

ENGLISH COMMONERS AND COMMUNITIES ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

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## ABSTRACT

NORA L. CORRIGAN: English Commoners and Communities on the Early Modern Stage  
(Under the direction of Alan Dessen)

This dissertation explores the treatment of the English common people, their communities, and their values in a variety of early modern dramatic texts, including Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, *Henry V*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* plays, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Rowley, Dekker and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* and the anonymous *Arden of Feversham*, *Woodstock*, and *Sir Thomas More*. When modern-day critics write about social relations in this period, their usual range of concerns includes hierarchy and power. Personal relationships among relative equals are a neglected subject in this field, yet they were central to most Elizabethans' lives and world-views. Thus, my reading of these plays focuses on horizontal rather than hierarchical social relationships; the key words are not *sovereignty*, *rule*, *obedience* but *neighborliness*, *brotherhood*, *fellowship*, *community*. My central thesis is that these texts associate commoners with a specific set of values – mutual help, conviviality, conciliation – which grow out of the social structures of village and urban communities to become the ideological cornerstone of the English commons. These ideas infuse the political rhetoric of stage commoners and inform the ideas about justice, government, and the potential for social change that these characters express.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### VISOR VERSUS PERKES: A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS

As Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* draws to a close, the audience receives a glimpse of everyday life at Justice Shallow's house in Gloucestershire. The justice pays some bills, orders dinner, and listens to a request from his servant, Davy:

*Davy.* I beseech you, sir, to countenance William Visor of Wuncot against Clement Perkes of the hill.

*Shal.* There is many complaints, Davy, against that Visor: that Visor is an arrant knave, on my knowledge.

*Davy.* I grant your worship that he is a knave, sir; but yet, God forbid, sir, but a knave should have some countenance at his friend's request. An honest man, sir, is able to speak for himself, when a knave is not. I have served your worship truly, sir, this eight years, and if I cannot once or twice in a quarter bear out a knave against an honest man, I have but a very little credit with your worship. The knave is mine honest friend, sir; therefore, I beseech your worship, let him be countenanced.

*Shal.* Go to; I say he shall have no wrong. (V. i. 41-58).

Set in the midst of the drama of King Henry's last breath and his son's public declaration that he has reformed, this quiet moment passes without much critical attention. If they notice the exchange at all, modern-day readers tend to interpret it as a minor but telling instance of judicial corruption in a troubled kingdom. As Henry Bolingbroke lies dying and the Lord Chief Justice anticipates Prince Hal's accession with trepidation, petty rural officials do exactly as they please. Others perceive Shallow merely as a figure of fun and the episode a comic interlude in the grand sweep of history. These readers may be inclined to agree with

Falstaff's derisive comments: "[Shallow], by conversing with [his men], is turned into a justice-like serving man [...] If I had a suit to Master Shallow, I would humour his men with the imputation of being near their master; if to his men, I would curry with Master Shallow that no man could better command his servants" (75-84).

This mocking speech strikes a strong note of dramatic irony. Perhaps Falstaff himself is aware of this; part of the fat knight's charm is his cheerful acknowledgment of his own hypocrisy. In any case, an impartial listener would surely observe that by the same logic, Falstaff's practice of consorting with his social inferiors makes him, in effect, a knight-like tapster or cutpurse. Two short scenes later, after the news of the king's death reaches Gloucestershire, Falstaff is anticipating new honors on the strength of his long acquaintance with Prince Hal, and urging Pistol and Bardolph to ride along on his coattails. He assumes that Henry V's royal court will operate under the same system of personal familiarity and favoritism that underlies Shallow's relationship with Davy, writ large. As all readers of the second tetralogy know, he is wrong. Hal repudiates his old friends and chooses the Lord Chief Justice, who, unlike Shallow, is a model of judicial rectitude and impartiality, as a surrogate father and mentor. The king's public rejection leaves Falstaff shocked and in denial: "Do not you grieve at this; I shall be sent for in private to him: look you, he must seem thus to the world" (V. v. 81-83). To Falstaff, the king's refusal to acknowledge an old friend is not merely ungrateful, but simply *inconceivable*: this is not, in his experience, how the world works. What is perhaps less obvious for a modern reader is that many Elizabethans would likewise have taken it for granted that custom and neighborliness would take precedence over strict moral rectitude.

Social histories of the period stress the importance of informal negotiations and neighborly trade-offs like the ones Shakespeare depicts in the scene at Justice Shallow's house. In *An Ordered Society*, Susan Amussen describes a process known as "purgation," which allowed people to avoid legal penalties for minor offenses if they could summon a number of their neighbors to attest to their good character (99). David Underdown, in *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*, points out that it was extremely common for residents of early modern English villages to avoid litigation altogether and resort instead to "[i]nformal methods of dealing with misbehaviour or resolving disputes" (16). Underdown cites the case of a man who "refused to denounce a thief 'for neighbourhood sake'" (16). Similarly, Keith Wrightson describes several instances of local officials who opted to show greater mercy to malefactors than the law allowed, either for the sake of maintaining neighborly goodwill, or because behavior proscribed by law had long been accepted by custom (*English Society* 157-58). "What really mattered," he explains, "[...] was the maintenance of specific, local, personal relationships. In that task, the attempt to enforce conformity to an impersonal standard of legally defined order could be thoroughly counter-productive" (159). This informal, flexible system underlies the workings of justice in Shakespeare's Gloucestershire. Justices, as Rosemary Kegl points out in an article on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, were in a somewhat ambiguous position in Shakespeare's England. They owed a "notorious dual allegiance both to [their] local community and to the central government" (260). In *2 Henry IV*, however, Justice Shallow's primary loyalties clearly lie within the community. He thinks in terms of mutual familiarities and repayment of favors, rather than guilt or innocence, as he prepares to arbitrate between Perkes and Visor.

The obvious risk of such a method of dispensing judgment is that one's actual honesty is apt to count for less than one's ability to maintain and exploit good relations with one's neighbors. Nevertheless, it has a core of integrity, as Davy's phrase, "the knave is mine honest friend," hints. Although Visor is not, in objective terms, an honest man, the fact that he has been an "honest friend" to Davy genuinely *counts* for something in the village justice system. Visor evidently possesses "neighborliness," a nebulously defined virtue which most people in early modern England held in high regard. As Wrightson explains:

'[G]ood neighbourliness', as Mildred Campbell has argued, was a virtue which stood 'perhaps first in the criteria by which the social and ethical standing of an individual in a community was measured'. Quite what was meant by neighbourliness is something which can be inferred from contemporary usage of the term. At its simplest it can be defined as a type of relationship between people established on the basis of their residential propinquity; but this too is inadequate. Two additional characteristics of neighbourliness were that it involved a mutual recognition of reciprocal obligations of a practical kind and a degree of normative consensus as to the nature of proper behaviour among neighbours. Finally, and crucially, it was essentially a horizontal relationship, one which implied a degree of equality and mutuality between partners to the relationship, irrespective of distinctions in wealth and social standing (*English Society* 51).

Two of the ideas in this passage will prove especially relevant to my analysis of the drama of this period. First of all, neighborliness obliges individuals to perform certain favors for their neighbors, and entitles them to expect the same in return even when there are differences in social rank: thus, Davy can expect, as a matter of course, that his master will give preference to his friend. Secondly, sixteenth-century commoners used "neighborliness" as a baseline for ethical judgments – a fact which has profound implications for the way theater audiences would have judged stage kings and commoners.

The essentially horizontal nature of this relationship should not, of course, obscure the fact that the social structures which demanded good neighborliness also encompassed hierarchy. Some individuals in the village clearly held power over others, and the types of favors exchanged depended upon the relative social positions of the individuals concerned. But even vertical social ties reflected a reciprocal rather than unilateral relationship, a two-way structure of paternalism and clientage in which aristocrats courted the affection of the people through village festivals and entertainments (Underdown 63). Wrightson likewise emphasizes the importance of face-to-face contact between superiors and inferiors in maintaining the social order, although he adds the caveat that such relationships should be viewed as *personalized* rather than *personal*, as those in socially superior positions were aware that over-familiarity would compromise their ability to maintain their authority (*English Society* 63-64). Nevertheless, the fact that they worried about this danger at all suggests that hierarchical relationships did, on occasion, become easy to confuse with personal friendship. Shakespeare's original audience would thus have found Justice Shallow's willingness to hand out favors very familiar indeed, and they may have been inclined to judge his behavior less harshly than a modern reader wedded to the idea of impartial justice.

Roger Manning, in *Village Revolts*, likewise emphasizes the centrality of these ideals to early modern culture: "A sense of community, whereby neighbours acted together to protect manorial custom, would seem to be a necessary characteristic of peasant society. Moreover, Henry Kamen has suggested that neighbourliness may have been a stronger social bond than kinship in many northern European village communities" (6). The chief subject

matter of Manning's book is social protest, and he gives this notion of community an explicitly political spin. He notes that popular protest in this era invariably had its roots in resentment of an *individual*, rather than "class conflict": "whether the grievance arises within the community or comes from afar, popular discontent remains focused upon personalities rather than issues" (310). Another widespread historical attitude that is, I will argue, echoed in stage depictions of popular protest is that officials considered food riots "more dangerous than enclosure riots because the participants were [...] mostly artisans and masterless men, who, by general agreement, were more intractable than husbandmen" (315). In other words, protest was more likely to be tolerated if the rioters were still bound by firm ties to the community as a whole. Alison Wall notes that the local community played a crucial role in enforcing order and political obedience under normal circumstances, yet, in some cases, colluded with those who sought to subvert the government. She cites the case of a man named John Raven, who publicly criticized Henry VIII in 1536; the local constable warned him to retract his words because "thou wilt sure to be hanged unless thy neighbours be good to thee" – a turn of phrase that suggests the neighbors might, in fact, choose to turn a deaf ear to speech that verged on treason if they were so inclined (qtd. in Wall 131). "Many other villages," Wall notes, "must have experienced this kind of uncertainty about how to deal with critics of the king and of Cromwell: whether or not they came to be investigated or punished depended on how unanimous the neighbours and local officeholders were in their belief that such criticism was to be stopped" (131).

Thus, people in Tudor and Stuart England lived in a world where neighborly relationships were not only of profound importance in their daily lives, but of considerable

political consequence: both popular support for the monarch and popular revolt began at the community level. These conditions of early modern social life have implications for the drama of this period which remain, as yet, underexplored. When modern-day critics write about the English history plays, in particular, their usual range of concerns includes kingship, statecraft and power – the “proper” subject matter for history, according to Renaissance notions of decorum. By contrast, I propose a reading of these texts that not only focuses on the English commons, but explores horizontal relationships rather than hierarchical ones. The key words for this project are not *sovereignty*, *rule*, *obedience* but *neighborliness*, *brotherhood*, *fellowship*, *community*.

One vitally important question for any study of this type is, of course, “How do we define ‘community’?” Ian Archer points out that many sixteenth-century Londoners were members of several overlapping institutions which fostered a sense of community among their participants, including livery companies, parishes, and wards (58 ff.). Thus, urban communities might be defined along either geographical or occupational lines. Rural villages like Dunstable in *Woodstock* or Edmonton in *The Witch of Edmonton* may seem to lend themselves to a more strictly geographical definition: everyone who lives in the village is automatically included. Nevertheless, such an assumption is deceptive, for there are characters who are clearly on the margins or entirely excluded from participation in the village’s activities – an important criterion for those who sought to define “community” in this era. The authors of one historical study, *Communities in Early Modern England*, quote a range of seventeenth-century definitions of the word, which range from “fellowship in partaking together,” to “a participation, fellowship, or society; good correspondency, neer

familiarity with one another,” to “injoining in common or mutual participation” (qtd. in Shepard and Withington 10). As the authors note, these definitions suggest that to people in early modern England, community was not so much a place as a set of behaviors and a state of mind.

A useful working definition, with regard to the dramatic texts that will form the core of this dissertation, would be a group of characters who have known each other for some time and interact repeatedly on stage. Often, they are united by geographic proximity or common employment; always, they are bound together by the expectation that they will fulfill certain mutual obligations. Moreover, these characters are generally commoners, with a few representatives from the minor local gentry. The social relations among small, localized groups of commoners in these plays often serve as a mirror for the kingdom at large. Thomas Heywood, for instance, represents Richard III’s devastation of England almost entirely in terms of its effect on Jane and Matthew Shore and their friends; the author of *Woodstock* similarly uses the village of Dunstable as a microcosm of Richard II’s corrupt and surveillance-ridden realm. While monarchs come and go (and, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, vanish entirely), the denizens of the Boar’s Head tavern form a relatively stable presence through four of Shakespeare’s plays. The amount of attention these playwrights give to middle- and lower-class communities suggests that they thought of England as a commonwealth as well as a state, and that they were interested in defining and debating what that commonwealth should look like. In particular, they explore – sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly – what place neighborliness, the core value of the English commons, held in the nation’s history, government, and economy.

The extent to which commoners in early modern literature are associated with a specific set of values and ideals has been underappreciated by critics. For example, in *Praise and Paradox*, Laura Caroline Stevenson points out that the late sixteenth century saw the emergence of a body of popular literature, including Deloney's novels and Dekker and Heywood's plays, dedicated to celebrating merchants and craftsmen. Characters from these classes previously appeared in literature – if they appeared at all – only as figures of fun or examples of bad behavior. However, Stevenson denies the existence of a specifically commoner-centered set of values during this period, arguing that in Elizabethan literature, praise for merchants and artisans is “expressed in the rhetoric – and by extension, in the terms of social paradigms – of the aristocracy” (6). In other words, writers praise these figures for being lordlike – “gentle,” “courtly,” “magnanimous” – or else for being good, obedient subjects, but seldom for being good *businessmen*. Stevenson extrapolates from this point to conclude that the Elizabethans did not regard “bourgeois” values as distinct from aristocratic ones.

However, she may be looking for middle-class values in the wrong places. She singles out “diligence” and “thrift” – the virtues most often associated with these classes in *eighteenth-century* texts – as the core of a bourgeois, entrepreneurial moral code, yet at the same time acknowledges the existence of a “gild ideal,” which comprises notions of good fellowship, reciprocity, and community spirit as its central values (37). Indeed, while making the argument that the aristocrats in this body of literature have much to learn from their social inferiors, Stevenson cites Deloney's dedicatory poem to *The Gentle Craft*:

The two key words in Deloney's closing rhymes are 'brother' and 'content.' Shoemakers look out for each others [sic] and strangers in distress; they are happy with what they have; they are kind as well as cheerful. The fellowship of shoemakers is more than a cheery kind of gild loyalty; it is a state of mind that acknowledges that no man can always fend for himself and that every man must look after his fellow mortals. This, as Deloney hints in his introductory poem, is a state of mind far superior to that of men who never forgive offences and spend their lives dragging their neighbours to court – a condition shared by many Elizabethan gentlemen and aristocrats (184-5).

The picture of the craftsman's life that Deloney paints is unquestionably idealized, but still very immediate and recognizable to an Elizabethan audience. I shall argue that these values are consistently associated with English commoners on stage and generally portrayed in highly positive terms, though they sometimes appear in a problematic or less-than-idealized form.

This dissertation began its life as a study of English history plays of the 1590s, a genre marked, in my reading, by a constant interplay between community and state, tragedy and comedy. As the project developed, however, it became clear that the lines between genres tend to blur where the commoners were concerned. Accordingly, I will discuss several plays whose subject matter falls outside of the traditional realm of "history," but which give English commoners and communities a notable level of prominence on stage and explore moments when the bonds of neighborliness and familiarity intersect with the world of politics, justice, and social hierarchy. Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton*, the anonymous *Arden of Faversham*, and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* all fall into this category. Furthermore, while *2 Henry VI*, both *Henry IV* plays, and *Henry V* are core texts for my argument, much of this project will draw on non-Shakespearean historical

drama, including Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* plays, and the anonymous *Sir Thomas More* and *Woodstock*. Most prior critics have stressed the differences between Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean history plays; I believe it is more fruitful to consider them points on a continuum.

One must, inevitably, ask why drama is the proper site for exploring these issues, rather than archival records, chronicle history, or prose fiction. Phyllis Rackin's *Stages of History* suggests a partial answer to this question: the stage was one arena where commoners could appear in person as historical agents, playing themselves and also playing kings. "Excluded, disempowered, or represented as demonic others by historiographic writing," she writes, "they derive their subversive authority from the present, material reality of theatrical performance" (203). Rackin draws a contrast between chronicle histories and other texts that are theoretically "univocal" (even if there are layers of multiple authorship lurking underneath) and theater, which is, by its very nature, "polyphonic" (26). The stage is one place where we can "hear" the voices of multiple commoners and observe community members interacting with one another, albeit in a fictionalized and often idealized setting. If these texts cannot precisely tell us who sixteenth-century commoners *were*, they can at least reveal a great deal about how they perceived themselves and how they wished to be perceived. We have, moreover, very few comparable sources if we wish to reconstruct a "people's History of England," in William Chappell's words, save the popular ballads to which Chappell was referring (181, n.1). The ballad is a genre closely allied to the history play in some ways – playwrights borrowed freely from its personages and motifs when they wrote about disguised kings interacting freely with their subjects – but, as I shall argue, the

ballads tend to erase the power differentials between king and subject and replace them with a generalized atmosphere of good fellowship. On stage, these distinctions are ever-present, yet the king's ability to have his will with his subjects is fiercely interrogated.

To provide a concrete demonstration of the ideological differences between play and ballad, my second chapter will explore the reworking of popular ballad motifs in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Heywood's *Edward IV* plays. Despite Charles W. Crupi's note that "recent accounts of Shakespeare's Henry are extremely helpful in approaching *Edward IV*" ("Ideological Contradiction," 225), relatively little work has been done on the affinities between these groups of plays. However, recent critics have *separately* called into question the assumptions that both Heywood and Shakespeare promote a conformist political agenda, and the time seems ripe for rethinking these plays in conjunction with one another. Both dramatists, in my reading, treat the interactions between king and commoner more cynically than the balladeers do, and only on stage do we get any real sense of the commoner as part of a vital and mutually supportive community. I will be paying particular attention to the treatment of King Edward's lover, Mistress Shore, a character who captured my interest when I first read Heywood, much as she captured the imagination of popular audiences more than four centuries ago. As a woman, a commoner, and an adulteress, Shore should not have been a player on the historical stage at all, according to contemporary notions of historiography. Remarkably, she emerges in Elizabethan literature as a folk heroine, becoming the central figure in a section of *A Mirror for Magistrates* and several popular poems as well as Heywood's two-part drama cycle. The multiple versions of her story touch upon such questions as what place commoners have in history and politics; to what extent the

interests of king and subject are mutually reconcilable; whether the king's or the subject's transgressions should weigh more heavily in the moral balance; and under what conditions, if ever, popular resistance or dissent is justified – all issues that lie at the heart of this dissertation.

Chapter Three explores the last of these questions in greater depth, exploring the multitude of ways history plays can represent popular resistance. Although Thomas Heywood defended the stage by arguing that plays “teach the subjects obedience to their King” and “shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections,” the texts themselves present a more complicated picture (*Apology* F3v). Stage rebels run a gamut from the lawless, reasonless peasants of *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* to the sympathetic and articulate Ill May Day rioters in *Sir Thomas More*. Subjects who stop short of violent rebellion, but commit nonviolent acts of disobedience or verbally criticize the reigning monarch, are still more likely to be presented as justified. In all of these episodes, the common thread is community. The characters who engage in political dissent never exist in a vacuum; they are people with jobs, kindred, and neighbors. The extent to which they maintain ties with their community and respect non-hierarchical social relationships often determines whether the audience is meant to perceive their behavior as treasonous or sympathetic. Moreover, these characters both overtly appeal to the values of neighborliness through their political discourse, and covertly exploit the community's hidden networks by using rhetorical strategies meant to be understood only by a select group of trusted listeners.

In my fourth chapter, I shall return to Shakespeare's second tetralogy, especially *Henry V*. As the Visor-Perkes episode suggests, one fundamental difference between king and commoner involves conflicting notions of justice; this last play in the cycle brings these thematic questions to the forefront. Is the impersonal judge an ideal? Can we, or should we, judge strangers and foreigners by the same standards as friends and community members? By and large, Henry would say yes and his subjects would say no. Shakespeare depicts a delicate balance between a definition of justice that is impartial and focused on the individual's moral standing, and one that is contextual and focuses on his or her standing within the community. Both have their pitfalls – coldness and lack of mercy on the one hand, and corruption on the other. At the same time, *Henry V* also forces the audience to consider what the young king has learned about popular rhetoric and winning his soldiers' goodwill from his time in the tavern, and when and why those lessons fail him. In his public rhetoric, Henry delivers a powerful commoner-centered message: he motivates his men by appealing to neighborly and fraternal values and promising social leveling. He proves, however, far less adept at subtler ways of establishing common ground with his men, both in his speech and in his actions. When his soldiers confront him directly, it becomes clear that his values are fundamentally antithetical to theirs. Ultimately, Henry's ideals are the ones that win out, for the commoners who question them are all executed or banished from the stage; but the play is not wholly unsympathetic to their position.

In contrast, Chapter Five will explore a group of plays that allow the popular values of neighborliness and good fellowship to triumph in the end: Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, Heywood's *2 If You Know Not Me*, and Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. These texts

cross the boundaries between comedy, history, and fantasy as they imagine an alternative, largely commoner-centered social order, though one marked by uneasy compromise and elision. Although all of these plays are set in England's historical past, the reigning monarch virtually disappears from the text, replaced by a panorama of characters best described as "the middling sort." Personal interactions and reciprocal generosity lie at the heart of these plays' value systems, while unilateral displays of power are rare. In every respect but name, the Simon Eyres and Merry Wives of these plays are rulers of their small worlds. As befits a comedy, their rule is benign and reasoned – most of the time – but some tensions bubble to the surface, and certain groups of people are deliberately excluded from the happy resolutions. Nevertheless, these texts elide the grimmest social realities of sixteenth-century life to create a conciliatory fantasy of an English commonwealth whose greatest works are achieved by friendly persuasion rather than unilateral displays of power.

Chapter Six will address these exclusions, and the darker side of stage communities in general, by focusing on murder and witchcraft as social crimes in *Arden of Faversham* and *The Witch of Edmonton*. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of these plays is the swiftness with which the close-knit village society turns into an agent of malice and destruction. In one case, a man is murdered by his most trusted intimates; in the other, the community's systematic abuse and scapegoating drives an old woman to take her revenge through witchcraft, embracing the role that local gossip has already thrust upon her. While both plays end with the most immediately guilty parties being led off to execution and the local authorities making some gestures toward restoring order, the audience recognizes that not all of the punishments have been fair, nor has the community's essential darkness been purged.

The complex webs of collective guilt in these village tragedies make a true reckoning almost impossible.

This project is intended to be a preliminary and exploratory survey, and I must apologize in advance for its many limitations. In particular, my use of the blanket term “commoners” is arguably problematic; it encompasses both Londoners and country-dwellers, leading citizens and the very poor. As Wrightson demonstrates, people in Tudor and Stuart England had multiple vocabularies for describing differences in social rank and status. The language of “estates,” which distinguished people by function, had carried over from medieval society, although the tripartite division of men into aristocrats, clerics, and laborers had been complicated by the addition of multiple new categories, most of them representing professions. The language of “degree” classified them according to their place in the social hierarchy, which was rigidly stratified at the higher levels of the aristocracy, but more difficult to order and define for those beneath the rank of knights (“Estates” 20). Finally, the simpler and less formal vocabulary of “sorts,” widely used in practice, grouped people into a few broad categories: “the better sort,” “the meaner sort,” and, more frequently as the seventeenth century progressed, “the middling sort.” Wrightson stresses that not all members of “the better sort” were aristocrats or gentry: “[T]he language of sorts may have originated in part as a way of expressing the essential identity of interest between England’s ruling élite of gentlemen and the more prominent members of what the early Tudors called the ‘communality.’ To speak of gentlemen and the common people missed an essential social fact which ‘the better sort’ captured admirably and flatteringly” (21). Nevertheless, although these prominent commoners – whether they are London citizens or prosperous country

yeomen – often occupied equally prominent places on stage, popular drama registers this unity of interests less often than one might expect. More often, stage characters who could logically be classified as members of “the better sort,” including some of those who have become knights or Lord Mayors as a result of their meritorious achievements, self-consciously resist this distinction and identify with the interests of their social inferiors. Such characters include Simon Eyre, Old Carter in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Matthew Shore and Mayor Crosbie in *I Edward IV*, and, arguably, Sir Thomas More.

As I have already hinted, Londoners probably conceived of community in different terms than the residents of small villages; occupation, for example, would often have been a stronger unifying factor than geographical proximity. Nevertheless, there is no reason to think their core values were significantly different, or that they felt the ties of community less strongly. The social bonds of the neighborhood and the livery company, Steve Rappaport claims, were “the blocks which formed the foundation of society in Tudor London” (215). Although he argues that privileged London citizens may have identified more strongly with these institutions than the poor, and that the ways in which people experienced and reinforced communal bonds changed over time as a result of increasing social stratification, Ian Archer emphasizes the extent to which the residents of the city shared a common set of ideals grounded in the notion of neighborly unity: “[A]ll found themselves appealing to communal and neighbourhood values at some time, the more substantial inhabitants in their roles as arbitrators of disputes and enforcers of communal norms, and the poorer in their quest for charity and in their efforts to mobilise support for the redress of grievances” (74).

Thus, I have accepted with certain modifications and caveats one of Annabel Patterson's core assumptions in *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, a book to which this project owes an immense debt:

While social historians today are quick to point out that terms like 'the commons', 'the commonalty', 'the people' or 'populace' were and are blanket terms that conceal large social and economic differences, and while the ranks of the gentry and even the aristocracy were not in practice impermeable, the fact remains that there was a clear line drawn conceptually (ideologically) between the gentry and everyone below (2).

Many of these texts do register tensions among commoners of different geographic backgrounds and social ranks: Heywood's *1 Edward IV*, for example, pits London citizens against rebels, while Falstaff's cast-off followers find a hard road to acceptance among the respectable townsfolk at Windsor. Nevertheless, I hope to show that certain broad ideological assumptions differentiate most of these characters from their social superiors. Patterson's basic thesis – that Shakespeare presents popular grievances and codes of behavior with considerable sympathy – is one with which I largely agree, and it functions as a starting point for this project.

More recently, Peter Holbrook, in *Literature and Degree*, has criticized Patterson for her assumptions that there is a single "popular voice"; that this voice is "always, even mainly, one of protest"; and that "sixteenth-century England was riven by class conflict" (145-6). In response, Holbrook emphasizes the overall stability and social cohesion of this society. Holbrook's position serves as a useful corrective against the tendency to oversimplify the commons and over-politicize the texts that deal with their concerns. Accordingly, this project will not be confined to issues of overt political protest and class conflict, but will

explore the way these texts construct communities and social networks in a broader sense. Nevertheless, I contend that most history plays – and a number of domestic comedies and tragedies – from this period do explore, persistently and provocatively, conflicts between aristocrats and commoners that are rooted in fundamentally different world-views. The line between the personal and political in these works is often blurred, a phenomenon which may be at the root of Holbrook's contention that none of Heywood's *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me* plays "qualify as a history by Wilson's definition (that its 'chief interest' be 'political')" (155, n.18). Esther Yael Beith-Halahmi similarly argues that Heywood "is not concerned with the more abstract problems of government" (311). I, on the other hand, would argue that Heywood, like the other authors whose work lies at the heart of this project, is an intensely political playwright – but his politics do not confine themselves to the court and battlefield. Rather, they play out in the greenwood, the private home, and the artisan's shop, and they are steeped in the values that governed commoners' day-to-day lives during this period.

A generation ago, Robert Ornstein read the episode in Shallow's orchard as a portrait in miniature of the stability of the English commons in a troubled and corrupt age:

What can men count on when princes' vows are cheap as dicers' oaths? What can men build on when trust is laughed at as shallowness and folly? The answer is that the land abides, the countryside and its people endure, uncorrupted by the struggle for power that makes necessities of treachery. Immediately after Henry protests against the "revolution of the times" that mocks men's purpose, Shallow appears to speak of the unchanging certainties of rural life in Gloucestershire [...] [W]hen a cup of wine is a signal for treachery at Gaultree Forest, there is something to be said for Shallow's conviviality; and when withered applejohns are the props in the Boar's Head for heartless jokes, one

thinks fondly of the pippins that Shallow serves with a dish of carraways in his orchard (159-60).

My object is not to argue against this reading, for it provides a powerful summation of how Shakespeare and his contemporaries represent popular values and why they are thematically important, but to complicate it. Shallow's orchard is not, after all, really a place of unchanging certainty or a refuge from political vagaries; the play's most earthshattering piece of political intelligence, the news of the death of Henry IV, shatters the day's peace and results in tragic consequences for most of Shallow's guests. Shallow's own method of settling William Visor's case – a way of dealing justice that factors in the malefactor's reputation and friendships and allows for greater leniency than the law might otherwise demand – will come explicitly under attack as Henry V seeks to leave his mark on the kingdom.

