Playing Work: The Uses of Labour on the Shakespearean Stage

by

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Abstract

In my thesis I argue that different social groups in early modern England used the idea of work both to legitimise their own and to invalidate others’ activities. Noble patronage, competition for audiences, the personal aspirations of dramatists, and its own problematic status all involved the theatre in these struggles.

In my first chapter I argue that on the popular stage of the 1590s, acting was depicted as work in an attempt to counter accusations that actors earned money through play. However, plays written for the revived children’s companies at the end of the decade stressed their performers’ amateurism in order to appeal to the leisured elite. In the following two chapters I continue to explore the relation between work and social status, identifying a tension between the ruling class’s attempts to justify its privilege by representing government as work, and its traditional disdain for labour. In Shakespeare’s plays, emphasis seems to shift from the former to the latter over the course of his career, and I argue that this may be related to the attempts of the Lord Chamberlain’s / King’s Men to attract a privileged audience.
In my fourth chapter I argue that ambivalence towards work underlies Ben Jonson’s treatment of poetry as a profession, and compare his strategies for dealing with this to those used in the writings of early modern lawyers and physicians.

I then examine the portrayal of mercantile work in the plays of Dekker and Heywood, showing how they reconcile uncertainty as to its morality with the need to appeal to a citizen audience. In my final chapter I suggest that the same playwrights both reflect and reinforce changing attitudes to women’s work by both belittling it and discouraging certain forms of female labour.
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Introduction

In his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Work*, Keith Thomas observes that "Work" is harder to define than one might think. Sociologists seem to concur, Richard Hall noting 'how slippery the concept of work is' and Keith Grint writing of the 'ambiguous nature of work' and 'the enigmatic essence of work'. Straightforward generalisations quickly reveal their inadequacy. If we define working as 'purposively expending energy', in Thomas's paraphrase of the entry in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, then this is to include strenuous recreations such as tennis; if we say that 'work is what we do in our paid employment', then this excludes slave labour and housework. 'It seems odd [...] to say that writers have ceased to work when they leave their word-processors and go to do some overdue digging in their gardens'. In fact, as Grint points out, the 'difference between work and non-work seldom lies within the actual activity itself and more generally inheres in the social context that supports the activity', a fact that is implicitly acknowledged in Hall's tellingly circular definition, 'Work is the effort or

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3 *The Oxford Book of Work*, p. xiii.
activity of an individual that is undertaken for the purpose of providing goods or 
services of value to others and that is considered by the individual to be work.\textsuperscript{4} 
Ultimately, an activity is work because we consider it to be such: this is why, for 
instance, ‘whether one regards domestic activities as “work” or “leisure” or “drudgery” 
or something else entirely does not depend upon the activities but how we read such 
activities through the appropriate lexicon’.\textsuperscript{5}

The fact that ‘work is itself socially constructed’ becomes particularly evident when 
one compares cultures such as our own, where work tends to be seen in terms of 
economic activity, and pre-industrial societies. For the Trobriand islanders, ‘there is no 
separation between the work of gardening and the associated rituals’; the ‘Dogons of the 
Sudan employ the same words to indicate both cultivating the ground and dancing at a 
religious ceremony’.\textsuperscript{6} Thomas has suggested that in mediaeval Europe, work may have 
been similarly intertwined with other aspects of social life. The nature of agricultural 
work, which was seasonal and discontinuous, and punctuated by religious festivals, 
strengthened the links between the agricultural and liturgical calendars, and blurred the 
boundaries between work and ritual. Recreations such as archery, wrestling and hunting 
were in fact closely related to society’s military and economic needs.\textsuperscript{7} However, 
through its Christian heritage mediaeval culture inherited a clear definition of what 
work was and its place in human existence:

Also to Adam he said, Because thou hast obeied the voyce of thy wife, and hast 
eaten of the tre (whereof I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it) 
cursed is the earth for thy sake: in sorowe shalt thou eat of it all the dayes of thy 
life.

\textsuperscript{4} Grint, p. 11; Hall, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{5} Grint, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{6} Grint, pp. 2, 11; Keith Thomas, ‘Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society’, Past and Present, 29 
(1964), 50-62 (p. 51).
\textsuperscript{7} Thomas, pp. 52-53.
Thornes also, and thy stymes shal it bring forthe to thee, and thou shalt eat the herbe of the field.
In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, til thou returne to the earth: for out of it wast thou taken, because thou art dust, and to dust shalt thou returne.

(Genesis 3. 17-19)

Genesis establishes that work is firstly, the productive labour a society needs to carry out in order to feed itself, and secondly, our common punishment for Adam’s disobedience.

