

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

In danger of undoing: The Literary Imagination of Apprentices in Early Modern London

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1fx380bc>

### Author

Drosdick, Alan

### Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

*In danger of undoing: The Literary Imagination of  
Apprentices in Early Modern London*

by

Alan J. Drosdick

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Joel B. Altman, Chair

Professor Jeffrey Knapp

Professor Albert Russell Ascoli

Fall 2010



Abstract

*In danger of undoing: The Literary Imagination of  
Apprentices in Early Modern London*

by

Alan J. Drosdick

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Joel B. Altman, Chair

With the life of the apprentice ever in mind, my work analyzes the underlying social realities of plays such as Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Jonson, Chapman, and Marston's *Eastward Ho!*, and Shakespeare's *Henriad*. By means of this analysis, I reopen for critical investigation a conventional assumption about the mutually disruptive relationship between apprentices and the theater that originated during the sixteenth century and has become a cliché of modern theater history at least since Alfred Harbage's landmark *Shakespeare's Audience* (1941).

As a group, apprentices had two faces in the public imagination of renaissance London. The two models square off in *Eastward Ho!*, where the dutiful Golding follows his master's orders and becomes an alderman, while the profligate Quicksilver dallies at theaters and ends up in prison. This bifurcated image of apprentices arises, I argue, from the national implementation of apprenticeship as a means of social control intended to create a supervisory system over masterless men in response to a century-long expansion of vagrancy. To reinforce this system, there arose a literature of apprenticeship, which included conduct manuals, popular ballads, prose works such as those of Thomas Deloney, and plays like those mentioned above. However, I have found that the crown's encouragement of apprenticeship was not without its perils. If the government wanted young men without better prospects to sign away their freedom for seven years or more, those men needed truly to believe that serving an indenture would elevate their socioeconomic station. If that promise proved false, apprentices would abandon their posts and revert to vagrancy. If it proved true, the widespread upward mobility enabled by apprenticeship would contribute to the formation of a proto-middle class that could exert pressure on the gentry. Thus, apprentices posed a double threat to the traditional societal hierarchy: they were in danger of undoing old lines that divided rulers from the ruled, either by undermining normative power structures through vagrancy or by ascending the social ladder, a prospect offered to induce them not to be vagrants.

Critics have long understood apprentice literature as instructive paeans to the redemptive power of honest work and the presumptive realization of individual potential.

Characters such as Golding, Deloney's Jack of Newbury, and Dekker's Simon Eyre are extolled as exemplary figures meant to be imitated by audiences and readers, their meteoric success the carrot to entice young men patiently to endure the often grueling labor of apprenticeship. However, that carrot seemed increasingly to recede, as over half of the many thousands of apprentices who began indentures failed to complete them, producing large scale systemic frustration. To stem the tide, a number of conduct books appeared which instructed young men merely to *act* like good apprentices, with an eye toward future independence and prosperity. This performative aspect might facilitate the rise from apprentice to master, but it also helped masters keep their apprentices content. By falsely acting in a fashion that reinforced a causal link between compliant service and inevitable success, masters could safely enjoy the cheap labor of apprentices without threat of revolt. My work explores how suspicion of the perfidy of apprenticeship and the performance of artisanal identity quietly inheres in the very literature thought to celebrate apprenticeship by providing examples of honest labor and fit reward.

## Table of Contents

Introduction:	
Dick Whittington and the Story of Apprentices.....	ii
Chapter One:	
What is an Apprentice?.....	1
Chapter Two:	
Bringing Down the House: Theater Riots and Conduct Books.....	32
Chapter Three:	
Performing Artisan Identity: Ambition, Industry, and Imitation in Thomas Deloney and Thomas Dekker.....	53
Chapter Four:	
“I hope I am my father’s son”: What Gentle Apprentices Can Learn.....	88
Conclusion.....	110

## Introduction:

### Dick Whittington and the Story of Apprentices

Dick Whittington is the most famous apprentice in English history. Despite the fact that he was born in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, English schoolchildren today can attend pantomimes each Christmas season featuring the adventures of Dick Whittington and his famous cat. A film version of the pantomime was released in 2002. *Whittington*, an adaptation of the legend of Dick Whittington for young adults, won a Newberry Honor Award in 2006. The instructive power of the Dick Whittington story—trumpeting the benefits of determination, hard work, and loyalty—remains as potent today as it did during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it first arose. For while Dick Whittington was a real figure in London’s social and political history, “the historical Richard Whittington and his mythical cat were first united in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I”<sup>1</sup> in the form of popular ballads and a now lost play entered in the Stationer’s Register in 1605. The figure of Dick Whittington represents the definitive example of what I identify as the literary imagination of apprentices during the early modern period. He is a fiction constructed out of slivers both of the real experience of apprenticeship and of the social function apprenticeship was designed to serve. He also provided a convenient but ultimately illusory blueprint for the tens of thousands of Englishmen who set out to earn their fortunes in London.

If the legend of Dick Whittington provided an inspirational fiction to young boys during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, his true story reveals many of the hurdles that would come to face those young men as they served their indentures with established shopkeepers hoping to emulate the famous Lord Mayor’s ascendance. The appeal of the Dick Whittington legend resonated with those in the early stages of their careers, for it held up an example of what perseverance and obedience might bring to a lowly apprentice. On the other hand, the historical figure of Dick Whittington demonstrates that the concerns of a man who achieves great wealth and power after serving an apprenticeship do not necessarily include preserving those same opportunities for following generations of apprentices. Dick Whittington, legend and man, provides a microcosm of the state of apprenticeship in early modern London, as both display the true potential for social mobility available in England’s burgeoning capital, but both also reveal potential problems with the apprenticeship system and the emergent concept of crafting one’s identity through industrial urban labor.

Though the legend adopted variant forms, the basics of the story provided easy morals for its audience to digest. Dick Whittington, a poor lad from the country, makes his way to the great city of London, where he had heard the streets were lined with gold. Upon his arrival, he discovers that, beyond a lack of golden thoroughfares, London proves a very hostile environment for a young man such as himself. Eventually, he procures a position as an apprentice to a wealthy merchant, but hates the grueling menial labor that comprises his duties. His only solace is his loving cat, which he has either brought from his country home or befriended in the city, depending on the version. One

---

<sup>1</sup> Barron, Caroline M. “Richard Whittington: the Man behind the Myth.” *Studies in London History*. Eds. A. E. J. Hollaender and William Kellaway. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969. 197-248. p. 197.

day, his merchant master, organizing a trading expedition to an exotic foreign land, demands all of his people contribute something to the venture, and all Dick can give is his beloved cat. Distraught at both the loss of his cat and his unpleasant work, Dick begins to run away from his apprenticeship back to the country, but hears church bells ring out and somehow speak to him. They tell him to turn back, as he will one day be thrice elected Lord Mayor of London. As it turns out, the prince of the land where the ship arrives has a tremendous rat infestation in his palace and buys Dick's cat for a fortune. The merchant returns to London and gives Dick the money his cat has fetched. With his newfound riches, Dick becomes a successful merchant in his own right, marries the daughter of his former master, and goes on to fulfill the church bells' prophecy by thrice serving as Lord Mayor.

The most salient moral to be drawn from this legend stipulates an apprentice's loyalty to his master as a necessary condition for his future success, even if he does not understand or appreciate his master's actions. The legend gained currency in the late sixteenth century with apprentices because Dick, though he had to endure some hardship, proved a poor boy from the country could rise to the highest social and financial ranks; it gained currency with merchants because it instructed their apprentices to behave obediently. However, the story also glosses, often speciously, the subtler challenges an apprentice faced during his years of servitude. First, the chances of a solitary, poor young man finding a station of apprenticeship with a wealthy merchant were virtually nonexistent. By the end of the sixteenth century, the choicest apprenticeships went to the second sons of already situated Londoners and involved a payment much like a dowry. If a boy like Dick did somehow manage to gain such a position, he would not have been so devastated at the loss of his cat. Apprentices possessed only what their masters allowed them, as the master acted as a surrogate father. In addition, when the church bells call to Dick as he leaves London in frustration, they tacitly prevent him from absconding to the country with valuable knowledge of the mystery of his master's craft before completing the term of his indenture, a common problem. Finally, after Dick has become a wealthy merchant on his own, he marries his former master's daughter, thus fulfilling the impossible dream of many an apprentice, who were not only prohibited from dallying with any woman of the master's house, but were expected to remain chaste for the whole of their seven year term.

While the legend of Dick Whittington artfully addresses several issues potentially important to early modern apprentices in London, the man's actual history paints a very different picture. Richard Whittington was not born a rough country lad, but the third son of a knight with a modest estate in Herefordshire, Sir William Whittington, who died in 1358. At the time of William's death, his house was in debt, so there was no money to support the family's three sons. As Caroline M. Barron reports, "Richard, the youngest, must have travelled to London where he first appears in 1379, sufficiently established in his new environment to be able to contribute 5 marks to a civic gift."<sup>2</sup> He belonged to the company of mercers, who practiced the trade of rich textiles such as silk and linen, a profession populated largely by men who hailed from some level of privilege. However, mercery did not end up being Whittington's life's work: "He made money because he was adventurous enough to use it and did not give way to the temptation to hoard.

---

<sup>2</sup> Barron p. 199.



Versatility, adaptability, and a certain calculated bravado are the hallmarks of Whittington's financial career, which encompassed three spheres of activity: as a mercer, as a royal financier and as a wool exporter."<sup>3</sup> A standard career as a mercer could not satisfy Whittington's great ambitions.

Although he appears to have done well for himself as a mercer, Whittington shifted his focus away from the trade that allowed him to establish himself in London. Barron draws this conclusion by assessing the number of people to whom Whittington extended the same opportunity he enjoyed upon his arrival in the capital:

The picture of his declining interest in the mercery trade is borne out by the enrollment of his apprentices to be found in the wardens' accounts of the Mercers' Company. In the years 1391-2, when the accounts began, he had five apprentices enrolled; in 1395-6 he paid to enroll a further two apprentices; and in 1400-1 he paid for two more, but after this date he took on no new apprentices to learn the skill of mercery. (202-3)

Rather than taking on young mercers to train and welcome into the ranks of his livery company, Whittington turned to leveraging the fortune he had earned as a mercer. He lent large sums to Richard II with the intention "to buy the royal ear and the public eye."<sup>4</sup>

His strategy succeeded, as Richard appointed Whittington to the post of Lord Mayor when the previous occupant died in office in 1397, temporarily infringing on the right of Londoners to choose their own mayor. Perhaps Richard wanted a friendly mayor because of "the political manoeuvres which culminated in the arrests of the duke of Gloucester and the earls of Warwick and Arundel." Given Richard's inclination to suppress popular uprisings, Londoners "clearly saw the advantage of having as their mayor a man who was on good terms with this unpredictable king. Accordingly Richard Whittington was elected to continue as mayor in October 1397."<sup>5</sup> Whittington was so comfortable in the corridors of power that "he was the only individual Londoner to lend money to the king between August 1397 and Richard's deposition,"<sup>6</sup> not that his influence ended with Richard's rule. "Almost immediately after his accession Henry Bolingbroke on 1 November 1399 appointed three Londoners to be members of his council, acknowledging thereby the important role which the citizens had played in his usurpation,"<sup>7</sup> and Whittington was one of those three. Far beyond the simple country boy of legend, the real Dick Whittington was not a mere model merchant who achieved great wealth, but a political player with significant influence at the very highest levels of government.

Whittington was not exceptional only in his unusual wealth and power, however, but also in how he conceived of success and how he channeled his money into that particular framework. As Barron notes, "what is remarkable is that, unlike almost all the other great London merchants, he does not appear to have invested any considerable

---

<sup>3</sup> Barron p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> Barron p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> Barron p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> Barron p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> Barron p. 216.

proportion of his wealth in land. His concerns seem always to have been civic and public rather than personal and proprietary.”<sup>8</sup> Whittington was a businessman through and through, preferring to keep his funds in liquid assets that could be distributed to whatever venture might provide the best return. Barron goes on to speculate: “Perhaps it was because he came from a gentle background that Richard Whittington did not feel the same urge to ape the landed gentry which drove many of the successful London merchants away from the City and into the fertile home counties.”<sup>9</sup> Rather than building a country estate, which would have separated him from both the industrial center of the capital and the mark of commerce anathema to traditionally moneyed gentlemen, Whittington devoted his considerable resources both to improving London and to imprinting his legacy on it.

Whittington and the executors of his estate guaranteed that his name could be found throughout the city. Many Londoners at the close of the sixteenth century would have been familiar with “Whittington’s almshouses for thirteen poor men or women and Whittington’s College for secular priests attached to the church of St. Michael Paternoster Royal.” In addition, most would have known “of the fountains in St. Giles’ courtyard and north of the church of St. Botolph, of the rebuilding of Newgate prison, of the endowments for the libraries at Grey Friars and at Guildhall, of the contributions for the new Guildhall built in the second quarter of the fifteenth century and for the repair of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital as well as the foundation of the college and almshouse.”<sup>10</sup> The legend of Dick Whittington literally was written into the city of London itself, woven into the physical structures and civic services citizens experienced every day. These monuments to Whittington’s phenomenal prosperity, when taken in conjunction with the pervasive story of his meteoric success, testified before the thousands of young men flooding into London each year to begin an indenture that apprenticeship provided a viable means to financial security and social stability. Not all of them expected eventually to be elected Lord Mayor, but most conceived of apprenticeship as an avenue to probable if not inevitable success. More than half were wrong.

This dissertation seeks to explain how apprenticeship, a process through which London society in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries sought to discipline and reproduce its commercial base, simultaneously constituted a rite of passage endured by an overwhelming majority of men in the capital and somehow was perceived to breed a mutinous subculture bent on tearing down established social structures. This contradiction, apprentice as obedient cog vs. apprentice as subversive agitator, produced an imaginative literature in which the representation of apprentices took unexpected forms. Various modes of publication—whether produced for government regulation, as practical guides for masters and workers, as commercial prose fiction aimed at a middling sort readership, or as plays written for an audience that included both former and current apprentices—functioned to mediate anxiety about the hierarchical destabilization that was rapidly taking place in the period. Most importantly, the institution of apprenticeship cultivated an impression of individual autonomy vis-à-vis professional life, and that impression was leveraged by government and the larger society in numerous ways to

---

<sup>8</sup> Barron p. 210.

<sup>9</sup> Barron p. 224.

<sup>10</sup> Barron p. 198.

control the masses. My project examines how apprentices came to occupy their vexed social position and how authors represented the fraught figure of the apprentice.

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Apprentices maintained a precarious place in the social structure of early modern London, and their experience provides a revealing touchstone of communal anxiety. My project explores their representation in the theater, their theatricalization in prose, and their instruction in a theatrical mode of behavior.

To establish the proper historical framework, my first chapter, “What is an apprentice?”, traces the evolution of apprenticeship in the sixteenth century. I identify who these young men were, where they came from, what rules governed their indentures, and how the Crown exploited the apprenticeship system to control the physical and social mobility of the general population. To address a rapidly expanding population, with attendant expansions of poverty and vagrancy, the government passed the Statute of Artificers (1563), which required poor young men to serve indentures, promising apprentices the potential to earn a living through individual effort regardless of their background. However, close study of the law reveals it as an attempt to preserve the extant social hierarchy. Minimum familial incomes and land holdings restricted access to apprenticeships with better livery companies, and commentary on the statute vehemently argued that children should follow in the vocational footsteps of their parents. Why would the son of a farmer choose to be a farmer if he could choose to work indoors as a cooper, so the argument went. Through readings of statutes, memoranda, and royal proclamations over the course of the sixteenth century, I outline how apprenticeship provided only the semblance of opportunity to countless young men, over half of whom failed to complete their indentures, placing them in violation of the Statute. For this reason, Queen Elizabeth, toward the end of her life, assumed no functional difference between apprentices and rogues.

Building upon the understanding that apprentices and outlaws came to be conflated in the public consciousness, I explore contemporary reactions to two sites of putative apprentice disorder in my second chapter, “Bringing down the house”—the theater and the household. Modern theater historians follow the example of their forbears in casting the playhouse as a kind of metastatic gathering place for apprentices, where they could commingle with one another and also with unsavory types to form mobs and hatch subversive plots. I focus on what is usually described as the most notorious apprentice theater riot of the age—the attack on the Cockpit of Shrove Tuesday 1617—which also happens to be a part of the worst general riot to strike London in the period. Apprentices were accused of being primary culprits in this riot. Careful analysis of Acts of the Privy Council and livery company court minutes reveal, however, that apprentices did not necessarily compose a large portion of the perpetrators, although authorities cite the assumed apprentice participation in this riot for years to come as an incentive for masters to enforce stricter control on their wards. In fact, livery company records indicate no concern whatsoever over what was positioned as the worst riot, involving a theater or otherwise, of the period. As we will explore further in the final chapter, while concern regarding apprentices at the theater did not here explicitly involve the fear that they would learn from a negative example onstage, contemporary drama did register the fact that apprentices who attended the theater were dangerous. The relationship of apprentices to the theater also plays a significant role in many seventeenth century

apprentice conduct books meant to stabilize households, which instruct apprentices merely to act dutifully toward their masters in order to advance their station. While outwardly condemning theaters as houses of ill repute, these books, in referencing drama as a standard for behavior, open a space for the false performance of artisanal identity intended only to reap material rewards.

Ironically, even if the authorities were not expressly concerned with the potential dangers of apprentices learning at the theater that performance and reality did not need exactly to coincide, some authors recognized how the possibility of false performance on the part of masters could open the door to abuse of the apprenticeship system. Concern that a system built upon ambition, industry, and imitation is ripe for advantageous false performances finds voice in the works of two authors closely associated with apprentices and the merchant class, Thomas Deloney and Thomas Dekker, and forms the basis of my third chapter, "Performing Artisan Identity." Critics have largely consigned Deloney to a footnote on popular literature of the Renaissance, alleging that he wrote prose works depicting exemplary working class heroes like Jack of Newbury as models to be emulated by his working class readership, and thus reinforcing one of the controlling dynamics of apprenticeship: that low men on the guild totem imitate accomplished companymen in hopes of achieving like prosperity. On the contrary, I argue that Deloney subtly critiques the potential to exploit apprentice faith in the *cursus honorum* by casting Jack as theatrically self-aware, wrapping himself in the russet cloak of his humble roots in order to convince his workers that their dedicated labor (which has benefited him) will lead to fantastic success just as his early earnest work led to his affluence. In Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, adapted from Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, the play's romantic protagonist is a profligate gentleman who briefly deigns to pretend to be a Dutch shoemaker, but eventually reestablishes his position above his coworkers as a knight, while the true shoemakers must content themselves with a Shrove Tuesday pancake feast. This suggests that the gentle protagonist was always going to find his way back to the top of the social order where he belonged, that the system of apprenticeship is merely a tool that enables this kind of return to stasis while appearing to facilitate change, and that the idea of the gentle apprentice is little more than a comforting oxymoron.

In "What Gentle Apprentices Can Learn," the dissertation concludes with a more detailed analysis of this concept of the gentle apprentice as represented in contemporary drama. Gentle apprentices in plays epitomize the potential that apprenticeship can be mere performance, that there is always the possibility that a character is simply a gentleman under certain duress pretending to be an apprentice until he no longer must (as was the case with Lacy in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*) or an apprentice pretending to be a gentleman. I examine this phenomenon in three sets of plays: Jonson, Chapman, and Marston's *Eastward Ho!* and Massinger's *The City Madam*, Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* and Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and finally Shakespeare's *Henriad*. For example, in *Eastward Ho!*, the gentle apprentice Quicksilver marks himself as profligate by quoting plays, but redeems himself by putting on a convincing performance of humility. Conversely, in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the 'real' apprentice Rafe pleases his master by reciting a speech from Shakespeare, but his blind obedience to the stylistic and thematic tastes of his class enable the action of the city comedy, *The London Merchant*, that denigrates him. In *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*, both Bolingbroke and Hal cast themselves as rebellious

apprentices before ascending to the throne. Shakespeare artfully distills conflicting impressions of apprenticeship into seemingly antithetical rhetorical strategies that somehow both impress the ideal that, even at the level of kings, a man achieves greatness, not because of his bloodline, but through his own will to succeed. Neither man attains the crown by emulating the model of his predecessor, but both look to apprenticeship as a constructive negative archetype in which to ground imitative strategies. Thus, the performance of kingship emerges from the performance of apprenticeship, leaving the common apprentice with an impression that he is allied to the monarch, an impression of allegiance that grants the monarch the power to rule.

## Chapter 1

### What is an Apprentice?

#### I. Definitions of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship was not a static institution in England during the early modern period. While it began the province only of guilds affecting a tiny sliver of the population, it expanded to become a national institution impacting various segments of the populace in important ways. The goal of this chapter is to trace a picture both of apprenticeship and an apprentice during the English renaissance in order better to explore how the institution and the individuals will come to be represented in, and in some cases defined through, contemporary literature and drama. At its essence, apprenticeship was designed to control the masses, and for a time it succeeded by bringing people to cities in order to work. The system proved untenable, however, and the ranks of the poor and unruly swelled in cities, particularly London, as failed apprentices who had come to work stayed even if there were no opportunities for honest employment. Thus, apprenticeship could be understood to contribute to the epidemic of masterless men committing crimes that it had been implemented to curtail. This led to a bifurcated image of the apprentice in the public consciousness: on the one hand responsible and industrious, on the other a constant threat. This image will be explored in later chapters, after a sufficient historical framework has been established.

Mechanisms of apprenticeship had been in place during the medieval period in Britain, implemented by small local guilds. However, the universal enforcement of apprenticeship only became state-sanctioned policy in the sixteenth century with the 1563 Statute of Artificers, often referred to as the Statute of Apprentices, and the influence of the system of apprenticeship as a vehicle for regulating social, political, moral, and industrial standards reached its zenith in the early seventeenth century. As O. Jocelyn Dunlop, the foundational modern historian to trace the advancement of English apprenticeship and child labor, explains, “The most important feature in [apprenticeship’s] development is its gradual evolution from an insignificant private custom into a public institution.” She adds that, “though it was at first but one way, and that not the most important way, of entering a guild or obtaining the freedom of a borough, it gradually took a more prominent place, and by 1562 was the most usual method of gaining the freedom, whether of town or guild.”<sup>11</sup> Only individuals granted the freedom of a town could vote in municipal elections, hold public office, and most importantly, trade goods and services legally and generally conduct business within the city’s confines—any kind of business, not simply that of one’s guild. Though there were other methods of attaining the freedom, “apprenticeship was the general rule, and admittance by grant, redemption, marriage, or patrimony, though permitted, was exceptional.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, “from the 1530s through the first decade of the seventeenth century 87 per cent of nearly 34,000

---

<sup>11</sup> Dunlop, O. Jocelyn. *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour*. London: Adelphi Terrace, 1912. p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Dunlop p. 50.

men became members of sixteen companies by means of apprenticeship, 9 per cent by patrimony, and 4 per cent by redemption.”<sup>13</sup>

While apprenticeship offered young people an opportunity to gain the freedom and its corresponding civic privileges, it also provided a steady flow of labor for established craftsmen and the means to ensure various controls over that flow. Anne Yarbrough, writing about sixteenth century Bristol, argues that “apprenticeship was the single most important channel for the recruitment of the urban population, and for the maintenance of traditional values from one generation to the next.”<sup>14</sup> Steven R. Smith, writing about seventeenth century London, points out that “apprenticeship was also a means of limiting the supply of workers. It was widespread since most of those who pursued careers outside the learned professions which required university training and those who were to be farmers or laborers customarily served apprenticeships.”<sup>15</sup> The livery companies could use apprenticeship to manipulate the labor pool and to maintain certain social mores, but the term of apprenticeship indenture still boiled down to an agreement between two individuals thought to benefit each party. The master tapped a source of inexpensive and available labor, and the apprentice both learned a viable trade and gained access to a social network that would allow him to one day open his own shop. In her article, “Youth and the English Reformation,” Susan Brigden articulates perhaps the most basic assumption underlying the apprenticeship agreement: “The medieval guilds, with independent craft masters producing in small workshops, had so ordered matters that the apprentices bound to the master to learn the trade, and the journeymen, waiting to set up their own establishments, had the expectation of being masters and freemen themselves—in time.” A young man apprenticing himself to a grocer expected, after years of toil, to one day be a grocer himself. Of course, that steady progress was often interrupted. Brigden goes on to explain that, by the mid-sixteenth century, at the height of London’s population explosion and the popularity of apprenticeship booming, cities and companies passed ordinances restricting the number of apprentices a single master could take on, “suggest[ing] that the number of apprentices was growing too fast. From about the turn of the sixteenth century, mastership could no longer be the expectation of every apprentice and journeyman.”<sup>16</sup>

Modern social historians disagree over the extent to which the average apprentice’s chances of achieving the paradigm of opening a shop might truly have been stunted by an oversaturated labor pool of young men clambering up the social ladder for the limited number of positions, which were becoming increasingly precious and increasingly guarded by guild establishments wary of sharing power and profitability. Those same modern social historians also disagree about the ramifications of various causes and effects of apprentice failure, as well as how the aggregate result of all such permutations crafted a very different public impression of the apprentice than that found in the popular legend of Dick Whittington. In fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, at

---

<sup>13</sup> Rappaport, Steve. *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989. p. 291.

<sup>14</sup> Yarbrough, Anne. “Apprentices as Adolescents in Sixteenth Century Bristol.” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Autumn 1979): 67-81. p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, Steven R. “The Ideal and Reality: Apprentice-Master Relationships in Seventeenth Century London.” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Winter 1981): 449-459. p. 449.

<sup>16</sup> Brigden, Susan. “Youth and the English Reformation.” *Past & Present*, No. 95 (May 1982): 37-67. p. 45.

the end of the sixteenth century, the crown conceived of apprentices, not as earnest young lads looking to make their way in the world by bringing honor and wealth to London, but as aggressive marauders in cahoots with vagabonds and criminals intent on sacking the capital. If one of the overarching goals of this study is to explore how a paradoxical general image of prentice expectations, actions, tastes, and desires is exploited, propagated, shaped, and subverted through contemporary literature, particularly drama, then the first step must be to examine how and why such an image developed by studying both the experience of the average individual apprentice—where he was born, what were his responsibilities, the degree of his success—and the fraught evolution of the system of apprenticeship throughout the sixteenth century, when the number, visibility, and significance of the apprentice population grew exponentially.

Whatever narratives historians tease out of the remnants of the past—guild records, personal accounts, court decisions—the sheer scope and expanse of the apprentice presence in London, when the numbers are laid bare, cannot be denied. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos estimates that “about 1,400 youths began apprenticeship terms every year in mid-sixteenth century London, comprising, together with those already apprenticed in the town, about one-tenth of the capital’s population within the walls at this time.”<sup>17</sup> Steve Rappaport, the undisputed authority on statistical analysis of London apprentice populations, calculates that “if three-quarters of the city’s men were citizens and nine-tenths of them obtained that status through service as apprentices, then two-thirds of *all* men in sixteenth-century London served apprenticeships.” He concludes: “since terms averaged seven and a half years in length, when they reached adulthood the majority of the city’s men had spent more than one-quarter of their lives as apprentices.”<sup>18</sup>

Actually, given the high non-completion rate of apprentices, more than two-thirds of the men found in London served as apprentices in some capacity. Some critics and historians, such as Ian Archer, Keith Wrightson, and Patricia Fumerton, paint a stark picture of a broken system churning out failed apprentices and frustrated journeymen. Though the fail rate of apprentices appeared staggering, and young men very rarely achieved the phenomenal success of a Dick Whittington, the system itself was not ineluctably fractured. Rappaport acknowledges:

In practice, however, there was a considerable gap between the ideal and the real. Most apprentices did not finish their terms in the sixteenth century, and thus the ideal form of apprenticeship was the experience of less than one-half of the tens of thousands of young men who came from the hamlets and villages throughout the realm to apprentice in the capital. This does not mean that they system was not functioning properly. Rather, it suggests that apprenticeship was a complex phenomenon, one that took several forms and thus met different needs, both for society and for the young men who served as apprentices.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Ben-Amos, Ilana Krausman. *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p. 294, emphasis his.

<sup>19</sup> Rappaport “Reconsidering Apprenticeship in Sixteenth-Century London.” In *Renaissance Society and Culture*. Eds. John Monfasani and Ronald G. Musto. New York: Italica Press, 1991. P. 239-61. p. 241.



Though necessarily broad, this is perhaps the best general, compact account of apprenticeship in the early modern period available. Failed apprentices did not signal the failure of apprenticeship; rather, the system was so pervasive that it could accommodate a failure rate of over fifty percent. To understand or discuss London as the bustling capital it was—a brimming metropolis that served as the industrial, economic, and social seat of the nation—posits the universal familiarity and widespread success of the apprenticeship system. The experience of serving a term of indenture provided a common cultural touchstone. Even if roughly half of apprentices did not complete their indentures and become citizens, an overwhelming majority of citizens obtained that status by completing apprenticeships. If a clear majority of men were citizens, then one can safely conclude that the institution of apprenticeship and its attendant conditions—which governed the development of these young men for a significant period of their lives—would strongly persist in the larger cultural consciousness of the city and would provide one of the defining experiences of life in early modern London.

Although most every company required its members to complete an apprenticeship as a necessary condition for admission to the brotherhood, which meant that both the high end goldsmith and the lowly bricklayer at one point could have nodded to one another as fellow apprentices, not every apprentice was created equal. Ben-Amos observes that “an enormous gulf separated the seaman apprentice, in his old jacket, cap, breeches, and a linen shirt with buttons made of hardened cheese or shark-bones, from the merchant apprentice wearing expensive shoes, gloves, gold lace on the sleeves of his doublet, a wig, and gold and silver buttons.”<sup>20</sup> These examples form the poles of the apprentice spectrum, but in order to ascertain a clearer understanding of the public impression of an average apprentice, such extremes must be bracketed. The apprentice seaman’s training took him out of town often, dampening his visibility as a municipal presence, and the dandy merchant’s apprentice engaged in a large, perhaps even international, distributive trade far beyond the scope of a workaday shop. Shani D’Cruze describes the variety of shop our generic apprentice would literally call home: “the business household, where the divide between working and domestic arrangements was minimal and the skills and labour of all household members contributed to both the economic and the domestic enterprise.”<sup>21</sup> The majority of apprentices joined such independent trading households, where a family, including apprentices, daily worked in concert to provide a good or service for local distribution in order to maintain their fiscal independence. Ben-Amos provides myriad examples: “Most urban apprentices filled the shops of numerous craftsmen and small-scale manufacturers: coopers and hosiers, feltmakers and weavers, cardmakers, shoemakers, carpenters, farriers, pinmakers, and turners, to name but a few. Early modern towns had diversified economies, and small industries, rather than the entrepreneurial, large-scale businesses and trades, predominated.”<sup>22</sup> These are the occupations our average, eager young lads sought out,

---

<sup>20</sup> Ben-Amos p.197.

<sup>21</sup> D’Cruze, Shani. “The Middling Sort in Eighteenth-Century Colchester: Independence, Social Relations, and the Community Broker.” *The Middling Sort of People Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800*. Eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994. 181-207. p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> Ben-Amos p. 88.

but to arrive at a conventional image of the typical apprentice, we must ask who these boys were before they became prentices.

If there is one salient characteristic of apprentices that stands above all others, it is that they were most likely born someplace other than where they served their indenture. Whether subsistence or betterment migrants, to use A. L. Beier's terms, young men traveled reasonably great distances to reach urban centers that could offer the opportunity to become apprentices and the chance to get their foot in a guild door. Ben-Amos observes that, "in London, a third of the migrant apprentices in the years 1552-53 came from Yorkshire and Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland, and, together with youths arriving from the western counties, as well as from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, they formed more than half of all arrivals in the capital. The average distance traveled by all migrant apprentices in these years was no less than 115 miles,"<sup>23</sup> no mean feat given the lack of uniform roads and harsh conditions. The influx of apprentices accounted for more than half of the total number of people arriving in London, meaning that their proportion of incipient apprenticeships was much higher. Anne Yarbrough cites "analysis of the geographical origins of 3,069 youths who became apprentices in Bristol between 1542 and 1565" to conclude that "some 78% came from outside" the town.<sup>24</sup> As for London, Rappaport explains: "The register of freemen provides information on the places of origin of 976 of the 1028 men who became citizens by means of apprenticeship in 1551-3 and 90 per cent of them had emigrated from elsewhere in England to apprentice in the capital."<sup>25</sup> As the seventeenth century approached, migrant apprentices tended to travel shorter average distances and a slightly greater percentage of native Londoners began indentures in their home city, but beginning an apprenticeship, for the majority of youths, still meant leaving home for somewhere new. This contributed to the popular image of a hopeful young man setting out for the big city in order to earn his fortune, but it also influenced the conception of apprentices being only a slim step above vagrants. As we shall see later in this chapter, Elizabeth goes so far as to lump prentices together with vagabonds and other criminals in assessing threats to London, in some cases accusing apprentices before the other groups. Patricia Fumerton argues that, even if apprentices never actually took up arms with vagabonds, the jarring physical and psychological dislocation inherent in commencing an indenture aligned apprentices with vagabonds in the formulation of what she calls a "low subjectivity." Whatever they did upon their arrival, apprentices began their training by leaving home.

It may initially sound odd that young apprentices could register as a sufficiently serious threat to draw the angry attention of the queen, but Rappaport provides an easy, if striking, explanation: "Most men in London did not begin apprenticeships until they were nearly twenty years old, hardly the boys of textbook fame." Analyzing the records of 1,317 apprentice enrollments in the Carpenters' guild from 1572 to 1594, Rappaport concludes that the average age of new prentices was 19.5 years, and that "57 per cent were aged eighteen to twenty, three-quarters between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one years."<sup>26</sup> As we shall explore below, the term of indenture was very much understood as a period of extended adolescence, when a master needed to shepherd his

---

<sup>23</sup> Ben-Amos p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> Yarbrough p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> Rappaport *World within Worlds* p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p. 295.

ward through the turbulence of youth and prepare him for responsible adulthood, but this seems odd if most apprentices were at or near full physical maturity when their service began. Rappaport concedes that using the Carpenters might skew the average age up to a year higher than that of a more far reaching sample set, and other historians remind us that young men began apprenticeships at a wide variety of ages, “from as early as 12 up to 25 and 26 years,” says Ben-Amos. She continues: “Among writers of autobiographies who had been apprentices in various towns during the seventeenth century, there were a few who started at 17, 18, or 19, but others who began at the age of 14 or 15.”<sup>27</sup> Though Anne Yarbrough references “a sermon preached in Bristol [which] suggested that apprenticeship typically began soon after the age of 12,” she concludes “it is evident that almost all entered service between the ages of 12 and 17, with the majority making the transition somewhere between the ages of 14 and 16.”<sup>28</sup> Given that the normal life expectancy in Elizabethan England fell somewhere close to 48 years, beginning an apprenticeship at 17 or 18 seems quite late, particularly given the length of indenture. In fact, the average age at which a young man began an apprenticeship, while sociologically interesting and pertinent for this study, should be viewed skeptically when sketching the image of a standard apprentice, as the length of servitude agreed upon in the contract was usually adjusted to accommodate the age of the new apprentice. Tradition, and later the Statute of Artificers, dictated that no young man in London be released from his service before reaching the age of 24, and local craftsmen and merchants vigorously upheld the custom. If a shopkeeper was asked to take on a boy of 12, who demanded more care and could provide less of an immediate return than an older teenager, he would only accept such a proposition if the boy signed on for over a decade. Whether the average starting age for an apprentice was 17, 18, or 19, the average age of our generic apprentice, with a few years of service under his belt, definitely falls in the early twenties, certainly old enough both to carry out the martial/mercantile exploits of many popular legends and to pose a viable threat to the establishment by banding together in mobs.

The final, and most loaded, component of a potential apprentice’s origin concerns his family—who they were, where they were from, what socioeconomic status they occupied. Traditional conceptions of apprentices adopt a populist approach to this issue, happily declaring that apprentices were drawn from all social ranks, from beggars to gentlemen. Thus, as demonstrated in the legend of Dick Whittington, apprenticeship provided the necessary first step onto the lowest rung of the social ladder, which even the lowliest urchin with sufficient personal drive could ascend to success, wealth, perhaps even the Lord Mayorship of London. Some social historians trumpet the relatively low birth of most prentices. Ben-Amos argues that the vast majority of urban apprentices “were not sons of gentlemen, yeoman, merchants, or other large-scale dealers and entrepreneurs,” and that “judg[ing] by the records of freemen admitted to London companies in the period 1551-53, the fathers of no less than two-thirds were craftsmen engaged in small-scale production, as well as husbandmen, and even a few labourers. Sons of husbandmen alone comprised a third of all those admitted free.”<sup>29</sup> Farmers’ sons might have had numbers on their side in trading fields for town, but they found no guarantee of the most lucrative opportunities. That is, while lower class apprentices

---

<sup>27</sup> Ben-Amos p. 131.

<sup>28</sup> Yarbrough p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Ben-Amos p. 88.

filled the city, they took up indentures with lower class trades. Steven R. Smith summarizes that some apprentices “were orphans or paupers’ sons, few of whom could expect to rise from the ranks of obscure workingmen; while others were sons of gentlemen or wealthy merchants and could expect to become prominent businessmen and citizens.”<sup>30</sup> Rappaport corroborates such a claim, citing the same statistical evidence Ben-Amos uses to argue that apprenticeship enabled the masses: “sons of gentlemen and yeoman, collectively accounting for only one-fifth of all men who became citizens in 1551-3, were in relative terms as much as three times as numerous in some great companies...account[ing] for three-fifths of 82 men sworn as Mercers and Drapers, ranked first and third among London’s companies in terms of prestige.”<sup>31</sup> A third of the men admitted free through completing apprenticeships might have been the sons of husbandmen, but the most prosperous guilds, those dealing in the manufacture or sale of cloth, were far more likely to fill their ranks with gentle sons.

Still, if three-fifths of the men joining the Mercers and Drapers could claim gentle status, then two-fifths could not, meaning that the social and financial opportunities of such prestigious guilds were afforded to a broader demographic, a new demographic collecting together gentle and non-gentle alike. Even if those non-gentle apprentices were the sons of rich merchants, rather than rough laborers or husbandmen, the new admixture of artificers’ and gentlemen’s children signaled that wealth and industrial success, instead of bloodlines or familial heritage, were to provide a new metrics of gentility. Similarly, just as the twelve great companies<sup>32</sup> failed to harvest absolutely all of their apprentices from gentle ranks, not every gentle apprentice had the good fortune to be placed in the great companies. Some young gentlemen had to take up indentures with less exclusive companies, a trend which grew more pronounced over the course of the sixteenth century. Christopher Brooks claims that “the relative presence of those who were the sons of ‘gents’ increased by a factor of three over the century from 1550 to 1650,” though he is quick to point out that “this was always much more pronounced in the more prestigious wholesale and retail trades than in the handicrafts, where there was hardly any increase at all.”<sup>33</sup> Even if those young men who identified themselves as sons of ‘gents’ were not training with bricklayers and pinmakers, many of them were not training with goldsmiths or mercers either. The overall number of apprentices in the finer guilds did not jump significantly, certainly not threefold, over this period, so more and more gentle sons would have found themselves obeying the orders of masters in many ways their social inferior. These differences seem to render our generic apprentice somewhat of a pleochroic figure, sometimes lowborn, sometimes high. The stereotype of the gentleman’s son compelled to serve a supposedly demeaning apprenticeship had become sufficiently entrenched by 1605 for two versions of it to appear in Jonson,

---

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Steven R. “The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents.” *Past and Present*, No. 61 (Nov. 1973): 149-161. p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p. 306.

<sup>32</sup> To settle a dispute between guilds, the Lord Mayor decided in 1515 upon the order of the twelve great livery companies of London. They are: mercers, grocers, drapers, fishmongers, goldsmiths, skippers, merchant tailors, haberdashers, salters, ironmongers, vintners, and clothworkers. Note only the goldsmiths and the ironmongers are not involved in either victuals or cloth.

<sup>33</sup> Brooks, Christopher. “Apprenticeship, Social Mobility, and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800.” *The Middling Sort of People Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800*. Eds. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994. 52-83. p. 61.

Marston, and Chapman's *Eastward Ho!*, the dutiful Golding patiently serving his term, and the resentful Quicksilver plotting to break away from his overbearing master. In Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), a foundling apprentice briefly butts up against the dismissed prentice son of a profligate gentleman scheming to win the hand of his former master's daughter. The picture of an average apprentice encompassed both the rough country lad and the gentle second son.

The issue of parentage comes to bear significantly on the conditions of apprentice placement. As we have seen, in the words of Steve Rappaport, "there are unmistakable signs that during the sixteenth century family background played a crucial role in determining who obtained apprenticeships in the capital's wealthiest and most prestigious companies," and those signs clearly indicate that sons of highly esteemed families had a better chance of landing an indenture with one of the great companies, particularly the large-scale distributive trades yielding the most lucrative opportunities. Families took seriously the task of placing their son in the best possible situation, as seemingly slight differences between masters, even within the same craft, could produce radically different results in the future earning potential of the apprentice, not to mention variant experiences of apprenticeship itself. As Christopher Brooks puts it, "for most parents, finding a place for their child was a necessary responsibility. There is a great deal of evidence that care was taken to find a suitable occupation, a suitable master, and satisfactory living conditions."<sup>34</sup> While the young man's wishes might have lightly factored into his eventual placement, the final arrangements generally fell to his family, particularly his father.

One of the most significant hurdles facing the parents of a future prentice, as well as the most likely reason that the best positions went to the sons of socially established and financially solvent families, was the apprentice premium, a fee paid to the master taking on the apprentice similar to a dowry intended to cover maintenance and training costs. Naturally, masters whose tutelage could lead to higher future earning power demanded more money up front, while some humble craftsmen asked for no initial payment at all. Steven R. Smith asserts that, "for an apprenticeship to a wealthy member of one of the twelve Great Companies, parents might have to pay a premium of several hundred pounds, while in other cases, masters were glad enough to secure labour for only the cost of room and board," and that "in the case of orphans, Justices of the Peace and Overseers of the Poor were authorized to arrange apprenticeships and occasionally did place them with members of the London companies."<sup>35</sup> In fact, Ben-Amos claims that the least exorbitant premiums "were in fact similar to the type of payment given by charity donors and allocated by parish authorities for the apprenticeship of poor boys," meaning that both utterly destitute boys and the sons of very poor families had at least a chance of learning a trade by which to earn a living. She goes on to observe, however, that even a pound or two would be hard to spare for "any family whose income was near subsistence" and "labourers who made even less and who had no steady employment throughout the year," but that "premiums ranging between 5 and 15 or even 20 pounds were not an insurmountable barrier, and it is evident that youths of poor background not infrequently managed to enter a wide variety of small trades and crafts."<sup>36</sup> The fact that

---

<sup>34</sup> Brooks p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> Smith "Apprentices as Adolescents" p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> Ben-Amos p. 91.

some entrepreneurial tradesmen could demand up to 500 pounds to take on an apprentice while some small householders charged virtually nothing demonstrates a clear pattern to Ben-Amos:

All this suggests that there was some kind of hierarchy of occupations which depended on the scale of business involved (merciers' apprenticeships were more expensive than those in small-scale trade), as well as on the degree of expertise and time required to learn a craft (goldsmiths and barber-surgeons charged more than buttonmakers, cardmakers, or tilers), the type of raw material handled by the craftsman and the trainee (e.g. goldsmiths dealing with precious metal, compared with coopers dealing with wood), and the perceived prestige of the occupations.<sup>37</sup>

Such a hierarchy did organize the amount of the premiums paid to respective masters, but the presence of this kind of hierarchy—a comprehensible continuum of money, work, and status—also should have indicated that successive generations could make their way up it. If an orphan was placed with a pinmaker, completed his indenture, and eventually opened his own relatively successful shop, he might one day afford a premium of a few pounds to apprentice his own son to a craftsman slightly higher up the chain, a shoemaker perhaps. This system driven by money and effort might have created a more egalitarian socioeconomic environment prizing individual will and ability alongside family history as the standards for placement, but those higher up the food chain kept a foot on the scale ensuring that market forces alone did not dictate access to the best companies.