A remarkable number of the commoners, both in Shakespeare's second tetralogy and elsewhere on the English Renaissance stage, *are* forced into situations that “make necessities of treachery.” Their stories are no less compelling than those of the kings and princes, even if they have been less heralded. Michael Williams expects to die in a war whose justice he questions; Jane Shore finds agency as a dispenser of justice and charity in Heywood's plays, in defiance of a historical narrative that casts her primarily as the object of one king's lust and another's wrath; Doll Williamson in *Sir Thomas More* seeks to provide for her children even as she is about to be executed for treason; Hobson in *2 If You Know Not Me* stands poised on the brink of accepting money from a debtor who cannot afford to feed his children. What these men and women have in common is that the social relationships they value most are

horizontal, neighborly ones, and out of these relationships emerge the virtues and character traits that guide them through these often wrenching choices: charity, peace-making, personal loyalty, willingness to put friendship above obedience to the law.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MERRY TANNER, THE MAYOR'S FEAST, AND THE KING'S MISTRESS:

#### *1 EDWARD IV AND THE BALLAD TRADITION*

The Elizabethan history play owes an immense debt to another form of popular historical narrative, the ballad – a genre which D. R. Woolf describes as “masterless history,” uncensored and irreverent (37). Richard Helgerson, quoting William Chappell’s notes to the Roxburghe ballad collection, suggests that the ballad tradition constitutes a “‘people’s history of England’ in two senses: they were the history commoners heard and knew, and they were history from a commoners’ point of view” (*Forms* 237). Gerald Porter describes the “dense relation between working life, popular song, and the theatre,” citing a number of elements in Shakespeare that seem to have been drawn from ballads or other aspects of the popular oral tradition (168). In the history plays, these range from the wooing scene in *Henry V* to the snatches of popular ballads that Falstaff quotes incessantly. Porter argues that “within the world of the plays, ballads function as part of the cultural resources of those who are disempowered”; they are typed as a working-class genre, with frequent references to songs being sung by weavers, shoemakers, and other laborers (175). The likeable rogue Autolycus brings this hidden world of storytelling and social commentary to life in *A Winter’s Tale*, offering to sell his listeners a cautionary ballad “to a very doleful tune, how a usurer’s wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burthen” (IV. iv. 265-7). The shepherdesses

gathered around him, all too ready to believe the worst of usurers, consider buying this text but eventually decide in favor of a “passing merry” love song (293). Often, however, the subject matter of ballads was historical rather than topical, and in this respect they performed similar cultural work to drama: they provided a narrative about England’s past that was both entertaining and accessible to people who were illiterate or unable to afford books. This narrative was at once bound by a particular historical context and timeless in its use of folk motifs; it sought to humanize kings and emphasize the personal interaction between king and commoner.

As Francis James Child explains in his exhaustive collection of English popular ballads, “Next to the adventures of Robin Hood and his men, the most favorite topic in English popular poetry is the chance-encounter with a king, unrecognized as such, with one of his humbler subjects” (69). Child surveys a dozen examples of such texts in his introduction to the ballad of “King Edward the Fourth and a Tanner of Tamworth,” one of Heywood’s sources for *I Edward IV*. These ballads feature kings ranging from Alfred the Great to William III, although the monarchs are usually generic figures undistinguished from each other by any topical references or explicit political commentary. Several common threads recur in multiple ballads of this type: the king receives an invitation to dine and drink in a humble household, sometimes featuring venison poached from the royal preserve or some similarly incriminating item. Further dramatic irony results from the subject being overly free with his speech in front of his disguised guest, although he never says anything truly seditious or critical of the king. The meal is always a harmonious occasion, with much wine drunk by all. During the course of the feast, the host often teaches the king a particular

drinking ritual that serves as a symbolic way of initiating the king into the community.

(Prince Hal's remarks on drinking with a tinker in his own language are reminiscent of this motif.) The words of this ritual may later identify subject and king to one another, or they may agree on some other sign or token by which they will know each other when they meet again. When recognized, the subject is invariably terrified that he is going to be hanged for poaching or general disrespect; instead, the king pardons him and offers largesse (Child 67-87).

The "king disguised" narrative was a favorite on stage as well; Shakespeare, for example, employs it on multiple occasions in the second tetralogy. Prince Hal appears in disguise twice in the *Henry IV* plays, the Gad's Hill robbery and the tavern scene with Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet. On each occasion, Falstaff fails to recognize the prince and leaves himself open to ridicule by speaking too broadly, but Falstaff is invariably forgiven and has his debts paid by the prince – until young King Henry abruptly banishes him for good. However, the disguised-king episode that most overtly evokes the ballad tradition is the scene before the battle of Agincourt in *Henry V*, in which Henry wanders his army's camp in disguise and encounters one unwitting subject after another. The first man he meets is Pistol, the last survivor of the Boar's Head crowd, who praises the king in crude but hearty terms that resemble those of the ballad commoners. After a brief interlude with Captains Fluellen and Gower, Henry meets three common soldiers and converses with them at length. The most outspoken of the three, Michael Williams, unaware that he is face to face with the king, vents his displeasure freely. Henry and Williams exchange tokens by which they agree

to recognize each other. When they meet again, Williams is accused of treason for offering to strike the king, but Henry pardons him and gives him a glove full of crowns.

The outward trappings of this scene are thus virtually identical to those of the disguised-king ballads, but Anne Barton argues that Shakespeare draws on popular ballad motifs in this episode “in order to question, not to celebrate, a folk convention” (99). Unlike the ballad kings who discover concord and mutual respect with their subjects wherever they go, Henry quarrels with his soldiers, fails to provide adequate answers to their questions about the justice of his cause, and finally retreats into a resentful soliloquy. His apparent reconciliation with Michael Williams, though accompanied by a lavish gift,

provides not a ghost of an answer to the questions raised during this particular encounter between common man and king disguised. Is the king’s cause just? If not, what measure of guilt does he incur for requiring men to die for anything but the strict necessity of their country? Can the opinions and judgments of private men influence a sovereign on his throne? Henry is generous to Williams, but it is a dismissive generosity which places the subject firmly in an inferior position and silences his voice. The two men do not sit down at table together to any common feast, in the manner of Dekker’s Henry V or Heywood’s Edward IV (“The King Disguised,” 101).

Here and elsewhere in her article, Barton uses the Hobs scenes from *1 Edward IV* as a paradigm of a more “conventional” disguised-king episode, one that “generate[s] harmony, good fellowship, and mutual understanding” (96). Heywood’s play and other contemporary ballad-inspired histories exemplify a genre Barton calls “comical history,” while Shakespeare’s treatment of these same motifs is essentially tragic.

To anyone familiar with the ending of the *Edward IV* plays, this is a problematic contention. The deaths of the Shores and their comrades bring the cycle to a bleak

conclusion, while Heywood supplies only the barest hint that Richard will eventually fall. Barton's use of the terms "comical" and "tragical" history is one of the key points with which Richard Helgerson takes issue in *Forms of Nationhood*. He argues that this distinction not only misrepresents Heywood's tone, but carries with it an implicit, and unfair, value judgment in Shakespeare's favor. Helgerson does read the *Edward IV* plays as qualitatively different from the Shakespearean histories, claiming that ballad-inspired histories such as Heywood's reflect the perspective of the subjects rather than the rulers. While they do not support open rebellion, they do "represent [monarchic] power from the point of view of those who suffer its harshest consequences" (239). The hallmark of this group of plays, in Helgerson's view, is the prominent presence of a likeable character with populist sympathies who eventually becomes a victim of royal power, suffers greatly as a result, yet remains deeply loyal to the monarch. Jane and Matthew Shore, Sir Thomas More, and Thomas of Woodstock are examples of this character type.

The tavern characters in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, while not as idealized as the Shores, arguably serve a similar function, suffering heavy losses in the king's war but still expressing absolute loyalty to their former drinking companion. Helgerson, however, does not draw this comparison. His argument, like Barton's, rests on the assumption that Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean histories are diametrically opposed in their treatment of king-commoner relations and of ballad motifs in general, though he and Barton draw opposite conclusions about Shakespeare's political position. Helgerson perceives the general political position of Heywood's play as indistinguishable from that of the ballads, which he summarizes as follows:

[T]he dominant attitude of the play accords with that of Hobs, the tanner of Tamworth. "I am just akin to Sutton Windmill," Hobs tells the disguised King Edward. "I can grind which way soe'er the wind blows. If it be Harry, I can say 'Well fare Lancaster.' If it be Edward, I can sing, 'York, York, for my money.'" Hobs shares the instinctive and indiscriminate loyalty of the balladeers for whom every king, regardless of lineage or personal qualities, is "our king" (*Forms* 238).

Yet when they are placed in context, and especially when read alongside the ballad from which Heywood drew the Hobs scenes, these lines admit a more cynical and more politically sophisticated reading. If we accept Barton's basic argument about the Michael Williams scenes, Heywood and Shakespeare do not seem so far apart after all.

Heywood's story line about Hobs the Tanner is drawn from a ballad source, but substantially reworked in ways that throw the ballad's ideological position into question. The ballad of "King Edward the Fourth and a Tanner of Tamworth" exists in multiple versions, but Heywood would most likely have known the one printed in London in 1596 by John Danter (*Child Ballads*, V, 81-83). Unlike Heywood's play, this ballad makes no reference to Edward's reputation as a playboy or the broader political context of his reign; any of the other popular ballad kings – Alfred, Henry II, Edward III – would have served the purpose equally well. The unnamed tanner is also a generic figure, unaware of the world outside of Tamworth. He expresses no political opinions, though he speaks bluntly enough when giving his opinion of the king, whom he considers a fool because the king does not recognize a good cowhide when he sees one. Every aspect of the tanner's characterization is class-marked. He is chiefly concerned with his own possessions – he takes great pride in his "good russet coat" and his "mare cost foure shillings" – and his trade (ll. 13-15). When Edward insists on

changing horses, the tanner first demands payment because he likes his own mare better, and then proceeds to demonstrate his crudeness and ineptitude in a comical riding scene<sup>1</sup>:

The king tooke the tanner by the leg,  
and lift him up a loft;  
The tanner girded out a good round fart,  
his belly it was so soft.

‘You make great waste,’ said our king,  
‘your curtesie is but small;’  
‘Thy horse is so high,’ quoth the tanner againe,  
‘I feare me of a fall.’

But when the tanner was in the saddle  
the steede began to blow and blast,  
And against the roote of an old tree  
the tanner downe he cast (ll. 145-56).

The tanner’s inability to remain mounted on the king’s high horse – or even to recognize that it is a better horse than his own – underscores the apparent “rightness” of class distinctions. The ballad never seriously questions these distinctions, although it introduces elements of comic misrule, culminating in Edward’s offer to make the tanner an esquire. In return, the tanner promises the king, “The next time thou comest to Tamworth town, / Thou shalt have clouting-leather for thy shoon” (l. 220). Although he has, in a sense, struck up a neighborly relationship with King Edward, he is never in any danger of losing either his present social standing or his comic ignorance of appropriate social behavior. Stephen Greenblatt, writing about peasant humor in the Renaissance, underscores the distinction “between a laughter that levels – that draws lord and clown together in the shared condition of the flesh – and a laughter that attempts to inscribe ineradicable differences”; the humor of the ballad is clearly the latter (17). Finally, and most importantly, the tanner is clearly as

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<sup>1</sup> Riding ability, or lack thereof, can function as a marker of social status in Renaissance literature; compare Spenser’s Braggadocio in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*.

unfit to judge the king's policies as the king is to judge a cowhide, nor does he attempt to claim a political and historical voice for the commons by expressing his opinions of the king and the times.

This sense of ineradicable difference has largely vanished from the parallel episode in *1 Edward IV*. Heywood's Hobs may be ignorant of the finer points of court etiquette, but he lacks the crudeness and absence of control over his own body that make the tanner in the ballad the butt of slapstick humor. The scene in the play is also darker and more politically charged. The civil wars, never mentioned in the ballad, are always in the background here. Before the king arrives, Hobs voices his frustration with the political situation: "[B]y my troth, I know not when I speak treason, when I do not. There's such halting betwixt two kings, that a man cannot go upright, but he shall offend t'one of them. I would God had them both, for me" (sc. 11.63-66). Hobs' responses to the disguised king's questions are understandably guarded. The audience cannot assume that he has no opinion about the wars, only that he has a keen sense of self-preservation. Despite the pervading atmosphere of danger and surveillance, a note of protest against current conditions creeps into the conversation from time to time:

*King*. Pray thee tell me, how love they king *Edward*?

*Hobs*. Faith, as poor folks love holidays: glad to have them now and then, but to have them come too often will undo them. So, to see the King now and then, 'tis comfort, but every day would beggar us. And I may say to thee, we fear we shall be troubled to lend him money, for we doubt he's but needy (13.28-34).

Hobs, then, has definite political opinions but is wise enough to soften his criticism of the king with compliments. The tanner neatly parries Edward's subsequent line of questioning, presenting himself as a politically ignorant, indiscriminately loyal peasant, but by this point

the audience knows it is a pose. His tone remains lighthearted and he quotes a snatch of popular song, but he seems acutely conscious that identifying himself to a stranger as either a Lancastrian or a Yorkist would court danger.

*King.* Say'th whether lovest thou better Harry or Edward.  
*Hobs.* Nay, that's counsel, and two may keep it, if one be away.  
*King.* Shall I say my conscience? I think Harry is the true king.  
*Hobs.* Art advised of that? Harry's of the old house of Lancaster, and that progenity do I love.  
*King.* And thou dost not hate the house of York?  
*Hobs.* Why, no, for I am just akin to Sutton windmill: I can grind which way so e'er the wind blow. If it be Harry, I can say 'well fare Lancaster'; If it be Edward, I can sing 'Yorke, Yorke, for my money' (38-48).

Unlike the tanner of the ballad, Heywood's Hobs is far from naive. One gets the impression that he may well have strong views about the succession, but is intelligent and crafty enough to evade a potentially dangerous line of questions. The entire scene, on close reading, reveals a delicate balance between loyalty and fear.

Hobs becomes more outspoken when the king offers him a monopoly on his trade:

By the mass and the matins, I like not those pattens. Sirrah, they that have them do as the priests did in old time: buy and sell the sins of the people. So they make the King believe they mend what's amiss, and, for money they make the thing worse than it is [...] Faith, 'tis pity that one subject should have in his hand, that might do good to many throughout the land (75-83).

Hobs implies that the holders of patents have deceived the king about their intentions, and that the commoners are in a better position than King Edward to know about these abuses. While he avoids criticizing the king directly, he also makes a powerful argument in favor of popular participation in the government by implying that kings are not always fully informed of conditions in their kingdom. The king's response to this is rather oblique – "Sayst thou me

so, tanner?” – suggesting that he is, perhaps, in less than perfect concord with these sentiments, although he will eventually allow himself to be ruled in this matter by Jane Shore, who shares Hobs’ dislike of patents (84).

Nevertheless, there seem to be no hard feelings; in keeping with the usual conventions of the disguised-king narrative, Hobs invites the king and his companion home for a meal. The fare is simple: “a good barley bagpudding, a piece of fat bacon, a good cow heel, a hard cheese, and a brown loaf” washed down with plenty of “Mother Whetstone’s ale” (14.15-16, 88). In this homely setting, the king drops the biggest political bombshell of the play: Henry VI is dead, and with him the Lancastrian line. Hobs’ response to the king’s anxious question about how the commons will take this news is one part heartfelt insistence on the common destiny of mankind and one part cynical political commentary:

Well, God be with good king Henry.  
Faith, the commons will take it as a common thing.  
Death’s an honest man; for he spares not the king;  
For as one’s come, another’s ta’en away –  
And seldom comes the better, thats all we say (82-86).

Perhaps in tribute to the deceased king, the evening’s entertainment concludes with a song about his father’s greatest victory:

*Agincourt, Agincourt, know ye not Agincourt?  
Where the English slew and hurt  
All the French foemen:  
With our guns and bills brown,  
O, the French were beaten downe,  
Morris-pikes and bowmen (109-14).*

Hobs’ choice of song provides a rather amusing metatextual moment: a popular ballad about English history is being performed by a character from a popular ballad about English history. The lyrics also emphasize the notion that the battle of Agincourt was won by the

*people*: the verse quoted is not about the heroic exploits of Henry V, but about “the English” and “our Guns and bills brown.” This intensely populist (and jingoistic) view of history underscores the theme of popular patriotism – and popular solidarity – that informs the entire play.

Nevertheless, the type of historical narrative that the play provides is fundamentally different from that of the ballads. The ballads offer a vision of the past that is comforting, idyllic, and above all stable. Not only does Heywood weave the story of King Edward and the tanner into a broader historical context and situates it at a critical moment of dynastic change, but he also draws the audience’s attention to the idea of historical change by having Edward remark after his first meeting with Hobs, “I see plain men, by observation / Of things that alter in the change of times / Do gather knowledge” (13.98-100). The times are in flux, and there is at least a hint that these changes may be empowering for men like Hobs: the commons are more knowledgeable and more politically aware than they have been in the past. However, the commoners in the *Edward IV* plays are left in the awkward position of having knowledge and opinions but no political agency of their own, except such agency as they can negotiate through their brief and unstable relationships with the king. The episodes that follow Hobs’ encounter with the king lead the audience to question whether this is sufficient, even under Edward’s relatively benevolent rule; they also introduce some of Heywood’s sharpest social commentary.

Laura Caroline Stevenson has noted that several of the financial concerns mentioned in the play, such as Hobs’ criticism of patents and his fear that the “needy” king will ask him for money, touch upon abuses common at *Elizabeth’s* court rather than Edward’s (206 ff.).

Shades of the present also creep in when Hobs and his neighbors appear in a follow-up scene with Edward's officials, who are collecting a quasi-voluntary tax called a benevolence. At first glance, the episode does appear benevolent; many of the residents of Tamworth give willingly and generously, while Hobs shames the more reluctant members of his community into contributing. Perhaps this is the payoff from Edward's personalized, commoner-friendly style of kingship. The scene is, however, problematic for several reasons. This method of taxation would have been an odd practice for Heywood to romanticize. Never popular, benevolences were outlawed under Richard III, although later monarchs continued to collect them from time to time; Elizabeth did so in 1599 (Crupi, "Ideological Contradiction," 234). The first benevolence, the one dramatized in the play, inspired Holinshed to editorialize, "many with grudge gave great summes toward that newe found ayde, which of them might bee called a Maleuolence" (qtd. in Crupi 234). Heywood transforms this picture of a reluctant populace into a scene in which the grudging are punished and those subjects who give willingly are "rewarded" with the moral high ground, but, as Crupi points out, it is less clear whether they will receive a more practical recompense from the king in return: "[W]e must ask whether the play dramatizes royal willingness to honor the feudal obligations contained in language and represented in ritual. If not, obedience is merely submission and the fantasy of conciliation is accordingly subverted" (232). Because the play raises grave and persistent questions about whether Edward's hearty populist manner is actually *good* for his subjects, the scene takes on a darker tone in context.

In particular, Edward's failure to "requite" generosity in kind will become the defining feature of his relationship with Matthew Shore, an ideal citizen who loses his wife to

a less than ideal king. Matthew, whether motivated by humility or by a touch of pride in his own social rank, refuses to be knighted in the aftermath of Falconbridge's rebellion. Instead, Edward promises him, "some other way / We will devise to quittance thy deserts" (10.240-41). As Lena Cowen Orlin notes, Edward's words find a bitter echo toward the end of the play, when Shore resigns his wife to the king and plans to leave the country: "England, fare thou well. / And Edward, for requiting me so well, / But dare I speak of him? Forbear, forbear" (20.94-96). This emphasis on requital, or the lack thereof, colors the resolution of the benevolence episode. Immediately after Shore's exit, the king enters and discusses the excellent yield from the benevolence with Howard and Sellinger. He promises that he "must requite that honest tanner" (21.14) with an invitation to court – but the juxtaposition of the two scenes provides a dark reminder that the king's requitals are not always fair or kind. Even his desire to play host to Hobs seems as much motivated by the promise of "good sport" as a sincere wish to return a favor (16). Both balladeer and playwright invoke the idea of neighborly reciprocity as they explore the relationship between king and subject, but while the ballad's happy ending provides a comforting fantasy of a subject establishing a successful neighborly relationship with the king, Heywood emphasizes Edward's failure to fulfill his end of this social obligation.

Finally, the benevolence is clearly not a just way of collecting taxes. The ever-obliging Hobs pays 20 nobles, approximately ten pounds, while his apparently well-off neighbors Hadland and Goodfellow get off with payments of two pounds and one pound one shilling, respectively. Only Harry Grudgeon is eventually shamed into giving more money after making an absurdly small initial pledge. He changes his mind, apparently, not because

of the scolding he receives from the king's agents but out of the desire not to be outdone by a tanner. The scene may embody a subtle critique of the way commoners do things, as well as of the abuses of royal power. Their over-reliance on the personal and obsession with shame and honor within the bounds of a narrow community tends to get in the way of fairness. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Shakespeare explores the same problem more subtly and extensively in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

The play brings the Hobs storyline to a happy, but by no means unproblematic, conclusion. *1 Edward IV* ends as most disguised-king ballads do, with the familiar rite of recognition, pardon, and celebration. Hobs comes to London to plead for his son, who is in jail for robbery, and ends up fearing for his own life when he discovers that he has addressed the king as “plain ‘Ned,’ mad rogue and rascal” (23.86). Predictably, the king absolves him, pardons his son, and gives him forty pounds, but Hobs remains wary and mildly skeptical of Edward's good faith to the end: “Marry, you speak like an honest man, if you mean what you say” (101-02). Furthermore, Heywood departs from the usual ballad pattern by foregrounding the generosity not of the king, but of the Widow Norton, who voluntarily adds her own “widows mite” to the sum the king originally requested as a benevolence (120). Edward's efforts to help her to a good husband are gently undermined by Hobs and the widow, who have no particular desire to be married off to one another. Thus, while a certain measure of harmony and good fellowship are indeed evident in the Hobs subplot, the third element Barton describes as central to the comical history – “mutual understanding” – remains elusive.

Another perennial feature of the disguised-king ballads, the feast shared by king and subjects, reappears elsewhere in the play and in a more troubling context, when Mayor Crosbie invites the king to the feast where he first sees Mistress Shore. The Lord Mayor is a self-made man, and his characterization has been cited as evidence of Heywood's ideological conservatism and pro-capitalist stance. Jean Howard ("Other Englands") and Theodora Jankowski, for example, argue that Crosbie's story of his origins romanticizes the status quo and erases the real obstacles to a penniless foundling becoming a prosperous tradesman, suggesting that poor people who *fail* to pull themselves up by the bootstraps are at fault. I find this assertion problematic for a number of reasons, some of which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five. For now, it should be enough to say that Crosbie's initial soliloquy does not celebrate individual entrepreneurship, but rather the network of social obligations that knits London tradesmen together.

One salient feature of Crosbie's rags-to-riches tale is that there are no aristocrats in it. His chief benefactors are a poor shoemaker and the masters of the Hospital of London. Both, in turn, have become the beneficiaries of his good fortune, and he has also established a poorhouse. While actual social realities were, of course, grimmer, it is significant that Heywood imagines private charity as a self-contained, commoner-run success story, based on reciprocity and mutual respect. At the disastrous feast which the king attends, these social virtues break down. Rather than reciprocating the mayor's hospitality, Edward sows discontent in the Shores' marriage and abruptly leaves the table when he can no longer keep his desire for Jane under control. Crosbie is both devastated and bewildered ("My house to cause my Sovereigns discontent?"), while the king does nothing to assuage his distress

(16.179). As Stevenson argues, the episode “suggest[s] that Edward’s courtly behaviour, unlike the London citizen’s loyal conduct, is merely a cover for what in Heywood’s plays are consistently the greatest of faults – callousness and ingratitude” (118). While Edward’s supper with Hobs has the expected genial good humor and harmonious outcome of the popular ballads, a more complete reversal of these tropes than the mayor’s feast cannot be imagined.

This scene also introduces the King Edward / Jane Shore subplot, the site of Heywood’s most radical departure from the ballads’ ideological position. Mistress Shore is known to many modern readers only through a passing reference in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Because her name was both familiar and laden with cultural baggage for the Elizabethans, it will be helpful to give a brief overview of her other appearances in sixteenth-century literature, beginning with Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III*. More apologizes for including such a lengthy account of a female commoner’s character and deeds, conscious that this digression was at odds with his contemporaries’ sense of decorum and his own practices elsewhere in the *History*:

I doubt not some shall think this woman so slight a thing to be written of and set among the remembrances of great matters, which they shall specially think that haply shall esteem her only by that they now see her. But me seemeth the chance so much the more worthy to be remembered, in how much she is now in the more beggarly condition, unfriended and worn out of acquaintance, after good substance, after as great favor with the prince, after as great suit and seeking to with all those that those days had business to speed, as many other men were in their times, which now be famous only by the infamy of their evil deeds. Her doings were not so much less, albeit they be much less remembered, because they were not so evil. For men use if they have an evil turn to write it in marble: and whoso doth us a good turn, we write it in dust, which is not worst proved by her; for at this day she beggeth of many at

this day living, that at this day had begged if she had not been (57-8).

More justifies his interest in Mistress Shore's life because it emblemizes a larger moral truth. He extrapolates her story into a commentary on the rise and fall of great men – a more fitting subject for historiography, in the eyes of most Renaissance writers. Richard Helgerson considers More's work the first "commoner's history," in large part because this portion of the text suggests that "tragic emotion may not be the exclusive province of the great" ("Weeping" 456). This interpretation, however, obscures the fact that this passage is unique in the *History*. Elsewhere, More appears to sympathize with the commoners as a group – portraying the London citizens as politically savvy and quick to see through Richard's political machinations – but rarely comments on the character and deeds of individuals. Mistress Shore is a remarkable exception in a text where the commons appear, for the most part, as commentators rather than as agents.

The citizen's wife turned royal paramour was an unlikely heroine in a culture that valued female chastity and regarded history-making as the province and prerogative of aristocratic males. Nevertheless, Mistress Shore's story captured the popular imagination throughout the sixteenth century<sup>2</sup>. She became a central character in a number of poetic and dramatic texts dealing with Edward's reign, including *A Mirror for Magistrates* (in which she appears at the heart of a debate about whether women and commoners ought to be granted a voice in historical writing, and if so, what sort of voice is appropriate), a series of popular poems and ballads, and three history plays, including Heywood's two-part series. Along the

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<sup>2</sup> For background information and more extensive discussion of the numerous literary texts dealing with Mistress Shore, see Beith-Halahmi, *Angell Fayre or Strumpet Lewd*; Harner, "Jane Shore in Literature," and Pratt, "Jane Shore and the Elizabethans."

way, she acquired a first name – Jane – and a pathetic death scene. As Helgerson has noted, her absence from the stage in Shakespeare’s first tetralogy would have been perceived by contemporaries as a conspicuous and deliberate omission; she was as integral to many popular accounts of Edward’s reign as the king himself (“Weeping” 462). In Heywood’s *Edward IV* plays, by contrast, she appears at the heart of the story, just where audiences would have expected her to be – but Heywood makes some unprecedented changes to his sources in his treatment of her character.

While More describes Mistress Shore in sympathetic terms and does not stress her wantonness or desire to take a lover above her husband’s social station, the popular ballads ascribe these negative traits to her *before* she meets Edward. In *The Garland of Good Will*, Thomas Deloney characterizes her as a willful, spoiled girl: “The only daughter of a wealthy merchant man / Against whose counsel evermore / I was rebelling” (ll. 12-14). In a ballad from the Roxburghe collection (titled, in full, “The Woful Lamentation of Mrs. Jane Shore, a Gold-smith’s Wife of London, sometime King Edward the Fourth’s Concubine, who for her Wanton Life came to a Miserable End. Set forth for the Example of all wicked Livers”), Jane admits she “spread my plumes as wantons do / Some sweet and secret friend to woove / Because my love I did not find / Agreeing to my wanton mind” (ll. 23-6). One version of this ballad substitutes “chaste” for “my” in the third line, further underscoring Jane’s sexual transgressions (Chappell, n. 7, 484). The same ballad introduces Jane’s false friend Mistress Blage, who urges her companion to accept Edward’s advances because she considers it “a gallant thing / To be beloved of a king” (ll. 33-4). Thus counseled, Mistress Shore embraces her new position at court and “the Joys that love could bring” (l. 45). There is no sign of

Heywood's tormented Jane in this text; Matthew is the only one who suffers while King Edward is alive. After Jane's fall from influence, the ballads emphasize her physical mortification rather than her repentance and spiritual redemption. She becomes a Cressida-like figure, begging "with clacke and dish" and wearing filthy, vermin-infested rags (Deloney, l. 62).

As Helgerson notes, Heywood departs from every known contemporary version of the story by making the Shore's marriage genuinely affectionate and the middle-class household a "place of value" ("Weeping" 463). Companionate marriage is in fact typed as a middle-class value throughout the *Edward IV* cycle. When the king defends his right to choose a bride of lower social position than himself, he imitates the language and manner of a private man, speaking in homely, jocular prose. In the final lines of *I Edward IV*, the king is having one of his more overtly "royal" moments; he attempts to arrange a marriage between Hobs and the widow Norton, but they refuse to play along:

*King.* [...] John Hobs,  
Thou art a widower; lackst thou such a wife?  
*Hobs.* S' nails, twenty pound for a kiss? Had she as many twenty  
pound bags as I have knobs of bark in my tan-fat, she might kiss  
them away in a quarter of a year. I'll no S. Katherine's widows, if  
kisses be so dear.  
*Widow.* Clubs and clouted shoes! There's none enamoured here  
(23.141-46).

Not only do Hobs and the widow reject Edward's proposition, they do so in distinctly working-class language, making it clear that expensive dalliances cloaked in courtly pleasantries are neither to their taste nor within their means. Unlike the final scenes of the ballads, Heywood makes it clear that the king's role as stage-manager and *deus ex machina* has its limits.

Several more assumptions taken for granted in the ballads – the king’s “right” to a mistress, the transgressive desire for pleasure and power that leads to Jane’s fall – are fiercely interrogated by Heywood. Jane shows no sign of excessive social ambition or discontent with her husband in *1 Edward IV*, although Edward attempts to instill these feelings in her: “You had been a lady but for him” (16.92). Like most of the arguments he uses to persuade her to become his mistress, this ploy proves unsuccessful. Ultimately, Heywood’s women are motivated not by lust or ambition, but by an acute sense of their own powerlessness and the dangers of disobeying the monarch. Mistress Blage counsels her distressed friend:

Believe me, Mistress Shore, a dangerous case,  
And every way replete with doubtful fear [...]  
If you should yield, your virtuous name were soiled,  
And your beloved husband made a scorn.  
And, if not yield, it’s likely that his love,  
Which now admires ye, will convert to hate;  
And who knows not, a prince’s hate is death? (19.21-27).