Adam’s curse, however, was not believed to lie so heavily on some members of society as upon others. In the Summa Theologica, Aquinas explains that not all people are bound to manual labour: ‘not everyone sins that works not with his hands, because those precepts of the natural law which regard the good of the many are not binding on each individual’. Frequently-cited models of society not only restricted manual work to the lowest estate, but also envisaged the social duties of the higher estates in terms other than those of work. ‘God has ordained three classes of men, namely, labourers such as husbandmen and craftsmen to support the whole body of the Church after the manner of feet, knights to defend it in the fashion of hands, clergy to rule and lead it after the manner of eyes’, as one Dominican preacher put it. Only manual labourers are conceived as laboratores, as distinct from bellatores and oratores. In a 1388 sermon at Paul’s Cross, Thomas Wimbledon compared the church to a vine that requires cultivation:

To priesthood it falleth to kut away the void braunches of sinnes with the swerd of her tong. To knighthode it falleth to letten wrongs and thefftes to ben done, and to maintaine Goddis law and them that ben techers thereof, and also to kepe the

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londe from enemies of other londes. And to labourers it falleth to travail bodelich.\(^{10}\)

That those to whom it fell to travail bodily saw the inconsistency between this social model and the implications of Genesis is evident from the rhyme attributed to John Ball from the time of the Peasants’ Revolt: ‘Whan Adam dalf, and Eve span, | Wo was thanne a gentilman?’\(^{11}\) Nevertheless, according to David Aers the tripartite model was ‘the major social ideology’ of the late Middle Ages, a ‘normative paradigm which never came into any kind of question’. Even a writer such as Langland, who could hardly be called an apologist for idleness, ‘assumed the total relevance of the chief and traditional social model to his world and his poem’:

The Kyng and Knyghthood and Clergie bothe
Casten that the Commune sholde hem communes fynde.
The Commune contreved of Kynde Wit craftes,
And for profit of al the peple plowmen ordeyned
To tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh.

The idea of work is restricted to those who labour with their hands to provide for the other estates. Similarly, when in Passus VI Piers establishes the respective duties of himself and the knight, the language of labour is applied only to his own:

‘By Seint Poul!’ quod Perkyn, ‘ye profre yow so faire
That I shal swynke and swete and sowe for us bothe,
And othere labours do for thi love al my lif tyme.
In covenaunt that thow kepe Holy Kirke and myselve
Fro wastours and fro wikked men that this world destruyeth.\(^{12}\)

The knight’s defence of commons and Church justifies his exemption from work.

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The underlying argument of this thesis is that by the early modern period, the manner in which work was 'socially constructed' had changed. Whereas in the Middle Ages the idea of work was largely restricted to manual workers and withheld from the other estates, its range had now extended: it became more common for groups in society to define their own and others' activities in terms of work. Obviously, those who had always been seen as labourers continued to be defined as such: as Laurence Humphrey put it in 1563, 'the commen people are the handes of the Nobles, sith them selues bee handlese. They labour and sweate for them, with tillinge, saylinge, running, toylinge: by Sea, by land, with hands, w' feete, serue them'. However, it was now possible for Hugh Latimer to preach, as he did before Edward VI in 1549, that '[e]very man must labour; yea, though he be a king, yet he must labour'. Though Latimer's more radical social agenda was never implemented, the idea that the duties even of a monarch could involve work gained currency: when Parliament was dissolved in April 1593, for example, Queen Elizabeth told the two houses that 'the greatest expense of my time, the labor of my studies, and the travail of my thoughts chiefly tendeth to God's service and the government of you, to live and continue in a flourishing and happy estate'. More generally, the business of government was represented in laborious terms. Thomas Elyot stressed the work carried out by the ruling class, writing, 'they that be gouernours [...] do imploie all the powers of theyr wittes, and theyr diligence, to the only preseruation of other theyr inferiours'; charged with idleness, the clergyman in A Compendious or Brief Examination of Certayne Ordinary Complaints (1549?) insisted that 'albeit we labour not much with our bodies [...] yet yee know wee laboure w' our

Members of the secular professions, too, stressed the labour they had undergone in acquiring expertise: John Cotta wrote that a physician's education must be 'watered with the dew and sweate of painfull studie', while William Fulbecke emphasised the 'extreame diligence' needed to study law.

However, while more and more classes of people do seem to have portrayed themselves as workers, it would be wrong to say that work was universally perceived in positive terms during the early modern period. Although some gentlemen and nobles used the idea of work as a way of representing their role as governors, work still retained many of the demeaning associations it had possessed during the Middle Ages: it was a commonplace to say that a gentleman should be able to 'live idly and without manuall labour'. The work of merchants was problematic for a different reason: the long-standing assumption that 'wealth & riches [...] are seldome attained vnto, but by oppression, extortion, deceit, fraud, & such other corruption' made business success decidedly suspect. Finally, the belief that 'a good wife keepes her house' because 'Home [is] Chastities keeper' meant that for a woman to work outside the home was to compromise her reputation for virtue.