To a large extent, the great companies of London formed a closed circle, in both geographical and generational terms. That is, the sons of great company men, natives of the capital, held a distinct advantage in obtaining an apprenticeship with the great companies. In the period 1551-3, Rappaport calculates that, of the “eighty-one sons of great company men [who] became citizens,” “roughly three-fifths entered companies in which their fathers were or had been members,” and “twenty of the thirty-one sons who did not enter their fathers' companies apprenticed in other great companies,” while “only eleven (14 per cent) entered minor companies.” In contrast, “only one-quarter of eighty-five sons of minor company men were able to arrange apprenticeships in great companies.”<sup>38</sup> This regular generational continuity in the greater and lesser guilds reflected the general trend of young men reared in the capital pursuing the career of their father: “three-fifths of 166 native Londoners followed in their fathers' occupational footsteps compared with only 7 per cent of 210 men who emigrated to London.”<sup>39</sup> It seems that the twin dreams, broadcast in popular legend, of traveling to London and earning one's fortune through an apprenticeship were bound inexorably to one another and were the provenance only of immigrants to the capital. The system of apprenticeship granted rude country lads hope of elevating their station by pursuing a more profitable career than their fathers', but once they became entrenched in London—literally, once they set up shop—that system stifled rather than stimulated socioeconomic mobility.

---

<sup>37</sup> Ben-Amos p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p. 308-9.

<sup>39</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p. 309.

As the sixteenth century progressed, the ideology behind the rigid division between great and minor companies in London, largely impregnable by apprenticeship, extended beyond guildhalls and city walls to monitor and control broader groups of young men hoping to begin indentures. As we shall explain more fully below, the 1563 Statute of Artificers used apprenticeship to reinscribe the dominant power structure on succeeding generations by mandating minimum land holding and income requirements to apprentice with more socially advantageous guilds. More telling, however, is the anonymous “Memorandum on the Statute of Artificers” of 1573, a numbered list of observations explaining the unspoken implications of the Statute’s clauses and expounding upon the implementation of the law. For the most part, the “Memorandum” treads close to the script of the Statute, affirming that prentices must be bound for no less than seven years and should be no less than twenty-four years old before completing their training, but it provides a more express rationale for maintaining the division between certain types of workers than naked annual acreages or allowances. As one of the conditions for placing an apprentice, any apprentice, the “Memorandum” demands that “the father of the apprentice must be an Artificer not occupying husbandry, nor being a laborer.” One might think that the real thrust of this clause lies only in prohibiting the sons of husbandmen from training in cities with craftsmen, as opposed to enforcing rigorously the idea that only the sons of artificers should become apprentices—after all, what would the younger sons of gentlemen of leisure do if they could not serve indentures with the finer guilds—but the explanation of this proviso paints a strikingly different picture:

It is a more easier thing for the children of husbandmen and laborers to become artificers, than for the children of Artificers to become husbandmen and laborers, Therefore when husbandmen and laborers do put their children to learn occupations, then Artificers children are driven to be Rogues and vagabonds. But the Parliament as well for the better service to be done in husbandry (whereunto the children of husbandmen and laborers are most apt) as for the avoiding of other inconveniences that groweth by the evil education of artificers children, hath provided that each sort of such children should be applied to the trades that their parents were of before them, which no doubt would work great commodity in the common wealth.<sup>40</sup>

Acknowledging that it is easier for the son of a husbandman to become an artificer than for the son of an artificer to become a husbandman demonstrates a recognition of the upward socioeconomic trajectory theoretically enacted by the system of apprenticeship. Husbandmen seek the more desirous placement of their sons with craftsmen, and craftsmen do not want their sons retreating from skilled to crude manual labor. However, the conclusion of the syllogism put forward in the “Memorandum” does not follow truly, and utilizes a vocabulary of intimidation to hammer home the threat it ascribes to social mobility. Since it is easier for sons of husbandmen to become artificers, when they are

---

<sup>40</sup> Tawney, R. H. and Eileen Power, eds. *Tudor Economic Documents: Being Select Documents Illustrating the Economic and Social History of Tudor England, Volume One*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961. p. 354-5.

placed as apprentices with craftsmen and fill those ranks, the artificers' sons should be forced to stoop to serving as husbandmen and laborers, but the author of the "Memorandum" supplies different, more nefarious anti-occupations for these displaced youths: rogues and vagabonds. Downward social mobility simply is not an option; if society's lower sorts do somehow manage to improve their stations via apprenticeship, the structures and hierarchies which enabled that improvement will implode because they cannot compensate for such a reorganization of labor, instead forcing the slighted children of artificers, whose positions have been stolen by upstart farmers' sons, beyond the bounds of law and order.

Over the next thirty years, rogues and vagabonds will increasingly be accused as destabilizing agents undermining the national interest, and apprentices will come to be coupled forcefully with such criminals as threats to the public good, though the "Memorandum" is unique in proposing that the system of apprenticeship itself, if unchecked and functioning under normal market conditions, would actually generate rogues and vagabonds reaped from the middling sort populated by artificers. By making such a claim, the author implicitly acknowledges but explicitly disavows the potential for downward social mobility; if husbandmen's sons could become craftsmen, then craftsmen's sons should be able to become husbandmen, but instead the system breaks down and they seek redress outside the strictures of the law. Thus, sons should "be applied to the trades that their parents were of before them," the occupations for which they were most apt, "which no doubt would work great commodity in the common wealth." Of course, in contending that the sons of artificers could only turn to lives of crime if farmers' sons took their jobs, the author of the "Memorandum" willfully ignores the logical extension of his argument, that the sons of artificers, not eager to trudge along fields, would themselves capitalize on the potential rewards afforded by apprenticeship and also move up the social ladder, perhaps to a career so lucrative that their future children would not have to work at all, and could instead retire to the country and live as gentlemen. To continue this line of thought, this new generation of gentlemen born out of the commercial pit of London would in turn displace the sons of the older, commonplace gentlemen, forcing them to try their hands at a trade. Such social mobility, predicated on individual drive and ability rather than inherited funds and cachet, constituted one of the "other inconveniences that groweth by the evil education of artificers children" which the author of the Memorandum sought to curtail by eliminating any variability in placement whatsoever. The realignment of social hierarchies through brute economic force, however, did not factor into the minds of most fathers seeking only the best opportunities for their sons.

After an acceptable master had been found and the premium had been paid, only drawing up the indenture itself remained before the apprenticeship could commence. Most indentures addressed instructional and behavioral obligations for both master and apprentice. Rappaport quotes a "typical apprenticeship indenture employed in London" as requiring a master to "teach and instruct or cause to be taught or instructed [his ward], finding unto his said apprentice meat, drink, apparel, lodging and all other necessaries, according to the custom of the City of London." The same typical indenture would stipulate that an apprentice:



his said master faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands everywhere gladly do. He shall not commit fornication nor contract matrimony within the said term. He shall not play at cards, dice, tables or any other unlawful games. He shall not haunt taverns nor playhouses, nor absent himself from the master's service day or night unlawfully.<sup>41</sup>

The general atmosphere described in these regulations was reasonably straightforward: the master would provide shelter, sustenance, tools, and full training to his apprentice, and the apprentice would do whatever his master told him. The morality clauses, such as the prohibitions of drink and sex, however, were not mere window dressing, nor did they apply only to the apprentice. When a family sent their son off to this near stranger's house, they expected the master to act *in loco parentis* regarding their boy, treating him not only as a trainee but also as a kind of stepson, acting as both an instructive foreman and a surrogate father. Thus, indentures commonly contained a clause ensuring that a master not only provide his apprentice with room, board, and tools, but also "his craft to be taught him and nothing to be hid from him thereof."<sup>42</sup>

That is, the master bore a moral responsibility to open to his apprentice the entire store of his craft knowledge pertaining to everything from minute trade-specific mysteries to general business strategies. A shoemaker could not take on an apprentice and teach him only how to fix soles while he himself would then finish the remainder of the shoe, nor could he teach the boy how to make shoes but neglect to teach him how to run a shoemaker's shop. Not only that, but a master shouldered the duty of guiding his apprentice's spiritual and civic development as well, leading him through the potential minefields of combative neighborhood politics or unspoken rivalries within the guild, and compelling him to keep at his prayers and generally keep his nose clean. In short, an apprentice could not be a mere employee or servant; if the indenture played out as intended, the apprentice would live and study with his master, emulating him as both a craftsman and a man, and this term of study in industrial production would in effect reproduce another generation of shopkeepers.

The question remains, however, if apprentices actually adhered to the restrictions on their behavior detailed in a typical indenture, or if such stringent rules were more preemptive tools of damage control designed to combat problems generally symptomatic of apprenticeship. Evidence points to the latter. For example, despite the prohibition against sex, apprentices as a group were understood to be major patrons of a booming prostitution industry. Paul Griffiths, citing recorded prostitution prosecutions in Bridewell courtbooks, catalogues the rainbow of apprentices seeking relief from working girls: "No single trade is notably prominent. But the apprentices of goldsmiths, butchers, fishmongers, merchants, haberdashers, dyers, and servants of the upper ranks head the Bridewell sample." He concludes that "the Bridewell records convey the real impression that apprentices of all trades purchased sex" in response to the notion propagated by some contemporary authors that only gallant apprentices frequented brothels—that is, only apprentices who came from money.<sup>43</sup> Such a reservation speaks to the larger question of

---

<sup>41</sup> Rappaport *World within Worlds* p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> Tawney and Power p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> Griffiths p. 219.

an apprentice's access to money, whether or not he received wages or gifts from his master, and how he afforded the lurid pastimes he was so often accused of pursuing. O. Jocelyn Dunlop asserted that "the apprentice received no wages, his labour being supposed to be adequately requited by the return made him in kind," and that, at most, "the boy sometimes received small sums of pocket-money, or a small lump sum, clothes or tools, at the end of his term, to help him make his start in life."<sup>44</sup> This observation has set the tone for many 20<sup>th</sup> century critics—particularly Ann Jennalie Cook in her *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642*—who maintain that apprentices could not have bought drinks or sex or admittance to a theater because they received no salary for their work. Unfortunately, there is much contradictory evidence indicating that wages often factored into an apprentice's total benefit package. In the 1531 indenture between a Leicester baker and a boy named John, the master agrees to take John on as an apprentice for seven years and employ him for an eighth as a journeyman, promising "for the term of vii years every year viii *d.* and the viii<sup>th</sup> year every week vi *d.*"<sup>45</sup> While there is a great difference between being an apprentice and a journeyman, along with a corresponding difference in pay, John did receive purely financial remuneration along with the meat, drink, hose, shoes, linen, and wool promised in his contract. Ben-Amos relates the story of two apprentices of a London shipwright who earned a combined 18 shillings per week in 1618.<sup>46</sup> Finally, during lean periods, masters would sometimes cover the cost of keeping an apprentice by sending that apprentice—only if he were reasonably advanced—out as a journeyman to work in another shop that needed the extra help, and "when this occurred, apprentices were paid, as a normal routine, in journeymen's wages."<sup>47</sup>

## II. How Apprenticeship Evolved in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

Attempting to formulate a narrative of the emergent societal pressures shaping, reacting to, and acting upon the system of apprenticeship over the course of the early modern period proves quite difficult, as apprenticeship was intricately woven into a matrix of powerful social changes. Apprenticeship and its perception constituted the product of imbricated demographic, agricultural, socioeconomic, political, juridical, punitive, charitable, violent, subversive, and stabilizing forces. Apprenticeship alternately provided an avenue from poverty to prosperity, a solution to major cultural problems, an exploitable pool of near slave labor, a demotion to daily work for some unfortunate gentlemen, and a mutinous subset of the population. In order to tease out how apprenticeship came to occupy these extremely varied positions, we must examine what circumstances formed the system of apprenticeship in Renaissance England; the key factor here, which gives rise to more direct causes, is the rapid demographic expansion commencing in the early sixteenth century.

The staggering population boom occurring throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries amplified the severity of many attendant social ills, including severe inflation and diminished real wages, as well as largely symbolic or psychic threats

---

<sup>44</sup> Dunlop p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> Tawney and Power p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> Ben-Amos p. 127-8.

<sup>47</sup> Ben-Amos p. 129.

such as residual popular resentment of enclosure and the constantly lurking specter of dearth. These problems coalesced, particularly in the mind of the ruling class, into ballooning numbers of vagabonds, dislocated paupers wandering the countryside and eking out a living often by illegal means. As poverty and vagabondage (or at least the perceived threat posed by them) grew more severe, Parliament passed occasional ineffectual statutes intended to palliate their symptoms, and though not explicitly couched in such terms, the Statute of Artificers—which set national standards for apprenticeship—was framed in large part to provide a kind of poor relief and to damp vagrancy.

Upon inspection, however, it quickly becomes apparent that the conditions of apprenticeship laid out in the Statute of Artificers were designed, not necessarily to provide opportunities for poor people to earn a living, but to shore up the status quo by tying down potentially troublesome perpetrators to a specific place with a particular occupation. Apprentices do not seem to have obediently accepted the positions many times forced upon them, as indicated by the apprentice riots during the crisis years of the 1590's. When taken as a whole, the long view of apprenticeship during the sixteenth century reveals the practice to be a double-edged sword threatening social stability. In short, the only way to alleviate vagabondage was to force young people to become apprentices—to promise that after at least seven years of service they would be better off than before—but that promise spurred the recognition of a potential for socioeconomic betterment. Either vagrants who refused to become apprentices would threaten the social structures allowing gentlemen to live idly in the country, or merchants having elevated themselves by way of that system via apprenticeship would move to the country themselves while the sons of poorer gentlemen set off for London to begin an indenture.

Drawing a detailed account of the causes and effects of demographic expansion, inflation, enclosure, and dearth would reach beyond the scope of this study, and the excellent work of social historians such as A. L. Beier, Keith Wrightson, Paul Slack, Ian Archer, and Roger Manning provides ample context to carry out an examination of how apprenticeship functions within this complex web of issues. The primary factor underlying all others, in this case, is the tremendous population growth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Exact numbers are always difficult to pin down, but Wrightson suggests “it seems likely that a population of approximately 2.5 million in the 1520s had risen to one of perhaps 5 million by 1680,” specifying that “the initial increase of the early sixteenth century was checked in the 1550s, renewed thereafter to reach perhaps 3.5 million in 1580, then continued until the 1620s and 1630s when it began to level off.”<sup>48</sup> If England's population neared 4 million by 1600, then the total population increased by 60 percent in roughly 80 years, and such wild growth took its toll on particular demographics and areas of the country. Manning agrees that “‘sustained population growth’ had begun by about 1520,” and goes on to claim that “it was difficult to absorb the population increase” because “in earlier times, the surplus population had been accommodated by colonizing the waste”—rugged forest lands dividing large manorial estates which were open to public use—but much less waste was available in the sixteenth century because of reorganizations of land usage. He concludes: “Since few among the surplus population could find tenancies, ‘it would have been the landless

---

<sup>48</sup> Wrightson, Keith. *English Society 1580-1680*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1982. p. 122.

wage-earners whose numbers were swelled'.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the poor and landless proved to be those most afflicted by the population boom.

As the population expanded over the course of the sixteenth century, society tended to fill out at the bottom. Given the tight time frame of the populace's growth spurt, a disproportionate percentage of the population was quite young, and as Beier puts it, "despite high rates of infant and child mortality, the problem of great numbers of unproductive youngsters was greatly intensified"<sup>50</sup> because of their dependence on older generations whose means were stretched thinner and thinner. Persistent inflation and falling real wages aggravated this problem. Wrightson calculates that "the average prices of foodstuffs in southern England, which had remained fairly stable throughout the later fifteenth century, had trebled by the 1570s, and by the early decades of the seventeenth century they had risen sixfold." Similarly, he claims that "wages rose less swiftly than prices in an overstocked labour market and real wages steadily declined, reaching their lowest point in the early decades of the seventeenth century (by which time they were half those of a century earlier)."<sup>51</sup> Poverty on the whole became an increasingly pressing national problem, especially given the image of an economic pyramid emerging from Slack's analysis of tax assessments for the subsidy of 1523-25, the beginning of the period of extended demographic expansion: "Five per cent of the population of London owned 80 per cent of its taxable wealth in the 1520s, for example. In part of Suffolk, less than 2 per cent of the population owned more than half of the land, while 60 per cent owned no land or house of their own."<sup>52</sup> As drastic a picture as they paint, these numbers only reflect those who had funds sufficient to be taxed. Slack believes "it seems probable that one third of adult males on average escaped the taxation net," and that this third "earned less than £1 a year in wages and did not have goods worth that amount."<sup>53</sup> Combined with occasional food shortages and the enclosure of land for commercial farming, a century of rampant inflation and skyrocketing costs only exacerbated the problems faced by a swelling population.

While commoners understood impositions such as enclosure and dearth as wrongs perpetrated against them by the elite which provided the impetus for social protest, the ruling class conceived of such protest as criminal activity, often folding it into one of the most pressing social issues of the period—vagrancy<sup>54</sup>. Beier argues that contemporary conceptions of the vagrant denoted five main characteristics: "First, they were poor, lacking any regular income apart from wages from casual labour. Secondly, they were able-bodied—'sturdy', 'valiant' and fit to work. Thirdly, they were unemployed, or in contemporary terms 'masterless' and 'idle'. Fourthly, they were rootless: wandering, vagrant, 'runnagate'. Finally, they were lawless, dangerous, and suspected of spreading

---

<sup>49</sup> Manning, Roger B. *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. p. 32-3.

<sup>50</sup> Beier A. L. *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640*. NY: Methuen, 1985. p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Wrightson *English Society 1580-1680* p. 125.

<sup>52</sup> Slack, Paul. *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England*. NY: Longman, 1988. p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> It bears repeating here that this study only seeks a cursory account of the tremendously complex issue of vagrancy as it relates to apprenticeship in early modern England. For fuller explanations, see the work A. L. Beier's *Masterless Men*, Paul Slack's *Poverty & Policy*, and Arthur F. Kinney's introduction to *Rogues, Vagabonds, & Sturdy Beggars*.

vice and corruption.”<sup>55</sup> Despite the fact that one of the symptoms of the reassignment of land use was depopulation, and despite the fact that scores of people with no means of supporting themselves needed to set out to find work, the geographical fluidity of an angry, impoverished, pullulative population unlocked from the land made many rulers nervous. Poor relief existed, where it existed at all, merely at the parish level, but it could not accommodate the massive numbers who needed aid, and not until 1572 did a national compulsory poor rate come into being. Rather than developing policy to aid their subjects, Slack argues, the Tudors demonstrated apathy toward helping the poor help themselves: “their concern was political security and their target the vagabond.”<sup>56</sup> A quick glance over the statutes and royal proclamations of the period reveals that mentions of poor relief tend to go hand in hand with concern about the deleterious effects of vagrancy upon the commonwealth—phrased as a matter of public concern, not a threat to the aristocracy—though responses to vagrancy outnumber proposals to help the needy. The axiom underlying the pairing of vagrancy and poor relief asserted that every individual should contribute to the public good according to his means and earn his own way in the world. Yes, the elite might have acknowledged there were mounting numbers of poor, and some of them legitimately needed relief because of infirmity or incapacity, but surely a great percentage of vagabonds actively chose to avoid honest work simply out of willful otiosity: “As population rose, idleness seemed a rampant infection and its suppression a matter of social hygiene as well as political self-interest.”<sup>57</sup> However, curbing idleness by occupying wastrels in husbandry proved difficult, because, with the commercialization of agriculture, “by 1600 it barely paid to farm less than 30 acres of arable,”<sup>58</sup> far more land than that available for an average tenancy. In fact, as Beier goes on to argue, conditions grew so desperate that “begging was a real alternative. By the early seventeenth century a licensed beggar might make a better living than most wage-earners: better indeed than many smallholders.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, thousands of vagabonds set out to find two pence to rub together.

A large number of these migrant poor found their way to London. While the total population of England roughly doubled from 1520 to 1620, London had more than tripled its size in the same period: “Mid-Tudor London and its suburbs contained from 80,000 to 90,000 people. In 1605, they may have held a quarter of a million, in 1625 perhaps 320,000.”<sup>60</sup> Certainly, vagrancy was not the sole cause of this population spike; as stated above, apprentices also came streaming into the city. By the middle of the sixteenth century, apprenticeship was the most popular entry method to the guilds, and roughly 1,400 new apprentices arrived every year to join with their established brethren to compose one tenth of London’s total population. Vagrancy, however, was clearly a growing problem, as indicated by the Bridewell criminal records: “the number of vagrants punished there rose from 69 a year in 1560-61, to 209 in 1578-79, 555 in 1600-01, and 815 in 1624-25: a growth-rate three times greater than that of the City’s

---

<sup>55</sup> Beier *Masterless Men* p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> Beier *Masterless Men* p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Beier *Masterless Men* p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Beier, A. L. “Social Problems in Elizabethan London.” *The Tudor and Stuart Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1530-1688*. Ed. Jonathan Barry. NY: Longman, 1990. 121-38. p. 123.

population as a whole.”<sup>61</sup> Beier gives further context for the same figures: “We have an eight-fold increase by 1601 and almost a twelve-fold rise by 1625.”<sup>62</sup> Slack points out that vagrancy came to be one of the most prevalent crimes recorded at Bridewell, citing that, “in the early 1560’s...only 16 per cent of all offenders were vagrants,” but “the proportion grew rapidly, reaching 62 per cent of the total in 1600-01.”<sup>63</sup> By the turn of the century, the streets of London were crowded with paupers begging and stealing whatever they could, circumstances seemingly unfit for a city which had grown to be one of the very greatest in all Europe: “Observers were struck by this growing destitution amidst the splendour of the Elizabethan capital. They sought explanations for the phenomenon, and more than one blamed in-migration by the poor and masterless.”<sup>64</sup> Measures were taken throughout the period to manage the tide of young men, for vagabonds “were mainly young and male,”<sup>65</sup> flocking to London, which usually endeavored to tie them to a specific place and find them steady employment. Adopting a national policy of enforcing apprenticeship constituted one of these measures.

The first statute seriously attempting to define who truly fell under the name of vagabond and to prescribe a course of action to deal with such people arrived in 1531. It stated that anyone “beyng whole & myghty in body & able to labour havynge no lande [or] maister nor using any lawful marchaundyse craft or mystery, wherby he myght gette his lvyng...be vagrant.”<sup>66</sup> If a person was physically capable of work but had no land to till, no master to serve, or no craft to practice—that is, if a person could work but could not give an account of how he made his living—he was deemed a vagabond. The statute also offered a straightforward corrective; any confirmed vagabond “shalbe enyoyned upon his othe to retourne forthewyth wythout delaye in the next & streyght waye to the place where he was borne, or where he last dwelled...& there put hym selfe to labour, lyke as a trewe man oweth to doo.”<sup>67</sup> In short, the national policy on the burgeoning vagrancy problem in 1531 was to make the vagabonds go home and get jobs, a just response, but one without considerable teeth. Offenders were also to be whipped and briefly pilloried, and recidivists could face harsher punishments, but the statute did little to arrest the widespread expansion of vagrancy or to correct its underlying causes. The statute stood for sixteen years before Edward upped the stakes, repealing the earlier law and enacting the Vagrancy Act of 1547<sup>68</sup>, which “demanded that all able-bodied persons not working be declared vagabonds, that they be seized by former masters and branded with a V on their breast.”<sup>69</sup>

It proved a spectacular failure—it was repealed two years later and the 1531 statute was restored—because “its central provision, that vagrants could be bound as slaves for two years to masters who would take them on, proved hopelessly

---

<sup>61</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> Beier “Social Problems in Elizabethan London” p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Beier *Masterless Men* p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Beier “Social Problems in Elizabethan London” p. 127.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Kinney, Arthur F. Introduction. *Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars*. Ed. Arthur F. Kinney. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990. p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Kinney p. 44.

<sup>68</sup> 1 Edw. VI. c.3.

<sup>69</sup> Kinney p. 45.

impractical.”<sup>70</sup> The act provided no legitimate motivation for either a captured vagabond or a skittish master to bind themselves to one another. Beyond initially avoiding further corporal punishment, vagabonds had no reason to remain with their new masters once enslaved. Given that these were criminals accused of illegally departing their homes in order to avoid work, it would seem likely they would similarly abscond from their masters’ homes to avoid work, and in fact, the Vagrancy Act contained detailed instructions for punishing runaways, including being “branded with an S and made slaves for life. A second escape meant death.”<sup>71</sup> The land had no chance to become littered with poor men brandishing V’s and S’s on their chests, however, because very few potential masters stepped forward to take in apprehended vagabonds. Unsurprisingly, people fortunate enough to have avoided the various financial pitfalls spurring the vagrancy epidemic did not line up to invite felons into their homes, farms, or shops. Masters had no reason to believe that vagabonds *qua* slaves would work efficiently or earnestly, that they would neither harm nor steal from their new wardens, or that they would not run away as soon as it proved convenient. Given no reason to expose themselves to such annoyances and threats, “volunteer slave-owners did not materialize.”<sup>72</sup>

As motivation for masters to take in possibly rowdy young men, even with the promise of free labor, they needed guarantees that said young men would behave themselves as both workers and boarders. As motivation for young men to behave themselves, they needed guarantees that their acquiescence in a master’s governance would return results greater than those yielded through begging or stealing. Wages did not provide an answer, as they continued to fall while prices rose. At the same time, trade guilds were employing an apprenticeship system which demanded that young men submit themselves to a master for a period of generally more than seven years, with little to no pay and great restrictions on their personal freedom, and it proved wildly successful predicated only on the concept that, after the apprentice had completed his service, he would be able to earn a viable living with the training he received. After his period of enslavement, a vagabond remained a vagabond, but after his indenture, a formerly shiftless lad became something greater than he was before, a wheelwright perhaps, a chandler, a bricklayer. He had watched his master run a shop, learned the intricacies of the business, and above all else, belonged to a guild ostensibly invested in his success, a stabilizing community regulating and governing itself. For a chance to join such an organization, for a chance to elevate his station, and for a chance to climb a rung on the social ladder, a young man would check his passions and give himself up to rigid controls for the better part of a decade if not more. This arrangement provided just the type of social ballast the anti-vagrancy laws could not, and the government would adopt a national system of apprenticeship with the Statute of Artificers<sup>73</sup> in 1563.

The adoption, however, would not be seamless. As S. T. Bindoff argues in his exacting analysis of the drafting of the Statute of Artificers<sup>74</sup>, the preliminary forms of

---

<sup>70</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 122.

<sup>71</sup> Kinney p. 45.

<sup>72</sup> Slack *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England* p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> 5 Eliz. c.4.

<sup>74</sup> Bindoff, S. T. “The Making of the Statute of Artificers.” *Elizabethan Government and Society*. Eds. S. T. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield, and C. H. Williams. London: The Athlone Press, 1961. 56-94.

the statute most likely looked quite similar to previous inchoate attempts at a poor law<sup>75</sup>, hardly mentioning trade apprenticeship at all, and only with the input of the House of Commons, lawmakers slightly closer to the front lines, did it develop into the document handed down through history. For example, Bindoff points out that, for a law so long understood as England's great affirmation of apprenticeship that held sway for centuries,<sup>76</sup> the purported goal of the act, according to its preamble, was to “bannyshe idlenes, avaunce husbandrie, and yelde unto the hyred persone bothe in the tyme of scarcitie and in the tyme of plentie a convenyent proporcion of Wages”<sup>77</sup> with nary a word about apprenticeship. He argues “that the apprenticeship clauses were an addition to a bill...in which apprenticeship was a small matter, and that their addition was not matched by any revision of its preamble.”<sup>78</sup> In fact, the title of the statute—“An Acte towching dyvers Orders for Artificers Laborers Servantes of Husbandrye and Apprentises”—did not even include the word “apprentises” until the bill had gone through several readings on the floor over the course of multiple weeks.

Consulting the anonymous “Considerations delivered to the Parliament, 1559”—a set of instructions outlining “a comprehensive programme of social and economic regeneration”<sup>79</sup> generally considered a precursor to the Statute of Artificers—corroborates Bindoff's claims, as the very first recommendation advised that Edward's statute “concerning idle persons and vagabonds being made slaves now repealed [should] be revived with additions.”<sup>80</sup> The remainder of the “Considerations” exhibited the same outdated mentality, espousing an elitist attitude disdainful not only of vagrants, but also of the socially and politically ascendant merchant class. Only one of the twenty-four instructions touches upon apprenticeship, and it placed strict limits on who could become an apprentice, prohibiting anyone “to be received apprentice except his father spend 40 *s.* a year of freehold, nor to be apprenticed to a merchant except his father spend 10 *l.* a year of freehold, or be descended from a gentleman or merchant.” The reason given for such restrictions is striking: “Through the idleness of those professions so many embrace them that they are only a cloak for vagabonds and thieves, and there is such a decay of husbandry that masters cannot get skillful servants to till the ground without unreasonable wages.”<sup>81</sup> Interesting that professions so idle that they cloak vagabonds and thieves should be reserved only for the sons of gentle or wealthy fathers. It is also interesting that four years before the Statute of Artificers becomes law, apprenticeship is already being accused or credited, depending on the perspective, as a vehicle for people who would otherwise be working the land to rise above manual labor. The author, obviously someone belonging to the class asked to pay supposedly unreasonable wages for skilled servants to till the ground, damns shopkeepers and merchants as vagabonds and thieves,

---

<sup>75</sup> In fact, the previous piece of legislation during Elizabeth's reign, 5 Eliz. c.3, was “An Acte for the Relief of the Poore,” which sought to aid deserving paupers. Thus, the Statute of Artificers served as the half of previous poor laws which organized and put to work poor people capable of physical labor.

<sup>76</sup> The law remained on the Statute Book until 1819.

<sup>77</sup> Tawney and Power p. 339.

<sup>78</sup> Bindoff p. 68.

<sup>79</sup> Bindoff p. 80.

<sup>80</sup> Tawney and Power p. 325.

<sup>81</sup> Tawney and Power p. 326.



equating tradesmen with idle rogues, eliding the very gaps bridged by apprenticeship.<sup>82</sup> Young men would apprentice themselves to avoid vagrancy and to become craftsmen, but here craftsmen are vagabonds. Those earning under 40 shillings, and certainly under 10 pounds, a year should stick to what they know, namely farming. This mentality informs the initial drafts of what would become the Statute of Artificers. Bindoff asserts that the early versions of the Statute, before the Commons could refocus it on craft apprenticeship, followed the old line of “directing all unemployed males into agriculture.” It was “no novel attempt to organize the labour market, but simply the shovelling of its refuse along a couple of well-worn paths.”<sup>83</sup>

Accordingly, the primary objective of the law, as stated in the unrevised preamble, was to banish idleness and advance husbandry (the same symptoms addressed in anti-vagrancy legislation), and the first seventeen clauses of the Statute address just these issues without any reference to apprenticeship. The Statute required all hired servants to serve terms of absolutely no less than one whole year, and demanded that both masters and servants give at least three months warning before the end of a term if either party wished to sever ties. It compelled anyone between the ages of twelve and sixty—if they were not in service, not born a gentleman, not a student or scholar, did not own sufficient lands, or were not heir apparent to a relative who possessed sufficient holdings—to be retained to serve in husbandry with any practitioner who asked them, and any who resisted were to be whipped and treated as vagabonds. The Statute also set wages for servants and assigned a penalty of ten days imprisonment and a five-pound fine for masters who paid salaries richer than deemed suitable. These clauses reflect the same motivations driving the 1547 Vagrancy Act and the 1559 “Considerations”: in order to tamp down vagrancy, thus halting the physical mobility of poor intransigents who might threaten social stability, the ruling class felt the need to tie vagabonds down to the land under definitive supervision, preferably in the country toiling on farms far away from seats of power like London. This strategy had been failing for nearly half a century, and as the Statute progressed through the House of Commons, they added clauses which redirected the call for mandatory service initially appropriated only for husbandry to guild apprenticeship in towns. Though this would seem to unlock a Pandora’s box of upward social mobility, the apprenticeship clauses of the Statute of Artificers also effected rigid controls on the population, tying individuals down for longer periods of time and later into life, as well as reproduced the dominant socioeconomic power structure on succeeding generations by restricting who could apprentice with whom.

The most fundamental regulations of apprenticeship are laid out in the nineteenth clause of the Statute, which states that any householder at least 24 years old practicing any occupation in a city or town should “reteyn the sonne of any freeman not occupying

---

<sup>82</sup> See the discussion of the 1573 Memorandum on the Statute of Artificers above. The Memorandum argues that, because all of the apprenticeships with artificers would be taken by the sons of husbandmen eager to trade the field for a shop, the sons of artificers would be forced to become rogues and vagabonds. In both the Memorandum and the Considerations, the potential for upward social mobility created by the enforcement of apprenticeship is condemned, not in and of itself, but in the terms of the threat that enforcement was designed to combat. That is, apprenticeship somehow creates rogues and vagabonds rather than eliminating them, either in the form of lazy shopkeepers who might as well be vagabonds because they allegedly do so little work, or in the form of artificers’ sons who turn to crime rather than move one rung up or down the social ladder.

<sup>83</sup> Bindoff p. 66.

husbandry nor beinge a laborer”<sup>84</sup> as an apprentice for a term of no less than seven years, and said term should not expire before the apprentice reached the age of at least 24 years. This rule was given considerable punch by the twenty-fourth clause, which prohibited “any person or persons other than suche as nowe do Lawfully use or exerceyse any arte or mystery or manuall Occupacion to sett up occupye or exerceyse any crafte...excepte he shall have bene brought uppe therin Seven yeres at the least as Apprentyce, in maner and forme abovesaid,”<sup>85</sup> and the twenty-eighth clause, which made refusing to serve an apprenticeship punishable by imprisonment. Thus, any man who wished to practice any craft in any town needed first to subject himself to at least seven years of apprenticeship—which meant swearing off sex, marriage, drinking, gambling, and general rabbleroising—not to conclude before he turned 24, and he could be thrown in jail if he declined to become an apprentice any time before he turned 21. This strategy promoted British industry by acknowledging the increasing importance of commerce and siphoning some of the labor supply away from husbandry, and the insistence on a long apprenticeship helped to ensure the high quality of English workmanship and products by preventing overhasty young men from setting up shop before they were prepared to succeed.

Future or very new apprentices, however, likely saw the mandatory seven or more years before them as a yawning gulf between themselves and financial independence, just one of the many restrictions the Statute of Artificers placed on them through the circuitry of apprenticeship. Clauses twenty through twenty-three detail specific guidelines dictating which young men could apprentice in which trades, and the sorting criteria were based upon familial status. No merchant trafficking “into any partes beyond the seae, mercer, draper, goldsmith, ironmonger, Inbroderer or clothe that dothe or shall put clothe to makynge and saile” could take on an apprentice unless that prentice was his son or if that prentice’s parents had “landes, tenementes [etc.] of the clere yerely value of xl s. of one estate of inheritance or freeholde at the leaste” if the merchant operated in a corporate city and “three pounds of one estate of inheritance or freeholde at the leaste”<sup>86</sup> for a market town. On the other hand, an artisan of a lower station, such as a “smythe, whelwright, plowwright, mylewright, carpenter, Roughe mayson, playsterer, sawyer, lymeburner, bryckemaker, bryke layer, Tyler, Slater,” etc., could have “the sonne of any person as Apprentyce...albeyt the father or mother of any suche Apprentyce have not any Landes, Tenementes nor hereditamentes.”<sup>87</sup> Though not quite as stringent as the recommendations put forward in the “Considerations delivered to the Parliament, 1559,” which suggested that all apprentices should hail from estates worth at least 40 shillings per year and that apprentices with merchants at least 10 pounds, the intent of these clauses in the Statute of Artificers point in very much the same direction. Indentures in, and thus access to, the most lucrative and powerful professions, large-scale international distributive trades usually dealing with cloth and fine goods, were reserved for already socially privileged sons. Though three pounds was not an extraordinarily prohibitive annual income, and a bricklayer’s son could conceivably land an indenture with an ironmonger, the Statute essentially codified established indenture patterns in London

---

<sup>84</sup> Tawney and Power p. 345.

<sup>85</sup> Tawney and Power p. 347.

<sup>86</sup> Tawney and Power p. 345-6.

<sup>87</sup> Tawney and Power p. 346-7.

discussed above, where the vast majority of apprenticeships with great company men went to the sons of other great company men. This practice speaks to the Statute's larger goal of using apprenticeship to retard socioeconomic and geographical mobility, to check the societal unrest demonstrated by swelling numbers of vagabonds, and generally to maintain the status quo, all under the guise of doing the very opposite. Young men would swarm to London to begin apprenticeships with stars in their eyes, dreaming of one day opening their own shops, and gladly tie themselves down to a master for nearly a decade. The dream would come true for many, but London could only sustain so many masons, goldsmiths, and mercers, and the authors of the Statute of Artificers tip their hand in one of the later clauses, which belies their anticipation of apprenticeship growing so popular that the market would become glutted.

The twenty-sixth clause of the Statute of Artificers orders that any craftsman who keeps three apprentices "shall reteyne and kepe one Journeyman and for every other Apprentyce above the number of the said three Apprentyces one other Journeyman"<sup>88</sup> upon pain of a ten pound fine. While this measure might seem like a benign gesture toward protecting young men throughout their entire evolution from prentice to shopkeeper—current apprentices should not be overly exploited, and former apprentices who have completed their indentures should have jobs waiting for them as journeymen—the clause demonstrates concern that apprentices and journeymen who willingly volunteered themselves for years of servitude on the assumption that they would one day become householders might grow wary of the real potential for such success. If the need already existed in 1563, when the enforcement of apprenticeship was only first adopted nationally, to include preemptive measures ensuring that prentices would have employment opportunities once they finished their terms and found they could not set up for themselves, and the national enforcement of apprenticeship would only funnel more young men into the guild system, then the problem of too many apprentices lining up to open redundant, superfluous shops would only grow worse, and increasing numbers of young men would be trapped at the wage earning stage of journeyman, while established householders would continue to turn to the virtually free labor provided by the steady stream of apprentices.

In fact, that seems to be just what happened. Steve Rappaport reports, "beginning in the 1560s and especially from the 1580s onwards wage labourers in many companies demanded action to reduce the number of apprentices engaged by shopkeepers,"<sup>89</sup> and most guilds acquiesced in those demands in one form or another. Some companies extended the minimum term of indenture to eight or even ten years, temporarily delaying the transition from apprentice to journeyman at a cost of further servitude and restricted freedom for already surprisingly old prentices. Some companies prohibited newly minted householders from taking on apprentices for a number of years, sometimes as many as ten, which might have briefly stymied the over reliance on apprentice labor, but only for young, unestablished shopkeepers, while senior guildsmen could continue to enjoy free apprentice labor. Other companies demanded that former apprentices who had just finished their indentures serve as journeymen for a given period of time, usually at least a year, while compelling householders directly to hire more journeymen. At best, these measures only slightly slowed the great influx of apprentices into London.

---

<sup>88</sup> Tawney and Power p. 347.

<sup>89</sup> Rappaport *Worlds within Worlds* p.109.

The aggregate effect of the conditions necessitating and caused by these directives was accretive apprentice frustration in the face of longer, harder service for less and less reward. In turn, the rate of apprentices fleeing their indentures and journeymen abandoning their abortive careers escalated greatly, leaving large numbers of outcasts milling about London with no master and no legitimate means of providing for themselves, and they were of course categorized as vagabonds. A. L. Beier describes “a striking development of the period...that more and more of them [vagrants] originated in the metropolitan area itself.” Until 1580, roughly 20 to 30 percent of vagabonds were either born or last resident in the capital, but by the end of the century, “from the standpoint of distance, those originating within 10 miles of London Bridge more than doubled, so that by 1600 about half of the total were in this category.” He concludes: “servants and apprentices were indeed most prone to vagrancy of all London’s socio-economic groups.”<sup>90</sup> At first, extreme nationwide demographic expansion, filling out the lower end of society, coupled with severe inflation, poverty, and general public frustration over enclosure and dearth, forced great numbers of young men to leave home looking to earn a living, and many of them set out for London. The government, concerned about angry hordes ranging about the country, called them vagabonds and eventually tapped the apprenticeship system employed by the guilds, as well as the potential for financial solvency it promised, as a means to appease and control these vagabonds. By the 1590’s, however, the system of enforced apprenticeship began to crack as more and more apprentices abandoned their indentures. Instead of apprenticeship saving large sections of the population from vagabondage, it came to provide perhaps the most fertile source of new vagabonds, discontent young men who already found themselves in London.

### III. Tudor Royal Proclamations

Though passing the Statute of Artificers evinced the government’s will to employ new strategies in the battle against vagrancy, the problem of vagabondage continued to expand and threaten national stability, and in 1572 the Parliament finally ratified a Poor Law establishing the first obligatory countrywide poor rate and furnishing an exhaustive definition of vagrants<sup>91</sup>. Much historiographic emphasis has been placed on statutes such as these, laws forged through a deliberative process, thus prioritizing parliamentary

---

<sup>90</sup> Beier *Masterless Men* p. 41, 44.

<sup>91</sup> 14 Eliz. c.5, entitled “An Acte for the Punishment of Vacabondes, and for Relief of the Poore & Impotent.” This is the statute that contains the famous phrase “rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars,” which appears in the preamble, and classifies “common players in interludes” as vagrants. The extensive definition of rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars provided in the fifth clause of the statute reveals telling preoccupations of the law’s authors. What one would expect, given previous legislation, to be the standard definition of a vagabond—“all and every person and persons being whole and mighty in Body and able to labor, having not land or master, nor using any lawful Merchandise Craft or Mystery whereby he or she might get his or her Living, and can give no reckoning how he or she doth lawfully get his or her Living”—does not rank first. Listed before it are fortune tellers, practitioners of physiognomy, and anyone else traveling the country “using subtle crafty and unlawful Games or Plays.” Overall, the law demonstrates a greater concern about the kind of infectious people who traverse the nation enabling others to be idle—such as fencers, minstrels, jugglers, peddlers, actors, etc.—than with simple common laborers who refuse to work for the going wage. That is, the government was worried more about the spread of idleness than with idleness itself.

influence, but such focused attention can sometimes obscure the monarch as the ultimate source of and authority behind all law. Royal proclamations usefully grant more direct, unmediated access to the primary concerns of the king or queen. Though proclamations were generally issued to “implement and supplement, rather than supplant, statutory law,”<sup>92</sup> they were full public ordinances with the same constitutional validity as statutes, manifesting a royal will with determined legislative, not simply annotative, intent. That is, while many proclamations were couched in terms either of republishing or enforcing a preexisting regulation, asserting crown rights, or announcing emergency injunctions, they reflect the monarch’s desire to bear immediate influence on pressing matters of public concern by suggesting remedies. Examining the royal proclamations regarding vagabondage, idleness, service, and apprenticeship of both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I provides unique insight into the complex interrelation of such concepts and the evolution of the royal understanding of that admixture over the course of the sixteenth century. While some of vagabondage’s symptoms remain consistent, namely willful idleness expressed in the form of play, the agents and occasions expressing those symptoms change radically. Toward the beginning of the century, idleness evoked a local failure between servant and master, but by 1600, widespread vagrancy signaled the corruption of the master-servant dynamic itself as a functioning institution of control. In short, Henry did not worry about apprentices because their masters would prevent them from becoming vagabonds, but Elizabeth, toward the end of her life, in many cases saw no real difference between apprentices and vagabonds.