The pervasive atmosphere of fear, both in this scene and in the episode in *2 Edward IV* where Mistress Blage rejects her friend, renders both women’s transgressions more understandable and forgivable.

But in another sense, Mistress Blage’s treachery is far more serious in the play than in the Roxburghe ballad: Heywood treats personal loyalty as the fundamental measure of a character’s decency. Nowhere is this clearer than in the differing treatments of Jane’s middle-class community in the play and in its sources. The Roxburghe ballad makes social isolation part of Mistress Shore’s punishment and portrays the loss of friendships and respect among her peers as a natural consequence of adultery: “Thus was I scorn’d of maid and wife / For leading such a wicked life / Both sucking babes and children small / Did make a pastime

of my fall” (123-6). Only one friend defies the general condemnation of Jane and ventures to relieve her, and gets hanged for his pains. The ballad ends, not happily, but with a validation of conventional morality – Mistress Shore repents her sins and urges others not to imitate them. The respectable neighbors who ostracized her are vindicated.

By contrast, in Heywood’s play the community at large sympathizes with Jane. The petitioners whose cases she has pleaded risk their lives to help her, and Brakenbury comments that the crowds who witness her disgrace “have their relenting eyes even big with tears” (2 *Edward IV*, 18.113). Mistress Blage and Rufford, characters whom Heywood strongly condemns and portrays as hypocrites, are the sole exceptions. The contrast between their behavior and the ready generosity of Aire, Jockie, Brakenbury, and even Matthew Shore encourages the audience to judge Jane’s betrayers harshly, while the royal mistress’ own errors seem readily excusable in the light of her friends’ forgiveness and her own willingness to extend charity toward Mistress Blage. (Mistress Blage, incidentally, appears “very poorly, a-begging with her basket and clap-dish” in her final scene on stage. This grim image of female penitence is attached to Jane in the ballads [sc. 20, sd.].) Moreover, the play ends with the sense that Richard’s treatment of Jane is an unrelieved moral travesty. Because Heywood chooses to include only the faintest foreshadowing of the tyrant’s fall at the conclusion of the play, readers and viewers are deprived of the neat sense of closure and justice that characterizes the ballads.

Jane’s moral transgressions do not go unacknowledged in the play, but the public shame that constitutes her punishment in the ballads has been replaced by an internal sense of guilt. The level of self-awareness and self-condemnation that Heywood’s Jane displays,

almost from the very moment when she agrees to become the king's mistress, has no parallel in the ballads, in which she shows no sign of repentance until after Edward's death. If her remorse is private, however, her method of seeking atonement is very public; she becomes the king's proxy and link to the people who seek his assistance. More's description of Mistress Shore's "great suit and seeking to with all those that those days had business to speed" is vividly dramatized in a scene in which Jane agrees to help a series of petitioners. Her sympathies clearly lie with the poor against the powerful, and she becomes an eloquent spokeswoman and advocate for the commons. The three petitioners to whom Jane offers assistance become, in a sense, her new community; they will repay her favors in *2 Edward IV*, after her fall from grace. However, a fourth petitioner, a man named Rufford who seeks a license to transport corn (another abuse more reminiscent of Elizabeth's reign than Edward's), incurs Jane's anger: "[You] care not how you wound the commonwealth. / The poor must starve for food to fill your purse, / And the enemy bandy bullets of our lead" (*1 Edward IV*, 22.66-68). This is the second time the play has raised the issue of monopolies. While Crupi argues that Hobs' subversive potential has come to nothing, since Edward's noncommittal response to his tirade against patents "provides [...] no indication of the possibility of reform," this episode picks up on one of the tanner's most important complaints and dramatizes one potential (if impractical) avenue for change: the principled decision of a commoner elevated to a social position where she can influence policy (245). The English people benefit from Jane's elevation to royal favor; but she herself will not be so lucky in the end.

Thus, Heywood's treatment of the relationship between king and subject is diametrically opposed to that of most popular ballads, which use the motifs of the disguised king and the common feast to bring about a happy ending marked by good fellowship between king and commoner. While social distinctions are temporarily set aside or reversed in these episodes, the harmonious ending reasserts their essential rightness and usefulness. In *1 Edward IV*, Heywood deliberately manipulates these ballad conventions in order to blacken the king's character and raise questions about the rightness of social distinctions. Differing treatments of community are central to this transformation. The disguised-king ballads typically have two important characters, the king himself and the subject temporarily deceived by his appearance; their friendship emblemizes a broader vision of cross-class harmony. In Heywood's plays, both Crosbie and Jane Shore (and to a lesser extent Hobs) appear as part of a vital middle-class community whose networks are permanently disrupted by the king's actions. Daryl Palmer's observation, "Shakespeare approaches familiarities in terms of loss; Heywood seems everywhere concerned with gain," though a reasonable generalization where the kings are concerned, seems less true for the commoners (300). Like Shakespeare's Michael Williams, Jane, Hobs, and the Mayor are articulate characters who raise grave questions about whether Edward's use of his power is just, and both of the Shores suffer severely as a result of having been singled out for the king's favor.

The emphasis upon royal abuses in *1 Edward IV* and the hints in the petitioner scene that Jane may be more fit to govern than her lover skirt around a dangerous question: At what point, if ever, is it acceptable to defy or resist royal power? Heywood would not confront this question head-on until Part Two of *Edward IV*, in which Richard III accedes to the throne and

a number of sympathetic characters, who have hitherto been fiercely loyal to the crown, find his tyrannical commands impossible to obey in good conscience. These moments are perhaps best considered in context with other contemporary stage treatments of rebellion and disobedience. To this end, the following chapter will survey a number of these scenes and explore the social dynamics among the characters involved. I shall also consider the rhetorical tactics they use to justify and propagate their claims, many of which are rooted in the values and social networks of community.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **“THOUGH LAW FORBID”: REBELLION, RESISTANCE, AND COMMUNITY**

“Playes,” wrote Thomas Heywood in his 1612 *Apology for Actors*,

are writ with this ayme, and carryed with this methode, to teache the subjects obedience to their King, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all trayterous and felonious stratagems (F3v).

The didactic purpose of the theater, in this formulation, is to enforce political orthodoxy and discourage dissent. Yet as we have seen in the previous chapter, Heywood’s own works do not necessarily follow this prescription. Jane and Matthew Shore unquestionably “live in obedience” to Edward IV, but their estate does not flourish. At the same time, many dramatic portrayals of disobedient subjects from this period further complicate this message by calling for the audience’s partial or wholehearted sympathy, including Heywood’s own celebration of the stalwart group of friends who relieve Jane after Richard III orders her to be driven out of the community and starved.

Popular politics and popular dissent can be staged in a variety of ways. Open rebellion is both the most dramatically impressive and the least likely to be portrayed with sympathy. Playwrights could also, for example, permit disaffected characters to voice political opinions and grievances but not to act upon them; show them seeking redress (often unsuccessfully) through accepted channels such as petitioning; or depict covert acts of

resistance rather than open rebellion. Finally, they could also show the victims of corrupt rulers suffering in silence and allow the abuse of power to speak for itself. Most writers were skillful at interweaving these strategies; Heywood, for instance, uses all four of them at various points in the *Edward IV* cycle. This broader definition of “dissent” reveals that commoners who critique or challenge the status quo are neither generally condemned nor generally excused. The amount of audience sympathy these characters command depends greatly on the context: How justified are their grievances? What are their methods? How do they frame and express their complaints? Finally, and of paramount importance, what is their relationship with their peers as well as their social superiors?

This chapter will explore two general themes: how the rhetoric of political resistance invokes the idea of community, both implicitly and explicitly; and how dissenters relate to their communities in practice. I shall show that as a general rule, when playwrights wish to present the perpetrators of resistance or rebellion to the established order as justified or sympathetic, they tend to situate these characters within a network of established relationships with friends, neighbors, and comrades. While vertical social relationships are often stretched to the breaking point in these scenes, horizontal ones – friendship, neighborliness, kinship – hold firm. By contrast, stage rebels who lack justification or redeeming qualities often show disregard and disrespect for these horizontal relationships, though not necessarily for the idea of community in the abstract. As Ian Archer points out, both official civic rhetoric and popular petitions at this time frequently invoked the ideals of commonwealth and neighborly charity, which “provided a set of values to which the disadvantaged could appeal” (54). On stage, references to these ideals are likewise part of

the conventions surrounding scenes of rebellion and resistance, but they can be invoked in many ways and with varying degrees of sincerity.

Annabel Patterson posits a “cultural tradition of popular protest” in late medieval and early modern England, a tradition which, she argues, encompassed “symbolic forms and signifying practices, a history from below encoded in names and occasions, a memorial vocabulary and even a formal rhetoric” (38). This rhetoric is marked by frequent references to the social bonds that unite the English commons, both the poor and the well-off, into a single community. At the opening of the anonymous play *The Life and Death of Jack Straw*, Parson Ball invokes these ideals, addressing his listeners as “brethren” and arguing that “it were better to have this communitie / Then to have this difference in degrees” (ll. 84-5). “Community,” to Ball, seems to embody both leveling ideas and neighborly reciprocity; he cites “And thou helpe me, Ile helpe thee” as the motto of the golden age that existed before there were differences in social rank (91). However, the other rebels soon replace this message with a more pragmatic mantra: “therefore looke you to your selfe, for I will looke to my selfe” (789-90). Straw’s followers – particularly the boy Nobs and the clown Tom Miller, who emerge as the most visible and vocal representatives of the peasant mob – steal from one another, plan to desert or hide as soon as danger threatens, and voice open disrespect for their nominal spokesman, Parson Ball. The audience is thus invited to vilify these characters as much for their selfishness and lack of mutual loyalty as for the act of rebellion itself. Though the play’s social message is conservative, it does not question the validity of the values of commonwealth and mutual help; rather, it demonstrates that not all those who invoke those values really have their neighbors’ best interests at heart.

Jack Cade's rebellion in 2 *Henry VI* depicts a similar tension between the rhetoric and the reality of community. Cade claims to speak for "such / As would, but that they dare not, take our parts" (IV. ii. 196-97), a statement that, in Thomas Cartelli's view, "bespeaks a consciousness of collective interest and shared goals that is, for all rights and purposes, a consciousness of class" (56). I would add that it also suggests a certain consciousness of *community* – a claim that the rebellion's legitimacy rests upon a large, voiceless, yet sympathetic body of supporters. However, this consciousness seems false and manipulative, partly because the audience has already heard that Cade is really the Duke of York's pawn, but also because we learn early in the rebellion episode that he cares little about maintaining his ties to his former neighbors. His followers, Dick the Butcher and Smith the Weaver, continually undercut his leadership with sardonic asides that reveal Cade's true background and deflate his pretensions to noble birth:

*Cade.* My father was a Mortimer –  
*Dick.* He was an honest man, and a good bricklayer.  
*Cade.* My mother a Plantagenet –  
*Dick.* I knew her well. She was a midwife.  
*Cade.* My wife descended of the Lacies –  
*Dick.* She was, indeed, a peddlers daughter, and sold many laces.  
(IV. ii. 41-49).

Throughout this scene, Dick and Smith stress the pre-existing bonds of neighborliness: their familiarity with Cade's background and family entitles them to deconstruct their leader's claims and to put words in his mouth. Despite their cynicism about Cade's rhetoric, they do, in fact, emerge as two of his chief lieutenants, no doubt upon the strength of their prior acquaintance with him. Thus, their position within the mob rests upon the very bonds that Cade is most eager to disavow.

The butcher and weaver's attitude toward their leader seems deeply conflicted. On the one hand, they reject Cade's attempts to dissociate himself from their common background. On the other, they remain enthusiastic participants in the rebellion and to some extent emerge as its chief spokesmen. These two characters display stronger leveling instincts than Cade (who shows a marked inclination to emulate the aristocracy, vowing at one point to extract tribute from the peers and claim the first fruits of every marriage in the kingdom). The bulk of their hostility seems directed toward those whose intellectual achievements set them apart from the common run of men. "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers," perhaps the most famous line in the play, is spoken by Dick, and Smith leads the attack on the clerk of Chatham. Cartelli points out that there may be some merit in this position, arguing that the rebels' anti-intellectualism stems "less out of ignorance than out of an assured belief in the role [the social institutions associated with literacy] play in dividing society into haves and have-nots" (59). Cade is protesting a real, contemporary injustice when he says to Lord Say: "Thou hast appointed justices of peace, to call poor men before them about matters they were not able to answer. Moreover, thou hast put them in prison; and because they could not read, thou hast hanged them; when indeed, only for that cause they had been most worthy to live" (IV. vii. 44-9). The rebels have, of course, got the remedy for this social ill completely wrong – massacring the literate rather than enlightening the ignorant – but their analysis is not entirely off base. Edna Zwick Boris, moreover, argues that Stafford's contempt for Cade's followers is an almost exact inversion of the rebels' own attitude toward the upper classes, and both are equally reprehensible. "[T]he stupidity and ruthlessness that Cade's followers evidence may ultimately be less repulsive than the

stupidity and ruthlessness evidenced in high places” (67). Thus, Cade and his followers arguably have their sympathetic moments; but nevertheless, it remains clear that the audience is, for the most part, supposed to disapprove of their actions. Shakespeare calls for this disapproval first by showing up Cade’s hypocrisy, signaled in part by his attempts to distance himself from his former neighbors and repudiate his community, and later by depicting the mob’s own lack of loyalty to their nominal leader.

However, one possible model for a more community-sanctioned, and also more morally acceptable, challenge to the social order exists in *2 Henry VI*, in the person of Peter Thumpe, an apprentice who accuses his master of treason and vanquishes him in a trial by combat. As Craig Bernthal points out in an article entitled “Treason in the Family: The Trial of Thumpe v. Horner,” Peter’s killing of his master – which undermines Horner’s authority within the household, just as Horner’s alleged treason undermines the king – would have been a multivalent and somewhat uncomfortable moment on the Elizabethan stage. The episode appeals to the audience’s desire to see traitors punished and underdogs vindicated, yet it also “dramatizes Tudor England’s prevailing social nightmare – betrayal to the authorities by friends, servants, family. The story thus tugs the audience in opposite directions: toward satisfaction about the victory of a loyal subject over a treasonous one, and toward dis-ease that such a victory is achieved by a servant against his master” (44). Bernthal sees a deep-seated, unresolved ambiguity in this episode, although it reinforces the politically orthodox idea that the loyalty Peter owes to the king outweighs his responsibilities to his immediate master.

For me, the salient point about this scene – which may have given the audience a broad clue about how to interpret it – lies in Peter’s relationships with his peers, which are as central to these scenes as his relationships with authority figures. Whenever he appears on stage, Peter is surrounded by a group of fellow petitioners or apprentices who advise and support him. This emphasis on stable, horizontal social connections renders his challenge to his master’s authority less transgressive than it might otherwise be. Both Horner and Peter spend the last few minutes before their combat drinking with friends and neighbors, a ritual that emphasizes and reinforces the bonds among these two groups of social equals. However, Peter is more firmly established as a productive, generous member of a community than his master. His fellows urge him to “fight for credit of the ‘prentices” as they reassure him about his chances for survival, and Peter, in turn, leaves them his possessions: “Here, Robin, an if I die, I give thee my apron; and, Will, thou shalt have my hammer; and here, Tom, take all the money that I have (II. iii. 71, 73-76). This idea of a communal support system is absent from the portrayal of Horner’s crowd of unnamed neighbors, who receive no bequests, express no sympathy, and seem chiefly interested in getting their champion as drunk as possible before the fight. Mark Thornton Burnett describes Peter and his fellows as “a community defending its values through fraternal spirit” (21). Nevertheless, he argues, Shakespeare permits the audience to draw an analogy between Peter and Cade. Thomas Heywood, by contrast, sets his apprentice-heroes unequivocally in opposition to the forces of rebellion when he casts them as the defenders of London against the rebel Falconbridge.

I wish to return to Heywood’s other strategies, which hint at various socially sanctioned avenues for dissent, later in this chapter, but for the moment I would like to focus

on Falconbridge's revolt. Falconbridge's rhetoric is unusual: these scenes provide a remarkable example of an *anti-popular* rebellion, led by a man who claims to be the lawful heir to the Lancastrian cause. In response to the cry of "Liberty, liberty, liberty, general liberty" from his followers, Falconbridge explicitly *disavows* any connection with traditions of popular protest rooted in social injustice:

We do not rise like Tyler, Cade, and Straw,  
Bluebeard, and other of that rascal rout,  
Basely, like tinkers, or such muddy slaves  
For mending measures or the price of corn,  
Or for some common in the weald of Kent  
That's by some greedy cormorant enclosed,  
But in the true and ancient lawful right  
Of the redoubted house of Lancaster (*I Edward IV*, 2.26-34).

Heywood discredits Falconbridge's cause by, among other things, having him disclaim any interest in issues that might benefit the people at large. (By mentioning "the price of corn," a topic that would have had considerable resonance for audiences in the 1590s, he also draws an implicit contrast between Falconbridge's unconcern and Jane Shore's principled refusal to give in to Rufford's demands.) Falconbridge shows little respect for his lieutenants, who in turn treat the rest of the mob with contempt, addressing them as "ye clamorous rogues" and "ye slaves" (20, 59). Like Cade in his most extravagant moments, the rebels' ambitions form a parody of aristocratic excess: Falconbridge plans to shoe his horse with silver once he has taken control of the mint. But while many of Cade's followers are making a muddle-headed attempt to remedy a genuine social injustice when they lash out at gentlemen and the educated, Falconbridge's mob targets tradespeople. On reaching London, they threaten to institute "Captain Chub's law," which involves bullying the bakers, brewers, and other food vendors into supplying the rebels with a free feast.

As in *Jack Straw*, the rebellion falls apart as the participants resort to quarreling, backstabbing, and mutual betrayal. Deserted by his followers, Falconbridge abuses them in language laden with pejorative references to their birth and rank:

Why this it is to trust these base rogues,  
This dirty scum of rascal peasantry,  
This heartless rout of base rascality;  
A plague upon you all, you cowardly rogues!  
You craven curs, you slimy, muddy clowns [...]  
This hedge-bred rascal, this filthy fry of ditches;  
A vengeance take you all! (5.102-11).

The defining image of this speech is *filth*: the muck and grime of the unwashed masses, from which Falconbridge attempts to distance himself. Finally, the rebellion degenerates into a slapstick scene of three-way betrayal, in which the survivors attempt to collect reward money by turning in each other and the clown Chub finally agrees to hang one of his erstwhile comrades in arms in exchange for a pardon. Before he leaves the stage for the last time, he improvises a ballad:

O Captain Spicing, thy vain enticing  
Brought me from my trade;  
From good candles-making, to this pains-taking,  
A rebel to be made.  
Therefore, Ned Spicing, to quit thy enticing,  
This must be thy hope:  
By one of thy fellows, to be led to the gallows,  
To end in a rope (10.166-73).

Chub's parting song, unlike the rhetoric of the other rebels, emphasizes the personal and the mutual. He considers his betrayal of Spicing a form of requital, payment in kind for false promises. Spicing's crime is compounded by the fact that the people he tempted into rebellion were his "fellows," who are therefore – in Chub's eyes – his fitting executioners.

While Chub is certainly no model of good fellowship himself, he exemplifies a rough sort of tavern justice that is otherwise absent in these scenes.

Thus, rebellion scenes in many of the history plays draw a distinction between rebels who cynically manipulate the rhetoric of community or disavow its ideals entirely, and those who maintain a certain respect for these ideals. The latter, if they are followers like Chub, are often pardoned. In *Sir Thomas More*, nearly all of the Ill May Day rioters escape hanging. These characters are motivated by the desire to defend their community, a fact which does much to render them sympathetic and soften the gravity of their offense against the social order. In a scene that the censor refused to approve, the foreigners who are the chief targets of the uprising are seen stealing food from Londoners and abusing a carpenter's wife, Doll Williamson. Richard Helgerson, who believes that most stage rebellions are rendered disreputable by the carnival atmosphere, argues that the original manuscript of this play (prior to the Additions) provides the closest thing to a sympathetic rebellion on the Elizabethan stage: "[T]he riot in *Sir Thomas More* [...] began by resisting these conventions [...] [N]either Doll nor any of the other rebels is at all clownish. Their grievances are well founded, the expression of them is cogent and even literate, and their strategy is carefully formulated [...] The difference is that these rebels are Londoners" (*Forms*, 221). More significantly for my purposes, they are also members of a community; their saving grace is neighborliness. Even in their most lawless moments, these characters repeatedly invoke the notions of commonwealth and mutual help, and, for the most part, actually *behave* in accordance with these ideas.

Lincoln, the leader of this rebellion, makes extensive use of the rhetoric of community. His overall message in his bill of grievances, addressed to the better sort of urban citizens, is one of unity, empathy, and mutual aid. Lincoln's central message is that the fabric of the commonwealth binds rich and poor together:

[T]o you all the worshipfull Lords and maisters of this Cittie, that will take compassion over the poore people your neighbours [...] [P]overtie is so much encreased, that every man bewayleth the miserie of other [...] [T]he redresse must be of the commons, knit and united to one parte. And as the hurt and damage greeveth all men, so must all men see to their willing power for remedie (79-89).

As the riot progresses, another rebel, Sherwin the goldsmith, emerges as a voice of reason, arguing that they should not fire the foreigners' houses because "that would endanger the whole Cittie / whereto I would not the least prejudice" (429-30). As Ian Archer argues, the theme of neighborly unity which underlies both Lincoln's and Sherwin's rhetoric was an important idea for the poorer sort of Londoners; these values framed their petitions for charity and redress (74). Archer notes, however, that the rhetoric of community could also be manipulated by elites to conceal tensions and differences in society (59), and one may, perhaps, read More's speech to the rioters in such a light. Nevertheless, his rhetoric is fraught with ideological tensions of its own.

While the main thrust of More's argument is a conservative affirmation of divine right and social order, several discordant elements complicate this message. As Burnett reminds us, "*Sir Thomas More* resists [...] too neat an interpretation, as the relationship between More and central authority is ambiguous; he espouses a doctrine of the body politic which he does not strictly obey; and it is unclear if he is a servant of the court or a master of

the people” (26). Many of his affirmations about the necessity of submitting to the king will take on an ironic edge, given his own fate. Later, as the play becomes increasingly concerned with tyranny from above rather than rioting from below, it becomes clear that More might, with equal pertinence, have addressed some of his most eloquent admonitions to the king who never appears on stage. Indeed, he invites the rebels to picture themselves in the position of tyrants who rule by fear:

ymagin that [...]  
[...] you sytt as kings in your desyres  
aauthoryty quyte sylenct by your braule  
and you in ruff of yor opynions clothd  
what had you gott, I’le tell you, you had taught  
how insolenc and strong hand shoold prevayle  
how ordere shoold be quelld, and by this patterne  
not on of you shoold lyve an aged man (Addition II, 197-206).

Although the nominal subject of this speech is mob rule, the metaphorical language – “as kings in your desyres” and “in ruff of yor opinyons clothd” – clearly associates the rule of “insolenc and strong hand” with the elites, who are capable of doing as great or greater damage to the social order. The appeal gains its power from the fact that it is addressed to people who have been on the receiving end of injustice and lordly arrogance – abuses which More critiques throughout the play, although he simultaneously argues that the poor derive their moral superiority from their patience. Doll Williamson concedes that More’s words are “as trewe as the gspell” (211).

More’s final rhetorical move in the Ill May Day episode is an appeal to the rioters’ sense of neighborliness. He threatens them with the loss of community when he invites them to imagine themselves in the place of the foreigners they have risen against:

say now the king [...]  
shoold so much com to short of your great trespass  
as but to banish you, whether woold you go.  
what Country by the nature of your error  
shoold gyve you harber [...]  
[W]hy you must needs be straingers (245-53).

This proves to be the clinching argument: “[F]ayth a saies trewe letts us do as we may be doon by,” the listeners respond (264). Ironically, it is the authorities who fail to observe this basic precept of both Christianity and common neighborliness: Lincoln hangs when the pardon More has promised fails to come through in time, and the others very nearly follow him. Though she is prepared to submit to the penalty the law has ordained, Doll Williamson voices a touch of reproach: “[Y]et would I praise [More’s] honestie much more / if he had kept his woord, and sav’de our lives” (Original text, 660-1). The keynote of Doll’s gallows speech is, once again, faith in her community: she commends her children to “the loove of some good honest freend: / to bring them up in charitable sort” (675-6) and bids farewell to her comrades: “Noe cheerely Lads, George Bets, a hand with thee, / And thine too Rafe, and thine good honest Sherwin” (682-3). While Doll also voices the obligatory sentiments of repentance and submission as she faces death, the strength of her personal friendships may do even more, in the audience’s eyes, to redeem her. We are meant to cheer when her pardon arrives just in time.

Helgerson argues that the revised passages in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript represent a retreat from this sympathetic treatment of the Ill May Day riots, perhaps in response to the censor’s demands. The addition of the clown, he suggests, rendered the rebellion less compelling and therefore “less dangerous”: “Festivity discredited rebellion; rebellion discredited festivity; and both discredited the clown and the common people he

represented [...] The history play rehearses popular festive customs, as Prince Hal studies his lowlife companions, only to reject them” (*Forms*, 222). The clown’s role seems less clear-cut to me. His request for clemency contains a note of justice denied as well as gallows humor: “Sir and I have a sute to you too [...] As you have hangd Lincolne first & will hange hir [Doll] nexte so that you will nott hange me at all”<sup>3</sup>. Clowning and humor are, I would argue, multivalent on the Renaissance stage in general and in this play in particular. The biggest joker is More himself, a man who will eventually be executed for his refusal to submit to royal authority in a scene that closely parallels Lincoln’s own death.

Both More’s public rhetoric and his practical jokes echo the “world upside down” motif widespread in early modern popular art. Art historian David Kunzle argues that this theme “permits [...] those satisfied with the existing or traditional social order to see the theme as a mockery of the idea of changing that order around, and at the same time, those dissatisfied with that order to see the theme as mocking it in its present, perverted state” – or even to perceive in these images a promise that radical social reversals are indeed imaginable and may one day come to pass. More’s sense of humor involves a constant play of implicit social reversals: he puts a justice in the position of the man he has just admonished, dresses his servant Randall in his own clothes, and steps in as understudy to a common player. Similarly, when More encourages the Ill May Day rioters to picture themselves in the position of those who rule over them – a passage present only in the additions – he invites his listeners to imagine a social order that *is* mutable and reversible, even as he denies that such reversals are desirable.

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<sup>3</sup> Marginal addition after l. 647 in the original text. Interestingly, the clown’s request is honored; the promised pardon arrives moments later.

The ambiguity evident in More's words is another defining feature of popular political discourse in these plays. Not only do commoners and those sympathetic to them explicitly appeal to ideals of community, they also engage in what James C. Scott terms a "politics of disguise and anonymity," employed in various cultures and historical eras by subordinate groups ranging from slaves in the American South to Eastern European dissidents (19). This political discourse is cryptic and oblique, plausibly deniable to members of the dominant group but intelligible to those in the know. Scott enumerates the rhetorical devices and strategies that such people employ: "[r]umor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms – a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups" (19). He goes on to describe the social conditions that foster the development of this culture: the existence of a secure social space to express dissent, such as the unsettled wilds, the tavern, the chapel, or the marketplace; and even more crucially, a solid network of community: "Because open political activity is all but precluded, resistance is confined to the informal networks of kin, neighbors, friends, and community rather than formal organization [...] The informal assemblages of market, neighbors, family, and community thus provide both a structure and a cover for resistance" (200). For much of human history, Scott suggests, "this ambiguous realm of political conflict was – short of rebellion – *the* site of public political discourse" (137).

Episodes in the anonymous *Woodstock* and Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I* provide glimpses of this hidden discourse. Rather than resorting to public and violent rebellion, disempowered characters mask their social commentary with gossip, humor, double meanings, and song. These rhetorical tactics conceal ideas labeled

“treasonous” by the current regime – and both plays, which depict the commons suffering under unjust and abusive rulers, present the perspective of those accused of treason with considerable sympathy. Moreover, these scenes are marked by a certain conspiratorial, inside-joke quality which requires the existence of a community to work at all. Equivocal speech is meant to be understood by “insiders” and not by others; thus, it establishes and reinforces horizontal relationships even as it undermines hierarchical ones. Moreover, because the playgoers are automatically in on the joke, they become, in a sense, honorary members of the community – invited to align themselves with these characters and give them their approval.

Alzada J. Tipton describes *Woodstock* as a play with “unabashedly radical politics” which “does much to justify the popular revolts it depicts as the natural result of Richard’s incompetence” (117-18). Thomas of Woodstock’s interest in working alongside Parliament to redress popular grievances makes him a champion of commoners’ social and political rights, while his trademark simplicity of dress and speech stands in sharp contrast to the excesses of Richard II’s courtiers. Although “Plain Thomas” is no rebel himself, he even goes so far as to imply that King Richard’s outrageous disrespect for property rights justifies revolt on the part of his subjects: “Afore my God I cannot blame them for it / He might as well have sent defiance to them. / O vulture England, wilt thou eat thine own? / Can they be rebels called, that now turn head?” (III. ii. 82-85). Tipton comments on the radical implications of this passage: “If *Woodstock* is distinctive in its support for the commons as they act within the bounds of the law and in its condemnation of princes who ignore that law, the play is perhaps unique in its continued support for the commoners once they cross over

the boundary of law and into rebellion” (125). Nevertheless, rather than take the shocking position that rebellion itself may be justifiable, Woodstock attempts to reclassify the commoners’ defiance as something *other* than rebellion. His rhetorical question, “Can they be rebels called?” obviously calls for the answer “No,” and he immediately qualifies his position: “I speak but what I fear: not what I wish” (86). The verbal ambiguity of this speech is, as we shall see, a trademark of the play as a whole.