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The various uses of the idea of work in early modern discourse, and its manifold associations, will be explored in more detail in the chapters that follow. In the remainder of this Introduction, however, I want firstly to identify some of the broader historical trends which I think may have precipitated this growing tendency to see human activities in terms of work; secondly, to give a brief outline of recent studies into the representation of work in early modern literature; and thirdly, to explain the aims and summarise the content of this dissertation.

To begin with, there are a number of economic factors which might explain an increased consciousness of the idea of work. One long-term trend is identified by Jacques Le Goff:

Between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries [...] [a]n economic and social revolution took place in the Christian West, of which urban expansion was the most striking symptom and the division of labour the most important characteristic. New trades came into being or developed, new professional categories made their appearance or grew more substantial, and new socioprofessional groups, strong in numbers and by virtue of their roles, demanded and won esteem and even a prestige appropriate to their strength.21

As a result, according to Le Goff, the Church was forced to revise its hitherto disdainful attitude towards labour; and it may be that this gradual re-evaluation was ultimately reflected in the early modern concern with work which I hypothesise. However, Le Goff’s perception of its roots as lying in the ninth century would not explain why there should be such a gap between the social theory of Langland, in the fourteenth century, and that of Latimer, in the sixteenth. On the other hand, economic changes did take place during the Tudor period which might have been the stimulus to new attitudes. The question of whether the sixteenth century can actually be called a period of economic

growth is a contentious one, as Sybil M. Jack’s survey shows. More certainly, however, it was a period of growth both in population and in prices. In 1500, England’s population seems to have stood at a little over two million, as compared to five or six million in 1300; by the 1550s it had risen to three million, by 1600 to four, by the 1630s, perhaps, to five. The country’s failure to produce enough food for its population was noted by Tudor observers such as Sir Thomas More, who attributed it to the enclosure of arable land in order to graze sheep, and Thomas Starkey, who cited the large number of idle servants and religious, as well as the ‘neclygence of the plowmen & artyfycerys’. Whether or not they were accurate in identifying the cause, it is evident that these commentators saw productivity as an important social issue.

Christopher Hill has suggested that slightly later in the century, England’s economic stagnancy impelled Puritan thinkers into deliberately fostering the notion that all members of the commonwealth had a duty to work:

So long as there are few consumer goods within the purchasing power of the mass of the population, there is little incentive to earn more than the subsistence minimum wage. [...] Prices must be kept up if men are to be made to labour. Until men work harder there will be no cheap consumer goods. An ideology advocating regular systematic work was required if the country was to break through this vicious circle to economic advance.

Hill’s formulation might be criticised, as it appears to ascribe a rather teleological motivation to the Puritans: they knew that England needed to modernise its economy, and so decided to create a work-ethic. However, the economic changes of the sixteenth century may have given greater currency to an ‘ideology advocating regular systematic

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work’. A predictable effect of the failure of productivity to keep pace with population growth was price inflation: while wages rose approximately threefold between the start of the sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth, ‘the products of the soil rose in price far more, cereals leading in the race with a sevenfold rise’. Although this had dire effects for wage labourers, and for landlords who lived only off rents and were unwilling to raise them, other classes were more fortunate. As D. C. Coleman explains,

There can be no doubt that the inflation put in a relatively advantageous position anyone who had enough land to produce a marketable surplus of food which could be sold on a consistently rising market [...]. It also put a premium on economic enterprise. The adventurous or the lucky, the ruthless or the greedy did better than those who, for reasons of laziness, inertia, or misfortune, were unwilling or unable to depart from old ways. [...] The gainers were to be found in all ranks of life but more especially amongst enterprising yeomen and landowning gentry, amongst traders, merchants, and lawyers.26

Whereas the Middle Ages had been dominated by the ideology of classes – the nobility, the clergy – who had not seen themselves as workers, sixteenth-century price inflation augmented the wealth and power of groups whose position depended, not on an army of feudal retainers, but on the industry of themselves and their employees. The bigger merchants, particularly those involved in the lucrative export of cloth, which trebled between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, became important as a source of finance to the Crown, especially when the fall of Antwerp closed down Europe’s main money-market.27