In 1576, the queen issued a proclamation “enforcing statutes against vagabonds and rogues,” who remained a persistent and growing problem in and around London. She asks the “mayor, aldermen, and recorder of London” to promise “good search to be made...in all common tabling houses, inns, alehouses, and tippling houses as also in all bowling alleys and other places where any gaming or play is used and frequented, and there to apprehend and take such suspected persons, being masterless men of evil name and fame, not having wherewithal to maintain their idle life.”<sup>93</sup> The condition of being without a master, a direct superior sitting higher on the social ladder responsible for his ward’s actions and daily maintenance, denotes that these persons willfully operate outside the normative hierarchy of power that provided the bedrock for societal stability and development. They actively choose to be idle, perhaps an acceptable decision if they possessed the funds necessary to support such illicit habits occasionally, or even if they had masters to rescue them financially and morally, but the decision to remove themselves from the grids of control renders them virtually irredeemable in their current state. Such establishments threaten to ensnare their denizens in a vicious cycle of idleness and gaming, theory and praxis, but true danger does not seem to appear either in hoisting a mug or wallowing in the state willful inactivity. Instead, the threat comes from the “many vagabonds, rogues, idle persons, and masterless men having nothing to live on [who] do daily resort to the cities of London and Westminster and the suburbs of the same,” whose arrival sparks “many robberies and felonies and other horrible crimes and offenses...to the high displeasure of Almighty God and to the great hurt of her

---

<sup>92</sup> Hughes, Paul L. and James F. Larkin. Introduction. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume I The Early Tudors (1485-1553)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964. p. xxvi.

<sup>93</sup> Hughes, Paul L. and James F. Larkin. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume II The Later Tudors (1553-1587)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969. p. 417.

[Elizabeth's] good and loving subjects."<sup>94</sup> Idle play is a symptom of the real dangers, poverty and unemployment, rather than their cause, yet the menace to London is displaced onto the poor, jobless people who descend on England's financial capital. She commands "all idle persons and masterless men not having wherewith to live on, [and] not living by any lawful labor or occupation" to "avoid themselves from the said cities of London and Westminster and suburbs of the same," and "from thence to repair to the countries and places where they were born, and there to tarry and abide in some lawful work and exercise, as they ought to do."<sup>95</sup> In short, she tells them to go home and get jobs, to tie themselves to certain land and a particular master, and to reinsert themselves back into the regular systems of control.

In 1511, Henry appears to share similar concerns. He proclaims knowledge that some of "his subjects, and in especial servants of husbandry and servants of artificers, do daily incline themselves to unlawful games, as to carding, dicing, and other unlawful games...whereby the said servants fall to robberies and oftentimes to robbing of their masters, to the undoing as well of themselves as of their masters."<sup>96</sup> Just as Elizabeth will come to complain about the phalanxes of masterless men invading London and stealing from her true subjects to feed their illegal pastimes, Henry warns against ruffians resorting to theft in order to accommodate costly and immoral gaming, but Henry's offenders do not exist in states of perpetual vagrancy or idleness. Instead, he identifies the most likely perpetrators of such offenses as servants, men working under a master, and thus operating in a fixed location under specific control. Accordingly, the threat posed by these gambling underlings, while tangentially touching the population at large in the form of an occasional public robbery, remains restricted within the bounds of the master-servant relationship. The servant endangers himself with the general moral evils of gaming and exposure to the vice of idleness, and troubles his master with the menace of violence and theft. Potentially more damaging, however, is the threat posed to the master-servant relationship itself, where divisive gambling and thievery risks undoing the bond beneficial to both servant and master. Husbandmen and artificers required steady servants to flourish in agriculture and industry, and servants required masters to supply a source of lawful labor providing them a regular income and suitable direction.

While Henry also worries that those feigning physical defect offend God and disturb his subjects, he concludes by adducing perhaps the most pressing danger of willful idleness: "the great hindrance of husbands and artificers which cannot get laborers for their money."<sup>97</sup> The larger concerns—rampant gambling, drinking, and general play, simultaneously born of and father to idleness, leading to vagrancy and the displeasure of God, king, and subjects—emerge from a local failure, the inability of prospective bosses to sustain normal master-servant relationships with their employees. Not only does such a failure bring about the inefficient usage of available labor, which diminishes the aggregate productivity of England's farmers and craftsmen, it signals the refusal of the country's lesser degrees of people to participate in one of the primary systems in place to control and contain them. Gambling and play threatened to transform formerly conscientious workers into an indolent drain, so Henry declared that no "apprentice, nor

---

<sup>94</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. II* p. 416.

<sup>95</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. II* p. 416.

<sup>96</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 88.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 89.

servant at husbandry, laborer, nor servant artificer play at the tables from henceforth, nor at the tennis, closh, dice, cards, bowls, nor any other unlawful games.”<sup>98</sup> Apprentices, though they were not to receive any direct financial compensation for their labor, find themselves grouped together here with servants of husbandmen and artificers because they each partook of a process that organized them, gave them direction, and put them to positive use, all under the watchful eye of an individual master.

Vagrancy continued to draw the king’s periodic attention, soliciting proclamations touching on the subject in 1517, 1527, 1530, 1531, and 1533; then in May 1545, Henry conceives of an innovative solution to the problem posed by idle vagabonds. He acknowledges that “there do remain yet in this realm of England, specially about the city of London, a great number of ruffians and vagabonds, to whom albeit God hath given personage and strength apt and able to labor...yet be they so wasted in mischief and idleness that they give themselves to no labor or honest kind of living.” Since they are able bodied with lots of free time, Henry orders “all such ruffians, vagabonds, masterless men, common players, and evil-disposed persons to serve his majesty and his realm in these his wars in certain galleys, and other like vessels.”<sup>99</sup> Furnishing the royal navy with sturdy beggars conscripted into service attended to two pressing concerns: the threat of masterless men chronicled in many previous proclamations, and the need to satisfy military recruitment goals. Just a month earlier, Henry issued a proclamation looking to enlist “as many of his highness’ subjects as shall offer themselves to serve at their own adventure”<sup>100</sup> as volunteers in ships of marque. Rounding up all the vagrants milling about the capital and stuffing them into boats was an extreme measure, but Henry was not willing to accept absolutely anyone for naval service, only those men who could offer to serve at their own adventure; that is, in a sense, *only* masterless men could serve. Henry permitted to volunteer “no prentice, nor no servant to any man, nor soldier already retained, be [he] so hardy to depart from his master or captain without his special license.”<sup>101</sup> If a young man served under someone—if he was spoken for—then the primacy of that master-servant bond trumped any other claim to service.

By 1590, the efficacy of that bond had significantly eroded, and the devolution of previously established methods of social control began to reach its zenith. In response to assaults on Lincoln’s Inn, Elizabeth issues a proclamation entitled “Enforcing Curfew for Apprentices,” which denounces the attacks as “a very great outrage lately committed by some apprentices and others being masterless men and vagrant persons, in and about the suburbs of the city of London.”<sup>102</sup> In Henry’s 1545 naval recruitment proclamations, apprentices were understood to be absolutely distinct from idle vagrants, and forty-five years later Elizabeth holds them in equal estimation. Gathering apprentices and masterless men under the same threatening umbrella does not necessarily elide the determinative distinction dividing them—apprentices were still attached to a master and vagabonds were not—but it did demonstrate that the faith of the queen, who sat at the top of the social hierarchy, had been irrevocably shaken in the ability of the apprenticeship

---

<sup>98</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 91.

<sup>99</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 353.

<sup>100</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 348.

<sup>101</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. I* p. 348.

<sup>102</sup> Hughes, Paul L. and James F. Larkin. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume III The Later Tudors (1588-1603)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969. p. 60.

system to maintain the peace in London. To those of the old guard in power, there was no longer a practicable difference between apprentices and vagrants, mastered men and masterless. Elizabeth does make a final gesture toward the master-servant relationship, commanding constables to find “any such apprentices, journeymen, or servants wandering abroad out of their master his house after nine of the clock in the night, [and] not only take and commit such person to prison, but also...warn and command the master of every such person to come and appear before the alderman...of that ward.”<sup>103</sup> By this point, however, attempting to hold masters responsible proves a bootless strategy; the swarms of masterless men have absorbed too many apprentices into their ranks.

The downward spiral continues in 1591 when Elizabeth issues a proclamation “prohibiting unlawful assembly under martial law.” The order is directed at the many “unlawful great assemblies of multitudes of a popular sort of base condition, whereof some are apprentices and servants to artificers and to such like as are not able or not disposed to rule their servants as they ought to do.”<sup>104</sup> The definition of who constitutes these unruly crowds expands from those of a base condition, to apprentices, to any servant of an artificer—for the concern now squarely focuses on the queen and London, where few husbandmen reside—and the imagined master cannot or will not (perhaps a more striking accusation) control his wards. This last clause in particular demonstrates that there are no precise criteria delineating who composes these angry throngs, only that their existence somehow results from a breakdown in society’s ability to contain its lower sorts. More frightening still is the supposed goal of the angry crowds: “attempting to rescue out of the hands of public officers such [offenders] as have been lawfully arrested.”<sup>105</sup> This is no longer a general danger to her majesty’s pleasure and the overall public good, but a unified and directed threat against a load bearing pillar in the structure of government, the ability to arrest and hold suspected criminals. If officers managed to capture some of the more egregious offenders, the crowds themselves would set about taking them back, and the will of the people—particularly low people—superseded governmentally imposed notions of justice.

Elizabeth reiterates who she believes to be behind all of this mischief, alleging that “these late unlawful assemblies and routs are compounded of sundry sorts of base people, some known apprentices such as are of base manual occupation, and some others wandering idle persons of condition of beggars and vagabonds, and some coloring their wandering by the name of soldiers returned from war.”<sup>106</sup> Once again, apprentices and idle vagabonds find themselves painted with the same brush, but the categories prove so slippery that Elizabeth cannot fully condemn them out of hand. Soldiers returned from the wars in France formed another highly unstable, potentially threatening population, but they were justified in roaming the countryside during their treks home, and vagrants seized upon this by claiming to be itinerant, impotent veterans. Later in 1591, Elizabeth issues a proclamation “placing vagrants under martial law” that attempts to differentiate between true and falsified returned soldiers. She acknowledges that there are those who “have indeed served and fallen into sickness, and [are] therefore licensed to depart their countries from whence they were levied, and do deserve relief,” but concludes that most

---

<sup>103</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III* p. 60.

<sup>104</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 82.

<sup>105</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 82.

<sup>106</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 82.



of the teeming multitudes claiming such status “either have not served at all, or have not been licensed to depart from the places of their service and therefore they are justly to be punished and not to be relieved.”<sup>107</sup> One could no longer distinguish masters who properly kept their servants from those who could or would not, apprentices interested only in completing their indenture from those eager to rebel, deserving soldiers injured in the wars from deserters. Elizabeth saw all gathered into a swirling mass intent on breaking the law, disturbing the peace, and generally evoking chaos.

Elizabeth would offer two further proclamations entitled “Placing London Vagabonds under Martial Law,” the first in 1598 and the second in 1601, and both clearly limn a monarch desperate to restore order to the apparently unraveling capital. In the 1598 proclamation, the queen once again notes “that there hath been of late divers routs and unlawful assemblies of rogues and vagabonds, coloring their wandering by the name of soldiers lately come from the wars,” but they have elevated the destructive quotient of their actions. These vagabonds, most likely including some apprentices, “have not only committed robberies and murders upon her majesty’s people” as had been previously noted in former proclamations, but they have “also resisted and murdered divers constables and others that have come to the rescue.”<sup>108</sup> Vagrants not only break the law, but they disable the rule of law from regaining its hold. As punishment for this, Elizabeth instructs her officers to seize offenders and “without delay to execute [them] upon the gallows by order of martial law.”<sup>109</sup> Such extreme measures, it appears, failed in the queen’s eyes to repel the marauding hordes, leading to this striking opening statement in the 1601 proclamation:

Whereas advertisement is given unto us that there is at this time dispersed within our city of London and the Suburbs thereof a great multitude of base and loose people such as neither have any certain place of abode nor any good or lawful cause of business to attend hereabouts, but lie privily in corners and bad houses, listening after news and stirs, and spreading rumors and tales, being of likelihood ready to lay hold of any occasion to enter into any tumult or disorder, thereby to seek rapine and pillage; and likewise that further numbers of such sort of vagabond people do continually flock and gather to our city and the places confining about the same.<sup>110</sup>

This passage provides, I believe, the apotheosis of both royal and noble terror regarding the threat vagabonds, and apprentices joining vagabonds, posed to established sociopolitical power structures. They formed a shapeless, invisible mass, secretly coiled in back rooms just out of sight, ever apprehensive of any whisper of rebellion, broadcasting cryptic instructions cloaked as gossip, and always perched to attack the very foundations of civilization itself. That the gaggles of young men migrating to London in hopes of attaining a foothold in the ascent to personal solvency should be understood largely as reinforcements for a secret anarchic army indicated that the destructive

---

<sup>107</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 96.

<sup>108</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 196-7.

<sup>109</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 197.

<sup>110</sup> Hughes and Larkin *Tudor Royal Proclamations Vol. III*. p. 232.

capabilities of vagabonds reached even into the systems designed to quell civil discontent, to reproduce certain social and economic hierarchies, to control a teeming youth population, and to develop Britain's industrial and trade standing within the international market. The influence of vagabonds upon apprentices, the incorporation of the latter by the former, had turned the strategy for containing masterless men against itself.

As a coda to the evolution of this version of the mutinous apprentice figure, which reached its apex during the riots of the 1590's, a former apprentice published in 1595 a rejoinder to some of Elizabeth's proclamations, explaining that not all apprentices moved of a single mind and that they should not all be summarily condemned. In "A Student's Lamentation that hath sometime been in London an Apprentice, for the rebellious tumults lately in the Citie hapning: for which five suffered death on Thursday the 24 of July last," the anonymous author adopts the provocative argumentative position that the infractions committed by genuinely riotous apprentices should not be dismissed as youthful indiscretions. Rather, he "entreat[s] all subjects and servants, that they obey her Majesty's Proclamations in their most headlong time of folly," and asks of those bad seeds, "condemn they not her Majesty's proclamation, by which they were three times charged to avoid?" He disagrees with those who might claim that "it may (by some) be here objected, sedition and rebellion are unfit terms to be used" to describe the actions of apprentices, "for the Prentices of London had no seditious purpose of open rebellion." If these young men were only interested in venting pent up frustration, how was it "clearly proved by the confession of their own mouths, that they intended to enter Tower street" to garner munitions, and "did they not scatter Libels, appoint a meeting place, [and] there had they not many conferences" discussing how best to storm the armory on Towerhill?<sup>111</sup> While he claims that not all of the perpetrators were truly apprentices, the author affirms that apprentices did engage in some of the most egregious crimes laid out in Elizabeth's royal proclamations and did abet seditious rebellion. He denies, however, perhaps the most damning of the queen's claims—that apprentices operated as a singular entity, a crazed mob loyal only to itself.

Though some evil apprentices fell to rioting, the author proudly proclaims that just and loyal apprentices broke rank and revealed the plots of their nefarious brethren. He chides seditious lads: "Be then ashamed you neglectful young men, I am ashamed to call you Prentices: for how can I call you by that name which you despise. For Prentices indeed are those, that bewrayed your practices." To be called an apprentice, the author argues, implies fealty to both individual master and London, and only the prentices who remained loyal can suitably claim that title. The ostensible thrust of the entire piece is to let it be "to all England made manifest, that albeit a number of careless boys (set on by evil disposed persons) attempted these things: yet the better sort of Prentices, yea and the greater sort, never stirred in these heinous actions." This statement is striking for a

---

<sup>111</sup> Ian Archer understands this episode as an example so representative that he begins *The Pursuit of Stability* with a brief description of the uprising: "On the evening of Sunday 29 June 1595 a crowd of London apprentices reported to have been one thousand strong marched on Tower Hill, intending to ransack gunmakers' shops, and then stoned the City's officers who had been sent to pacify them. Their ultimate intentions are unclear, but in the legal proceedings which followed it was alleged that they planned 'to robbe, steale, pill and spoile the welthy and well disposed inhabitants of the saide cytye, and to take the sworde of aucthoritye from the magistrates and governours lawfully aucthorised.'"

number of reasons, the least of which being the assertion that a majority of London's apprentices, the greater sort, had nothing to do with the riots.

Acknowledging that a subset of the apprentice population constituted a "better sort" taps into a complicated matrix of class hierarchy and nomenclature which normally positioned apprentices near the very bottom rung. In the contemporary language of sorts, which will be discussed more fully elsewhere, apprentices fell among the lesser sort, among common laborers and husbandmen, no matter the degree of their family or the prestige of their guild. The predetermined low station of apprentices lead to friction between levelheaded craftsmen and merchants who resented their dandy apprentices of gentle birth indulging in opulent clothing and dismissing earnest labor. In most cases, referring to apprentices of the better sort would imply the second sons of gentlemen or perhaps those learning one of the finer trades, but, in this instance, the better sort of prentices designates those young men all along the spectrums of heritage and industry who strictly and faithfully adhere to the oath they swore at their indenture. The better sort is here defined not by circumstance, but by personal action and will. Finally, rarely did an author, himself a former prentice writing a tract defending the honor of his fellows, set out to proclaim to all of England that true London prentices did *not* win fame with irrepressible martial prowess, strange that he should trumpet the young men deserving the apprentice appellation for resisting the urge to pick up a weapon and prove themselves by force. As we shall see, most chapbooks heralding apprentices argued that the world should take note of the fame and honor London's prentices brought the capital through the physical domination of their enemies. Such books, however, likely targeted current and former apprentices as their core audience. "A Student's Lamentation" slyly sets its sights on different targets.

Though the words "An admonition to all prentices" appear atop each page of the work—nicely capitalizing on the valences of meaning present in "admonish": to counsel against wrong practices, to scold as punishment, and to remind of a duty—the author clearly intends to do more with his text than speak to apprentices gone bad or those resisting the call to follow their fallen brothers. While he "grieve[s] on the one side at the presuming folly of such witless Prentices as have offended," and on the other side "rejoice[s] many times more at the faithfulness of those Prentices that revealed their offense," articulating the act of recognition sets an example for a more powerful audience, for he does not simply let these actions stand on their own, but instead cites them explicitly as evidence, arguing that no "greater proof of their fidelity could be had." The end goal of the text, of course, is not simply to demonstrate that apprentices did not act entirely in unison, or even to specify that some apprentices rebelled against authority while others revealed their plots and testified against them, but to leverage that differentiation as proof against the charges levied by the queen in her proclamations. "Surely," the author claims, "by them [the good apprentices] hath London no little cause of joy, that her Majesty and the Nobility are assured, there are in her such Prentices, as prefer no familiarity before faithful duty, accounting those friends foes, that seek to disturb England's peace." Rather than claiming a stake of London's honor through battle against invaders or foreign infidels, these apprentices allegedly bring joy to the city by informing on their compatriots. Such lads understand that being an apprentice means placing their allegiance in the vertical social hierarchy atop which sit the queen and nobility, rather than in the horizontal community of others occupying a similar

socioeconomic position. In other words, the author of this defense wants the queen to believe that the majority of London prentices privilege the potential to advance as individuals up the social ladder above any fraternal bonds that might have formed between peers.

### Conclusion

At the very beginning of the sixteenth century, the system of apprenticeship was an entrenched but specific tradition employed by livery companies to train new members and pass along some of the social and industrial mores of a particular locale. In response to an expanding national population, and disproportionate growth in poverty and vagabondage, the government—looking for a way to make people stay in one place and behave—co-opted the guild system, officially codifying it in the 1563 Statute of Artificers. The ostensible premise of the law was that any man otherwise unable to earn a living could, by obediently training with a master for seven years or longer for no payment apart from instruction, elevate his station and build himself a career. Upon closer inspection, the law is truly designed to prevent social and physical mobility while merely appearing to facilitate them, creating a false promise that drew thousands of young men to London each year as apprentices who would eventually fail to find gainful employment. The perfidy of apprenticeship ironically channeled impoverished young men into London all the more directly, and as more apprentices descended on the city, the line between upstanding craftsmen in training and rebellious miscreant became blurred in the public eye, as both avenues of evolution were plausible. By the end of the sixteenth century, apprentices were conceived of as both the future generations of London's citizen economy and a constant threat to undermine the stability of the capital's culture.

## Chapter 2

### Bringing Down the House: Theater Riots and Conduct Books

In June 1584, William Fleetwood, Recorder of London and honorable brother of the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors, returned to London from a trip to find the city in commotion. In a letter to Lord Burghley, he relates the cause of the fracas:

That night returned to London, and found all the wards full of watches. The cause thereof was for that time neere the theatre or curten, at the time of the playes, there lay a prentice sleeping upon the grasse; and one Challes did turn upon the toe upon the belly of the same prentice; whereupon the same prentice did start up, and after words, they fell to playne blowes. The company increased of bothe sides to the number of 500 at least. This Challes exclaimed and said that he was a gentleman, and that the apprentice was but a rascal, and some there were little better than roogs, that took upon them the name of gentlemen, and said that the prentices were but the skumme of the earth.<sup>112</sup>

Spurred by simmering antipathy and resentment of the diminishing clarity of lines demarcating social strata, a rabble-rousing gentleman named Challes sparks a riot by kicking an unaware prentice sleeping near a theater. This episode nicely encapsulates many contemporary attitudes towards apprentices: that they were only a step above rogues who earned their living criminally; that as a group they looked upward at being able to claim the name of gentlemen for themselves; that the gentility felt pressure from below from the rising merchant class, represented here by apprentices who themselves were working to elevate their individual stations; that apprentices maintained a proclivity for violence, dormant but easily awakened by a swift kick; that they were eager to join the cause of a slighted brother, thus quick to form mobs; that theaters provided a physical, and by association ideological, cradle for their illicit behavior; and finally, that the threat they posed was a matter of public concern that required extra policing by city watches. Authorities and moralists conceived of the potential for apprentice riots as a very real threat, not simply fodder for provocative literature. As historian Charles M. Clode explains, “what we have here recorded are not sensational reports of a writer catering for the amusement of his readers, but the authoritative statements of the Recorder of London to the Secretary of State for the guidance of the Queen’s Government.”<sup>113</sup> Even if the perceived threat of riots specifically carried out by apprentices was the product of vertiginous, escalating, self-referential fear, that perception often drove real social and legal policy.

In the last chapter, we examined how the ubiquitous threat of vagabondage—which threatened to distribute the poor throughout the country, allowing them to pop up

---

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Clode, Charles M. *The Early History of the Guild of Merchant Taylors. Part II—The Lives*. London: Harrison and Sons, St. Martin’s Lane, 1888. p. 292. Also in Chambers, E. K. *The Elizabethan Stage, Volume IV*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923. p. 297-8.

<sup>113</sup> Clode p. 293.

anywhere and everywhere—contributed to the legal enforcement of mandatory apprenticeship for scores of young men, and simultaneously tied them to the image of the vagabond. Vagabondage was too diffuse and vague a threat, however, to cause outright panic in the population, so apprentices sometimes needed to present a more clear and present danger as a manifestation of the unease they engendered. That danger came in the form of riot.

In his *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), Sir Thomas Smith explains, “Riot is called in our English term or speech, where any number is assembled with force to do anything,”<sup>114</sup> but apprentices were fabled to form crowds numbering in the hundreds and sometimes thousands. The public legend of massive apprentice riots dated back to the Evil May Day Riot of 1517, when a violent mob, supposedly composed of apprentices, gathered in protest of excessive numbers of foreigners living in London. Rioting apprentices were often cast as a scourge embodying the public will against social ills. “As overseers of justice,” Paul Griffiths argues, apprentices were known for “taking a leading part in the food riots of the hungry 1590s, adopting a high profile in the anti-alien reaction which was partly motivated by perceived inequalities in the labour market, and protesting against unfair monopolies.”<sup>115</sup> Entering the seventeenth century, however, apprentice riots increasingly focused their supposedly righteous violence not at correcting exploitative grain prices, but at tearing down houses of iniquity such as taverns, brothels, and theaters, and in the process caused great amounts of collateral damage. It is puzzling that apprentices should select these specific targets, given that they were reputed to frequent those same immoral houses, which allegedly provided organizing grounds out of public view for planning riots.<sup>116</sup>

As outlined in the previous chapter, ‘apprentices’ became a catchall label applied to virtually any disruptive group of people in London, and there appeared to be a disconnect between the legal admonitions against apprentice misbehavior and the guilds’ actual implementation or recognition of these directives. While the culture at large targeted apprentices in particular as disruptive agents, livery companies—the organizations that oversaw the admission of young men as apprentices and arbitrated disputes involving those young men in their capacity as apprentices—rarely registered public complaints about such disruptions officially.

We have traced the historical forces that shaped the implementation of a national system of mandatory apprenticeship over the course of the sixteenth century, which in

---

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Elton, G. R. *The Tudor Constitution*. Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1965. p. 164.

<sup>115</sup> Griffiths, Paul. *Youth and Authority*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. p. 154.

<sup>116</sup> The seeming paradox of apprentices attacking bawdy houses continued throughout the seventeenth century. In his diary entry of March 24, 1668, Samuel Pepys (Pepys, Samuel. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, Volume IX*. Eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.) describes a gathering of apprentices about Moorefields suspicious enough to warrant sending troops to disperse it. However, the troops met an unexpected reaction: “And none of the bystanders finding fault with them [the apprentices], but rather of the soldiers for hindering them. And we heard a Justice of the Peace this morning say to the King that he had been endeavoring to suppress the tumult, but could not; and that imprisoning some in the new prison at Clerkenwell, the rest did come and break open the prison and release them. And that they do give out that they are for pulling down of bawdy-houses, which is one of the great grievances of the nation. To which the King made a very poor, cold, insipid answer: ‘Why, why do they go to them, then?’” (IX 129-30). In his next diary entry, Pepys notes: “This doth make the courtiers ill at ease to see this spirit among the people, though they think this matter will come to not much; but it speaks the people’s minds” (IX.132).

turn led to a bifurcated image of the apprentice in the public consciousness. By the close of the century, Queen Elizabeth could conceive of apprentices as a constant unshaped menace, while fifty years earlier Henry VIII understood them relatively simply as managed men. Theaters played an important role in that evolution of the concept of apprenticeship as a supposed hotbed for misconduct. Playhouses provided a locus for the imagined transformation of the vague threat of apprentices congregating with criminals to hatch nefarious plots into the real and immediate offense of violent riots; theaters were where the powder keg was ignited. In the final decade of the sixteenth century, this impression became engrained through the writings of popular commentators and city officials alike, despite the fact that very little evidence exists of guilds exhibiting any concern about their apprentices rioting at theaters, and found its quintessential example early in the seventeenth century with the Shrove Tuesday Riot of 1617. The idea that apprentices gathered at theaters, often nefariously, would dominate for decades to come, and in fact persist in filtered form into modern accounts of theater history. This chapter will examine how the historiography of the rioting apprentice at the theater somehow emerged from a history that lends it little support, and explore how perceptions of playhouses and apprentices thus became entangled.

The power of the image of apprentices as riotous playgoers was not lost upon the guilds, even if they failed to register any complaints about their apprentices rioting at theaters. The livery companies did take some measures to maintain plausible deniability vis-à-vis their potentially rambunctious trainees. Beyond forbidding various illicit activities—such as drinking, gambling, fornicating, and playgoing—in the terms of indenture, some guilds began distributing moral and behavioral manuals to each young man commencing service as early as 1600. At first nothing more than perhaps a brief catechism, these books grew longer and more elaborate over the course of the seventeenth century, with some becoming popular enough to support multiple editions. Rather than warning against destructive rioting, however, the conduct books counsel against the more traditional apprentice pitfalls, such as squandering one’s master’s resources, disobeying orders, and generally practicing idleness. They universally caution apprentices about the deleterious influence of other apprentices, and warn against attending the theater, which provided a perfect atmosphere free from authority for apprentices to gather and intermingle with other mischievous elements. In spite of the many interdictions regarding the theater, which would indicate a present and continual need for such rules, apprentices seem to have gotten into plays, and modern theater historians largely accept contemporary reports that apprentices constituted a significant demographic among London playgoers. The role they played at the theater, however, remains open to question.

The long held critical assumption that apprentices composed a large subset of the early modern theater audience finds its most prominent modern voice in Alfred Harbage’s landmark *Shakespeare’s Audience*.<sup>117</sup> Harbage argues that a typical performance gathered Londoners of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and that artisans comprised a particularly strong presence. Citing mostly literary or quasi-literary sources, such as pamphlets and the prologues of plays, he claims that, despite concern about their disruptive nature, apprentices also frequented plays. “Two groups are mentioned again and again in contemporary allusions to the theatres—the students at the

---

<sup>117</sup> Harbage, Alfred. *Shakespeare’s Audience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.

Inns of Court and the apprentices of London,” Harbage asserts, and “we must recognize that the apprentices of London would have outnumbered the students ten to one.”<sup>118</sup>

While he acknowledges that apprentices “had no income except what spending money was allowed them by parents or masters, and theoretically they had no weekday leisure time,” Harbage maintains that “by hook or crook they flocked to the theatres,”<sup>119</sup> and he does all he can to paint a charitable portrait of them as playgoers. Although he rightly observes that “they were compelled by statute to be twenty-four years of age before coming out of their apprenticeships,” Harbage makes some unjustified leaps, concluding that apprentices “formed, indeed, a superior class” of playgoer because “gentle birth was not uncommon.”<sup>120</sup>

While there certainly were gentle born apprentices serving under commoner masters, a situation that produced resentment for master and apprentice alike, apprentices were not all the refined playgoers Harbage makes them out to be. As he playfully points out, the apprentice Rafe in Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* can “recit[e] at length from Shakespeare—with somewhat fewer errors than would be made by a modern college student,” supposedly indicating a sophisticated capacity to comprehend the Bard. On the contrary, as I shall explore further below, the ‘huffing part’ that Rafe speaks—a speech from Hotspur in *Henry IV Part I*—performs a very specific function within *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Spoken meta-theatrically to the putatively discriminating Blackfriars audience in order to prove his acting chops, the speech rather signals that Rafe possesses crude theatrical taste. In the self-conscious world of Elizabethan and Jacobean theater, an apprentice quoting Marlovian lines of contemporary plays, such as Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho!*, was understood as buffoonish, dangerous, or both. Such knowledge marks Rafe as the type of apprentice who loitered at theaters, much like the apprentice at the heart of the 1584 riot described by William Fleetwood. In fact, in his defense of apprentices as playgoers, Harbage cites Fleetwood’s description of that riot explicitly, though improperly.

Harbage describes theaters as potential incubators for conflict between rival demographic groups:

Between the apprentices (who felt that London was theirs) and the young gentlemen placed out in service (who were insistent upon their social superiority) there existed a natural antagonism. At places where these factions met in numbers, trouble was apt to brew, especially in the presence of setters-on who would profit by the melee. (102-3)

As proof, he offers the testimony of William Fleetwood quoted above regarding the riot at “the theatre or curten” originating with a tussle between a sleeping apprentice and a gentleman named Challes, but twists it to mean the opposite of its true intention. While Fleetwood clearly explains that Challes, who started the brawl, called the apprentice a rascal and claimed that his apprentice peers “were little better than roogs, that took upon them the name of gentlemen,” Harbage quotes Fleetwood as saying that the Challes and his friends were the ones “who ‘were litell better than roogs that took upon them the

---

<sup>118</sup> Harbage pp. 80, 81.

<sup>119</sup> Harbage p. 81.

<sup>120</sup> Harbage p. 82.



name of gentlemen.” He even speculates that “Fleetwood’s underlying sympathies must have been with the apprentices,”<sup>121</sup> as his so obviously are. Harbage poignantly misattributes the charge of assuming the name of gentility to the gentle rioters levying that accusation against apprentices, essentially diffusing the major cause for contention between the two parties. In this account, rogues claiming the name of gentlemen simply pick a fight with always pugnacious apprentices, while Fleetwood clearly states that the real gentlemen attack apprentices because of the threat they posed to gentility. Harbage may argue that apprentices with gentle backgrounds form “a superior class” of playgoer, but he ignores the complex constellation of social issues represented by apprentices at the theater. In fact, Harbage’s full throated defense of playgoing apprentices serves on some level to reaffirm suspicion of them by way of legitimizing otherwise unfounded complaints.

If Harbage mounts too vigorous a defense of apprentices at the theater, some of the early modern commentators he cites in that defense adopt a more measured stance regarding apprentices as playgoers. In *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), Thomas Nashe defends theaters against the charge that they corrupted apprentices and offers a counter accusation:

Whereas some Petitioners of the Counsaile against them [players] object, they corrupt the youth of the Cittie, and withdrawe Prentises from their worke; they heartily wishe they might bee troubled with none of their youth nor their prentises; for some of them (I meane the ruder handicrafts servants) never come abroade, but they are in danger of undoing: and as for corrupting them when they come, that’s false; for no Play they have, encourageth any man to tumults or rebellion, but layes before such the halter and the gallowes.<sup>122</sup>

As we shall explore further below, antitheatrical proponents contended that, because apprentices constituted a salient contingent among theater audiences, playhouses subverted the city’s quotidian workings by drawing prentices from their labor. Nashe, a friend of the theater, argues that, on the contrary, professional troupes saw large groups of apprentices as a looming threat, constantly “in danger of undoing” whenever they left their homes and shops. Rather than the theater providing a catalyst to accelerate apprentice misbehavior that would then move beyond the playhouse, Nashe claims that theaters were more likely to be a target of such misbehavior carried out by a group naturally inclined to riot. However, this charge comes tinged with class prejudice, as Nashe parenthetically specifies that apprentices of the “ruder handicrafts”—as opposed to, say, mercers, drapers, or goldsmiths—were the ones in danger of undoing the theater.<sup>123</sup> Those lowest down the social ladder, thus the apprentices thought to be closest

---

<sup>121</sup> Harbage p. 103.

<sup>122</sup> Nashe, Thomas. *Pierce Penilesse, His Supplication to the Divell. Works Vol. 1.* Ed. Ronald B. McKerrow. London, 1904-1910. Quoted in Harbage p. 101.

<sup>123</sup> Edmund Gayton describes a similar scenario while discussing the theater in his *Pleasant Notes on Don Quixote* (1654): “If it be the holidays, when Sailors, Watermen, Shoemakers, Butchers, and Apprentices, are at leisure, then it is good policy to amaze those violent spirits with some tearing tragedy full of fights and skirmishes, as the *Guelphs and Ghibbelines*, *Greeks and Trojans*, or *The Three London Apprentices*, which commonly ends in six acts, the spectators frequently mounting the stage, and making a more bloody

to rogues and vagabonds, allegedly proved the most pressing threat. Still, apprentices as a recognized demographic group were understood as dangerously unstable.

Henry Chettle provides a more nuanced explanation of apprentice misbehavior at the theater in *Kind-Harts Dreame* (1592), one that jibes with the notion advanced in attendant royal proclamations that apprentices were susceptible to the influence of other disruptive hooligans. Chettle did “intreate the young people of the Cittie, either to abstaine altogether from playes, or at their coming thither to use themselves after a more quiet order,” because once at the theater their tumultuous nature opened them to the pernicious ambitions of criminals. While Chettle acknowledges that apprentices participated in the riots, he testifies that they were not the instigators:

The beginners are neither gentlemen, nor citizens, nor any of both their servants, but some lewd mates that long for innovation; & when they see advantage, that either Servingmen or Apprentises are most in number, they will be of either side, though indeed they are of no side, but men beside all honestie, willing to make boote of cloakes, hats, purses, or what ever they can lay holde on in a hurley burley.<sup>124</sup>

Chettle’s account does not assign the blame for theater riots primarily to apprentices, but it does little to challenge the idea that playhouses provided a particularly incendiary space in which apprentices predisposed to violence would be ignited.

Commentators inclined to look favorably upon the theater scene were not the only ones suspicious of apprentices at plays. City officials adopted a more forceful tack. Also in 1592, Sir William Webbe, Lord Mayor of London, writes a letter to Lord Burghley that initially appears to be in line with Chettle’s generalized account of apprentice theater riots. “Being informed of a great disorder & tumult lyke to grow yesternight about viij of the clock within the Borough of Southwark,” Webbe arrived on the scene to find “great multitudes of people assembled together, & the principall actours to bee certain servants of the feltmakers gathered together out of Barnsey street & the Black fryers, with a great number of lose & maisterles men apt for such purposes.” While Webbe describes the feltmakers’ servants as the principal actors in the disturbance, apprentices did not constitute the bulk of the rioters, their numbers and illicit behavior augmented by seemingly ever present masterless men. Moreover, as in William Fleetwood’s account of the 1584 riot, the ruckus merely occurs in the vicinity of a theater, not necessarily indicating any correlation between playhouses and apprentice disorder; however, once Webbe reveals the impetus for the riot, the link becomes all too clear. A few days earlier, some feltmakers’ servants had been apprehended and imprisoned, and “for rescuing of whome the sayed companies assembled themselves by occasion & pretence of their meeting at a play, which bysides the breach of the Sabboth day giveth opportunitie of committing these & such lyke disorders.”<sup>125</sup> This is a direct indictment of theaters as

---

catastrophe among themselves than the players did.” Gayton goes on: “And unless this were done, and the popular humour satisfied...the benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, oranges, apples, nuts, flew about most liberally; and as there were mechanics of all professions, who fell every one to his own trade, and dissolved a house in an instant, and made a ruin of a stately fabric.” p. 271.

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Harbage p. 102.

<sup>125</sup> The letter appears in Chambers *Elizabethan Stage IV* p. 310.

seats of violent, organized apprentice disobedience, places where apprentices could gather for the supposedly benign purpose of seeing a play in order to plot how to spring their peers from jail. Still, this condemns theaters only as physical locations with no mention of malicious influence inherent in drama itself.

That accusation comes in another 1592 letter from the Lord Mayor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, which begins:

Whereas by the daily and disorderlie exercise of a number of players & playeng houses erected within this Citie, the youth thearof is greatly corrupted & their manners infected with many evill & ungodly qualities, by reason of the wanton & profane devises represented on the stages by the sayed players, the prentizes & servants withdrawn from their woorks, & all sorts in general from the daylie resort unto sermons & other Christian exercises, to the great hinderance of the trades & traders of this Citie & prophanation of the good & godly religion established amongst us...<sup>126</sup>

Here, the Lord Mayor explicitly complains about the “wanton & profane devises represented on the stages.” Moreover, he ideologically and syntactically intertwines the economic and moral threats posed by theaters. They lure apprentices away from their occupations, hindering them from performing their duties and receiving fit industrial instruction, and lure them away from Church, preventing them from performing their prayers and receiving fit religious instruction. These individual failings contribute to the decline of two entities essential to the city, business and faith. Apprentices receive special attention because they represented the nexus of industry, religion, and pliable youth.

Patronizing theaters not only granted apprentices a certain degree of dangerous independence, but it also brought them into contact with unsavory types who, under the guise of enjoying a show, safely inculcated them with rebellious thoughts. According to the Lord Mayor, theaters attracted “great numbers of light & lewd disposed persons, as harlots, cutpurses, cuseners, pilferers, & such lyke, & thear, under the collour of resort to those places to hear the playes, devise divers evill & ungodly matches, confederacies, & conspiracies, which by means of the opportunitie of the place cannot bee prevented nor discovered, as otherwise they might bee.” Thereby, the Lord Mayor argues, theaters enable “the corrupting of our youth, which are the seed of the Church of god & the common wealth among us,” and closing them would “not only benefit...the politique state & government of this Citie,” but “allso take away a great offence from the Church of god & hinderance to his ghospell.”

The official concerns of the Lord Mayor were mirrored by antitheatrical moralists, who demonstrated a more direct contempt for the relationship between apprentices and theaters. Stephen Gosson claimed that he “would rather bee a Londoners hounde then his apprentice, bicause hee rathe his dogge, for wallowing in carrion; but rebukes not his seruant for resorting to playes, that are ranke as poyson.”<sup>127</sup> Despite such alarmist reactions, there does not appear to be a great deal of concern about prentice playgoing

---

<sup>126</sup> The letter appears in Chambers *Elizabethan Stage IV* p. 307-8.

<sup>127</sup> Gosson, Stephen. *Ephemerides of Phialo, an Apology for the Schoole of Abuse* [London, 1579], fol. 88<sup>v</sup>.

within the guilds themselves. In his investigation of such heated charges, Harbage claims, “so far as I can discover, nothing ever came of the attempt, partly inspired by pressure from the pulpits, to force masters and wardens of the London companies to forbid their apprentices, servants, and journeymen to go to plays.”<sup>128</sup> While the effort to force masters to prevent their apprentices from attending the theater actually does result in at least one formal prohibition, it does not appear to have gained much purchase.

On 29 March 1582, the Court of Aldermen ordered that “the M<sup>rs</sup> and wardens of all the seu’ all companyes of this Cyttye, [were] not to suffer any of theyre App’ntyces servauntes or Iorneymen to repayre or goe to see any pleas, pryces or Enterludes at any tyme hereafter.”<sup>129</sup> This order, entitled “App’ntyces and Iorneymen to be stayd from playes & pryces,” was forwarded by the Lord Mayor to the livery companies in the form of a precept delivered at the Guildhall on 3 April:

These shalbe straightlie to charge and command you, that forthwithe upon the receipt hereof you call before you all the freemen of your said companie, and give to everie one of them straightlie charge and commandement that they or anie of them at annye time hereafter suffer any of ther sarvants, apprentices, journemen, or children, to repaire or goe to annye playes, peices, or enterludes, either within the cittie or suburbs thereof, or to annye place witheout the same, uppon payne of everie servant so offendinge, or master so sufferinge, to be punyshed at the dyscretion of me and my brethren. Fayle you not hereof, as you will answer the contrarie at your perill.<sup>130</sup>

Thus, as early as 1582, the Lord Mayor and alderman were threatening to punish apprentices for going to the theater and masters for allowing their apprentices to go to the theater. As indicated by the presence of similar complaints in 1592, however, this interdiction appears to have failed, most likely because none of the livery companies took it seriously.

In a compelling article<sup>131</sup> on the poignantly few official records of apprentice theater visits during the period, Charles Whitney explores the question of how great an impact governmental regulation had on the guilds regarding apprentice playgoing, and by extension, if livery companies were genuinely concerned about their apprentices attending the theater. Whitney collects journeymen, apprentices, and servants under the single heading “‘subalterns’ because most were young and of middling or low degree and

---

<sup>128</sup> Harbage p. 69.