No violent rebellion of the commons actually takes place on stage in *Woodstock*. What the play *does* depict, with considerable sympathy for the perpetrators, is widespread, covert subversion consisting of “privy whispering” and the circulation of songs critical of the king’s ministers. This method of dissent takes advantage of the pre-existing social structures of the rural community; indeed, it is woven deep into the fabric of early modern popular culture. As Garrett Sullivan points out:

[T]he kinds of actions construed as treasonous – the singing of songs, the humming of ballads, the collecting into groups of ‘privy whisperers’ – are all crucial to the dissemination of information, subversive or otherwise, in rural, largely illiterate communities: crucial, that is, to the workings of the culture. Ballads and songs were frequently topical and often functioned as sources of news [...] and this news would be mulled over or evaluated in various social groups (*Drama of Landscape*, 74-75).

Sullivan goes on to point out that Tresilian’s man, Nimble, shows himself to be familiar with these methods and willing to exploit local social structures when he sets forth to identify and arrest “privy whisperers”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Social historian Alison Wall emphasizes the degree to which early modern rulers depended on the willingness of local community members to absorb and enforce the lessons of obedience that they were taught by church and political authorities: “[D]uty to the community meant a surprisingly widespread participation in governing and the maintenance of order, despite the hierarchical emphasis of English society. Because enforcement of order was mostly done locally, there were people on the ground everywhere to monitor what was

The commoners in *Woodstock* are perpetually (and rightly) afraid of surveillance from above. They confine their social criticism to what they believe is a private, safe sphere, where they can be overheard only by intimates who share a mutual respect for the ideals of neighborliness and “good company.” As Cowtail the grazier puts it in conversation with two other inhabitants of Dunstable: “I may tell you in secret, here’s a dangerous world towards. Neighbour, you’re a farmer, and I hope here’s none but God and good company – we live in such a state, I am e’en almost weary of all, I assure ye” (III. iii. 48-52). “Neighbors,” as a term of address, is repeated at least nine times in the space of a hundred lines, as if Cowtail and his fellow townsmen regard their mutual familiarity as a talisman that can protect them from the Lord Chief Justice’s spies. Unbeknownst to the others, Ignorance, the Bailey of Dunstable, has already been conscripted by the king’s agents. His status as an established member of the community highlights the paranoia and corruption of Richard II’s England: if the commons cannot trust their own neighbors, whom can they trust? Ignorance addresses the others as “my good friends and neighbors” right before he turns them over to the authorities, providing a final touch of irony (99).

Tipton reads the commoners’ concern with secrecy as a comment upon the playwright’s own rhetorical strategies: “[The play’s] primary observation is that, despite the ideal of plain speaking [...] the need is established to speak in hidden meanings, through riddles and metaphors, when one is criticizing the king” (139). One episode in particular reflects these strategies in miniature. A schoolmaster, in conversation with a serving-man,

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happening, and, crucially, with the power to take action if anything was amiss: little brother was watching you!” (115). In some respects, this description seems reminiscent of Dunstable in *Woodstock*; but crucially, the community as a whole refuses to participate. Tresilian has to plant his own “people on the ground” to ensure compliance.

shares a song he has written that indicts Tresilian, the corrupt Lord Chief Justice, and several of King Richard's favorites. The schoolmaster brags that he uses "a kind of equivocation," concluding each verse with the words "God bless my Lord Tresilian" (III. iii. 184-85). This thin gloss of piety deceives neither the intended listeners nor the authorities, and the schoolmaster is promptly arrested. But, Tipton comments, "Just because the schoolmaster's song was too straightforward to deceive the censor does not mean that a more 'equivocal' text" (i.e. *Woodstock* itself) "would not succeed" (141). Significantly, however, the song is only "too straightforward to deceive the censor" if he actually hears the *words*. The tune itself is harmless and conveys no information unless one posits a listener who is "in the know" – a member of a particular community, in other words. After the schoolmaster himself is taken away, the ballad proves impossible to suppress. Later in the same scene, Ignorance complains that "There's a piece of treason that flies up and down the country in the likeness of a ballad," and although he and Tresilian's other agents do their best to arrest anyone they find whistling it, his frustration implies that this low-key, private form of rebellion defies all attempts to stamp it out (230-31). Tresilian is eventually betrayed by his own comic servant, Nimble, who sings his own version of the ballad as he hands his master over to the king's virtuous uncles – no doubt receiving laughter and applause from the audience.

A pivotal scene in Thomas Heywood's *I If You Know Not Me* depicts a group of unnamed "white-cote Souldiers" who employ a similar, but more successful, tactic of equivocation when they express subversive views. In this case the "reasonable" position is one that would be entirely orthodox for an audience in Heywood's own era – sympathy for

the future Queen Elizabeth, who is at this point in the play discredited and imprisoned by her Catholic half-sister. The soldiers' conversation is characterized by an obsessive concern with "lawful" speech and a constant awareness that they are skirting close to the line:

3: Masse weele drinck and talke of our frendes.  
2: I but, my frnd, do not talk of state matters.  
1: Not I, Ile not meddle with the state,  
I hope this a man may say without offence,  
Prethee drinck to me.  
3: With all my harty faith: this a man might  
Lawfully speak, but now, faith what wast about to say?  
1: Masse I say this: That the Lady *Elizabeth* is both a lady,  
And Elizabeth, and if I should say she were a vertuous Princess,  
Were there any harme in that?  
2: No, by my troth, ther's no harme in that,  
But beware of talking of the Princesse,  
Let's meddle with our kindred there, we may be bold.  
1: Well sirs I have two sisters, and the one loves the other,  
And would not send her to prison for a million, is there any harme  
In this? ile keepe my selfe within compas I warrant you,  
For I doe not talke of the Queene, I talke of my sisters (ll. 471-87).

The soldiers recast their political commentary as discussion about "safe," socially sanctioned topics, notably gossip about friends and family. It is dangerous to "meddle with the state," but one may speak freely about people in one's immediate social circle and allow the listeners to draw their own conclusions about the Queen's behavior. Thus, the scene evokes notions of community on two different levels. First, the three soldiers engage in the communal acts of drinking and equivocal speech. All of the parties in this conversation understand the true import of words that are (they hope) less transparent to outsiders. Simultaneously, the soldiers also call attention to the fact that they are members of a broader social network – the "friends" and "kindred" with whom the speakers may safely make bold –

and implicitly contrast the values and behavior of their own families with the actions of their social, if not moral, superiors.

Ivo Kamps argues that Heywood is making a point whose potentially radical implications extend far beyond the historical conflict between Mary and Elizabeth. In this reading, the episode

draw[s] our attention to the fundamental mutability of historical contexts [...] Within the immediate dramatic-historical context created by the play, the White Coat soldiers *are* engaging in treasonous speech. They go unpunished because they express their views privately; their meddling with the state goes undetected. Yet their subversive speech is also made extremely public, on the public stage of a different historical time. The result is not merely a superficial realization that ‘times change,’ but that a historical occurrence can mean radically different things in different settings; that the response to the state to any given point of view can vary from calling it treasonous to licensing it for public consumption (80-1).

A similar commentary on the mutability of the definition of treason marks the final scenes of Heywood’s 2 *Edward IV*, which take place after Richard III usurps the throne. Jane Shore has incurred the wrath of the new monarch, and his officers label her a “rebel to his majesty.” Their warrant for this claim is dubious, but the mere word is sufficient to attain her (18.217). The contemptible Mistress Blage shows herself to be hyper-aware that notions of treason and loyalty are unstable under a tyrant’s rule: “As long as you were held a true subject, / I made account of you accordingly; / But being otherwise, I do reject you, / And will not cherish my King’s enemy” (138-41). From a completely orthodox political position, Mistress Blage does right when she obeys Richard’s proclamation; but the play makes it obvious at every turn that her motives are self-serving and she is morally in the wrong. Aire, one of Jane’s supporters,

argues for a different way of thinking about authority and treason in an exchange with the villainous Rufford:

*Rufford.* The world hath judged, and found her guilty,  
And tis the King's command she be held odious.

*Aire.* The king of heaven commandeth otherwise (20.127-29).

In Aire's view – which is clearly the position endorsed by the playwright – subjects have a positive duty to *defy* a reigning monarch who has shown himself to be a rebel to a still higher power.

The actions of Aire and his cohorts constitute what may be the single clearest example of *justified* collective resistance on the Elizabethan stage. One after another, Jane Shore's friends' attempt to give her aid and comfort in defiance of Richard's tyranny, and in most cases are condemned and executed for it. Although they come from far-flung corners of the kingdom (her entourage includes Jockie, a comic Scot) and their modes of living are far removed from the middle-class comfort of Jane's former neighbors, by this point in the cycle these characters have come together as a community – at least according to most early modern definitions of the word, which, it will be remembered, emphasized familiarity and shared actions rather than geographic proximity. Jane's comforters have associated with her since the days of her glory and are bound to her by informal ties of gratitude and patronage, and in the wake of Richard's unjust decrees, they share a common goal. Although these characters engage in civil disobedience on a scale that has the potential to end in massive social disorder, they simultaneously reinforce the basic social bond of neighborliness by offering relief to a friend who has helped them before.

The popular support for Jane does not turn into a rebellion in the sense that Falconbridge's march on London is a rebellion. Much of the time it remains covert, ambiguous, and slyly subversive, in the style of the "whistling treason" episode in *Woodstock*, but the ambiguity here extends to action as well as speech. Jockie and his companion Jeffrey, for example, provide Jane with bread, cheese, and ale under the guise of an innocent game of bowls. The scene is "comic" but not really funny, "deniable," but not plausibly so, for the participants are swiftly apprehended and punished. Jockie's final line, "Shall they be whipped and hanged that give to the pair? Then they shall be damn that take fro' the pair!" pushes his actions into the realm of open defiance, which he, like Aire, justifies by appealing to a higher law than that of the reigning king (20.266-68).

Heywood places a strong emphasis on personal loyalty and reciprocity in these scenes. The sins of Mistress Blage, Jane's false friend, are compounded by her ingratitude for the assistance Jane has given her in difficult times, while those who stand by Mistress Shore do so because she has helped them in the past. Despite his official position as Lieutenant of the Tower, Heywood's Brackenbury makes the remarkable argument that the responsibility to reciprocate an individual's kindness actually *outweighs* a subject's duty to obey the monarch: "[Jane] saved my kinsman, Harry Stranguidge, life; / Therefore, in duty am I bound to her / To do what good I may, though law forbid" (20.67-69). Several other characters voice similar sentiments in situations that plainly call for the audience to agree with them. Ultimately, I would classify the social message of the *Edward IV* cycle as considerably more radical than the one Heywood puts forth in his *Apology*. Strictly speaking, all of those who defy Richard do, indeed, meet "untimely ends"; but their fate is less an exhortation to

allegiance than a protest against the arbitrary abuse of power. Conversely, obedience to the monarch is no guarantee of survival, for Mistress Blage will eventually meet the same fate as Jane. The play's grim final moments depict a kingdom where justice is nonexistent and neighborliness virtually outlawed; Heywood suggests that the only morally acceptable way to behave under such a regime is to engage in activities that have been officially defined as treason.

Thus, several common threads unite the plays I have discussed in this chapter, which run the gamut from affirmations of orthodoxy to pointed political criticism. On the early modern stage, popular political discourse is grounded in the rhetoric of community on multiple levels. First, explicit appeals to the ideals of neighborliness and the common good provided English commoners with a socially sanctioned framework for voicing popular grievances. At the same time, these characters engage in another type of political speech that depends on the community for its very existence: jokes, songs, and "privy whispering" meant to be understood only by listeners whom the speaker personally knows and trusts. In addition, the social dynamics among characters who engage in political rebellion or resistance often function as a subtle commentary on the legitimacy of their cause. Rebellions which the audience is meant to discredit – Cade's, Falconbridge's, Jack Straw's – reveal tensions and betrayals among the rebels as the rank and file undercut their leaders' claims to aristocratic descent and eventually abandon their comrades. In *Sir Thomas More*, by contrast, the Ill May Day rioters behave like a community rather than a mob; throughout the episode, they express mutual support and respect. Likewise, Jane Shore's friends repeatedly break the law in order to relieve her, but Heywood takes pains to place their disobedience within a

framework of established social relationships and obligations. As a final example of the power of these social bonds, I would like to take a brief look at an episode that must have pushed an early seventeenth-century audience's tolerance of dissent to its outermost limits, the sudden revolt of Cornwall's servant in *King Lear*.

At the moment when Cornwall gives the order to blind Gloucester, one of the nameless servants and attendants present at every Shakespearean court steps out of the woodwork, first ordering his master to hold his hand, then drawing his own sword and wounding Cornwall fatally. Both Cornwall ("My villain!") and Regan ("A peasant stand up thus!") express outrage at such insubordination from a man far beneath them in social rank (III. vii. 78-80). Richard Strier describes a servant's murder of his master as "the most radical possible sociopolitical act" in Shakespeare's society, and notes the remarkable political implications of staging this act in a context that virtually forces the audience to applaud it (119). But another, equally remarkable, feature of this moment is that the servant does not rebel against the social fabric itself. The servant justifies his actions in terms of the very social bond they challenge, his longtime service to Cornwall: "I have served you ever since I was a child / But better service have I never done you / Than now to bid you hold" (73-5). In the quarto text at least, the other servants clearly support his actions, cursing Cornwall and Regan under their breaths and conspiring to provide Gloucester with such aid and comfort as they are able. Their behavior provides a glimpse of a world where solidarity and mutual help still exist, an ironic counterpoint to the breakdown of virtually every social tie among their "betters." Even in this radical moment, the danger inherent in rebellion

against political authority seems mitigated, at least in part, when other social relationships remain intact.

The strategies that both characters and playwrights use to legitimize political dissent suggest that they conceive of neighborliness as a positive moral good and a restraining force on those who would otherwise be overstepping society's bounds. The following chapter will examine what happens when the notion of community becomes more ethically ambiguous – when good companionship is at odds with other social desiderata, such as justice or military discipline, and when it no longer mitigates but exacerbates the transgressions of unruly subjects. For this purpose, I shall return to Shakespeare's second tetralogy, in which Henry V's program for his country collides with his subjects' expectations. The young king makes a calculated attempt to incorporate the values of community and brotherhood into his public message to his subjects, although his private actions suggest that he is much less willing to accept them as a cornerstone of his kingship. His subjects also voice these values, but to a different end: "sworn brotherhood" is at once the most sincerely held ideal in their lives and an excuse for xenophobia, theft, and disorderliness. Both king and commoner employ the overt rhetorical appeals to neighborliness that, as Ian Archer notes, helped disempowered members of Elizabethan society establish common ground with the powerful but could also be manipulated by elites to conceal tensions and differences in society (59). Nevertheless, the subtler rhetoric of shared jokes, gossip, and commiseration – a language that relies on the undercurrents within the community for its very existence and, as we have seen, can mask serious political resistance – eludes Henry. Ultimately, the king's attempt to penetrate the hidden discourse that bonds his subjects together is doomed to failure.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE RHETORIC OF BROTHERHOOD AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF**  
**RHETORIC: HENRY V AND THE COMMON SOLDIER**

A generation ago, Karl P. Wentersdorf summarized the two core camps into which critics of *Henry V* tend to fall. To some readers, he wrote, “the play presents the story of an ideal monarch and glorifies his achievements; for them, the tone approaches that of an epic lauding the military virtues. For others, the protagonist is a Machiavellian militarist who professes Christianity but whose deeds reveal both hypocrisy and ruthlessness” (265).

Though the language and terms of the debate have changed since then, the poles in the argument have not. The commoners in the play, though they are less often the focus of critical discussion, polarize readers and audiences as sharply as the king does. As Richard Levin has noted, some consider the lower-class characters foils for Henry – cowardly, morally bankrupt figures who enhance the king’s nobility and heroism by contrast; others regard them as distorted mirrors who serve to reflect and draw attention to the king’s own failings.

Although these two readings seem diametrically opposed to each other, they have an important common thread: both groups of critics regard these characters as important because of their relationship with the king, regardless of whether that relationship is that of foil or mirror. Seldom have Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, Mistress Quickly, and the Boy been viewed

primarily through the lens of their relations *to one another*, as members of a community that is sometimes contentious, sometimes harmonious, but always vital, until war and disease finally destroy it. These characters, I would argue, ultimately gain a certain tragic dignity as they lose their lives and livelihood amid the fluctuations of history. Furthermore, they show an increasing level of self-awareness as the end approaches; the tavern scenes in *Henry V*, to a much greater extent than those earlier in the cycle, depict a community that has a great deal to say about itself and its values. While they may not always follow their own prescriptions, these characters have definite ideas about how social relationships, government, and justice ought to work. For this reason, although I do plan to return to Henry – one can hardly discuss the play without reference to its title character – I shall begin my analysis of *Henry V* by exploring the world the young king has left behind.

Although the Boar's Head tavern and its denizens have been a constant thread running through the last three plays of the tetralogy, it is only in *Henry V* that the tavern emerges as an entirely separate world with a consistent value system of its own. Falstaff is dying offstage, and Hal has repudiated his wild youth: Eastcheap is no longer the refuge of profligate courtiers, but a community of relative social equals who are left to their own devices. The first thing the audience learns, on returning to the Boar's Head, is that the relationships in this community have been in flux: Mistress Quickly, once engaged to Nym, has married Pistol and made him host of the tavern. (Pistol seems uncomfortable with his new title; perhaps he imagines his "true" profession to be military service and feels that his new career lacks glamour, or perhaps he is simply reluctant to exert authority over his longtime companions.) As a consequence of their old romantic rivalry, Pistol and Nym exchange an increasingly

elaborate series of oaths and threats, and eventually draw their swords, but never get around to shedding blood. The Boy interrupts them with the news that Falstaff is near death, and Bardolph persuades the other two men to make peace shortly thereafter. Pistol agrees to pay the gambling debt he owes Nym, and all three men hasten offstage to visit Falstaff when the Hostess reports once again that his state of health is dire.

Pistol and Nym's "quarrel," like so many other elements in *Henry V*, has spawned two sharply polarized critical interpretations, both of which ultimately reflect upon the king and the king's war. Are the Eastcheap ruffians, on some level, more admirable than their social superiors because they are able to settle their differences without fighting? Or are they cowards who squabble over a few shillings but put up their swords rather than risk their skins in a street brawl, in contrast to Henry's weighty reasons and steadfast determination to pursue the war in France? Taken on its own terms, however, the scene in the tavern does not seem to lend itself to a direct analogy with the war; perhaps the most telling feature of this episode is the fact that it incorporates no violence, only talk. In fact, I would suggest that there has never been any real "war" between Nym and Pistol at all – the entire episode is more bonding ritual than quarrel. Bardolph, at the very opening of the scene, inquires of Nym, "What, are Ancient Pistol and you friends yet?" – a question that implies that their restored friendship is, in fact, a foregone conclusion (II. i. 3). When Nym confirms that they are still at odds, Bardolph promises, "I will bestow a breakfast to make you friends; and we'll be all three sworn brothers to France" (II. i. 12-13). Nym and Pistol quarrel, in other words, in part because their reconciliation provides a good excuse for a party, which will in turn solidify

and formalize the social bonds among the three men – as indeed it does at the end of the scene.

“Sworn brotherhood,” an idea first mentioned by Bardolph, will emerge as one of the central themes of the play. References to this notion abound, in moments that range from the Boy’s cynical observation that “Nym and Bardolph are sworn brothers in filching” (III. ii. 48-49), to Alexander Court’s single line, “Brother John Bates, is not that the morning which breaks yonder?” addressed to a fellow-soldier who is not *literally* his brother, but with whom he expects to die before sunset (IV. i. 87-88). And Henry, famously, will promise his soldiers brotherhood at a crucial moment before the battle of Agincourt – but throughout the three and a half acts that precede this key speech, the language of brotherhood and comradeship-in-arms has come exclusively from the commoners. Fraternal unity is perhaps the most sincerely held ideal in the tavern. “We must to France together,” Bardolph comments, “why the devil should we keep knives to cut one another’s throats?” (94-96). After a few more threats and a ritual drawing of swords, both Nym and Pistol agree that Bardolph’s words should carry the day. The episode concludes with renewed good fellowship among the men, as Bardolph has predicted in his initial conversation with Nym. Pistol dispenses some liquor-soaked generosity and another promise of sworn brotherhood:

A noble<sup>5</sup> shalt thou have, and present pay;  
And liquor likewise will I give to thee,  
And friendship shall combine, and brotherhood:  
I’ll live by Nym, and Nym shall live by me;  
Is not this just? for I shall sutler be  
Unto the camp, and profits will accrue.  
Give me thy hand (112-18).

<sup>5</sup> The sum that Pistol actually owes Nym is eight shillings; a “noble” is ten and sixpence. The overpayment is both a face-saving gesture and a way of reinforcing the ties of restored amity.

At this point, modern-day readers, even those sympathetic to the tavern characters, will probably be inclined to protest that Pistol's proposal is not "just" at all. He plans to share the spoils of his war profiteering with his small group of particular friends, with little regard for how his dishonesty will affect the entire army. Henry, who is doing his best to fight what *he* considers a "just" war – one where "there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language" – would certainly not approve (III. vi. 114-17). However, in Pistol's mind, a "just" distribution of profits is simply one where friends share and share alike. This definition is solidly grounded in the values of the Boar's Head, whose inhabitants preach – and, most of the time, practice – a code of forgiveness, charity, and mutual help for those who are bound to them by the ties of community. Outsiders, on the other hand, are fair game for theft or exploitation. A crime against strangers – the French – is no crime at all under this ethical system, but failure to do favors for a friend is damning<sup>6</sup>.

To give the inhabitants of Eastcheap their due, most of them hold to this unwritten credo regardless of personal expediency. Falstaff – a well-born reprobate who never pays his bills and dies, apparently, on Pistol and Mistress Quickly's charity – is forgiven for his transgressions time and again. At least in *Henry V*, the attitude that Pistol, Bardolph, and Mistress Quickly express toward Falstaff is not unlike the "instinctive and indiscriminate loyalty" Richard Helgerson perceives in the attitude of popular balladeers toward the king (*Forms*, 238). Falstaff has taken advantage of the other tavern characters, replacing the

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<sup>6</sup> The darker side of a community-oriented value system is, of course, a tendency to scapegoat or demonize outsiders – a point which I shall discuss more fully in Chapters Five and Six.

expected generosity of a social superior with a flat refusal to pay the reckoning, and yet they love him for it. A good knight or a bad knight, he is still *their* knight – which leads to a conflict, since Henry is likewise *their* king, and as Nym admits, “the king hath run bad humors on the knight” (127-28). Nym’s eventual conclusion, “The king is a good king; but it must be as it may” (131-32) seems to be a brave, though muddle-headed, attempt to reconcile these two irreconcilable loyalties. On the other hand, “it must be as it may,” one of Nym’s characteristic tag lines, often conceals a sting beneath its superficial fatalism; compare his earlier, not-so-veiled threat against Pistol: “things must be as they may: men may sleep, and they may have their throats about them at that time; and some say knives have edges” (22-23). What seems clear, in any event, is that both Falstaff and the king continue to be powerful unifying forces in the tavern, even after they have physically departed from it. Despite Bardolph’s bitter comment that “the fuel is gone that maintained that fire; that’s all the riches I got in [Falstaff’s] service” (II. iii. 46-47), his impromptu eulogy for Falstaff is the play’s single most compelling statement about the power of good fellowship: “Would I were with him, wheresome’er he is, either in heaven or in hell!” (7-8).

The tavern characters’ attitude toward Henry is similar. Even after he has abandoned them for good, they regard him with a fierce, though one-sided, loyalty. In their minds, despite Henry’s insistence that they must not presume he is the thing he was, neither his essential character nor his relationship to them has ever changed. Pistol addresses the king as “most royal imp of fame” just before being ordered out of his presence and sent to the Fleet (2 *Henry IV*, V. v. 44). On the eve of Agincourt, he will echo this phrase in his conversation with the disguised King Henry:

The king's a bawcock, and a heart of gold,  
A lad of life, an imp of fame;  
Of parents good, of fist most valiant:  
I kiss his dirty shoe, and from heart-string  
I love the lovely bully (*Henry V*, IV. i. 44-48).

Pistol praises the king for being, essentially, a good companion – and it is the highest tribute he can pay. Henry, however, is not the “lad of life” Pistol remembers; he has given his final allegiance to a world where good fellowship is not enough. The audience knows something that Pistol does not: despite Pistol’s attempts to secure a pardon for his brother-in-arms Bardolph, Henry has ordered him to be hanged for theft *while fully aware of Bardolph’s identity*. We do not know, and never will, how much significance would have been attached to this moment in performance. Henry’s “We would have all such offenders so cut off” may have been delivered coolly and crisply, or with hesitation and deep regret; considered in terms of dramatic effect, the latter seems more probable (III. vi. 112). But if the true measure of Henry’s character lies in the delivery, the true measure of his values lies in the decision itself – and the substance of this speech is unambiguous. Henry has chosen to be an incorruptible judge rather than a good companion.

There is, of course, much to be said for Henry’s way of executing justice. It is fair and unbiased, but also inexorable in its destructive sweep, and it leaves little room for loyalty or good fellowship. When Pistol approaches Fluellen to plead for Bardolph’s life, his fruitless exchange with the Welsh captain neatly encapsulates the differences between these two irreconcilable value systems:

*Flu.* [F]or if, look you, [Bardolph] were my brother, I would desire the duke to use his good pleasure, and put him to execution: for discipline ought to be used.

*Pist.* Die and be damn'd! and figo for thy friendship!" (III. vi. 56-60).

We should, I think, read this parting line with an emphasis on the word *thy*: Pistol's curse is an indictment of Fluellen's whole concept of friendship, its meaning, and its obligations, not just his prior acquaintanceship with Pistol. Fluellen's decision, of course, is necessitated by the practicalities of military discipline, as Shakespeare's audience would have known.

Nevertheless, in a play so dedicated to scrutinizing the ethics of warfare on every level, there remains room to question its moral standing. Fluellen has the moral high ground if one considers impartial justice the supreme virtue, and the fact that he imagines Bardolph as his *own* brother suggests that he is willing to apply this virtue consistently. Modern readers, however, often overlook the fact that Pistol has an equally legitimate point if one considers personal loyalty in the same light; there is something monstrous about a man willing to turn his brother over to the executioner for the sake of preserving "discipline." The episode encapsulates a complex ideological conflict between a code of conduct based on impartiality and top-down rule and one based on a reciprocal network of personal friendships and allegiances.

Where the audience's sympathies are supposed to lie is a difficult question. Although Shakespeare does much to discredit Pistol's claims in the exchange between Fluellen and Gower that follows, the underlying structure of the tetralogy seems virtually guaranteed to lead us in the opposite direction. Fluellen is a stranger to the audience, but Bardolph is an old friend. The deaths of clowns are, in dramatic terms, more shocking than the deaths of kings; they shake the audience more forcibly by virtue of being neither expected nor required by a broader historical narrative. Moreover, *Henry V* is marked by a persistent echoing effect, in

which a line or episode forcibly recalls a brighter and happier tavern moment from the earlier plays, calling attention to the growing distance between Hal and his old companions. I have already mentioned Pistol's repeated use of the epithet "imp of fame" for Henry; Falstaff's "Do not, when thou art king, hang a thief" (*I Henry IV*, I. ii. 70) is another instance of this technique. The Eastcheap scenes restage a familiar tableau from the earlier plays in the cycle: the farewell scene in the tavern as the men (and boy) prepare to go to war. This time, most of them will not return. The parallels between the Justice Shallow / Davy and Fluellen / Pistol exchanges work similarly, though more subtly, to underscore the fact that Bardolph has run afoul of an unfamiliar brand of justice, a more equitable but chillier system than the old law of negotiation and neighborliness.

Even as the earlier plays in the tetralogy foreshadow the tavern characters' fates, they also set up the conflict between personal mercy and institutional justice. This question first surfaces during the closing scenes of *Richard II*. These clashing values will be strongly class-marked in the later plays, but in this episode, all of the key players are members of the royal family. The newly and unsteadily crowned Henry Bolingbroke is called upon to pass judgment against his cousin, the Duke of Aumerle, who has participated in a conspiracy to murder the king. Aumerle's rigorously loyal father, the Duke of York, argues that the king cannot, and should not, take the traitor's familial relationships into account when he dispenses justice. Indeed, he absolutely rejects Bolingbroke's promise that "thy abundant goodness shall excuse / This deadly blot in thy digressing son" (V. iii. 65-66). Bolingbroke's position here – that merely being associated with a true subject mitigates Aumerle's faults – is the same one Shakespeare would associate with the commoners later in the tetralogy;

Justice Shallow's man Davy might have phrased it as "God forbid, sir, but a traitor should have some countenance at his father's request." York, conversely, makes a compelling argument that justice must not only supersede but destroy paternal affection: in a kingdom where traitors are allowed to live, "the true man's put to death" (73).

At this point Aumerle's mother arrives to plead for her son's life, couching her request to be admitted to the king's presence in extremely personal terms. She emphasizes the fact that she is both relative and subject to Bolingbroke, appealing to his sense of pity and metaphorically casting herself in the role of the poorest of the poor: "A woman, and thy aunt, great king; 'tis I; / Speak with me, pity me, open the door: / A beggar begs that never begg'd before" (76-78). Bolingbroke's self-conscious response registers an immediate shift in the tone and terms of the debate and provides a moment of metatheatrical commentary. "Our scene is alter'd from a serious thing," he comments, "And now changed to 'The Beggar and the King'" (79-80). By alluding to a popular ballad – a genre associated with the common people and steeped in the fantasy that personal friendships between subject and monarch are possible – the king acknowledges that we are back in a world where the personal matters. Simultaneously, he implies that this world *is* comical and fantastical at heart, that his pardon of Aumerle, though inevitable, is somehow less "serious" and less real than the discussion of justice and aristocratic honor that has preceded it.

