of Lord Bonfield. Eventually, George and Kendal meet when Kendal deliberately has his horses put in a corn field that is under George's care. Upon discovering the identity of the horses' owner, George strikes Kendal, but, realizing that he is outnumbered, George uses his wits to delay a fight. Ultimately, George kills Sir Gilbert Armstrong in battle and takes Kendal and Bonfield prisoners.

These actions are resolved less than two-thirds through the play, and the play enters into a second plot in which Robin Hood and George engage in personal battle to see who is best. George bests Scarlet and Mulch, and then he and Robin fight to a draw, whereupon Robin asks George to join his band. Late in the play the two plots are brought together as Edward and James, disguised, enter Bradford, where George and Robin are having a good time. The two kings witness George's skill with a staff and his generosity to all, and Edward rewards George for his efforts against the rebellion, even persuading Grime to allow a marriage between Bettris and George. The play ends with general good will and humor.

The George a Greene of the play is the ideal commoner-hero. He is brave, as he takes on the three gentlemen

alone, loyal to the king despite Kendal's superior forces, and strong, defeating a group of Bradford shoemakers with his quarterstaff. He is as clever as he is strong: when outnumbered by Kendal and his men, George turns to conversation and finds out that Kendal believes in the prophecy that says King Edward will "vaile his bonnet" to King James and himself in London. Pretending that a fortune-telling hermit lives nearby, George arranges a meeting with Kendal and two of his men. Against more manageable numbers, George, shedding his hermit's disguise, prevails.

Despite his abilities, George is humble before the king (lines 1100 ff.), although he demonstrates complete confidence in himself throughout the play.¹⁴ George is merciful, as well, when he asks Edward for the pardon of Kendal and his men.

To complete the ideal, George is both hospitable and generous. Having discovered that he has fought the renowned Robin Hood to a standstill, George becomes the good host:

Welcome, sweet Robin; welcome, mayd Marian;
And welcome, you my friends.
Will you to my poore house;
You shall haue wafer cakes your fill,
A peece of beefe hung vp since Martlemas,
Mutton and veale (997-1002)

Having bested the shoemakers of Bradford, George opens his purse to pay for "a stand of ale . . . set in the Market place, / That all may drinke that are athirst this day" (1074-75).

Some of the details in the sources that Robert Greene

¹⁴ Line references are to A pleasant conceyted comedie of George a Greene, the pinner of Wakefield, in The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene, ed Churton J. Collins, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

left out of the play would have confused his representation of George. In the romance, George's father, Geoffrey, was a rich farmer who opposed King Henry II and lost, subsequently losing his property and George's inheritance. Greene had nothing to gain by including this detail, which would have distracted from his story and, unless handled correctly, would have affected the audience's perception of George's loyalty to the crown. Another instance is found in the ballad, where George shows no allegiance to his master, but prepares to join Robin Hood. By making that choice, George disavows the established socioeconomic hierarchy and swears loyalty to a looser outlaw power structure. Such an action did not fit Greene's intentions. Greene selected those incidents from his sources that would allow him to form a "coherent" representation of those qualities celebrated in much sixteenth-century literature written for and by commoners. In his play, George is unequivocally loyal to the king, and George's only threat is to those who are disloyal, no matter their station. Greene wanted to see his play succeed, and he ensured that success by writing to the conservative values of his audience.

Socioeconomic Issues and the "Natural" Hierarchy

An in-depth examination of the socioeconomic issues present in the play reveals how well George a Greene represents those conservative values. George's ideal qualities are recognized by the other characters, most significantly, by those in the gentle ranks. Musgrove is a knight with a history of fighting the Scots. His son,

Cuddie, tells King Edward that "had King Iamie bene as good as George a Greene, / Yet Billy Musgroue would haue fought with him" (750-51). The king notes that he has often heard proverbial reference to George (754-56). In the same scene, the Earl of Warwick describes George: "For stature he is framde, / Like to the picture of stout Hercules, / And for his carriage passeth Robin Hood" (769-71). George's recognition by those above him in the social structure helps give legitimacy to his heroic status and, from the audience's perspective, subtly reinforces that structure.

By including the Robin Hood and Hercules comparisons in his play, Greene underscores the legendary status of George a Green for commoners in his audience, and the source of the comparison in the play, an earl, appears to confirm that George's legitimacy transcends differences in socioeconomic levels. The commoners are Londoners for the most part; despite their general feeling of superiority to country cousins, which comes down to us in many writings from the period, George's story as it appeared in the play was a success. As an equal to Robin Hood in battle skills and generosity, George secured an elevated status among commoners on the Elizabethan stage. But the play held additional enticements for the commoners in the audience: the nature of George's office and his relationship to other characters provide opportunities for socioeconomic themes.

The pinner's job was to impound stray animals, which, allowed to roam, could do considerable damage to crops. The ideological significance of George's occupation is that it is official, or part of the established hierarchy, and that

it involves protecting community and private property. Twice in the play, George performs his duty, but the first instance, the initial meeting with Kendal, receives greater emphasis.

Wishing to teach a lesson to the man who had made his emissary eat the wax seals of his commissions, Kendal has his and his men's horses led into a wheat field at Wakefield. George is resolute in performing his duty. Faced with three men above him in the social structure and their "train of men," George says,

Nowe, gentlemen, I know not your degrees, but more you cannot be, vnlesse you be Kings. Why wrong you vs of Wakefield with your horses? I am the pinner, and before you passe, you shall make good the trespasse they haue done. (444-47)

When Kendal defies him, George insists that "were good King Edwards horses in the corne, they shall amend the scath, or kisse the pound" (465-66). George has put community interest and the conservation of property above concerns for social hierarchy, and that would have appealed to many commoners, especially the prosperous, as long as it was not their place in the hierarchy that was being disregarded.

In the second occasion for George to perform his duty as pinner, he just as resolutely insists that Robin Hood and his three men (whose identities are unknown to George) remove their horses from the field. In this instance, the intrusion serves simply to move the characters toward battle, where they fight to a draw. Socioeconomic issues do not arise, other than in the reinforcement of the characteristics of the ideal commoner-hero presented in this scene: bravery, physical prowess, and generosity. The scene

contrasts with George's confrontation with Kendal in that this one ends with good will. The difference helps create a sense of camaraderie among commoners that contrasts with the distance between levels in the socioeconomic hierarchy implied in George's defiance of corrupt nobility. The difference in moods probably would have been felt by audience members.

George's role as custodian of property is significant late in the play, when King Edward insists that George name the ransom for King James. After humbly deferring with the words, "It passeth my skill" (1206), George shows that he does have the skill, saying,

Then let king Iames make good
Those townes which he hath burnt vpon the borders;
Giue a small pension to the fatherlesse,
Whose fathers he caus'd murthered in those warres.
(1208-11)

This quotation subtly affirms the fact that lives below the level of royalty did not require revenge, only recompense, but this fact is not made an issue in the play. More importantly, George's words show that he takes care of the material needs of the community.

As important as these moments are in the figuring of the commoner-hero, George's relationship to other characters, that is, how he compares or contrasts with those characters, is of even greater significance for socioeconomic issues in the play. The outstanding contrast in the play occurs between George and the alliance against King Edward, especially the Earl of Kendal.

The alliance's motivations are base. In the romance first printed in 1706, Kendal sets out to defend the rights

of the people against the Bishop of Ely and Prince John. Allowing only a vague reference to this motivation in the lines, "And here vpon my sword I make protest / For to relieue the poore or dye my selfe," Robert Greene instead gives Kendal and his men more self-serving motives. A climb upward in power is Kendal's primary goal. He reassures Bonfield that he will distribute new titles to his supporters, and make Bonfield a duke and himself king (24-27). Indeed, he cares little for the people. In seeking provisions, Kendal is ready, "like martiall Tamberlaine, [to] lay waste" to the countryside, "leauing none aliue that contradicts [his] Commission" (41-45).

Pleasure is their secondary goal. "Come, Bonfield, let vs goe, / And listen out some bonny lasses here," Kendal says early in the play (54-55). King James' lustful intention receives far more notice in one of the play's subplots. James besieges the honor of a gentlewoman, Jane a Barley, when he knows her husband is gone. He further shows his dishonor and cowardice when he threatens to kill her son, Ned, unless she gives in to his wishes. Only the entrance of William Musgrove stops James from murdering Ned.

Greene had to delete material to set up the contrast between George and the alliance. In the ballad, George's own motives are materialistic. Each time Robin asks George to join his band, George is ready, but he must wait until Michaelmas, the traditional day for forming contracts, and the day "when every man gathers his fee" ("The Jolly Pindar of Wakefield"). As mentioned earlier, George displays no allegiance to his master: "I'le sett as litle by my master /

As he now setts by me." The unpleasant relationship between master and worker and George's overt materialism would taint the persona that Greene needs for his story.

In the play, the moral center is the commoner-hero, and George is the standard by which corrupt nobility are measured. Against their lust, greed, and unlawful ambition, George is portrayed as a man pure in motive, whom "nature teacheth . . . duetie" (1090). The belief that the nature of an action or person will receive its just due is reflected in the Justice's line to Kendal: "Euen as the cause, so is the combat fallen" (672); and in Jane's words to King James: "by the highest Holy God, / That doometh iust reuenge for things amisse" (310-11). George, essentially the "natural" man, is the instrument of justice against the wicked.

Characters that parallel George, both noble and common, appear in the play. Jane a Barley, wife of Sir John, and her son Ned remain steadfast against the lecherous James. In fear for her son's life, Jane is prepared to give in, but Ned charges his mother to "dye with honour, mother, dying chaste," to which she replies, "I am armed: / My husbands loue, his honour, and his fame, / Ioynes victorie by vertue" (329-32). The scene is symbolic, as well: Jane stands atop the castle wall while James holds her son captive far below; Jane tells James that "[t]his castle is too strong for thee to scale" (317). The height of her virtue is unattainable by James.

Her rescuer is a gentleman who may be as brave and strong as George. Despite his age, Musgrove defeats James,

as he has in the past. Of course, his and Jane's stories receive far less emphasis than George's; these two subplots reinforce a system of values that the commoner-hero champions.

These values are further buttressed by other commoners: the townspeople and Bettris. In the prose romance, the people of Wakefield are cowed by Mannering's threats of devastation if they do not provision Kendal's troops. Mannering receives a much different response in Greene's play. After consulting his fellow townsmen, the Justice tells Kendal's emissary that they refuse "a traytour to the King," and that they defy him to "doe thy worst, we feare thee not" (65, 83). At this point, George steps in and orders Mannering to "vayle [his] bonnet to the bench / That represents the person of the King" (87-88), then to eat the seals of Kendal's commission. The scene celebrates honor, respect, loyalty, and bravery by the townspeople in the face of intimidating power.

The most clever defiance of the rebel alliance comes from Bettris. Her father, Grime, entertains Kendal and his men, but secretly disdains them. One of Kendal's men, Lord Bonfield, has designs--dishonorable, to be sure--on the beautiful Bettris. He promises her jewels, but not marriage, if she will become his lover. Bettris occupies a vulnerable position in the social hierarchy, as a female commoner dealing with nobility who use the hierarchy to their advantage and suspend rules that inconvenience them. She says,

Heigh ho' my heart is in a higher place,
Perhaps on the Earle, if that be he.

See where he comes, or angrie, or in loue,
For why his coulour looketh discontent. (205-8)

Charles Pennel thinks her response is confused, since she loves the commoner George, and that it is another indication of a memorially reconstructed text ("Critical Edition" 82-82), but I think Bettris dissimulates. Her reply serves two purposes: to at least momentarily distract and evade Bonfield, and to emphasize the central theme in the play. Bonfield knows that Bettris desires George to be her husband, but her disingenuous reply relies on Bonfield's understanding of "higher place." To a person apparently without moral ideals, the phrase can only refer to the material power structure. She deflects attention away from herself and toward the approaching earl. The distraction does not last, for Kendal brings news of George's treatment of Mannering, but with George as the revived topic of conversation, Bettris finds an opportunity to make clear her meaning of "higher place": "Oh louely George, fortune be still thy friend' / And as thy thoughts be high, so be thy minde / In all accords, euen to thy hearts desire!" (224-26).

The play is clear on the point that true nobility exists in one's actions and thoughts, not in an arbitrary social system. While the play contains examples of such true nobility in both the gentle and commoner ranks, commoners receive the greatest attention. In the scene in which George disguises himself as a hermit, the language emphasizes the enmity and social distinction between nobility beneath the royal family and commoners. Kendal refers to George as "seruile pinner" and "villaine" (640,

653), and Bonfield swears, "For rather had we bide what he [the King] appoynts, / Then here be murdered by a seruite groome" (665-66). But George has clearly expressed the theme of "natural" hierarchy when, earlier in the play, he struck Kendal (an action emblematic of the story's values) and said, "A poore man that is true, is better then an Earle, if he be false" (473-74). In the final scene, George emphasizes the difference between commoners and courtiers, from the commoners' viewpoint:

Though we Yorkshire men be blunt of speech,
And litle skild in court or such quaint fashions,
Yet nature teacheth vs dutie to our king . . .
.(1089-90)

George's words celebrate bluntness, which we are to read as the virtue of honesty, and posit that Yorkshire commoners act according to "nature," that is, act the way that God intended. On the other hand, these lines suggest that courtiers practice unnatural deceit.

The conflict between a natural hierarchy and the socioeconomic hierarchy is glossed over by the commoners' loyalty to the crown. Note that George did not say "A poore man that is true, is better than a King." As in the moral fool plays, royalty is exempt from most of the criticism aimed at the nobility. Loyalty and subservience to the king are, apparently, part of that unquestioned natural order, but loyalty to those between commoner and king appears to be conditional. For such loyalty to exist, the nobility must measure up to standards championed by conservative commoners. Commoners in the audience surely enjoyed this aspect of the play, but the nobility in attendance must have found less to appreciate.

Minor Fractures in the "Natural" Hierarchy

Although the play declares a "natural" hierarchy, there are a couple of points in the story that contradict this ideal. Both instances constitute a celebration of George's status in the terms of the same socioeconomic order that receives some criticism in the play.

In one curious statement, George indicates that he is, somehow, a gentleman. After Kendal and his men have purposefully put their horses in Wakefield's grain, and George has claimed that they "shall make good the trespasses they haue done" (447), the following dialogue is spoken:

Kendal: Peace, saucie mate, prate not to vs: I tell thee, pinner, we are gentlemen.

George: Why, sir, so may I sir, although I giue no armes.