<sup>129</sup> Order of the Court of Aldermen, 29 March 1582, entitled “App’ntyces and Iorneymen to be stayd from playes & pryces”: Item yt ys orderyd, that p’ceptes shalbe forthwyth made and dyrected to the M<sup>rs</sup> and wardens of all the seu’ all companyes of this Cyttye, not to suffer any of theyre App’ntyces servauntes or Iorneymen to repayre or goe to see any pleas, pryces or Enterludes at any tyme hereafter, w<sup>th</sup>in this Cyttye or the suburbs and lybertyes of the same vpon payne that yf any shall heereafter be taken thereat to be punysshed by the dyscrecion of the L Mayo<sup>r</sup> & Courte of Alderman” (quoted here from E. K. Chambers, “Dramatic Records of the City of London: The Repertories, Journals, and Letter Books” in *The Malone Society Collections, Vol. II. Part III*, W. W. Greg, gen. ed. [Oxford: The Malone Society, 1931], 285-320, esp. 312-13).

<sup>130</sup> Chambers *Elizabethan Stage IV* p. 287.

<sup>131</sup> Whitney, Charles. “‘Usually in the Werking Daies’: Playgoing Journeymen, Apprentices, and Servants in Guild Records, 1582-92.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Winter, 1999), 433-458.

also because their daily lives and movements were legally subject to the wills of their masters and mistresses.”<sup>132</sup> This universal label elides many significant differences between the three groups, such as the fact that a portion of apprentices were not of low or middling degree in certain trades. It is also somewhat misleading, as journeymen were older, independent employees not legally obliged to submit to the will of their masters. However, the term “subaltern” does capture the spirit of how apprentices in particular were regarded as a group in early modern London. Whitney notes that the documents he focuses on in his essay “may well comprise all references to subaltern playgoing surviving in guild records for the decade 1582-92 and are an important part of the small number in all guild archives up to the closing of the theaters in 1642.”<sup>133</sup>

Whitney acknowledges the fact that moralists and politicians spent a fair share of time criticizing the theater for drawing subalterns from their work and corrupting them once in the playhouse. “Alarm over a general social threat to religion and civility finds plenty of resonance in complaint literature and in mayoral precepts on the theater,” he claims, “but not in guild records.”<sup>134</sup> If anything, the guilds were worried about general apprentice idleness that found an outlet at the theater, as well as the potential for apprentices somehow to swindle their masters in order to procure money to pay for admission, rather than concerned over vague threats posed to the overarching civil order. In fact, there appears to be little evidence that livery companies concerned themselves with apprentice playgoing in any regard, as “guild records generally have very little to say about it.” “If playgoing had been widespread,” Whitney asks, “why are there not more records of its suppression?”<sup>135</sup> As evidence, he points to the mayoral precept of 1582 quoted above. Despite such a strong message passed along from the Privy Council, the precept is recorded in only one of sixteen livery company court record books, the ironmongers. The remaining fifteen bear no mention of any prohibition against apprentice playgoing. As opposed to enemies of the theater like the Lord Mayor who complained that plays drew apprentices from their labor, Whitney argues that the absence of injunction in company record books “makes it impossible to believe that, even though mayors and aldermen were drawn from their numbers, the guilds were eager to go on record as enthusiastic supporters of antitheatricalism.”<sup>136</sup>

Taking the general silence of guilds on the matter as tacit acceptance or approval, Whitney concludes that “the range of evidence supports the view that neither the guilds nor the theaters were squarely opposed to subaltern playgoing,” and that “if this was the case, subalterns of many companies and social degrees could well have comprised a significant audience segment in the years both before and after 1592.”<sup>137</sup> Despite all of the attention given to the deleterious effects attending the theater might cause apprentices, the organizations that actually interacted with them *qua* apprentices, rather than simply as potentially unruly, wayward youths, failed to express much outrage or concern about apprentice playgoing. This would seem to indicate that much of the rancor over apprentices at the theater stemmed not from the perception of a real threat arising

---

<sup>132</sup> Whitney p. 433.

<sup>133</sup> Whitney p. 437.

<sup>134</sup> Whitney p. 439.

<sup>135</sup> Whitney p. 442-3.

<sup>136</sup> Whitney p. 444.

<sup>137</sup> Whitney p. 437.

from the combination of apprentices and plays, but from a general fear about sociopolitical instability and its potential to disrupt normal civic activity.

Such an interpretation is supported by an act of the Privy Council dated 22 June 1600. Here the council does “acknowledge previous complaints of the manifold abuses and disorders that have grown and do continue by occasion of many houses for stage-plays;” it further affirms that “it is manifestly known that many such houses contribute to the daily occasion of the idle, riotous and dissolute living of great numbers of people, that leaving all such honest and painful course of life as they should follow, do meet and assemble here.”<sup>138</sup> Despite these reservations about the theater, the Privy Council concludes: “nevertheless it is considered that the use and exercise of such plays (not being evil in itself) may with a good order and moderation be suffered in a well governed State.” In other words, plays in themselves are not so corrosive to be outlawed, and even theaters, magnets for mischief though they may be, do not pose a grave threat to sociopolitical stability, or the “well governed State.” Recognizing that plays were in danger of “not serving for recreation but inviting and calling the people daily from their trade and work to misspend their time,” however, the Privy Council recommends that “each playhouse can play twice a week and no more, and not on Sabbath,” restrictions that never appear to have been enforced with any real teeth.

Conspicuously absent from Whitney’s account, and occurring after the 1600 act of the Privy Council, is the most significant incident of the period involving apprentices at the theater, the riot of Shrove Tuesday 1617. This specific disturbance registered with contemporary playwrights as an important moment in the theater world. Shrove Tuesday had by this time long been recognized as an occasion for apprentice misbehavior,<sup>139</sup> when apprentices would attack houses of iniquity (including theaters) in displays of violence simultaneously demonstrating their ability to disrupt the established social order as well as their submission to it. As part of this particular Shrove Tuesday riot, apprentices tore down the Cockpit theater in Drury Lane, an event that left a great impression on Thomas Middleton. In his *The Owles Almanacke*, published the following year, he explains<sup>140</sup> that “Shrove Tuesday falls on that day on which the prentices plucked down the Cockpit, and on which they did always use to rifle Madam Leak’s house at the upper end of Shoreditch.” Middleton testifies to the tradition of apprentices rioting on Shrove Tuesday by observing “they did always use to” trouble Madam Leak’s house, a likely real establishment whose fictional name conventionally joins the sexual and the excremental. In 1619, Middleton again refers to the 1617 Shrove Tuesday riot in *The Inner Temple Masque*, when the character Doctor Almanac reminds a personified Shrove Tuesday: “‘Tis in your charge to pull down bawdy-houses, / To set your tribe a-work, cause spoil in Shoreditch / And make a dangerous leak there, deface Turnbull, / And tickle Codpiece Row, ruin the Cockpit: / The poor players ne’er thrived in’t, o’ my conscience / Some quean pissed upon the first brick.”<sup>141</sup> Because a prostitute urinated on the foundational brick of the theater, the physical building falls under the aegis of the brothel. Thus,

---

<sup>138</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, Volume 30, 1599-1600*. Ed. Henry Petrie. London: G. E. Eyre & W. Spottiswoode, 1848. p. 395. The quotations immediately following can be found in the same entry.

<sup>139</sup> For example, Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) makes light of this issue.

<sup>140</sup> Middleton, Thomas. *The Collected Works*. Eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. p. 1279.

<sup>141</sup> Middleton p. 1327-8.

Middleton introduces the concept that the Cockpit somehow deserved to be torn down because of an ill fit between the players, and by extension their plays, and the theater itself, a theory embraced by modern theater historians.

Much, perhaps too much, has been made of the division between public and private theaters in the world of early modern drama. Indoor theaters charged more for admission and catered to a more exclusive audience than outdoor amphitheaters, such as the Red Bull, specializing in plays that allegedly appealed to citizen tastes. Martin White explains what transpired when a managerial decision deprived the Red Bull's cruder audience of the theater's standard repertoire:

Around 1616, Christopher Beeston, a veteran actor with the Queen's Men but with aspirations to be an impresario, moved his company from the Red Bull in Clerkenwell to the more upmarket location of Drury Lane, close to fashionable residential districts and the Inns of Court. There he opened, and managed, an indoor playhouse, initially called the Cockpit as it was built on the foundations of one....Beeston had no intention of retaining an outdoor playhouse as an alternative venue, and on 4 March 1617, Shrove Tuesday, a crowd of Clerkenwell apprentices, angered at the loss of their local entertainment, attacked the new playhouse.<sup>142</sup>

Middleton claims that apprentices ruined the Cockpit at least in part because "the poor players ne'er thrived in't," but it appears it was those very rioting apprentices who prevented them from thriving. Rather than unofficially policing immoral activity, apprentices had a fit when their preferred plays were transferred to a private theater beyond their means. In the short term, the plan worked, as the Queen's Men returned to the Red Bull for a few months until repairs to the new theater were complete, at which point they moved back to the newly christened Phoenix.

In discussing the same episode, Andrew Gurr wonders "how far it was the apprentice patrons or how far the apprentices' favourite plays that gave the Red Bull its reputation as a 'citizen' playhouse in distinction to the hall playhouses, since the Cockpit often ran Red Bull plays for its privileged audiences."<sup>143</sup> In other words, to further clarify Middleton's comment about the players not thriving in the Cockpit, plays that appealed to lowborn tastes also appear to have pleased well-to-do playgoers, so any ill fit between acting company and theater could be attributed not to any real dissonance in theatrical expectation, but to apprentice disappointment and resentment. Like White, Gurr reaches essentially this conclusion, summarizing that after Beeston removed his troupe from the Red Bull to the Cockpit, "on the two following Shrove Tuesday holidays gangs of apprentices tried to mob the new hall playhouse and destroy it, presumably in protest at having their plays taken away from the penny playhouse and transferred to a sixpenny venue."<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> White, Martin. "London professional playhouses and performances." *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume I, Origins to 1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 298-340. p. 329-330.

<sup>143</sup> Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. p. 15.

<sup>144</sup> Gurr p. 14.

For theater historians, the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617 represents little more than the best example of apprentice playgoers throwing a fit when they were displeased, picking their signature holiday to express that displeasure by attacking the expensive, private playhouse that had robbed them of their brand of drama. However, that circumscribed interpretation fails to account for the full scope of the 1617 Shrove Tuesday riot and its historical place in the context of the period riots. A contemporary description of the disturbance begins to paint a fuller picture:

The Prentizes on Shrove Tewsday last, to the number of 3. Or 4000 comitted extreame insolencies; part of this nomber, taking their course for Wapping, did there pull downe to the grownd 4 houses, spoiled all the goods therein, defaced many others, & a Justice of the Peace coming to appease them, while he was reading a Proclamation, had his head broken with a brick batt. Th'other part, making for Drury Lane, where lately a newe playhouse is erected, they besett the house round, broke in, wounded divers of the players, broke open their trunckes, & whatt apparrell, bookes, or other thing they found, they burnt & cutt in peeces; & not content herewith, gott on the top of the house, & untiled it, & had not the Justices of the Peace & Sherife levied an aide & hindered their purpose, they would have laid that house likewise even with the grownd. In this skyrmishe one prentise was slaine, being shott throughe the head with a pistoll, & many other of the fellowes were sore hurt, & such of them as are taken his Majestie hath commaunded shal be executed for example sake.<sup>145</sup>

Beyond an exercise in youthful exuberance expressed in shenanigans, the attack on the Cockpit proved extremely violent, with apprentices wounding actors and ransacking their equipment. In defense of the theater, one of the perpetrators was shot through the head and killed. In another part of town, rioters brained a Justice of the Peace trying to restore order with a brick. Indeed, the 1617 Shrove Tuesday was not only the defining theater riot of the age, but the most significant riot of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In "Riot Prevention and Control in Early Stuart London," K. J. Lindley observes that, for the period 1603-1642, "Shrove Tuesday riots occurred on at least twenty-four of the thirty-nine years under discussion, normally in the suburbs and especially the northern suburbs within easy reach of traditional recreational areas."<sup>146</sup> Of all these disturbances, however, "the blackest Shrove Tuesday was undoubtedly that of 1617 when large-scale rioting broke out in three separate centres. In the gravest incident, thousands of apprentices and other unruly subjects (some of the victims, perhaps, of the current dislocation of trade) forced their way into a new playhouse in Drury Lane, destroyed its contents and had entered upon its demolition when they were finally dispersed."<sup>147</sup> The inability of the Lord Mayor to control the apprentices of London frustrated James I, who

---

<sup>145</sup> Anonymous observer quoted in Bentley, Gerald Eades. *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, Volume VI Theatres*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968. p. 54.

<sup>146</sup> Lindley, K. J. "Riot Prevention and Control in Early Stuart London." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol. 33 (1983): 109-126. p. 109

<sup>147</sup> Lindley p. 110.



“was said to have wanted the execution of arrested Shrove Tuesday rioters in 1617 to set an example, but had to rest content with fines and imprisonment in irons.”<sup>148</sup> As commander of the city’s trained bands, a policing force of roughly 6,000 men, the Lord Mayor was responsible for keeping the peace, a fact the Privy Council harped upon after the 1617 riot.

In at least the twenty years before the great riot of Shrove Tuesday 1617, the Privy Council had never specifically associated apprentices with rioting, particularly with rioting at theaters. While there appeared an occasional announcement regarding the power of plays to draw undesirable people together, to pull otherwise responsible people away from their work, or to corrupt the populace through the lewd matters presented onstage, apprentices are never singled out as a distinct group, be it bad, good, or corruptible. The handful of acts that do address apprentices treat them not as a threatening subculture of susceptible youths, but as contracted trainees in livery companies; that is, before the 1617 Shrove Tuesday riot, the Privy Council treated apprentices as apprentices. It issued warrants for an apprentice who absconded to Ireland with a great deal of his master’s money,<sup>149</sup> and for apprentice shipwrights who abandoned their indentures but tried to practice their craft outside of London, a commonplace situation.<sup>150</sup> A year before the riot, the Privy Council issued rulings on complaints brought before them regarding the procedures of apprenticeship. Early in 1616, English bakers complained that foreign bakers who had immigrated were working without having served apprenticeships, placing the local workers at a significant disadvantage. The council ruled that halting the foreign bakers would place undue hardship on the community, in that the price of bread would increase and availability decrease.<sup>151</sup> In June of the same year, responding to a complaint from merchants on the coasts who resented having to send their apprentices to London to be made free of the livery company, the Privy Council ruled that coastal tradesman could free their apprentices locally, further dissipating the power and reach of guilds. Before the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617, the Privy Council dealt with issues of apprentices rarely and evenhandedly.

After the riot, however, the council embraced the same type of inflammatory rhetoric employed by antitheatrical alarmists. On the day after the riot, the Privy Council issued “a letter to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London” denouncing the disturbance:

It is not unknowne unto yow what tumultuous outrages were yesterday committed neere unto the citty of London in diverse places, by a rowte of lewde and loose persons, apprentices and others, especially in Lincolnes Inne Feildes and Drewry Lane, where, in attempting to pull downe a playhouse belonging to the Queen’s Majesty’s servants, there were diverse persons slayne, and others hurt and wounded, the multitude assembled

---

<sup>148</sup> Lindley p. 125 n. 78.

<sup>149</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1595-96*. 19 April 1596. p. 357.

<sup>150</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1613-14*. 12 July 1613. p. 126-7.

<sup>151</sup> An analogous situation concerning silk weavers shall be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. It appears that official governmental rulings usually found in favor of whatever was best for overall trade, which usually meant finding in favor of foreign merchants and tradesmen at the expense of English apprentices.

there being to the number of many thousands, as wee are credibly informed.<sup>152</sup>

Concerned that “the example of so fowl and insolent a disorder may prove of dangerous consequence, if this should escape without sharp punishment of the principal offenders,” the Privy Council demanded special court sessions to proceed against the offenders with special severity. While they acknowledged that “amongst this crew of apprentices there were an exceeding great multitude of vagrant rogues gathered together, as there are always about this city, ready for any mischief upon every occasion,” the prentices were the real culprits. The letter concludes by ordering the Lord Mayor and aldermen “to have at all times hereafter an eye and watch upon the apprentices likewise, who by this experience and the like, where the reins of liberty are given them, are found apt to run into many unsufferable insolvencies.”

Less than a month later, the Privy Council issued another letter to the Lord Mayor that appeared to retreat some from this position. Taking the “fresh example upon Shrove Tuesday last by a disordered multitude,” they admitted the composition “of which, though many were apprentice, yet the greatest number were rogues and vagrant persons.”<sup>153</sup> Despite this assessment, the inclination to demonize rioting apprentices, particularly apprentices rioting in connection with theaters, proved too strong, and the anniversary of the great riot saw a return to familiar rhetoric. In a pronouncement dated 12 February 1618 anticipating the imminent holiday, the Privy Council, reminding local authorities of “what disorder and tumult was committed the last Shrove Tuesday in diverse parts about the cittie by apprentices and other lewd and ill affected persons,”<sup>154</sup> concentrated on perhaps the most theatrical issues of the disturbance: the power and danger of example and imitation, and the fact that theaters served as a breeding ground for discontent.

With the event of the riot a year behind them, the Privy Council could concentrate on its symbolic significance. They had laid the track for this interpretation in their initial reaction by warning that “the example of so fowl and insolent a disorder may prove of dangerous consequence, if this should escape without sharp punishment of the principal offenders,” and a year later they described how that example played out:

And though diverse of the offenders were committed to Newgate, and proceeded withal to the sessions according to lawe, yet they are so far from being warned by that example as they rather take occasion thereby, in regard that some of their fellows were in danger and punished the last yeare, to cast seditious libels into playhouses in the name of some London fellow apprentices, to summon others in the skirtes, and confines, to meet at the *Fortune*, and after that to go to the playhouses, the *Redd Bull*, and the *Cock Pit*, which they have designed to rase, and pull down, besides what further mischief may ensue thereupon to the scandal of government and the great contempt of his Majesty’s laws.

---

<sup>152</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1616-17*. Around 5 March 1617. p. 175.

<sup>153</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1616-17*. 16 March 1617. p. 193-4.

<sup>154</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1617-18*. 12 February 1618. p. 38. The block quote that follows comes from the same entry.

Although many of the rioters from the previous year had been imprisoned and successfully tried in court, those inclined to mischief would not be dissuaded by the example officials made of their peers. Rather, that example engendered the opposite of its intended effect, as potential rioters returned to their preferred staging ground, the theaters of London, to foment unrest. According to the Privy Council, these rabble-rousers would now use the theaters themselves to plot—as if by remote control through seditious letters—an even more massive attack on both theaters in which the Queen Majesty’s players performed. A fully concocted conspiracy of apprentices was at hand.

Despite the fact that the Privy Council had already acknowledged that more rogues and vagrant persons than apprentices had perpetrated the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617, and that like ruffians were adopting the name of London apprentices to stir trouble in 1618, the course of action to prevent another large scale riot focused on a predictable group. The council recommended to the Lord Mayor and aldermen “to take special and effectual order, that every man within their jurisdiction do keep in their servants and apprentices, and not suffer any of the to go abroad that day.” This became a standard annual warning around Shrove Tuesday. In the decades before 1617, the Privy Council considered apprentices essentially as the livery companies did, expressing the same contained concerns and addressing thorny contractual issues—a prentice stealing from his master here, runaway apprentices working without permission there, etc. After the 1617 riot, however, the council echoed the same vague and unfounded suspicion of apprentices exhibited by Elizabeth in her royal proclamations at the close of the sixteenth century.

In 1622, the Privy Council recalls “the disorders and tumults committed in former years at Shrovetide in diverse parts about the city of London by apprentices and other lewd and ill affected persons,” and commands the Lord Mayor and aldermen to “order that every man within their jurisdictions do keep in their servants and apprentizes, not suffereing them to go abroad.”<sup>155</sup> In a 1624 letter to the Lord Mayor, the Privy Council chides, “It is so wel known unto you as that it needs not to be repeated what have been the insolencies and disorders committed heretofore upon Shrove Twesdaies,” and then orders that the city’s trained bands be placed “in such convenient places as may best serve for the preventing of any riots or tumults which by the number of apprentizes joining with other loose and dissolute persons which abound in these parts might otherwise happen or be attempted.”<sup>156</sup> In a letter dated 19 February 1626, the council reminds the Lord Mayor, “the day of liberty for aprintizes called Shrove Tuesday being now at hand at which time many insolences and disorders have bin often committed,” the trained bands should be placed “as may best serve for the preventing of any riots or tumults which by the number of apprentizes joining with other loose and dissolute persons might otherwise be attempted.”<sup>157</sup> On the first of February 1627, the Privy Council requested extra troops “to be in a readiness and cause them to be mustered upon Shrovetuesday next in such convenient places as may best serve for the prevention of any riots or tumults, which by the number of the said apprentices joining with other loose and disorderly persons might otherwise be attempted.”<sup>158</sup> Finally, the Privy Council begins a

---

<sup>155</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, July 1621 to May 1623*. 2 March 1622. p. 152.

<sup>156</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, June 1623 to March 1625*. 10 February 1624. p. 175.

<sup>157</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1625-1626*. 19 February 1626. p. 346.

<sup>158</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1627*. 1 February 1627. p. 47.

letter to the Lord Mayor dated 22 February 1628 with the familiar reservation, “Although it is so well known unto you as that it needs not to be repeated, what have been the insolencies and disorders committed heretofore upon Shrove Twesdaies,” it falls back on the common refrain to use the city’s bands “for the preventing of any riots and tumults, which by the number of apprentices joining with other loose and dissolute persons which abound in those parts, might otherwise happen or be attempted.”<sup>159</sup>

Before 1617, the Privy Council never articulates any connection between apprentices and riots, even on or around Shrove Tuesday. From 1617 through 1628, apprentices are referred to as potentially dangerous instigators practically every year like clockwork. Apprentices had been treated as young men working patiently to one day earn the freedom of the city, but had become timebombs who “where the reins of liberty are given them, are found apt to run into many unsufferable insolvencies.” This marks the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617, which according to theater critics began when apprentices took exception to the fact that they could no longer afford to see the kinds of plays they liked, as the most pivotal and socially disruptive riot of the age both for modern historians and in the contemporary consciousness. After the 1617 riot, where thousands of apprentices gathered to wreak havoc and violence from Wapping to Drury Lane, apprentices were understood by seemingly everyone to be a menace to society. Everyone, that is, except the livery companies to which apprentices belonged.

If the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617 was as severe a disturbance as the Privy Council marks it, referencing the danger posed by apprentices year after year for a decade, then surely the guilds themselves must have had something to say about it, as they governed those very apprentices and were constituted by members who had themselves served apprenticeships. Taking Whitney’s study of guild records registering (or meaningfully failing to register) a mayoral precept forbidding apprentice playgoing as an instructive model, I examined the court minute books of ten livery companies<sup>160</sup> housed in London’s Guildhall Library that contained entries soon after the date of the 1617 riot. My survey included high end companies that often drew their apprentices from finer ranks of families, such as the Merchant Taylors and the Grocers, as well as companies focused on harder manual labor, such as the Carpenters and the Coopers. The court minute books I examined often contained great amounts of detail. Not only are there entries cataloguing the indentures of young men becoming apprentices and commemorating when apprentices are accepted as full members of the guild, but the books also record the minutiae of complaints brought before the company. For example, there is a record of a widow arguing that her husband’s guild brothers had not contributed sufficient financial support for his funeral. Regarding apprentice complaints, there appear instances of disciplining apprentices for gilding coins, stripping an apprentice and beating him in the company hall, and judging apprentice complaints that they had not received adequate instruction from their masters. However, there is no record in any of the court minute books I examined of any response to or acknowledgment of the Shrove Tuesday riot of 1617. Given the exacting nature of the other records present in the books, one can surmise that, if apprentices *qua* apprentices had played a significant part in the

---

<sup>159</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1627-8*. 22 February 1628. p. 311.

<sup>160</sup> They are the Cooks (MS 03115), Carpenters (MS 04329), Weavers (MS 04655), Pewterers (MS 07090), Grocers (MS 11588), Brewers (MS 05445), Coopers (MS05602), Blacksmiths (MS 02881), and Merchant Taylors (MS 34010).

great riot, there would be some indication that the livery companies at the very least discussed the matter.

On the contrary, it would appear that Privy Council was correct in its assessment that of the “disordered multitude” that attacked the Cockpit, “though many were apprentice, yet the greatest number were rogues and vagrant persons.” This interpretation is corroborated by numerous printed histories of individual livery companies commissioned by the guilds themselves,<sup>161</sup> none of which mention apprentices in the context of the 1617 riot, even when they do otherwise discuss apprentice discipline issues. Nevertheless, the specter of rioting apprentices has become so thoroughly ingrained in the imagination of the period that it bears influence even when there is a definite lack of evidence. In discussing an incident involving a Spanish ambassador that occurred in the year following the Shrove Tuesday 1617 riot, Rev. A. H. Johnson, writing a history of the Drapers, observes: “At once the English hostility to our old enemy Spain was aroused, the Spanish ambassador was insulted, and a riot of apprentices took place. As however no reference to this riot is found in the Drapers’ records, we must assume that their apprentices took no serious part in it.”<sup>162</sup> This statement nicely summarizes the manner in which contemporary hysteria about rioting apprentices has bled into modern historiography. There is nothing to indicate that *our* apprentices had anything to do with the riots, but an authority as grand as the Privy Council proclaims that apprentices are the disruptive force powering these disturbances, so it must be all the other apprentices doing it. Thus, apprentices are dangerous and to be distrusted, despite the facts that current apprentices appeared to keep their noses clean and that virtually everyone in every livery company had served as an apprentice for nearly a decade.

The social and legal history of the second half of the sixteenth century and the first decades of the seventeenth century examined heretofore laid the groundwork for the myth of apprentices, an interpretation of events that strategically if not necessarily purposefully evolved to perpetuate the aspirations of potential apprentices and the anxiety of everyone else in order to extend the hegemony of a deteriorating social order. As the seventeenth century unfolded, a series of apprentice conduct books were published that served as both a manifestation and propellant of the early establishment of an ideologically motivated literary mythology. They bore titles such as *The Prentises Practise in Godlinesse, and his true freedome* (1608),<sup>163</sup> *The Pious Prentice, or, The*

---

<sup>161</sup> For example: Archer, Ian W. *The History of the Haberdasher’s Company*. Sussex: Phillimore & Co. LTD, 1991. Clode, Charles Mathew. *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors*. London: Harrison and Sons, 1875. Heath, Baron. *Some Account of the Worshipful Company of Grocers of the City of London*. London: Chiswick Press, 1869. Johnson, (Rev.) A. H. *The History of The Worshipful Company of the Drapers of London, Vol. III*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922. Myers, Robin. *The Stationer’s Company Archive An Account of the Records 1554-1984*. Winchester: St. Paul’s Bibliographies, 1990. Phillips, Henry Laverock. *Annals of the Worshipful Company of Joiners of the City of London*. London: Privately Printed, 1915. Plummer, Alfred. *The London Weavers’ Company 1600-1970*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1972. Prideaux, Sir Walter Sherburne. *Memorials of the Goldsmiths’ Company being Gleanings from their Records between the Years 1335 and 1815, Vol. I*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1896. Underwood, E. Ashworth, ed. *A History of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London, Vol. I 1617-1815*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963.

<sup>162</sup> Johnson p. 72-3.

<sup>163</sup> B.P. *The Prentises Practise in Godlinesse, and his true freedome*. London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, for Iohn Bach, and are to be sold at his shop in Popes head Palace, 1608.

*Prentices Piety* (1640),<sup>164</sup> *A cap of grey hairs for a green head, or, The fathers counsel to his son, an apprentice in London* (1671),<sup>165</sup> and *The Apprentices Companion, Containing Plain and Useful Directions for Servants, especially Apprentices; how to perform their particular Duties to their Masters, so as to please God* (1681).<sup>166</sup> These texts collect and crystallize contemporary anxiety over apprentices. No threat, for example, was greater to an apprentice than another apprentice who might infect him with untoward ideas of rebellion. Interestingly, a thread of advice running through these books cites another perceived great corrupter of apprentices, the theater, where apprentices of all sorts would intermingle without oversight while scandalous scenes would appear onstage before them. Young men were instructed simply to act like good apprentices during the time of their indentures, so as to enjoy the fruits of city freedom after their servitude had ended. Perception was often conflated with true moral and industrial education.

The bedrock of any apprentice's obedience was his relationship with his master, and by extension, his duty to God. As a master stood in the stead of an apprentice's father, the normal patriarchal family order equated the prentice's respect for his master with his deference and obedience to God. B. P., the author of *The Prentise's Practise in Godlinesse*, observes: "assuredly that servant that is not faithfull to GOD, can never bee faithfull to his master; but he that serves GOD with a good conscience, wil serve his master with a good conscience." According to him, the real educational goal of apprenticeship was clear: "The true knowledge of God will bring more sound profit in one day to a man, then the best trade in London will doe in seven yeares."<sup>167</sup> The major threats to the successful completion of an apprenticeship were also reasonably uniform, if slightly more complicated. The central problem rested in the impure and impressionable nature of youth, inclined as it was to embrace the vices available within the walls of London, and the failure of masters to inure their wards properly against the temptations presented to them by their peers. B. P. argues that masters should spend the "seven or eight yeares together" with their apprentices working "till their first youth (the age which is set upon the very pinnacle of temptations) be past over,"<sup>168</sup> and Abraham Jackson, author of *The Pious Prentice*, points out that "Many good natured children, even at their first entering in to service have been plunged over head and eares in the Ocean of many errors and offences, for want of the Rudder of precepts and directions to guide the ship of their behaviour."<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Jackson, Abraham. *The pious prentice, or, The prentices piety Wherein is declared, how they that intend to be prentices, may 1. Rightly enter into that calling. 2. Faithfully abide in it. 3. Discreetly accomplish it. 4. And how they may be satisfied in conscience in such doubts as may arise upon some particular occasions and occurrences proper to that calling.* London: Printed by E. G[riffin] for M. Sparke and Ioh. Hardisty, and are to be sold at the signe of the blue Bible in Green-Arbor, 1640.

<sup>165</sup> Trenchfield, Caleb. *A cap of grey hairs for a green head, or, The fathers counsel to his son, an apprentice in London.* London: Printed by J.C. for Henry Eversden, 1671.

<sup>166</sup> Burton, Richard. *The apprentices companion containing plain and useful directions for servants, especially apprentices, how to perform their particular dutys to their masters, so as to please God ... : together with prayers and devotions for morning and evening : to which is added, a short and familiar method of arithmetick, and some copies of the most useful, writing hands / by Richard Burton, author of The civil wars of England.* London: Printed for Thomas Mercer, 1681.

<sup>167</sup> B. P. *The Prentise's Practise in Godlinesse.* p. 39.

<sup>168</sup> B. P. *The Prentise's Practise in Godlinesse.* p. 41.

<sup>169</sup> Jackson p. 34.

Without the ballast of a godly master, an apprentice could easily succumb to the seemingly ceaseless efforts of his fellow prentices to corrupt him. Jackson warns that “many lewd servants...labour to draw their fellows to evill by evill counsell; to corrupt them by wicked example; to dissuade them from subjection and obedience; and to allure them to all kinde of lewdnesse and wantonnesse, whence it is, that as one scab’d sheep infects a whole flocke, so one wicked servant doth oftentimes corrupt and marre a whole family.”<sup>170</sup> In *A Cap of Grey Hairs for a Green Head*, Caleb Trenchfield admonishes his son, a London prentice, that no “subject deserves your more abundant caution, unless it be the treachery of a Fellow-Prentice.”<sup>171</sup> In *The Apprentices Companion*, Richard Burton asks “what wickedness and debauchery is there, which Servants in these days are not drawn into by evil company,” and warns that “from hence proceed *drunkenness, whoredom, swearing, lying, cheating, gaming.*” He concludes: “How easily are the tender natures, and the most hopeful dispositions of young persons corrupted thereby; for the filth will secretly cleave unto them, and will insensibly infect them.”<sup>172</sup> The fear that apprentices were ever susceptible to infection—that all of them were inclined to join this preexisting, amorphous, destabilizing force of rogue apprentices if they simply came into contact with it—also provided the basis for appeals to resist that force. If every apprentice, no matter his background, current station, or future prospects, might rebel simply because of his ‘condition of apprenticeship,’ then it might be possible to control each apprentice with uniform incentives and strategies.

More practical motivations for being a good apprentice quickly come into focus. Even in the very title of *The Prentises Practise in Godlinesse, and his true freedome*, the true freedom of religious devotion is defined in relation to earthly freedom, namely the freedom of London, the real carrot enticing young men to become apprentices and driving them to remain dutiful. Burton says that the first “thing that an ingenious and well minded young man ought to do, is willingly to prepare and compose himself to some honest Calling and Employment, wherein he may afterwards live serviceably and comfortably in his Generation.”<sup>173</sup> Rather than instructing young people simply to find honest employment, Burton recommends preparing and composing oneself to do so, suggesting that obtaining a vocation itself involves a certain amount of practice and conscious self-presentation. The fittest course for procuring that honest calling and employment was followed by apprentices, in “that Genteel Servitude, which by a few years service faithfully and diligently performed toward their Masters, lays a certain foundation for attaining Riches and Honour in this world, and by Gods grace, everlasting happiness in the life to come.”<sup>174</sup> Calling an indenture Genteel Servitude reassures the sons of gentlemen that they have not suffered any real diminution of status by becoming apprentices, but it also speaks to the promise of riches and honor that even non-noble apprentices hoped to one day obtain through their labor.

To that end, Burton suggests another form of consciously shaping one’s public identity, that apprentices should render themselves pliant to their masters, improving their profitability, because “by being perfectly instructed in their calling or mystery, they may

---

<sup>170</sup> Jackson p. 82.

<sup>171</sup> Trenchfield p. 82.

<sup>172</sup> Burton p. 75-6.

<sup>173</sup> Burton p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> Burton p. 2.

be the more capable to maintain and provide for themselves and their families when they come to be free; and may likewise be able to instruct those that may happen to be servants to them in time to come.”<sup>175</sup> In this model, apprenticeship is merely a brief period during a longer process, a process that will eventually lead to personal solvency and social advancement, and one day to mentoring apprentices of one’s own. As such, the best advice for apprentices is to fashion themselves in obedience. Thus, Jackson can tell his readers that following his advice will lead to the “happy passing of the time of your apprenticeship to God’s glory, your Masters content, the comfort of your conscience, and the good estimation and opinion of all those that shall observe your godly and civill behavior”<sup>176</sup>—as if an apprenticeship requiring nearly a decade of physical labor could be experienced as an edifying mastery of a role performed before those empowered to grant the apprentice’s desire for social and financial betterment.

Jackson reinforces this advice by telling apprentices that “To be discontented therefore with your calling, is to repine at Gods Providence,” as God placed them in their indentures for a reason. He cites three root causes of the discontent plaguing so many apprentices: envy, which is “when a man grieves to see him, that was sometimes his equall or inferiour, placed (to outward seeming) in a more profitable, eminent, or easie course of life;” ambition, which is “when a man thinking better of himselfe then there is cause, falls into dislike with his present estate, and...seekes for a calling of more eminency;” and impatience, which is “when a man meeting with crosses & troubles in the affaires incident to his employments, and being not able to brook them, resolves to relinquish his place, and either to live in another calling, which is ill; or in no calling, with is worse.”<sup>177</sup> The overarching lesson is one of patience and, above all else, stability. The worst thing an apprentice can do is abandon his post (that is, become a vagabond or masterless man), so even if he is unhappy, he should at least pretend that he isn’t until his indenture is over.

In this fashion, these authors implicitly suggest that apprentices look to the theaters they were thought to frequent for a model of behavior: act like good apprentices and you will be good apprentices, and you only need to keep it up for the relatively short duration of your indenture in order one day to be masters yourselves. Caleb Trenchfield, however, goes further than the others by emphasizing appearances and performance above all else. Despite the fact that he says “the great divertisement of the present Age, is the frequenting of Plays; which in the practice of it among us, doubtless is very vitious, where the design is laid, rather to corrupt Youth, then to inform it,”<sup>178</sup> the craft of acting glosses most of his advice to apprentices. He counsels them that “to take commands with such a pleasant chearfulness *as gives account* that you’re delighted to obey, if not because the things you’re bid do please, yet at the least because you are pleased to be bidden.”<sup>179</sup> Giving account, or acting in a certain fashion to produce a desired reaction, also dictates how an apprentice should defend his master’s reputation: “So is there not any thing which endears a Servant to such Masters more, than when he shall be overheard, either refuting such calumnies whereby their good Name was endangered, or

---

<sup>175</sup> Burton p. 41-2.

<sup>176</sup> Jackson p. 35.

<sup>177</sup> Jackson p. 54-6.

<sup>178</sup> Trenchfield p. 100.

<sup>179</sup> Trenchfield p. 45.



giving the most favourable interpretation to those just allegations to which their weakness or oversight might render them obnoxious.”<sup>180</sup> Defend them most vigorously when they can hear you defending them. Finally, Trenchfield minces no words in laying out the big picture: “So it behoves you now to answer the end that was designed in your being so disposed of, and so to take care to be a servant now, as that you may be a Master hereafter. To which end, it is not a little conducing, to come off the Stage with the clear applause of having acted the part of a Servant well: For he that is furnished with that report, goes a great way in the second part, I mean the setting up for himself.”<sup>181</sup> Whoever you are, if you can *act* like a good apprentice now, you’ll really *be* a master later.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have reopened for critical investigation a conventional assumption about the mutually disruptive relationship between apprentices and the theater that originated during the sixteenth century and has become a cliché of modern theater history at least since Alfred Harbage’s *Shakespeare’s Audience* (1941). Public dismay regarding apprentice playgoing emerged from the general concern that developed mid-century about idleness in apprentices, namely that plays drew apprentices from work and worship, the only two acceptable outlets for their energies. The threat posed by apprentices at theaters coalesced and concentrated, however, around the notion of riots, where apprentices were assigned the roles of both instigators and co-conspirators in violent outbreaks originating at theaters. Despite the fact that the livery companies—those organizations that were actually responsible for overseeing apprentice behavior—registered no official complaints about apprentices either skipping work or causing trouble at the theater, fear of playgoing apprentices grew, especially after the Shrove Tuesday Riot of 1617, which theater historians recognize for the destruction of the Cockpit. The theater provided a privileged conceptual space for considering the nature and function of apprenticeship, where apprentices who were supposed to define themselves by imitating their masters might encounter instead malevolent examples to imitate, not onstage but in the audience. I will explore some contemporary permutations of the nature of performance in this link between theater and apprenticeship in imaginative literature and drama below, but those iterations presage the representation of apprentices and (false) performance in the conduct manuals discussed above. The manuals connect the self-fashioning nature of apprenticeship—where a young man can make himself into a craftsman by imitating his master—to that of dramatic self-presentation. In the end, while it seems certain that apprentices did attend plays, there is little evidence indicating that apprentices *qua* apprentices should have been stigmatized as particularly dangerous theater patrons, or that the belief structure binding apprentices to playhouse riots can any longer be justified in modern criticism.

---

<sup>180</sup> Trenchfield p. 31.

<sup>181</sup> Trenchfield p. 27.

## Chapter 3

### Performing Artisan Identity: Ambition, Industry, and Imitation in Thomas Deloney and Thomas Dekker

#### I. Introduction

As we've just seen, a strongly performative element underlies the advice that seventeenth-century manuals offer apprentices on how to conduct themselves during their indentures. It should not be surprising, then, to discover that mimesis and performance are found even earlier in the imaginative literature that represents the relationship of apprentices and their masters. In this chapter, I shall trace this mimetic strain in Thomas Deloney's prose fiction and then, after examining Thomas Dekker's social and economic attitudes in three prose works, pick up the trail of mimesis in his best-known play.

Simon Eyre's Shrove Tuesday feast at the conclusion of Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), with all its panoptic festive power, fulfills a promise dramatized nowhere in the play itself but is in its main source, the third and final story of Thomas Deloney's prose work, *The Gentle Craft Part One* (1597). In Deloney's account, we first meet Eyre while he is the youngest apprentice in his master's shop, thus the one responsible for fetching water from the conduit, where he congregates with fellow prentices from the neighborhood. One morning, when he cannot pay his share of a meal tab, Eyre swears to the compatriots who cover him, in a slightly euphuistic lilt, that if ever he becomes Lord Mayor of London, he will provide breakfast to all the apprentices of the city. Eyre completes his indenture, marries, sets up a shop, takes on his own apprentices and journeymen, and achieves a modest measure of success. Through a serendipitous series of events, including hiring a foreign journeyman and dressing up as an alderman, Eyre comes into a fortune. In the final chapter of the story, after his election as Lord Mayor has been revealed, Eyre recounts the story of his promise and delivers to the apprentices a feast of pancakes and pudding pies, wine and ale, though not in excess "to cause them to be disordered."<sup>182</sup> Deloney's subdued description of an orderly celebration occupies roughly the same amount of space as Eyre's recollection of the initial promise, and itself satisfies a promise to the reader. When Eyre was just an apprentice, it was implied that when he became Lord Mayor we would read about a celebration, and by story's end we have, even if it was a different experience than the one Deloney's audience might have expected given the contemporary reputation of Shrove Tuesday festivities.<sup>183</sup>

In *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, however, Dekker follows a different path. The celebration ostensibly encapsulates the qualities critics have long held typify the play—joyous fraternity, class-blind inclusiveness, and the presumptive fruition of potential, all available within the capital's purview—and enchantingly extends them to a theater crowd

---

<sup>182</sup> All quotations of Deloney cite *The Works of Thomas Deloney*. Ed. Francis O. Mann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912. p. 133.

<sup>183</sup> The fact that Deloney depicts a rather subdued Shrove Tuesday celebration could indicate a strategy of sanitizing the holiday of its more rebellious associations.

watching in 1600. The London of the play represents a kind of municipal Arden where even a lowly maimed soldier returned from war on the continent can always earn a living with his hands and his friends, that is, through his personal determination and engagement in a craft community. During the final feast, raucous apprentices rub shoulders with the king, the haughty blocking figures Oatley and Lincoln are put in their places, love matches are validated, and a good time is had by all. Unlike Deloney's story, we never see Dekker's Eyre when he was an apprentice; rather, we first encounter him as the charismatic leader of his own shop. Dekker does depict Eyre's ascension to Lord Mayor, although the rise does not occur because of merchant class perseverance or ingenuity, but because a profligate gentleman posing as a foreign shoemaker sets up the lucrative transaction that enriches Eyre and then fronts him the money to see it through. Contrary to the standard interpretation of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, which casts the play as a paean to the potential benefits and redemptive power of industry and fraternity, I shall explore how the play interrogates the simulacrum of opportunity extended by the hierarchic ladder of the guild system—which promised appropriate promotion for earnest labor within an industrial community—and how the potential to perform artisanal identity in place of inhabiting it opens the door for abuses unseen by the apprentices and journeymen who place their faith in that system.