Appropriately for the first royal judgment of a turbulent and morally equivocal reign, the episode remains unsettling and multivalent to the end. Bolingbroke's commentary on his decision – "I pardon him, as God shall pardon me" – briefly lifts the scene's resolution out of the comic realm and invests it with powerful theological implications (131). Nevertheless, he

swiftly qualifies this position by vowing to pursue and destroy the rest of the traitors, including the earl of Huntingdon, whom the king sardonically dubs “our trusty brother-in-law” – suggesting that this is the first and last time he will allow personal considerations, whether they involve kinship or the hope of future loyalty, to sway his decisions (137). (At this point Bolingbroke moves away from the rhymed couplets that have lent the pardon episode an old-fashioned, gently comic tone reminiscent of the ballads, and begins to speak in blank verse.) Finally, Henry leaves Aumerle with an admonition to “prove you true” (145). Shakespeare’s audience would have known that Aumerle was, in fact, destined to prove true, dying heroically at the battle of Agincourt – but, on the other hand, his abortive rebellion was the first of many Yorkist challenges that would eventually destroy Bolingbroke’s line. Thus, this scene opens a debate about how far kings ought to be swayed by personal appeals in dispensing justice, but does not offer a definitive answer. This question will recur and become one of the key issues at stake in the final play of the tetralogy. Henry V becomes the virtual personification of one side of the debate. Throughout his reign, his overriding concern is justice and impartial judgment, from the moment when he adopts the Lord Chief Justice “as a father to [his] youth” and bids him always to use his sword “With the like bold, just and impartial spirit / As you have done ‘gainst me” to his final, inexorable ruling against Bardolph on the battlefield (*2H4*, V. ii. 116-8).

Early in *Henry V*, the young king is faced with a decision that closely parallels his father’s judgment upon Aumerle. Once again, the House of York has produced a would-be traitor: Aumerle’s younger brother Richard, Earl of Cambridge. Meditating on how to pass judgment against Cambridge and his fellow conspirators, Henry voices his own, stricter

definition of justice: “[We] shall forget the office of our hand, / Sooner than quittance of desert and merit / According to the weight and worthiness” (II. ii. 33-35). Justice is, first of all, integral to Henry’s notion of what it means to be a king; the king who neglects to dispense it with fairness and forethought “forget[s] the office of [his] hand.” Secondly, it is concerned with rewarding and penalizing individuals according to their “desert and merit”; other considerations, whether personal or pragmatic, should not enter the picture<sup>7</sup>. At most, some measure of Christian mercy tempers the king’s harsher judgments, but it is not entirely clear that even this is part of Henry’s world-view. When he lectures Cambridge, Grey, and Scroop about mercy, it is a calculated move to test the extent of their hypocrisy and entrap them into speaking their own doom. Moreover, Henry has taken pains to make sure that the commoner he proposes to pardon actually deserves mercy, having judged his railing to be inspired by drunkenness rather than a genuine desire to use violence against the king. “Get you therefore hence,” he orders the traitors, “Poor miserable wretches, to your death: / The taste whereof, God of his mercy give / You patience to endure” (177-80). To Bolingbroke, showing mercy to one’s fellow humans is a prerequisite for obtaining pardon from God; for his son, mercy is the office of God and judgment that of a king.

This episode, sandwiched as it is between the two tavern scenes, throws the difference between Henry’s values and those of his subjects into sharp relief. Henry’s idea about how to reconcile these two world-views is to transfer *his* ideas about justice to the commons, with

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<sup>7</sup> As I have noted in the Introduction, judicial practice in Elizabethan England *did* attach some weight to these considerations, evaluating an individual’s reputation and relationships with his neighbors through practices such as purgation (Amussen 99). Moreover, Keith Wrightson notes that in practice, local officials acknowledged the difficulty of judging individual behavior under law without taking “a host of personal considerations” into account (*English Society*, 159). Henry’s relentless emphasis on impartiality is thus at odds with established practice.

stiff penalties if they demur: “We would have all such offenders so cut off” (III. vi. 112). The success of this program is questionable. The Boy, at least, seems to have adopted Henry’s firmer and less contextual sense of right and wrong on the last few occasions that we see him, suggesting that the charismatic king has perhaps begun to inspire a new generation with his values: “[It] makes much against my manhood, if I should take from another’s pocket to put into mine, for it is plain pocketing up of wrongs” (III. ii. 53-55). On the other hand, his vow to leave Nym and Bardolph’s company apparently goes unfulfilled, and at his last appearance he seems to genuinely regret their deaths. One has the impression that this youth, perhaps the only genuine innocent in the play, is steering a cautious course between the tavern values with which he has grown up and the lessons he has learned from Henry. But since the Boy, along with all of his peers, dies in the camp at Agincourt, any impression that Henry may have made upon him is ultimately a dead end.

The tavern ethos of good times and good companionship is likewise dead by the end of the play, at least as far as the last survivor of the Boar’s Head is concerned. After his humiliation at the hands of Fluellen, Pistol remains on stage for a final soliloquy:

Doth Fortune play the huswife with me now?  
News have I, that my Nell is dead i’ the spital  
Of malady of France;  
And there my rendezvous is quite cut off.  
Old do I wax; and from my weary limbs  
Honour is cudgelled. Well, bawd I’ll turn,  
And something lean to cutpurse of quick hand.  
To England will I steal, and there I’ll steal:  
And patches will I get unto these cudgell’d scars,  
And swear I got them in the Gallia wars (V. i. 85-94).

A number of critics – most famously, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield – have used the tail end of this speech to argue that this moment presents Pistol as a morally bankrupt

character and represents Shakespeare's final attempt to discredit social strata and ideologies that do not fit into Henry's plan to consolidate national unity. But it is, I would argue, the first six lines that are key – lines which generate sympathy for Pistol and nostalgia for what has been lost. "Malady of France" literally refers to one of the social diseases endemic to Eastcheap, but Pistol's use of the popular Elizabethan euphemism recasts it as a *foreign* illness and associates it with the foreign wars which have destroyed the rest of his community. "There" in the next line can likewise refer either to France or to England; Pistol's "rendezvous" – his hope of meeting up with a sympathetic friend or neighbor – has been "cut off," in the most grim and final manner, in both countries. He is a displaced person and a broken man. His parting words hold a note of real tragedy, a lament for the loss of home and neighborliness and sworn brotherhood. As Norman Rabkin's words suggest, the speech resonates with most playgoers on an emotional, rather than an ideological, level:

The pun on "steal" is the last faint echo of the great Falstaff scenes, but labored and lifeless now as Pistol's pathetic bravura [...] [O]ur regret is for more than the end of some high comedy: it is for the reality of the postwar world the play so powerfully conjures up – soldiers returned home to find their jobs gone, falling to a life of crime in a seamy and impoverished underworld that scarcely remembers the hopes that accompanied the beginning of the adventure (293).

Ultimately, this small band of commoners whose lives and fortunes have been so tightly intertwined with Henry's career gain nothing but empty hopes and promises from their association with the king. But before we write off the community at Eastcheap as wholly excluded from the triumph at Agincourt, we must consider the flip side of the question: what has Henry gained from *them*?

In his public rhetoric, culminating in the famous St. Crispin's Day speech, Henry repeatedly appeals to fraternal and neighborly ideals. As we have seen, this "rhetoric of brotherhood" has its roots in the tavern and the trenches; it has been well established as the common man's domain before Henry appropriates it to such tremendous effect. But when he does, he displays an impressive command of its possibilities:

This day is call'd the feast of Crispian:  
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named,  
And rouse him at the name of Crispian (IV. iii. 40-43).

The names of Saints Crispin and Crispianus echo throughout this speech; Henry invokes them no fewer than six times. As Alison Chapman has noted, these two figures were prototypes of ideal brotherhood to the Elizabethans; contemporary iconography depicts them as identical twins embracing one another as they walk side by side (1484). They were also, famously, disguised princes who spent some time working as shoemakers; in this capacity, they are the heroes of a substantial section of Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*. Chapman has shown that shoemaking is frequently associated with social leveling in popular Elizabethan literature; the motifs of the prince or nobleman in disguise and the king sitting down to a common feast with his subjects figure in a number of works celebrating shoemakers, including Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, written in the same year as *Henry V* (1469-73). Henry's continual references to Crispin and Crispianus are thus closely related to the popular literary traditions that, as we have seen in Chapter Two, Shakespeare both invokes and subverts elsewhere in the play.

In Chapman's reading, Henry consciously alters the popular meaning of the "shoemaker's holiday":

[B]y linking Saint Crispin's Day to a rhetoric of obedience, martial solidarity, and loyalty to the king, [...] Henry fashions a shoemaker's holiday that celebrates monarchical instead of artisanal power, and he attempts to insure that this holiday will commemorate his own apotheosis as England's saint-king rather than the transformation of shoemakers into gentlemen. He thereby precludes the possibility that this holiday will mark a day when a king (like the princes Hugh, Crispin, or Crispianus) stooped to shoemaking (1482).

Nevertheless, Henry evokes this popular tradition in ways that cannot be entirely erased or denied. Within the broader context of the battle of Agincourt, the notion of princes laboring alongside commoners proves partly real and partly illusory. As Phyllis Rackin points out, when Henry reads over the rolls of the English dead after the battle, in a scene that closely follows Holinshed, only the handful of men who are "of name" come in for a mention as individuals; the non-aristocratic casualties are described as an anonymous mass of "all other men" (*Stages*, 227). Rackin argues that the distinction between gentleman and common soldier reasserts itself swiftly as we leave the world of theatrical performance, where the commoners matter, and re-enter that of chronicle history, where their names go unrecorded and unremembered. On the other hand, some of Henry's promises will be kept: he does risk his life alongside those of his men, and the text provides no indication that we are meant to read his pledge not to be ransomed as false.

The contradictions inherent in Henry's rhetoric become more evident in the next few lines, even as he evokes some of the speech's strongest images of community:

He that shall live this day, and see old age,  
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
And say 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian' [...]  
[...] Then shall our names,  
Familiar in his mouth as household words,  
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,

Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester  
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd (44-55).

The free-flowing food and drink, the image of the returning war veteran fulfilling his neighborly obligations, the promise that the common soldier will make free with the names of noblemen and turn them into his “familiar”: Henry’s message is steeped in the tavern values of good companionship and social leveling. For once, he seems to be the same Hal who remembers how to drink with a tinker in his own language. Even the repetition of personal names provides a slight echo of a remark the reprobate prince once made in the Boar’s Head: “I [...] can call them all by their Christian names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis” (*I Henry IV*, II. iv. 6-8). To be sure, the king’s rhetoric elides the massive difference between Christian names and aristocratic titles; but the listeners are unlikely to notice this as the speech mounts toward its ringing climax: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; / For he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother” (60-62).

In the last few lines of the speech, King Henry returns to his characteristic theme of judgment. The day’s events will separate the worthy from the unworthy and guarantee that the former have their reward:

[...] Be he ne’er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition.  
And gentlemen in England now abed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s Day (62-67).

Although the promise that the day will level the distinctions between aristocrat and commoner, in favor of a system of honor based on merit and service, will prove illusory after the battle, the fact that the promise is made at all is significant. It is important to remember

that Henry conceives of the king's justice – the “quittance of desert and merit” – as a leveling force. This attitude has already been evident in his willingness to release a drunken wretch and condemn aristocratic traitors, and even earlier, in his free acceptance of the Lord Chief Justice's censure.

Throughout this speech Henry proves quite skilled at manipulating the rhetoric of brotherhood – undoubtedly the legacy of his time in the tavern. He is, however, less successful at recognizing that this brand of justice is not necessarily one that his subjects understand or desire, and similarly unsuccessful at establishing what I shall term the “brotherhood of rhetoric”: ritualized bonding through language, another hallmark of tavern society. David Ruiter draws a strong link between communal festivities, social leveling, and verbal “wit” in these plays. Falstaff's complaint that John of Lancashire lacks “wit” is, in his reading, really a note of protest against the Lenten restoration of hierarchy that the dour prince represents (128). These verbal expressions of comradeship may include shared jokes, complaints, and gossip; drinking slang and other catch-phrases; the bestowing of nicknames and playful insults. Even the constant quarrels and boasting in the tavern serve, on some level, to establish social bonds and common ground; in the case of Nym and Pistol's quarrel earlier in the play, the real focus is on the reconciliation rather than the dispute. The vow to suck French blood, and similar examples of jingoism and boasting, likewise function as bonding rites, if rather unsavory ones to modern ears. Such moments draw sharp distinctions between “us” and “them” and serve to unite the English commoners against the French. Although these lines expose the tavern world's greatest flaws – its cowardice, self-

centeredness, and xenophobia – it is likely that many in Shakespeare’s audience would have cheered them.

When we first meet Hal, he professes to be an avid student of drinking rituals and other aspects of verbal bonding. Both the prince himself and Warwick imagine Hal’s madcap youth in terms of language-learning – an important motif throughout the cycle of plays. Shakespeare draws an implicit contrast between rote, word-by-word learning (exemplified by Katherine’s English lessons with Alice) and a real understanding of the subtler, non-literal signals that make up the greater part of communication in any language (as when Mortimer realizes that he can understand his Welsh bride’s looks and kisses). Henry’s “studies” in the tavern tend toward the first sort of learning. “The prince but studies his companions,” Warwick assures Henry IV, “Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language, / Tis needful that the most immodest word / Be look’d upon and learn’d; which once attain’d, / Your highness knows, comes to no further use / But to be known and hated” (*2H4*, IV. iv. 68-73). The ultimate purpose of this study is suggested by Warwick’s next words: “The prince will in the perfectness of time / Cast off his followers; and their memory / Shall as a pattern or a measure live, / By which his grace must mete the lives of others” (74-77). Thus, from an aristocratic perspective, it is useful for a king to learn the language of his most vulgar subjects because it enables him to judge rightly.

But from the tavern point of view, this language is useful because it is a way of bonding and forging relationships, something that Hal appears to recognize when he gives Poins an account of his adventures at the Boar’s Head:

Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers; and can call them all by their Christian names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis. They take

it already upon their salvation that though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy; and tell me flatly that I am no proud Jack, like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy, by the Lord, so they call me, and when I am king of England, I shall command all the good lads of Eastcheap. They call drinking deep, dyeing scarlet; and when you breathe in your watering, they cry 'hem!' and bid you play it off. To conclude, I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour, that I can drink with any tinker in his own language during my life (*1 Henry IV*, II. iv. 6-20).

In any of the popular ballads, Hal's claim to have learned this language *for life* would be no idle boast. These details would invite the listeners to expect a certain type of follow-up scene: The "leash of drawers" would eventually turn up at court; the language of the drinking ritual would serve to identify the "sworn brothers" to one another and remind them of their previous bond; and Hal would give generously from the royal coffers. Hal makes this implied promise explicit a few moments later, when he pledges to give Francis the tapster a thousand pounds in exchange for his pennyworth of sugar: "Ask me when thou wilt, and thou shalt have it" (69-70). However, we hear nothing more of the matter, and judging by Henry's demeanor after he becomes king, Francis and his fellows would hardly be welcome at his court. This unfulfilled expectation may pass unnoticed during the triumphal ending of *1 Henry IV*, but as the fortunes of the tavern characters take a darker turn during the two sequels, the brotherhood of rhetoric seems to be forgotten. Hal may have paid the bill at the Boar's Head with the coin of the realm, but there is a larger reckoning, in the currency of familiarity and personal access to the king, that remains outstanding. Critics have often taken it for granted that this is not a great fault on King Henry's part – that over-familiarity with his subjects is a luxury that he cannot afford as king – yet Daryl Palmer points out that sixteenth-century political theorists generally regarded familiarity as a positive or neutral quality in a

monarch, and if so, Henry would seem to owe his subjects a personal audience that he is not willing to give.

It is possible that Hal, even as a madcap prince, lacks the ability to bond with his future subjects through the verbal rituals of the tavern. We have only his word that he has managed to establish common ground with his “leash of drawers” and learned their language; Ralph Berry suggests that the prince may have “fallen into the classic trap of the anthropologist, who contaminates the data by being there to record it” (78). Hal’s on-stage interaction with Francis of “Anon, sir” fame, later in the same scene, seems geared toward putting the tapster firmly in his place rather than befriending him. Ruiter sees thematic significance in the fact that, like many of Hal’s jokes, his baiting of Francis isn’t all that funny. The prince, he argues, lacks Falstaff’s “ability to move among all men, all classes, and to create community” (89). I am not entirely convinced that the failure in this case is Hal’s, since Shakespeare’s comic muse tended to be erratic at the best of times. But in any case, he seems to lose touch with this ability later in life; when he speaks one-on-one with his subjects, King Henry repeatedly shows himself to be deaf to the appropriate rhetorical register. He tries to use a jocular, friendly tone at inappropriate times (as in his “leave gourmandizing” line to Falstaff, which sends mixed signals at a crucial moment), and fails to establish it when he most needs to do so. The scene with John Bates, Alexander Court, and Michael Williams is a case in point.

This “disguised king” episode presents Henry with a commoner who presents an articulate ideological challenge to his principles and his war, in the person of Michael Williams. Williams is the most outspoken of the group and the most openly critical of the

king, but the fact that there are three soldiers present situates him as a member of a community, instead of an isolated malcontent. At least in some respects, it is a community reminiscent of the Boar's Head. Court addresses Bates as "brother," suggesting that sworn brotherhood is a value these men recognize and privilege, and Bates' words "Be friends, you English fools, be friends: we have French quarrels enow, if you could tell us how to reckon" (IV. i. 239-41) echo Bardolph's "Come, shall I make you two friends? We must to France together: why the devil should we keep knives to cut one another's throats?" (II. i. 94-96). Thus, Henry's attempt to establish common ground with these men is the true test of whether he can remember the lessons of his youth.

Henry begins well: when Williams challenges him, he claims to serve under Sir Thomas Erpingham, a mutual acquaintance of whom Williams approves, and follows this up with a reminder of the common humanity of king and foot soldier: "I think the king is but a man, as I am [...] his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man" (IV. i. 104-08). His attempt to communicate with his soldiers begins to go awry only when he fails to supply the accepted response to Bates' complaint: "I believe, as cold a night as 'tis, [the king] could wish himself in Thames up to the neck; and so I would he were, and I by him, at all adventures, so we were quit here" (119-22). Although Bates does not know that he is actually speaking to the king, his willingness to stand "by him" in this uncomfortable extremity signals to the audience that the king still has his good will. In the exchange that follows, Henry abruptly loses the sympathy of his men:

*K. Hen.* By my troth, I will speak my conscience of the king: I think he would not wish himself any where but where he is.

*Bates.* Then I would he were here alone; so should he be sure to be ransomed, and a many poor men's lives saved.

*K. Hen.* I dare say you love him not so ill, to wish him here alone,  
howsoever you speak this to feel other men's minds: methinks I  
could not die any where so contented as in the king's company; his  
cause being just and his quarrel honourable.

*Will.* That's more than we know.

Although his words are a reasonable rejoinder to Bates on a *literal* level and no doubt a sincere expression of his own beliefs, Henry fails to recognize that this particular rhetorical context calls for bonding through mutual commiseration. He then compounds the problem by questioning Bates' sincerity – causing Williams to come to his friend's defense by questioning the king's. Bates and Williams are put off by Henry's failure to respond to their grouching as a comrade in arms rather than a debating partner.

The argument that follows is about judgment, both divine and human. At this point the conflict between king and commoners' ideas of justice, a subtle undercurrent throughout the tetralogy, becomes overt. Williams imagines the soldiers who will lose their lives not as individuals, but as a collective body of "legs and arms and heads," jumbled together on the battlefield and indistinguishable from each other (141-42). In life, moreover, they were subjects, husbands, and fathers, and their individual responsibilities are inseparable from these social roles. The guilt for any sins they may have committed, in Williams' mind, falls not only on their own heads but on the king's because their status as his subjects obligates them to obey him. The king is likewise responsible for the relationships fragmented by war: "their wives left poor behind them [...] their children rawly left" (145-47). Henry, not surprisingly, rejects this argument. He envisions the soldier's spiritual state as wholly separate from his social obligations: "Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own" (183-84). Furthermore, he imagines war as an agent of providential

judgment, wreaking God's vengeance in cases where lawless men have enlisted in the army to escape human justice: "Now, if these men have defeated the law and outrun native punishment [...] [they] are punished for before-breach of the king's laws in now the king's quarrel" (173-78). Henry's rejoinder emphasizes the soldier's status as an individual who may be sinful and worthy of punishment, rather than his position within a broader network of social relationships; it neatly sidesteps the questions Williams raises about the fate of the widows and orphans.

The soldiers concede that the king has a point about individual responsibility, suggesting that his ideas about justice are, perhaps, gaining common currency. The next exchange, however, suggests that his public "rhetoric of brotherhood," with its emphasis upon the commonality among the king and his troops, has proven less convincing:

*K. Hen.* I myself heard the king say he would not be ransomed.

*Will.* Aye, he said so to make us fight cheerfully. But when our throats are cut, he may be ransomed and we ne'er the wiser.

*K. Hen.* If I live to see it. I will never trust his word after.

*Will.* You pay him, then. That's a perilous shot out of an elder-gun, that a poor and private displeasure can do against a monarch! You may as well go about to turn the sun to ice with fanning in his face with a peacock's feather. You'll never trust his word after! Come, 'tis a foolish saying (202-15).

No doubt Henry *did* say he would not be ransomed, with the expectation that this information would be passed down through the ranks, and the play gives us no reason to believe this promise is disingenuous. But this attempt to establish common ground with his troops has evidently failed; Williams immediately dismisses the idea. Moreover, he is keenly aware that claiming to face the same dangers is an easy way for Henry to manipulate his forces ("he said so to make us fight cheerfully"), but in fact, a vast chasm in rank and power separates poor

and private men from the king. More aware of the reality of social distinctions than Pistol, Williams perceives that it is, in fact, absurd for a commoner to speak of the king in the same terms one would speak of a personal acquaintance; one soldier's trust or lack thereof means nothing to a powerful monarch.

At last Bates steps in and creates the common ground that the king cannot, reminding the others of their mutual peril and exhorting them to reconcile by appealing to their shared sense of community: "Be friends, you English fools, be friends. We have French quarrels enow, if you could tell how to reckon" (239-41). Henry takes this cue to change the subject and engage in a bit of pre-battle boasting: "[I]t is no English treason to cut French crowns, and tomorrow the king himself will be a clipper" (244-46). This patriotic jest seems to strike the right note at last – Williams makes no objection – but neither does he join the game with a counter-boast of his own. It is a private joke whose full implications are understood only by the king, humor that excludes rather than unites. The soldiers exit immediately afterwards, leaving Henry alone to deliver a resentful soliloquy that further emphasizes his isolation from his men.

Williams' departure from the scene, though less ignominious than Pistol's, nevertheless represents a dismissal of the common soldier and the values he represents. By asking Fluellen to wear his own favor, Henry induces Williams to strike the blow he means for the king against Fluellen, a practical joke that no doubt saves Williams' life but embarrasses both men considerably. In his own defense, Williams states, "Your Majesty came not like yourself. You appeared to me but as a common man – witness the night, your garments, your lowness. And what your Highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you to

take it for your own fault and not mine. For had you been as I took you for, I made no offense” (IV. vii. 53-59) Williams asserts that the sentiments he expressed are lawful in themselves, despite the fact that he has criticized the king rather harshly. His complaints become subversive only when expressed to a superior rather than an equal. In essence, he argues that the “brotherhood of rhetoric” – the bond forged among soldiers through complaints, mutual commiseration, and shared verbal abuse of their superiors – is not the sign of entrenched hostility that it appears to be, but wholly benign as long as it never reaches the king’s ears. The soldiers should be permitted to speak freely among themselves because, as Williams told Henry at their earlier encounter, a “poor and private displeasure” has little concrete effect on a monarch.

The king’s response – a magnanimous one, by some standards – once again shows him to be deaf to the nuances of commoners’ speech. First, he attempts to appropriate the role of peacemaker which both Bates and Bardolph have assumed in earlier scenes, but because he approaches the two men as a commander rather than a comrade in arms, he is unsuccessful. Unlike Bardolph and Bates, he does not position himself as a member of the group he hopes to reconcile, instead giving Fluellen a direct order: “You must needs be friends with [Williams]” (66). Fluellen’s idea of making friends, directly imitated from the king, is offering Williams money to mend his shoes. Williams responds, “I will none of your money” (72). Like the blow earlier in the scene, this angry reply may really be intended for the king, whose glove filled with crowns is a present that Williams cannot refuse without giving further offense. Anne Barton’s description of the king’s attitude toward Williams as “a dismissive generosity” intended to silence the commoner’s voice is, I think, accurate (“The

King Disguised,” 101). Another, unprecedented, act of silencing takes place shortly after Williams’ departure, when Henry orders, “Be it death proclaimed through out host / To boast of this or take that praise from God / Which is his only” (IV. viii. 119-21). This proclamation not only carries an extraordinarily harsh penalty (even the admiring Fluellen seems taken aback by the king’s announcement), it puts an end to one of the verbal rituals by which the soldiers reinforce their solidarity and identify themselves as members of the community.

Thus, the commoner scenes in *Henry V* stage a battle of values on two fronts. The king’s strict, individual-centered concept of justice competes with his subjects’ belief that the law ought to be enforced with an eye to personal circumstances and social context. Simultaneously, the king both appropriates and attempts to control the commoners’ mode of discourse, a language rooted in the ideals of personal loyalty, membership in a community, and sworn brotherhood. Ultimately, King Henry wins both wars by unilateral force: Nym and Bardolph are hanged, Pistol and Williams are dismissed into obscurity, and a single royal command silences much of the talk in the camp. The idea that justice means an impersonal government and impartial dispensing of rewards and punishments would also win out on the wider stage of history; modern readers would be hard pressed to find anything “just” in Pistol’s proposal that he and his friends should share the spoils of war without paying the consequences. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, however, radically revises the characterization and social dynamics of the *Henry* plays, giving audiences an alternative ending to the tetralogy and a glimpse of a world where the commoners’ values are the dominant ones. The following chapter will explore what Shakespeare, Dekker, and Heywood imagine such a

world to look like in *Merry Wives*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, and the second part of *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**COMICAL-HISTORICAL-FANTASTICAL: “THE MIDDLE SORT” IN**  
**SHAKESPEARE, DEKKER, AND HEYWOOD**

The bulk of this project has focused on “history plays” in the conventional sense – works based on chronicle history and focusing on the deeds of a king or other notable figure, most often titled and male. This chapter, however, will explore the commoner-centered, and largely commoner-run, social worlds of three plays written in a mode that Polonius might have termed “comical-historical”: Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, and Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part Two*. The first two texts, in particular, bear most of the hallmarks of comedy: a cast of fictional or heavily fictionalized characters, most of them part of the “middle sort,” and a happy resolution involving marriage and the potential for child-bearing. But at the same time, these plays are consciously and deliberately set in England’s past, and many of the questions they address will be familiar from the histories: What sort of people should make up the English commonwealth? How do the values of court and commoner differ, and can they peacefully co-exist? What happens to the community when ordinary men and women are pressed into the king’s wars or lusted after by corrupt courtiers? The solutions here are happier than they are in *Edward IV* or *Henry V*, but marked by uneasy compromises and elisions. I am inclined

to categorize all three of these plays as “alternative histories,” fantasies about what a world might look like where aristocratic values do not dominate.

David Scott Kastan’s description of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* applies equally well to the other two texts: “[T]he play cannot be understood as a realistic portrait of Elizabethan middle-class life. It is a realistic portrait only of Elizabethan middle-class dreams” (151-52). From my perspective, however, this is precisely what makes these three plays so intriguing. While history demands a certain fidelity to established facts and traditions, comedy grants authors a radical freedom to give voice to dreams and re-imagine social relationships. *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and *2 If You Know Not Me* do indeed present an unrealistically sanitized and egalitarian picture of Elizabethan capitalism, labor conditions, and social mobility, but the purpose of this lack of realism, I would argue, has less to do with legitimating actual social conditions than with giving voice to middle-class London’s desires and dreams. The gender politics of the plays, similarly, are both improbable and revealing. Where Jane Shore found herself powerless to resist Edward IV’s advances, these comedies repeatedly stage the spectacle of a dissolute male courtier wooing a virtuous woman of middle rank – Falstaff and the wives of Windsor, Fenton and Anne Page, Rowland Lacy and Rose Oatley. But this time, the citizens have the upper hand, and the plot ends either with the courtier’s humiliation or with a happy marriage that takes place on the girl’s terms. Lacy and, to some extent, Fenton have to be reformed and improved before they are found worthy to marry; Rose and Anne do not.

Dekker, in particular, has multiple subplots that touch on the anxieties surrounding cross-class wooing, but avoids depicting the worst-case scenario of a female commoner

forced to yield to advances she does not desire. The play opens when the Earl of Lincoln informs Oatley, the Lord Mayor of London, that his nephew is wooing Oatley's daughter Rose. Oatley laments, "Too mean is my poor girl for his high birth. / Poor citizens must not with courtiers wed, / Who will in silks and gay apparel spend / More in one year than I am worth by far" (i. 11-14). The submissive language of this reply cloaks a not-so-subtle insult, to which Lincoln is far from oblivious: "I know this churl, even in the height of scorn / Doth hate the mixture of his blood with thine" (79). Oatley gets away with expressing scorn to the earl's face and asserting that citizen values are superior to those of courtiers, something that would be impossible in *I Edward IV*, where the power imbalances are real and grave.

Lincoln cannot deny his nephew's spendthrift tendencies, but he retaliates by exaggerating the gap in social status and dismissing the Lord Mayor as a "churl". (Ford, similarly, is "the peasant" to Falstaff, despite his "masses of money" [*MWW* II. ii. 283, 294].) His rage, however, is impotent – Oatley has left the stage and cannot hear him, and the conventions of comedy demand that the two mismatched lovers will eventually marry. The closest the play comes to a real case of sexual coercion is the story of Ralph Damport's lost wife Jane, who is perhaps deliberately evoking Jane Shore when she refuses the wealthy Hammon's addresses: "Whilst he lives, his I live, be it ne'er so poor; / And rather be his wife than a king's whore" (78-79). Hammon later offers Ralph a bribe of gold to give up his claim to her, which Ralph angrily rejects: "[D]ost thou think a shoemaker is so base to be a bawd to his own wife for commodity?" (xviii. 92-94). By acting together, Ralph and his fellows successfully resist the demands of the wealthier and more powerful Hammon, defusing the threat of forced marriage.