Kendal: Thou! howe art thou a gentleman? (448-51)

Jenkins, the clown, makes a comic reply, and George's meaning is never clarified. If what we have is a faulty memorial reconstruction, then George's meaning is lost. But if the text is correct, then this part of the scene serves two functions: humor, as Jenkins insults Kendal through a play on words, and the suggestion that George is at least Kendal's equal. The theme of true nobility has already been made clear in the play; this statement is a bit surprising in that it elevates George in the social hierarchy, and, therefore, subtly affirms the same hierarchy that the play criticizes. We will see this same phenomenon in The Shoemaker's Holiday: the ideology of the upper levels of commoners is legitimized, in part, by expressing itself in terms of the same power structure that it critiques.

A similar instance of ideological conflict occurs when George is rewarded for his actions. A paradox is created: the elevation of the commoner-hero in socioeconomic status simultaneously with his statement of allegiance to his "base degree" (1198). For his loyalty and service, King Edward gives George the King's land near the town of Bradford and half of all that the Earl of Kendal owns. Such a gift would have raised George in wealth above all commoners but a very few wealthy yeomen and merchants that might live in his part of England. But, at the same time, George rejects the King's wish to knight him, saying,

Then let me liue and die a yeoman still:
 So was my father, so must liue his sonne.
 For tis more credite to men of base degree,
 To do great deeds, than men of dignitie. (1196-99)

George demonstrates loyalty to his station in life at the same time that, in economic terms, he moves far beyond that station. When combined with his own vague claim to being a gentleman, the representation of the commoner-hero is inconsistent, and the hero of the natural hierarchy benefits from the dominant socioeconomic structure. In this latter system, capital, in the form of land, is concentrated in the hands of the few and can be traded for service. When George is rewarded for his service to the crown, the property is held by one man, albeit a commoner.

These inconsistencies are not disruptive, and certainly not subversive. They represent the fulfillment of the commoner's fantasy of acquiring wealth and status and support Robert Greene's characterization of George a Greene. The author has created a fairly coherent representation of

citizen ideology in the play. We cannot say for sure that the play was intended to be a statement of Greene's own values, although we know something of his background as a commoner and of his professional and social aspirations.¹⁵ As was discussed earlier, the coherence of the play, in contrast to the moral fool plays and The Life and Death of Jack Straw, may have merely been the product of better craftsmanship and the desire for commercial success. Whatever the cause, the strong figure of the commoner-hero expresses the moral, social, and economic values of prosperous commoners effectively.

THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY

Arriving at a definitive interpretation of The Shoemaker's Holiday is difficult because of the contrasting views of London life that it simultaneously offers. The dominant mood of the play is even more festive than in George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield. Simon Eyre, the commoner-hero in the play, leads the jolly goodwill and optimism as he moves upward in London society. Yet the play also contains reminders of how dark life could be in London, especially for the vulnerable.

The mixture of harsh reality and light comedy has increasingly occupied the attention of scholars as Marxist

¹⁵ Greene appears to have been the son of either a saddler or "a cordwainer turned innkeeper" (Cruik Robert Greene 3). If he has been correctly identified in college records, Greene attended Cambridge, entering as a sizar, and Oxford (4), which means that he was one of those commoners described in Chapter One who earned the resentment of some gentlemen for corrupting the purity of a gentleman's institution.

theory has influenced readings of citizen comedy. Over the last thirty years a number of scholars have found it difficult to take at face value Dekker's assertion in The Shoemaker's Holiday that "nothing is purposed but mirth" (Epistle 1. 19).¹⁶ Some scholars still deemphasize the importance of the intrusions into the play of social and political realities and perceive the play as pure comedy.¹⁷ Others have tried to account for what they typically describe as a gap between Eyre's fantasy, holiday, or comedy world and the socioeconomic conflicts and war with France that coexist in the play. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several scholars recognized the significance of the socioeconomic conflicts in the play, conflicts that reflected London life. They found that the difficult transition from feudalism to capitalism had created tensions that are represented in the play, but they believed that the positive mood in the play manages to overcome or at least

¹⁶ References to lines in the play are to R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells's edition of The Shoemaker's Holiday (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ For example, George K. Hunter, who compares the play to Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor, emphasizes the fantasy element in the play and finds economic conflict unimportant. See "Bourgeois Comedy: Shakespeare and Dekker," Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison, ed. E. A. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) 1-15.

disguise the tensions.¹⁸ The trend among scholars in the years since has been to argue against closure in the play. These scholars can be grouped into two camps. One thinks that Dekker is unsuccessful in covering the difference between Eyre's joyful optimism and socioeconomic conflicts, and implies that he has insufficient control of his materials.¹⁹ The second counters that Dekker is very much in control and that he uses the difference to critique his society.²⁰

My view is closest to this last group of scholars. In reading the play I am struck by the incongruity of Eyre's world and the grim realities of life coexisting in the play,

¹⁸ Joel H. Kaplan argues that Eyre's rhetoric covers the moral ambiguities created by the "festive and commercial energies" that drive the play. See "Virtue's Holiday: Thomas Dekker and Simon Eyre," Renaissance Drama: New Series II, Essays Principally on Dramatic Theory and Form, ed. S. Schoenbaum (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969). In "Thomas Dekker's Twelfth Night," University of Toronto Quarterly 41.1 (1971): 63-73, Arthur Kinney finds that those tensions are resolved by Dekker's making Eyre a Lord of Misrule. Alexander Leggatt, in Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), states that the genre of citizen comedy "is concerned with social relations in their most material form--sex and marriage, money and property"--and with social stability (151). Dekker's play teaches the lesson that "prosperity must be linked with generosity . . . in the world of hard reality" (20). For this last point see also Harold E. Toliver, "The Shoemaker's Holiday: Theme and Image," Boston University Studies in English 5 (1961): 208-13, rpt. in Shakespeare's Contemporaries, eds. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 184-93. Michael Manheim, however, argues that the play is not really about social classes, but about "a man's 'inner linings,' his inherent moral strength . . . Good will and honest industry link the true cobbler and the true courtier." See "The Construction of The Shoemaker's Holiday," Studies in English Literature 10 (1970): 315-23.

¹⁹ See Peter Mortenson, "The Economics of Joy in The Shoemaker's Holiday," Studies in English Literature 16 (1976): 241-52; David Scott Kastan, "Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in The Shoemaker's Holiday," Studies in Philology 84 (1987): 324-37; and Lawrence Venuti, "Transformations of City Comedy: A Symptomatic Reading," Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts, ed. Peggy A. Knapp, vol. 3 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985) 99-134.

²⁰ For the view that the discrepancies are intentional and are important in Dekker's "propaganda," see Jeanne Macintyre, "Shore's Wife and The Shoemaker's Holiday," Cahiers Élisabéthains 39 (April 1991): 17-28, and Marta Straznicky, "The End(s) of Discord in The Shoemaker's Holiday," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 36 (Spring 1996): 357-72, online, Expanded Academic ASAP, August 17, 1998, available: <http://webL.searchbank.com>

and the play is, on the whole, so well written that the sharp contrast in moods cannot be accidental. In presenting a commoner-hero who experiences great material success and the approval of the King with reminders of the bitter experiences of life for the lower ranks of the commons, Thomas Dekker's chief thematic purpose is to suggest that Londoners act with compassion towards each other. As Marta Straznicky has pointed out, the play is specific about which methods of becoming materially successful are permissible, "making the distinction in terms of [the characters'] generosity" towards others (6). While Dekker does critique London society, the perspective that dominates the play is conservative. Dekker's commoner-hero stands for traditional ideas about society at the same time as he exemplifies capitalism's influences on English society.

Dekker's Perspective on Life in London

Dekker's life as a Londoner and his efforts as a professional writer have much to do with the mixture of moods in the play.²¹ Dekker, who may have been the son of a London tailor (Rhys xi), lived his entire life in London, loved the city, and devoted many of his writings to it, including satire such as the tract The Seven Deadly Sins of London. L. C. Knights contrasts Dekker with Jonson, who, of course, also wrote extensively about London life but had an "artistic conscience" that Dekker lacked: "[Dekker] does not draw on popular thought and refine it, like Jonson; his thoughts are the thoughts of the average Londoner" (231).

²¹ Dekker's authorship of the play has been established principally on the fact that Philip Henslowe bought "the gentle craft" from him on July 15, 1599 (Henslowe's Diary 122)

Dekker's knowledge of London is evident in the play.

In writing The Shoemaker's Holiday, Dekker took advantage of Londoners' pride in their city, which was especially high in the 1590s.²² After the defeat of the Armada in 1588, all England could boast, but Londoners always felt special pride and had even more reason in the 1590s. London trade thrived, and the city was home to beloved Queen Elizabeth, whose power and influence were never greater. R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells point out that the play appeared at the end of a decade in which the developing genre of the English history play had contributed to national pride and that playwrights were now turning to London history and scenes in the citizen comedies. John Stow, who had published national histories, likewise turned to London history in 1598 with his Survey of London (10-16).

With The Shoemaker's Holiday Dekker also took advantage of the growing market for popular literature, as Robert Greene had done with George a Greene. In addition to the general pride in contemporary and historic London, the rising literacy rate in the city helped make such a market possible.²³ Two of the plots in The Shoemaker's Holiday came from Thomas Deloney's prose fiction The Gentle Craft (1597). Deloney's work depended on and profited from the abundant

²² We have scant information about performances of the play on the Elizabethan stage. The title page of the 1600 first quarto states that the play "was acted before the Queenes most excellent Maestie on New-yeares day at night last" by the Admiral's Men, it seems likely that they had performed The Shoemaker's Holiday successfully at the Rose in late summer or fall of the year before (Smallwood and Wells, eds., The Shoemaker's Holiday 9).

²³ Unlike the rest of the country, 82% of apprentices and 69% of servants (one of the lowest classes of commoners) in London could sign their names, one indicator of literacy. In contrast, perhaps only a quarter of rural commoners could meet that test. See Paul Salzman's English Prose Fiction 1558-1700: A Critical History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 87.

pride in England and its capital wealth, and in the competence and power of craftsmen and their companies. Trumpeting, especially, certain values of prosperous commoners, Deloney's book sold well (Lawlis xi). It is important to note that, in addition to its content, the price of Deloney's fiction further indicates that his stories were directed toward a particular market segment. Chapbooks were accessible to the poorest readers, but romances like Deloney's "were aimed at artisans, merchants, tradesmen, apprentices--people who could afford to pay a shilling or more for a book" (Salzman 110-11). As mentioned in the discussion of George a Greene, such literature was still only a minor segment of the publishing market. Of 296 known popular works published shortly before and after the turn of the century, Laura Stevenson counts only 80 that deal with "merchants, clothiers, craftsmen and the economic and moral context of their lives" (15). Yet the number reveals a new market that the new professional writers could tap, and the texts produced became a commodity that could be revised and resold in dramatic form. The increasing appearance in London of the kinds of prose fiction that Deloney produced--in 1600, triple what it was in 1560 (Salzman 110)--indicates the growing significance of this market as a cultural force. Popular literature constituted a new opportunity for the commons to express their values in forms more "literary" than the folk play or the sung ballad, and for a significant movement into a medium of expression that had been largely restricted to the nobility.

Dekker's career would have been impossible without the

evolution of popular literature and the public theater, and, based on the amount of work produced, his was a successful career. He seems to have been contributor to or sole author of more than fifty plays in the years 1598 to 1603, and he collaborated with Jonson, Shakespeare, Middleton, Webster, Heywood, Massinger, and Ford. Two of the plays he wrote by himself in 1599, The Shoemaker's Holiday and Old Fortunatus, were performed at court, most likely after enjoying profitable (for Henslowe, that is) stage runs. His published works number more than 140 (Smallwood and Wells 2-5). Dekker knew how to write for his London audiences, and he enjoyed at least some of the economic and social benefits that came with commercial success. Literary success brought the court's attention to a tailor's son and provided a living, although it was often inadequate.

The compensation for a professional writer's efforts surely had a bearing on the references in The Shoemaker's Holiday to the life of the poor in London. Work for a writer was inconsistent, and none of it paid particularly well. A play rarely earned more than £6 or £7 for its author, and collaborators often had to share this amount (Smallwood and Wells 3). In 1598, Dekker received a total of £30 from Henslowe for his work on 16 plays, and £3 for The Shoemaker's Holiday the next year (Kastan 336). Authorities sent him to debtors' prison twice that same year (Smallwood and Wells 3); he was incarcerated a number of times, the longest stay lasting from 1613 to 1619, and he died in debt (Price 30, 33). His troubles indicate one reason for the sympathetic portrayal of the poorer commoners in the play.

Writing of Dekker's body of work, J. B. Steane discusses Dekker's sympathy for the poor and his capacity for great "social indignation" on their part (8-10). While Dekker exploited Londoners' desire for stories that glorified the city and its heroic commoners, The Shoemaker's Holiday also reflects his "aware[ness] that life for many was precarious, however hard they worked" (Parr vii).

The World According to Simon Eyre

The play's optimism is embodied in the commoner Simon Eyre, who represents values that appealed to citizens--hard work as the means to success, a belief in putting the community before oneself, and generosity--as well as material success. His rise from shoemaker to lord mayor is only one of three intertwined plots, but his story binds the others together.²⁴ In the romantic main plot, Sir Hugh Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, and Sir Roger Oatley, Lord Mayor of London, serve as obstacles to the love of Lincoln's nephew, Rowland Lacy, and Oatley's daughter, Rose. Lincoln's and Oatley's joint motivation is socioeconomic snobbery. The second plot concerns the separation of journeyman shoemaker Ralph from his wife, Jane, by the war, and the attempts by Master Hammon, a city gentleman, to woo her in Ralph's absence. Simon Eyre's ebullient perspective comes to dominate the play and helps resolve the conflicts in the other two plots. Like George a Green, Simon Eyre, with the help of his employees, is a heroic commoner-hero, solving problems and receiving approval and rewards from the king. The

²⁴ Simon Eyre was sheriff of London in 1434 and lord mayor in 1445. A number of events in the play are based on fact.

shoemakers prevent Lincoln and Oatley from stopping the marriage of Lacy and Rose, and they thwart Hammon in his efforts to marry Jane, whom he believes (or so he says) has lost her husband in the war.²⁵ As the plots develop and are resolved, Eyre's mood and his perspective on life inspire others in the play.