The landless poor, however, and those whose land holdings were not large enough for their profits from the sale of produce to offset rising rents, did badly as a result of price inflation. Their numbers were increased not only through general population growth and rent increases, but also through enclosures; and many were forced into

vagrancy and unemployment. The fact that significant numbers of people had no work was seen by Tudor governments as a worrying threat to order and stability. This concern is reflected in legislation such as the 1563 Statute of Artificers (5 Eliz. I. c. 4), which, by compelling unretained workers in certain occupations to labour for a master, prescribing minimum periods of employment, restricting geographical mobility, and making both dismissal and voluntary departure from service more difficult, did more than merely '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'. As W. E. Minchinton puts it, 'it is now generally agreed that Tudor governments were more concerned to regulate industry in the name of public order than to establish any unified set of economic objectives'. The 1576 Acte for the Setting of the Poore on Worke, and for the Avoyding of Ydlenes (18 Eliz. I. c. 3) compelled the poor either to work on 'a competent Store and Stocke of Woole Hempe Flaxe Iron or other Stufe' to be provided for them in towns and cities, or to enter houses of correction, so that they 'shall not for want of Worcke goe abrode eyther begginge or committinge Pilfringes or other Misdemeanor lyvinge in Idlenes'; again, order rather than productivity is the aim of the legislation.

The problem of feeding a rising population, the 'growing social importance of the industrious sort of people', and the perceived link between idleness and social unrest are three developments which may have contributed to a heightened sense of the social

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31 Tudor Economic Documents, ii, 332.
importance of work in the early modern period. In particular, the increasing wealth and power of merchants and yeomen, groups who worked themselves and whose income depended on the industry of others, may have encouraged the expression of a belief that all in the commonwealth had a duty to labour. Changing attitudes to work, however, can be attributed not only to new material conditions but also to new intellectual and religious ones. Max Weber’s argument that the Reformation created a moral and religious climate favourable to the growth of capitalism has been criticised as positing too straightforwardly causal a link between religious and economic change; however, it might more cautiously be ventured that some doctrines of the Reformers may have facilitated the expression of new attitudes towards work and economic life.

Luther’s denial that there was a separate and superior clerical estate gave a new dignity to manual work: ‘A shoemaker, a smith, a farmer, each has his manual occupation and work; and yet, at the same time, all are eligible to act as priests and bishops.’ Again, while good works do not save the soul, they have the beneficial effects of preventing idleness and encouraging discipline, as well as being an inevitable condition of living in society. R. H. Tawney stresses Luther’s distrust of mercantile work, but argues that Calvin and his followers ‘seized on the aptitudes cultivated by the life of business and affairs [and] stamped on them a new sanctification’. In other words, the merchants and tradesmen who found Calvinism attractive were able to use certain features of it — personal discipline, rejection of established Church teaching — to validate existing aspects of their conduct such as industriousness and, under some circumstances, the taking of usury. Tawney sees this as ultimately giving rise to the Puritan temper,

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32 Hill, Society and Puritanism, p. 139.
whereby ‘mundane toil becomes itself a kind of sacrament’; but it must be
emphasised that this derives only partly from a specific ‘conception of the nature of
God and the destiny of man’, and ‘partly from the obvious interests of the commercial
classes’.

While new attitudes towards work were not inherent in the doctrines of Luther and
Calvin, Protestants were able to take from them a framework in which manual and
commercial work could be favourably represented. Furthermore, in the context of the
English Reformation, Protestant writers used ideas such as that of the vocation as a
means of attacking the monastic system. Thomas Becon, for example, provides this
gloss on the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25. 14-30):

> Worke, labour, toyle, and occupy my money therfore, sayeth our master Christ,
till I come. Be not sluggish: be not idle: be not carelesse: Lyue according to your
vocation & calling [...]. And albeit these wordes of Christ be generally spoken to
al orders of people, to all states and degrees without excepcion: yet do they
specially concerne the spiritual Pastores, y Ministers of Gods worde.

He goes on to criticise monks and friars for living idly and in no vocation. However,
while his recourse to the doctrine of the calling seems to be motivated primarily by
antimonasticism, it has the further effect of giving currency to the notion that all in the
commonwealth must work. Similarly, in *A Treatise of the Vocations* (1603) William
Perkins uses the idea of the calling to attack monastics, and also vagabonds, on the basis
that God ‘would not that men [...] should be as wandring Rechabites, tied to no certaine
place or calling’. However, he stresses much more emphatically than Becon that
‘[e]very person of every degree, state, sexe, or condition without exception, must haue
some personal and particular calling to walke in’; even ‘the life of a king is to spend his

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35 Tawney, pp. 101, 119, 199, 230-31. Or more generally, according to Hill’s reading, Protestantism’s
‘appeal to inner conviction, and the rejection of the routine of ceremonies through which the priesthood
imposed its authority’, made it easier for the commercial classes to overcome traditional objections to
their behaviour (Hill, *Change and Continuity*, p. 99).
time in the governing of his subjects, and that is his calling'. Furthermore, 'to them which employ their gifts more is given, and from them which employ them not, is taken that which they have; and labour in a calling is as precious as gold or silver'. Perkins gives a wider application to a doctrine originally used to attack Catholicism.