Such suspicions are not manifest only in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, as Dekker developed veiled criticisms of the existent guild structure found in his immediate source and throughout Deloney's prose fiction. Critics typically read Deloney's prose—particularly *Jack of Newbury* and *The Gentle Craft*—as encomiums for merchants and craftsmen praising the collegial atmosphere of the cordwainer's shop and the national contribution of hardworking but pleasant clothiers. Deloney would be disposed to write such tales extolling the virtues of craftsmen, so the story goes, because he himself worked as a journeyman silk weaver in London, and thus maintained a personal investment in the rewards offered by the guild system, particularly in the capacity to advance efficiently and fairly through the *cursus honorum*—from apprentice to journeyman to shopkeeper to liveryman (company men successful enough to wear the livery of the guild who enjoyed certain privileges and influence) to alderman and perhaps all the way up to Lord Mayor. Deloney saw in the ranks of his peers, however, a disconnect evolving between that which was promised and what was delivered. Ideally, a young man eager to make his way up the social ladder would apply himself to assimilate the practices of those occupying the rung just above him. An apprentice would learn the mysteries of the craft from his master in order to one day become a master himself. A shopkeeper would emulate the local politics and business acumen of more successful guildsmen in hopes of attaining the livery. Even the most successful large scale merchants copied the dress and habits of the gentry, purchasing land and moving to the country if possible, leaving their working class roots behind them. Thus, the archetype for craft advancement derived from the combination of ambition, industry, and imitation, but Deloney witnessed the adulteration of the assurance held out to tradesmen that earnest labor would be met with fit reward. He voiced these concerns by printing a letter complaining about the abuse of apprentices by foreign weavers, but instead of prompting change, he was briefly imprisoned because of it. This period of social protest and punishment coincides with Deloney's adoption of prose fiction praising craftsmen, subject matter he had never previously treated in his popular writing in a genre he had never employed. While

Deloney's prose fiction does exalt the virtues of crafts and craftsmen, it also obliquely, ironically, and self-referentially critiques the underpinnings of the guild promotion system. If an apprentice imitates the behavior of his master out of a desire to achieve his master's success, then a master might perform whatever behaviors that, when imitated by his apprentice, most benefit the master, so long as such behaviors do not disillusion the apprentice. Ideally, both parties would attend to their duties without artifice, but Deloney questions whether instead the citizen heroes he creates merely perform their artisanal identities extremely well, providing an appealing but hollow model both to the other characters within his stories and to his readers and critics alike.

Unlike Deloney, Dekker appears never to have belonged to a guild, and thus had no personal investment in the success or failure of the real life counterparts of the cordwainers he portrayed in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, so long as they continued patronizing his plays. Dekker did, however, have a stake in London's economic conditions because, although he was always a professional writer, he was a perpetually poor one, imprisoned for debt in 1598 until Henslowe lent him the money to secure his release. In prose tracts such as *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606) and *Worke for Armourours* (1609), Dekker bitterly denounces the severe disparity between rich and poor, as well as the corruption and cruelty of some craftsmen regarding their apprentices. In adapting *The Gentle Craft* for the stage, Dekker further teases out the link between industry, imitation, and promotion, emphasizing the possibility of a causal gap between the achievement of success—which inspires apprentices to remain compliant in hopes of achieving commensurate prosperity—and the actual means by which that success was attained. While probing the relationship between spectacular façade and its more complicated roots, Dekker also negotiates the emergent tensions of identity politics between the gentry and the merchant class. Class lines are crossed by marriage, and Eyre, a proud shoemaker, climbs to the Lord Mayorship, but only with the help of Lacy, a destitute gentleman. To a certain extent, both Lacy and Eyre theatrically perform their artisanal identities, and Dekker suggests that self-interest, ambition, and public performance are not the tools only of the political elite, but also of those who work for a living.

In my first chapter, I traced how a double-sided image of apprentices emerged from the historical conditions of apprenticeship in the sixteenth century. On their face, the major works of Thomas Deloney and Thomas Dekker would appear only to consider the positive image of apprentices, where the workshop is a cradle of communal fraternity and each man respects everyone else while remaining fully aware of his place in the pecking order. However, the perfidy of apprenticeship that developed over this period—where apprentices who submit themselves to discipline with the expectation that it will lead to employment discover afterwards that there is no guarantee—can also be found in these texts. In a promotion system grounded in imitation, where apprentices act like their masters until the guild declares that they have become masters themselves, there is the potential for a master merely to act in a fashion that, if imitated by his apprentices, will benefit the master without delivering promotion to the apprentice while maintaining the illusion that promotion is still inevitable.

## II. Thomas Deloney's Critical Turn from Ballad to Prose

In the last decade of the sixteenth century, the competing ambitions of every social rank combined to create an atmosphere rife with infighting and jockeying for available wealth and power, which contributed to repressive socioeconomic inequalities in London. Thomas Nashe condemns Londoners' treatment of one another in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593), a work that would strongly influence both Deloney and Dekker. Comparing the sins of Jerusalem before it fell to the Romans with those he sees in London, thus casting himself as an analogue to Christ, Nashe warns against the relentless acquisitive drive plaguing everyone in the capital, particularly the rich: "Take it of me, rich men expressly, that it is not your own which you have purchased with your industry; it is part of it the poor's, part your prince's, part your preacher's" (87). Nashe cites the force driving this voracious self-interest as ambition, the greatest threat to the city: "London, look to ambition, or it will lay thee desolate like Jerusalem" (46). He defines ambition, the "first son" of pride, as "any puffed up greedy humour of honour or preferment" (44), and claims that it reaches past class markers and fraternal bonds to make each individual view everyone else as an enemy:

From the rich to the poor (in every street in London) there is ambition, or swelling above their states; the rich citizen swells against the pride of the prodigal courtier; the prodigal courtier swells against the wealth of the citizen. One company swells against another, and seeks to intercept the gain of each other; nay, not any company but is divided in itself. The ancients, they oppose themselves against the younger, & suppress them and keep them down all that they may. The young men, they call them dotards, & swell and rage, and with many oaths swear on the other side cullions, but go good and near to out-shoulder them.<sup>184</sup>

Just below the uppermost echelon where wealthy courtiers tread without envy, rich merchants covet the social cachet of gentlemen, while irresponsible courtiers desire the funds available to successful citizens.<sup>185</sup> Further down the ladder, Nashe describes companies attempting to take advantage of each other, and within a single company, guildsmen divided against one another. Instead of passing through the ranks with an overarching sense of *communitas* shared by everyone from liverymen down to apprentices, the elders of a guild subjugate the less established members, preventing them from succeeding to the positions of political or social power.

Though Nashe sets up an equilibrium of ambition by pitting seasoned against green company members, the young men are the only ones truly swelling above their states. All of this adds up to a system in which the poorest and youngest—those who perhaps should have ambition—are the most victimized by it. Young men early in their careers hope to advance but find themselves stymied by more senior guildsmen intent on

---

<sup>184</sup> Nashe, Thomas. *Christ's Teares over Jerusalem. The Works of Thomas Nashe, Vol. II.* Ed. Ronald B. McKerrow. London: A. H. Bullen, 1904. p. 44.

<sup>185</sup> This formulation of the social hierarchy—moneyed gentlemen from good families set the bar for everyone else—corresponds to the theories put forward by Jack Hexter in "The Myth of the Middle Class in Tudor England" and Peter Laslett in "A One Class Society." They argue that, if there were an urban middle class in Elizabethan England, its ultimate goal would be to move to the country and no longer be urban or middle class. That is, while rich citizens might have taken pride in their 'class' while they belonged to it, they ultimately wanted to be accepted as gentlemen and scrub off the stigma of work.

maintaining their market share and company authority. Nashe describes an environment where potent contempt runs unmistakably downhill:

In London, the rich disdain the poor. The courtier the citizen. The citizen the countryman. One occupation disdaineth another. The merchant the retailer. The retailer the craftsman. The better sort of craftsmen the baser. The shoemaker the cobbler. The cobbler the carman. (73)

Despite looking down at the cobbler, who merely mended shoes, the shoemaker ranks only as a baser craftsman, so for a shoemaker to rise to Lord Mayor, he would have to overcome the ambitions both of the better sorts of craftsmen, retailers, and merchants, and of the other shoemakers clamoring for prosperity within the guild.<sup>186</sup> Overall, the image of 1593 London Nashe casts in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* is one of myopic individuals focused only on improving their own circumstances in relation to and at the expense of others.

Deloney experienced firsthand the conditions Nashe described. Although the date and place of his birth are unknown, Deloney was definitely established in London by 1586, when entries in the parish register of St. Giles, Cripplegate for the birth and death of a son, Richard, to "Thomas Deloney, silk-weaver" signal that he was married, raising a family, and working as a weaver in the capital. We know that Deloney died in 1600 at the latest because of a reference to his passing in Will Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder*. Kemp, investigating who had perpetrated nasty rumors about him, sought the man who "hath been the Author of these abhominale ballets written of me: I was told it was the great ballet-maker *T. D., alias Tho. Deloney,*" only to discover that Deloney had already been "honestly buried" by that time.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, apart from working as a journeyman weaver, Deloney made his living as one of the most widely read balladeers of the period. Nashe himself dubbed him the "ballading silk-weaver" in his 1596 piece, "Have with you to Saffron-Walden," underscoring just how thoroughly Deloney was identified with both the ballad and the silk trades of London. Deloney served as the standard bearer of lowbrow literary tastes in the feud between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey, and Robert Greene needles Deloney in his 1592 *The Defense of Cony Catching* for playing to a popular audience by claiming Deloney's brains were "beaten to the yarking up of ballads."<sup>188</sup> The insult marries the process of artistic creation with the trappings of

---

<sup>186</sup> Paul Seaver provides some useful contextual information about the status of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers: "Although large, the company was neither prestigious nor wealthy. When the order of precedence was fixed in 1515, the Cordwainers were assigned the twenty-seventh place, despite the fact that they were among the twelve oldest companies in the City, and when in 1627 the crown demanded £60,000 from the livery companies as their share of the forced loan that year, the Cordwainers were assessed £360, a sum that seems derisory compared to the Merchant Taylors' £6,300 or the Drapers' £6,000." Regarding a shoemaker's chances of attaining the Lord Mayorship: "A handful of spectacularly successful members of minor companies were elected alderman in Elizabeth's reign, but all of these slated for election to the mayoralty were translated beforehand to one of the more prestigious twelve, typically the Grocers or Drapers." Seaver, Paul S. "The Artisanal World." *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre, and Politics in London, 1576-1649*. eds. David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 87-115. p. 92-3.

<sup>187</sup> Kemp, Will. *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder*. ed. G. B. Harrison. London: The Bodley Head, 1923. p. 20.

<sup>188</sup> Greene, Robert. "The Defense of Cony-Catching." *The Works of Robert Greene, Volume XI*. ed. Alexander B. Grosart. London, 1885. p. 49-50.

commercial production, as “to yark” or “to yerke” literally means “to draw stitches tight, to twitch, as a shoemaker in sewing,”<sup>189</sup> so Greene’s jab implies that the craftsman in Deloney could only produce artistically deficient writing manufactured by rote, ballads by numbers written by a craftsman to be consumed by other craftsmen.

Deloney’s ballads adhered to a relatively standard blueprint, relating pastoral romances or the chivalric exploits of medieval kings. In the introduction to his 1903 edition of *The Gentle Craft*, Alexis Lange observes: “Not one of Deloney’s extant poems is intimately personal. A few are reflective, didactic, objectively lyrical...being more or less direct imitations of the ballad of communal parentage.” Deloney’s reputation was built upon ballads that “owe their substance wholly or in part to local oral tradition or wandering legend”<sup>190</sup>—that is, the type of story that circulated among workers. Deloney successfully published these kinds of generic ballads for ten years, but the brutal London atmosphere Nashe described in *Christ’s Tears over Jerusalem* finally led Deloney to write about something closer to home.

In 1594, the year after Nashe wrote *Christ’s Tears*, Deloney published his own admonitory comparison between London at the close of the sixteenth century and “the dolefull destruction of faire Jerusalem,” a ballad called “Canans Calamitie.” In a prefatory letter “To the Gentlemen Readers health,” Deloney warns that Jerusalem fell when “gould and Treasure most abounded, when pride excelled, and [when] the people were bent to all wantonnes,” those same people so “glutted with to much wealth and plentie” that “they loathed every thing that bore not an high price.” Deloney asks “all Christians to take example, least following them in the like sinne, we feele the like smart” (419). In the poem proper, Deloney warns “all English hearts” to “marke well the woes of fayre Jerusalem” (365-6). The fall of Jerusalem provided an apt vehicle for Deloney to comment on the state of London in the mid-1590’s, as famine wracked the biblical city while Roman forces surrounded it after disgruntled underlings set fire to a storehouse of food that could have lasted twenty years. Eugene P. Wright argues that “by concentrating upon the specific elements in the story—a description of the city, the sins of the people, details of preparation for war, the horrors of famine—instead of upon Christ’s and Nashe’s tedious moralizing, Deloney is more successful than Nashe in calling attention to an historical allegory warning of the wages of sin.”<sup>191</sup> Rather than spool out expressly didactic prose, Deloney sets a scene for his reader in verse, a technique he will revisit later with an interesting variation in his prose work *Jack of Newbury*.

Deloney’s faith in the ability of a popular anecdote to manifest positive change trickles into the poem itself in the story of Miriam, who murders and cooks her son out of hunger, the centerpiece of the entire work. After months with no new sources of food, the smell of roasting meat draws the interest of Miriam’s neighbors, and soon the city elite knock at her door demanding their share, ignorant of the flesh in question. They claim that, because they are her “lords, and leaders of renowne,” Miriam “shouldst be punished as in case of treason” (675-7) for withholding food from them in times of famine. The normative social hierarchy absurdly attempts to reassert itself even during a period of intense collective trauma, when men drop dead in the street and once proud citizens are

---

<sup>189</sup> *OED* definition 1 of “yerke.” Listed as a synonym of “yerke” and “yark” is “firk,” the name of journeyman clown in Simon Eyre’s shop in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.

<sup>190</sup> Lange, Alexis F. Introduction. *The Gentle Craft*. Berlin: Mayer & Muller, 1908. p. 13.

<sup>191</sup> Wright, Eugene P. *Thomas Deloney*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981. p. 44.

reduced to eating dirt. Frightened, Miriam sets a proper table with silver trenchers and “damask napkins, dainty, fine, and neate” (694), and proceeds to serve them her boy. Aghast, Jerusalem’s former lords and leaders refuse to eat, and word quickly spreads of the atrocity she has committed. “The starved Jewes hearing this dolefull tale, / Were at the matter smitten with such sadnesse” (775-6) that they “fled to the Romaines secret in the night” (781), where, “finding mercie, tolde when that was done, / How famine forc’t a Lady eate her Sonne” (784-5). In turn, the Roman general who had held Jerusalem hostage for eighteen months, upon hearing the doleful tale of Miriam from the first to flee the city, openly wept at the famine he had helped enforce, and afterward received all surrendering captives with mercy and “nourisht famisht men at point to die” (814). Thus, Deloney demonstrates how the circulation of a story can help transcend artificial, outdated, repressive societal divisions. Although “Canans Calamitie” does not directly comment upon the gross division between rich and poor or bitter rivalries between and within companies, it does chastise Londoners for their pride as Nashe had done in *Christ’s Tears*. More importantly, it signals Deloney’s entry into literary social critique and exhibits his faith that publishing the truth could effect change.

That faith would be tested in the following year, not in the literary realm, but in an industrial venue. For years, native weavers had complained that foreign artisans were not abiding by town or guild regulations, giving them an unfair competitive advantage in the market, and neither the city nor the company seemed able to stop them. In 1595, fifteen journeyman weavers, headed by Deloney and Thomas Muggins, wrote a letter appealing to “the Minister and Elders of the French Church in London”<sup>192</sup> to intervene with their countrymen. Deloney and Muggins complain that, although the foreign weavers were permitted “to buy and sell in as ample manner as any Freeman amongst us,” they managed to dodge stringent guild control by “run[ing] into the Countrey five or six myles from the Cittye out of our Liberties,” where an individual master could exceed restrictions on the size of single shops. The native journeymen levied four main grievances, but none greater than the charge that many foreign weavers “kepe Apprentices and Loomes twyce or thryce as many as they ought whereby such an intollerable multitude of workmen are growne, that nowe one is not able to live by another.” Secondly, the foreigners had no qualms teaching their newly immigrated countrymen the secrets of silk weaving even if those countrymen were formerly shoemakers or joiners, “and by this meanes such fellows that never served daye for the trade have as great Comoditye by our Occupacon as ourselves that served 7, 8, 9, or 10 yeares for yt.” Thirdly, they set their women to work, who thus learned the trade, and those women in turn married and taught men outside the guild, “likewise increase[ing] [to] an infinite number” the ranks of weavers. Finally, they betrayed the mysteries of the craft to their suppliers of raw materials, generally lessening demand for weavers. Seeking redress, Deloney and the other weavers “intreate you [church elders] to call those

---

<sup>192</sup> For an explanation of the complex textual history of the letter, see Roger A. Ladd, “Thomas Deloney and the London Weavers’ Company,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 2001): 981-1001. The letter itself, as well as the other letters discussed below, can be found in Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers’ Company*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933. They appear in an appendix (pp. 312-8). Consitt also provides the best explanation of the letter’s context within the history of the weavers’ guild (pp. 144-52).



men before you and exhort them to be obedient to good Orders, which are made for a generall benefit to all men that use this trade.”

To use the terms of Nashe’s *Christ’s Tears over Jerusalem*, the interests of the native journeymen weavers butts up against the allegedly overzealous ambition of the foreign weavers, and the argument comes largely couched explicitly and implicitly in terms of apprenticeship, either in keeping too many apprentices or in not suitably enforcing apprenticeship as an entrance into the trade. Maintaining excessive looms might yield a disproportionate market share, but the real threat to workaday weavers came in the accelerated multiplication of their numbers. Serving an apprenticeship not only ensured a weaver’s skill, it also controlled the influx of manpower into the labor pool. If foreign workers could arrive in London and immediately take up a position while native workers had to labor without wages for as long as a decade, then the English weavers were at a distinct disadvantage. To defend their continued relevance and profitability, but “without any coercive power to bring to bear, Deloney’s and Muggins’s letter attempted to shift the control of ‘stranger’ weavers to moral and ideological ground, and appeal to an organization to which some of the foreign weavers presumably did belong, the French Protestant church in London.”<sup>193</sup> In other words, because the native journeymen could not influence the foreigners with appeals as fellow weavers or fellow Londoners, Deloney sought to influence them as aliens and Christians. Neither guild regulations nor city ordinances could check their illicit activity, but perhaps French ministers could.

Unfortunately, the letter not only failed, it backfired spectacularly, but not entirely because of its content. Because Deloney and his cohorts sought to publish forty copies of their complaint, they found themselves tossed into Newgate prison. Native weavers had been making essentially the same valid complaints for years to their guild and to the city, but the intent to distribute publicly those complaints proved too volatile, and the strangers complained to the Lord Mayor. In a letter to the Lord Treasurer dated 27 June 1595, the Lord Mayor reports the details he uncovered “touching the printinge of the pamphlet by the Company of Weavers” for which they were apprehended. It seems Deloney and friends intended to deliver copies of their letter to the French and Dutch churches, as well as to the Lord Mayor and each individual Alderman. As Ladd notes, “the lord mayor’s letter clarifies that Deloney’s and Muggins’s letter’s attack on the ‘stranger’ weavers was not itself the problem, but rather it was the *printing* of that letter which had to be punished.”<sup>194</sup> As further proof that publication, not content, was the problem, Deloney and Muggins, in a petition to the Lord Chief Justice of England for their release, claim that only “because the writeinge of the said Letters seemed burdenous unto them, they unadvisedly, without any intencion of malice or offence to her Majestie or her lawes, attempted for Five shillings in money to put the same in Printe.” The Lord Mayor, however, did not believe their explanation, arresting the fifteen principal offenders and playing the weavers against one another, eventually releasing everyone but Deloney, Muggins, and a third major conspirator; the other twelve weavers, the wardens of the company assured the Lord Mayor, had enough to lose by further punishment that they would no longer pose any problem. In the end, not only did circulating a just complaint

---

<sup>193</sup> Ladd p. 984.

<sup>194</sup> Ladd p. 984. Emphasis his.

via pamphlets fail to effect positive change, it landed London's great pamphleteer in prison.

Unlike the world of his pamphlet, Deloney discovered that broadcasting the truth around London in 1595 did not set him free or right public wrongs. This message would be reinforced the following year, after Deloney published his "Ballad on the Want of Corn," sadly no longer extant, for which he was once again sought by the authorities, though never arrested. Strype, in his edition of Stowe, reports that the ballad "contained in it certain vain and presumptuous matters, bringing in the Queen, speaking with her People Dialogue wise in very fond and undecent sort," according to another letter between the Lord Mayor and Lord Treasurer. The ballad apparently prescribed a course of action for the common man to combat the dearth of corn, but did so in a manner "that thereby the Poor might aggravate their Grief, and take occasion of some Discontentment."<sup>195</sup> It remains unclear which subversive element of the ballad drew the Lord Mayor's attention, whether Deloney might have suggested some sort of civic unrest or that he dared to depict the queen in uncouth conversation with her subjects. Certainly he understood, though, that he could no longer publish ballads or pamphlets levying social criticism against the establishment on behalf of humble craftsmen like himself without risking further punitive action.

Unless one is willing to accept that Deloney spontaneously abandoned both the spirit of social critique that had driven him for the previous three years and the medium in which he was recognized as a master, it should come as little surprise that the next year marked the beginning of his foray into prose fiction celebrating the exploits of famous historical tradesmen.<sup>196</sup> Modern critics, however, resist the idea that he simply swapped genres while maintaining the same motivations. Rather, they insist that his drive to criticize the socio-economic conditions he witnessed in London grew into something else, namely a desire to celebrate the commoner heroes he saw experiencing those conditions. Lange argues that "the change from verse to prose, from ballad to novel, presents itself primarily in the form of a natural evolution," and that "Deloney's story-writing is essentially an outgrowth of his ballad-writing, the realistic comic manner uniting with the historical romantic manner in the treatment of themes drawn from the *bourgeoisie*, themes supplied by the life, traditional lore, and documentary history of industrial civic instead of agricultural feudal society."<sup>197</sup> This stance informs the positions of most twentieth century critics, who insist that Deloney followed the trite writers' workshop advice of writing what he knew. Wright begins to offer a more nuanced interpretation of Deloney's unforeseen adoption of prose fiction, only to retreat immediately to the standard take on Deloney as a contented craftsmen turned author who wrote stories lionizing his class:

---

<sup>195</sup> Quoted in Francis O. Mann's introduction to his edition of Deloney's works, p. ix.

<sup>196</sup> Deloney produced all four of his novels in the 3-4 year window just before his death. The exact order of the texts remains unknown, but *Jack of Newbury* certainly came first, entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 March 1597. *The Gentle Craft Part I* was entered on 19 October 1597. One theory suggests that Deloney wrote *Thomas of Reading* just after *Jack of Newbury*, followed by the two parts of *The Gentle Craft*, while another theory posits that Deloney wrote *Thomas of Reading* last. In any case, all four works appear so close to one another that little time elapsed for Deloney to mature as a prose author.

<sup>197</sup> Lange p. xvii.

It may be that his close brush with imprisonment caused him to decide upon the less risky genre of historical prose, where he might carry on his social and economic criticism under the guise of historical allegory. More likely, however, with the economic hard times of the last decade of the sixteenth century, Deloney, a practical and inveterate storyteller, saw a chance to earn a living by doing something he liked to do in a medium of growing popularity. (56)

For the most part, Wright adheres to the idea that Deloney's prose works do little more than exalt the middling sort in a variety of ways. Even Ladd—who interprets *Jack of Newbury* as Deloney idealizing “craft self-governance without subjecting his characters to the direct power of a guild” after his own guild failed to protect the interests of its lesser members—can only bring himself to point out, “We can see from their timing that Deloney's novels were part of the same discursive moment as his and Muggins's letter,”<sup>198</sup> implying that Deloney's imprisonment bore merely a correlative rather than causative relationship to his switch to prose. On the contrary, I would argue that Deloney, frustrated by his company's inability or reluctance to protect its puisne members, exchanged the ballad, an inherently imitative literary genre in which he wrote about fantastical subjects, for prose fiction, an incipient form in which he chronicled the achievement of common craftsmen, in order to question the real potential of apprentices and lesser craftsmen to achieve success by imitating either the great men in his stories or their masters in the real world.

### III. *Jack of Newbury*

In *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney describes the exploits of John Winchcombe, who begins the story as a lowly yet loyal and dutiful apprentice, but ends up a fantastically successful weaver who operates a shop employing a thousand people and, among other valorous deeds, furnishes the king with one hundred fifty exquisitely outfitted men to help defend the country during times of need. Laura Stevenson calls *Jack of Newbury* “a book written specifically to show that a wealthy clothier can be as honourable and just as a gentleman.”<sup>199</sup> That is, not only can a humble craftsman rise to make contributions as great or greater than landed noblemen, but merchants can find social and financial success on their own terms without aspiring to become aristocrats. *Jack of Newbury* does speak to the great opportunities granted through the cloth-working trade, but those opportunities are thoroughly intertwined with the notion, constantly trumpeted by Jack, that individual ability and determination can produce the great results he has enjoyed. Walter R. Davis argues that the defining feature of the story is this guaranteed success no matter the circumstance: “In *Jack of Newberie* the possibilities are exactly the same on every level: Jack will show forth his virtue and be rewarded, whether by mistress, town, or king.”<sup>200</sup> Jack is indeed rewarded for demonstrating his virtue, but as we shall see, a

---

<sup>198</sup> Ladd p. 986.

<sup>199</sup> Stevenson, Laura Caroline. *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and craftsmen in Elizabethan popular literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. p. 89.

<sup>200</sup> Davis, Walter R. *Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. p. 250.

gap appears between show and reward. Jack remains very invested in reinforcing the faith that others, particularly those who work for him, have in the causal link between demonstrating virtue and the allegedly resultant advancement. But in reminding them that he rose from where they are to where he is now, he motivates them to continue plugging away in his shop, which benefits him more than anyone else.

At the outset of the story, which takes place during the reign of Henry VIII,<sup>201</sup> Deloney introduces Jack, “a broad cloth Weaver” “being (though he were but poore) in good estimation” of everyone he met because he was “of a merry disposition” and did “discreetly behave himeselfe with honest mirth” (3). Jack’s master dies, leaving the business to his wife, who, recognizing Jack’s merit, puts him in charge of the entire operation for the space of three years. Despite this great responsibility, Jack still associates with his youthful peers, joining them in carousing each Sunday, though never spending too much or indulging to excess. Once he reaches his limit, he departs, leaving his friends with a song as they carry on:

*My masters, I thanke you, its time to packe home,  
For he that wants money is counted a mome:  
And twelve pence a Sunday being spent in good cheare,  
To fifty two shillings amounts in the yeare;  
Enough for a Crafts-man that lives by his hands:  
And he that exceeds it shall purchase no lands.  
For that I spend this day, Ile work hard to morrow.  
For woe is that partie that seeketh to borrow. (4)*

With this song, Jack transforms the immoderate revelry of his fellows into an instructional performance, literally putting on a show informing them how and why to better themselves, namely through emulating the same prudence and composure he exhibits himself. Deloney has Jack use art, in this case song, to reach out to the lower sorts in order to teach them to behave—that is, not get drunk and rowdy—because such evenhanded behavior provides the path for an artisan to elevate his station. Even a man who works with his hands, if he refrains from wasting money on idle play, can come to purchase lands one day.

The power of Jack’s performance of discretion also extends to his peers in the shop, and his mistress takes notice: “shee had never a Prentise that yielded her more obedience than he did, or was more dutifull: so that by his good example, hee did as much good as by his diligent labour and painfull travel” (4). In other words, his power as a symbol to other apprentices indicating the benefit of obedience proved just as valuable as his real work. In fact, Jack’s mistress grows so enamored of his sober responsibility that she marries him, utilizing a bed trick in which she plies him with liquor before installing him in his old master’s bed, at which point she crawls under the covers

---

<sup>201</sup> The blueprint of the story is provided by the history of John Smallwood, otherwise known as John Winchcombe, a real and very successful clothier in Newbury at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Henry VIII did visit Winchcombe’s mills in 1516 and 1518, and part of Winchcombe’s house still stands in Newbury. The legend of Jack of Newbury was quite popular, and Thomas Fuller called him “the most considerable clothier without fancy and fiction England ever beheld.” See Wright p. 59-60.

alongside him.<sup>202</sup> Taking stock of his mistress, Jack decides because “her estate was reasonable good, and considering beside, that he should find a house ready furnished, servants ready taught, and all other things for his trade necessary, he thought it best not to let slip that good occasion” (8). Thus, they marry the next morning, and Jack finds himself in possession of a profitable business. Although Jack’s initial hard work and sober dedication was not pure performance designed to advance his station, he is keenly aware of the power of impressions and demonstrates an eye toward manipulating his own. When he first greets the servants who had been his peers only hours before, he expresses gratitude for the promotion “from being your fellow to be your master” and assures them that he will not “forget [his] former estate,” but he also warns them: “seeing I am now to hold the place of a master, it shall be wisdom in you to forget what I was, and to take mee as I am” (16). At least in this early stage, Jack must separate himself from his former life as an apprentice in the eyes of his workers in order to solidify his place as a master, but once he has established his authority, he will carefully cultivate and deploy the public memory of his rough origins.

Though the unyieldingly modest comportment which made him an excellent apprentice is what first attracted the widow, Jack does nothing proactive to achieve this promotion; he is rewarded for his virtue, not compensated for his industry. As Stevenson puts it, “Jack works hard, but he is not an entrepreneur; his virtue, by bringing him to the attention of his mistress, allows him to become rich, but it does not make him rich.”<sup>203</sup> While Jack might have followed the advice he gave his friends in his song and found success, he does not succeed in a fashion that everyone who follows his advice could. That is, Jack’s accomplishment merely appears reproducible, when, in fact, imitating him will not necessarily lead to corresponding remuneration. However, as Jack grows wealthier and more successful, he continually associates that wealth and success with his humble beginnings, simultaneously reminding everyone of what he was—dutiful weaver’s apprentice—and what he is—one of the most powerful merchants in the country. Richard Baskin argues that Jack’s “move up has been entirely realistic and within traditional boundaries,”<sup>204</sup> but while widows were sometimes known to marry former apprentices, the central underlying conceit of the story—this is a rags-to-riches tale, as Jack himself will constantly remind us—places it uncomfortably between exceptional and expected. Jack’s success is not merely coincidental, but it also is not guaranteed to everybody.

Jack publicly clings to his humble roots well after becoming extremely wealthy, broadcasting his pride in being a modest weaver to king and craftsman alike. When Jack

---

<sup>202</sup> The bed trick episode demonstrates how Deloney drew from earlier literary sources, in this case a story called “The Burning of John” from a 1525 jestbook, *A Hundred Merry Tales*. In the jestbook tale, a master named John dies and his apprentice, also named John, seeks to marry his widow, signaling the inevitably fungible relationship of masters and apprentices. Unlike in *Jack of Newbury*, this apprentice plays the bed trick on his mistress, actively seizing possession of the shop rather than passively accepting it as Jack does. Though he does not become a master by properly progressing through the *cursus honorum*, the apprentice from the jestbook tale uses his own determination and cunning to achieve his goal. For the full tale of “The Burning of John” and a discussion of its influence on *Jack of Newbury*, see Lawlis, Merritt E. *An Apology for the Middle Class*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960. p. 38-45.

<sup>203</sup> Stevenson p. 148.

<sup>204</sup> Baskin, Richard. “‘Prince am I non, yet am I princely born’: The Confused Hero of the Commons.” *Critical Approaches to English Prose Fiction 1520-1640*. Ed. Donald Beecher. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1998. p. 344.

receives a request to contribute six men for the protection of the kingdom against invaders, he provides 150, all outfitted with opulent arms. This draws the envy of some, who “gave out words that hee shewed himselfe more prodigall than prudent, and more vaine-glorious than well advised, seeing that the best Noblemen in the Country would scarce have done so much” (23). Queen Katherine grants Jack an audience to thank him directly, and she calls him a “gentleman,” offering “forth her lilly white hand” to kiss, but Jack offers a humble response: “Gentleman am I none, nor the sonne of a Gentleman, but a poor clothier, whose Landes are his Looms, having no other rents but what I get from the backs of little sheep” (24). Erasing any doubt that Deloney purposefully cast Jack as theatrically self-aware here, Jack approaches the Queen having smeared blood on his face and fine white coat, and tells her that a monster named Envy seems to have assailed him invisibly, attacking him unawares. Jack embraces both his common lineage and his current occupation—he was not born to great wealth, and he does not earn money from rents on property, but by continuing to operate his business—though his claim to be a poor clothier is patently absurd, as is his posturing about looms and lambs. Later, when Jack takes the King and Queen on a tour of his shop, we see that he has legions of workers laboring at the looms and a hundred children to pick wool from those little sheep. In admiration of his great prosperity, the King offers to knight Jack, but Jack refuses, beseeching the king to “let me live a poor clothier among my people, in whose maintenance I take more felicity, than in all the vain titles of Gentility” (38). The King shrewdly points out that “thy Knighthood need be no hinderance of thy Faculty,” but Jack claims that such “honour and worship” make “men forget themselves that taste thereof,” and he wishes to “keepe in minde from whence I came and what I am.” Thus, he asks the King to let him “rest in my russet coate, a poore Clothier to my dying day” (38).

Stevenson would point to this moment as proof that Deloney wrote the character of Jack “to show that a wealthy clothier can be as honourable and just as a gentleman” without actually wanting to become a gentleman, and she would be mostly right. In a time when the line dividing gentlemen from merchants was becoming ever more permeable, the ultimate goal of most tradesmen—the top rung of the ladder—would be to abandon their russet coats entirely given the opportunity. Deloney and Jack mean to honor the craft of weaving, but they both also have ulterior motives. Jack could receive a knighthood and become a gentleman, but he earns a vast fortune as a poor clothier, a fact he advertises freely. Supplying 150 finely arrayed men when only asked for six announces Jack’s wealth and influence, and he intends both to provoke the ire of jealous gentlemen and to evoke class pride from his fellow cloth workers. This does not explain, however, why Jack feels the need to overcorrect the Queen when she refers to him as a gentleman in passing, to refuse an honor offered by the King that would not otherwise affect him, or to espouse so vehemently the identity of a *poor* clothier on one hand while flaunting his wealth on the other. Not being born of gentle stock is not the same as being a poor clothier, but Jack strategically conflates the two, reinforcing the idea that his current success developed as a matter of course from his early diligence. In Jack’s case, a knighthood would hinder his faculty in maintaining his people, because his power as a symbol to the apprentices in his shop relies on their perceiving him as the instantiation of their potential. If Jack accepted a knighthood or embraced being called a gentleman, it would signal his abandonment of the working class roots that supposedly reach all the way down to the thousand people who work for him. They pick wool, spin thread, and sit

at their looms—to Jack’s great benefit—because they believe they might achieve similar promotion by imitating his virtues. In order to keep them content, he needs to keep in their minds the connection between whence he came and what he is, and he uses his russet coat<sup>205</sup> as a tool to accomplish this.

Jack extends his hortatory efforts in an episode involving fifteen portraits of great men born to humble fathers. Jack guides his servants around a parlor in his home housing the pictures, explaining how the magnificent Dioclesian was the son of a simple bookbinder, that the emperor Maximus was born to a blacksmith, and that Marcus Aurelius was but a cloth-weaver’s son. Deloney borrows this scene almost directly from Thomas Fortescue’s translation of *The Forest* (1571)<sup>206</sup>, often lifting complete sentences from his source. However, Lawlis argues that because “Deloney visualizes everything in terms of action, he proceeds to dramatize Fortescue’s cold facts. Fortescue merely lists examples from history, whereas Deloney constructs an easily visualized scene in which Jack conducts a kind of tour through a picture gallery.”<sup>207</sup> As he did in “Canans Calamitie” when compared to *Christ’s Tears over Jerusalem*, Deloney animates the expository prose of his source to render it more affecting. Jack sums up the purpose of his tour of portraits:

Seeing then my good servants, that these men have been advanced to high estate and Princely dignities, by wisdom, learning and diligence, I would wish you to imitate the like vertues, that you might attaine the like honours: for which of you doth know what good fortune God hath in store for you? there is none of you so poorely borne, but that men of baser birth have come to great honours. The idle hand shall ever goe in a ragged garment, and the sloathfull live in reproach: but such as doe lead a vertuous life, and governe themselves discreetly, shall of the best be esteemed, and spend their daies in credit. (42-3)

Jack highlights the promotion each of the men in the portraits had attained by adhering to the virtues of wisdom, learning, and diligence, and implies that his servants could make similar gains by imitating those virtues, the same virtues he himself exhibited when he was an apprentice. Deloney has Jack introduce a linkage between moral and economic benefit, between reputation and wealth, to guard his claim: promising that his servants would enjoy “Princely dignities” after advancing to a “high estate” and that they would “spend their daies in credit” strongly implies financial remuneration for striving to imitate

---

<sup>205</sup> Deloney explores another costuming strategy presented by a russet coat in *Thomas of Reading*. On a trip to London from Southampton, the wife of a successful clothier demands that her husband buy her some of the fancy clothes that even lesser merchants, such as cobblers, provide for their wives in the city. The clothier claims that opulent dress would be “enough to raise me up in the Kings booke, for many times, mens coffers are judged by their garments: why, we are country folks, and must keepe out selves in good compass: gray russet, and good hempe-spun cloath doth best become us; I tell thee wife, it were as undecent for us to goe like Londoners as it is for Londoners to goe like courtiers” (238). In order to avoid greater potential taxation, the clothier wears russet and hemp to appear less wealthy to the aristocracy. An argument based on morality and class-consciousness masks economic motivations.

<sup>206</sup> Fortescue translated into English a French version of the text by Claude Gruget, itself a version of an Italian translation from the Spanish original by Pedro Mexía, written around 1540.

<sup>207</sup> Lawlis p. 21.

great men, while maintaining the potential to claim that only respect and honor might be gained.<sup>208</sup> Moreover, Jack couches these implied promises to his servants in labor- and property-oriented language. Idle hands shall ever go in ragged garments, and by unspoken extension, industrious hands will enjoy finer ones, perhaps as fine as those Jack wears, for Jack is surely the most powerful and immediate example among all the great men on display in this scene, both to Jack's workers and Deloney's readers.

If, as Paul Salzman claims, "Deloney's intention was to hold up notable examples of honourable and successful tradesmen for the admiration and emulation of his readers,"<sup>209</sup> then Deloney situates Jack among the pictured men for his readers just as Jack situates himself among them for his workers. Jack's success and wealth, which enable him to keep a gallery of portraits to show off, speak more directly to the hopes of Jack's servants and Deloney's readers than do the exploits of Dioclesian or Marcus Aurelius. Thus, this episode would be a double appropriation of art to reinforce artisanal faith in the causal link between virtue expressed as labor and promotion—Jack's of the portraits for his servants and Deloney's of Fortescue for his readers. I argue, however, that Deloney ironically carries out the same exercise that Jack performs in self-interest. Deloney presents a figure for apprentices to imitate in Jack, but he shows Jack presenting his own apprentices with figures to imitate as a means of motivating them to continue laboring assiduously in his shop. In doing so, Deloney criticizes and subverts the practice of advocating faith in imitation as a means to promotion while appearing to support and propagate it.

Critics very rarely attribute such manipulative motivations to Jack<sup>210</sup>, but there is a small moment where Jack's controlling nature manifests itself, though it could easily be mistaken as generosity. Jack had always given his workers excellent food, white bread rather than brown and choice cuts of meat instead of scraps. Jack's wife, in a ploy to afford herself better jewelry and clothing, cuts the quality of food unbeknownst to her husband in order to save money. When Jack discovers this, he becomes angry and quickly reinstates the old policy. Mihoko Suzuki argues that his wife's actions offend Jack because he believes his "generosity with his wealth is a measure of his success"<sup>211</sup>—a kind of literal, shared conspicuous consumption—but Jack himself offers another, more calculating reason. "I will not have my people thus pincht of their victualls," Jack exclaims, "Empty platters makes greedy stomackes, and where scarcity is kept, hunger is nourished" (56). Jack does not give his people good food because he likes them or because he feels they deserve it or because he wants to demonstrate he can afford it. He

---

<sup>208</sup> There is no such confusion in Fortescue, where it is clear that struggling to lead a virtuous life may lead to honor alone: "By these examples it thus now lyeth manifest, of what estate so ever or condition man be borne, he may if he wil attain sometime to honor, so if he walke stil in the path of vertue, which only is acquired by incessant pain & diligency." Fortescue, Thomas. *The forest or Collection of historyes no lesse profitable, then pleasant and necessary, doone out of Frenche into English, by Thomas Fortescue. Scene [sic] and allowed*. Imprinted at London : By [John Kingston for] Iohn Day dwelling ouer Aldersgate, 1576. p. 83 recto.

<sup>209</sup> Salzman, Paul. *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700 A Critical History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. p. 101.

<sup>210</sup> Stevenson points out that, in his exchange with the King, "Jack asks to live among his people, but he describes them as his subjects: they are the ants he *defends*, the bees which he *keeps*." p. 123. Still, this observation does not posit any benefit Jack might reap from keeping or defending his people.

<sup>211</sup> Suzuki, Mihoko. "The London apprentice riots of the 1590s and the fiction of Thomas Deloney." *Criticism* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 181-217. p. 196.



gives it to them so they will remain satisfied with what they have and not desire more, all while laboring in his shop and making him incredibly rich and powerful. Jack does not treat his workers well because he remembers what it was like to be a poor clothier, but to control the poor clothiers who work for him. He ensures that the only avenue to advancement they understand arises from the model he impresses on them, the model of himself, despite the fact that his advancement was marked by luck (his master's death, his mistress's opportunism) as much as by his hard work and determination.

This reading flies in the face of the vast majority of Deloney criticism, which operates under repressively exact presuppositions about the relationship both between Deloney and his protagonist and between Deloney and his audience. Of Jack as a character, Davis claims that "his narrator dotes on him, and never allows any irony to interfere with his loving presentation."<sup>212</sup> Of Deloney's prose in general, he claims that "Deloney has a very palpable design on his readers, and uses his books as models of perfection untouched by any but the highest motives—heroes idealized."<sup>213</sup> Similarly, Baskin argues that "Deloney's commoner-heroes represent, to some degree, what could be obtained" by his readers, with only the caveat that "the depiction of upward mobility in the novels was simplistic."<sup>214</sup> Such views ignore the fact that, only two years before he wrote *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney had been imprisoned for publishing a letter in which he complained about the failure of the rich and powerful leaders of his guild to protect the interests of journeymen who worked in the shops of more successful guildsmen. Deloney does not dotingly portray Jack without even a whisper of irony, nor is his depiction of upward mobility in *Jack of Newbury* simplistic. He didn't write citizen saints to be directly imitated by a monolithic block of citizen readers. In *Jack of Newbury*, rather, he explored the disconnect between the opportunity offered by a craft and the often corrupted manifestation of that opportunity effected by craftsmen, a subject he would revisit in *The Gentle Craft Part I*.