One element of Eyre's perspective is his dictum "to work" (4.131). Eyre embodies the ideal so important to many commoners that one's efforts lead to material success, and his men enthusiastically follow his lead. After Eyre becomes sheriff, has given the shop to Hodge, and made Firk foreman (10.153-54), the men work just as cheerfully, and Hodge urges them on: "To it, pell-mell, that we may live to be Lord Mayors, or Aldermen at least" (13.3-4).²⁶

The shoemakers share not only a work ethic but also a sense of responsibility for each other. While Eyre maintains his position of authority in the shop, we see in the first scene that a strong feeling of comradeship also defines his relation with his men, and scene four, which is set at the shop, further demonstrates their congenial efforts to produce and thrive. In addition to establishing a pleasant, healthy work environment for the men in the play, the scene reinforces the theme of brotherhood when the men insist that Eyre employ the foreign journeyman

²⁵ Hammon is a character in need of some guidance from the goodwill and morality of Eyre's world. For this reason, some scholars have suspected Hammon of having tampered with the list of those who died in the war. See, for example, Anthony Parr, ed., *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, 2nd ed. (London: A & C Black, 1990) xviii. However, there is no clear indication in the play. This question is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

²⁶ This same emphasis on the value of hard work is found in Dekker's 1609 allegorical pamphlet *Worke for Armourours*, in which Industry is the one good counselor to the Princesses Money and Poverty.

shoemaker, Hans (Lacy in disguise). Comradeship is also expressed through generosity, as when Eyre celebrates his success by hosting a pancake breakfast on Shrove Tuesday for all London apprentices at his house. This act extends Eyre's "world" to encompass a large group of Londoners. His act appears to be entirely altruistic. He tells the king that in hosting the breakfast he only reciprocates a kindness done for him when he had nothing.

Eyre's way is to maintain good humor and to put the best face on things, even when his intentions are thwarted, as when his efforts to keep Ralph from going to war fail. He replies to Lacy, colonel of the London troops:

You will not release him? Well, let him go. He's a proper shot. Let him vanish. Peace, Jane. Dry up thy tears, they'll make his powder dankish. Take him, brave men. Hector of Troy was an hackney to him, Hercules and Termagant scoundrels. Prince Arthur's Round Table, by the Lord of Ludgate, ne'er fed such a tall, such a dapper swordman. By the life of Pharoah, a brave, resolute swordman. Peace, Jane. I say no more, mad knaves. (11.168-76)

Eyre's bombastic exaggeration usually overrides negativity. Anthony Parr has described the mood of the play as "expansion, . . . as Eyre generates out of himself the festive mood which gradually comes to dominate the entire action" (xii). Eyre's distinctive language is part of this expansion, "a cause rather than an effect" that "does create its own level of reality" (Hunter 6-7).²⁷

The king himself is inspired by Eyre's mood, responding as much to Eyre's enthusiasm as to his efforts and success. In the final scene of the play, the king rewards Eyre in

²⁷ For more on Eyre's mood as a causal force in the play see also Parr, ed., The Shoemaker's Holiday xviii, xxi

several ways. Most important to the mood of the play, he fulfills the optimistic expectations of Eyre's perspective: he sanctions the marriage of Lacy and Rose, saying to Lincoln and Oatley,

Dost thou not know that love respects no blood,
Cares not for difference of birth and state?
(21.105-6)

He further supports Eyre's perspective and honors him by supping at Eyre's home and by naming the market building (Leaden Hall) that Eyre has had built at his own expense.

The last reward emphasizes the economic theme in the play. The king grants Eyre's wish that shoemakers be given two days of the week to sell their wares at Leaden Hall. This economic wish-fulfillment is part of the overall optimistic picture confirmed in the play by the king's authority.²⁸ In conjunction with royal approbation of Eyre, we see the socioeconomic system working efficiently in the play to the benefit of the commoner-hero. By making a shrewd deal for a ship's cargo, Eyre attains the wealth necessary for his move up the social ladder to the position of lord mayor. This manner of acquiring economic and social success did occur in London,²⁹ and Eyre's story represented the dream of many commoners.

Eyre's enthusiasm and values gain emphasis by standing

²⁸ In *The Gentle Craft, Part I, The Novels of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Merritt E. Lawlis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), Thomas Deloney only writes that the market day for the leather trade at Leaden Hall was "for their [London shoemakers'] ease" (169). The significance of this "ease" is not clear, but the King's patent probably had some importance for shoemakers or Dekker would have left it out of the play. In fact, he doubles the number of market days mentioned by Deloney.

²⁹ In *The Artisan in Elizabethan Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), Charles W. Camp explains that in the late Middle Ages master craftsmen were superseded in respectability by merchants. Many craftsmen, like Simon Eyre, became merchants through speculation. Wealth was requisite for obtaining the positions of sheriff and lord mayor of London (8-9).

out sharply against the perspectives of certain other characters in the play, especially Lincoln, Oatley, and Hammon. Where Eyre's view is generally broad and generous, theirs is narrow and selfish. Oatley and Lincoln look petty in the first scene, each desiring the best material match for nephew or daughter, each judging the other through the ignorant perspective of socioeconomic prejudice, each pretending to the other that his motivations are selfless. Juxtaposed with this spectacle of self-interest and division is Eyre's entrance with his wife Margery, Jane, Ralph, and the rest of his men to petition for Ralph's release from the army. We quickly see that Eyre is head of a micro-community that certainly has degrees, but whose members have a shared concern for each other, exemplified by their mission. Oatley's and Lincoln's surliness will continue into the last scene, when the king finally forces them to take, for the moment at least, Eyre's perspective.

Self-interested materialism is represented as well in Hammon, and even in Eyre's wife Margery. Hammon, a wealthy commoner,³⁰ believes that he can buy Jane, and offers Ralph £20 for her. This crass attempt to deal for a human being contrasts with Eyre's offer to supply Lacy and his cousin, Askew, with boots for seven years if they will let Ralph stay home with his wife. For Eyre, money appears to be more a tool to do good than a means of obtaining "things" or status. Although he celebrates his success, he seems to care little about titles (9.82-84).³¹

³⁰ His name may suggest "Mammon "

³¹ In comparing representations of the entrepreneur in citizen comedies, Hunter notes this quality in Eyre as being different from Middleton's *Quando* or Massinger's *Sir Giles Overreach*. See "Bourgeois Comedy" 5.

His wife Margery, on the other hand, revels in her increasing status, expressed in several kinds of adornment: new clothes, affected language, and a grave appearance. The butt of humorous criticism from her husband and the shoemakers, she represents, comically, the superficial face of success, as opposed to Eyre, who is the embodiment of essential accomplishment.

Dekker supplies the commoners in the audience at *The Rose* with a commoner-hero who reflects them in the way that they would wish to be seen: a perspective in which material success is noble and an agent of virtue, in which socioeconomic differences appear to be less important than one's actions, and in which they are affirmed by the highest authority in the land. The characteristics of this perspective are a logical result of commoners' desire to cross social boundaries and acquire greater power.

Yet the play contains significant elements that do not fit easily, or do not fit at all, into this pleasant picture. In contrast to George a Green, Dekker's play presents a more complex view of life. Eyre's perspective is not so neatly tied to socioeconomic position as is George's, and The Shoemaker's Holiday ultimately lacks a coherent promotion of a value system representing a particular socioeconomic level in London.

The Darker Side of Life in London

While Simon Eyre's optimism dominates the play, we are often reminded of the reality of life for Londoners vulnerable in the socioeconomic system. We see relatively

powerless individuals suffer or be threatened by those with power, and we see prejudice against and conflict between socioeconomic groups. To further emphasize the theme of economic and social vulnerability, Dekker included elements in his play that would evoke responses based on associations with contemporary people and events.³²

Many such reminders come from the Ralph-Jane plot.³³ Through this plot Dekker introduces war as more than a cause for the expression of patriotism; the death and injuries of war intrude into the festive mood. The fact that the contrast between the brutal effects of war and the play's enthusiasm has been an issue in a couple of modern productions demonstrates that it is more than a scholarly question; it is a problem that actors and directors must deal with in performing the play. A reviewer of a 1981 production at England's National Theatre commented on the manner in which the director, John Dexter, tried to "reconcile . . . sociohistorical truths with rags-to-riches fantasy and fun" (Nightingale 25). Dexter did not attempt to soften the "truth" of war, but let it receive full attention. In his production, when Ralph returns from the war, he is missing part of a leg, and the other characters

³² Scholars who write criticism from a materialist perspective have emphasized this aspect of the play. In "The Economics of Joy in The Shoemaker's Holiday" 252, Peter Mortenson writes that "Dekker creates a grim world and encourages us to pretend that it is a green one." David Kastan argues that the play is "a realistic portrait only of Elizabethan middle-class dreams." Rather than present the realities of life for the poor, the play

erase[s] the tensions and contradictions created by the nascent capitalism of the late sixteenth-century. The comic form offers itself as an ideological resolution to the social problems the play engages. Social dislocations are rationalized and contained in a reassuring vision of coherence and community. See "Workshop and/as Playhouse" 325.

³³ Dekker did not find this story in Deloney. Smallwood and Wells think that he created it for the play. See their introduction to The Shoemaker's Holiday 6.

stop to gape. The moment temporarily alters the mood and bears on the play as a whole. In contrast, in a 1989 performance of the play, director David William "took care (as Dekker did) to keep the portrayal of Ralph and Jane well within the bounds of the touchingly pathetic and not to let it disfigure the general contentment of the shoemakers and all" (Sidnell 149).³⁴

The latter point of view would have been even more arguable when the play was first performed, for the war was quite real for Dekker's audience. David Kastan notes that in the years 1596-99, problems with the Irish demanded increasing numbers of soldiers, and rumors of a new Spanish invasion meant a call for more conscriptions (329). The war is mentioned early in the play, when Lacy's responsibilities get in the way of romance, and is the last subject discussed in the play, when the king reminds all that

When all our sports and banquetings are done,
Wars must right wrongs which Frenchmen have begun.
(21.195-96)

Ralph's reappearance occurs at the structural center of the play, which is suggestive of its significance. He is the commoner who fights in and suffers from the war while young Lacy, a nobleman, stays at home. It is Ralph's wife Jane that is forced to fend for herself in a generally uncaring city. Margery's insensitivity towards Ralph's injury and the fate of his wife is more jarring than comical, and emphasizes Ralph's fate all the more. The dissonance between harshness and festivity appears to have been planned. Fear of war and a sense of injustice over Ralph's fate would have been as likely a response from the audience

³⁴ The performance occurred during the Stratford Festival in Canada

as the patriotic feeling that the end of the play promotes.

The Ralph and Jane story also presents the most pointed negative references in the play to the nature of labor relations during the period. Despite the comradeship established in Eyre's world in scenes one and four, Jane has left the "community," and is struggling, selling goods in a seamstress's shop, alone and vulnerable in the great city. Of Jane's leaving, Margery says,

Perdie, we know not what's become of her. She was here a while, and because she was married grew more stately than became her. I checked her, and so forth. Away she flung, never returned, nor said bye nor bah. And, Ralph, you know: 'ka me, ka thee'. And so as I tell ye--Roger, is not Firk come yet? (10.91-97)

The audience knows by now that Margery is somewhat insensitive to Ralph and Jane and therefore is not a reliable source of information.³⁵ No further information will be immediately forthcoming, except that Jane lives in London, and the audience must speculate on the exact nature of Jane's departure.

To intensify the audience's concern for Jane, Margery's remarks are full of signs that there is little compassion, on her part at least, towards Jane. To begin with, Margery's integrity is undermined further by the fact that the audience has just seen in her the affectedness that she charges to Jane. She seems rather shallow. Her indifference to Jane's fate is apparent in her flippant comments in the last half of her remarks.³⁶ Finally, she

³⁵ The audience also knows that Margery is rather superficial and that she loves to put on airs herself. The cause of Jane's departure may have had more to do with Margery than with anything that Jane did.

³⁶ Smallwood and Wells find the gloss for "ka me, ka thee" in Tilley: "Do as you would be done by," "tit for tat."

interrupts her chattering about Jane to ask if Firk has arrived--to bring news about her husband's advancement. Her following comment that, "if she had wanted, she might have opened her case to me or my husband or to any of my men; I am sure there's not any of them, perdie, but would have done her good to his power" (100-3), does little to clear up the matter for Ralph or for the audience. The matter is further trivialized by the bawdy suggestion in her words. One can't help feeling that here is more to the matter than what Margery wishes to divulge. She is probably feeling guilty about her treatment of Jane, but her own social snobbery shows how little she really cares. The scene is certainly not all negative--all welcome Ralph, and Margery also speaks kindly to him--and the shoemakers will come to his aid in a later scene when he discovers the whereabouts of his wife. But the moment of carelessness exhibited by the community, which is represented by Margery, towards Ralph and Jane is striking.

The audience's discomfort would deepen two scenes later, when Jane appears for the first time since early in the play and is seen eking out an existence in the position of a female Exchange shop keeper, which was a somewhat disreputable job associated with prostitution.³⁷ Outside Eyre's world, she becomes more vulnerable to the advances of the wealthy Hammon.

Hammon is neither purely good or bad, and he is not the villain that some have seen him to be. Parr accuses him of deceiving Jane into thinking her husband is dead (xviii),

³⁷ See Parr, xvii, and Smallwood and Wells, 149 n., in their editions of the play. Parr says that Hammon "accept[s] the popular myth which identified female shopkeepers with prostitutes "

but the question of whether or not the letter reporting Ralph's death (and others') is genuine or not is never clear. Erroneous reports of deaths occur in our own century, despite computerized records and identification numbers. And the chances of there being more than one Ralph Dampont would have been good. Besides, we have evidence in the play that, despite his "spiritual vulgarity" (Parr xvii) and materialism, Hammon does have a caring soul. Delivering a soliloquy while observing Jane from outside her shop, he reveals genuine feelings of love:

. . . Thus I oft have stood
 In frosty evening, a light burning by her,
 Enduring biting cold only to eye her.
 One only look hath seemed as rich to me
 As a king's crown, such is love's lunacy. (12.15-19)

We will also see him give the twenty pounds he had offered Ralph for Jane to the couple when he knows that he has lost and realizes he has wronged her, and he will vow never to wed (18.98-102).

On the other hand, Jane is still treated like an object by Hammon, most obviously in his asking her "how sell you then this hand?" (12.27) and in his offer of money in exchange for her hand in marriage. His offer is, of course, only a variation on the transaction of the marriage dowry, but that subtlety would probably not have occurred to the audience. Instead, the commoners would have identified with the shoemakers' response:

Ralph. Sirrah Hammon, Hammon, dost thou think a shoemaker is so base to be a bawd to his own wife for commodity? Take thy gold, choke with it! Were I not lame, I would make thee eat thy words.
Firk. A shoemaker sell his flesh and blood--O indignity!

Hammon. Sirrah, take up your pelf, and be packing. (18.92-97)

More subtle is the fact that she is the object of Hammon's gaze. She is "fair and lovely," works "prettily," and has a "pretty hand," and Hammon knows little more about her (12.2 and 13). These details in the scene underscore the reality of a woman's position in London which is not protected by wealth, status, or community.