While these texts may tell modern readers little about early modern social conditions, they reveal a great deal about their authors' and audiences' very real hopes, aspirations, and values. In all three cases, these values are community-centered. The basic unit of social organization is a small group of intimate associates who work, drink, and feast together, whether they are merchants, craftsmen, or neighbors, and the most frequently touted values include neighborliness and good fellowship. Social relationships among these characters are not, of course, completely horizontal: there are clear differences in rank, as well as less formalized but generally acknowledged ones in status. Figures such as Simon Eyre, Hobson, and the Page family emerge as leaders of their respective communities. In a sense they are the "royalty" of their little worlds – Eyre's "Prince am I none, yet I am princely born" tag line suggests that he thinks of himself in such terms – but the nature of leadership and authority is radically different here than in the history plays. Rather than demanding absolute obedience, these middle-class leaders emphasize conciliation, cooperation, and conviviality.

Any community-based value system, of course, requires individuals to distinguish between fellow members of the community and outsiders. Many of the drawbacks of such a system are evident on the early modern stage: acts of xenophobic violence such as the Ill May Day riots in *Sir Thomas More* and the vows to suck French blood in *Henry V*; the casual disregard for the property rights of those outside of the community that is prevalent in Shakespeare's *Eastcheap*. Chapter Six of this project will explore a still darker aspect of this society: the tendency for communities to turn on their own members and retaliate violently against a designated scapegoat. The complex interplay of inclusion and exclusion likewise infuses the three texts I will be examining in this chapter. Although they celebrate the

English common people and their ideals, all three are marked by conspicuous exclusions.

*The Shoemaker's Holiday* celebrates the core social relationship of guild-brotherhood, from which women and non-laboring men are excluded. Part Two of *If You Know Not Me* draws a firm line between its citizen heroes and the nameless multitude of other “great possessors” in the city, who, Heywood implies, have abdicated their charitable responsibilities toward their neighbors (l. 2187). *The Merry Wives of Windsor* depicts a community that plays host to a multitude of outsiders, ranging from a French doctor and a Welsh cleric to a handful of lowlifes who have been inexplicably displaced from Eastcheap and from the history plays. But in all cases, one of the most conspicuous absences is that of aristocratic and noble characters, who appear on stage only rarely and briefly, though both Dekker and Heywood characterize the reigning monarch in positive terms.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* portrays a steady undercurrent of tension among those who are part of the community, those who are tolerated, and those who are definitely unwelcome. It is often unclear who belongs in which category at any given point in the play, leading critics to dispute how inclusive the play really is. Rosemary Kegl, for example, reads Windsor as a community deeply suspicious of outsiders; she notes that the play's language is replete with insults, many of which have xenophobic undertones. Foreign nationalities are repeatedly used as terms of abuse, a fact which may reflect on the community's attitudes toward resident foreigners such as Evans and Caius. Kegl also argues that Shallow and Evans have trouble enforcing local order because neither derives his social position from the community itself: “they do not share the collective identities of ‘townsmen’ and ‘gentlemen’ (269). Conversely, Anne Barton reads Evans and Caius as “fully accepted and indeed leading

members of the community” and comments that “it is one of Windsor’s strengths as a community that it is remarkably inclusive and willing to absorb foreign elements” (“Falstaff,” 143). Falstaff, however, overreaches the limits of the community’s tolerance, in her reading – and so, to some extent, does the Host of the Garter, who gives lodging to strangers from the court and always seems a little on the fringes of town society. (Barton points out that he has certain linguistic affinities with Falstaff, such as his liking for bizarre, bombastic oaths, and is apparently not invited to take part in the final ritual of Falstaff’s humiliation.) She notes that the other refugees from the *Henry* plays evidently *do* adapt to Windsor’s norms. Pistol’s participation in the final prank on Falstaff at the end of the play suggests that he “has [...] become a bona fide member of the community at Windsor” (141), while Mistress Quickly has acquired a new and rather improbable streak of sexual puritanism even though she still has an ear for the bawdy. Phillis Rackin believes that Falstaff *is* finally included in the comic world of Windsor at the end of *Merry Wives*, while he has to be banished from the historical *Henry* plays (*Stages*, 238). The range of opinions about who belongs in Windsor and who does not reflects a community whose membership is continually in flux and which is, arguably, in the process of defining and refining its own values.

The play opens with a status-driven conflict between Shallow and Falstaff. Falstaff’s offenses, apparently, are beating Shallow’s men, killing his deer, and breaking open his lodge, but Shallow resents the insult to his status within the community more than the physical damages: “if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire” (I. i. 2-3). Ralph Berry notes that “‘Esquire,’ one rank below the knighthood, meant more than it does today” (50). The narrow gap in social rank is less significant than the fact

that Falstaff is an outsider, associated with the court rather than the town. Windsor, as a royal borough, would have had an unusually direct relationship with the court, as Kegl notes in her essay; thus, she argues, “the authority relations that underpinned absolute rule were visibly feudal and visibly associated with royal prerogative” (265). Familiarity, in this case, breeds discomfort and a touch of resentment at outside authority. The court is the touchstone against which the inhabitants of Windsor define themselves and their values. One reason why Falstaff finds such a chilly welcome there is that he is still fundamentally *of* the court, though physically exiled from it; in his extravagant addresses to Mistress Ford, he promises to make her a “lady” and “an absolute courtier” (III. iii. 53-65). This is the wrong note to strike in Windsor, where the locals seem less than impressed with aristocratic life. They associate courtliness with flattery and deceit – Mistress Page tells Falstaff’s young page, “O, you are a flattering boy; now I see you’ll be a courtier” – and, with considerable justification, with sexual corruption and venality (III. ii. 7-8). Page’s main objection to Fenton, the consummate courtier, is that “he kept company with the wild prince and Poins; he is of too high a region; he knows too much” (III. ii. 73-5). In the light of Falstaff’s behavior toward the town’s wives and Fenton’s own admission that his initial motive in pursuing Anne was money, one can hardly blame Page for his suspicions.

Nevertheless, the conflicts between court and town reveal that Windsor possesses its own brand of hypocrisy. Mrs. Page favors the doctor’s suit to her daughter in part because his friends are “potent at court,” suggesting a delicate balance between suspicion of the court’s values and deference to its admitted power (IV. iv. 89). Shakespeare drops hints that the inhabitants would like to displace certain moral failings onto the court which are also

present within the community. Anne Page's father, for example, accuses Fenton of loving her "but as a property," but Caius and Slender seem equally guilty in this regard (III. iv.10). This element of scapegoating comes to a head when the townspeople unite in a shaming ritual directed against Falstaff at the climax of the play. They take more delight in enumerating his follies and vices than in examining their own, though Evans does slip in a quiet admonition to Ford about his jealousy. Although the play treats the witch of Brentford as a figure of fun, the fact that none of the other men seem greatly disturbed by Ford's attempt to beat her is a grim reminder that the tight social bonds which held early modern towns together also mandated violence and ostracism against those who failed to conform to the community's norms.

Despite these moments, Windsor is by and large an idealized community; the townspeople champion inclusion and conciliation throughout the play. While Falstaff and his companions exchange insults with Shallow and his cousin in the opening scene, the other men in Windsor emerge as peacemakers. Page, Evans, and the Host of the Garter take the role of umpires in the quarrel, suggesting that these three men are acknowledged as pillars of the community. Page invites everyone to dinner and expresses his faith in the power of good fellowship to smooth over conflicts: "I hope we shall drink down all unkindness" (I. i. 204). This opening episode reveals much about Windsor and its values: though the townsmen have a strong streak of local pride and are easily angered by the arrogance of a titled interloper, the ritual that they prefer to use to settle the matter is the common feast rather than the duel. Evans, whose English is admittedly muddled, suggests not that friendship should *replace* the

sword, but that friends should *be* the sword, a turn of phrase that grants friendship remarkable weight and force (42).

Despite Page's good intentions, it seems unlikely that Windsor will be able to absorb this influx of cheats and thieves without a struggle. Most of them do, however, find a slow and winding route toward acceptance within the community, a fact which illustrates both the resilience of Windsor and the adaptability of Eastcheap. Mistress Quickly has already settled into her place as the doctor's servant and Anne Page's confidante, although the audience is not privileged to know how this came about. We do, however, witness the other refugees from London's underworld undergo a radical shift in allegiances and, quite possibly, a reformation. Falstaff unexpectedly cuts loose his followers at the beginning of the play, a gesture which puts an end to the ties of patronage that have left them free to pursue a life of idleness and petty theft. Significantly, the severed relationship is a hierarchical and distinctly courtly one; it is replaced by new relationships within the town, which place the men on a more equal footing with their new neighbors. Bardolph almost immediately finds a position as a tapster at the Garter; Nym and Pistol plot revenge by throwing their lot in with the townspeople and telling Page and Ford of Falstaff's designs on their wives. Although Page doubts their honesty, the men prove to be telling the truth, and we hear no more accusations of theft against them. Pistol, at least, seems to have been fully integrated into Windsor society by the end of the play, when he dresses as Hobgoblin and joins in the elaborate prank played on Falstaff.

The tavern characters cannot survive in the heroic, historical world of *Henry V*, in which the young king's program of judicial reform and military is entirely at odds with the

way things have always been done in Eastcheap. On the other hand, they can live on in Windsor and eventually be absorbed into the community because they share its core values: good fellowship, personal loyalty, a willingness to tolerate one's neighbors' failings and foibles. The one exception is Falstaff, who persists in regarding the townsmen as "knaves" and "peasants" and makes no attempt to adapt his behavior to Windsor's norms. The play culminates in his public humiliation, a ritual which cements Pistol's and Mistress Quickly's membership in the community as much as it marks Falstaff's continued position as an outsider. Generations of readers and viewers have expressed disappointment with Falstaff's role in *Merry Wives*, perceiving him only as a shadow of the character who appears in the history plays. The problem, however, is not so much that Falstaff himself has changed, but that he is in the wrong milieu to use his comic potential to its best advantage. His knighthood makes him one of the most high-status characters in Windsor, but of relatively low rank when compared to the entire cast of the history plays – and Falstaff is consistently funnier and more likeable when he takes on his social superiors rather than his inferiors. The "food for powder" exchange in *1 Henry IV* pokes fun at Prince Hal and Westmoreland, who are silly enough to expect Falstaff to share their own notions of military honor; the recruitment scene in *2 Henry IV* dramatizes the same practice from the commoners' point of view, rendering the comedy grim and exposing Falstaff as no more than an exploiter of men who are about to die as cattle. "Decidedly," Ralph Berry remarks, "Falstaff is funnier out of power than in" (86). At the opening of *Merry Wives*, Falstaff once again becomes a figure of power, an outsider who sees the town and its lower-ranked inhabitants chiefly as a readily exploitable source of cash and hospitality; the difference in this case is that in accordance with the conventions of

comedy, the underdog wins. The community at Windsor turns the tables on him and beats him at the game of cozenage.

Yet the play's final note is inclusion, even for Falstaff. After humiliating and excoriating him, Mrs. Page invites him to join the community: "Good husband, let us every one go home, / And laugh this sport over a country fire; / Sir John and all" (V. v. 255-7). In the First Quarto, it is Mistress Ford who makes the initial call for reconciliation, urging her husband to forgive Falstaff's debt: "Nay husband let that go to make amends / Forgive that sum, and so wee'll all be friends" (sc. 18). Ford accordingly offers his hand to Falstaff. In both the quarto and folio texts, the inhabitants of Windsor are the ones extending the invitation; Sir John is welcome, but only on the townspeople's own terms. Fenton, likewise, is welcomed into the fold in the play's final lines, but only after he marries one of the town's daughters and accepts its values as his own. His reference to his "riots past" and his claim that he initially pursued Anne for her money but later came to see her true worth implies that he has undergone a genuine transformation in attitude (III. iv. 8). The end of the play smooths over the rocky relationship between court and town, incorporating a blessing on Windsor Castle into the revels of the "fairies." Nevertheless, the notion that the castle *needs* a blessing from Mistress Quickly, of all people, is distinctly unorthodox; Shakespeare's audience at court would have been gently reminded of their dependence upon the people's goodwill.

*The Shoemaker's Holiday* depicts a mutually supportive community of London craftsmen that is somewhat reminiscent of Windsor, both in its suspicions of courtly language and behavior and in its emphasis on conciliation and cooperation. The essential social

relationship in the city, however, is guild-brotherhood rather than neighborliness. As Keith Wrightson notes, these two relationships had similar social functions but crucial differences in membership: “For craftsmen, the urban guilds performed many services akin to those of the rural neighborhood, though obviously only among the members of these bodies” (*English Society*, 56). Much of the social bonding in Dekker’s play takes place in the male-dominated world of the workshop, from which women (and men who do not work with their hands) are excluded by definition. While the shoemakers consistently offer aid and comfort to their comrade Ralph when he is pressed into the military and later wounded, his wife Jane loses touch with them after he goes away. Only Ralph’s return brings her back into the fold. For those who are members, however, the guild forms a tightly knit and supportive community, strengthened by the social rituals of eating and drinking together. These rituals were formalized aspects of company membership in early modern London; the common feast was an important yearly rite, and Steve Rappaport notes that the companies’ courts of assistance frequently ordered “[s]haking hands in court, drinking together, these and other public demonstrations of good will [...] when interpersonal disputes were resolved” (209). Rappaport describes a typical case at the Pewterers’ hall, in which the disputants were ordered to “be lovers and friends, and to pay 12d. apiece towards the relief of the poor people of the craft, and 4d. apiece to drink together before the master, wardens, and assistants, and 2d. apiece to the beadle” (209). Thus, their reconciliation was sealed with a ritual gesture of neighborliness. The verdict emphasizes both the sociable and the charitable aspects of company membership, both of which are evident in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.

Ronda Arab comments on the play's insistence on the men's unity, forged through work and guild membership: "[The artisans] are bound together by the collective activity of their work and by their mutual loyalty. The men are almost always seen on stage together, and when they do appear individually, as when Firk is interrogated by Lord Oatley, his unshakeable loyalty to his guild-brothers continues to define him as part of a greater body" (192). Hodge describes shoemakers as "perpetual benefactors to all good fellows," an ethos that emphasizes generosity and conviviality (xviii. 3-4). Despite his apparent foreignness (and real, though invisible, difference in social rank), Lacy is immediately greeted as "a brother of the Gentle Craft" when he approaches the workmen in his disguise as a Dutch shoemaker (iv. 48-49). The play depicts deeply chauvinistic attitudes toward some foreigners (specifically, the French), but "Hans" does not encounter any real ethnic prejudice from the other men, just some good-natured ribbing. His skill with his tools and his willingness to buy the first round of beer are sufficient to ensure his acceptance into the workshop. Kastan points out that the workmen's readiness to accept "Hans" elides the very real tensions between English and foreign workers in the London of the 1590s, but this idealization is a key part of Dekker's message: the community comes first, then the nation. In this play, the fellowship forged by working and drinking together is the cornerstone on which English patriotism is built. Loyalty to one's guild and neighborhood merges into a broader sense of nationalism in one of Simon Eyre's finest displays of bombast, as he sees Ralph off to war: "Fight for the honor of the Gentle Craft, for the Gentlemen Shoemakers, the courageous cordwainers, the flower of Saint Martin's, the mad knaves of Bedlam, Fleet Street, Tower

Street, and Whitechapel. Crack me the crowns of the French knaves, a pox on them – crack them” (i. 221-26).

Ronda Arab calls attention to another of Dekker’s social fictions, one which has profound implications for the play’s value system and political message:

One of the play’s central fictions is that guilds functioned as unified, fraternal bodies – horizontal communities – rather than hierarchical, patriarchal work systems riddled with conflict between master and apprentices. In the work world of the play, the master will do anything for his boys, and whereas this may be seen as a kind of paternalistic relationship [...] it has a distinctly horizontal element in that Simon allows his men to make certain decisions and is guided by their advice, as when he hires Hans (193).

In reality, Arab points out, masters were supposed to have complete authority over apprentices, and hierarchies in the everyday work world were becoming more permanent and more pronounced, with apprentices and journeymen finding it increasingly difficult to move up the industrial ladder (194). Like Kastan, she notes that the disorderly, violent nature of the Shrove Tuesday holiday is omitted from the play. Arab reads these omissions as a sign of the play’s orthodoxy and erasure of social protest; I consider it equally valid to interpret them as a subtle call for social change. Dekker’s implicit argument is that early modern London would be a better society – a less disorderly and violent one, and also a more prosperous one – if real-life guilds mirrored the play’s emphasis on horizontal community. In *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London*, Dekker would state this position outright, lamenting that “Trades that were ordaind to be *Communities*, had lost their first priviledges, and were now turnd to *Monopolyes*” (74).

Upsetting social hierarchies is a central element of Simon Eyre's leadership style<sup>8</sup>. Firk, intensely protective of his status among the other men, is put out when Eyre calls "Hans" into the shop first: "Though my master have no more wit but to call you afore me, I am not so foolish as to go behind you, I being the elder journeyman" (iv. 132-34). Future events will show Eyre's approach to be far from witless, however. He is financially successful specifically because the loosely enforced hierarchy in his shop leaves room for persuasion from the bottom up; his men influence his crucial decisions to hire "Hans" and then to purchase the cargo that makes his fortune. Later in his career, as Lord Mayor and the king's guest, Eyre retains his crude and irreverent sense of humor and resists his wife's attempts to reform him. His attitude contrasts with Margery's eagerness to embrace her new social status and Hammon's faux-aristocratic airs, choices which the play constructs as less admirable than Simon's determinedly working-class manner. Dekker takes pains to establish that despite Simon's eccentricity, he is a competent mayor: "In all his actions that concern his state / He is as serious, provident, and wise, / As full of gravity amongst the grave, / As any Mayor hath been these many years" (xix. 6-9). Eyre's great material achievement as mayor is the building of Leadenhall, an event commemorated with a gesture of equal symbolic importance, a common feast on a grand scale:

Soft, the king this day comes to dine with me, to see my new buildings. His majesty is welcome. He shall have good cheer, delicate cheer, princely cheer. This day my fellow prentices of London come to dine with me too. They shall have fine cheer, gentlemanly cheer. I promised the mad Cappadocians, when we all served at the conduit together, that if I ever came to be Mayor of London, I would feast them all, and I'll do't, I'll do't (xvii. 43-50).

<sup>8</sup> Alison Chapman describes the trade of shoemaking as intrinsically "symbolic of an inverted social hierarchy" in Elizabethan England; Eyre takes this existing cultural association to an extreme (1469).

Though the king and apprentices never actually sit down at one table on stage, this speech links the two feasts inextricably. It also links Eyre's old friendships from his apprentice days with his new social status, in which he is in a position to keep the pledges he made long ago; and in stark contrast with the trail of broken promises that litters the end of *2 Henry IV*, Simon fulfills them all.

The feast itself symbolizes both community and social leveling. By taking on the role of host and benefactor – to the king, no less – Simon is in some ways usurping traditional aristocratic privilege. Mark Thornton Burnett suggests that Eyre's ability to practice public generosity on a grand scale “ultimately indict[s] the aristocracy and call[s] into question its execution of traditional functions” (65). Real-life London merchants, he notes, did indeed give generously to charity, while some aristocrats became unable to maintain the tradition of hospitality around this time. At the same time, however, the common feast was also an established tradition of commoners, as it was a central aspect of guild culture. Stephen Maynard describes it as “an essential symbol of their solidarity and friendship,” the ritual by which tradesmen asserted their existence as a community and displayed their legitimacy to others (337). In response to Kastan, Maynard argues that “the play also portrays something more substantial than mere dreams [...] it portrays a *claim to equality*. It does this in its evocation of the reciprocal and obligatory structure of gift-giving” (338). Eyre, in evoking the language of common feasting and, more specifically, communion, “insists upon [...] what men such as Lincoln and Oatley cannot acknowledge, that we break the same bread and eat the same flesh, the fact that life is common amongst us, as common as air” (342). Maynard suggests that one reason why both Lincoln and the king protest their inability to requite their

hosts in kind is that they are reluctant to enter into such a relationship with their social inferiors: “[S]uch a notion of reciprocity entails a concept of community. My gift to you, as it were, touches you, brings us together and represents us as joined (in an exchange) – and that may not be a union you desire” (334).

Reluctant or not, the king accepts the shoemaker’s hospitality in the end and joins him at the common table. The last voice we hear is the king’s, a choice which represents a startling departure from his absence through most of the play and sets up an ambiguous conclusion: does the feast represent the grand finale of a temporary experiment in social inversion, or a permanent alteration in relations between men of different social ranks? Certainly, the king’s final lines provide a reminder that all holidays must come to an end: “When all our sports and banquetings are done / Wars must right wrongs which Frenchmen have begun” (xxi. 195-96). Furthermore, the final scene replaces Eyre’s consensus-centered style of doing business with a display of absolute royal power. The king is the one who takes control, ordering Rose’s marriage to Lacy and regulating trade in the new Leadenhall. On the other hand, he continues to behave more like an urban tradesman’s fantasy of an ideal king than any historical monarch. In particular, he expresses the idea that work is ennobling – Lacy is a better man after he has learned a trade and worked alongside Eyre and his men: “He for her sake did stoop / To bare necessity, and, as I hear, / Forgetting honours and all courtly pleasures, / To gain her love became a shoemaker” (xxi. 109-12). The king’s *deus ex machina* solution, admittedly, lends itself to being read as a triumph of comic convention over social reality. Lacy’s transgressions against the state are readily forgiven under “love’s laws” – which, apparently, sweep away all distinctions of birth and wealth (77).

Nevertheless, the king's affirmation that Rose is "a worthy bride for any gentleman" also embodies a quiet tribute to her social rank and its distinctive virtues (108). And, as with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, it is the commoners who instigate the comedic ritual of feasting and mutual reconciliation and offer their social betters a place at the table.

Like *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Heywood's *2 If You Know Not Me* features a monarch who is benevolent but rarely present onstage, and emphasizes citizens' charitable deeds and the building of London monuments. Jean Howard calls this genre "chronicle comedies" and suggests they were written "partly as an alternative" to national history plays focused on a single monarch's story. The genre, she argues, "perform[s] the cultural act of subordinating the monarchical to the citizen narrative even while overtly confirming the preeminence of the monarch," thus "rearranging the hierarchy of social players while also seeming not to" ("Competing Ideologies," 165). Thus, it embodies the potential for both celebration and low-key subversion of the social order; it is not surprising that critics have found evidence of both in *2 If You Know Not Me*. The fact that the play's ostensible subject is capitalism also makes it a natural target for ideologically driven readings, a tendency exacerbated by the fact that Heywood plays fast and loose with the facts of Thomas Gresham's life and the building of the Exchange<sup>9</sup>.

Theodora A. Jankowski, in "Historicizing and Legitimizing Capitalism," makes a case for a politically orthodox, pro-capitalist Heywood who "works to validate not only the

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<sup>9</sup> Heywood's numerous historical inaccuracies have been documented by Bonahue, Crupi, Howard, and others. While they are most often read as an attempt "to show merchants and mercantilism in the best possible light but also to legitimize and celebrate their activities and existence within the city" (Bonahue 78), I suspect that Heywood is not so much whitewashing the failings of the wealthy as making a call for greater social responsibility on their part.

sovereign, but those producers of capital who are necessary for maintaining the status quo”

(312). She argues that in the process of glorifying his “merchant heroes,”

Heywood had to erase or severely downplay the ways that capitalism is complicitous with the government and exploits the poor worker. The philanthropic and charitable attitude of capitalism that allowed John Crosbie to rise to his position as lord mayor must be stressed [...] [W]hat I see in Heywood’s two plays is a sophisticated erasure of both the grinding poverty of the Tudor period and the complicity between government and capital (331).

As I have already hinted in Chapter Two, I do not find this reading of Crosbie’s role in *I Edward IV* particularly convincing. For one thing, Crosbie’s interests are not precisely aligned with those of the government; the king’s selfishness hurts him grievously. In addition, far from making “grinding poverty” vanish from the world of the *Edward IV* plays, Heywood openly depicts a middle-class woman’s fall to beggary and presents that fall as a direct consequence of tyranny. While Jane Shore’s melodramatic final scenes do not precisely qualify as social realism, and her story is obviously atypical of Tudor beggars in general, the fact remains that Heywood treats her plight with sympathy and dignity, while vilifying the monarch who forced her into poverty. In *2 If You Know Not Me*, the struggles of the poor are depicted vividly in the peddler John Tawnycoat’s “Hard world” speech, which implies that poverty is caused by the exploitation of the powerful: “[T]he mightier / Teare living out of us” (ll. 1577, 1588-89).

I also find Jankowski’s conflation of mercantile capitalism, royal power, and “the status quo” problematic; this equation seems more applicable to our own culture than Heywood’s. Gresham and Hobson represent an emergent social group, one actively engaged in creating new institutions and shaping an image for itself. And as we will see, the interests

and sensibilities of this group and the aristocrats are not identical. Indeed, Sharon O'Dair makes a case for early modern capitalism as a leveling, and even potentially radical, force:

Capitalism is, of course, vulgar [...] [W]hat distinguishes the nobility, the gentry, and the well-educated from the mass of people in early modern Europe is freedom from engaging in trade, commerce, or physical labor [...] [T]hose interested in preserving professional, intellectual, or aristocratic privilege do well to resist capitalist development, for markets are highly subversive and volatile arenas [...] Capitalism allows the vulgar a voice, a voice they exercise in the market, which, when played very successfully, can then be exercised elsewhere, as in universities or the halls of government (69).

The merchants in this play have taken possession of that voice with a vengeance. They have the ear of the peers, the Dean of St. Paul's, and the queen – and what they are saying, over and over, is that the world ought to operate on a system based on personal ties, trust, and charity. In fact, both Gresham and Hobson are characterized primarily as good neighbors rather than good businessmen: they are eager to give money away, willing to patch up quarrels, quick to trust both the deserving (Tawnycoat) and the undeserving (Gresham's nephew). However, Hobson's statement that he takes on Gresham's nephew as a factor “partly for your love / And chiefly to supply my present want” implies that friendship and financial gain are not fundamentally contradictory goals but complementary ones (ll. 297-98). Gresham, similarly, describes his great civic project, the building of the Exchange, as an act of community-building: he intends to give his colleagues “a place to meete in [...] That Marchants and their wives, friend and their friends / Shall walk underneath it as now in Powles” (ll. 547, 552-3). This phrasing suggests that he conceives of the proposed Exchange as a place for social intercourse as well as business transactions.

While Gresham's speech patterns and grand gestures of extravagant expenditure align him with the aristocratic world, Hobson – a classically Heywoodian comic figure, with his constant tag line of “Bones a me” – remains firmly defined as a commoner in spite of his wealth. The bits of personal philosophy he occasionally spouts, such as his comment that “Men are more worth then monie,” spring from a world-view that values personal relationships and neighborly charity (l. 2181). Although Lady Ramsie contrasts his attitude with the usual behavior of “great possessors [...] in this populous Cittie,” suggesting that the merchant class as a whole does not share these ideals, Heywood implies not only that they ought to do so for moral reasons, but that they would benefit *financially* from adopting such an attitude (ll. 2187-88). Hobson appears in the capacity of a peacemaker, healing a standing dispute between Gresham and Sir Thomas Ramsie through informal negotiations and “a cuppe or two of merry-godowne” (l. 420). Ruefully, Gresham admits that he and Ramsie might have avoided seven years of lawyers' fees if they had “at first [...] ended it by friendes / And made our selves merry with the money” (ll. 519-20). The reconciliation paves the way for the building of the Exchange, another project that promises financial advantage to all parties. Throughout this episode, Hobson's arguments resemble the “rhetoric of brotherhood” we have seen in *Henry V*: he appeals to communal values and the easy fellowship of the drinking party. At one point he even echoes the language of radical revolt, with a line that verges on a challenge to the very notion of private property: “*Adams* earth is free for *Adams* sons, / And tis a shame men should contend for it” (ll. 497-98). Hobson consistently works to strengthen the community through friendship, peace-making, and

charity; he treats the impersonality of lawsuits and (as we shall see elsewhere) purely business relationships with suspicion.

With the benefit of four hundred years of hindsight, modern critics tend to read Hobson as a figure of nostalgia. Jean Howard refers to his “cultural obsolescence” (“Competing Ideologies,” 177), and Charles Crupi observes:

[S]omething old-fashioned in [Hobson] conflicts with his participation in new economic structures. With his compassion and eccentricity, his instinctive generosity and comic speech patterns, he seems to exemplify the ‘neighbourly dealing’ and ‘sense of community’ that L. C. Knights found in Stuart drama as ‘a legacy from the Middle Ages’ [255] (“Reading Nascent Capitalism,” 315).

Similarly, Anita Gilman Sherman characterizes a recurring theme of the play as a “clash between two worldviews – the one backward and sentimental, the other forward-looking and grounded in a market economy” (115). Hobson, she argues, “is harking back to a world where monetary relations occur within a community of known acquaintances who help one another out as need arises and who operate on trust” (114). The obsolescence of this worldview is, however, much clearer in retrospect, although the play openly registers nostalgia on both Gresham and Hobson’s part for an older and less greedy age. “O *M. Gresham*,” Hobson comments early in the play, “t’was a golden world / When we were Boyes, an honest Countrey-yeoman, / Such as our fathers were, God rest their soules / Would were white Karsie” (ll. 266-69). Gresham muses that his contemporaries “see our owne disgrace” in the charitable works of former London citizens; by contrast, rich men in the present age “live like beasts, spend time and die / Leaving no good to be remembred by” (ll. 812, 818-19). But despite these commonplaces about the degeneracy of modern times, I would argue that

Heywood's vision of the ideal England is essentially a forward-looking one, if not necessarily an attainable one. It draws together the best aspects of Hobson's "golden world," with its sense of communal and social responsibility, and the new era of investment and profit. Nostalgia invariably translates into resolution and action in this play, as when Gresham vows to outdo his forebears.