Early modern culture also derived ideas from classical literature which may have affected attitudes towards work. As Lorna Hutson has shown, some reformers were themselves indebted, in their conceptualisation of domestic relationships, to the scheme elaborated in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, and in a work of the same title once wrongly ascribed to Aristotle, whereby a man's effective management of his household both equips him for and is testimony to his abilities as a civil governor. Though Hutson is particularly concerned with the repercussions of this for the literary representation of women, Xenophon's emphasis on the relationship between husbandry and statecraft—as embodied in the figure of Cyrus of Persia, a successful military leader and diligent gardener—may have made it easier for early modern writers to imagine government in laborious terms. Various Latin writers also stressed the duty of the social elite to take part in the business of government, an attitude typified by Cicero's *De officiis*, 'one of the most published secular works of the sixteenth century in England', which was 'securely established in the curricula of the English schools'. Cicero not only recommends that 'those whom Nature has endowed with the capacity for administering public affairs should put aside all hesitation, enter the race for public office, and take a hand in directing the government'; he insists that a young man should be 'trained to toil

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39 Xenophon's *Treatise of Householde*, trans. by Gentian Hervet (London, 1534), fols 14'-15'.
and endurance of both mind and body [in labore patientiaque et animi et corporis], so as to be strong for active duty in military and civic service’.  

However, as well as encouraging gentlemen and nobles to perform civil as well as military service, and to see that service in laborious terms, Xenophon and Cicero both stress that other types of labour are unsuitable for these groups. Xenophon writes that ‘suche craftes, as be called handy craftes, they be very abiect and vile, and lyttel regarded and estemed in cities and common welthes’ (Hervet’s translation).  

Cicero rejects means of livelihood ‘which incur people’s ill-will, as those of tax-gatherers and usurers’; the work of hired labourers, ‘for in their case the very wages they receive is a pledge of their slavery’; that of retail merchants, ‘for they would get no profits without a great deal of downright lying’; and ‘those trades which cater to sensual pleasures’, such as butchery and cooking.  

The fact that these texts could be used to justify gentlemen’s exemption from most types of work may be one reason for their wide currency in the early modern period.

The place of work in early modern English society thus begins to seem increasingly complex. A variety of interconnected factors, such as the growing wealth and power of some yeomen, merchants and tradesmen, problems of productivity and of public order, and the influence of the Reformation and the revival of classical learning, seem to have given greater prominence to questions of labour and idleness, and to have encouraged people to view and represent their activities in terms of work. However, work itself was a highly problematic concept. Many types of work retained demeaning connotations; the work of some groups was distrusted; women’s work was intertwined with questions

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42 Xenophon, fol. 11’.
of chastity and subordination. In fact, the concept of work can be regarded as having
been deeply implicated in some of the early modern 'social struggles' with which many
literary critics of the last two decades have been concerned.44 For example, an important
element in the conflict between the aristocracy and the middling sort, upon which
Margot Heinemann and Jean Howard both focus, was the commercial classes' critique
of the idleness of their landed rulers. In Middleton’s plays of the 1620s in particular,
Heinemann identifies the ‘citizen element of the revolt […] seriously, intensely and
sometimes narrowly moral, stressing personal responsibility for sin, conscious of
economic pressures and everyday tasks, and convinced by experience that idleness and
immorality lead inevitably to disaster in this world as well as the next’.45 Similarly, the
popular revolts which Annabel Patterson and Richard Wilson examine seem to have
been perceived very much as the uprisings of a labouring class against their idle
oppressors: Patterson notes the similarity between the reference, in a prophecy
associated with Ket’s rebellion, to ‘clubs and clouted Shoon’, and Jack Cade’s words in
2 Henry VI, ‘Spare none but such as go in clouted shoon’.46 Not only did those who
challenged the upper classes’ hegemony of power articulate their grievances in terms of
work, however; the rulers themselves used ideas of work, play, and idleness in their
attempts to exercise social control. As I have already mentioned, Tudor legislation used
forced labour to restrict the independence of the masterless poor; Paul Brown and
Terence Hawkes both argue that the way Prospero exercises power over Ferdinand and

44 I take the phrase from Jean E. Howard, The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England
(London: Routledge, 1994).
45 Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the
Struggle, pp. 22-46.
40; Richard Wilson, Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester
Wheatsheaf, 1993); The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
Caliban in *The Tempest* is influenced by the demonising of the indigent as idle. By contrast, Leah Marcus has highlighted Stuart monarchs’ promotion of holiday pastimes, which she ascribes to the hope that ‘the license and lawlessness associated with the customs could be interpreted as submission to authority’. Finally, one particular type of repression which has been of great concern to modern critics has been the enforcement of patriarchy by means of ‘discourses that manage women’, as Karen Newman puts it. The notion that different types of work were appropriate for men and women, and more specifically that the ‘wyues workynge place is wythyn her houes’, was one means by which women’s mobility and independence could be restricted.