Other incidents would have called to mind contemporary labor relations. The first occurs when Eyre rejects Hans (Lacy) for employment, and the men, as a group, threaten to quit (7.48-76). This scene emphasizes the difference between Eyre and the subcommunity of workers, even though the two quickly become united again. Later in the play, the shoemakers act to bring back Ralph's wife. They form a mob--"Enter Hodge, Firk, Ralph, and five or six shoemakers, all with cudgels, or such weapons" (18.sd)--and confront Hammon and his friends, crying "Down with them. Cry 'Clubs for prentices'" (18.31-32), the traditional rallying cry of apprentices.

These representations of worker unity were topical in 1599, and two related developments in Elizabethan society were involved. First is the change in the guilds, which originally had been developed on the communal model, but, in their structure, had become "increasingly hierarchical and entrepreneurial," a change Dekker complained about elsewhere

in his writings (Kastan 326-27).³⁸ For much of the Tudor period, moral interludes had been reflecting the gradual economic shift to capitalistic values, as Covetousness came to be replaced as the chief vice by Sloth or Idleness (Wickham xiii). Dekker's response, in a different dramatic form, was to glorify the shoemakers' insistence on community.

Second, the developing form of protest by Londoners of gathering in mobs to seek redress finds representation in this play. Popular unrest in England was certainly nothing new, but had been gaining momentum during the century. An example characteristic of the late sixteenth century is the cloth-workers' protest in 1592 over record wool prices, which were causing "the poorest felt makers [to be] squeezed out of the market" (Richard Wilson 173). As was the case in many other protests, members of one of the guilds were frustrated by fluctuating market forces and were going outside the established practices in labor relations to make their demands known.

Londoners had long tended toward conservatism, remaining loyal to the Crown and to existing order, and rioting in London had been "extremely rare" during the Tudor period (Wilson 166). But in the "crisis years" at the end of the century, crop failures and expensive wars

accelerated the collapse of social consensus in the transition to market capitalism, provoking a

³⁸ In his discussion of Elizabethan and Jacobean citizen plays, which includes The Shoemaker's Holiday, Laurence Venuti argues that they

exhibit an approving interest in the rise of capitalism by applauding its high energy and calculation, but they still cling to the feudal order and the moral values that uphold it.

See "Transformations of City Comedy" 112.

rash of urban revolts across Europe which were a forecast of the great revolutionary civil wars to come. (166)

Richard Wilson points out that the London mobs which began appearing usually had several common characteristics: they wanted food at affordable prices, they "despised ostentatious wealth and harked back to a golden age of social harmony," they protested entrepreneurship, and they expected results from the government (167). The play as a whole reflects some of these desires, but the point here is that the mobs of workers in the play reflect the political activity happening on the streets of London, an activity that some in the audience had probably participated in. The group of shoemakers have clear goals, they band together to improve their bargaining position, they expect results, and, in the case of Hammon's wedding, they are prepared to become violent.³⁹

Related to these reminders of labor relations are details in the play that recall a former Lord Mayor of London and offer a contrast between him and Simon Eyre. Although he was mayor in 1594-95, Sir John Spencer's name had been in the air the year before Dekker's play was staged because of scandal over his daughter's marriage. The details bear a strong resemblance to the Lacy-Rose plot: Spencer, who had been a successful London merchant, disapproved of the marriage of his daughter to the second Lord Compton so much that he hid her away and was eventually

³⁹ In his introduction to the play Steane comments that, after this sympathetic portrayal of apprentices, it is not surprising that when Dekker leaves the restraints of romantic comedy for satire in The Seven Deadly Sins (1606), he will place his commentary on the relationship between masters and apprentices under the section titled "Cruelty." See The Shoemaker's Holiday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 8

accused of mistreating her, for which he spent a short time in the Fleet (Novarr 234-37). Spencer was hard on the theaters--see "Conflict and the Theaters" in Chapter One--which, to some extent, may have motivated Dekker to create such a close resemblance between plot and life.

Spencer was principally known for three things: "spectacular wealth, stinginess, and harassment of apprentices" (Straznicky 6). Eyre's acquisition of great wealth served to set his character next to Spencer's for comparison. The latter two characteristics are obvious contrasts, and the "harassment of apprentices" is especially relevant to the play. In addition to food shortages and riots that occurred during Spencer's term, there was popular unrest instigated "largely [by] the city's apprentices." As part of Spencer's efforts to curb them, apprentices were "whipped, pilloried, and imprisoned" (Novarr 234), but instead of subduing the apprentices, his efforts "were met with outright defiance and an attempted assassination" of the Lord Mayor (Straznicky 6). The contrast in the play between Oatley's term as mayor and Eyre's--"narrow, snobbish officialdom yielding irresistibly to the tenure of the public-spirited man" (Parr xii)--was made more vivid by the allusion to Spencer and to political turmoil among the populace.

In evoking memories and feelings related to the war and to contemporary labor relations Dekker provides some balance to Eyre's jovial, optimistic perspective. In his comedy about London life he seems to be reminding his audience of

the need to treat each other humanely.⁴⁰ I now turn to one scholar's very different interpretation of the two contrasting moods in the play.

Holiday (Dis)Order

Much has been written about holiday in the play, both as an event and a mood, and of Eyre's role in that holiday. Arthur Kinney has written an analysis in which he describes Eyre, the acknowledged "madcap" mayor, as a Lord of Misrule. The "holiday" that forms the heart of the play allows "the release of desire and wish," "pointing the way to a firmer society" (66). Eyre must give up control to the king at the end of the play, and order is reestablished with a "reconstitute[d] . . . behavior and attitude" as the characters turn to the reality of war (66). In sum, the chaos of Eyre's world is cathartic, a necessary release of energy like that that is supposed to occur in rural folk festivals. The catharsis allows the established social order to continue to function.⁴¹

Yet Kinney's thesis depends upon interpreting Dekker's play, an artifact of the London professional theater, in terms of a rural-centered folk rite, and that is a more complex and subtle task than Kinney allows. Although he points out interesting parallels between Simon Eyre and the

⁴⁰ While L. C. Knights finds Dekker's plays "uniformly dull" (228), I think he comes closest of the critics of this play to defining Dekker's intention when he says that Dekker's works as a whole exhibit a considerable humanitarianism. See Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson (London, 1937 Repr. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) 229-31.

⁴¹ For elaboration of this function of folk ritual see Michael Bristol's Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England (New York: Methuen, 1985) 27, and Natalie Z. Davis's "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France," Past and Present 59 (1973): 51-91.

function of the Lord of Misrule in folk festival, Kinney's conclusions that the play, like the festival, "advanc[es] folly in order to exorcise it" and "becomes indistinguishable from the occasion it advertises" are reductive (64).⁴² Dekker was simultaneously attuned to the literary conventions of romantic comedy and to the daily life of London, with an eye to what would sell on the stage and further his career. While his sources have their origin in popular culture, those stories as they appear in his play are highly stylized, with a very different set of concerns affecting their presentation. The professional theater is too different a cultural activity for Simon Eyre to be interpreted by simply using the Lord of Misrule as a model.

Kinney is accurate, however, in seeing Eyre and his festive perspective as functional to the socioeconomic order. Along this line of thinking we see the immediate cultural relevance of holiday. The holidays that Elizabethans would have recognized in the play were concerned, ultimately, with reinforcing social hierarchy. The culmination of Eyre's perspective is his establishment of a feast holiday for all London apprentices, and that feast falls on Shrove Tuesday, a significant holiday for apprentices, as Marta Straznicky explains:

[It] was a day of feasting and carousing during which legal strictures were loosened and normative social relations suspended. . . . [A]pprentices were singularly empowered on this holiday. Enacting a mock jurisdiction over what appear to be traditional morals, London apprentices raided

⁴² Kinney's article appears to have been inspired by C. L. Barber's Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom (1959, Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968). Barber's analysis recognizes the subtleties and vagaries in the relationship between folk culture and London professional theater.

brothels and carted prostitutes through the streets, stormed and vandalized theaters, carried out skimmingtons, and tortured performing animals.⁴³ (1)

Thus, while the apprentices were given additional freedoms, they were contained within and even supported established authority by attacking the objects of official condemnation.

Elizabethans would have also readily connected Firk's naming the holiday "St. Hugh's Holiday" (18.224-25), after the patron saint of the shoemakers, with Queen Elizabeth's Accession Day, for both fell on November 17 (Timms). The association of the crown with St. Hugh occurs again in the final scene, when Eyre promises to "set your sweet Majesty's image cheek by jowl by Saint Hugh" (21.7-8). Taken together, the association implies order in the holiday rather than chaos (Timms). And, Straznicky adds, Accession Day "was primarily a political festival, imposed from the top down" (2).

Holiday in Dekker's play, then, means something different than it might in certain celebration rituals in popular culture. The reinforcement of social hierarchy is inherent in these holidays, and they would have tended to evoke associations with structure and authority. The upper levels of commoners present in a London public theater audience would have found such associations reassuring.⁴⁴

Eyre's Self-Interest

While Dekker deliberately juxtaposes Eyre's optimistic

⁴³ "skimmington" a mocking, noisy serenade to or verbal abuse of someone, a charivari

⁴⁴ L C Knights perceives an order in Dekker's work formed from "the traditional conception that lies behind Ulysses' speech on 'Degree' on the one hand, and the acts of the Elizabethan Privy Council on the other" (*Drama & Society* 242)

perspective with the harshness of life for the lower levels of society, there is a conflict that he does not prevent from being potentially disruptive. That is the conflict between the feudal economic system that no longer existed in 1600 and the developing capitalist system, a conflict referred to earlier in this chapter. As in several other plays discussed in this study, we see the paradox of the belief that socioeconomic differences do not determine an individual's worth, it is essential qualities that matter, at the same time that commoners seek to move up in the socioeconomic order and commoner-heroes are celebrated. This paradox is most plainly stated in Eyre's favorite line, "Prince am I none, yet am I princely born," or some variation. Dekker got the idea for this line from Deloney, and appears to have used it to express Eyre's exuberance as well as the idea of essential value. Yet once again we see a commoner-hero declare his inner worth as being independent of his social status, yet use as his metaphorical paradigm the class structure that he purports to be above or outside. Dekker does indeed draw the character with a "princely" (though not perfect) nature, showing him to be generous, compassionate, and humble.

The tension created by this conflict has already been alluded to in the discussion of war and labor relations in conjunction with Eyre's exuberance. The manifestation of the conflict comes down to communal interests and responsibilities versus self-interest, an issue at the core of social tensions in modern Europe. Dekker clearly is in favor of community. He begins establishing an egalitarian

mood by addressing the epistle for the play "To all good fellows, professors of the Gentle Craft, of whatever degree soever." Then, in the first scene, the community of shoemakers is contrasted with Oatley and Lincoln's self-interest, and the communal spirit, defined by Simon Eyre, runs through the play and is confirmed by the king in the last scene. When we see Eyre, he is either at the shop with his men or his men surround him when he is elsewhere. Dekker goes so far as to deemphasize the events that constitute Eyre's socioeconomic advancement by not showing them on stage; attention is kept more on the group (Conover 37). The climax of Eyre's story, which would seem to be his becoming Lord Mayor (an event not dramatized), is, instead, "the establishment of the traditions of Shrove Tuesday and the use of Leadenhall, things Eyre did as Lord Mayor which had lasting public effect" (34). The festival mood, which peaks in the last part of the play, adds to the feeling of community because it "reawakens and strengthens feelings of solidarity" (Bristol 29).

Despite the emphasis on community, there are the instances of individual advancement and isolation that condemnation of self-interest cannot erase. The socioeconomic orders that context brings to the play--the guild structure; Eyre as shop owner, sheriff, alderman, and mayor; the hierarchy that begins with the king and descends to a poor, female shopkeeper--insist that one person's interests can be more important than another's. As the earlier discussion of modern performances of the play indicated, the individuals whose interests are not protected

by society can no more be easily dismissed than can Eyre's profiting by the system. The gap between Dekker's vision of a humane society and the self-interest and social conflict in life would have been even more obvious to Elizabethan audiences. The unpleasant side of the socioeconomic values represented by Simon Eyre's perspective provided the opportunity for ideological disruption despite the festive mood of the play.

Conclusion

Dekker wanted to write a play that would appeal to the well-to-do who dominated the average public theater audience. He was a professional writer whose living depended on commercial success. In the jovial, financially successful Eyre and the values that he represents Dekker was probably successful in fulfilling his intentions. Yet it is clear that he was not afraid to take risks, for his introduction of the Ralph-Jane plot into the material derived from Deloney's prose fiction deliberately foregrounds the gap between ideals and reality for many in the society. The Ralph-Jane story is the conduit for one of Dekker's key themes. The Shoemaker's Holiday suggests that people must treat each other well.

In delivering this theme, Dekker provides two voices for the commons, and this is a key difference from Greene's George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield. In George a Greene, greed, ambition, and lust are vanquished, and commoners are united against those who commit these sins against king and community. In The Shoemaker's Holiday,

Ralph will be lame the rest of his life, the socioeconomic conflicts that remind the audience of life outside the theater do not go away, and Margery's lack of concern for the welfare of another commoner is not easily forgotten. While both plays are based on legendary characters and both contain an optimistic mood, we can say that Dekker's play about London life is a degree closer to realism, and his commoner-hero is a bit less uncritically presented.

Despite this greater realism, among the qualities that The Shoemaker's Holiday shares with George a Greene is a more positive view of present-day England than we have seen in the plays previously discussed. Rather than the one-sided condemnation of society implied in the moral fool plays, these plays offer a more optimistic blending of the idealization of a faded socioeconomic system with the rise of the commoner in the current system. Even while Dekker reminds his audience of how hard life can be on the vulnerable, he offers a generally positive representation of a commoner-hero moving up in the socioeconomic hierarchy. Certainly George a Greene and Simon Eyre are the strongest, most appealing representations of commoners that we have seen. In celebrating these commoner-heroes and the values they represent, Greene's and Dekker's plays constitute the best examples of the viewpoint of prosperous commoners in the plays discussed in this study.