The scene in which Hobson encounters an impoverished Tawnycoat in the mist of a fallen world develops this theme more fully. Sherman points out that Tawnycoat, who "both gives and receives charity," is arguably the most idealized figure in the play: "Despite the play's focus on the Royal Exchange, it is not Gresham's career, but Tawnycoat's that seems to exemplify the way Heywood wants charity to circulate in a market economy" (111-2). The peddler embodies the values of trust, reciprocity, and neighborliness; at one point in the play his real name is even given as "John Good-fellow" (ll. 1000 ff.), although it is later rendered as "John Rouland." Although Hobson also values these qualities, he is also capable of letting his desire for gain get the better of him at times, as when he boasts about making a massive profit off of a monopoly on rosary beads. He seems to have lost his way both literally and figuratively before he encounters Tawnycoat, whom he is on the verge of having arrested for debt. Having gone to see his "rents and buildings of the Bancke-side" (ll. 1597), he gets lost in the mist and is reminded of his grandmother's stories. These reminiscences of an older and more rural world replace his profitable holdings with a wilderness of "Fayries and Hobgoblins": "Ten to one this *Robin Goodfellow* / Hath led mee up and downe the mad mans maze" (ll. 1605, 1608-09).

Hobson is actually about to encounter *John* Good-fellow, alias Tawnycoat, who has meanwhile been giving voice to the play's most sustained critique of the relations between rich and poor:

Hard world, when men dig living out of stones,  
As wretched miserable I am inforc't:  
And yet there lies more pittie in the earth,  
Then in the flinty-bosomes of her children,  
For she's content to have her aged brest  
Mangled with matrocks, rent and tome with spades,  
To give her children and their children bread,  
When man more flinty then her stonie Ribbes  
That was their mother, neither by intreates,  
Teares, nor complaints will yeeld them sustenance,  
But tis our ages fault the mightier,  
Teare living out of us, we out of her (ll. 1577-89).

The reference to want of charity on the part of the wealthy as "our ages fault" underscores the frequent hints that the current age is susceptible to greed and self-regard, but it is not irredeemable. When Tawnycoat recognizes his creditor, he expects to be bankrupted. He explains to Hobson that he cannot pay his debts because he has placed the obligations of neighborliness above those of business: "[M]y kind heart, / Seeing my helpelesse neighbours in distresse, / By reason of the long and extreame dearth, / Some I relieved, some trusted with my goods / Whose poverties not able to repay" (ll. 1650-54). Hobson's sympathy is stirred by this tale; on the point of accepting the money, he abruptly refuses to "surfet upon poore mens sweat": "Take it againe," he tells Tawnycoat, "and buy thy children bread" (ll. 1694-5). At this point the mist breaks and Hobson finds himself again, literally and symbolically. When Tawnycoat informs him that he is at Deptford, he exclaims "Bones a me, to Detford came I to do charitie," a statement somewhat inconsistent with his earlier account but indicative of a revised and improved sense of purpose (l. 1699).

It is tempting to read this moment as a simplistic and sentimental solution to the problem of poverty, since it takes place at the personal rather than the institutional level. Crupi remarks that “what Hobson sees is not the cruelty inherent in a system which benefits him, but ‘Gods appointment’ to an opportunity for personal intervention in an individual’s case which affects him emotionally,” with the implication that Heywood, with his emphasis on private and voluntary charity, is sidestepping the real gravity of Tudor social and economic problems (“Reading Nascent Capitalism,” 312). But in depicting the solution to these problems as personal, Heywood *is* making a call for social change of sorts – the way to redeem this fallen world, he argues, is to embrace the ideals that have guided generations of English commoners. What keeps this solution from being purely nostalgic is the fact that Hobson takes his new knowledge back to the city and applies it to his subsequent dealings, blending business and charity. Tawnycoat, likewise, finds a place in the new economy as “an able Citizen late chosen / A Maister of the Hospitall” (ll. 2130-31). Increased profit leads to increased neighborliness in Heywood’s idealized version of early Elizabethan England (which in turn can lead to material gain, as when Gresham and Ramsie agree to abandon their lawsuit by mutual agreement).

At the same time, Heywood seems conscious of the shifting face of community in the early seventeenth century. Ian Archer emphasizes the degree to which increasing social stratification affected the way in which Londoners expressed communitarian values. By the 1590s, company dinners such as the one that concludes *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* were often cancelled in favor of poor relief, the predominant theme of *2 If You Know Not Me*. “Perhaps in this conflict between the claims on company funds of the needs of the poor and

commensality,” Archer writes, “we see something of the changing conception of brotherhood in the sixteenth century. Whereas in the past the company had sat down to a general feast, now the social bond received its most frequent and tangible expression” in charity toward the poor (120). In registering this shift, Heywood acknowledges that the “golden world” of his merchants’ humble beginnings cannot be recaptured, yet makes a powerful argument that neighborly charity continues to be a vital element of their lives as they gain wealth and power.

Hobson’s last appearance is remarkable because a man who speaks and thinks like a commoner commands the attention of a queen, although whether she listens to what Hobson has to say is another question. While Heywood’s Elizabeth is certainly a more benign monarch than either of the kings in the *Edward IV* plays, it is, perhaps, revealing that she is mostly absent from the stage after she becomes queen. The commoner-friendly princess of *If You Know Not Me* has become a monarch who rarely interacts with her subjects, and the play registers at least one highly significant difference between their understanding of social relations and the queen’s. When the queen asks Hobson for money, he is prepared to lend her twice as much as she requests on the basis of a supposed *personal* relationship: “How, bones a me, *Queene* know *Hobson*, *Queene* know *Hobson*? [...] If *Queene* know *Hobson*, once her *Hobsons* purse, / Must be free for her” (ll. 1114-19). He addresses her agent as “good friend” and invites him into the shop, apparently to share a meal with himself and Tawnycoat (ll. 1120). Upon discovering that the queen *doesn’t* acknowledge any personal relationship with him, Hobson is baffled and comically put out: “Bones a me woman send to borrow money / Of one you doe not know, there’s a new tricke” (ll. 2078-79). Sherman describes the incident

as a comedy of role reversals: “[T]he Queen is behaving like a businesswoman and the merchant like a nobleman” (114). But, as earlier chapters of this project demonstrate, Hobson’s attitude is more characteristic of stage *commoners*. The clash between a monarch who perceives the transaction as an impersonal prerogative of rule, and a commoner who views everything in terms of community and relationship-building, is reminiscent of similar situations in *1 Edward IV* and *Henry V*, although here it is recast in milder, comic terms. Darker implications, however, emerge from the fact that the conflict seems resolvable only through Elizabeth’s absence from most of the play, and the disappearance of the other main characters from the conclusion. Perhaps these two ways of looking at social relationships are not, after all, reconcilable.

These three texts provide three slightly different visions of the ideal English commonwealth. As they imagine an England transformed, sometimes subtly and sometimes radically, from reality, the authors inevitably draw our attention to real social problems and inequities. Heywood constantly reminds his audience that there are wealthy people just out of view who do not share Gresham and Hobson’s willingness to help those in need; Hobson himself skirts the edge of becoming one of those exploitative rich when he prepares to accept Tawnycoat’s money. Both Dekker and Shakespeare raise the spectre of exploitation of another sort – virtuous middle-class women forced to yield to unwanted sexual advances from their social superiors; Dekker also dramatizes the impressment and return of a soldier maimed in the king’s wars. These works do, of course, provide happy endings and comic resolutions to situations that have the potential to turn tragic, and it is tempting to read these elements, as many critics have done, as part of a strategy of containment. I believe that they

can also indicate a strategy of empowerment. As intractable as the problems of poverty and abuse of power undeniably were in Tudor and Stuart England, I consider it significant that all three playwrights imagine the solutions to lie within the grasp of the middle-class community, and in particular in the hands of the men and women who help to strengthen neighborly relationships through peacemaking, hospitality, and mutual help.

Amid these idealized portraits of English commoners and their values, certain moments of discord and exclusion do stand out, none of them more conspicuous than the virtual absence of the aristocracy. Although both *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *2 If You Know Not Me* feature brief appearances from the reigning monarchs and other high-born figures, these royal and noble characters normally appear on stage either to praise the commoners' virtues or to provide a foil for them through their own, less exemplary, behavior. In *Merry Wives*, the separation between the two worlds is almost complete; courtiers are welcome in Windsor only if they adapt their behavior to the prevailing standards of the community, which – Shakespeare heavily implies – are morally superior. Throughout this dissertation, I too have run the risk of idealizing the commons – a fault less forgivable in a critic than a playwright. As a counterbalance, the following chapter will conclude this project by considering two plays that reveal a darker side to the social structures that bind the early modern community together: *Arden of Faversham* and *The Witch of Edmonton*. Like *Henry V*, these two plays dramatize the difficulty of dealing justice fairly in a world where the characters are interrelated and interdependent; unlike *Henry V*, they explore the motives that lead individuals to commit crimes such as witchcraft and murder as well as the punishment. In both cases, I would argue, the community bears some of the moral responsibility for the

fact that the crime was committed in the first place, and subsequently does an imperfect job of executing justice upon its own members.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **“A WITCH? WHO IS NOT?”: COMMUNAL GUILT IN *ARDEN OF FAVERSHAM* AND *THE WITCH OF EDMONTON***

Throughout this project, I have emphasized close neighborly relationships as a source of strength, stability, and positive moral reinforcement for community members. Nevertheless, these relationships could also fail, sometimes disastrously. While early modern social networks provided support and mutual help for English commoners both in fiction and in history, their very tightness could also lead to gossip, scapegoating, resentment, and in extreme cases witchcraft and murder. Two tragedies of village life gone wrong, the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* and William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* remind audiences that these everyday familiarities could have a double edge. While the ideal of neighborly charity is present in these texts, exemplified by characters such as Arden's friend Franklin and the Carter family in *The Witch of Edmonton*, both plays focus overwhelmingly on communal relationships that become perverted, leading to violent crime and gross miscarriages of justice.

As the titles of these texts suggest, in both cases the local community in which the action takes place plays as crucial a role in the action as the title character, if not more so. Thomas Arden, a wealthy landowner, has almost no agency; his role in the play that bears his name is largely reactive. Most of the action is engineered by his wife Alice and her lover

Mosby, who repeatedly plot to murder the oblivious Arden with the assistance of his servants, tenants, and neighbors. Mother Elizabeth Sawyer, the eponymous witch, takes a slightly more active part in her own damnation, but she acts in response to mistreatment from her neighbors, and a large portion of the plot concerns a murder for which she is not responsible. In a sense, the villages of Faversham and Edmonton are the real tragic protagonists in these texts, communities that turn on their own and come close to destroying themselves. When neighborly relationships and values go awry, these plays suggest, the result is witchcraft and murder. Moreover, the difficulty of disentangling the relationships and motives that lead up to these crimes makes it almost impossible for local officials to enforce justice fairly.

Much contemporary criticism of *Arden of Faversham* has focused on gender and the home, with a corresponding de-emphasis on the broader web of social and business relationships (as is often the case in early modern literature, the lines between the two are blurred) that exist within the community of Faversham. Julie R. Schutzman argues that this focus imposes an artificial, anachronistic distinction between the public and the private, spheres that are not clearly separated in an early modern village setting. Nevertheless, it is tempting for a modern audience, familiar with Shakespeare's tragedies and histories with their focus on statecraft, to perceive *Arden* as a private and domestic play; or, in more complex readings, as a text that mediates between the private household and the public realm of law and government. In *Adulterous Alliances*, a book that focuses primarily on the relationship between the home and the state, Richard Helgerson argues that the play and the various chronicle accounts of Arden's murder push the boundaries of historiography by

treating the destruction of a middle-class household as noteworthy. Similarly, in Catherine Belsey's influential reading of the play, the players who matter are Arden himself, Alice, and Mosby. "Alice Arden's crime," Belsey argues, is first and foremost a defiance of an absolutist, hierarchical concept of marriage (146). Mosby's death threats toward his partner in adultery, however, suggest that "Alice Arden's bid for freedom [...] would have led, had it succeeded, to a new form of subjection, both for the woman within the family and the family within the state" (147). These interpretations tend to gloss over the Ardens' rather more complicated relationship with local village society – arguably, the intermediate step between family and state.

Lena Cowen Orlin, who researched the archival records surrounding the historical Thomas Arden's<sup>10</sup> murder, notes that these records support Stow's contention that Arden was "evil beloved" among his neighbors – yet the facts we can infer about Arden's public life from these sources point to an entirely different set of potential murderers, men who apparently had economic or professional grudges against him (41). Only one of these people, Greene, appears among the list of those who were ultimately convicted of the murder. By locating the impulse to murder among Arden's wife and domestic servants, Orlin argues, the play and chronicles elide the existence of Arden's professional life in favor of treating the murder as a domestic crime (64). The play, she writes, "is focused strictly on the protagonist's sovereign domestic role and locates its claim to tragedy in his disastrous domestic misrule" (97). Nevertheless, the peculiar thing about this play is that it requires so many forces from outside of the household to unite against Arden. All of the elements of

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<sup>10</sup> Orlin uses the spelling "Arden" to refer to the historical personage and "Arden" to refer to the fictionalized protagonist of the play. I have followed this usage when discussing her work.

“disastrous domestic misrule” are present in the first scene of the play: Alice’s deceit, Arden’s jealousy, Alice and Mosby’s private vow to “murder Arden in the night,” the servant Michael’s treachery and greed (i. 193). Yet Arden is not killed *then*; Alice’s first attempt to murder him, by the purely domestic method of poisoning his broth, fails. Alice and Mosby succeed only after they have enlisted multiple allies and – perhaps most importantly – after a disgruntled tenant enlists the aid of Providence by cursing Arden for his failure to practice charity. Thus, the play implies that Arden can only be killed when the full weight of the community’s resentment is ranged against him.

In my own reading, “Alice Arden’s crime” is in fact the crime of an entire village. The murder that takes place at the climax of *Arden of Faversham* is, both literally and symbolically, a community effort. Arden is stabbed to death by three people, with five others a party to the plot; a ninth individual, Reede, anticipates and perhaps invokes the final calamity with his curse. Most of these people have been on intimate terms with Arden. In addition to his wife and her lover, they include servants, tenants, and neighbors, as well as two hired assassins who are nonetheless connected to the respectable townspeople of Faversham through mutual acquaintanceship. In some cases there are double and triple connections involved; for example, Alice’s maid Susan is also Mosby’s sister and the love interest of two of the other conspirators. The climactic scene thus provides a stark and frightening image of village familiarities turned deadly. Moreover, the events preceding the murder comprise a Byzantine saga of failed plots against Arden’s life and negotiations among the would-be murderers, in which communal relationships and public opinion play a vital role.

Belsey, despite her focus on Alice, acknowledges that “A good part of the plot is taken up with Alice’s negotiations with potential murderers” and details the various transactions and attempted transactions that lead to the recruitment of co-conspirators (132). She reads these events primarily in economic terms, however, while I would argue that the play foregrounds personal influence. Rather than offering a monetary bribe, Alice and Mosby use their (presumed) influence over Susan to enlist the help of her two suitors, Michael and Clarke. Alice also takes advantage of Greene’s standing grudge against her husband to persuade him to assist her. Although she both pays Greene for his part in the murder and promises him the land Arden has wrongfully withheld from him, personal, intangible factors – Greene’s desire for revenge and Alice’s complaint that her husband has ill-treated her – seem to carry greater weight in his decision to join the conspiracy. “I’ll pay him home, whatever hap to me,” he vows; Alice has to rein him in by suggesting that he hire an assassin so that he may live to enjoy his land and profits (i. 515).

In these scenes, Alice Arden proves exceptionally adept at manipulating existing social bonds to serve her own ends. Initially, she is aware that the weight of public opinion is against her and the near familiarities of village life make her affair with Mosby risky: “[T]hese my narrow-prying neighbors blab / Hinder our meetings when we would confer” (i. 135-36; some editions read “marrow-prying,” a turn of phrase which further emphasizes the invasive nature of local gossip). Mosby also perceives the neighbors as a threat, and criticizes Alice for confiding in them and attempting to enlist their help: “You would be so forgetful of our state, / To make recount of it to every groom. / What! to acquaint each stranger with our drifts, / Chiefly in case of murder!” (i. 576-79). Alice, however, knows

what she is doing. Rather than trying to escape the neighbors' tendency to gossip, she exploits it, presenting herself as the victim of an abusive and adulterous husband. As Schutzman observes, "Alice criticizes her husband and invites community disapproval of his weakness and greed. In doing so, she deflects public censure away from her own adulterous actions, thereby allowing herself a modicum of space within which to explore her illicit desires" (292). She goes on to note that Arden, by contrast, shows himself to be notably inept at interpreting and exerting control over village gossip, resulting in his counterproductive plan to leave town and discourage rumors by encouraging Mosby to resort to his home in his absence (305).

Alice's attempts to influence public opinion are facilitated by Arden's other failings as a community member. Her husband is a greedy and exploitative landlord whose actions have already made him unpopular in Faversham. Lenore Lieblein observes that while this side of his character is mentioned only briefly in the chronicle sources, the dramatist greatly expands the roles of two of Arden's disgruntled tenants, emphasizing his failure in his social obligations. Thus, the play adds "a complicating social context to the ethical implications of adultery" (Lieblein 196). In one of these expanded scenes, Greene laments that Arden "doth me wrong / To wring from me the little land I have [...] / Desire of wealth is endless in his mind / And he is greedy-gaping still for gain" (i. 470-75). In the market for a hired killer, Alice finds him easy to persuade. Dick Reede, a poor tenant who has been similarly deprived of his land by Arden, curses him for his greed and wishes he may come to harm on the plot of land he has wrongfully appropriated – a malediction that is shortly fulfilled. In his analysis of the cultural function of land and property ownership in the play, Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.

writes that in his encounter with Reede, Arden “rhetorically casts off the mantle of the beneficent lord”— a vision of land ownership that has a strong personal, reciprocal component – in favor of the notion that property can be used for profit without attendant social responsibilities (“Arden Lay Murdered,” 232). Reede invokes social relationships as insistently as Arden tries to set them aside, appealing first to the needs of his poverty-stricken wife and children, and then wishing in his final curse that Arden “be butchered by [his] dearest friends” (xiii. 35). Of several possible misfortunes that Reede predicts for Arden, this is the one that most closely foreshadows his eventual fate. The encounter leaves the audience deeply conscious that Arden falls victim to his closest acquaintances, and that his failings as a neighbor and landlord leave him vulnerable to their plots.

Arden does possess a handful of social virtues: his friendship with his one ally, Franklin, seems solid, and his servant Michael admits that he has been a good master. Franklin, interestingly, is the one wholly fictitious character in the text. As a dramatic invention, he represents a steadfast source of companionship and affection and provides a foil for the increasingly hostile neighbors who surround Arden. His presence in the play reminds us of how far short of the ideal the other relationships in Faversham have fallen. The brief glimpses of good neighborliness that the play affords are closely associated with Arden’s personal safety. Michael briefly wavers in his design to abet his master’s murder when he considers the many kindnesses Arden has shown to him, and Franklin offers both good counsel and physical protection. One of the murder plots is thwarted by the sudden appearance of a thick and impenetrable mist, which the play implies may be of supernatural origin. Arden likens this odd meteorological phenomenon to “a good companion’s smoky

brain / That was half-drowned with new ale overnight,” an unexpected simile that recalls the cozy tavern world of drinking rituals and sworn brotherhood and associates good fellowship with Arden’s (temporary) escape from his murderers (xi. 6-7). At the same time, however, an uglier vision of village social life lies at the core of the play, for we are constantly aware that *Arden’s* “good companions” have banded together in a conspiracy and are at that very moment closing ranks against him.

The final murder could not take place without the existence of a complex network of personal bonds within the village of Faversham; the conspirators are connected to one another and to their victim through romantic love, kinship, and neighborliness, as well as landlord-tenant and master-servant relationships. By depicting repeated failures on the part of *some* of these people to kill Arden, the play implies that the plot cannot succeed unless they *all* participate. Yet at the same time, the crime results in the utter destruction of these relationships. Mosby foreshadows the ending of the play when he muses that he cannot trust his confederates, including Alice, and plots to murder them or pit them against each other: “I can cast a bone / To make these curs pluck out each other’s throat, / And then I am sole ruler of mine own” (viii. 34-36). Mosby will never achieve the radical individualism he envisions here – the conspirators’ fates are too tightly bound up with one another – but he correctly foresees the fact that Arden’s murder will put an end to any ties of love or loyalty that once existed among them. As Sullivan writes, “What is so striking about the end of the play is that it presents us with a stark image of a dehierarchized and solipsistic world [...] the final scene shows us the conspirators, all members or guests of Arden’s household, bitterly divided, and, in the Mayor’s words, ‘accus[ing] each other’ [*AF*, 18.26]” (246). The Mayor’s sentence and

Franklin's epilogue underscore the symbolic dissolution of relationships among the murderers by physically separating them from each other. Seven people, one of whom is the apparently innocent Bradshaw, are eventually executed in five different towns, while one conspirator takes sanctuary and is later murdered, and another flees and drops out of sight. In conspiring to murder one of its own, the community has effectively destroyed itself.

Bradshaw's story merits closer analysis, as it further illustrates the double-edged nature of personal familiarities in Arden's world. Bradshaw is in the company of his neighbor Greene when they catch sight of the ruffians Black Will and Shakebag. Greene, who is thinking of hiring them to help him kill Arden, asks his companion, "Do you know them?" – a loaded question in a world where personal friendship can pardon or hang a man (ii. 2). In an immediate, literal sense, Bradshaw *does* know Black Will; they were soldiers together. However, he rejects the rogue's attempts to "know" him socially: "Oh Will, times are changed; no fellows now" (15). Will retaliates by cramming the word "fellow" as many times as possible into one speech:

Why, Bradshaw, was not thou and I fellow soldiers at Boulogne where I was a corporal and thou but a base mercenary groom? No fellows now because you are a goldsmith and have a little plate in your shop? You were glad to call me "fellow Will" [...] when I stole the half ox from the victualler, and domineered with it amongst good fellows in one night (18-25).

Familiarities become a battleground as Bradshaw asserts that he is Will's moral superior, while Black Will accuses Bradshaw of trying to distance himself because of social snobbery, rather than genuine possession of the ethical high ground. (Regardless of his motives, Bradshaw is not too particular about his associates to hold a long conversation with Will and enlist his help in locating a thief; consorting with acquaintances in low places is as necessary

in this society as it is dangerous.) At the end of the play, the criminal has the last laugh on the respectable goldsmith. Acting on Bradshaw's introduction, Greene decides to bring both ruffians into the plot. After the murder, Bradshaw is condemned on the flimsy evidence that he has been Greene's letter-carrier. Though not a direct participant in Arden's murder, he will share the grim fellowship of the gallows with Black Will and his co-conspirators, assumed guilty by association.

The chilling ease with which the play dispatches Bradshaw underscores the difficulty of sorting the guilty from the innocent in a community where all the inhabitants are bound to each other by a complex web of social ties. The first scene of the play establishes that the entire village knows about Alice and Mosby's affair, and prominent figures such as Adam Fowle, the landlord of the local tavern, have been aiding and abetting them. Almost any of these witnesses and go-betweens might have been held culpable for Arden's murder in Bradshaw's place. As Orlin comments:

In their insistence on the innocence of Bradshaw [...] the chronicles betray the fact that so serious a rupture of the public order could not find closure easily. And what seems to us to be something akin to superstition in this community-wide sense of incrimination, even among those innocent of direct involvement, was in fact borne out: according to Holinshed, "many hundreds of people" came to the site of Arden's murder "wondering about him"; the name of the town was inextricably linked in the public record and imagination with the crime; and every townsman experienced the onus of association. That sense of personal complicity was undoubtedly compounded, in Arden's case, among the many who had cherished privately their (civic, legal, economic – public) resentments of him (74).

Initially, the closeness of village society plays a vital role in maintaining justice. Neighborly gossip reinforces moral behavior and brings transgressions into the open; Alice worries

because the other villagers rightly criticize her relationship with Mosby. By the end of the play, not only have individual relationships been broken past repair, but the entire concept of community as a moral force has been compromised. Nearly all of the inhabitants of Faversham who have appeared on stage are guilty, if not of direct complicity in Arden's murder, at least of wishing for it to happen, lending unwitting aid to the conspirators, or looking the other way. This massive failure of justice cannot easily be reconciled with the providentialist view of justice to which Franklin, almost the only guiltless figure among Arden's web of acquaintances, pays lip service in the epilogue.

*The Witch of Edmonton* is, I would argue, a marginally more optimistic play, as it ends with a reaffirmation of social and familial bonds among the surviving villagers. Nevertheless, it presents us with another guilty village and some intractable problems of justice. Most recent criticism of this work focuses on the title character, Elizabeth Sawyer, and the way the play constructs the process of witch-making. However, the witch-plot is interwoven with another, equally important, plot strand that raises parallel questions about crime, justice, and communal responsibility. Sir Arthur Claringdon, a prominent member of the local gentry, has seduced his maid Winnifride; when her pregnancy becomes evident, he pays Frank Thorney to marry her. Frank also contracts a more public marriage to Susan Carter, the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman; the father of the bride and groom approve of this match, but Frank prefers his other wife, Winnifrede. He plans at first to run away from his bigamous marriage to Susan, but prompted by the devil – who appears to him, as to Mother Sawyer, in the shape of a black dog – he murders Susan instead. Frank is sentenced to hang after his sister-in-law, Kate Carter, discovers his crime, and he is executed at the same time

as Mother Sawyer. As in the various Elizabethan versions of the Jane Shore story and the dramatic representations of popular rebellion, the community's attitudes toward the two condemned criminals shape the audience's perception of their crimes. Mother Sawyer remains a scapegoat and a pariah, while Frank receives sympathy and forgiveness even from his victim's family.

The Carter family embodies many of the values that we have seen associated with English commoners in other texts: good fellowship, reciprocity, and lack of pretension. Old Carter, the father of Susan and Kate, is a stock figure who has much in common with Simon Eyre or Hobs the tanner – the plain-spoken, good-hearted common man, who may be comically uncouth at times but is also thoroughly sympathetic. Like most such characters, he is proud of his station in life and does not aspire to join the gentry: “No Gentleman, I, Mr. *Thorney*; spare the Mastership, call me by my name, *John Carter*; Master is a title my Father, nor his before him, were acquainted with. Honest Hertfordshire Yeomen, such a one am I; my word and my deed shall be proved one at all times” (I. ii. 3-7). Carter defines the core virtues of his own social station as honesty, faith to one's promises, and generosity to one's guests: “When [Frank Thorney] comes he shall be welcome to Bread, Beer, and Beef, Yeoman's fare; we have no Kick-shaws: full Dishes, whole belly-fulls. Should I diet three days at one of the slender City-Suppers, you might send me to Barber-Surgeons Hall the fourth day, to hang up for an Anatomy” (27-31). Susan, who is of similar mind to her father, spurns a “Scholar-like” suitor who hails from out of town in favor of Thorney's local connections and unpretentious manners (44). But the darker nature of village life in this play ensures that Susan is making a fatal mistake. In the Carters' eyes, Edmonton is the same sort

of place as Shakespeare's Windsor – an idyllic outpost of old-fashioned virtue guarding itself from suspicious suitors from the city. But the audience already knows that Sir Arthur – a pillar of local society, the sort of man who supplies beer for the local morris-dancers and whose letters are believed without question – is guilty of dishonesty and sexual licentiousness, and that Thorney has deceived his family by marrying Winnifrede. It becomes clear in the play's second act that Edmonton hides even darker shadows, as the audience witnesses the events that lead to Mother Sawyer's execution as a witch.

Witchcraft, in early modern England, was the quintessential social crime. It depended on a complex network of relationships in the local community for its very existence, even as it threatened to destroy these relationships. Of the 460 indictments for witchcraft that Alan Macfarlane studied in Essex, in only five cases did the accuser and accused live more than five miles apart (168). The bond that typically linked the accused witch and her alleged victim was neighborliness, rather than kinship, and the sequence of events leading up to the accusation represented a neighborly relationship gone sour. In Macfarlane's words, "Whereas neighbours normally lent each other small objects and showed concern and interest in each other's business, witches were, in a sense, either too good as neighbours or impossible. Either they cursed and banned and became intolerable, or, perhaps worse than this, they were too solicitous, too eager to lend and borrow" (172). In this climate of suspicion, "neighborly" gestures such as giving gifts of food or drink, or inquiring after a sick person, could be perceived as a threat if they came from an alleged witch. Both Macfarlane and Keith Thomas note that witchcraft allegations often began when the *victim* somehow breached the unwritten code of neighborliness and mutual obligations. Such breaches might

involve failing to give food or alms or refusing the witch a privilege which she had traditionally been allowed, providing a motive for malevolent magic. In such cases, “The actual object of the dispute [...] was merely the final stage in the severing of a relationship. Much more was at stake than the particular article or privilege; in effect, it was the total relationship between two neighbours” (Macfarlane 176).

More recently, Marion Gibson has argued that Macfarlane and Thomas’s “charity refused” model is only one of several possible patterns for witchcraft accusations, and that the paradigm changed over time and in response to the parties’ social status. Aristocratic victims of witchcraft, for example, were less likely to be accused of refusing charity, and more likely to be constructed as victims of motiveless malignity (104). Nevertheless, I think the Macfarlane / Thomas model is the most useful one for an analysis of *The Witch of Edmonton*, since it corresponds very closely to what actually happens on stage<sup>11</sup>. In anticipation of these modern historians, the play constructs witchcraft as a highly social crime and places a large measure of blame for Mother Sawyer’s fall upon an uncharitable community.

Other early modern writers understood the process of witch-making in similar terms. Reginald Scot, in his skeptical treatise *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), provides a vivid description of how such a scenario might unfold, which will serve as a useful touchstone for comparative purposes. Witches, he argues, are the outcasts consigned to dwell on the fringes of the community, dependent on charity. Though they exist on the margins of society, they

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas actually quotes from the play at some length in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, using it as an illustration of the vicious cycle by which early modern society “forced the role of witch upon its victims” (526).

nonetheless depend on their neighbors for their survival. Their numbers are drawn from the most wretched of the poor:

[...] women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles [...] They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them [...] These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske: whereby they take upon them; yea, and sometimes think, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of human nature (4).