The idea of work seems to have occupied a prominent position both in discourses where power was exercised, and where it was contested, in the early modern period. However, while critics have addressed the subject in passing during studies concerned with other topics – popular protest, the position of women – they have generally been reluctant to address it as a topic in its own right. The only recent full-length survey I have found of work *per se* is Maurice Hunt’s book, *Shakespeare’s Labored Art: Stir, Work, and the Late Plays*. Hunt argues that ‘Shakespeare’s dramatization of labor in his late plays ultimately reflects the ambiguous, bifurcated attitudes of different segments of his culture’: the early modern period inherited the mediaeval conception of work as a curse, but the Reformation precipitated a more positive view of work both as a sign of

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50 [Heinrich Bullinger], *The Christen State of Matrimony*, trans. by Miles Coverdale ([Antwerp], 1541), sig. 13v.
election, in the case of good works, and as having salutary, disciplining effects. In *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare ‘satirizes the sloth of certain (upper) Jacobean social classes’ and shows how physical work ‘proves redemptive for afflicted characters such as Pericles and Imogen’. In *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*, the working mind, often represented in terms of birth labour, ‘take[s] precedence over physical labor’. Hunt describes Shakespeare’s as a ‘labored art’, not only because it is ‘an art recommending the virtues of work of all kinds, from physical labor to the work of the mind’, but because of its highly wrought, ‘Mannerist’ style.  

My own thesis is indebted to Hunt’s survey of the complex early modern attitude to work; however, I have found some of his assumptions questionable. Firstly, by seeing Shakespeare’s plays simply as reflecting contemporary attitudes to work, Hunt detaches them from the social context which he describes, denying them status as participants in cultural change; however, as commodities in the early modern theatrical marketplace, plays were shaped by commercial and other pressures, while as an extremely public form of art that reached courtier and illiterate artisan alike, they themselves shaped the society around them. Secondly, I feel that Hunt may enlist Shakespeare rather too enthusiastically as a spokesman for the virtues of labour. His attempts to gain aristocratic patronage early in his career, and his acquisition of a coat of arms for his father (and therefore himself), imply a more complex attitude towards the social elite than mere disdain for their idleness. Furthermore, it must be emphasised that work, and particularly manual work, still carried a stigma in the early modern period, so that some of Hunt’s readings – ‘Hard work chiefly makes possible Imogen’s acquisition in Wales of new virtues’ – seem to me to depend on anachronistic assumptions.  

Finally, Hunt’s sense of what is and is not work seems relatively straightforward: for him, the

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52 Hunt, p. 104.
complexity lies in attitudes towards it, which may be positive or negative. I would argue, however, that work is an inherently unstable concept, and that ideas of what work means, and what activities constitute work, vary greatly in different times and cultures.

One aspect of work which has been well served by recent critics has been the representation of women’s work in early modern literature. Indeed, writers on this subject have tended to be less susceptible to the tendencies which I have attributed to Hunt; I think this may be partly because feminist theory has contributed to a greater awareness of literature’s ideological complicity, and partly because women’s work even today illustrates the extent to which the idea of work is culturally constructed and reflects wider social relationships. Within the home, women’s work usually goes unpaid and, to some extent, unrecognised; outside it, it remains more poorly paid than that of men. Mary Wack’s study of the treatment of alewives in the mystery plays of sixteenth-century Chester shows how the drama could be an active participant in the regulation (in this instance, the discouraging) of female labour. Ronda Arab has argued that the valorisation of men’s physical labour in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* entails a marginalising and a devaluation of women’s work. Jean Howard discusses the shop-work of citizens’ wives, and the transgressively independent lifestyle of Moll Frith, in *The Roaring Girl*, Garrett A. Sullivan, too, discusses women’s work in shops, and the way it is dramatically represented in similar terms to prostitution. The level of interest in women’s work was reflected in the devotion of a seminar to the subject at the twenty-

ninth annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in 2001, where participants discussed papers on brewing, prostitution, domestic service, housewifery, and the status of female labour. Other critics have discussed women’s work within the context of wider studies. Linda Woodbridge has suggested that ‘the Renaissance habit of conducting all arguments in moral terms’ meant that writers were more concerned with the effects of women’s work upon their chastity than with its economic status. Lorna Hutson argues that Protestant treatises on matrimony displaced the more morally disreputable aspects of husbandry – the ‘ethical stigma of the calculating outlook’ – onto women’s work in the home.