#### IV. *The Gentle Craft*

In the first two sections of *The Gentle Craft Part I*,<sup>215</sup> Deloney appears to follow the more conventional strategy for writing positively about artisans during the period, which Stevenson summarizes: "When an author wishes to assert the dignity of trade, he does not argue that trade is good for the nation; he says that gentlemen think well enough of merchants to apprentice their sons to them."<sup>216</sup> In the first story, when the virtuous Sir Hugh finds himself destitute during his romantic pursuit of the chaste princess Winifred,

---

<sup>212</sup> Davis p. 251.

<sup>213</sup> Davis p. 260.

<sup>214</sup> Baskin p. 346.

<sup>215</sup> In the following examination of *The Gentle Craft Part I*, I concentrate heavily on plot points for two main reasons. First, though brief and seemingly straightforward, the stories contain rather complex action, and many critics gloss over their intricacy. Second, Dekker makes several subtle alterations in his adaptation of *The Gentle Craft* into *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, so to understand the full effect of the play, one must have a certain purchase on its source.

<sup>216</sup> Stevenson p. 115. Deloney also employs this stance in the dedicatory letter to *Thomas of Reading*, in which he says of the craft of clothing: "The younger sons of Knights & Gentlemen, to whom their fathers would leave no lands, were most commonly preferred to learn this trade, to the end that thereby they might live in good estate, & drive forth their days in prosperity" (213).

he happily works in a shoemaker's shop for a year, and gladly would have remained there if his love had not driven him on. In the second story, when the Roman general Maximinus conquers ancient Britain, the two sons of the fallen king seek refuge from the tyrant by taking up apprenticeships with a shoemaker. While Sir Hugh's stint as a shoemaker merely runs parallel to the main action of the plot, the tenure of Crispin and Crispianus as cordwainers plays an integral role in their story. Because Maximinus is intent on slaughtering all young British noblemen to stymie any future attempts to reclaim the country, the princes must hide for an extended period of time. After four years of apprenticeship, the princes gain a reputation as the finest shoemakers in the land, and the Roman general calls upon them to fashion shoes for his daughter, Ursula. Attracted to Crispin, Ursula somehow intuits, however, that he is not what he seems, detecting that his birth does not match his present appearance and that he is merely "clothed with these rags of servitude" (94). Crispin reveals himself to Ursula, and they flee her father's fortress to elope secretly. While some of Deloney's readership may have cheered at a shoemaker's apprentice winning the hand of a princess, she marries him despite the fact that he is an apprentice because she senses his true identity. In fact, she chastises herself at first for finding so lowly an artisan appealing. Crispin's hard work as an apprentice has brought him into contact with a princess, but his royal bloodline wins her love.

While Crispin dallies with Ursula in the castle, Crispianus finds himself conscripted into military service to fight against Persians in Gaul on behalf of Maximinus. Before the first battle, Crispianus's commander mocks Iphicratis, the Persian general, for being the son of a shoemaker, to which Iphicratis responds: "thou shalt understand that a Shoemakers son is a Prince born, his fortune made him so" (100). The two forces do battle, and Crispianus fights "like a second Hector" (101), granting his side victory. After discovering that Crispianus works as a shoemaker, his commander announces: "right sorrie am I that ever I reproached famous *Iphicratis*, with his fathers trade, seeing I find it true, that Magnanimity and knightly Prowess is not alwayes tied within the compasse of Noble blood" (101). Of course, Crispianus's knightly prowess is tied to his noble blood, as the real son of a shoemaker has suffered defeat at the hands of the son of a king. Crispianus wins himself great renown, and upon his return home, finds that Crispin and Ursula have had a child, which he takes in his arms and says: "Now I will say and swear...that a Shoemakers Son is a Prince born, joyning in the opinion of *Iphycratis*, and henceforth Shoemakers shall never let their terme die" (106). He reveals his royal identity to Maximinus, who is so impressed with his great martial prowess that he agrees to accept Ursula's marriage to Crispin, and everyone lives happily ever after, with the two princes proud to be remembered as shoemakers. However, Crispianus's appropriation of Iphicratis's motto of shoemaker pride—which provides the basis for Simon Eyre's catchphrase in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, "Prince am I none, but I am princely born"—reverses the force of the original statement. Like the great men in Jack of Newbury's portraits, Iphicratis was born to a shoemaker and willed himself up to enjoy certain Princely dignities; he is a shoemaker's son first and only a metaphorical prince. Crispin's child is born with a royal lineage to a father who had to pretend to be a shoemaker; he is a real prince and only metaphorically a shoemaker's son.

In the third and final section of *The Gentle Craft Part I*, Deloney's incarnation of Simon Eyre dismisses the cold comfort of being a nominal prince. Of shoemakers being

born princes, he says, “those titles do onely rest in name, but not in nature: but of that sort I would rather be, whose lands are answerable to their vertues, and whose rents can maintain the greatnesse of their minde” (112). By all accounts, Eyre was an accomplished cordwainer. He completed his apprenticeship, married a local girl, set up his own shop, worked hard to turn it profitable, and took on apprentices and journeymen of his own. In fact, his shop was so successful that he needed to chase down a French journeyman he saw passing on the street to help satisfy demand. Still, Eyre hit a shoemaker’s ceiling of sorts. An opportunity arises when the French journeymen reports that a foreign merchant’s ship laden with fine goods has run aground in England and must unload its freight at a great discount, but Eyre falls far short of the funds necessary to purchase the cargo. He tells his wife that he wishes to make her a lady and himself Lord Mayor, but the £3000 asking price simply exceeds his means. His wife then concocts a cunning, if less than moral, plan to procure the goods despite his lack of ready purchasing power.

Eyre will go to the foreign merchant with his French journeyman to act as translator, and offer to pay him £1000 a week, with the full £3000 to be paid in no more than twenty-eight days. As a down payment, Eyre will offer six angels, or £3, which is all the money he and his wife could scrape together on short notice. When Eyre asks why the merchant should trust him with such an arrangement, his wife instructs Eyre to claim that he does not bargain for himself, but “in the behalf of one of the chief Aldermen in the City” (113). The bill Eyre is to give the merchant will have his own name on it, but because neither the foreign merchant nor the French journeyman can read English, they will believe that Eyre represents a rich man with sufficient credit. When Eyre first visits the merchant, he will be dressed in his “doublet of sheeps skins, with a smooched face, and thy apron before thee, thy thumb-leather and hand-leather buckled close to thy wrist, with a foule band about they neck, and a greasie cap on they head” (114) in order to demonstrate that he is a guileless, earnest shoemaker. That afternoon, however, Eyre will again visit the merchant, without the journeyman this time, after a bath and a haircut, dressed in “a very fair doublet of tawny sattin, over the which thou shalt have a cassock of branched damask, furred round about the skirts,” “a fair gown, welted about with velvet,” and finally “a great seale-ring of gold” (114). Posing as an alderman, Eyre will make an appearance to reassure the merchant and ensure that the deal goes through.

The plan works and Eyre makes a killing.<sup>217</sup> His new fortune enables him first to become Sheriff and then Lord Mayor, and the story concludes with the feast for all the apprentices of London Eyre promised when he was but a prentice. Like Jack of Newbury, critics characterize Simon Eyre as another of Deloney’s one-dimensional middle-class heroes. Eyre “is held up as a model for success.”<sup>218</sup> His tale “celebrates openly the tradesman’s virtues of industry, thrift, and generosity,” while he himself is “presented as an object for imitation, with his combination of wit, shrewdness, ambition, and piety.”<sup>219</sup> In some regards, Eyre proves an even better role model than does Jack. He

---

<sup>217</sup> Deloney only describes the plan as just that, a plan; we do not see Eyre carry it out. Lawlis points out the strange effect this creates, calling it “an omission that makes us wonder if the text is lacking a whole chapter.” He goes on: “Deloney prefers to skip it [the action] altogether, and take up the story some weeks or months later at a banquet where the mayor greets Eyre and his wife as welcome guests.” Lawlis p. 38-9.

<sup>218</sup> Lawlis p. 88.

<sup>219</sup> Davis p. 256.

has opened and developed his own shop rather than taking over someone else's. After earning his fortune, he gives his shoemaking shop to one of his men, thus enabling a journeyman to move a rung up the ladder and become a master. Finally, Eyre delivers on his promise of a feast for all the apprentices of the city just as apprenticeship had delivered its promise to Eyre—the lowly apprentice who could not afford his breakfast at the conduit ascended all the way to Lord Mayor.

However, he accomplishes this by denaturing the prescribed blueprint for success featuring ambition, industry, and imitation. In order to satisfy his drive to become Lord Mayor, Eyre does not emulate the models of business cunning or political ingenuity provided by local aldermen; instead, he literally pretends to be a local alderman. Rather than working hard to imitate, and hence develop, the ability of successful aldermen, which would then be validated by promotion accompanied by the trappings of prosperity, Eyre dons a costume of success that leads first to real prosperity and then to promotion, which retroactively validates his innate ability. In doing so, however, he must resort to dishonesty, exploitation, and even the debasement of his own trade. He takes advantage of a merchant who has suffered the misfortune of a shipping accident and he commits fraud to enable the transaction. Worse still for this model of tradesman's virtues, Eyre deceives the journeyman who first alerted him to the opportunity, abusing the journeyman's inability to read English despite the fact that he facilitated the deal by translating. Perhaps most damning, Eyre reduces his true clothing, the proud shoemaker's thumb-leather and a cap greasy from a true hard day's work, into just as much of a costume as the alderman's satin doublet and gold seal ring, employing both to produce strategic effects in his audience. He dresses the shoemaker to appear sincere and unassuming, the alderman to appear magisterial and rich. Eyre evolves from being a shoemaker, to playing a shoemaker, to playing an alderman, to being an alderman. In so doing, he wrests back control of imitation as a means to promotion, but also reveals that, for it to work, even his true artisanal identity must be performed. Advancement is not based solely upon individual ability and drive, but also upon others perceiving and rewarding ability and drive, and that gap between reality and performance allows for certain abuses. Deloney casts Eyre as a good man and a good shoemaker, but his great success—the success that critics say readers would have wanted to imitate—arises not from honest work, but from a quick change between acts.

#### V. Thomas Dekker's Economic Prose

During the 1590's in London, when Deloney was struggling against foreign weavers and writing the prose fiction for which he is best remembered, Thomas Dekker was just coming into his own. Like Deloney, the exact date and place of Dekker's birth remain unknown—though he is presumed to have been born near London in 1572—but he was surely established in the capital by 1594, when baptismal records in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, indicate the birth of a child to a "Thomas Dycker." Although Dekker does not appear to have ever belonged to a particular guild, he was nonetheless invested, as both a resident and an author, in the socioeconomic conditions and power dynamics that operated through the business community of the capital. And while his name does not appear in Henslowe's diary until 1598, Dekker was inducted into his

coterie by having a hand in the play called *Sir Thomas More* (1592-3)<sup>220</sup>, in which More is knighted for preventing different branches of citizen riots from combining to do further harm. The citizens are rioting for reasons that would have resonated strongly in 1593: unreasonably high food prices and the increased presence of foreign tradesmen, both of which contributed “to the undoing of poor prentices” (II.iii.11). Dekker did not merely write about the economic struggles of hardworking Londoners, as he himself was imprisoned for debt in 1598. In January of that year, Henslowe records lending twenty shillings to Thomas Downton to free Dekker, and then in February he buys Dekker’s play *Phaeton*, now lost, for four pounds.<sup>221</sup> Given Dekker’s personal experience of the often punishing London economic world and his part in writing the apprentice rebellion scene in *Sir Thomas More*, Simon Eyre’s idyllic shop in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1599), where jubilant guild brotherhood is coupled with surefire opportunity, appears to be an anomaly. As *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* is the earliest extant text in which Dekker had a major hand, it would prove fruitful to examine his prose works touching on socioeconomic issues in the first decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century before closely analyzing the play.

Dekker found inspiration for much of his prose, in both style and substance, in the work of Thomas Nashe. In 1606, Dekker wrote *News from Hell*, a sequel to Nashe’s *Pierce Penniless’s Supplication to the Devil* (1592), which details the knight of the post’s attempt to deliver Pierce’s missive to hell. In the same year, Dekker also published *The Seven Deadly Sins of London*, in which seven personified sins parade into London over the course of a week, bringing the plague to tradesmen of the city. Charles Whitworth points out that, rather than adapt the standard seven deadly sins to his subject, “Dekker’s sins are of London in 1606, and he abandons entirely the generalized medieval family, except for sloth.”<sup>222</sup> As Nashe did in *Christ’s Tears over Jerusalem*, Dekker merely gestures at a true narrative in favor of lecturing about the moral shortcomings riddling London’s business community. Always the playwright, Dekker focuses many actions on the theater—the players pray for Sloth’s arrival, for instance, because he sits in the two penny seats with the gentlemen and draws great crowds in with him—and often employs a dramatic idiom to explain the actions of the plot. As Candle-light marches into town, bringing darkness and secrecy with him, shops begin to close, and “all the Citty lookt like a private Play-house, when the windowes are clapt downe, as if some *Nocturnal*, or

---

<sup>220</sup> Munday, Anthony, Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, and William Shakespeare. *Sir Thomas More*. Eds. Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori. New York: Manchester University Press, 1990. Gabrieli and Melchiori conclude that Dekker had a hand in the original composition of the play, not only in revising it. They argue Dekker wrote an abandoned scene between apprentices discussing a riot: “In 1592-93 Thomas Dekker (born c. 1572) cannot have been more than an apprentice in the London theatre. The suggestion that he was first given a chance at playwriting by being entrusted with the one scene in *Sir Thomas More* concerned with his fellow apprentices is an attractive surmise, substantiated by his undoubted participation in the revision of the play” (13).

<sup>221</sup> Rutter, Carol Chillington, ed. *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1984. Of course, Dekker would later spend seven years in prison for debt, 1613-19.

<sup>222</sup> Whitworth, Charles. “A Medieval Topos in Elizabethan Prose Satire: The Seven Deadly Sins in Pamphlets by Nashe, Lodge, and Dekker.” *Critical Approaches to English Prose Fiction 1520-1640*. Ed. Donald Beecher. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1998. Dekker’s sins are: Politike Bankruptisme, Lying, Candle-light, Sloth, Apishnesse, Shaving, and Crueltie.

dismal *Tragedy* were presently to be acted before all the *Trades-men*” (30)<sup>223</sup>. The cover of night provided by Candle-light might have extended to all tradesmen in their shut-up shops, but it proves particularly welcome to apprentices, who are prohibited from many of the pleasures their masters could enjoy. Dekker accuses Candle-light of enticing “Prentices to make their desperate sallyes out, & quicke retyres in (contrarie to the Oath of their Indentures) which are seven yeares a swearing, onely for their Pintes” (31). He asks, “O *Candle-light, Candle-light!* to howe manie costly Sacke-posssets, and reare Banquets hast thou beene invited by Prentices and Kitchen-maidens?” (33). Sneaking a drink at a tavern or in the back room is one thing, but Candle-light also enables apprentices to break more serious rules of their indentures. Dekker wonders, “How many odde matches and uneven mariages have been made there betweene young Prentises and there maisters daughters, whilst thou (O *Candle-light*) hast stood watching at the staires heade” (34). Technically forbidden from sexual activity, apprentices were often understood as major patrons of prostitutes, but marrying the master’s daughter proved a thornier issue. Apprentices were also forbidden from marrying, ostensibly because they could not support a family since they earned no wages, so a shopkeeper would not be happy if his daughter married a young man who would not be able to provide a living for himself or his wife for perhaps another ten years.

Dekker explores the real prospects that masters grant their apprentices in his examination of the nastiest and final sin, Crueltie. While he treats the other sins with sarcastic humor, Dekker practically abandons the device of anthropomorphizing Crueltie, instead railing against the brutal injustices committed by some Londoners. Regarding apprentices, he again uses a dramatic comparison, saying that “*Crueltie* hath yet another part to play, it is acted (like the old Morralls at *Maningtree*) by Trades-men, marrye severall companies in the Cittie have it in study, and they are never perfect in it, till the end of seaven yeares at least” (54), the standard length of an indenture. Dekker excoriates masters for exploiting not only the labor provided by their apprentices, but the hope for advancement which motivates that labor:

When your servants have made themselves bondmen to injoy your fruitfull hand-maides, thats to say, to have an honest and thriving Art to live by: when they have fared hardly with you by Indenture, & like your Beasts which carry you have patiently borne al labours, and all wrongs you could lay upon them.

When you have gathered the blossomes of their youth, and reaped the fruites of their strength, And that you can no longer (for shame) hold them in Captivitie, but that by the lawes of your Country and of conscience, you must undoe their fetters, Then, even then doe you hang moste weightes at their heeles, to make them sincke downe for ever: when you are bound to send them into the world to live, you send them into the world to beg: they serv’d you seven yeeres to pick up a poore living, and therein you are just, for you will be sure it shall be a poore living indeede they shall pick up... (54)

---

<sup>223</sup> Dekker, Thomas. *The Seven Deadly Sins of London*. Ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1922.

Masters abuse the industry and ambition of their apprentices, capitalizing on their wards' faith that working hard in service of their masters will eventually result in becoming masters themselves.<sup>224</sup> Masters hold out such a possibility only to hamstring their former apprentices once they can no longer enjoy their free labor, and they do so out of greed. When tradesmen "have the fullnesse of welth to the brim, that it runs over, they scarce will suffer their poore Servant to take that which runs at waste" (55).<sup>225</sup> Dekker saw shopkeepers exploiting their apprentices and then ensuring their future failure, undermining the spirit of both apprenticeship and the guild structure implementing it: "Trades that were ordaind to be *Communities*, had lost their first priviledges, and were now turned to *Monopolyes*" (55). He concludes with a fierce reminder of how the relationship between apprentice and master should function: "But remember (*o you Rich men*) that your Servants are your adopted Children, they are naturalized into your bloud, and if you hurt theirs, you are guilty of letting out your owne" (55).

Dekker criticizes the treatment of apprentices from an observer's vantage point in *The Seven Deadly Sins of London*, but he writes from an apprentice's perspective, among many others, in *Four Bird's of Noah's Ark* (1609), a book of devotions. In it, he writes prayers theoretically to be spoken by everyone from a galley slave to the late Queen Elizabeth. The second prayer of the book adopts the outlook of "a prentice going to his labour," and one of the first things the prentice asks is that God "take away from him (that is, my master) all thoughts of crueltie." This apprentice does not conceive of his master's cruelty in terms of intentionally hobbled prospects, however, but in a more immediate currency: work. He hopes that his master will not ask more of him than he can accomplish, that he "may not be set to a taske aboue my strength." Industry, one's will and ability to work hard, should provide the bedrock of an apprentice's endeavors. This prentice prays, "Fill my veynes with blood, that that I may goe thorow the hardest labours: sithence it is a law set downe by thy selfe, that I must earne my bread with the sweat of my owne browes." Though the need to work for a living is set down by God, men determine the expected rewards for working in the guild system. In a telling request, Dekker's apprentice asks God to "bestow vpon me thy grace that I may deale vprightly with all men, and that I may shew my selfe to him, who is set ouer mee (a Ruler) as I another day would desire to haue others behaue themselues to mee." The apprentice deals uprightly with his master because one day he expects to have apprentices himself, whom he hopes will treat him well in turn if he is not cruel to them. Industry serves ambition, and ambition is satisfied not simply with remuneration for labor performed, but by duplicating the master who commanded that labor. As a measure of future success, an apprentice not only imagines rising above poverty and servitude, but maintaining apprentices himself.

---

<sup>224</sup> Deloney includes a similar scene in *Thomas of Reading*, although in his version, the apprentices seize control of their fate to certain degree. When a master finds himself in dire financial straights because of his own prodigality, his apprentices announce that they are leaving him to work for a more solvent shopkeeper. Resentful, he points out that "from paltrie boies, I brought you up to mans state, and have, to my great cost, taught you a trade, whereby you may live like men." The apprentices respond: "because you tooke us up poore, doth it therefore follow, that we must be your slaves?...if you taught us our trade, brought us up from boies to men, you had our service for it, whereby you made no small benefit" (268).

<sup>225</sup> Compare this to Nashe's description in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* of the poverty that results from the unchecked ambition and covetousness of rich men: "Our dogs are fed with the crumbs that fall from our tables. Our Christian brethren are famished for want of the crumbs that fall from our tables" (87).

Also in 1609, Dekker wrote *Work for Armourours*, in which he describes the battle between Money, an empress who rules within the walls of London, and Poverty, a princess whose forces surround the city. George R. Price writes that “*Work for Armourours* particularly challenges our attention, for it appears to deal as systematically with economics as anything [Dekker] ever wrote,” and that “for a study of Dekker’s social and economic ideas, none of his tracts is more illuminating and readable.”<sup>226</sup> Dekker plainly announces his intentions early on in an epigraph on the title page: “God helpe the Poore, The rich *can shift*” (89). Unfortunately, the ensuing war between Money and Poverty does not correct the unjust imbalance between the haves and have-nots, as after a ceasefire has been called, the status quo reasserts itself: “The rich men feast one another (as they were wont) and the poore were kept poore still in policy, because they should doe no more hurt” (166). The result of the conflict appears unsurprising, as those in power tend to remain in power, but certain of Dekker’s assignments of sides in the battle do shed light on his assessment of the socioeconomic state of London.

Both Money and Poverty have a set of personified traits or attitudes as advisers to help guide their followers, and most hew to a predictable line. For example, Covetousness serves under Money, and “was he well beloved of the best Citizens, and never rode through the city but he was staid, and feasted by many Aldermen, and wealthy Commoners” (129). In her court, Poverty employs the likes of Discontent, Hunger, and Beggary, but she also keeps Industry on her staff: “*Industry* was a goodly personage, a faithfull friend to his Prince, and a father to his country, a great Lawyer, & a deepe scholler, stout in warre, and provident in peace” (115). Industry serves Poverty diligently, but her constituents often take exception to his advice:

In deare yeeres, when the Land had beene ready to sterve, hath [*Industry*] releevd it, and turned dearth into plenty: his head is ever full of cares, not for himselfe so much as for the people, whom hee loves and tenders as deerely as if they were his kindred: yet stand they not so well affected to him, because he compelles them to take paines, when tis their natural inclination (like Drones) to live basely, and to feede upon the bread that the sweat of other mens browes doe earne. (115)

Despite the fact that Industry appears available and willing to aid the poor, they are unable or unwilling to capitalize on him to earn their way into the city among the prosperous. Dekker makes two significant observations here. First, Industry is not an adviser to Money; that is, the wealthy do not employ Industry either to earn their fortune or to keep it. Rather, “Dekker traces the sources of economic hardship and oppression to individual selfishness and greed.”<sup>227</sup> While on one hand this signifies that the rich horde wealth to the detriment of the masses, on the other it indicates that selfishness dominates in the rich and poor alike. The second point to draw from the above passage is that Industry cannot successfully combat Money’s advisers—including Deceit, Parsimony, Monopoly, Violence, and Usury—as a means to redistribute wealth more evenly in London, because the people Industry advises refuse to heed his instruction, unless in a

---

<sup>226</sup> Price, George R. *Thomas Dekker*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969. p. 139, 123.

<sup>227</sup> Price p. 139.



crisis such as dearth, because it requires too much work. Thus, it proves incredibly difficult to trade places between camps.

In fact, only two pathways appear in *Work for Armourours* from one camp to the other. Certain young gentlemen “could get no entertainment in the court of *Money*, because they were yonger brothers” (119), and found themselves relegated among Poverty’s minions. However, salvation is within reach, not through the hard work of an apprenticeship in one of London’s finer guilds, but if “they should winne honour, nay perhaps knighthood, which in these dayes are better then lands: if fat widdowes can be but drawne to nibble at that worshipfull baite” (120). Thus, those poor younger brothers would “put themselves (as knights errant) into Armes” in order to kill rich merchants such as mercers and goldsmiths and “marry their yong wives...so to raise them up to honour in their most knightly posteritie” (120). Although he refuses a knighthood, Deloney’s Jack of Newbury follows a similar path, marrying a wealthy widow to achieve overnight prosperity.<sup>228</sup> Conversely, there are “certain yong prodigall Heires, who, (as voluntaries) maintained themselves in service under *Money*” (155), young men who have already squandered their fortune but remain in the city as long as they can in hopes of somehow coming back into luck and money. They venture out and skirmish with Poverty’s troops, “but *Povertie* still drave them either in to their owne shame, or else had them in execution” (156). That is, the prodigals either return to London in disgrace or find themselves captives to Poverty. Dekker had described a specific case of this phenomenon a decade earlier, when Roland Lacy returns to London having frittered away a fortune in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.

## VI. *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*

At first glance, none of Dekker’s blistering criticism of the brutal infighting, exploitation, and resentment present in London’s business world exhibits itself in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. In the dedicatory epistle to the play, Dekker preemptively claims that “nothing is purposed but mirth,” and that when the play was performed before the Queen, “mirth and pleasant matter [were] by her Highness graciously accepted, being indeed no way offensive.”<sup>229</sup> As David Scott Kastan points out, “certainly critics have generally taken Dekker at his word.”<sup>230</sup> Critical reception of the play may have evolved since Mary Leland Hunt’s 1911 observation that “In ‘The Shoemaker’s Holiday’ we have the most attractive picture of citizen life presented on the Elizabethan stage, and perhaps it is the truest,”<sup>231</sup> but many critics still understand the play and its protagonist only in the jovial light cast by the final Shrove Tuesday feast. Dekker intended this effect. As Peter Mortenson points out, Dekker “makes Eyre more immediately personable than Deloney’s Eyre by dramatically stressing his comradeship with the workmen in his shop and by

---

<sup>228</sup> Recall that Jack warns his compatriots when he is an apprentice that wasting money prevents one from obtaining lands, but after he has found great success through marriage, he claims that his only lands are his looms, his only rents from the backs of little sheep. For Jack, one widow was worth more than lands.

<sup>229</sup> All quotations from the play cite Dekker, Thomas. *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. Eds. R. L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells. New York: Manchester University Press, 1979.

<sup>230</sup> Kastan, David Scott. “Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *Studies in Philology* 84, 3 (Summer, 1987): 324-337. p. 324. Kastan goes on to cite Patricia Thompson, H. E. Toliver, and Joel H. Kaplan as critics who accept the play as unwaveringly positive.

<sup>231</sup> Hunt, Mary Leland. *Thomas Dekker A Study*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1911. p. 58.

stressing his engaging eccentricity in manner and speech.”<sup>232</sup> Michael Manheim describes Simon Eyre as “an apprentice’s superman endowed with honesty and merriment” and so “overflowing with love for his fellow man, he embodies all the qualities the play celebrates.”<sup>233</sup> David Bevington calls Eyre “the presiding genius of the ‘holiday’ evoked in the play’s title” and “a kind of metonymy for the Gentle Craft and for the city in which it flourishes.”<sup>234</sup>

Other critics, such as Kastan and Peter Mortenson, have fruitfully situated the play within the intricate matrix of social and economic forces active in London at the close of the sixteenth century. Mortenson correctly surmises that “Dekker creates the illusion of a bounteous world of festive comedy, but it is really commercial and competitive,”<sup>235</sup> and Kastan understands that “the romantic logic of the plot overwhelms the social and economic tensions that are revealed.”<sup>236</sup> However, no critic has closely studied the many subtle implications of Dekker’s adaptation of Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft Part I*,<sup>237</sup> which appeared only two years before *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and has also been simplistically characterized as an inspirational middling sort success story. Dekker’s alterations reveal, not that *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* “is a realistic portrait only of Elizabethan middle-class dreams” rather than “a realistic portrait of Elizabethan middle-class life,”<sup>238</sup> but that the play amplifies anxieties in Deloney’s prose about the possibility for abuse within a hierarchic apprenticeship system grounded in imitation. More so than Deloney, Dekker destabilizes the performance of artisan identity by, on one hand, revealing the potential for the gentility to exploit working class faith in a system that rewards industry with promotion, and on the other, dislodging imitation from the guaranteed fruition of potential while appearing to bind the two inexorably. While the diminishing boundary differentiating ascendant merchants and declining gentlemen supposedly threatened traditional power structures, Dekker explores how the craft community’s trust in the ladder system of apprenticeship might be used against it.

While discussing degrees of people in his 1577 *Description of England*, William Harrison parenthetically notes that wealthy merchants “often change estate with gentlemen, as gentlemen do with them, by a mutual conversion of the one into the other.”<sup>239</sup> Rich citizens became indistinguishable from moneyed aristocrats, and the sons of unfortunate gentlemen needed to serve apprenticeships and earn an income. The first scene of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* takes up this issue, opening with a conflict between degrees of people about degrees of people. The Earl of Lincoln and Roger Oatley, grocer

---

<sup>232</sup> Mortenson, Peter. “The Economics of Joy in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *SEL* 16, 2 (Spring, 1976): 241-252. p. 248.

<sup>233</sup> Manheim, Michael. “The Construction of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *SEL* 10, 2 (Spring, 1970): 315-323. p. 319, 317.

<sup>234</sup> Bevington, David. “Theater as Holiday.” *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre, and Politics in London, 1576-1649*. eds. David L. Smith, Richard Strier, and David Bevington. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 101-116. p. 106.

<sup>235</sup> Mortenson p. 248.

<sup>236</sup> Kastan p. 325.

<sup>237</sup> Mortenson does an admirable job of briefly juxtaposing Deloney’s Eyre and Dekker’s, but he does not draw the comparison out far enough, and some of his observations—such as the statement that Dekker “removes the incident of Eyre’s masquerade” (248) to purchase the cargo—are telling but wrong.

<sup>238</sup> Kastan p. 325.

<sup>239</sup> Harrison, William. *A Description of Elizabethan England*. “Of Degrees of People in the Commonwealth of Elizabethan England.” 1577, Book III., Chapter 4.

and Lord Mayor of London, are arguing about the nascent love between Lincoln's nephew, Lacy, and Oatley's daughter, Rose. Neither party wishes his ward to marry outside his social class, and in shows of false modesty each preemptively adopts his opponent's argument against the match, revealing that such cross-denominational pairings had become common enough to prove worrisome. Oatley, concerned that the idle, profligate Lacy will burn through his daughter's inherited wealth, claims that "Too mean is my poor girl for his high birth. / Poor citizens must not with courtiers wed" (I.11-2). Lincoln, reluctant to attach his gentle name to a family that works for a living, tells Oatley of Lacy's outrageous spending, and instructs him to "seek, my lord, some honest citizen / To wed your daughter to" (I.36-7). As an example of his nephew's reckless extravagance, Lincoln tells Oatley of how, almost a year ago, Lacy began a tour of the continent, but spent all of his money within six months and thus "became a shoemaker in Wittenberg—/ A goodly science for a gentleman / Of such descent! (I.29-31). The argument appears irrelevant, however, when Lincoln reveals that he has arranged for Lacy to be commissioned a colonel to serve in the wars in France.

The first thing Lacy does, of course, is to ditch his military post in order to remain in London, where he will disguise himself as a shoemaker and pursue his forbidden love. Not going to war in France, posing as a shoemaker, and falling in love with the enemy's daughter mark Lacy as the analogue to Crispin in Dekker's adaptation of *Deloney*; by extension, however, this also posits Oatley as the stand-in for Maximinus, the Roman general who conquered Britain. Dekker recasts an invading tyrant, intent on slaying all young English noblemen to cut off the supply of future leaders, as a gainful liveryman of the grocer's guild who only wants his daughter to find a good husband. A foreign military threat to traditional ruling class families becomes an internal financial menace, and mercantile success supplants martial acumen as the necessary trait for prosperity. Dekker reimagines the conflict as polite but resentful banter between an aristocrat and merchant about intermixing gentle and common blood, with the shadow lurking behind it of violent usurpation of power specifically directed at eliminating the youngest representatives of old bloodlines. This formulation nicely embodies the pressing but unvoiced concern in the 1573 Memorandum on the Statute of Artificers that the upward socioeconomic mobility enabled by apprenticeship would eventually exert pressure on the ruling class as successive generations sought to earn their place in the world through diligence and ability rather than lineage. In the London of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, industrial prosperity allegedly lies open to anyone, if he exuberantly embraces fraternity and work. Lacy, on the other hand, embraces neither, but still comes out on top.

If Lacy has set off on his European jaunt less than a year before the play begins, and became a shoemaker in Wittenberg after spending all his money in just "one half-year" (I.33), then his tenure in the Gentle Craft has lasted all of six months, far from the minimum seven years of apprenticeship an English shoemaker would need to serve in order to be hired as a journeyman. In fact, by pretending to be Dutch, Lacy becomes a version of the foreign craftsmen *Deloney* complained about in the letter for which he was imprisoned. Lacy *qua* Hans is a foreign artisan working in London, without being free of the city, who has picked up the basic skills of shoemaking in six months but has not served long enough to warrant the loyalty of other journeymen. In *Deloney's The Gentle Craft*, Crispin begins as a lowly apprentice and serves his master for four years, developing real skill and making the shop prosperous, which in turn leads to Maximinus

employing him to make shoes for his daughter. If, as Dekker's Eyre says when Lacy first approaches his shop, this is "a hard world," and "we have journeymen enough" (IV.53-4), he is echoing Deloney's real-life complaint, for Lacy takes a precious job away from a deserving journeyman shoemaker when Eyre hires him.

In his soliloquy before joining Eyre's shop, Lacy makes it clear that he does not participate in the intense fraternity of shoemakers because he does not consider himself one; he is among them, but not of them. Beginning with some lofty comparisons, he exclaims:

How many shapes have gods and kings devised  
Thereby to compass their desired loves!  
It is no shame for Rowland Lacy then  
To clothe his cunning with the Gentle Craft (III.1-4)

As Zeus became a bull or a swan, Lacy becomes a shoemaker. He repeatedly calls the Gentle Craft a disguise, and wonders at the power of love to change "a noble mind / To the mean semblance of a shoemaker" (III.11-2). This speech serves the dramatic end of explaining to the audience Lacy's plan to remain in London, but it also underscores Lacy's understanding of his relationship to the shoemakers he is about to join. He himself is not truly a shoemaker, despite his knowledge of the trade; he merely performs the role of one, complete with costume and accent. He concludes his soliloquy with what should be a rallying cry of shoemaker pride: "The Gentle Craft is living for a man!" (III.24). In Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, Sir Hugh might have exclaimed this when a journeyman shoemaker rescues him from destitution and provides him a means of supporting himself, and Crispin might have shouted it when he found refuge in a shoemaker's shop after his father had been murdered. "The Gentle Craft is living for a man!" should be a motto for distressed gentlemen forced to practice a trade for a living and grateful to be able to do so, but Lacy corrupts it into an excuse for deigning to change his "high birth to bareness" (III.11). It stands akin to his uncle's sarcastic pronouncement that the Gentle Craft is "a goodly science for a gentleman / Of such descent" (I.29-31). Yet, despite his haughty disdain for shoemakers, Lacy finds employment in Eyre's shop because of the extreme loyalty among cordwainers.

When Lacy, dressed as Hans, first walks by Eyre's shop singing in Dutch with a set of shoemaker's tools strapped to his back, one of Eyre's journeymen, rather than Eyre himself, first notices him. A journeyman, Firk, recognizes Saint Hugh's bones—the term for a shoemaker's gear—and asks Eyre to hire the stranger. Discussing the atmosphere Eyre fosters in his workplace, Kathleen McLuskie points to this moment: "The dramatic energy of the comic exchanges between Simon Eyre and his workmen allow the scenes in the shoemaker's shop to act as symbolic locus of harmony in the play. When Lacy applies for work, the real antagonism between native and foreign workers is forgotten in the warmth with which he is welcomed by his fellow journeymen."<sup>240</sup> While Lacy's admittance to the shop does demonstrate the keen fraternity felt among journeymen, it is hardly a locus of harmony. After Firk asks Eyre to hire Lacy to help "make us work the

---

<sup>240</sup> McLuskie, Kathleen E. *Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. p. 68.

faster,” Eyre refuses, saying it is “a hard world; let him pass, let him vanish. We have journeymen enough” (IV.52-4).

In *The Gentle Craft*, Eyre’s shop is so successful that Eyre has to chase down a journeyman in the street to help satisfy demand, but Dekker’s Eyre appears unwilling to hire needed labor even at the request of his workers. Firk and Hodge, Eyre’s foreman, threaten to quit if Eyre fails to hire Lacy, but their threats come couched in fraternal terms acknowledging that this stranger’s economic opportunity is tied to their own. “If such a man as he cannot find work, Hodge is not for you” (IV.64-5), says the foreman. The bawdy Firk is more menacing: “If Saint Hugh’s bones shall not be set a-work, I may prick mine awl in the walls, and go play” (IV.69-70). He violently and sexually threatens, not simply to quit and work in another shop, but to drop out of the industry entirely—leaving his awl behind him—in favor of socially disruptive play. Eyre finally acquiesces and hires Lacy. In doing so, he abandons the sober, pragmatic language he had used to resist the overtures of his workers, and reverts to his characteristically playful language: “Peace, pudding-broth. By the Lord of Ludgate, I love my men as my life. Peace, you gallimaufry. Hodge, if he want work, I’ll hire him” (IV.73-5). When the fraternity of the shop and his authority within it are threatened, and when the audience might question the appeal of a character willing to let a fellow shoemaker vanish into the hard world, Eyre responds by reasserting his theatrical charm, smoothing over any disruption in the conception of work as revelry or the audience’s enjoyment of the play.

The journeymen’s perceived link between fraternity and economic opportunity finds its truest expression when Ralph, a journeyman in Eyre’s shop conscripted into military service at the beginning of the play, returns maimed from the war. Hodge greets him, “He’s a brother of our trade, a good workman, and a tall soldier” (X.64-5). Concerned about his ability to support his wife, Ralph wonders how he can survive “now [that] I want limbs to get whereon to feed,” but Hodge assures him that “thou shalt never see a shoemaker want bread, though he have but three fingers on a hand” (X.86-9). In what some critics believe is the controlling statement of the entire play, Ralph, comforted by Hodge’s words, declares: “Since I want limbs and lands, / I’ll to God, my good friends, and to these my hands” (X.118-9).<sup>241</sup> Personal industry, the will and ability to work, paves the path to prosperity, but it finds expression and is nurtured through industrial community. The journeymen believe in the ability of their hands, but that ability best earns when they come together.

While the journeymen associate fraternity with opportunity, that fraternity is tempered by the enforcement of hierarchy. Although Firk fights for Eyre to hire Lacy, he also reminds Lacy of his place on the totem. Andrew Fleck observes: “While Firk, the lowest-ranking laborer in Eyre’s shop, appears hospitable in his overtures towards Hans, throughout the scene he is determined to exert his priority over the foreigner.”<sup>242</sup> Fleck credits Firk’s insistence on his privilege to a veiled xenophobia, but Firk merely ensures that the new man know his place. When they order beer to celebrate Lacy’s arrival, Firk

---

<sup>241</sup> In their introduction, Smallwood and Wells argue that this “is a sentiment which expresses one of the most fundamental concerns of the play” (31) and that it articulates “in a nutshell, the formula of work and good fellowship” (39).

<sup>242</sup> Fleck, Andrew. “Marking Difference and National Identity in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *SEL* 46, 2 (Spring, 2006): 349-70. p. 358. Firk is not technically the lowest ranking member of Eyre’s shop, as there appear to be apprentices (referred to as boys) always available to fetch beer or put tools away.

asserts that “Hodge and I have the vantage; we must drink first, because we are the eldest journeymen” (IV.100-2), and he sends Lacy the bill with only the explanation, “Here’s a new journeyman” (IV.114). At the close of the scene, Firk even insists on leaving the stage before Lacy: “I am not so foolish to go behind you, I being the elder journeyman” (IV.134). Despite all the friendly banter, the hierarchy exercises a palpable influence on Eyre’s shop, and Eyre sits definitively atop the ladder. Bevington claims that Eyre “is admired and liked by his workmen, who see his success as the pathway to their own advancement,”<sup>243</sup> and Eyre actively cultivates that belief. After he has made his fortune and been elected Sheriff, Eyre returns to the shop and exclaims to his men, “Be as mad knaves as your master Sim Eyre hath been, and you shall live to be sheriffs of London” (X.155-7). Having taken this advice to heart, Hodge later rallies the entire shop: “Ply your work today—we loitered yesterday. To it, pell-mell, that we may live to be Lord Mayors, or Aldermen at least” (XIII.2-4). Eyre’s performance as a mad knave translates into work from his journeymen, who see in him what they might one day achieve. Fraternity and hierarchy in the shop lead to productivity, fortune, and success. Of course, Eyre’s success ultimately derives neither from work nor fraternity, but from a chance encounter.

No scene in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* has received more critical attention than the episode in which Eyre purchases the merchant vessel’s cargo, and no scene is more misunderstood. As in Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*, Eyre buys luxury goods at a discount off a foreign ship with the translating help of one of his journeymen, and he does so by offering a down payment up front with the full balance to be paid later. Marta Straznicky nicely summarizes most accounts of the transaction: “For most critics, Eyre’s capitalist venture is one of the play’s more cynical moments in which the otherwise sympathetic master craftsman resorts to deceit and debt in order to take advantage of a massive commercial opportunity. There is no way to exonerate Eyre from these charges.”<sup>244</sup> On the contrary, Eyre needs no exoneration, not because his actions pass or fail some test of virtue, but because the episode as Dekker portrays it simply neglects to provide sufficient context or continuity for his audience to reach any conclusion regarding Eyre’s motivations or moral compass. This important scene—the turning point in the play which enables Eyre to earn his fortune, to rise to Lord Mayor, to inspire his men, and to throw the final raucous Shrove Tuesday feast—barely makes sense, appearing unexpectedly without any cues to guide the audience, its internal logic stretched to breaking when acknowledged at all.

The scene opens with Lacy as Hans, Hodge, and Firk onstage with a skipper, who has not previously appeared in the play. The stranger speaks first, in Dutch, to Lacy, offering him the bill of lading for precious cargo on a ship from Crete, and assures him that “*Your meester Simon Eyre sal hae good copen* [shall have a good bargain]” (VII.5). Lacy exits with the skipper to a tavern, telling Hodge to escort Eyre there when he arrives. There has been no previous mention in the play of a foreign ship, fine goods, a bargain to be had, or anything of the sort; after the skipper has departed, Firk and Hodge provide necessary background information to the audience. Firk complains about the new journeyman being so bold as to order them to bring Eyre “to buy a ship worth the

<sup>243</sup> Bevington p. 105.

<sup>244</sup> Straznicky, Marta. “The End(s) of Discord in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *SEL* 36, 2 (Spring, 1996): 357-372. p. 367.

lading of two or three hundred thousand pounds” (VII.14-5)<sup>245</sup>, and Hodge explains the larger points of the arrangement:

The truth is, Firk, that the merchant owner of the ship dares not show his head, and therefore this skipper, that deals for him, for the love he bears to Hans offers my master Eyre a bargain in the commodities. He shall have a reasonable day of payment. He may sell the wares by that time, and be a huge gainer himself. (VII.17-22)

No further explanation is given of why the merchant owner of the ship cannot show his face, or how the skipper can bear love for Hans, a false identity Lacy only just created. Firk asks if Hans could also lend Eyre “twenty porpentines as an earnest-penny” (VII.23-4), and Hodge informs him that Lacy/Hans has already given him the twenty portagues, worth roughly £100, to put down on the purchase. At this point, Eyre finally appears onstage with his wife, and all discussion of the ship and the deal promptly halts without Eyre saying a word about either. Seventy lines of typical banter pass—double entendres from Eyre’s wife and pompous, overblown rhetoric from Eyre—before once again Hodge cuts to the chase:

Well, master, all this is from the bias. Do you remember the ship my fellow Hans told you of? The skipper and he are both drinking at the Swan. Here be the portagues to give earnest. If you go through with it, you cannot choose but be a lord at least. (VII.97-101)

Before Eyre responds, a boy enters with an alderman’s gown, which Eyre dons. No mention has been made of Eyre desiring to become a lord, nor of any plot to dress as an alderman. As Eyre declares that he will go through with the purchase, Lacy and the skipper reappear, and the skipper implores Eyre directly to buy the cargo, asserting again that he will have a great bargain. Eyre, Lacy, and the skipper leave for the ship, and the scene closes with Firk exchanging bawdy quibbles with Eyre’s wife.