CHAPTER 5

THE NOBLE COMMONER

THE DOWNFALL OF ROBERT, EARL OF HUNTINGTON

Anthony Munday's The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington holds an unusual place in this study, for the play has no true commoner-hero. Instead, its hero is a less vigorous, more refined version of the legendary commoner-hero Robin Hood. By the late sixteenth century, Robin Hood, a figure with considerable cultural significance, already had a long history of being altered and adapted to suit the purposes of different socioeconomic groups. With his play, which appeared in 1598, Munday helped appropriate into English high culture a figure who had originated in low culture as an outlaw, and he considerably altered Robin Hood when he made him the hero of a play that combined history with religious allegory and the pastoral.¹

The change that had the most significance for the Robin Hood tradition was Munday's making Robin a nobleman. As this chapter will show, Munday appears to have ennobled Robin because a nobleman better fit his plan to please his

¹ On February 15, 1598, Philip Henslowe paid Anthony Munday £5 "for a playe boocke called the firste parte of Robyne Hoode" (Henslowe's Diary 86). We know from Henslowe's diary that Henry Chettle had a hand in some way with The Downfall and/or its companion play, The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington (101-2), but scholars have established that Munday wrote at least the main body of the play. See H. Dugdale Sykes, "The Dramatic Work of Henry Chettle," Notes and Queries 144 (1923): 324-27, and John C. Meagher's "Hackwriting and the Huntingdon Plays," Elizabethan Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies, no. 9 (London: Edward Arnold Pub., 1966) 197-219.

audience and to impress the elite with his poetic skills. Yet, with this alteration, Robin, or the Earl of Huntington, became a member of the social group who held socioeconomic power, and his chief function became preserving the traditional line of authority. To this day, Robin Hood represents not the commons', but rather the nobility's capacity for bravery, compassion, and loyalty, and he is known for his benevolence to the poor and for his gathering the support of commoners to protect the King's authority.²

This chapter looks in some detail at the transformations that the figure of Robin Hood went through, from his origins through his appearance in Munday's play, and the cultural significance of the figure. J. C. Holt has observed that "in each generation [the Robin Hood legend] acquired new twists from shifts in the composition, outlook and interests of the audience, or changes in the level of literacy, or developments in the means of communication" (7). The following account of that legend as it developed in the sixteenth century presents the salient features. By 1600, the Robin Hood tradition held an unusual cultural position, or perhaps positions would be more accurate, for the figure of Robin Hood was used differently by the various levels in the social hierarchy. From his popular ballad origins, Robin had become important in the May games and had attained symbolic meaning in politically subversive activities; he

² In his valuable study, The Robin Hood Tradition in the English Renaissance (Salzburg Studies in English Literature Salzburg, Austria. Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1973), Malcolm A. Nelson says of The Downfall and The Death that "the importance of their contribution to the tradition, for good or ill, cannot be overemphasized" (167) The Death receives little attention in this study because the Earl dies early in the play and the rest of the play is given over primarily to court intrigue.

had a less important ideological significance for London citizens; and he was eventually appropriated by the nobility and his new status made legitimate by the written word.

Robin Hood's Cultural Significance for Commoners

Stories about Robin Hood were first told in ballads, and the dichotomous representation of him that we find in the ballads bears on all later traditions, not only the literary.³ On the one hand, as Malcolm Nelson characterizes the ballads, Robin "is a great archer and outlaw leader, courageous, manly, devout, kind to those in need, loyal to his king and his men, and humbly devoted to the service of the Virgin" (11).⁴ Perhaps most importantly, he represents "freedom writ large": he does not have the responsibilities of parents, wife, or children, and he has no lord in the forest (Hanawalt 169). This is Robin Hood as we know him in the late sixteenth-century plays and, except for his devotion to the Virgin Mary, in the narrative tradition that continues in our own century.

On the other hand, Robin and his men are a violent band in the ballads. The violence, which is consistent with the actions of real bandits in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, contrasts with the band's compassion and

³ The earliest reference to Robin Hood, William Langland's late fourteenth century Piers Plowman, is not, of course, a ballad, and it predates extant ballads about Robin Hood. However, its mention of "rhymes of Robin Hood" tells us that such ballads did exist. See J. C. Holt's Robin Hood (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1982) 16. The ballads from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are generally agreed to form the basis for the later literary tradition (Nelson, The Robin Hood Tradition 8).

⁴ The tradition of his thefts being intended to feed the poor peasants is the creation of a later century. In only one ballad, #117, does Robin Hood rob from the rich "in order to give to the poor" (Holt, Robin Hood 39), and the poor man is a knight.

religious devotion. In one ballad, Robin is not satisfied with shooting the sheriff dead; he hangs him as well. In another, after killing Guy of Gisborne with a sword,

He tooke Sir Guys head by the hayre,
And sticked itt on his bowes end:
"Thou has beene traytor all thy liffe,
Which thing must have an ende."

Robin pulled forth an Irish kniffe,
And nicked Sir Guy in the fface,
That he was never on a woman borne
Cold tell who Sir Guye was.

Much the Miller's son, one of Robin's men, strikes off the head of a young page only because he is afraid that the page might reveal that they had murdered his master, a treacherous monk.⁵ The key difference between the violence of genuine bandits in late Medieval England and of Robin Hood and his men is that real robbers, who stole wine, ale, and bread as well as the king's deer, usually victimized peasants. Indeed, parish records show that 37% of the bandits' murder victims were women and 4% were children. These figures were double the overall homicide rates for those two groups (Hanawalt 164-65).⁶ Robin Hood's mayhem is aimed only at unjust local and church authorities and their representatives.

By redirecting the violence of bandits, peasant ballads converted the figure of a potential enemy into a hero.

Robin Hood's transgressions are against the authorities that

⁵ Ballads #117, 118, and 119 in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. All numbered ballads discussed in this chapter have been reprinted in this collection

⁶ Hanawalt's figures are derived from the fourteenth century jail delivery rolls of Norfolk, Northamptonshire, and Yorkshire, counties near Nottinghamshire. The records are contemporary with the earliest references to Robin Hood. However, we must keep in mind that we do not know when many of the stories that appeared in later, published ballads originated. For that reason, we should acknowledge that the creation of the figure of Robin Hood as a bandit friendly to the poor may have occurred some time after the period covered by the jail rolls

most directly attempt to control the peasantry; his loyalty to the distant king is unwavering.⁷ While Robin's service to the crown and his other ideal attributes portrayed in the ballads endure to this day, the violence was retained, for the most part, only in folk customs and political activity of early modern England.

Some of the most significant folk customs developed in the May games. The ballads preceded the fifteenth-century folk plays, which in turn quickly led to Robin Hood's introduction into the May games tradition, in which he was a popular figure (Nelson 45-49). By the 1550s, he had risen in status to Lord of the May (70-73).

In the second chapter of The Robin Hood Tradition, Nelson describes the May games and their relationship to Robin. A celebration of spring, these folk games were an important cultural event for the peasantry. Although practices varied somewhat from one locale to another, and our knowledge of these practices remains incomplete, some generalizations can be made about Mayings at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Participants selected a Lord and Lady of the May. With these festival figures commoners both imitated and, through dress, behavior, and language, mocked the nobility. In addition to putting up Maypoles, symbolic of fertility, rural commoners took part in folk plays, athletic competitions, and morris dances. The morris dance became, over a period of time, "a compendium of the leading figures of native mythology, with membership open to any figure who caught the fancy of the people" (Nelson 56).

⁷ In the early ballads the king is Edward I. Nelson states, in The Robin Hood Tradition, that John Major's Historia Maioris Britanniae (1521) is the earliest extant text to have placed Robin in the time of Richard I (24).

Marian, as Lady or Queen of the May, and Friar Tuck were important in the morris dance long before Robin Hood's appearance in the May celebration.⁸

The games were an opportunity for celebration and boisterous, rude behavior, and the characterization of Robin Hood was "scurrilous and degrading" in comparison to the ballads (Nelson 78). He, Marian, and Friar Tuck were often silly or lewd. In addition to this basic, crude characterization, a relevant and significant paradox developed. As he rose in rank, spectators began to enjoy "seeing him drubbed by a local hero like George a Green, or by a representative of some humble profession, such as a tanner" (78-79). He was, at once, representative of "low" humor and desires, subject to abuse, and elevated in the hierarchy. In its complexity, this paradox is typical of conflicts concerning social status in representations of commoner-heroes.

The May games and the ballads continuously influenced each other, for hackwriters produced a number of ballads during the sixteenth century in which Robin loses in combat to a potter, a tanner, or some other commoner (Nelson 77-78). A more important influence on the ballads and the Robin Hood tradition was the addition of Marian and Friar Tuck to the stories. A late addition to the ballads, they brought a greater range of better-developed characters (63). Although she was often portrayed as a lewd character in the May games, Marian provided the potential for romance in the

⁸ Maid Marian, who might have descended from the Roman goddess Flora, and Friar Tuck entered the May games independently of Robin Hood. They led the morris dance before Robin Hood's introduction to the games. See Nelson's The Robin Hood Tradition 55-57, 61-2.

Robin Hood story. For the later literary tradition, her presence "accelerate[d] Robin Hood's development from a gentlemanly outlaw who protects women to a chivalrous noble lover" (76). As we will see, Munday's play was important to this character development.

Bakhtin's theory about the carnivalesque is useful in trying to understand the ideology embedded in folk customs like the ballads and May games, and Peter Stallybrass has applied that theory to the sixteenth-century Robin Hood tradition. In general, Stallybrass finds that, in much of the Robin Hood material of the ballads and May games, "the law became the subject of interrogation." These forms of community activity and expression were "both a means of unmasking legal violence (the violence of which the state claimed a monopoly) and of producing alternative definitions of 'law'" (Stallybrass 72-73).

Stallybrass has identified characteristics of the carnivalesque, which includes the folk custom charivari, or skimmington, and found them to be a part of the Robin Hood traditions as well. These characteristics include 1) feasting, 2) the "transgression of spatial barriers," with the boundaries between private and public spaces as the central issue, 3) the protection and violation of the body, with emphasis on the breasts, genitals, and anus, which were often symbolized by the nose and open mouth, 4) the inversion of social hierarchy, 5) the abuse of the sacred, and 6) the elevation of low language--curses and crudity--over "correct" language (46). Some of these symbolic elements in the ballads and May games have already been

implied or made apparent in this chapter: lewdness and crudity, bodily violence, low humor, and mocking of the nobility. In regards to this last element, participants in the May games not only substituted their own, temporary hierarchy by choosing a Lord and Lady of the May, they also inverted traditional concepts of order by having a Boy-bishop or Abbott of Unreason lead the revels (Nelson 62).

Certain of these characteristics are evident throughout the Robin Hood tales. The forest, for instance, represents a delimited space in which a peasant-centered power is localized. Within this space, Robin and his men rule, and the forest is clearly opposed to the town, the stronghold of traditional authorities. Crisis only occurs when one side or the other transgresses that boundary. Another example is the feasting, which usually occurs within the forest. It represents the indulgence in plenty at the expense of traditional religious and secular authorities.

Although Stallybrass demonstrates that carnivalesque elements are part of many Robin Hood ballads, "Robin Hood and the Bishop," ballad #143, is particularly interesting because it contains many of these characteristics.⁹ In this ballad, Robin, seeing the Bishop and his men near, arranges a disguise at the nearby house of an old woman whom he had befriended. They trade cloaks, Robin escapes, and the Bishop's men mistake the old woman for Robin. When the Bishop encounters the real Robin and realizes that he has been fooled, he asks the woman who she is. She replies, "Why, I am an old woman, thou cuckoldy bishop; / Lift up my

⁹ Like many of the Robin Hood ballads, the date of its composition is uncertain. Francis Child notes that it first appeared in printed form in an early seventeenth century broadside (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 193).

leg and see." Robin and his men bind him to a tree and take £500. Little John then forces the Bishop to sing a mass, and the ballad ends with the Bishop sitting backwards on his horse, the animal's tail in his hand, as he leaves the forest. The men bid him to pray for Robin.

This ballad contains typical elements of the carnivalesque: the spatial boundary of the forest is violated; "female mocks male; the oppressed deride the oppressor; the human is subordinated to the animal; the head is turned toward the anus; prayers are said for the outlaw; [and] mass is parodied in the wilderness" (Stallybrass 51). The social hierarchy is inverted and authority is mocked. The old woman's crudity and the inappropriate singing of mass are also characteristic of the carnivalesque. The bishop's final ride is a version of the skimmington, a custom in which the community ridiculed someone as he or his effigy was given a rough ride through a given locale (49). The skimmington was usually confined to use among commoners as a "form of social regulation and protest"; a troublemaker, for example, might be subjected to such abuse (49). Because manor courts considered skimmingtons helpful in controlling behavior (50), this form of communal expression served to keep order among commoners and acted as an extension of the authority of the nobility.

The skimmington of ballad #143 represents, then, a more complex situation than might first appear. The ballad draws on a cultural tradition of the commons, with the popular commoner Robin Hood in the role of controlling authority. The subject of this control is not an unruly commoner, but

the power and wealth of the church. To this extent the ballad encourages the subversion of authority. Yet, because it was accepted by the nobility as useful to the social hierarchy, the skimmington--authorized by Robin Hood, in this instance--is linked to the nobility.

The paradox of commoners simultaneously degrading and honoring the social hierarchy became embodied in the figure of Robin Hood, which led to some interesting developments in the Robin Hood tradition. For example, records show that men holding office in some rural towns symbolically adopted the name "Robin Hood" for certain civic events and functions. In the parish of Yeovil, Somerset, during the sixteenth century the churchwarden had responsibility for the Whitsun ale festivities each year.¹⁰ This position was filled by a male commoner; records show that a smith, a mercer, a shoemaker, a yeoman, and an innkeeper were selected to the position in various years. One of the purposes of the Whitsun ale was to raise money for the parish, and "Robin Hood" was responsible for organizing folk plays, music, and dinners. This sociopolitical activity, festival with a civic purpose, was led by a figure with a connection to subversion of religious and political authorities, not to mention violence against commoners.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, Robin Hood was a complex figure who represented the commons' mixed attitudes towards authority. They wished to ridicule those above them in the social and economic hierarchy at the same

¹⁰ See James D. Stokes's "Robin Hood and the Churchwardens of Yeovil," Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews 3 (1986) 2-8. Stokes's conclusions are based principally on the wills and official records of the parish from the years 1516-1577.

time that they imitated and used that hierarchy in certain cultural practices. While Robin represented freedom from a number of social restrictions, he became linked to a high position in the social hierarchy, thereby implicitly affirming the boundaries of that hierarchy.

Yet, despite the ambiguity in Robin Hood's meaning and his gradual integration into the dominant authority structure, the figure of Robin Hood could still represent subversion in the Tudor period. The more aggressive symbolic use of Robin Hood could cause alarm in the upper ranks of society, as will be shown in the next section of this chapter. The discussion to this point has emphasized Robin Hood's significance for rural commoners, and it is in the small villages that Robin was a most vigorous and meaningful cultural figure, one still capable of being wielded in a threatening manner.

Robin Hood's Significance for Nobility

The nobility, in Scotland as well as in England, were quite aware of the importance of Robin Hood for commoners. The nobility responded in two conventional manners that the powerful take against a perceived threat: elimination and appropriation.

William Langland's reference to Robin Hood in the late fourteenth century is the first indication we have of high-level concern over commoners' interest in the tales. The context in which Langland makes reference to the "rymes of Robyn hood" suggests that the ballads "distract the peasantry from their work and their religion" (Langland

passus V, line 402; Nelson 4). Their concern about economic and social disruption, whether potential or realized, would increase in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the point that reactions to those worries became codified in the law.