In arguing that the ascription of certain meanings and valuations to women’s work served to reinforce male cultural dominance, such critics insist upon the political dimension of the idea of work. This is an approach which I have favoured in my own thesis: rather than investigating the way in which work, or a specific kind of work, was represented on the early modern stage, I have chosen to explore the uses made of the idea of work by different social groups in order to define themselves and others, and the part played by the theatre in this process. In the first chapter, I investigate what is

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58 Hutson, p. 29.

59 This is not to say that those critics who have explored the representation of specific groups of workers have ignored the socio-political background. Some studies I have found particularly useful are Laura Caroline Stevenson, Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Douglas Bruster, Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 47-62; Theodore B. Leinwand, The City Staged: Jacobean City Comedy, 1603–1613 (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 21-80; Mark Thornton Burnett,
perhaps the most obvious instance of the theatre's involvement in a wider debate that made use of the idea of work: namely, criticism of the stage itself, both for distracting workers from their duties and because actors themselves were supposedly idle drones who made an illegitimate living through play. I suggest that this criticism is a reaction to changes in the nature of acting during the sixteenth century, which I view as a reorientation with regard to the idea of work. Actors themselves, I argue, responded with dramas that depicted their activities as laborious; however, writers for the revived children's companies at the end of the 1590s distinguished the boy actors from their adult competitors by stressing the children's amateur status.

In chapter two, I turn from actors to the social elite, a group whose social role had traditionally been seen as warfare. However, I argue that in response to changing circumstances, it used the print medium to represent government as a form of work. In an attempt to ascertain whether it used the stage for similar ends, I begin by examining the extent to which the theatre was institutionally linked to the ruling class, and then discuss the treatment of government in Shakespeare's histories. I identify a tension between two rival imperatives, to propagandise for the elite and to appeal to them as an audience, and suggest that the second of these became increasingly important from the mid-1590s onward. In the next chapter, I argue that while some members of the elite used the idea of work to validate their activities, others insisted upon their idleness, their freedom from the obligation to work; the contradiction between these rival uses of work is evident in Shakespeare's characterisation of Hamlet. In the later Roman plays, Shakespeare makes dramatic use of the assumption that gentlemen should not engage in merchandise; however, not only were monetary pressures in fact forcing them into new

*Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997).
kinds of financial behaviour, but those gentlemen who participated in the colonial enterprise found themselves having to practise manual labour. I end by comparing the way in which this novel circumstance was described with Shakespeare’s treatment of aristocratic work in the Romances.

In chapter four my attention shifts from Shakespeare to Ben Jonson: I suggest that similar pressures to those which gave rise to contradictions in Shakespeare’s dramatic treatment of the ruling class affected the way Jonson represented himself as an author. I identify a tension between Jonson’s insistence on the work that poetic creativity involves, and his own social ambition, which allied him with a class that disdained labour. I suggest that he resolved this tension by using methods of self-presentation which he shared with legal and medical professionals, with whose situation his own bears comparison.

In chapter five I revise my earlier survey of the social space occupied by the theatre, which had stressed its relationship with the privileged class, and emphasise the part played in theatrical enterprise by London’s merchants and tradesmen: as investors, builders, audiences, and actors. I evaluate Andrew Gurr’s claim that certain theatres, especially the Fortune and the Red Bull, appealed in particular to an audience drawn from these classes, and go on to examine the treatment of mercantile work in plays by Dekker and Heywood; in particular, how traditional distrust of commercial profits affects the way they depict the work of merchants. I continue to focus on these playwrights in my final chapter, which is concerned with the work of women. I discuss the extent of women’s involvement in the theatre, and ask whether the drama should be seen as a medium through which patriarchy was consolidated. I suggest that plays by Dekker and Heywood both devalue female labour, and discourage women’s work.
outside the home as conducive to unchastity. Finally, I argue that early modern writers used bodily difference as a way of explaining the gender division of labour, a notion that I illustrate with reference to the depiction of cross-gendered labour in *The Roaring Girl*.