Despite the fact that the skipper knows exactly to whom he is selling his wares and will receive a suitable down payment on the purchase, critics insist that Eyre somehow fleeces him. Brian Walsh argues: “To enact this transaction, Eyre disguises himself as an alderman and uses borrowed money he purports to be his own capital in order to buy the Dutch captain’s goods, the sale of which establishes his prosperity. Eyre’s progressive rise to historical prominence is marked by his seeming amorality.”<sup>246</sup> At no point does Eyre attempt to convince the skipper that the money is his own—rather, Eyre seems nearly ignorant of the down payment until Hodge slips it to him—and the deal appears to be worked out entirely before Eyre dresses up as an alderman. Kastan acknowledges that “the play...refuses to engage any moral concern that the episode might elicit”—that is, no one in the play reacts negatively to the transaction, thus giving

---

<sup>245</sup> As Smallwood and Wells note, this fantastic sum is most likely a printer’s mistake. They suggest that Dekker perhaps originally wrote only ‘hundred’ and then substituted ‘thousand,’ but the printer included both.

<sup>246</sup> Walsh, Brian. “Performing Historicity in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*.” *SEL* 46, 2 (Spring 2006): 323-348. p. 330.

no indication to the audience that it should react negatively—but he makes it clear that he thinks the episode should elicit moral concern: “Eyre’s appearance to the captain dressed as an alderman... is presented not as cunning hypocrisy but as proleptic propriety: as Hodge says, ‘now you look more like yourself, master’ (VII.118).”<sup>247</sup> Eyre cannot act hypocritically when he dresses as an alderman, I would argue, because Dekker barely gestures at explaining *why* he is dressing as an alderman. As he walks offstage with the skipper, Eyre offers him “countenance in the City” (VII.145-6), perhaps extending an alderman’s protection against the mysterious force preventing the merchant owner of the ship from showing his face in public. The skipper, however, needs no protection; that’s why he is representing the owner in the first place. In short, there is absolutely no need, within the context of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, for Eyre to don the costume, as the skipper is already begging to sell him the goods.<sup>248</sup> The entire episode appears confusing and dramatically ill managed, the audience content to take away the idea that Eyre has lucked into some valuable cargo at a good price. Critical animus toward Eyre in this moment must be traced back to *The Gentle Craft*, but the plan of Deloney’s Eyre and the place it holds in his story prove very different from Dekker’s adaptation.

The exacting description of Eyre’s con to obtain the cargo provides the fulcrum of his story in *The Gentle Craft*. He begins as a poor apprentice, who enjoys the generosity and fraternity of his peers who buy him breakfast when he cannot afford it himself, and winds up as Lord Mayor of London, delivering on his promise of a breakfast feast for all apprentices of the city. The story begins with Eyre beholden to the community of apprentices and ends with his affirming his dedication to them, but in order to accumulate the power and wealth necessary to demonstrate his gratitude, he must interrupt an otherwise honest career with a single dishonest moment. Deloney’s Eyre must lie to the foreign merchant because the earning power of an earnest shoemaker is not great enough, certainly to become Lord Mayor, but even to put down reasonable collateral on a purchase of £3000. Deloney’s Eyre can offer £3, virtually nothing, but Dekker’s Eyre can offer £100, a sizable sum. The money comes from Lacy, who received it at the beginning of the play as a gift from his uncle, the Earl of Lincoln, for going off to war. Dekker’s Eyre can make a straightforward offer on the cargo without the subterfuge of Deloney’s Eyre, who must conjure an alderman with sufficient credit to account for the lack of a down payment. When Deloney’s Eyre dresses as an alderman, he pretends to be an entirely different person; in fact, for the plan to work, the fictional alderman must not be recognized in any way as Simon Eyre. Deloney’s Eyre engages in a subversive grasp for power, short-circuiting the imitative model for advancement by acting, not as an alderman would act, but as an alderman. Dekker’s Eyre has no need to impersonate an alderman because he has Lacy, and Lacy’s uncle’s money, working on his behalf.

In *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, the moment when Eyre dons an alderman’s robes is a purely spectacular vestige of the intricately deceitful plot in *The Gentle Craft*, a flamboyant but ultimately impotent shell divorced from, yet suggestive of, its original purpose. Deloney depicts Simon Eyre dressing up as an alderman in a successful attempt to seize control of the promotional machinery that failed to deliver his desired level of success, but equates it with Eyre dressing up as a character in his real work clothes,

---

<sup>247</sup> Kastan p. 334.

<sup>248</sup> The costume is so fleeting and gratuitous, in fact, that Mortenson incorrectly declares that “Dekker removes the incident of Eyre’s masquerade” (248) entirely in his adaptation of Deloney.



signaling that the performance of artisanal identity applies just as much to everyday labor as it does to a fantastical schemes of rigging the system. For Dekker, the performance of artisanal identity involves a spendthrift gentleman pretending to be a shoemaker arranging and facilitating a lucrative transaction for a charismatic but virtually unaware shoemaker. However, he retains the theatrical display integral to Deloney's formulation of the plan but irrelevant to his own. Dekker has Eyre dress up as an alderman, I would argue, not to influence the skipper, who has already committed to selling him the goods, but to impress those who witness him put on the outfit, both within the play and without, in a moment of gratuitous image making.

In *The Gentle Craft*, the reader never encounters the plan put into action—the story skips ahead to after Eyre has made his fortune—and no one in Eyre's shop knows of the deceit except for his wife, who devises the plot. When she tells him, "I see you in it [the costume] already, and how like an Alderman you will look, when you are in this costly array" (115), it is a doubly proleptic propriety, leaping ahead to an unwritten moment which itself looks forward to Eyre's ultimate achievement. Unlike Deloney, Dekker dramatizes this action and stages it before both the audience and all the journeymen of Eyre's shop. When Dekker's Eyre dresses in alderman's garb, it dazzles the audience and the journeymen with what McLuskie calls "the magical quality of fine clothes,"<sup>249</sup> and falsely connects Eyre's costume with his future prosperity. Eyre's workers are particularly enamored of the clothing. Hodge tells Eyre, "now you look more like yourself, master" (VII.118), and Firk exclaims, "Lord, Lord, to see what good raiment doth" (VII.122-3).

After this episode, Eyre can instruct his men to "be as mad knaves as your master Sim Eyre hath been, and you shall live to be sheriffs of London" (X.155-7), and they can believe "that we may live to be Lord Mayors, or Aldermen at least" (XIII.2-4), but Dekker holds out a false theatrical model. Eyre's ascendance does not result from his dramatic imitation of an alderman, as he cannot be said to perform as an alderman at all. In the case of Dekker's hero the performative is not a *means* to achieving a new identity, but a *realization* of that identity, as Hodge attests: "now you look more like yourself, master." On the other hand, it is the out-of-favor gentleman who uses performance to achieve his destiny, which—ironically—is to marry a citizen's daughter, thus making explicit that natural exchange between merchants and gentlemen that Harrison describes and that the government statutes feared.

The persona of a made knave, however, appears to be at least partly acted. In a brief scene late in the play, the King<sup>250</sup> asks a nobleman about Eyre: "Is our Lord Mayor of London such a gallant?" (XIX.1). The nobleman responds that Eyre is "one of the merriest madcaps in your land," (XIX.2), "rather a wild ruffian than a Mayor" (XIX.4), but includes a significant caveat:

In all his actions that concern the state  
He is as serious, provident, and wise  
As full of gravity amongst the grave,

---

<sup>249</sup> McLuskie p. 69.

<sup>250</sup> Dekker strategically leaves the particular identity of the king unknown. Henry VI was technically king when the historical Simon Eyre was Lord Mayor, but Dekker may have tried to tap into the mythos of Henry V and his victory at Agincourt on St. Crispin's Day.

As any Mayor hath been these many years. (XIX.6-9)

The King, desirous to meet the charismatic version of Eyre, voices concern that “when we come in presence, / His madness will be dashed clean out of countenance” (XIX.11-2), so he orders that someone should “give him notice ‘tis our pleasure / That he put on his wonted merriment” (XIX.14-5). In the next scene, Eyre’s wife takes him aside to tell him that “one of his [the King’s] most worshipful peers bade me tell thou must be merry” (XX.36-7), and the King himself instructs Eyre to “be even as merry / As if thou wert among thy shoemakers” (XXI.13-4). Thus, in the final scene of the play when the King visits during the Shrove Tuesday celebration, it proves impossible to tell whether Eyre is being himself or performing a variant of himself tailored to fit the King’s expectations in order to curry political favor.

The King’s visit is one of the major additions Dekker makes to Deloney’s original, and Eyre announces it to the audience in a rare soliloquy, the same soliloquy in which he first makes mention of the feast for apprentices:

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, gentlemanlike cheer. (XVII.43-7)

Given that Eyre couples the two visits, giving notice of them together in a parallel style, his motivations and expectations for each inform and complement the other. The King will be impressed by the raucous camaraderie Eyre enjoys with the apprentices, and Eyre will reinforce that camaraderie by providing “gentlemanlike cheer” to the apprentices, who get to see the king in person. The feast gives Eyre a stage to demonstrate to the King that he is a madcap dedicated to the craft community, and to demonstrate to the apprentices that acting as a madcap dedicated to the craft community can gain one an audience with the King, neither of which is exactly true. In *The Gentle Craft*, Deloney has Eyre degrade his real clothes—the uniform and equipment of a shoemaker—into just as much of a costume as the alderman’s robes he wears to trick the foreign merchant; Deloney’s Eyre must perform his genuine identity before performing the identity to which he aspires. In *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, Dekker renders a similar effect, but instead of forcing Eyre to perform his authentic artisanal identity, he reveals that the “intensely theatrical”<sup>251</sup> identity we have associated with Eyre for the entire play, the eccentric speech and exuberant fellowship with his men, is indistinguishable from a performance of that identity intended to elicit particular reactions. Eyre capitalizes on what makes him an appealing dramatic character to sway political power.

I do not wish to argue that Dekker intended to interpret Eyre as some kind of manipulative genius, a merchant class Machiavelli grasping for power, fame, or personal gain. However, Eyre undeniably stages the final Shrove Tuesday feast as a site for political negotiations while dressing it as a party. He has two main suits to plead before the King. During the celebration that repays the generosity of the craft community, the

---

<sup>251</sup> Smallwood and Wells, Introduction p. 23.

King announces the naming of the great marketplace Leadenhall,<sup>252</sup> built at Eyre's cost. Eyre gets down on his knees on behalf of the shoemakers and begs "for the honour of poor Simon Eyre and the good of his brethren" that "your Grace would vouchsafe some privilege to my new Leaden Hall, that it may be lawful for us to buy and sell leather there two days a week" (XXI.155-9). Eyre uses his new power to benefit his company, just as he promoted Hodge and Firk within his individual shop when he came into his fortune. He is committed to the hierarchic fraternity and its potential to advance its members. However, that commitment also entails casting his lot with Lacy; Eyre's second suit involves redeeming Lacy in the opinion of the King. Lacy asks Eyre for the favor directly: "I know your honour easily may obtain / Free pardon of the King for me and Rose, / And reconcile me to my uncle's grace" (XX.44-6).

The final scene begins with the King forgiving Lacy for deserting his military post and committing treason, and blessing Lacy's marriage to Oatley's daughter. When Oatley arrives at the feast and objects, the King dismisses his reservations, praising how Lacy debased himself, "forgetting honours and all courtly pleasures, / To gain her love became a shoemaker" (XXI.111-2). On the contrary, Lacy became a shoemaker in Germany after burning through more than £1000 in less than six months; in London, he pretends to be one in order to pursue his love, who happens to be the daughter of an incredibly wealthy grocer. With the madcap Lord Mayor in his corner, Lacy finds himself knighted rather than punished for his exploits. In an earlier scene, after Lacy has revealed his true identity to Eyre and asked for his master's help, Eyre expresses his debt to Lacy: "Simon Eyre had never walked in a red petticoat, nor wore a chain of gold, but for my fine journeyman's portagues; and shall I leave him?" (XVII.19-21). "Am I not Sim Eyre?" he asks, "Is not Sim Eyre Lord Mayor of London? Fear nothing" (XVII.7-9). Eyre's meteoric rise is predicated on the illicit activities of a disgraced gentleman, who in turn takes advantage of the promotion he enabled in order to exonerate himself and reestablish his social position above the shoemakers who had embraced him. The Shrove Tuesday feast represents a complex articulation of shifting social hierarchies and the roles of imitation and apprenticeship within such reshuffling. Rather than the polite disagreement that began the play between Lincoln and Oatley over the potential union of citizen and gentle families through marriage, the final success of both Lacy and Eyre embodies the collaboration, bordering on collusion, between the gentry and the merchant class of London, an alliance built upon the faith of apprentices and journeymen in the fraternity of their guild and the guild promotion system.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how the manufactured cultural construct of the figure of the apprentice was interrogated and subverted in interconnected literary representations created by two of the authors most associated with the artisanal world during the early modern period. Thomas Deloney and Thomas Dekker each critique the socio-industrial conditions of London by way of a belief system inculcated in apprentices that the livery company promotion hierarchy treated everyone fairly and equally: namely that apprentices were told that their ambition for a better life could be pursued successfully in

---

<sup>252</sup> Leadenhall was still a tremendously popular marketplace at the end of the sixteenth century, familiar to any Londoner.

industry, where they needed only to imitate the qualities and skills of those directly above them on the company totem to one day be promoted to that position. Both Deloney and Dekker offer versions of the potential for abuse by masters, conscious or not, to perform in a fashion that reinforces for their apprentices the often false connection between imitation and promotion, motivating them to work all the harder to the benefit of their master.

Deloney lived the guild life, as he was a working silkweaver while rising to become one of the most popular balladeers in London. Frustrated by his company's refusal to address the problem of foreign workers taking jobs without serving an apprenticeship, he wrote a letter complaining that Englishmen who had served patiently for seven or more years did not have access to the opportunities due to them, for which he was imprisoned. In his prose work *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney slyly points out that Jack, while a very good apprentice, achieves success by way of marrying a rich widow rather than earning his way ladder. Nevertheless, Jack vigorously performs the role of the lowly apprentice who made good, providing false inspiration for his own apprentices, who believe if they subscribe to the same tenets of hard work and moderation than Jack constantly recalls, they too can recreate his prosperity. In his story about the famous shoemaker Simon Eyre, appearing in *The Gentle Craft Part I*, Deloney shortcircuits the guild promotion system. Rather than imitating the business acumen of an alderman in order to improve his profits, Eyre literally pretends to be one, donning the costume of an alderman to secure the business transaction that enriches him enough to become an actual alderman. Deloney here underscores the fact that individual drive and talent alone are not necessarily sufficient to succeed, but that perception also always factors into the equation, and the space between perception and reality allows for abuses of performance.

Dekker picks up this thread in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, which he adapted for the stage from *The Gentle Craft Part I*. Despite that fact that, in the decade after writing *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Dekker aimed scathing attacks at masters abusing apprentices evincing a deep-seated suspicion of guild hierarchies, critics generally accept the play as a celebration of industrial life in the capital. I argue, on the other hand, that Dekker picks up the thread present in Deloney's original that imitation, as much as it might be a vehicle to social promotion through apprenticeship, could also enable abuse of apprentice faith in that vehicle, and that he uses the conditions of dramatic performance to accentuate this fact. While Deloney's Eyre dresses up as an alderman for the practical purpose of securing credit necessary for the transaction that enriches him, Dekker's Eyre is backed by Lacy and his uncle the Earl's money. Nevertheless, Dekker's Eyre puts on the richly fantastic alderman's costume for no apparent reason, but the effect is one of mesmerizing the workers and apprentices in his shop. They are led to believe that simply performing as an alderman is inseparable from eventually becoming one, which in turn motivates them to work all the more diligently, despite the fact Dekker's Eyre's performance has little or nothing to do with his financial and political ascent.

## Chapter 4

### “I hope I am my father’s son”: What Gentle Apprentices Can Learn

Shakespeare begins *As You Like It* (1599)<sup>253</sup> with an extended treatment of the nature vs. nurture debate that would have been familiar to a specific subset of his audience at the turn of the century. Orlando, the youngest son of the late Sir Rowland de Boys, complains that Oliver, the eldest brother who inherited the lion’s share of their father’s wealth and authority, refuses to instruct him in a manner suitable for a gentleman. Despite the fact that their father “charged my brother on his blessing to breed me well” (I.i.3-4), Orlando has nothing to do but hang around their estate, taking meals with the farm hands, and he complains to Adam, a longtime family servant, that Oliver “[under]mines my gentility with my education” (I.i.20-1). Orlando then confronts his brother, accusing him:

My father charged you in his will to give me good education: you have trained me like a peasant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities. The spirit of my father grows strong in me, and I will no longer endure it. Therefore allow me such exercises as may become a gentleman...(I.i.66-72)

The idea that a crude education could undermine a noble bloodline, that peasant training could blunt innate gentility, would have resonated with London audiences containing apprentices, artisans, and merchants who themselves had been born of noble stock but, for one reason or another, had to work for a living.

Public discussion of this subject, emerging from the national focus on apprenticeship in the second half of the sixteenth century, developed over the first decades of the seventeenth. In 1629, Edmund Bolton published *The Cities Advocate*<sup>254</sup>, an entire volume on the topic, with the subheading, “Whether Apprentiship extinguisheth Gentry?”. In it, he presents a “clear refutation of that pestilent error” that “layes upon the hopefull, and honest estate of APPRENTISHIP in London, the odious note of bondage, and the barbarous penaltie of losse of Gentry” (Dedicatory Epistle i-ii). That is, Bolton argues against the proposition that serving as an apprentice is actually a form of slavery or bondage, which would preclude any who underwent such subjugation from the ranks of the noble. Similarly, Thomas Fuller, in *The Holy State and the Profane State*<sup>255</sup> (1640), analyzes the supposed plight of younger noble brothers who serve indentures. He concludes that “neither doth an apprenticeship extinguish native—nor disenable to acquisitive—gentry” (43) because the indenture is a civil contract, into which bondmen could not enter, and because becoming an apprentice could cost a young man’s family a great deal of money. “Now, if apprenticeship be a servitude, it is either a pleasing

---

<sup>253</sup> Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Ed. Agnes Latham. London: Methuen & Co., 1975.

<sup>254</sup> Bolton, Edmund. *The Cities Advocate*. London: Printed [by Miles Flesher] for William Lee, at the signe of the Turkes Head next to the Miter and Phoenix in Fleet-street, 1629.

<sup>255</sup> Fuller, Thomas. *The Holy State and the Profane State*. Ed. James Nichols. London: Thomas Tegg, 1841.

bondage, or strange madness, to purchase it at so dear a rate,” Fuller argues, “Gentry therefore may be suspended perchance, and asleep during the apprenticeship; but it awakens afterwards” (43).

In this chapter, I shall discuss eight plays, each of which negotiates this anxiety about the influence of apprenticeship upon inherent nobility and social advancement. In Jonson, Chapman, and Marston’s *Eastward Ho!* (1605) and Philip Massinger’s *The City Madam* (1632), we shall discover noble sons who resent their manual labor as an affront to their heritage, and gentle apprentices who serve patiently and are rewarded. In Thomas Heywood’s *The Four Prentices of London* (1594) and Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), we shall find princes forced to serve adventures in disguise, who nonetheless love and honor their guilds, and lowborn apprentices who use the theater as a proxy vehicle for promotion. Finally, I shall trace these concerns, in their most fully realized form, to Shakespeare’s *Henriad*, where explicit “apprentice” references are only symptoms of a much larger preoccupation with opposing models of achieving and maintaining status and power, which results in the paradox underlying much citizen literature—the “apprentice king.”

While these plays sometimes explicitly wrestle with the idea that serving an apprenticeship might irrevocably bring young gentlemen low, they also implicitly address one of the underlying promises of apprenticeship: that a humble man might be able to elevate his station by way of earnest labor. As Fuller put it, apprenticeship did not extinguish native gentry, but it also did not disenable acquisitive gentry or the ability to gain gentle status through working as a merchant. Bolton makes a stronger case, imploring “fathers, such of you are not gentlemen, [to] put your children to be Apprentises, that so as God may blesse their just, true, and vertuous industrie, they may found a new family, and both raise themselves and theirs to the precious and glittering title Gentlemen bearing Armes lawfully” (51-2). Of course, gentle born apprentices forced to serve would resent the idea that their humble peers might one day earn via apprenticeship the very status that apprenticeship threatened in them. Everyone should accept his place, or as Orlando gratefully explains to the ever loyal servant Adam in *As You Like It*: “Thou art not for the fashion of these times, / Where none will sweat but for promotion” (II.iii.59-60).

These plays are also notable for the ways in which performativity and actual playgoing are intertwined with identification as an apprentice. In the last chapter, we explored how authors such as Deloney and Dekker, who recognized how false performances in a system dependent on imitation could open the door to potential abuse, teased out particular permutations that appear to celebrate the guild hierarchical system, but also subtly critiqued the often false promise of advancement it was designed to extend. If the imaginative literature of the time registered how masters like Jack of Newbury and Simon Eyre might perform in a fashion to placate their apprentices, then naturally the literature would also register the potential for apprentices to perform in a fashion to placate their masters. Moreover, as theaters came to occupy a more prominent space in the imagination of those who conceived of apprentices as a threatening segment of the population willing to and capable of disrupting the normative social order, the dramatic representation of apprentices as playgoers, or at least theatrically self-aware, evolved accordingly. In *Eastward Ho!*, not only does Quicksilver mark himself as a profligate apprentice by quoting contemporary plays, but both he and the supposedly good

apprentice Golding literally perform roles in order to trick their master. The controlling conceit of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* involves an apprentice disrupting and encroaching upon a play that otherwise mocks the merchant class. In the case of Shakespeare's *Henriad*, although no physical theaters are involved, performing is certainly present, and not only in Eastcheap when Hal and Falstaff take turns playing king. Crafting an identity by temporarily performing the role of an apprentice plays an integral role in the ascensions of both Henry IV and Henry V.

### I. Industry and Idleness: Pairs of Apprentices in *The City Madam* and *Eastward Ho!*

Apprentices had two faces in seventeenth-century London. On one side, they were an integral cog within the business community of the capital, providing cheap labor for artisans and merchants, who themselves had most likely served indentures. In a prefatory letter "To the happie Masters of Laudable Apprentises in London" affixed to *The Cities Advocate*, Bolton reminds masters that "because yourselves, for the most part, were Apprentices once, you may therefore behold herein, with comfort, the honesty of your estate when you were such, and the splendour of what you are now in right."<sup>256</sup> Apprenticeship provided the vehicle by which London's commercial community developed and reproduced itself, and today's businessmen could remember when they were mere apprentices, understand how that training led to their eventual success, and trust current apprentices to continue that tradition. On the other side, apprentices had a nasty reputation for rioting and general misbehavior, a reputation that helped spur Bolton to write a defense of apprenticeship in the first place. Regarding such rowdy young men, he claims "that those apprentises are of the dregs, and branne of the vulgar: fellowes voyd of worthy blood and worthy breeding; and (to speake with fit freedome) no better than merely rascals."<sup>257</sup> There were raucous apprentices, but they came from the dregs, either in birth or training. Some lowborn apprentices might be more inclined to misbehavior, but gentle apprentices could also rebel if the right morals were not instilled in them. Humble or gentle, apprentices were perceived as both the future of the city and a permanently imminent threat.

The infrangible Janus face of apprentices—simultaneously dutiful and dissolute, loyal and conniving—is distilled to its essence in Jonson, Chapman, and Marston's *Eastward Ho!*,<sup>258</sup> which features two gentle born apprentices, Quicksilver and Golding, sensitive to their relatively low position in their master Touchstone's house. Quicksilver emphasizes that "my mother's a gentlewoman, and my father a justice of the peace...and though I am a younger brother and a prentice, I hope I am my father's son" (I.i.26-9). Golding reminds his master's wife, "I am born a gentleman, and...I have learned of my master (which I trust taints not my blood)" (III.ii.114-6). While both apprentices freely announce their gentle bloodlines, the good apprentice and the bad apprentice are clearly defined at the outset of the play. Quicksilver bickers with Touchstone, who chides him

---

<sup>256</sup> Bolton, Edmund. *The Cities Advocate*. "To the happie Masters of Laudable Apprentises in London."

<sup>257</sup> Bolton, Edmund. *The Cities Advocate*. "To the modest apprentises of London, Schollars, and Disciples in Citie-Arts, during their seven or more yeares Noviceship."

<sup>258</sup> Chapman, George, Ben Jonson, John Marston. *Eastward Ho*. Ed. R. W. Van Fossen. New York: Manchester University Press, 1979.

for his untoward behavior and pompous dress, while Golding responsibly attends to a potential customer.

Moreover, each apprentice reveals his instructional influences early on as well. Quicksilver, complaining to Golding about their master and attempting to recruit him to the gallant lifestyle, explicitly cites the theater:

‘Sfoot, man, I am a gentleman, and may swear by my pedigree, God’s my life. Sirrah Golding, wilt be ruled by a fool? Turn good fellow, turn swaggering gallant, and ‘let the welkin roar, and Erebus also.’ Look not westward to the fall of Don Phoebus, but to the east—eastward ho!  
(I.i.123-8)

In quoting conflated phrases from Pistol in *2 Henry IV*, Quicksilver links the appeal to turn gallant with playgoing. Why should they, born of gentle blood, have to serve a lowly but successful citizen, when they could be enjoying themselves at the theater? He punctuates his entreaty with another theatrical reference, again fusing gentle heritage, gallantry, and popular drama: “Wilt thou bear tankards, and mayst bear arms? Be ruled, turn gallant, eastward ho!... ‘Who calls Jeronimo? Speak, here I am’” (I.i.144-6). Quoting plays such as Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* marks Quicksilver as a trouble maker. Golding resists Quicksilver’s requests and remains loyal to Touchstone, who soon tires of Quicksilver’s antics and cancels his indenture.

Conversely, Golding follows Touchstone’s example of leading his life according to pat aphorisms bent toward a modest life and earnest labor. Richard Horwich describes Touchstone thus: “Thrift is his standard and his battle-cry; it is the spiritual and economic prodigality of those who think to soar upward but who actually fly headlong toward ruin that he fears and despises.” He “shapes the action of the play into a homiletic demonstration of his moral ideals,”<sup>259</sup> and explains those ideals clearly:

I hired me a little shop, bought low, took small gain, kept no debt book, garnished my shop, for want of plate, with good wholesome thrifty sentences—as, ‘Touchstone, keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee’; ‘Light gains make heavy purses’; ‘Tis good to be merry and wise’.  
(I.i.54-60)

Touchstone casts himself as humble and sincere, but he also comes off as boring, overly literal, and somewhat dim. Percy Simpson points out that one of the ways “the middle-class tone of the comedy was carefully observed” could be found in the fact that there are virtually no references to classical literature in the play, and the few references to be found entail misunderstanding or mistaking the facts of the legends. Mildred, Touchstone’s equally abstemious daughter:

alludes to the fable that Ulysses, to escape going to Troy, feigned madness, yoking an ass and an ox to the plough and sowing salt (I. ii. 35-38); but her version is that he yoked cats, dogs, and foxes, and she

---

<sup>259</sup> Horwich, Richard. “Hamlet and Eastward Ho.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1971): 223-233. p. 226.



prefaces it with the statement "I heard a Scholler once say." The other passage is a Homeric reference to Ulysses sailing past the island of the Sirens, stuffing the ears of his crew with wax and getting himself tied to the mast until he was out of hearing. Touchstone replies to the appeal of his family (v. iv. 1, 2), "I will sayle by you, and not heare you, like the wise Vlisses": "not heare you" is, again, an inaccurate version, and Touchstone follows it up with, "I have stopt mine eares, with Shoemakers waxe," which effectively gets away from the Greek.<sup>260</sup>

Touchstone's marries an insistence on self-control with the trappings of a craftsman—stopping his ears with Shoemaker's wax—and in so doing marks himself as simple. Golding appears much the same. In one of the play's more humorous moments, Touchstone offers Mildred's hand in marriage to Golding, and while both quickly agree to the match, neither seems very enthusiastic, in line with their reserved natures. Only after Mildred condemns the pretensions of her social climbing sister does Golding truly respond. Mildred says, "These hasty advancements are not natural. Nature has given us legs to go to our objects, not wings to fly to them" (II.i.74-7). Golding is smitten: "How dear an object you are to my desires I cannot express" (II.i.78-9).

Each model of instruction yields expected results. Quicksilver goes to plays, fails in his attempted voyage to the New World, and ends up in prison. Golding follows his safe maxims, earns an early release from his indenture, marries his wealthy master's daughter, and is promoted to deputy alderman on the same day that he is admitted to his guild. Still, the theatrical model, as well as the bond between apprentices, appears to hold some influence. When plotting his trip to Virginia, Quicksilver's bawd asks how he can brook pandering to noblemen at court: "What care and devotion must you use to humour an imperious lord, proportion your looks to his looks, smiles to his smiles, fit your sails to the wind of his breath?" (II.ii.81-4). Quicksilver answers, "Tush, he's no journeyman in his craft that cannot do that" (II.ii85-6). This response equates courtly self-fashioning—largely composed of the kind of gallantry that Quicksilver is condemned for—with acting like a good apprentice in order to please one's master, and implies that training in a craft is good training for court, two kinds of training usually thought to be antithetical. Moreover, it also calls into question Golding's strict adherence to Touchstone's precepts as potentially a mere performance, a performance for which he is very handsomely rewarded. In fact, at the conclusion of the play, Golding explicitly adopts theatricality in an effort to dupe Touchstone and to secure Quicksilver's release from prison for no particular reason other than some kind of unspoken fraternity. In order to get Touchstone to visit the jail housing Quicksilver, Golding pretends to have been taken into custody, knowing that his now father-in-law will come to bail him out. When Touchstone finally arrives, Quicksilver's performative abilities take over.

It remains impossible to be certain if Quicksilver actually realized the error of his previous ways during his time in prison, but he certainly does a good job of making it appear that he has. He has cut his hair and renounced his former profligate lifestyle. The other prisoners all comment on how pious he is, and he has even helped one of his jailers clean up his act. With Touchstone hiding in the wings, Quicksilver launches into a

---

<sup>260</sup> Simpson, Percy. "The Problem of Authorship of *Eastward Ho*." *PMLA*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sep., 1944): 715-725. p. 716-7.

ballad, in imitation of that written by George Mannington on the way to his execution, begging to be redeemed by his former master. Touchstone, apparently naïve to the persuasive power of theater, immediately steps forward to accept Quicksilver back with open arms, and all ends well. The potential of theatrical performance renders it impossible to discern if an apprentice truly is good or is simply acting as if he were good, but in either case, he benefits because of it.

Apprehension over an apprentice's ability merely to act like a responsible servant provides the basis for one of the major plots in Philip Massinger's *The City Madam*,<sup>261</sup> a re-imagining of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* as a city comedy, which takes *Eastward Ho!* as a major influence. A rich merchant, John Frugal, exasperated with the exorbitant courtly pretensions of his wife and daughters, pretends to retire to a monastery and leaves his brother, Luke, in charge of his vast fortune. Like the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, Frugal blurs the line between author and actor, orchestrating the action of the play by pretending to be someone else, underscoring the potential power of performance as a means to an end in contemporary London. Frugal may have had a particularly strong impact on theater audiences because of similarities to the real London merchant and one time Lord Mayor, Sir William Cockayne. In his essay on the play, C. A. Gibson makes a compelling case comparing Frugal to Cockayne, "one of the merchant princes of Jacobean England."<sup>262</sup> While acknowledging "there can be no certain identification of the real man with the play character," Gibson postulates of Massinger that it is "tempting to propose that the dramatist used Cockayne's career and circumstances as a model for his own Sir John Frugal"<sup>263</sup> because both the character and the man were knighted citizens who earned fantastic profits through East Indian trade and large scale money lending.

Frugal provides a fitting analogue to Cockayne. Just as Frugal in a sense creates the world of the play around him through his machinations—and always makes a point to affirm that he earned his fortune through hard work and dedication, even if that included occasional usury and exploitation within the bounds of the law—Cockayne appears to have understood that early seventeenth century London could be a place shaped by the will and performance of individual tradesmen. Giving Cockayne's funeral sermon at St. Paul's, Donne described the man and his relation to the capital thus:

You have lost a man, that drove a great Trade, the right way in making the best use of our home-commodity... of Arts, and Manufactures, to be employed upon our owne Commodity within the Kingdome, he did his part, diligently... This City is a great Theater, and he Acted great and various parts in it.<sup>264</sup>

Ann Hollinshead Hurley argues that, "in celebrating Cockayne, Donne must have been aware that he was caught up in the larger project of defining the city through its civic elite." By defining London as a theater and Cockayne as an actor, Donne "implies his

---

<sup>261</sup> Massinger, Philip. *The City Madam*. Ed. Cathy Shrank. New York: Theatre Arts Books / Routledge, 2005.

<sup>262</sup> Gibson, C. A. "Massinger's London Merchant and the Date of 'The City Madam.'" *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Oct., 1970): 737-749. p. 740.

<sup>263</sup> Gibson p. 743, p. 740.

<sup>264</sup> Quoted in Gibson p. 742.

awareness of the city as a production, something factually existing but culturally malleable.”<sup>265</sup> If civic and commercial elites could mold the capital to their will, learning that process began as apprentices, both for good and for ill.

In *The City Madam*, Frugal hands the reins of his fortune over to his brother Luke, but before this occurs, Luke occupies a low place in Frugal’s household because of past imprisonment for debt due to his extravagantly gallant lifestyle. While still little more than an errand boy, Luke spends his time conversing with Frugal’s gentle born apprentices, Goldwire and Tradewell. After Luke asks how the prentices plan to spend their free time, and they properly respond that they technically have no free time (“Being prentices, we are bound to attendance” (II.i.42-3)), Luke teases them for their prudishness:

Have you almost served out  
The term of your indentures, yet make conscience  
By starts to use your liberty?  
...  
Are you gentlemen born, yet have no gallant tincture  
Of gentry in you? You are no mechanics,  
Nor serve some needy shopkeeper, who surveys  
His everyday takings. You have in your keeping  
A mass of wealth, from which you may take boldly  
And no way be discovered. (II.i.43-5, 51-6)

The apprentices balk at the idea of stealing from Frugal, but Luke plies them with subtle schemes to siphon off funds and seductive tales of luxurious clothes, beautiful prostitutes, and easy money won at the ordinary. Finally, he breaks through.

Rather than persuade them to adopt the gallant lifestyle, however, Luke discovers that one of them, Goldwire, already has. Upon hearing Luke’s description of a punk’s perfumed cambric smock, Goldwire can no longer contain himself, and reveals that he has “had my several pagans billeted / For my own tooth, and after ten-pound suppers, / The curtains drawn, my fiddlers playing all night / ‘The shaking of the sheets’, which I have danc’d / Again and again with my cockatrice” (II.i.110-14). Goldwire has kept his exploits secret even from his fellow apprentice, Tradewell, who has actually led the honest existence we first believed both prentices had. Goldwire goes on to explain that, if for any reason he could not steal enough money to cover his expenses, he would reach out to a syndicate of other corrupt apprentices who:

...hold correspondence, supply one another  
On all occasions. I can borrow for a week  
Two hundred pounds of one, as much of a second,  
A third lays down the rest, and when they want,  
As my master’s money comes in, I do repay it:  
Ka me, ka thee.” (II.i.122-7)

---

<sup>265</sup> Hurley, Ann Holinshead. *John Donne’s Poetry and Early Modern Visual Culture*. Cranbury: Susquehanna University Press, 2005. p. 100.

Luke puts the proposition to Tradewell: “You may make use on” the advice of Goldwire “or freeze in the warehouse” where he should be working. Tradewell quickly responds, “No, I am converted”(II.i.129-31), and sets out for the gambling hall as Goldwire leaves to visit his madam.

This episode encapsulates many contemporary concerns about apprentices. It is revealed that, within the context of the play, Goldwire was always already profligate. He has been stealing money from his master over a long period of time, has been visiting brothels, has been indulging in expensive meals, and has been wearing overly fine clothes. This version of apprenticeship, the pleasures of which Luke describes to tempt Goldwire and Tradewell, emerges as dominant from the beginning. The nature of the gentle apprentice predisposes him to these kinds of vices, and that predisposition apparently cannot be resisted. What’s more, Goldwire’s immorality is not contained within Frugal’s shop, as he belongs to a constellation of rogue apprentices. These scoundrels do not independently steal from their respective masters and then meet up at a tavern, but have an elaborate credit system between shops designed to enable gallant behavior without threat of discovery. This sophistication of collusion goes far beyond the general fear of apprentices banding together to tear down a theater or free a colleague from prison, and testifies to the fear of the formation of a corrupt apprentice subculture always on the prowl for new members.

Conventional wisdom posited that nothing threatened the virtue of an apprentice more than other apprentices. Tradewell falls victim to this susceptibility to infection when exposed to Goldwire’s true nature, as he immediately runs out and gets himself into debt at a gaming hall. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this episode, however, is that there is no way for the audience to predict that Goldwire is a bad apprentice. If the ritual of apprenticeship essentially entailed that a young man act like a craftsman until he became one, with the expectation that he would learn to be a moral and responsible citizen, then an unintended, perhaps inevitable extension of that ritual suggests that young men should at the very least *act* like good apprentices even if they are not, with an eye toward future prosperity once their indentures are complete. Goldwire appears to be quite a capable actor, as he is near the end of his apprenticeship and Frugal has trusted him with great responsibility. Good and bad apprentices are essentially indistinguishable because they act alike. Thus, learning how to perform as an apprentice sufficiently to satisfy a master’s expectation of how an apprentice should behave becomes equally as important as learning the mysteries of a craft.

## II. Fictions of Apprentice Faith:

### *The Four Prentices of London* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*

If *Eastward Ho!* and *The City Madam* explicitly negotiate anxiety about the potentially deleterious effect serving an apprenticeship might have on gentlemen, and questions the master’s ability to distinguish the good apprentice from the bad, then Thomas Heywood’s *The Four Prentices of London*<sup>266</sup> celebrates the benefits a nobleman might derive from serving an indenture in disguise. A liberal adaptation of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Heywood does nicely combine exotic locales and thrilling battles

---

<sup>266</sup> Heywood, Thomas. *The Four Prentices of London*. Ed. Mary Ann Weber Gasior. New York: Garland Publishing, 1980.

with workaday London life in *Four Prentices*, thus blending citizen values with chivalric fantasies. The play opens with a deposed French nobleman bemoaning his fallen state to his daughter. He complains: “I am forct to loose the name of Earle, / And live in London like a Cittizen” (28-9). London apparently provides the best hiding place for an earl on the lam, but it also presents economic opportunities for a nobleman dispossessed of his wealth. The earl has bound his four sons as apprentices in London guilds, notably with four of the twelve great companies: Godfrey with the Mercers, Guy with the Goldsmiths, Charles with the Haberdashers, and Eustace with the Grocers. Reminding them of their gentle blood, the father warns his sons against believing that “the name of Prentice can disparage you,” for “Even Kings themselves have of these Trades been free” (132-4). This statement sets up the arc of the play, for the noble prentices soon heed the war drum of Robert of Normandy, who is departing to engage in the holy wars at Jerusalem. Each son enlists in the army, not as a prince who has the innate ability to marshal troops to military victory, but as the apprentice he is so proud to be, each brandishing the crest of his guild upon his shield. As they sail for glory, however, their vessel shipwrecks, casting each man to separate shores and leaving each to believe himself the sole survivor. The play presents these actions to the audience via dumbshows with explanation by a presenter, who concludes: “Foure London Prentises will ere they die, / Advance their trowing fame above the skie; / And winne such glorious praise as never fades, / Unto themselves and honour of their Trades” (330-3). By play’s end, Jerusalem will be liberated, and all four prentices will rise to become kings, thus demonstrating that wearing an apron cannot dim the noble light shining within them. Throughout their adventures, however, they never forget to acknowledge and celebrate their industrial roots.

Each brother proudly fights for the honor of his guild, and each trumpets his particular pride in serving as an apprentice in that guild. While preparing for a skirmish, Eustace wishes for “many good lads, honest Prentices, / From Eastcheape, Canwicke-streete, and London-stone, / To end this battell” (777-9). Here, Heywood likely plays to an audience containing apprentices from these locales, who might frequent a public theater catering to a slightly shabbier crowd, the kind of theater where Heywood’s plays were generally most popular. The brothers’ drive to act as ambassadors for their companies never wavers; after some martial success, Eustace addresses the Grocers’ Arms emblazoned on his shield: “Thou Trade which didst sustain my poverty, / Didst helplesse, helpe me; though I left thee then, / Yet that the world shall see I am not ingrate. . . I will enlarge these Arms, and make their name / The original and life of all my fame” (1697-1702). The noble prentices remain grateful to a guild system that allows them to earn a living despite their downcast circumstances—that rewards individual dedication with financial remuneration.

This just system seems to fall within the particular province of London, where any man can support himself with nothing more than a strong work ethic and his own two hands. Before setting out on the crusade to free Jerusalem, Godfrey extols the virtues of his adoptive city:

I praise that Citty which made Princes Trades-men:  
Where that man, noble or ignoble borne,  
That would not practise some mechanicke skill,

Which might support his state in penury,  
 Should die the death; not suffered like a drone,  
 To suck the hony from the publicke Hive.  
 I hold it no disparage to my birth,  
 Though I be borne an Earle, to have the skill  
 And the full knowledge of the Mercers Trade. (67-75)

Heywood again plays to a crowd full of craftsmen in this somewhat subversive speech, positing not only that high born men should feel no shame at learning a trade, but that every man—no matter his birth—has a public duty to work. The wonder of London is not simply that any man *could* earn a living by entering the guild system, but that every man *should* work to support himself. Failure to do so strains the country, for an individual's state of penury contributes to the penury of the state. Guy further develops this notion of personal accountability operating through industry: "when I have a Trade, / And in my selfe a meanes to purchase wealth, / Though my state waste, and towring honours fall, / That still stayes with mee in the extrem't of all" (86-9). In this model, a learnable trade available to anyone, indiscriminate of birth, remains animate and viable within the breast of an individual despite any social hardship he might endure. In essence, mechanical skill unseats gentle blood as the primary quantifier of individual worth. One would expect the sons of a fallen earl to harp upon the prestige of their heritage, to rely on their nobility to rescue them from their fallen station, and to resent being forced to engage in manual labor. Instead, the audience sees not only that apprentices are capable of fantastic deeds, but that noblemen can come to understand that an individual's drive to succeed trumps any bloodline.