In his history of Scotland for the year 1266, written in 1440, the Scotsman Walter Bower wrote,

Then arose the famous murderer, Robert Hood, as well as Little John, together with their accomplices from among the dispossessed, whom the foolish populace are so inordinately fond of celebrating both in tragedy and comedy. (qtd. in Holt 40)

We have seen that the use of Robin Hood to express ideological values became common, and we have evidence that the potentially subversive elements of the ballads and folk plays did become a part of overt, public activity that led to government responses. For instance, official documents show that in 1497 Robert Marshall adopted the name "Robyn Hood" as he led a "riotous assembly" in Staffordshire (qtd. in Pettitt 8). Another event with at least some political implications was recorded in 1502. A "rebel" who called himself "Grenelef" "renued many of Robin Hodes pagentes" (qtd. in Pettitt 8).

Legal prohibitions were eventually instituted in an effort to squelch the increasing cultural significance of Robin Hood, in addition to the subversive activities themselves. A Scottish law in 1555 ordered "that in all times cumming, no manner of person be chosen Robin Hude, nor little John, abbot of unreason, queenis of Maij, nor otherwise" (qtd. in Ritson I, cxxiv, n.). Six years later,

commoners rioted over the enforcement of such laws. The Scots General Assembly finally prohibited Robin Hood plays in 1577 (Nelson 70-71).

Government reaction in England was mild, but the nobility were aware of the danger. Sir Richard Morison, advisor to Henry VIII, wanted to draw public interest from "playes of Robyn hoode, mayde Marian, [and] freer Tuck" by substituting anti-papal plays, thereby diverting energies from a negative purpose to a positive one, from the government's viewpoint. In a letter to the king, probably in 1536, Morison stated that, "besides the lewdenes and rebawdry that ther is opened to the people, disobedience also to your officers, is taught" (qtd. in Pettitt 8).

We have no evidence that Henry felt threatened by the plays or the May games. On the contrary, he enjoyed the tradition, although sometimes in a very different form than commoners were familiar with. He did, on at least one occasion, take part in a yeomen's Robin Hood parade (Weimann 25), but he appears to have been accustomed to a more regal version of the tradition. In his Chronicle, Edward Hall describes some of the mayings at the court during Henry's reign, of which the 1516 maying was especially elaborate. The king, "with many lordes & ladies," rode out into the forest and met two hundred of the king's guard, who represented "a company of tall yomen, clothed all in grene." The court joined the "yomen" in shooting arrows, and then "Robin Hood" invited Henry, Catherine, and the court "to come into the grene wood, & to se how the outlawes lyue." Under an elaborate arbor, festooned with flowers and herbs,

that formed two great rooms, "Robin" seated the king and queen at a table and served them wine and venison. Afterwards, he led them to a kind of pageant in which ladies on horses, richly apparelled, represented "vegetaue," "pleasaunce," "swete odour," and, of course, Lady May, accompanied by Flora (582).

In this way, nobility played at being commoners and thieves. Their vicarious experience held none of the violence, injustice, or subversion of the tradition, of course; they romanticized the past, altering cultural material to suit their own values and desires. This activity is similar to the commoners' May games, in which nobility were simultaneously imitated and mocked. In both events, the appropriation of cultural material signifies power over that material, in being able to reshape it and apply it to one's own purposes. One important difference, however, is that the nobility do not appear to mock, not in any overt manner. Those in power usually have less need to mock, as mockery is a form of expression that the relatively powerless can employ to enjoy vicarious control. Henry's mayings were part of a long process in which Robin Hood entered the noble ranks in cultural tradition.

Robin Hood in London

The account of Robin Hood's cultural significance so far has described his popular, rural origins, his complex, sometimes self-contradictory symbolic importance in subversive expression and social hierarchy, and the reaction of governments, either to suppress such expression or to

join in its less threatening manifestations, thereby exerting a different form of control. For Londoners, the figure of Robin Hood in public discourse contained somewhat different meanings.

Robin Hood could not hold the same significance for the London citizen, much less nobleman, as he did for the country cousin. The contexts were too different. May games originated in the countryside and remained more important there. In addition, London lacked the small political hierarchy of the towns. The city had its own subversive activity, but, throughout the history of England, rebellion usually originated in the countryside, and Londoners tended to defend the established power structure on those occasions. In the city, Robin Hood was a watered-down version of his country self, representing similar qualities, but less vigorously.

Forms of cultural expression different from the early ballads and the rural May games provide evidence of this change. Robin Hood appeared in sixteenth-century London ballads, but with key differences. First, they were typically written by "professional" writers, who were usually educated men. Second, the authors' purposes were different, and they wrote for different audiences. Perhaps the most common form of Robin Hood narrative was the broadside ballad produced by hackwriters. The broadsides reproduced some of the early tales, but, as mentioned earlier, they added to the tradition by emphasizing stories in which Robin confronts a tinker, peddler, shepherd, or other low-ranking commoner who bests him in combat. Robin

then asks the man to join his band. While this popular story pattern might reflect the concurrent battering of Robin in the May games, it may, as well, be linked to the overall change in the Robin Hood legend in London. The purpose of these ballads was to entertain and, therefore, sell. They not only often evoked an idealized view of rural life, but their turning craftsmen into the equal of the legendary Robin Hood would have appealed to many of the city commoners.

A different kind of poetic expression demonstrates a new purpose for the Robin Hood tradition: religious allegory. In a poem that has been dated in the 1590s and of which only a manuscript fragment has survived,¹¹ Robin Hood symbolizes the episcopate, Little John the universities, and Adam Bell the abbots.¹² The episcopate is the hero--Robin fights giants and dragons--but the abbots grow fat and lazy, and a lion, Henry VIII, tears the abbots apart. Now that, allegorically, the monasteries are dissolved and their belongings redistributed, the wolves (Puritans) and foxes (politicians) attack.¹³ At this point, the poem breaks off. This striking instance of appropriation shows how far Robin Hood could be removed from his original context. The writer uses only the concept of Robin as a fighting hero and incorporates that concept into the religious and political ideology of the Church of England. The poem may have been

¹¹ The poem is titled "A Tale of Robin Hoode, Dialogue Wise Between Watt and Ieffry." The fragment has been reprinted in Ballads From Manuscript, ed. F. J. Furnivall, vol. I (London: The Ballad Society, 1868) 295-98.

¹² Adam Bell was the central character in another, unrelated ballad cycle.

¹³ The meaning of the allegory is discussed in Andrew Wawn, "Robin Hood and the Elizabethans: A Propagandist Note," Cahiers Élisabéthains 22 (1982): 87-91, and Michael G. Brennan, "Foxes and Wolves in Elizabethan Episcopal Propaganda," Cahiers Élisabéthains 29 (1986): 83-86.

written soon after the Martin Marprelate controversy (Wawn 88), and was certainly written for educated readers.

The May games tradition in sixteenth-century London was necessarily different from rural custom, in part because of the lack of natural setting. Drawings and descriptions of London may poles, for example, show that they were often not simply adorned with flowers, but were highly stylized in formal designs (R. Chambers 574-76). More importantly, the May Queen and Lord gradually became much less significant. R. Chambers describes the London tradition as "in a great measure peculiar." In the festivities, "chimney sweeps play[ed] the sole part," and the conventional character most like those in the country was Jack-in-the-green, who was decorated with herbs and flowers (573). With the loss of the lord and lady, much of the mockery of the upper levels of the social hierarchy disappeared.

In Munday's city pageants we find further evidence of Robin Hood's cultural significance for Londoners, which included associating Robin with London political power. On the occasion of a member of the Drapers Company being elected mayor in 1615, Munday wrote a pageant in which the crowned figure of London sits, surrounded by representations of the Twelve Great Companies. Also present is Robin Hood, who sings the final song. The oddity of this mix of civic authority and rural lawlessness may have been lessened by Munday's earlier ennoblement of Robin on the stage (Bradbrook 70). In one of his pageants, Munday made Robin the son-in-law of Henry Fitz-Alwin, the first Lord Mayor of London, thereby "join[ing] the ancient figure of woodland

freedom [and] defiance of the law, with an ancient emblem of civic power and legal authority" (66).¹⁴

These examples demonstrate the changes in the figuring of Robin Hood as he moved from rural to urban area. While he remained a rather complex cultural symbol, the trend towards a stronger link between the outlaw and socioeconomic authority is apparent. Related to this transition was Robin's further movement away from the violence of the ballads. The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington was an important force in this change. Munday wrote the play within the cultural context of London, and The Downfall reflects its values. Yet the play influenced the Robin Hood tradition beyond its contemporary, urban context. The Downfall helped recreate Robin as a nobleman, and for the majority of those people in the future who would be familiar with his story, Robin would be seen as a member of the upper class who saved poor commoners from injustice and destruction.

Ennobling Robin Hood

At the beginning of the Elizabethan period, Robin Hood was still a yeoman in "a ballet of Wakefylde and a grene" (1557) and "A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode" (1560). By 1746, the gentle class was so enamored with their ennobled hero that a "spurrious pedigree" showing Robin's ancestry and descendants was created by a fellow of the Royal Society (Holt 42). The impetus for documenting Robin Hood's nobility had its origin in several Elizabethan texts, of which Munday's play is probably most significant in the

¹⁴ Bradbrook does not specify the pageant in which Munday made this connection.

Robin Hood tradition.

Munday's principle sources for The Downfall were histories written by Grafton, Holinshed, and Stow (Pittman 33), and a primary source for these writers was John Major's Historia Maioris Britanniae (1521). Major had used the early ballads for much of his information about Robin, but refused to acknowledge such coarse material as sources (Nelson 24). Major did not ennoble Robin, but he did move him from the time of King Edward, as given in the ballads, to the reign of Richard I. More important to the tradition was his use of the descriptive phrase "latronum humanissimus et princeps erat"; that is, of all the robbers, Robin was the most human and the chief (24). The epithet "prince of thieves" may have derived from this phrase, but Major's words do not suggest that Robin was a nobleman. Holinshed, in his Historie of Scotland, follows Major and describes Robin as a commoner, as does Stow in both the Summary of English Chronicles (1565) and the Annales of England (1592) (Nelson 36-37). Grafton, however, interpreted Major's phrase as support for the possibility of Robin's nobility, the idea for which he says he found in a pamphlet that no contemporary historian appears to have seen and that no longer exists. Grafton explained his evidence:

. . . in an olde and auncient pamphlet I finde this written of the sayd Robert Hood. This man (sayeth he) discended of a noble parentage: or rather beyng of a base stocke and linage, was for his manhoode and chiuallry aduanced to the noble dignitie of an Erle, excelleng principally in Archery, or shootyng, his manly courage agreeing therevnto: But afterwarde he so prodigally exceeded in charges and expences, that he fell into great debt, by reason whereof, so many

actions and sutes were commenced against him,
wherevnto he answered not, that by order of a lawe
he was outlawed (I, 221-22)

Munday ignored his other sources in adopting the idea of noble parentage and making use of the suggestion that debt was the cause of Robin's becoming an outlaw. However, calling him the "Earl of Huntington" appears to have been Munday's invention, as George Pittman has found no extant documents calling Robin Hood by that name before The Downfall (31).

Robin Hood appears in two plays on the professional stage in the half-dozen years before The Downfall. George Peele's King Edward the First, printed in 1593, was based on the May games, folk plays, and ballad tradition. Some of the characters take on roles from these cultural activities, including Robin, who is a Lord of Misrule. But the play may have contributed to the ennoblement of Robin Hood by the fact that Robin was played by Lluellen, the Prince of Wales. Because the play was popular, it is likely that Munday saw King Edward the First (Nelson 87-97). The integration of noble and common elements, also observed in Henry VIII's mayings, signifies a long-term appropriation that Munday capitalized on. A second play, entered in the Stationers' Register in 1594, is now lost (E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage IV, 402). Its title, The Pleasant Pastoral Comedy of Robin Hood and Little John, suggests that it was based on the May games tradition (Nelson 114).¹⁵

¹⁵ There is also the play Look About You, an anonymous play of uncertain date, that does call Robin Hood the Earl of Huntington, but Nelson provides a detailed and persuasive argument for The Downfall having appeared first (The Robin Hood Tradition 117-23)

Munday's play appears to have been a significant text in the conversion of Robin into a nobleman. Because it appeared on the public stage and, perhaps, at court, The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington provided the best opportunity of the texts that we are familiar with for broadcasting the idea that Robin Hood was an earl rather than a yeoman.¹⁶

Munday's Hero

Why did Munday choose the first option offered by Grafton's "olde and auncient pamphlet," noble parentage, rather than the second, elevation from Robin's "base stocke" into an earldom? Why not let Robin Hood remain a commoner, as the prevalent tradition held? Munday was the son of a draper (Turner 2), and it seems odd that a commoner would help give the legendary yeoman over to the nobility. A couple of scholars have given reasons for Robin Hood's ennoblement in Munday's play. Although both deal only briefly with the issue, their answers indicate the importance of socioeconomic forces and their manifestations in the play.

While The Downfall is a romantic comedy containing pastoral elements, its companion play, The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington, is a tragedy in which the Earl is murdered early in the play. The last four acts concern Prince/King John's lecherous pursuit and murder of Marian.

¹⁶ The record of performances of this play is limited and a bit vague. It is not clear whether The Downfall or The Death was performed at court in the 1598 Christmas season, but both were performed at the Rose in that same year. Meagher finds that both this play and The Death, which Munday co-wrote with Henry Chettle soon after completing The Downfall, were "at least moderately successful," but that we have no record of performances after the 1590s ("Hackwriting and the Huntingdon Plays" 198).

The plot and framework of The Downfall make clear Munday's plan from the start for a tragic story centered on Robin and Marian. Nelson argues that, in the sixteenth century, a commoner was "not a fit subject for tragedy," and so Munday made Robin Hood an earl (131). The play demonstrates a principle often true in the arts: aesthetic values and socioeconomic values are impossible to separate completely.

William E. Simeone has elaborated on the significance of Robin Hood's social position, but has taken a different approach. Rather than explain the ennoblement in respect to a literary convention, Simeone has related social position in the play directly to real-life social hierarchy. He considers the ennoblement of Robin to be a necessary "rationalization." In historical accounts of the "sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a figure of such power without social position to go with it would be an almost implausible paradox" (186).