This state of affairs exacerbates the mutual resentment between the “witch” and her neighbors. Eventually, someone refuses to give her food or reproves her, and she responds by cursing. If the target of the curses coincidentally falls ill or suffers some misfortune, the witch is inclined to believe that she is responsible, and may well confess at her trial “that she hath done, or can doo that which is proper onelie to God himselfe” (5). According to Scot, the community bears much of the responsibility for creating individual witches. A woman is first impressed with the idea that she possesses supernatural powers when she observes that her neighbors *believe* her to be dangerous; she also finds that there are (limited, but tangible) benefits to playing the part. In time, expediency becomes indistinguishable from truth. This process, obviously, can take place only in a community where the social role of “witch” is already familiar. Once people have seized upon the *idea* of witches, usually through the writings of scholarly “witchmongers,” Scot argues that they are almost certain to manufacture the reality.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford depict a similar chain of events, with one additional complication: While Scot made an impassioned argument that witchcraft did not and could not exist, the playwrights take it for granted that it does. Mother Sawyer is clearly guilty in

the world of the play: the audience witnesses her pact with the devil. Though the fact that she is a witch is unambiguous, the play raises a more complicated question about social justice: to what extent are her neighbors responsible for making her what she is? The answer, the text suggests, is that witches are created by the community in which they reside. The “poor, deform’d and ignorant” Elizabeth Sawyer conforms precisely to contemporary stereotypes about witches, but when we first meet her she is not yet a witch (II. i. 3). The rest of Edmonton, however, has already labeled her one. She has become their favorite scapegoat, “a common sink / For all the filth and rubbish of men’s tongues / To fall and run into” (6-8). This vivid metaphor emphasizes one of the dark truths of village life: while the witch’s neighbors hate her, she also fulfills a necessary social function – absorbing the blame for failures and diverting the collected malice of the town into a place where it can do no great harm.

Much as Scot describes, this talk of witchcraft has come very close to creating the real thing:

Some call me witch,  
And being ignorant of myself, they go  
About to teach me how to be one; urging  
That my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so,  
Forespeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,  
Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse,  
This they enforce upon me; and in part  
Make me to credit it (8-15).

Unlike Scot’s melancholy old women, Mother Sawyer is not deluded; she believes only “in part” that her curses have any effect. She has not, as yet, received any advantage from the identity her neighbors have forced upon her, but there is a hint – in her statement that they “teach her how to be” a witch in reality – that this will change. In the aftermath of this

soliloquy, we get a glimpse of Sawyer's relationship with the rest of the community. Old Banks catches her gathering sticks on his land, a minor act of theft necessary for her survival. He shouts, "Out upon thee, witch!" and strikes her; in return, she curses him (16). Although Banks has labeled Sawyer a witch, he evidently has no real fear that her words will harm him, as he continues to beat her. After he exits, she voices her desire to be a witch in fact as well as in name: "Where [...] / May the thing call'd 'familiar' be purchased?" (34-36). Banks' son Cuddy enters with a group of morris dancers, and Mother Sawyer frightens them away; they, too, refer to her as a witch. Left alone, she once again wishes for a familiar:

I have heard old beldams  
Talk of familiars in the shape of mice,  
Rats, ferrets, weasels, and I wot not what,  
That have appear'd and suck'd, some say, their blood.  
But by what means they came acquainted with them  
I'm now ignorant (100-5).

She is already familiar with witch lore; the gossip of these "old beldams" has kindled in her the desire to emulate them. Thus, the *idea* of witchcraft and the pre-defined social role of the witch precede the act, and the treatment that inspires Mother Sawyer to muse upon revenge is a far cry from Old Carter's ideal of generosity.

Despite the fact that the community has already cast her in the role of witch, *actually* committing the crime and laying claim to the title alters Elizabeth Sawyer's social position. Cuddy Banks flatters her and offers her money in exchange for a love spell; she pretends to give him what he wants, meanwhile plotting to avenge herself on the father by deceiving the son. For the first time in the play, her reputation brings her some tangible benefit. Her encounter with the devil has provided her with not only an opportunity for revenge, but silver coins and a certain social cachet. Previously among the lowest of the low, she can now hint

mysteriously about her acquaintance with “a great learned man” (251). Cuddy is not fooled (“Learned devil it was as soon!”), but he is impressed, and throughout this episode he addresses her with new respect (252). As soon as Mother Sawyer begins to conform to the community’s expectations, she receives a payoff that was previously absent. The playwrights show us a vicious cycle in which talk about witches produces their actual presence, which leads in turn to more talk. By the middle of the play, the number of witches in the community has snowballed, in repute if not in fact: a character remarks that “They say we have three or four in Edmonton besides Mother Sawyer” (III. i. 13-4).

The charges against an individual witch also proliferate once it becomes clear to the community that witches serve a useful function. In a darkly comic scene late in the play, various countrymen accuse Mother Sawyer of bewitching them. Although the audience knows that Sawyer is indeed guilty of witchcraft, none of these specific charges are substantiated elsewhere in the play; most are simply absurd. The playwrights satirize the credulity and mixed motives of the accusers. One man recounts how he caught his wife and his serving-man in a compromising position, “and, examining my polecat why she did so, she swore in her conscience she was bewitch’d” (IV. i. 7-8). Rather than admit that he has been cuckolded for more mundane reasons, the husband not only accepts this excuse but supplies the name of the guilty party himself: “What witch have we about us but Mother Sawyer?” (8-9). Mother Sawyer takes the blame for acts ranging from the reprehensible to the merely embarrassing. Her “revenge” on Old Banks, if she is indeed guilty of this charge, falls squarely in the latter category:

BANKS. So, sir [...] having a dun cow tied up in my backside, let me go thither or but cast mine eye at her, and [...] I cannot choose

[...] but run to the cow and, taking up her tail, kiss - saving your worship's reverence - my cow behind, that the whole town of Edmonton has been ready to beiss themselves with laughing me to scorn.

JUSTICE. And this is long of her?

BANKS. Who the devil else? For is any man such an ass to be such a baby, if he were not bewitch'd? (IV. i. 53-62).

The question, of course, answers itself. There is something chilling as well as comical in this portrait of a town trying to save face: Banks has just come within an inch of lynching an old woman because he cannot keep from kissing his cow's rear end. The rural community as a whole is rendered grotesque in this scene, inviting the London audience to look down upon the characters rather than share their anxieties.

The Justice and Sir Arthur Clarington, who enter together in time to keep the mob from hanging Mother Sawyer, represent a different social rank: the well-off, well-educated men responsible for bringing the witch to justice. The Justice initially introduces a measure of reason and moderation into the proceedings. He orders the assembled men to "forebear this violence" and not to threaten Mother Sawyer, as it is against the law (IV. i. 30, 52). Like Henry Goodcole, the clergyman who examined the historical Elizabeth Sawyer, the Justice critiques certain folk beliefs about witchcraft (Briggs 94). When Banks claims that Sawyer must be a witch because she came running when they set fire to some thatch from the roof of her house, the Justice replies: "Unless your proofs / Come better arm'd, instead of turning her / Into a witch, you'll prove yourselves stark fools" (41-3). Nevertheless, as the two men investigate the matter, Mother Sawyer's case finally intersects with the Claringdon / Thorney / Carter plot, and it becomes clear that the legal authorities are as subject as the countrymen to presumption, fear, and corruption.

Sawyer's most eloquent moments come in this scene as she puts her finger on one aspect after another of Edmonton's collective guilt. She states, first, that the abuse of others has driven her into the role of witch: "If every poor old woman / Be trod on thus by slaves, revil'd, kick'd, beaten / As I am daily, she to be reveng'd / Had need turn witch" (79-82).

When Sir Arthur accuses her of having sold her soul, Sawyer replies:

MOTHER. [...] Is he a landlord of my soul, to thrust it  
When he list out of door?

JUSTICE. Know whom you speak to.

MOTHER. A man. Perhaps no man. Men in gay clothes,  
Whose backs are laden with titles and honours,  
Are within far more crooked than I am,  
And if I be a witch, more witchlike (85-91).

The "landlord of my soul" metaphor reminds the listeners that social superiority does not automatically grant its possessors the right to cast moral judgments, and Sawyer replies to the Judge's attempt to reassert social hierarchies by asserting that Sir Arthur is merely "a man." Both men interpret her "sauciness" as evidence of her guilt, but the audience – well aware that Sir Arthur is not the upright and impartial judge that he pretends to be – perceives that Mother Sawyer is only speaking the truth. Sir Arthur's response to this speech, "Y'are a base hellhound!" indicates that her shot has hit home (92).

Sawyer then launches into a defiant, bitter, and highly articulate tirade, in which she attempts to redefine the entire concept of witchcraft to include all of those who serve evil, particularly those of high social rank:

A witch? Who is not? [...]  
What are your painted things in princes' courts,  
Upon whose eyelids, lust sits, blowing fires  
To burn men's souls in sensual, hot desires? [...]  
Have you not city witches who can turn  
Their husbands' wares, whole standing shops of wares,

To sumptuous tables, gardens of stol'n sin,  
In one year wasting what scarce twenty win?  
Are not these witches? (105-20).

Yes, the Justice admits, “but the law / Casts not an eye on these” (120-1). The law makes a fundamental distinction between “witches” and other transgressors, a notion that the playwrights consistently present as arbitrary. In the initial temptation scene, Old Banks’ guilt is set up as a counterpoint to Sawyer’s own; his refusal to allow a poor old woman to gather sticks is legally unpunishable, but morally reprehensible. As the interrogation continues, Sir Arthur’s seduction of Winnifrede takes on a similar function.

Sawyer probably seals her doom when she touches upon this transgression and reminds us that Sir Arthur will never be brought to justice:

Dare any swear I ever tempted maiden,  
With golden hooks flung at her chastity,  
To come and lose her honour, and being lost  
To pay not a denier for’t? Some slaves have done it.  
Men-witches can, without the fangs of law  
Drawing once one drop of blood, put counterfeit pieces  
Away for true gold (141-7).

“Some slaves,” of course, means Sir Arthur; Sawyer has precisely described his treatment of Winnifrede. The play does not make clear whether she has learned this through her familiar, or guessed it, or simply voiced what all of Edmonton has been saying behind closed doors. Sir Arthur, however, takes the reminder of his own guilt as certain proof of hers: “By one thing she speaks / I know now she’s a witch, and dare no longer / Hold conference with the fury” (147-9). The Justice lets Sawyer off with a warning, but she has made a powerful enemy, and the end for her is not far away. Thus, the examination culminates in a powerful moment of dramatic irony: we know that Mother Sawyer is indeed guilty of witchcraft, but

the “proof” of this fact has nothing to do with her own crime and everything to do with Sir Arthur’s.

Like the privileged Sir Arthur Claringdon, Frank Thorney comes close to escaping punishment because of his good standing with his neighbors. In the immediate aftermath of Susan’s murder, the town’s suspicions seize upon two outsiders, Somerton and Warbeck, and only Kate’s fortunate discovery of her brother-in-law’s guilt saves these men from hanging. The play demonstrates how easily wrongdoers can be shielded by their familiarity and good credit with their neighbors if their status within the community is secure. Even when his seduction of Winnifrede is revealed, Sir Arthur receives only a fine and a reprimand because of his higher social rank. Although the justice system spares him, the playwrights do not: the Justice, who emerges as the play’s moral spokesman, advises Sir Arthur, “though the bench hath mildly censured your errors, yet you have indeed been the instrument that wrought all their misfortunes” (V. ii. 1-3). Susan’s father expresses this sentiment more strongly: “[Y]ou are worthier to be hang’d of the two, all things considered; and now make what you can of it” (7-8). In the absence of any real possibility that Sir Arthur will be hanged, Old Carter lashes out at a more convenient scapegoat – Mother Sawyer, now on the way to her execution: “Did she not witch the devil into my son-in-law, when he kill’d my poor daughter?” (V. iii. 21-3). Unlike the countrymen in the accusation scene, the playwrights treat the grieving Carter with sympathy. His desire to place the blame for his daughter’s death on someone other than Frank, a man he knew and trusted, is wholly comprehensible. Frank, he insists, “could never have done’t without the devil” (27). Carter thus attempts to locate the devil outside of his own household and outside the realm of common experience.

The play, however, spares few residents of Edmonton, rendering the problem of guilt and punishment far more complex than Carter wishes. Mother Sawyer replies, bitterly, “Who doubts it, but is every devil mine?” and, as usual, she is every bit as correct as she is malicious (V. iii. 28). In the final scene of the play, we see that the devil is still in the midst of Mother Sawyer’s neighbors, despite all their efforts to distance themselves from the convicted witch. One countryman accuses her of causing a woman’s sow to miscarry, and, in the same breath, admits that the dead piglets “were sent up to London and sold for as good Westminster dog pigs at Bartholomew Fair as ever a great-bellied ale-wife longed for” (V. iii. 38-40). Sawyer, out of patience, says of the countryman and the other bystanders, “These dogs will mad me” (41). Given the incessant punning on the word “dog” elsewhere in this play, there can be little doubt that we are meant to associate these onlookers with Sawyer’s familiar and all he stands for. They remain in the grip of the sins they have tried to displace onto the accused witch. In the play’s final moments, Old Carter acknowledges that there is something deeply unjust about a system that punishes those on the margins of society while ignoring the rot at its core: “[I]f luck had serv’d, Sir Arthur, and every man had his due, somebody might have totter’d ere this, without paying Fines” (163-5). The play thus highlights what is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of witch persecution: it allows the rest of society to imagine that they are fundamentally different from the witch, that they are not responsible for her transgressions, that they can purge their own sins by sacrificing one old woman to the hangman. In truth, the devil – in his visible form as Tom the dog – belongs as much to the local community as he does to Mother Sawyer; Frances Dolan comments on his

role in linking the multiple plots and illustrating the extent to which “witchcraft is simultaneously about domestic *and* social relations” (220).

Nevertheless, the tone of the ending emphasizes reconciliation and recasts the community as a positive force. Frank Thorney repents of his crimes and consigns his surviving family members to the care of the onlookers: “Let me beseech you, Gentlemen, / To comfort my old Father; keep him with yee; / Love this distressed Widow [...] / All help me with your prayers” (135-42). Old ties of kinship are reinforced and new ones established, as Frank and Susan’s fathers comfort one another and Somerton announces his engagement to Kate Carter. Finally, Carter turns to the grief-stricken Winnifrede with words that emphasize the commonality between her suffering and his own family’s grief:

*Old Carter.* [...] Come to me *Winnifrede*, shalt be welcome; make much of her, *Kate*, I charge you: I do not think but she’s a good Wench, and hath had wrong as well as we. So let’s every man home to *Edmonton* with heavy hearts, yet as merry as we can, though not as we would.

*Justice.* Joyn Friends in sorrow; make of all the best: Harms past may be lamented, not redrest (V. iii. 165-71).

Though the sentiments are conventional, the call to “joyn Friends” and the acceptance of the wayward Winnifrede into the Carters’ family circle herald a return to harmonious neighborly relations. Edmonton, unlike Faversham, has been damaged but not broken.

I have chosen to juxtapose these two plays, and include them in a study that focuses mainly on drama set in England’s historical past rather than the contemporary world of the playwrights and audience, because they explore the same central problem of personal versus impersonal justice that lies at the heart of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy, albeit in slightly different terms. One of the core differences, of course, is that crime in the village tragedies is

also personal. Viewers of Shakespeare's histories are not invited to waste much time thinking about why Bardolph decides to steal from the French (because they're French, and besides, the pax wasn't bolted down) or why William Visor ought not to win his court case (because he's a knave). But in these two village tragedies, the audience witnesses the prelude to a crime as well as its commission – indeed, *Arden* is almost all prelude – and understands the complex tangle of village alliances and tensions that make disaster inevitable. A number of the criminals – Greene, Thorney, Sawyer – act as they do because they are, in their own way, victims of injustices that the law cannot punish. The audience has gotten to know these characters as individuals, and thus experiences some of the messy personal sympathies that tend to get in the way of strict justice.

The audience likewise experiences the process of justice in these works, not as a unilateral decision by judge or king, but as a series of awkward compromises. The Mayor of Faversham, after listening to a complicated series of accusations, counter-accusations, and excuses from Alice, Mosby, Bradshaw, Susan, and Michael, orders them all hanged. This decision effectively silences the guilty but earns the Mayor a dying curse from the innocent Bradshaw: "My blood be on his head that gave the sentence" (xviii. 38). The Justice in *The Witch of Edmonton*, a rather more conscientious and self-aware figure, nonetheless finds himself incapable of punishing Sir Arthur, the individual who – in his opinion – has touched off the chain of events that ended in Susan's murder and is thus more deserving of blame than her actual killer. In *Henry V*, justice can be achieved by sacrificing neighborliness; in these two village tragedies, it cannot be achieved at all.

As a final note, much recent criticism of these two plays approaches them from a gender-studies perspective; I have deliberately played down this angle in favor of looking at the text through the less familiar lens of social status and place in the community.

Nevertheless, these two attributes are not easily separated. Mother Sawyer's tirade against the "men-witches" who escape punishment reminds us that her neighbors accuse her of witchcraft because of her sex as well as her poverty. Alice Arden's gender works sometimes to her advantage and sometimes to her disadvantage, but it shapes every aspect of her relationships with other people in Faversham. Being a woman makes her the object of surveillance from her neighbors, but it also allows her to exert influence over her domestic servants and to present herself to Greene as the ill-used victim of a cruel husband.

Neighborliness provides a framework of values to which Alice, Winnifrede, and other distressed women can appeal, much as it does for the victims of social and economic injustices. However, gender and social status do not affect the individual's relationship with the community in precisely analogous ways; in fact, the intricacies of this relationship are arguably so complex that they deserve another book-length project to explore them.

Nevertheless, the conclusion to this dissertation will preview some of the ways in which this study may provide a fresh look at questions of gender in early modern drama.

## **ENDNOTE: GENDER AND THE COMMUNITY**

When I first began researching this dissertation, I conceived of it as a project about gender and social status in early modern history plays, focused on the Jane Shore story. That plan fell by the wayside early on, in large part because I found that the representation of social rank on stage was underexplored and exciting territory in itself, but also because the issues raised by the intersection of gender and degree were so complex that I began to feel that it would take another book-length project to do them justice. Nevertheless, it has always been tempting to draw analogies between the position of women and that of commoners in these texts, and I would like to consider some of the potential implications for gender studies in the final pages of this project.

Many of the values and behaviors that are associated with the English commons on the Renaissance stage are typed as “feminine” in our own culture. Commoners speak indirectly: they spread information through gossip, soften their criticisms with flattery or self-deprecating humor, and communicate as much through context and implications as through direct statements. They value horizontal, reciprocal relationships over hierarchical ones and, even when interacting with people of higher or lower social status, frame their speech and behavior to emphasize commonality. They prize personal connections, and will gladly sacrifice impersonal principles such as justice or obedience to repay personal favors and remain on good terms with their neighbors. These are all useful survival strategies for people

who are born into a position of relative powerlessness, and it is not surprising that they are as gendered now as they were once class-marked. But at the same time, much of the vocabulary used to denote community in early modern English – words such as *brotherhood* and *fellowship* – specifically implies a community of men, and women are excluded or marginalized in many of the social spaces where the bonds of community are forged – the tavern, the workshop, the battlefield. To what extent, then, could early modern women share in the experiences that shape the voices and values of male commoners in this body of literature?

Up to a point, these values seem to cut across gender lines. The supporting framework of the community allows stage commoners to rely on their neighbors for favors and appeal to their social superiors; similarly, it allows women to carve out a space in which they have a voice and some measure of influence. Alice Arden, initially the subject of village gossip, gains power by skillfully manipulating the relationships among her servants and neighbors. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the women are not only valued members of the community but also the ones who finally determine the membership and shape of that community by decreeing that Falstaff's transgressions should be forgiven. This play, to a far greater extent than any of the others in this study, privileges female friendship and depicts a community where the women are the ones holding the social network together, while the men suffer from jealousy, quarrel with one another, and plot revenge over real or imagined humiliations. While I would not go so far as to argue, as Phyllis Rackin does in *Shakespeare and Women*, that Mistress Quickly is absolutely "powerless" in the world of the history plays, I am inclined to agree that she is "empowered by her membership in the social network of the

Windsor community, which includes wives as well as husbands, daughters as well as sons” (68). Both the happily married Mistress Page and the less fortunate Alice Ford are likewise empowered; their friendship allows them to thwart Falstaff’s designs against their chastity and hold their own against a man of higher social standing.

By and large, such communities of women are absent from the other plays, particularly those set in more urban social worlds. Mistress Quickly in *Henry V* and Doll Williamson in *Sir Thomas More* are outspoken and valued figures in their respective neighborhoods, but their primary relationships are with men. To some extent, of course, this is a consequence of the practical conditions of the early modern stage; if a company had only two or three boy actors available to play all of the female parts, it is inevitable that the female characters would be surrounded by men much of the time. Nevertheless, it also testifies to the historical fact that community relationships were often created and strengthened in male-dominated social spaces. Especially in plays set in London, where occupation plays as large a role as geography in defining a community, women tend to be relegated to the fringes of the urban social world. Women were rarely apprenticed and usually barred from practicing a trade unless they were widows of a company member; still, Steve Rappaport points out that they probably worked in their husbands’ and fathers’ shops (36 ff.), and it seems plausible that they may have made social contacts in this setting. Among the acts of charitable relief performed by livery companies was providing for the widows of deceased members; however, remarriage made women ineligible for this benefit and effectively severed their relationship with their former husband’s company (198 ff.). Thus, women existed on the periphery of the communities of artisans and tradesmen that formed one of the core social

structures in early modern London. “Gender,” Rappaport concludes, “was effectively the most important criterion for distributing access to communal resources in early modern London” (216), and it seems likely that women did not receive the full *social* benefits of company membership either.

Urban women’s identities as members of a particular community were therefore more fragile and more fluid than those of men, a fact which is evident on stage. Jane Dampport in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, for example, slowly drifts away from her husband’s fellow-shoemakers when he is away at the wars. She does not seem particularly close to Margery Eyre, the other woman associated with the workshop. While the other shoemakers welcome the injured Ralph back into their circle and remind the audience of the benefits of guild-brotherhood (“Thou shalt never see a shoemaker want bread [i.e., because the others will help him], though he have but three fingers on a hand”), Margery has a different story to tell about Jane’s relationship with this community:

O Ralph, your wife! 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, indeed, we heard not of her;  
but I hear she lives in London – but let that pass. If she had wanted  
to, 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 (x.87-103).

The Elizabethan proverb “ka me, ka thee,” which John Heywood glosses as “one good tourne askth an other” is normally an affirmation of neighborly reciprocity and mutual help (I. xi. 1065). But in this instance, Margery uses it to justify cutting all ties of neighborliness with

Jane – who is in fact alone, grieving, and very much in need of assistance, though she has not asked for it.

Jane's plight calls attention to the precarious position of a woman without a husband present to ensure her position in the community. Jane loses Margery's approval by acting too "stately" "because she was married," yet if she were not married to Ralph, she would have no claim on the shoemakers' friendship in the first place. The bawdy double-entendre of "opened her case," though characteristic of Margery's speech and almost certainly unintentional on Margery's part, suggests one reason why Jane may have been reluctant to approach Simon or one of the other men for assistance: in a culture fiercely protective of female chastity, even the appearance of sexual misconduct could lead to permanent social ostracism. Jane is in a lose-lose situation, as she becomes vulnerable to sexual pressure from Hammon after she loses contact with the shoemakers. At the conclusion of one of the play's darkest scenes, she chooses to cut herself off from human contact, perceiving solitude as the only alternative to Hammon's tactless attempts at wooing: "[A]ll grief / Desires to be alone" (xii. 120-21). Jane does not remain alone for long, as membership in a social network of some sort was a matter of survival for a woman in early modern London. She yields, unwillingly, to Hammon's entreaties and is about to marry him when Ralph and his fellow-journeymen stage a rescue. Ralph's return signifies her re-entry into the community of shoemakers; her welcome there is wholly tied to her husband's presence.

Similarly, Jane Shore in Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* plays loses her ties with one community, consisting of her kinsmen and neighbors, when she becomes the king's mistress. Her own brother, Francis Emmersley, maintains a neighborly relationship with Matthew

rather than with Jane. Unlike Jane Dampont, Mistress Shore succeeds in establishing a completely different set of social relationships in place of the ones she has lost. In both cases, most of these relationships are with men. Jane has one female confidante, Mistress Blage, but Heywood emphasizes her misplaced confidence in her friend's advice and the eventual rupture of the friendship rather than depicting the social bonds between women as a source of genuine intimacy and mutual support. Mistress Blage repudiates her old friend after it becomes clear that acknowledging Jane's existence is a political liability:

And what can be objected [...]?  
That once I loved her? Well, perhaps I did.  
But now I am of another humour;  
And women all are governed by the moon,  
Which is, you know, a planet that will change (2 *Edward IV*,  
18.211-215).

This passage constructs feminine willfulness as antithetical to neighborly loyalty. Although the audience is supposed to perceive Mistress Blage's argument that being a woman excuses her from being a loyal friend to Jane as flimsy and disingenuous, most of the exemplars of gratitude and good fellowship in the play are, indeed, male. Jane's most constant and supportive relationships are with men, such as the petitioners Aire and Jockie. Thus, Heywood does, to some extent, present the virtues of community as gendered as well as class-marked: they are forged in the camaraderie of apprenticeship and proper to men of the middling sort. Nevertheless, Jane's peculiar relationship with Queen Elizabeth, her paramour's wife, complicates this picture.

A number of royal women in the history plays, including Princess Elizabeth in *I If You Know Not Me* and Queen Anne in *Woodstock*, are depicted as sympathetic to commoners and their concerns, though powerless to help them. Queen Elizabeth's characterization in 2

*Edward IV* is another instance of this literary trope; in this particular case, the Queen's ability to imagine herself in Jane's place may be aided by the fact that she herself has married above her station. (Heywood takes some pains to remind his audience of the Queen's origins in the opening scene of *1 Edward IV*, but does not directly mention it again.) When she summons her husband's mistress to her presence, the Queen intends to excoriate her, but her own rhetorical strategies force her to acknowledge her kinship with Jane. She begins by exhorting Jane to imagine that their roles are reversed:

Why, as I am, think that thou wert a queen,  
And I, as thou, should wrong thy princely bed,  
And win the King, thy husband, as thou mine:  
Would it not sting thy soul? Or if that I,  
Being a queen, while thou didst love thy husband,  
Should but have done as thou hast done to me:  
Would it not grieve thee? (10.45-51).

The appeals here are reminiscent of Thomas More's speech to the Ill May Day rebels: the queen invites Jane, a commoner, to imagine herself in a position of power and urges her to recall her own experience of royal abuses, lest she become a tyrant herself. But the Queen goes on to imagine herself in *Jane's* place – an imaginative leap which More never explicitly makes, although he will himself be labeled a rebel and a traitor later in the play. "[I]f my state had been as mean as thine," Queen Elizabeth admits, "And such a beauty to allure his eye, / Though I may promise much to my own strength, / What may have happ'd to me, I cannot tell" (101-04). Forced to acknowledge the commonality between herself and Jane, which she imagines in terms of their shared powerlessness, the Queen concludes, "Thou art my sister" (122).

Queen Elizabeth's confession is a remarkable moment because it bridges the chasm between ruler and subject, a division in rank and ideology that seems impenetrable in most of the other plays from this era. King Edward and Prince Hal attempt to find common ground by drinking and feasting with the commoners, but they do not fully grasp the significance of these social rituals and create false expectations of reciprocity. The King in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Queen Elizabeth in *2 If You Know Not Me* are benevolent but remote; they are amused by Eyre and Hobson, but do not stay long to hear what the craftsmen have to say. Only the Queen in *Edward IV* is able to build a genuinely reciprocal relationship with Jane. She succeeds in part because her affection and fellow-feeling for her husband's mistress are genuine rather than self-serving, but also because of her own relative powerlessness within her marriage. The queen first tells Jane not to kneel in her presence, then kneels *with* her when she falls to her knees before the king – a dramatic visual representation of their shared subjection.

The "sisterhood" of this moment is nothing like the "brotherhood" of a play like *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, forged in laughter, drinking, and good fellowship – but it is somewhat akin to the "brotherhood" of the Bates-Court-Williams scene in *Henry V*, which takes place among men who are likewise powerless and subject to their king's will. The ethos of community that prevails among the English commons in these plays is born of powerlessness, but it is not merely a survival tactic for the desperate. The truly disaffected – former soldiers turned criminals like Pistol and Black Will – cling to it when they have nothing else to cling to, and the commoners in *Woodstock* hope in vain that it will keep them safe from Tresilian's depredations. But at the same time, Renaissance playwrights could

imagine a world where wealthy citizens like Gresham and Eyre take neighborliness as their guiding principle, where Old Carter's kindness to Winnifrede signals that the gaping social wounds left by the murder in *The Witch of Edmonton* are beginning to heal, and where a powerful official like Brakenbury can place his debt of gratitude toward Jane Shore above his duty to obey the king. In short, they argued for the importance of these values at all levels of society, and the Queen's willingness to accept Jane as a "sister" carries within it the seed of possible social change as well as the consciousness of present social inequity.

I am not arguing for radical social reformism on the part of Heywood or any of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, this body of drama, written primarily by and for English commoners, invites its audiences to consider how everyday social rituals incorporate or inform political rhetoric, critique the meaning of terms such as "treason" and "justice," and imagine what their society might look like if its leaders were to adopt the principles that governed commoners' lives. In doing so, these authors pushed audiences toward a broader conception of what was politically and historically significant, and created a fictionalized – though recognizable – world on stage where important ideas can be voiced by women as well as commoners.

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