At least, that's how Heywood might sell the play to an audience full of craftsmen. Despite the sheer volume of language the brothers pour forth proclaiming pride in their respective guilds and in serving as apprentices, nothing learned in their training factors into their success in the crusade. Godfrey cuts no silk, and Guy pounds no gold to defeat the infidels occupying Jerusalem. Rather, some innate martial talent bubbles up whenever troops need to be lead to victory. What's more, for a play entitled *The Four Prentices of London*, very little of the action takes place in the capital. True, the noble prentices never suck honey from Britain's public hive, but none of the good they do directly benefits the city that provided them financial and social shelter. There does come a moment, after the shipwreck when Charles washes ashore to find himself surrounded by thieves and outlaws living in the wilderness, when it seems that he attempts to impose on the savages the British guild system that had supported him in hopes of improving their condition. He says: "I'll make these villaines worke in severall Trades, / And in these Forrests make a Common-wealth." For an instant, we feel the leveling power of apprenticeship might take hold, but Charles promptly exposes his true goal: "When them to civill nurture I can bring, / They shall proclaim me of these Mountains King" (551-4). The guild system might enable individuals to develop marketable skills, but it also ensures that they can be ruled by a monarch, probably one with noble blood.<sup>267</sup>

---

<sup>267</sup> While he did not come from noble blood, Deloney's Jack of Newbury employs a similar strategy to occupy his apprentices, as I argue in the previous chapter. This suggests that the guild promotion system favors whomever sits atop it, gentleman and commoner alike.

While *The Four Prentices of London* dramatically renders a fantastic chivalric romance which incorporates into itself the audience who would most appreciate such a play, Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*<sup>268</sup> presents a playful, meta-theatrical send-up of just this kind of bourgeois hero tale. It could be argued that *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has *The Four Prentices of London* squarely in its parodic sights; after all, both plays contain grocers-errant performing rare feats of heroism, and the citizen demanding his own play in *Burning Pestle* directly names *Four Prentices* during his negotiations with the acting troupe. Unlike *Four Prentices*, which depicts four apprentices without any discernable difference between them, *Burning Pestle* presents a pair of apprentices from very different backgrounds, and privileges one as more real. Rafe, the eventual knight of the burning pestle, enters the theater with his grocer master to enjoy the treat of a play. Jasper Merrythought, the son of a declining gentleman, is the lead character in *The London Merchant*, the play scheduled for performance before the citizen clambers on stage, but he is still a closer approximation of an actual London apprentice than any of Heywood's four prentices.

By any standard, Jasper is a near perfect apprentice to Venturewell, his merchant master. He does not suffer from any of the vices to which contemporary apprentices were often shown to fall prey, as epitomized by Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho!*: general laziness, stealing from one's master, overindulging in liquor, or frequenting theaters. Jasper freely professes to Venturewell that he is "Bound by love and duty to your service, / In which my labour hath been all my profit" (I.17-8). Jasper only stumbles by falling in love with Luce, Venturewell's daughter. While (or because) apprentices were contractually obliged to forbear marriage, wedding the master's daughter had become a common fantasy. (As we have seen, Golding marries Touchstone's daughter in *Eastward Ho!*, and the legend has Dick Whittington marrying his master's daughter after achieving financial success. But in both cases, marriage is a reward for virtue and not the apprentice's stated goal.) Venturewell berates Jasper for this transgression, reminding his apprentice that his "charitable love redeemed [him], / Even from the fall of fortune" (I.2-3)—that the privilege of serving an apprenticeship provided salvation from financial failure. Venturewell punishes Jasper by canceling his indenture before he can join the guild and become a freeman. Without a master, Jasper would find himself in violation of the 1572 Statute calling for the arrest of all "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars," and he articulates this specific fear to Luce.

Much as Venturewell misjudges the degree of his apprentice's folly, Jasper's mother also reacts strongly against her eldest son, actually calling him a vagabond for having "run away from thy master that loved thee well" (I.317-8). Still, he is "of the right blood of the Merrythoughts" (I.313), a gentle family suffering financial hardship, but somehow the circuits within this clan have become crossed—nothing is quite how it should be. Master and Mistress Merrythought have the unorthodox agreement that he will provide an inheritance for Jasper, the eldest son, while she will provide an inheritance for Michael, the younger son. Master Merrythought is a spendthrift, and can only provide Jasper with ten shillings; thus Jasper must apprentice himself to Venturewell in hopes of becoming a merchant. Normally, the eldest brother inherits full title and purse-strings, while second sons must make their way in the world through the distasteful

---

<sup>268</sup> Beaumont, Francis. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Ed. Sheldon Zitner. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

practice of apprenticeship. Mistress Merrythought, however, has saved well over a thousand pounds to pass onto her favorite Michael, so he can live in comfort while his older brother learns a trade. This is particularly strange because Master Merrythought has not only spent all of Jasper's inheritance, but most of his own wealth as well. Mistress Merrythought upbraids him: "Thou art an old man, and thou canst not work, and thou hast not forty shillings left, and thou eatest good meat and drinkest good drink and laughest?" (I.360-3). Master Merrythought sees no reason to curb his affluent lifestyle, because he believes it exists almost independent of him. Whenever he sits down at the table, good food is there; whenever his clothes wear out, the tailor brings him a new suit, and, he says, "without question it will ever be so" (I.371). Master Merrythought is over-invested in a social system that entitles him as a gentleman, and cannot believe that anything could ever detract from his social position. If *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* enacts an upper class anxiety that the lower sorts were beginning to encroach into privileged arenas, such as private theaters, then Jasper's greatest victory—above reconciling with Venturewell or winning Luce's hand in marriage—lies in tricking his master into financially supporting his profligate father. Thus, the apprentice of *The London Merchant* forces the merchant class to subsidize the failing gentry, of which he is a member, ensuring that the skeleton of the social order remains intact. He cannot do this, however, without some help from the apprentice in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the purportedly "real" apprentice sitting in the audience.

While Master Merrythought has too much faith in a social system that sustains his pleasantly indulgent lifestyle, Rafe seems to place all his faith in serving a master and mistress who might one day lead him to financial independence and greater social prestige. Rafe is a foundling, and thus must look to apprenticeship as his only means of carving out a life for himself. While orphans were placed in indentures as means of support, the chance of landing an apprenticeship with one of London's great companies was probably nearly nonexistent, underscoring how fantastic even the world of the broken fourth wall is in this play. Still, as a grocer's prentice, Rafe would expect one day to be a grocer himself. The only problem is that he is so entirely invested in this system of training and reward that he is susceptible to the chivalric fantasies presented in Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* and extends them into the world of his own play, which is offered as a response to *The London Merchant*. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is perhaps the best example of how playwrights, recognizing that apprenticeship was represented in the larger culture as a state of mind grounded in imitation, reconfigure as a realm of imagination based explicitly on performance. Believing himself to be the Knight of the Burning Pestle, Rafe rings up a twelve shilling tab at the Bell Inn, under the impression that it is not a contemporary place of business, but an ancient castle providing respite to weary wandering knights. When the innkeeper demands payment, Rafe—having no money, as apprentices received no pay for their labor—offers instead to take on any of the innkeeper's squires and train them eventually to "receive from my heroic hand / A knighthood, by virtue of this pestle" (III.iii.170-1). The romantic world can always use another knight, but the innkeeper and Rafe himself do not truly exist in that world; the bill requires real payment and Rafe finds no guarantee of advancement.

When, at the beginning of *Burning Pestle*, the citizen demands his own play featuring a grocer doing rare things, the prologue politely tells him that "everyone hath a part already" (Induction 57-8). Every role is filled, and an entirely new fictional space



must be created for Rafe to find a place. Only in this doubly fictional romantic world can Rafe find a post and become a full-fledged grocer. No one ever forgets that he is really just an apprentice, though, and a boy representing the acting company voices his concern when Rafe woos Pompiona, daughter of the king of Moldavia: “it will show ill-favouredly to have a grocer’s prentice to court a king’s daughter” (I.iv.46-7). But the craftsman’s rallying cry in *The Four Prentices of London* has succeeded with the Citizen, who points out that a prentice marries a princess in Heywood’s play, as if Godfrey and Rafe were fungible dramatic entities. The Citizen fails to realize that Guy can only marry the French king’s daughter because of his noble birth, not because he is a dedicated but ultimately lowly apprentice like Rafe.

Jasper and Rafe cross paths only twice. Mistress Merrythought, eager for Michael to behold his future bounty away from Jasper’s prying eyes, brings her younger son into the woods to show him the casket full of riches she has procured for his inheritance. Unfortunately, these are the same woods that Rafe haunts as a knight searching for helpless damsels in need of aid. Mistress Merrythought and Michael see Rafe lurking, flee in fear, and abandon the rich casket. Rafe chases after the “lady flying the embrace of some uncourteous knight” and her “squire”, leaving the casket for Jasper to find when he comes onstage. Later on, the casket will play an integral role in Jasper winning Luce and duping Venturewell in *The London Merchant*, which follows a reasonably conventional city comedy plot: Jasper employs a coffin trick very similar to that found in Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.

Thus, the fact that Rafe so dutifully follows his master’s orders (in this case, to act as a knight in a chivalric romance) ensures that Jasper can solidify the gentle status of his family. Because the ‘real’ prentice believes so thoroughly in apprenticeship as a means to advancement, the fictional prentice can force a merchant to sponsor gentry. One highly conventional literary genre enables another, and Rafe functions as a corrective allowing the upper class to repress the rising merchant class to which he aspires. The only occasion when the two prentices actually meet ends in violence. The citizen, naturally unhappy with an upstart prentice daring to love his master’s daughter, demands Rafe thrash Jasper, but Jasper gets the better of him. While he pummels Rafe, Jasper recites trite prose parodying the matter and manner of romance. As Rafe is literally beaten down by his best model for apprentice prosperity, Jasper hammers home that Rafe’s current realization of service and achievement is utterly artificial, particularly literarily artificial. Ultimately, while seeming to validate apprentice pride and confirm faith in the opportunities engendered by an indenture, it appears that *The Four Prentices of London* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* suggest an apprentice’s greatest hope for finding success might just be in the world of a play.

### III. *To play the coward with thy indenture:* Service, Identity, and Imitation in the Henriad

In the first two plays of Shakespeare’s Henriad, *Richard II* and *I Henry IV*, Bolingbroke and Hal utilize a rhetoric of apprenticeship to hold out the ideal that, even at the level of kings, a man achieves greatness, not because of his bloodline, but through his own will to succeed. In *Richard II*,<sup>269</sup> Bolingbroke, a descendent of Edward III, adopts

<sup>269</sup> Shakespeare, William. *King Richard II*. Ed. Charles R. Forker. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002.

the position of an apprentice who has justly broken his indenture and appeals to the commons in order to earn the throne. In *1 Henry IV*,<sup>270</sup> his son too acts like a rogue prentice and cavorts with apprentices in a premeditated play to contour the reception of his inevitable call to glory. Hal will not rely on the rules of inheritance to earn the throne, but forges his own course to convince others that he is fit to rule. Rather than his bloodline validating his actions, Hal's actions validate his bloodline, placing him firmly in control of his destiny, his subjects, and the theater audience. The fact that those high on the social ladder can ascend still higher by imitating apprentices inversely corroborates the fantasy that any apprentice can make his own way up the ladder by imitating his master. By the end of the tetralogy, however, Shakespeare makes it clear that it does not ultimately matter if Hal earnestly embraces the workaday mantle of an apprentice or not: what is important is that he is an unparalleled master of bending that potential perception to his political advantage.

Early in *Richard II*, Richard complains to his toadies of the upstart Bolingbroke “wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles / And patient underbearing of his fortune” (I.iv.28-9). That is, Bolingbroke fashions himself into a figure amenable to the tastes of the working class.<sup>271</sup> While we never actually see Bolingbroke doff “his bonnet to an oyster-wench” or give “a brace of draymen” “the tribute of his supple knee” (I.iv.31-3), Richard accurately pairs Bolingbroke's craft of smiles with the “patient underbearing of his fortune”—the six-year exile from Britain—as Bolingbroke himself has already associated his punishment with craftsmen. Complaining to his father about the king's sentence, Bolingbroke asks:

Must I not serve a long apprenticeship  
To foreign passages, and in the end,  
Having my freedom, boast of nothing else  
But that I was a journeyman to Grief?           (I.iii.271-4)

He gets the timeline slightly wrong—one becomes a journeyman after completing an apprenticeship and attaining the freedom—but this is still a striking metaphor from someone with royal bloodlines. Bolingbroke rhetorically strips himself of his earldom, lowering himself to the ranks of the commons who will later help him to the throne, and endears himself to audience members who themselves labored through apprenticeships. However, Bolingbroke returns to Britain before finishing his sentence, effectively breaking his rhetorical indenture and becoming a rogue prentice. Rather than being arrested for this transgression, Bolingbroke proves that an individual can work hard and achieve success to the betterment of his country.

Imbued with the divine right of kings, Richard believes he possesses some inherent quality, derived from his lineage, which entitles him to the throne, even if he abuses the power of the position: “Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the

---

<sup>270</sup> Shakespeare, William. *King Henry IV Part I*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002.

<sup>271</sup> Recall that the historical Bolingbroke appointed Dick Whittington along with two other Londoners to his council as a signal of recognition to citizens for the role they played in his usurpation of Richard (see Introduction).

balm off from an anointed king; / The breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord” (III.ii.54-7). As a strategy to wrestle the crown away from Richard, Bolingbroke adopts the position that, while Richard has squandered the opportunity to rule through largess, he has earned the right to be king through desire and effort. He tells Richard that his “true service shall deserve your love,” and Richard angrily retorts that “they well deserve to have / That know the strong’st and surest way to get!” (III.iii.199-201). The strongest and surest way for Bolingbroke to get the crown is to woo craftsmen with the craft of smiles and rhetorically fashion himself as a suffering apprentice. Like Jack of Newbury earning a great fortune or Simon Eyre being elected Lord Mayor, Bolingbroke wills himself to success, fulfilling his personal potential and earning his just deserts by leveraging the system of apprenticeship.

In next play of the tetralogy, Bolingbroke’s son also adopts the role of rogue apprentice, but in a very different context. When we meet Hal in *1 Henry IV*, our introduction to the madcap prince includes friendly banter with Falstaff and details of the practical joke to be carried out at Gad’s Hill with Poins. Hal is not here the brutish thug of the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, but a playful and witty compatriot. As Stephen Greenblatt notes, “When in *1 Henry IV* Hal boasts of his mastery of tavern slang, we are allowed for a moment at least to imagine that we are witnessing a social bond, the human fellowship of the extremest top and bottom of society in a homely ritual act of drinking together.”<sup>272</sup> The audience is only allowed to imagine this for a moment because, at the end of the scene, Hal surprisingly reveals via soliloquy that he only engages in such raucous antics now in order to render his eventual emergence as king all the more impressive. Hal claims that he will “so offend, to make offence a skill” (I.ii.211), defining his ploy as a kind of craft that can be honed through practice in the manner of apprenticeship, even if that craft involves heavy drinking or highway robbery. Joel B. Altman observes that Hal’s goal here is “to defeat the very understandings he has deliberately shaped, to disvalue common experience and the concept of likelihood that is its child, and therefore to challenge the signifying power of history itself.”<sup>273</sup>

For the king, however, the predictive power of history remains intact, and he is concerned about his son’s indiscretions. Henry cannot understand what he presciently calls his son’s “affections, which do hold a wing / Quite from the flight of all thy ancestors” (III.ii.30-1). Hal refuses to imitate the model of his father the king, the predecessor whom he will one day replace, instead ditching his responsibilities to drink at a tavern with other louts and find trouble. In other words, Hal appears to be the very definition of a rebellious apprentice. The king, concerned that the prince tarnishes his image by constantly associating with vulgar company, warns Hal against Richard’s fate of “being daily swallowed by men’s eyes,” which lead them to be “surfeited with honey” and “loathe the taste of sweetness” (III.ii.70-2). Henry goes so far as to compare the presumptuous Hotspur to Hal now as he was to Richard then, claiming that “he [Hotspur] hath more worthy interest to the state / Than thou [Hal] the shadow of succession” (III.ii.98-9). Henry’s assessment of Hal and Hotspur recapitulates the conflict enacted in *Richard II*, when Henry as Bolingbroke takes the crown from Richard. Peter Womack

<sup>272</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. p. 49.

<sup>273</sup> Altman, Joel B. “‘Vile Participation’: The Amplification of Violence in the Theater of Henry V.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 1991): 1-32. p. 6.

explains: “Henry IV is clearly a usurper, responsible for the death of the rightful king. On the other hand, the plays’ stress on his care of government accords him a *de facto* sovereignty.”<sup>274</sup> If Hal refuses to reform, then Hotspur’s will to make himself king will trump Hal’s claim to inherit the throne, just as Bolingbroke’s will to govern justly overtook Richard’s right to rule by lineal succession.

When Hal reveals to the audience that he will so offend to make offense a skill, however, he reveals his fellowship with the common man to be an artificial foil against which to set off his future glory, which leaves us suspicious of his interactions with the denizens of Eastcheap. Such suspicions prove most founded in Hal’s gulling of Francis, the drawer’s apprentice. Greenblatt notes that “it is tempting to think of this particular moment—the prince awakening the apprentice’s discontent—as linked darkly with some supposed uneasiness in Hal about his own apprenticeship.”<sup>275</sup> Indeed, Hal appears to instantiate the idea of a rebellious apprentice, but it is only for show.

Just after Hal invokes the spirit of apprentice community by claiming to “have sounded the very base-string of humility” as a “sworn brother to a leash of drawers” who can “drink with any tinker in his own language,” he ridicules his brother and defames such language, rendering Francis’s “eloquence the parcel of a reckoning” (II.iv.5-7, 18-9, 98-9). Not even Poins, Hal’s partner in crime, understands the point of the joke, asking the prince: “what cunning match have you made with this jest of the drawer: come, what’s the issue?” (II.iv.87-9). This question confirms the audience’s likely reaction to the Francis episode—that Hal’s prank represents a gratuitous and mean-spirited attack on an unsuspecting supporter. Greenblatt argues, “The Prince must sound the base-string of humility if he is to play all of the chords and hence be the master of the instrument, and his ability to conceal his motives and render opaque his language offers assurance that he himself will not be played on by another.”<sup>276</sup> While we may be reassured that Hal will not be manipulated by anyone, his performance as an apprentice turns sour.

By reducing Francis to his vocational call, “Anon,” Hal finds no counterpoint to the base string of humility he has sounded; he mocks it. What’s more, he uses the necessary condition of the exchange to provide the material for the attack. Francis can only demonstrate admiration for Hal—happily sneaking him sugar for his sack—because the prince shirks his responsibilities, frequents the tavern, and fraternizes with apprentices. Hal occupies Francis, disallowing him from fulfilling his duty to respond to Poins’s calls, by questioning his will to complete his indenture. After exclaiming that five further years of training as a drawer seems a “long lease,” Hal asks Francis if he “be so valiant as to play the coward with [his] indenture, and show it a fair pair of heels, and run from it” (II.iv.46-8). Hal has shown his own indenture a pair of heels, and they brought him to Eastcheap. The audience empathizes with Francis here because he idolizes Hal for the same reason we want to—that the future king of England would rub shoulders with the hoi polloi. Despite the fact that Francis remains loyal to him, Hal’s performance as a playful rogue apprentice is tainted.

---

<sup>274</sup> Womack, Peter. “Henry IV and Epic Theatre.” *Henry IV Parts One and Two*. Ed. Nigel Wood. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1995. 126-61. p. 144.

<sup>275</sup> Greenblatt p. 44.

<sup>276</sup> Greenblatt p. 45.

After the victory at Shrewsbury, imitating an apprentice has lost its shine. In *2 Henry IV*,<sup>277</sup> once again Hal and Poins plan a practical joke in Eastcheap, and must determine how to approach Falstaff without his recognizing them. Poins suggests dressing in aprons and posing as drawers, to which Hal jovially responds: “From a prince to a prentice? A low transformation!” (II.ii.165-6). Falling from prince to prentice, even in jest, is of course a low transformation, but a similar transformation helped Hal’s father to the crown, and Hal himself capitalizes on his imitation of an apprentice. The plan fails, as Falstaff recognizes Hal immediately, seeing through the fabricated apprentice persona to the true prince beneath. At this juncture, pretending at being an apprentice provides Hal no advantage, so he must look to a different behavioral model.

In the short scene immediately following Hal’s plans to dress as a drawer, Northumberland’s wife and daughter-in-law implore him not to charge into battle against the king with other rebels. Lady Percy invokes the spirit of her deceased husband, Hotspur, himself killed attempting to overthrow the crown:

He was indeed the glass  
Wherein the noble youth did dress themselves.  
He had no legs that practiced not his gait;  
And speaking thick, which nature made his blemish,  
Became the accents of the valiant,  
...  
He was the mark and glass, copy and book,  
That fashioned others. (II.iii.21-5, 31-2)

A frequent playgoer in Early Modern London would know that the figure of Hotspur, unrelentingly earnest and overzealous—himself an adaptation of a Marlovian model characterized by powerful if overblown rhetoric—did provide the glass by which some young men fashioned themselves, but not the noble youth. As we have seen, in many contemporary plays, young men, often apprentices, replicate Hotspur-like language, and it inevitably marks them as crude or immoral. While watching noblemen represent themselves as prentices may please a citizen audience, watching apprentices or other low characters quote the lines of magisterial figures signals to the audience that they are buffoonish or dangerous. However, Hal, who has positioned himself as both nobleman and apprentice, can move freely between worlds, tapping whichever mode of rhetoric best suits his goals.

Upon reaching *Henry V*, he has clearly mastered this strategy. When speaking with the French ambassador early in the play, Hal can guiltlessly claim, “I have laid by my majesty / And plodded like a man for working days, / But I will rise there with so full glory / That I will dazzle all the eyes of France” (I.ii.277-80). Two acts later, on the other hand, before the gates of Harfleur, he unleashes a Marlovian speech beyond anything Hotspur could have conjured, fashioning himself into an English Tamburlaine. After declaring, “I am a soldier, / A name that in my thoughts becomes me best” (III.iii.5-6)—a nod to the fact that he can shape his identity as he chooses through his language—Hal explains to the city governor that this “fleshed soldier” will mow “like grass / Your fresh fair virgins and your flow’ring infants” (III.iii.13-4). Once the attack has begun, his

<sup>277</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Henry IV Part II*. Ed. Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

authority as king might prove powerless over his bloodthirsty troops: “We may bootless spend our vain command / Upon th’ enraged soldiers in their spoil” (III.iii.24-5), and the governor will find that English soldiers have:

defile[d] the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;  
Your fathers taken by their silver beards,  
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;  
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes... (III.iii.35-8)

It seems impossible that this extremely cruel and violent rhetoric could come from the king who “plodded like a man for working days” who we first encountered plotting a practical joke with his friends.

Hal’s absolute mutability, and his apparent freedom from any concrete sense of morality, is hammered home a few scenes later, when he visits his soldiers in the evening disguised as one of them, providing “a little touch of Harry in the night” (IV.cho.47) to bolster morale. One of the troops reasons that, if the king leads his men into battle for ignoble reasons, he would have a “heavy reckoning” (IV.i.132) to pay for causing their blood to be spilled for insufficient cause, because they cannot refuse his command (without breaking the bond of being a loyal subject). In response, Hal asserts that “every subject’s duty is the king’s, but every subject’s soul is his own,” (IV.i.172-3), effectively shifting blame away from himself to individual soldiers for any evil acts they may commit in the name of war. Of course, this skirts the issue of whether or not the war itself is evil and focuses on easily recognizable crimes. An army, Hal claims, cannot be composed “with all unspotted soldiers. Some peradventure have on them the guilt of premeditated and contrived murder; some, of beguiling virgins with the broken seals of perjury; some, making the wars their bulwark, that have before gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery” (IV.i.157-62). It is debatable if a leader is in some way responsible for the crimes his soldiers commit in war because he can no longer control them; it is clear, however, that Hal is perfectly willing to bend the potential for his soldiers to commit such crimes to his advantage. At the gates of Harfleur, he threatens the governor with just such a loss of control, where his interdictions will prove bootless as his soldiers rape, pillage, and murder. Despite his order in a subsequent scene that no French are to be harmed or robbed, an order that he admits is designed to mold an impression, surely his leveraging the possibility of such violence lays some of the blame at Hal’s feet. He tries to have it both ways: an individual soldier’s crime spots only that subject’s soul and not the king’s, but the king can capitalize on that crime to win military victories without blemish.

Nevertheless, that is precisely Hal’s position, and he compellingly sells it to the soldiers under his command. He can do this because he is so proficient in the vernacular of the common man, a skill acquired at the Boar’s Head tavern where he caroused with drawers—as well as belittled Francis, the drawer’s apprentice—and learned to “drink with any tinker in his own language” (*IH4* II.iv.18). At the Boar’s Head, Hal shared himself with commoners and they loved him for it, but he also learned how to speak like and to them in order to get his way, all while preserving his innate royalty. In the camp near Agincourt, Hal again congregates with common men, employing the language he learned before, but they cannot love him for his royal status, because they do not

recognize him as their king. The “touch of Harry in the night” is not so much for the soldiers, for he is not Harry to them, but for the audience, who see a king happily deigning to walk among those well beneath him. He visits them to provide inspiration, but not the inspiration of a king. Instead, he offers them arguments as a peer, bolstering their will to carry out his orders by pretending to be one of them who believes, not only that those orders are just, but that each lowly soldier is responsible for the condition of his own soul and will to fight.

This represents a dark extension of the promise advanced by the apprenticeship system, where individuals have the power within themselves to create their own station, and their masters are not responsible for their failing. In fact, Hal cites close analogues to apprentices in his defense of the king’s innocence in the face of soldiers’ actions. In response to the argument that, “if these men [soldiers] do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it” (IV.i.140-1), Hal offers two counterexamples:

So, if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him; or if a servant, under his master’s command transporting a sum of money, be assailed by robbers and die in many irreconciled iniquities, you may call the business of the master the author of the servant’s damnation. But this is not so. The king is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of his son, nor the master of his servant; for they purpose not their deaths when they purpose their services. (IV.i.144-55)

A son transporting merchandise for his father and a servant transporting money for his master both constitute jobs often carried out by apprentices, as apprentices fell somewhere on a spectrum between son and servant. While Hal’s argument may be technically valid, in that a king does not actively seek out the death of his soldiers when sending them to war, it is far from true. While the father and master in Hal’s example have no reason to expect that the son or servant will die in the performance of their assigned duties, a king sending soldiers to war must anticipate that some will be killed in battle even if he does not intend for them to be killed. Thus, Hal, dressed as a common soldier, employing the language of a common soldier, makes the argument to real common soldiers that they are responsible for themselves—that it is not his fault if they die in a fight whose motivation they appear to be questioning—all in an effort to ensure they perform at full capacity in carrying out his orders as king. He pretends to be one of them to lie to them about their own responsibility and authority to persuade them to do what he wants.

This is the fruit of Hal’s efforts: he can wear any hat necessary to make the best possible case to persuade his listeners. In perhaps his greatest motivational speech just before the battle at Agincourt, he once again paints a very pretty bald faced lie. Staring down sixty thousand fresh French soldiers, outnumbered five to one, Westmoreland rightfully wishes for “but one ten thousand of those men in England / That do no work today” (IV.iii.18-9) in observation of the Feast of Saint Crispin. In response, Hal argues that “the fewer men” who fight on England’s side, “the greater [the] share of honor” (IV.iii.23), for those brave Englishmen who will eventually prove triumphant. Thus, Hal

wants his perilously overmatched English soldiers to “wish not one man more” (IV.iii.24) come to their aid, and he offers to pay for any soldier who lacks the stomach for such a one sided fight to return to England. He eventually distills his argument into that most famous appositive: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers” (IV.iii.61).

Hal builds the scaffolding to support this preposterous claim on Westmoreland’s observation that great numbers of men at home in England were taking the day off work because it was St. Crispin’s Day. He claims that, after the British win their inevitable victory, all those who survive will show their scars each year on St. Crispin’s Day, reminding their neighbors of the honor won in battle, and fathers will tell their sons the names of the great men who fought at Agincourt. Those men who today observe the holiday will wish they could have fought, “and gentlemen in England now abed / Shall think themselves accursed they were not here” (IV.iii.65-6). While Shakespeare did not invent the idea that the battle at Agincourt took place on St. Crispin’s Day—it is reported thus in Holinshead—he does capitalize on the meaning that day held for an audience at the close of the sixteenth century. St. Crispin was the patron saint of shoemakers. As we have seen, Thomas Deloney’s account of the brothers Crispin and Crispianus in his popular *The Gentle Craft Part I* appeared in print contemporaneous to the performance and publication of *Henry V*. In Deloney’s telling, the brothers become shoemaker’s apprentices after their father, the king, is murdered and they must hide their identities. The moral of the story is twofold: one, that shoemaking—and by extension, all trades—can provide a living for a man of any background provided he puts in the requisite effort to learn the mysteries of the craft; and two, that the craft of shoemaking is fit even for royalty (or at least gentlemen), and that there is no shame in working as a shoemaker because ‘a shoemaker’s son is a prince born.’

Deloney’s story of Crispin and Crispianus inspires its readers by demonstrating how skilled labor can have a democratizing effect, evening the playing field through apprenticeship for anyone to earn a living via individual effort and hard work. Moreover, working as a shoemaker actually has something of an ennobling effect, even if it does result from little more than wishful thinking, where shoemakers can take pride in the idea that their sons are born princes, albeit fictional ones. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare has Hal hijack this story, complicate it, and turn it on its head to serve his own inspirational needs. At Agincourt, those in England taking the day off in honor of St. Crispin are *gentlemen*, while the working men are present with the king to fight his chivalric war. Those who survive this day will, during future celebrations of St. Crispin, feast his neighbor, roll up his sleeves and show the scars earned in France, reminding those who celebrate their craft of the honor they achieved together. Moreover, they will have gentled their condition, fulfilling *in history* the fantasies of those apprentices who aspire to chivalric honors through labor while gentlemen of blood will be shamed for their truancy. In a brilliant rhetorical tour de force, Hal thus actualizes the apprentice-journeyman that has echoed through the second tetralogy since *Richard II*.

Of course, only the audience, with the perfect vision of history, knows that the English victory at Agincourt is inevitable, which helps explain why Hal’s speech proves so stirring. For the characters within the play, the central premise of the rallying cry—that the English army outnumbered five to one by a well-rested French battalion should not wish a single available soldier more join their side—remains highly questionable. Nevertheless, the sheer rhetorical force of the speech wins them over, and they go on to



win a stunning victory. As Altman points out, Shakespeare creates a metatheatrical effect when Hal builds his speech around Westmoreland's distinction between the soldiers facing long odds and "those men in England / That do no work today," "distinguishing them, that is to say, from those who are joined together within this wooden O finding profit and pleasure in shows of war."<sup>278</sup> The audience watching the play does no work today and thus cannot partake in the honor of battle. Hal shames the audience for their leisure at watching a play, and redirects that shame, marshalling it to the cause of motivating his beleaguered and outmanned troops. In that moment, Hal joins the energy of the audience to his attempt to manipulate his men, creating all the more powerful a dramatic effect for both.

Only Hal demonstrates the skill and ability to engage in whatever rhetoric proves necessary to achieve his goal, and through that rhetoric he makes it clear that he is the rightful king. He and he alone can learn to accomplish this. By absorbing the language of all those he encounters, from Falstaff to Hotspur, Hal learns how to act the part that best serves his goal. In another of his best known motivational speeches—when he orders his men "once more unto the breach" (III.i.1) into the wall of Harfleur—Hal shares this knowledge, telling his men to "imitate the action of the tiger" (III.i.6) by "set[ting] the teeth and stretch[ing] the nostril wide," as well as "hold[ing] hard the breath and bend[ing] up every spirit / To his full height" (III.i.15-7). Could not the play's director give the same instructions? When Hal tries to win Katherine's heart in the final scene, but she protests that she cannot sufficiently understand his English, he casts himself as a simple soldier and affirms, "my wooing is fit for thy understanding" (V.ii.124). While this may ostensibly mean that Hal's words are suitable to a woman of Katherine's vocabulary, this statement also speaks to Hal's strategy in all of his interactions. He fits his wooing to the understanding of his audience, calibrating it to achieve his desires. Even the most skeptical spectator encountering the "band of brothers" speech—armed with the belief that Hal is doing little more here than manipulating his lieutenants and their men, rallying them to charge into almost certain death—cannot help but understand how his eloquence moves them. Greenblatt notes that "the enhancement of royal power is not only a matter of the deferral of doubt: the very doubts that Shakespeare raises serve not to rob the king of his charisma but to heighten it, precisely as they heighten theatrical interest in the play." He concludes: "The audience's tension, then, enhances its attention; prodded by constant reminders of a gap between real and ideal, the spectators are induced to make up the difference, to invest in the illusion of magnificence, to be dazzled by their own imaginary identification with the conqueror."<sup>279</sup> Of course, the audience's identification with the king, the seeds of which were planted back in Eastcheap, can only be imaginary. Only Hal can cheerily conflate French villages with the French princess, and make the latter blush as he seizes all. Hal does learn and work to achieve what he deserves, but he cultivates ability native only to himself, taking advantage of opportunity available only to him. He fulfills the ideal of apprenticeship—building himself up into the man he wants to be—but does so by exhibiting another central tenet of apprenticeship, universality, while capitalizing on exclusivity.

---

<sup>278</sup> Altman p. 14. He argues that this shaming of the audience is in the service of raising their desire to join the Queen's forces in Ireland and acquire their own contemporary honors.

<sup>279</sup> Greenblatt p. 63.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored anxieties concerning how the process of serving an apprenticeship might impact those of gentle stock, and how authors deployed those expected anxieties for dramatic effect. In addition, I trace how the idea of performance in terms of apprenticeship is explored in the plays considered. For the gentle-born apprentices of *Eastward Ho!*, serving an indenture is a curse for one and a boon for the other, though in the end both demonstrate that they can act in a fashion that tricks their master into serving their interests. In *The City Madam*, the audience is duped, in that it has no way of knowing that one noble apprentice is good and the other bad from the beginning of the play, because they are both able to act the part of a loyal apprentice effectively. The royal apprentices of *The Four Prentices of London* may provide inspiration for apprentice playgoers, but combining apprentice glory with chivalric romance could set up unreasonable expectations. Such expectations are explored in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, where a lowborn grocer's apprentice lets fiction bleed into his reality, while a gentle born apprentice achieves success. Finally, in Shakespeare's *Henriad*, we see Bolingbroke adopt the position of a rogue apprentice in his successful attempt to usurp the crown via a strategy of earning his place as ruler. Hal also ensure that it is clear he earned his position as king, but does so by exploiting (perhaps abusing) the idea at the core of apprenticeship: that every man has the ability, opportunity, and responsibility to cultivate his innate talent and transform it into real success.

## DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

As we have just seen, Shakespeare positions Hal, a dramatic character recognized as a consummate actor in his own right, performing kingship as an evolution from his early performance of apprenticeship. Critics have long recognized Hal's unparalleled skill at performing to his audience in order to evoke the response he desires, but little attention has been paid to the fact that Hal learns how to perform as a king by first following the well-trodden script of a rebellious apprentice, or the fact that his father also rhetorically cast himself as an apprentice in his journey to the throne. Why would Shakespeare link the nation's highest and most solitary authority with an experience shared by a majority of men in early modern London? Over the course of my dissertation, I have demonstrated how apprenticeship, a model of authority based upon imitation, became so ingrained in popular culture that a playwright working in popular theater—a site where varied demographics took pleasure in imitation—representing a king building his authority on performance would cite apprenticeship as an analogous model. While it may seem strange on its face, my work reveals the underlying sensibility Shakespeare employs in representing how one in power can leverage the problems posed by apprenticeship through performance when Hal learns to expand his stage to his country as a kind of “apprentice king.”

This project began as an attempt to resolve a paradox about the representation of apprentices in early modern London: How could it be, in a city where the majority of men had themselves served apprenticeship indentures lasting for a significant period of their lives, that apprentices came to be understood as a wild and menacing underclass that posed an often violent threat to the capital's physical and socioeconomic security? How could apprentices simultaneously be conceived of as industrial trainees under the direct supervision of an established master—the very definition of an apprentice—and as rebellious renegades always teetering on the edge of falling in with an insurgent subculture? As I learned, the theater played an integral role in shaping the idea of apprentices and apprenticeship in the period, just as apprentices significantly contributed to the concept of the institution of the theater. For better or worse, though usually worse, apprentices were considered a core playgoing demographic, a union that reinforced stereotypes about both apprentices and playhouses. To the extent that theaters were bad for society, they exerted their pernicious influence by drawing impressionable apprentices away from earnest labor. To the extent that apprentices were rebels, they exhibited it by congregating and intermixing with other mutinous elements at theaters. That playhouses provided an alleged staging ground for apprentices to launch destructive riots fueled anxiety about apprentices in general, and that anxiety helped transfigure apprentices from simple workers into a looming menace. A dangerous synergy thus developed.

Enforcing a national system of mandatory apprenticeship began as a camouflaged tool of social control to manage rising levels of poverty, vagrancy, and attendant public discontent. While intended to solve these problems, apprenticeship served instead as a temporary palliative, eventually aggravating preexisting problems and engendering new ones. Rather than being a potential destination for poor vagrants, London became an epicenter, as failed apprentices and stymied journeymen choked the streets. At the other end of the spectrum, because apprenticeship promised to elevate the social station of

some young men, and because some less fortunate gentlemen were forced to serve indentures, the widespread implementation of apprenticeship promised or threatened to blur class demarcations and expand access to the increasingly distinct middling sort. Apprentices as a group, then, were seen as permanently interstitial figures, not only because they were trainees in between ignorance of a trade and professionalism, but because they had one foot on the path back toward vagrancy and the other on the steps up the social scale. My first chapter explores how the national system of mandatory apprenticeship, codified in the 1563 Statute of Artificers, worked as an amalgamating force, collecting masterless men into a more definitive group with a firmer geographic, social, and industrial identity, and it explains why that group was stigmatized as a contumacious subculture.

While apprentices may have been a more conceptually unified class to fear than vagrants, they remained an amorously ubiquitous threat. That threat was instantiated, however, at theaters, where diffuse concern over potential apprentice misbehavior was allegedly reified into actual mobs of violent apprentices. As my research demonstrates, there is little data to suggest that apprentices *qua* apprentices participated in the riots originating at theaters—the livery companies themselves register no concern after the most salient apprentice theater riot, that of Shrove Tuesday 1617—but there is ample evidence that there was a societal proclivity to imagine that riots found their engines in apprentices at playhouses. Why should the fantasy of the riotous playgoing apprentice have proved so durable, despite the lack of evidence to support it, as to have persevered even into current conceptions of early modern London theater audiences? In other words, why did society need to distill the vague notion of apprentices as a general threat into the specific scene of apprentices rioting at the theater? I argue not only that theaters provided an established social space in which apprentices could be imagined into a riotous collective, but also that the culture at large had to imagine apprentices at the theater because theater and apprenticeship share a common operative mode, the logic of imitation. One could imagine apprentices at the theater because the theater provided the location where the logic of imitation underlying apprenticeship—an apprentice imitates his master until he becomes one himself—is most powerfully expressed and potentially subverted as *mere* performance.

The concept of performance in relation to apprenticeship is overdetermined, in that authors could write fiction that celebrates the nature of imitation in the master-servant relationship and also exposes the space wherein imitation opens the potential for false performance. Once an awareness emerged that false performance, by both apprentice and master, could be strategically deployed to subvert the normal functioning of the system while appearing to maintain the (largely imaginary) status quo, fascinating filiations develop about what it means to perform one's duties as a craftsman. The germ of this potential for false performance in the relationship between master and apprentice can be found even beyond the precincts of the theater—in the imaginative literature at the close of the sixteenth century, and it provides the basis for my third chapter, which examines relevant works by Thomas Deloney, which then recirculate in the drama of Thomas Dekker.

Deloney's place in literary history is that of the craftsman-as-author, known for writing stories of famously successful artisans, and he provides the best example for this summary. Critics characterize Deloney's immensely popular *Jack of Newbury* as a tale

providing an exemplary figure for readers to imitate, but my work undermines that simplistic reading. Jack first appears as a near perfect apprentice, hardworking and loyal to his master. He achieves his eventual fantastic success, however, not because he is promoted due to his talent and effort, but because a wealthy widow fancies those same qualities and marries him. Although he did not merely perform the role of dutiful apprentice to rise to his new position, when Jack becomes a master he acts in a fashion that reinforces the bond between good behavior and prosperity for his own apprentices, thus ensuring that they work hard to his direct profit. That is, a master could enthusiastically perform as if the guild promotion system worked just as advertised to apprentices, which motivates his own apprentices, when in fact emulating their master's performance provides no guarantee of commensurate achievement. Deloney subtly critiques the idea of apprenticeship as social control by underscoring the fact that it can only prove effective when apprentices exhibit faith that their dramatic imaginations can influence the real world—that by imitating their masters they can become them—while the potential for false performance on the part of the master is precisely what cultivates that faith.

Thomas Dekker underscores this trap in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, adapted from Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, inserting the extra-theatrical critique of performativity in the master-apprentice relationship back into the appropriate context of the playhouse. In Deloney's prose work, Simon Eyre dresses up as an alderman to falsify a line of credit in order to enable a deal. Dekker retains a version of this scene in his play, but his Simon Eyre actually has the credit necessary to secure the deal, but dons the alderman costume nonetheless. The scene is a spectacular vestige that in fact undermines the spirit of the original. Whereas Deloney's Eyre shortcircuits a guild system that promises promotion by means of imitation, Dekker's Eyre presents to his own employees and the audience the idea that he simply becomes what he always already was, the rich alderman's robes an adumbration of an identity inevitably realized. Dekker's Eyre does not act like an alderman to become one, he simply is an alderman in gestation, and his men believe they too can live to be aldermen if they labor patiently for him.

Abusing the potential of performed authority is not only the province of masters, however. As I argue in my final chapter, playwrights depict apprentices exploiting the ability merely to appear as if they imitate their masters when their true motivations actually run counter to their performance. Alternately, apprentices can have such fervent faith in the authority of imitative apprenticeship system that they prematurely adopt the theatrical tastes of the merchant class they hope to join via imitation, only such adoption actually works against their industrial interests. Ultimately, this examination of apprenticeship as a nexus of authority, imitation, and theater leads us to the character of Hal. As I have demonstrated, apprenticeship is not a marginal enterprise that happens to be collected and theorized in the theater, but fundamental to the manner in which culture imagines and creates authority.

Just as the theater is more than the sum of its parts vis-à-vis early modern culture, so is apprenticeship. For Hal, the performance of kingship emerges from his performance of apprenticeship and the theater in which that performance occurs expands to encompass the nation, for a king's theater is his nation. While it may have originated as such, the national system of apprenticeship in early modern England was not simply an instrument of social control. It became sufficiently woven into the fabric of the English

imaginary so as to fill both the literary and political spheres. In the *Henriad*, we find English monarchs performing apprenticeship—the contemporary proposed solution to a problem of deteriorating authority of the nobility over the plebian—in order to establish their own authority as kings. In the theater world of early modern London, audiences took pride in the performance of apprentice kings, as Henry V demonstrates when he “gentles” all who have fought with him on St. Crispin’s Day.