Nelson and Simeone have only touched on a cultural issue of significant interest, but their comments point towards Munday's purposes in making a commoner-hero a nobleman on stage. His fundamental purpose was to write a play quickly, to write one that would entertain well enough to sell tickets. This was a task at which he was experienced. He had received a classical education (Turner 2-3), and he had a varied career that would take him from a stationer's apprenticeship to a small court appointment (Hazlitt A Select Collection 99n.). In his experiences, Munday learned how to write for a variety of audiences. William D. Wolf has summarized his occupations:

[Munday was] a printer's apprentice, a Jesuit seminarian; a spy, pursuivant and informer against those same Catholics he had met in Rome; a hunter of the Puritan propagandist Martin Marprelate for Bishop Whitgift; a writer of pious, bourgeois moral tracts and patriotic pamphlets; a literary executor and chronicler; an author and translator of popular romances; a balladeer and lyric poet; a producer and writer of city pageants; an attacker of the stage; an actor; and, of course, a playwright. (659)

As chronicler, Munday updated Stow's Survey of London (Ayres 236). In these various occupations Munday had contact with people in many levels of the social hierarchy in London, and he made a living from representing their news, morals, and ideals in different forms. In its variety and its relative success, his career resembled those of Greene and Dekker. Unlike them, Munday had great success with city pageants in the early 1600s, which has general relevance because his success indicates an ability to address the interests of London commoners, and specific relevance because Munday wrote Robin Hood into the pageants already discussed.

In the theaters, the quantity and quality of Munday's work places him in the group of "hackwriters" like Henry Chettle, Michael Drayton, Thomas Dekker, and Robert Wilson, who supplied a large volume of plays for public stages and the court. While The Downfall is not a particularly good play, it is more typical of theatrical productions of the time than those of Shakespeare or Jonson (Meagher, "Hackwriting" 199). Munday was as adept at responding to public wishes on the stage as he would prove to be in city pageants. As a professional writer during this period, he had to compete with other writers. To do so, he not only

had to provide popular entertainment, but, as the discussion of this play will show, he felt the need to demonstrate his ability to write in the elevated style and to use the conventional materials that especially appealed to many in the upper levels of Elizabethan society.

To these ends, he chose for this play a popular hero as his subject, and the dramatic forms he used were among the most popular in the late sixteenth century.¹⁷ Munday combined romantic comedy with the pastoral and the history play to tell a story that would please his mixed audience, but especially the gentles. Elements of the pastoral and history forms, in particular, had much to do with the playwright's transformation of a commoner-hero into a nobleman.

Writers of Elizabethan history plays confined themselves to national political history, or what was considered "history," which meant that commoners were generally excluded. Because little was written about individual commoners in prose histories, except where they affected official order (usually as violators of that order), dramatists had little material to work with if they wished to write a history play about commoners. Up to the sixteenth century, source material existed, for the most part, in oral narratives which, as we have seen, were only beginning to find their way onto the professional stage late in the century. Thus, those plays which were intended to be

¹⁷ In discussing the play's "unsatisfactory mixture of folk tale, melodrama, and farce," J. M. R. Margeson argues that The Downfall is not a history or comedy but, in the main, a romance. See his "Dramatic Form: The Huntington Plays," Studies in English Literature 14 (1974): 223-38. The point is arguable, but the play's primary mode is of less interest in this study than Munday's mix of genres.

serious historical accounts--as opposed to the understood romanticism of a George a Green--tended to figure individual commoners in a significant way as transgressors of the law, as is the case in The Second Part of King Henry VI and The Life and Death of Jack Straw. Alterations of the "facts" for dramatic purposes did not affect the "truths" that political history could reveal, and commoners appeared to have only a tangential or pernicious relevance.

Munday took advantage of the growing nationalism in the late 1500s and the popularity of history plays by choosing a pseudo-historical event. For his story of government corruption and intrigues, a popular subject in the history plays, a noble victim fit much better than would a commoner. Furthermore, the Earl's trials, his cunning and his forgiving nature, and his betrayal and death all gain a tragic dimension from the perspective of most Elizabethan playgoers by the fact that he is a nobleman.

The play is an obvious attempt by Munday to impress with his knowledge of dramatic and poetic techniques, and the pastoral was a favorite form in the sixteenth century for writers to display their poetic skills on such conventional subjects as nature, love, the country life, and so forth.¹⁸ From the opening play-within-a-play device, we know that we are reading, or watching, a self-conscious expression of the dramatist's art. Munday has fun with the character of Skelton, who is in the frame and plays the part of Friar

¹⁸ The shepherd and shepherdess of the French pastourelles, Robin and Marion, may have influenced the Robin Hood tradition at some point long before The Downfall. See E. K. Chambers's The Medieval Stage, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903) 175-76. However, the setting of the ballads and the popularity of the pastoral drama would have been enough to suggest the emphasis on a pastoral setting to Munday.

Tuck, and who forgets himself as he steps out of character in the second act and complains about contemporary poetry and wit. The poet laureates

. . . from their graves
See asses and knaves,
Base idiot slaves,
With boastings and braves
Offer to upfly
To the heavens high,
With vain foolery
And rude ribaldry. (p. 136)¹⁹

Munday occasionally mixes other passages of skeltonic verse with blank verse, heroic couplets, and iambic tetrameter. He imitates courtly speech and employs stichomythia. He uses a dumb show, which Skelton narrates, to introduce the plot. None of these elements, except for the skeltonic verse, is unusual in an Elizabethan play, but in their cumulative effect the reader senses that Munday tries hard to display his talents and to appeal to the gentles and educated commoners.

The pastoral, in which rustic life serves as a foil for courtly ideals, manners, and speech, lent itself to Munday's artistic purpose as well as to his subject, even more so because he integrated nobility into the pastoral scene. In his Idylls, Theocritus had portrayed the bucolic life of the country shepherds at the same time as poet and listeners smiled at their coarse manners. The classical pastorals were the source of elements that became conventions in such English works as Spenser's Shepeardes Calender (1579), and

¹⁹ References to the play are to The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington, in A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed W Carew Hazlitt, 4th ed, vol. 8 (Robert Dodsley, pub, 1744; London Reeves & Turner, 1874; reprint, New York Benjamin Blom, 1964) Because the play's lines are not numbered, references are to page numbers

the difference between shepherd and courtier was always a part of the pastoral tradition. The use of courtly diction and sentiments by the rustic characters constituted, like Henry VIII's mayings, subordination through the control of discourse. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pastoral was a favorite literary form "for the representation of the ideals and values of courtly culture" (Hayes 51).

The Downfall, like Shakespeare's As You Like It, is a variation on the pastoral, dropping many conventions and using the idyllic setting as a location for problems of the court to be resolved. Munday gives us the same sort of "green world" we find in several of Shakespeare's plays in Robin's praise of the virtues of Nature and his criticism of the world of the court:

Marian, thou seest, though courtly pleasures want,
Yet country sport in Sherwood is not scant:
For the soul-ravishing, delicious sound
Of instrumental music we have found
The winged quiristers with divers note
Sent from their quaint recording pretty throats,
On every branch that compasseth our bow'r,
Without command contenting us each hour.
For arras hangings of rich tapestry
We have sweet nature's best embroidery.
For thy steel glass, wherein thou wont'st to look,
Thy crystal eyes gaze in the crystal brook.
At court a flower or two did deck thy head,
Now with whole garlands is it circled. (154-55)

Likewise, the comradeship of the rural people who befriended Robin during his escape from the town is implicitly contrasted with the dissension and back-stabbing at court. Yet the idealized pastoral world remains a foil, is recognized as such, and is never meant to be considered superior to the world of the court. The central characters

are from the gentle ranks, and only two commoners are of much importance in the play. One, Much the Miller's son, is the clown, whose lines include considerable material written for comic intent rather than significance in the plot. Only Little John, who is strong, loyal, and good, approaches hero status, but he never threatens to take the play from Robin. Besides, at the end of the play he becomes a member of the gentle ranks when he is made a squire by the king and given an allowance of 100 marks a year (201).

Munday focuses on the Earl of Huntington and Lady Marian as the dominant figures in the pastoral setting of Sherwood Forest, and this "shepherd" and "shepherdess" speak courtly language without the sense of difference between speaker and discourse found in the pastoral tradition. In The Downfall, nobility and Nature are one; true to the Robin Hood tradition, Robin does not leave the forest when all problems have been resolved, but invites King Richard into his "homely" bower. But the power structure of the court is established here and is pronounced. Before the king arrives, Robin and Marian "rule" this domain. Robin sets down articles to which his men must agree if they are to remain in the forest with him. They readily agree to treat women honorably, defend the poor, and so forth. He then sends them forth to hunt, saying, "Marian and I, as sovereigns of your toils, / Will wait within our bower your bent bows' spoils" (154). This play constitutes complete appropriation into the gentle ranks of what had been in the ballads and folk customs a "world" with commoners at the center. Through verbal and written discourses and through

the institution of the court's hierarchy in a pastoral setting, Robin Hood's honorable and noble character becomes a part of the nobility's cultural tradition.

Yet Robin Hood represents more than the reigning socioeconomic power. In the manner in which he resolves conflicts and unites opposing sides under one banner he exemplifies Christian charity and forgiveness, and Munday pushes perfection of Robin's character to the point that he becomes a Christ type. In the play's structure and characterizations, Munday imbues the Robin Hood story with a religious ideology that reinforces social and political hierarchy. By linking Robin Hood to Christ, Munday solidifies Robin's elevated status by appealing to the values of his audience, and he further displays his literary skills. One effect of the allegory is that Robin Hood is removed a step farther from his ballad origins.

Munday sets up Robin as a Christ-type by having him betrayed. In the first two acts, the Earl of Huntington discovers that, in Richard's absence, several people whom he trusts have turned against him: Warman, his former steward who betrays the Earl and is made Sheriff of Nottingham; the Prior of York, his greedy uncle; the Bishop of Ely, chancellor of the realm, who looks forward to receiving the Earl of Huntington's property, but will be deceived by the prince; and Prince John, who lusts after Marian and has masterminded the conspiracy against the Earl so that he can assume the throne. Not only have the church and state proved false, but a family member has turned on him and a close advisor and servant in his household has brought false

charges against the Earl for profit.

The first indicator of the Robin Hood-Christ analogy is the identification of Warman with Judas. The Earl had made Warman, a lowly clerk, into a Justice of the Peace (118), but when Huntington reveals his knowledge of the plot against him and Warman says, "Your honour thinks not ill of me, I hope," Huntington replies, "Judas speaks first, with 'Master, is it I?'," an echo of Judas' words in Matthew 26:25 (118, my italics). Prince John also calls Warman "Judas" (166), and Warman's own cousin decries his "damn'd Judasism, . . . Impious wickedness, wicked impiety!" (187). After Prince John banishes Warman for letting Ely escape, no one will aid him. The man whom Warman had made jailer rejects him, finding his dog more faithful, and the wife of a man whom Warman had saved from death offers him only a rope to hang himself, in a clear reference to the death of Judas (Matthew 27:3-5). Warman decides to hang himself where "my master hath his walk; / There will I offer life for treachery, / And hang, a wonder to all goers-by" (190).

At this point in the plot, Warman meets Lord Fitzwater, father of Marian/Matilda, in a scene that contrasts opposites. Lord Fitzwater is the third ideal character in the play, after the Earl of Huntington and King Richard. He represents the traditional values of honesty and loyalty, set against the treachery of the court under Prince John. He tells the court,

When I was taught, true dealing kept the school;
Deeds were sworn partners with protesting words;
We said and did; these say and never mean.

...
A shame upon this peevish, apish age,

These crouching, hypocrite, dissembling times'
(143)

Fitzwater is not afraid to tell Queen Elinor, who lusts for Huntington, to "mind King Richard's love...[and] do the king no wrong," to which she sharply replies, "Well-said, old Conscience" (144). This idealistic representation of the virtuous past is, of course, soon banished from England, all property forfeit. This is the point at which the two opposites meet: Warman, linked to the most infamous representation of treachery in Christianity, who is at his lowest point and is ready to end his life in despair, and Lord Fitzwater, symbol of truth and fidelity in the play, who, despite being reduced to poverty and homelessness, has the support of family and the steadfast desire to persevere.

Fitzwater advises Warman to "hear wholesome counsel 'gainst unhallow'd thoughts" (190), but it is up to Robin Hood to save Warman from himself. In words that sound Christ-like by this point in the play, Robin says,

Disconsolate and poor dejected man,
Cast from thy neck that shameful sign of death,
And live for me, if thou amend thy life,
As much in favor as thou ever didst. (193-94)

The words "live for me" are suggestive. From this moment on, Robin Hood's sole function in the plot appears to be reconciling enemies and unifying the kingdom in preparation for the king's return. He accomplishes this feat through Christian love. Into his "natural" domain eventually follow all who had plotted against him and had turned on each other. One by one, Robin and his men convert them all through their good example, for Robin does not punish them, but treats them with kindness, and seems to remind them that

they also can be good. Prince John tries to deceive one last time (in this play), by disguising himself in Kendal green, singing a snatch of the ballad of the Pindar of Wakefield, and insinuating himself into Robin's band. His efforts are futile, for Scathlock perceives his true identity. After Prince John engages Scathlock and Friar Tuck in a harmless skirmish, no one will answer his challenges. The Prince thinks that they all wish to deliver him to the king so that they can receive Richard's favor, but Robin Hood replies,

My purpose you have much misconstrued:
 Prince John, I would not for the wide world's
 wealth
 Incense his majesty, but do my best
 To mitigate his wrath, if he be mov'd. (200)

Love conquers hate, and Robin mediates between subject and ruler. In this way he resembles Christ, who, according to Christian theology, brought the word of God to humanity and died for our sins, thereby protecting us from punishment.

The play also suggests a parallel between King Richard and God that depends, in part, upon the traditional link between the king or queen and divine authority. The suggestion of such a parallel is supported by other passages in the play.²⁰ When Robin Hood plainly becomes a Christ-type in the play, his relationship to the king on the allegorical level becomes clear. Richard greets Huntington as "my late-lost son" and "the true pillar of my state" (202). The Earl cannot pronounce judgment on the sinners against the kingdom, but, true to his word, Huntington presents them to

²⁰ Richard's allegorical role is somewhat ambiguous. The Earl of Leicester, appearing at court to ask John for the King's ransom, recounts the idealized "historical" account of Richard's crusade that left "the green sea red with Pagan blood" (173), and he subsequently refers to the King as "Christ's champion" (176).

the king (along with Fitzwater) as "jewel[s he] had lost" (203). Symbolically, then, Huntington/Robin Hood is God's instrument of redemption for these men. Richard bestows his grace on each and ends the play with the declaration that "here all quarrels end."

This Robin Hood is very different from the violent bandit of the early ballads or the lewd figure of the May games. J. M. R. Margeson argues that Munday's Robin Hood is not only different from the narrative tradition, he is even better than the Christian knight of literature, and compares him to a "saint in the fifteenth century miracle play or . . . Abraham or Christ from the mystery cycles" (225). John C. Meagher has written that, in this play, Robin's forgiving nature "reaches almost hagiographic dimensions" ("Hackwriting" 204). Although the saintliness in Munday's Robin did not become part of the mainstream tradition, his identification of a noble Robin Hood with Christ certainly sharpened the contrast with Robin the commoner-hero and, therefore, distanced Munday's play from the commoners' traditions.

Simeone has called the play an "oblique form of social criticism" (188). Yet Munday was more interested in writing to please the gentles in the audience than in creating social criticism. The ideology that the play constitutes and reflects has to do with fulfilling the desires of these audience members, mirroring their own values and their self-images (at their most positive). The mix of patriotic history, folk legend, pastoral, and Christianity was intended to achieve this end and impress the audience with

Munday's poetic and dramatic skills. Far from being the commoner-hero of the tradition, the bandit who terrorized local state and church authorities, this figure of Robin Hood supports the unification of nationalism, Christian ideals, and the ideology of the nobility.

Stewardship and the Treatment of Wealth

Despite the figuring of Robin Hood as a Christ-type, wealth is so esteemed by the characters of The Downfall that an obvious gap occurs between spiritual and material values. Certainly the greed of Warman, the Prior of York, and the Bishop of Ely is contrasted with the noble motives of Fitzwater, the Earl of Huntington, and King Richard. But property is a central concern for these same virtuous characters, and a self-contradictory ideological representation results.

Picking up the hint from Grafton, Munday has the Prior of York call the earl "wasteful Huntington" (111). Although Robert is excommunicated by Rome until he pays his "debts" (148), no evidence of such debts is ever given in the play, and neither the King nor the Earl of Huntington ever mentions that he owes money or has been "wasteful." The charge appears to be nothing more than a trumped-up justification for removing Huntington, Richard's able and staunch supporter, from the political scene, as well as for seizing his lands and movable property. For these reasons, it appears, Prince John calls him "careless" (129), the Bishop of Ely describes him as "wasteful" (133), and Warman lumps him together with all those who "revel, waste and

spend, and take no care" (140).

These charges are immediately seen to be ironic as Prince John and the others show themselves to be poor stewards of the realm, interested in self-gratification at the expense of the kingdom. John desires power, over England and over Marian. For the others, wealth and/or social position, which translate to power, are the goals. Warman moves up in office at the same time that he is handsomely paid, more than once, for his betrayal of the Earl. Ely urges the Prior of York to hurry with his commission to the Earl of Huntington's country houses before the herds are sold (125). And one reason that the Prior wants the Earl arrested is that, as Sir Doncaster tells us,

'twas he that urged the king to 'sess the clergy,
When to the holy land he took his journey;
And he it is that rescued those two thieves,
Scarlet and Scathlock, that so many griefs
To churchmen did (155)

As none of these men hold what they attain for very long, but lose it through mutual distrust or to the greater power of goodness, the story is a classic moral tale.

Yet the issue of stewardship is not figured solely in terms of the virtues truth, compassion, justice, and loyalty versus greed, lust, and covetousness. Fitzwater, Robin, and King Richard are stewards of these virtues, but stewardship for Robin also has a tangible dimension. After he discovers that he is about to be betrayed, Huntington reveals that Warman has been a "false steward." Warman has charged the Earl's tenants high rents, built "halls and mansions" for himself while his own father lives in a small cottage, and wasted the Earl's wealth while his own increased (118). As

small a part of the play as it is, concern over the material well-being of others and of one's self is significant in this morality tale. This materialism would have appealed to most of the audience at the same time that it conflicted with Robin's allegorical role as a Christ-type.

The immediate conservation of Huntington's wealth is also a concern. Little John plans to retrieve the Earl's "plate and jewels" and sell off his cattle (116). First by threatening physical violence, then by smooth talk, including a lie, Little John manages to remove some of Huntington's riches despite the Sheriff and Warman's efforts to stop him (121-25). This episode, in particular, brings to the fore conflicting ideological values. Along with Little John's practical efforts to maintain wealth and the power it brings there coexists in the play the repeated condemnation of greed. Furthermore, the value of personal status--we must not forget Little John's reward of elevation in status as well as of money--is linked to the welfare of the nation, by both positive and negative examples.

Little John is a good steward because he preserves some of the Earl of Huntington's property; the Earl is a good steward because he manages the kingdom while the King is away, and in the play's religious dimension, he performs a spiritual stewardship for Christ/God. It is probable that few, if any, audience members noticed the contradiction in the play's simultaneously promoting economic materialism and Christian virtues. The conflicting values expressed in the play were meant to support the principle of obedience to authority, whether social, political, or spiritual. Rather

than disrupt conservative ideology, the play affirms it.

Conclusion

The most obvious flaw in the play is, at least to some degree, a result of Munday's elevation of Robin Hood in social status. In refiguring Robin Hood as a nobleman, Munday combined disparate elements--history, pastoral, religion, romance, and folk legend--into a whole that has thematic unity, coherent plotting, and some nicely turned dialogue. Yet the play is dull. As Tom Hayes has pointed out, the play contains "nothing of [the] subversive festival spirit" that the Robin Hood tradition held (65). Munday turns the rough bandit of the ballads and folk plays into a Christ-type and has him speak the elevated language of the court, which softens Robin Hood to the point that he is a shadow of his former self.

It is instructive to compare this representation of Robin to that in a couple of contemporary plays. Malcolm Nelson states, accurately, I think, that the reference to Robin Hood in Shakespeare's As You Like It (1.1.115-16) is intended to evoke "the native strength of the English yeoman and his refusal to submit to tyranny" and "the simple vigor of those who live close to nature" (The Robin Hood Tradition 1-2). We find the same kind of Robin Hood in Robert Greene's George a Green. Although Munday's play glorifies the natural setting, "strength" and "vigor" do not characterize his Robin Hood other than in a moral sense. Hayes has charged Munday with having "drain[ed the Robin Hood legend] of social energy" (58).

This play certainly supports Stephen Greenblatt's thesis in Shakespeare Negotiations, with a twist. In this play it is not radical subversion that is produced, only to be contained. Instead, a potentially subversive figure is transfigured and thereby contained. Probably without intending to do so, the commoner Munday helped English high culture exert some control over popular culture, in this instance by appropriating one of that culture's greatest commoner-heroes. Munday appears to have been most interested in economic and social success, which is surely an important reason why, of the plays discussed in this study, The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington is the least critical of the culture in which it was produced.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most striking broad conclusion to be drawn from the plays discussed in this study is that, despite evidence that the theater was one locus of the struggle for control of Elizabethan culture, these plays are marked by a general affirmation of the social and economic structures already in place. The contexts of composition suggest the possibility of more radical social criticism than we see in these plays. In the public theater of late sixteenth-century England, commoners owned the playing spaces, wrote plays, acted the parts, and produced the plays. The seven plays discussed here feature commoners in central roles, which is unusual for the professional stage in this time, and six, at least, were written by commoners. Playwrights frequently based their work on materials from popular culture, materials that reflected the lives and values of country and city commoners and sometimes expressed subversive ideas. The writing situation seems to have created the opportunity for plays with commoners in central roles to express commoners' fears about their material conditions, and the years from 1588 to 1600 were economically tumultuous. Crop failures, high prices, and hunger increased many commoners' resentment of foreign trade, of immigrants' intrusions into the workplace, and of other developments that threatened their material security. A number of protests, sometimes violent, occurred against government policies and commercial practices. One might

look for one or more of the plays discussed in this study to serve as a voice for discontented commoners.

Because of the public theater's ambiguous cultural status, it would, however, have been difficult for a professional production to serve that function. We have considerable evidence that civil and religious authorities felt at least somewhat threatened by the presence of the public theaters and their power to comment on English society. Their concerns included certain material presented on the professional stage that they thought critical of authority, along with the theaters' association with such reprehensible activities as prostitution and rioting, and the theaters' detrimental effect on the profits of local businesses. As a result of these concerns, London and national authorities often exerted pressure against the theaters. The professional theater consequently occupied an uncertain position in Elizabethan culture, not only as a result of the pressure from authorities, but also because many people involved in the theater were trying to obtain cultural legitimacy with the elite of society. The public theater's marginal status in London and the significance of the role of commoners in the theater are more fully appreciated when considered within the context of economic instability and the movement of prosperous commoners across traditional lines of demarcation between socioeconomic levels.

This uncertainty, in part, led to the communication in the plays and their commoners of a conservative perspective, that is, a desire to maintain the reigning socioeconomic

structure. None of them could be called subversive. Expressed in all of the plays is a faith in the dominant political and moral values of Elizabethan England, or in an idealized past whose values appear to be threatened by cultural instability. The political plays, for example, do not question the system; they condemn the corruption and subversion of that system, and both commoners and gentles are guilty of violating order.

The plays discussed here support to some extent Stephen Greenblatt's assertion of a centralized authority over Elizabethan culture, in the sense that these plays reinforce the current socioeconomic structure. Belief systems, rather than individual perspectives, are emphasized. Furthermore, the Crown's authority is unquestioned, although imperfections in many of the rulers depicted in the plays are exposed. With the exception of The Second Part of King Henry VI, the kings in these plays are handled rather gently. Criticism is mild, as commoner-heroes, obedient to their kings, provide the necessary advice or action to correct the monarchs' brief waywardness, or merely to provide support. Even Shakespeare's play, which is the most critical of a king, does not constitute subversion. The monarchy's right to rule is not questioned in this or any of the other plays.

The key purpose for having commoner-heroes provide such aid to their rulers was to glorify either commoners or the values that prosperous commoners liked to associate with themselves, and thereby appeal to a large portion of the public theater audience. The evidence indicates that those

commoners with sufficient leisure time--the wealthier merchants, professionals, and those who had entered the gentle ranks--made up a significant portion of the audiences. The virtues exemplified by the commoner-heroes were familiar ones, expounded upon in other forms of popular culture as well--morality plays, prose fiction, and ballads. Thus, in the more positive treatments of commoners, the commoner-heroes were mirrors held before the prosperous commoners that reflected them as they wished to be seen.

Commoner-heroes are much more strongly contrasted with certain members of the gentle ranks than with rulers. Courtiers frequently appear foolish, greedy, traitorous, or decadent next to the commoner-heroes, and those nobility criticized in the play serve as foils to their virtues. In searching for the plot material that served as the basis for these plays, playwrights sometimes chose historical accounts and stories of insurrection by nobility, and sometimes they altered the stories so that a nobleman was blamed for a moral or political transgression. They usually made sure that their plays presented a fairly positive view of the king. An obvious reason for these choices is that it was prudent for playwright, theatrical company, and theater owner to avoid unpleasant associations between a monarch in a play and Queen Elizabeth. Lesser nobility and gentlemen provided a safer target for criticism, but such criticism does not constitute subversion any more than does the mild criticism of royalty.

The support of the dominant socioeconomic hierarchy is further emphasized by the fact that the commoners who wrote

these plays did not always choose a character from their own ranks to represent the conservative values. In the two plays in which the commoner-hero comes from the gentle ranks, The Second Part of King Henry VI and The Coblors Prophecie, a commoner represents low qualities and a gentleman stands for the ideal qualities that the audience could support and identify with. Jack Cade's self-interest contrasts with Iden's contentment, and Ralph's foolishness is a foil for Sateros's dignity. In these two plays, the qualities of loyalty, patriotism, swift action, honesty, and general moral strength are placed in gentlemen who represent, for many commoners in an Elizabethan audience, the social and/or economic status that they dreamed of obtaining. Each hero's status is then improved in recognition of his virtues. Iden, an esquire, is made a knight and given a thousand marks for having killed Jack Cade, and Sateros is praised by the Duke and promised that his "deedes [in war] shall be rewarded worthily" (G3b).

This kind of wish fulfillment is not a great deal different from the rewards that commoners receive in the other plays. Walworth, in The Life and Death of Jack Straw, is made a knight, an honor that future London mayors also would receive. The King honors Simon Eyre by taking supper at his house and grants shoemakers two days a week to buy and sell leather at Leaden Hall. George a Greene is rewarded with a great deal of land, and Little John is made a squire and provided with an allowance of 100 marks a year. These plays demonstrate how a commoner who exemplifies the proper values can earn material rewards within the

socioeconomic structure.

Yet despite the apparent coherence of the conservative perspective in these plays, we have seen that all of the plays contain moments in which ideological disruption could occur. That is to say, the confidence that people like to have in a seamless view of the world, in a clear set of values with which to approach life, runs the risk of being shaken. Contradictions and dissonance between values occur. None of these moments can be considered subversive, and some of them may have gone unnoticed by most, if not all, of the commoners in the audiences, for the contradictions are often quite subtle; but these moments should draw our attention. The incongruities in values tend to have occurred in two areas that were of great interest to prosperous commoners: the conflict between the pursuit of material success and the belief in intangible virtues, and the inconsistency in upholding the social structure one moment and crossing its lines of demarcation the next.

These instances of potential disruption support Louis Montrose's claim that Greenblatt's view of the struggle for cultural power in Elizabethan England is too reductive. Ideological inconsistencies are markers of subtle cultural changes. Centralized authority may have contained subversion, Greenblatt's point, but it could not ultimately contain culture or ideology. The cultural process is more complex than his thesis allows. The contradictions in values indicate the additional complexity of the formation of the social subject in this culture, that is, the ways commoners were perceived to be a part of society and the

ways they saw themselves. Attempts to view this process as being dominated by either one of the "binary oppositions"--hegemonic system or individual agency--oversimplify a process that involves the mutual influence of both socioeconomic systems and the individual. For example, in this study I have tried to show in the plays not only the dominant role of values related to these systems, but also the traces of self-interest that sometimes contradict those values. The two plays that celebrate the commoner-hero as commoner, George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield and The Shoemaker's Holiday, unexpectedly provide the clearest examples of this conflict within the commoner-hero.

The discussions herein have also focused on the choices that authors have made. Using a variety of cultural materials, these playwrights eliminated some things, emphasized some, and added others to make statements and raise questions about their culture, but they sought to please conservative audience members most of all. While the playwrights may have been sincere at times about the values expressed in the plays (certainly the writers were shaped by the same cultural values), they were motivated, in part, by a desire to succeed as writers, and they used cultural values to further their own material success. They appealed to a patriotism heightened by the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and they were well aware of Londoners' special relationship with the Crown. The plays' reinforcement of the social hierarchy also indicates the playwrights' concerns with the threat of censorship.

The representations of commoners that are significant in

these plays are to a great degree products of these interests and concerns, and the commoner-heroes are largely drawn to meet the expectations and desires of the upper levels of the commons. At the same time, the plays and their commoner-heroes indicate the instability of ideology and certain deep cultural currents during the relative political stability of the late sixteenth century.

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