As will be evident from this brief summary, my study places a great deal of emphasis upon the conditions of dramatic production: the influence of both patrons and audiences on the ideological content of the plays, the effect of commercial imperatives, various groups' involvement in or exclusion from theatrical enterprise, opposition to the stage on the part of civic authorities, censorship, and so on. My reason for this is not because I see these as being more important influences on the drama than authorial agency, but because they have seemed the most straightforward way of linking the world represented on stage with the world outside it. Through these media, no more significant but often more readily identifiable than authorial intention, 'contests for the meaning' of work achieved expression in the drama.⁶⁰ Similarly, I spend a good deal of time discussing the social developments which I see as influencing the theatre in this way; this is not because I imagine that, if only one explores its context in sufficient depth, the meaning of a text can be isolated and stabilised. Rather, I have assumed that as well as continuing to affect readers and audiences today (in however different a manner to their early modern counterparts), the plays I study were participants in a society that was changing around them; to dwell on aspects of that society is, hopefully, to evolve a clearer picture of the cultural work the theatre itself was doing.

⁶⁰ 'Performed both at court and in the city, before an audience which was representative of the social range and the social mobility of the capital, the drama of the period before 1642 can be seen as a focus of the contests for the meaning of subjectivity and gender which can also be identified elsewhere' – Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 9.
Other aspects of my methodology deserve explanation here. My title refers to 'the Shakespearean stage', although clearly I have dwelt on plays by several authors other than Shakespeare. My intention was to avoid confining myself to too rigid a chronological period, such as 1590-1610, or 1576-1642, on the grounds that some of the trends I discuss, such as the change in the nature of acting, took place over a longer time-scale. However, the plays on which I concentrate almost all date from the period between the time around 1590 when Shakespeare seems to have started writing for the stage, and the time of his death in 1616. This latter date was also the year in which the Queen's Men moved from the Red Bull in Clerkenwell to the Cockpit in the more salubrious neighbourhood of Drury Lane, an event that might be seen as the culmination of the social stratification of audiences which, Andrew Gurr argues, began with the revival of the child companies at St Paul's and Blackfriars at the end of the 1590s.\(^6\)

I have also been reluctant to discuss the semantics of work: other than a brief survey in the fourth chapter of the word 'profess' and its derivatives, I have generally avoided the question of how words such as 'work' and 'labour' were actually used in the early modern period. My reason for this is their extremely wide application. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows that the noun 'work' was frequently used in the highly general sense I.1, 'Something that is or was done', as in *King John* iv. 3. 57, 'It is a damned, and a bloody worke.' The transitive verb was also used generally, to mean 'To do, perform, practise' (I.1): Hooker writes, 'God worketh nothing without cause.' The intransitive verb too can mean merely 'To do something' (II.21), as in *All's Well That Ends Well*, iv. 2. 29: 'This ha's no holding To sweare by him whom I protest to loue

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That I will worke against him'. To have examined the use of the word in all its senses would have been to involve myself in matters only distantly related to labour. I have also avoided discussion of the word ‘labour’ in the sense of childbirth, on the grounds that the topic is so vast that I do not feel I could have done it justice in a thesis primarily concerned with the more general application of the word.

Finally, it may seem strange that a study of work should pay so little attention to the laboratores, the vast majority of male and female farm workers, wage labourers, and domestic servants who carry out the productive toil on which society depends. My thesis is complicit in society’s failure to recognise the importance of what they do. In defence, I can only plead that the status of their activities as work is unproblematic: whereas governors, lawyers, physicians and the rest had to insist that they too were workers, and whereas work carried a social stigma for gentlemen and a moral one for merchants, no one has doubted – except, perhaps, when it is carried out by women – that manual labour is work in its most obvious form. In large part, this thesis is about the way other groups have tried to appropriate that certainty for themselves.

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Chapter 1. Acting as Work in Elizabethan England

The sixth edition of Sir Thomas Overbury’s character-book *The Wife* appeared in 1615, two years after Overbury’s death. Amongst other additions, it contains a character of ‘An Excellent Actor’, possibly by John Webster, which appears to be a reply to John Cocke’s ‘A common Player’, printed earlier that year in John Stephens’ *Satyrical Essayes Characters and Others*. Cocke’s player is ‘A Daily Counterfeit’, a servile crowd-pleaser given to drink and of loose sexual morality. The author of ‘An Excellent Actor’, however, praises his subject’s skill and the moral worth of his profession:

Whatsoever is commendable in the grave Orator, is most exquisitely perfect in him; for by a full and significant action of body, he charmes our attention: sit in a full Theater, and you will thinke you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the Actor is the Center. [...] By his action he fortifies morall precepts with example; for what we see him personate, we thinke truely done before vs: a man of deepe thought might apprehend, the Ghosts of our ancient Heroes walk’t againe, and take him (at seuerall times) for many of them.¹

Clearly, the two characterists have very different conceptions of the value of personation, and of the nature of the typical thespian. It is also notable, however, that the writer who seeks to disparage his subject calls him a *player*, and the one who seeks

to eulogise him, an *actor*. Whereas the word ‘player’ had been used to mean ‘one who acts a character on the stage’ for at least a century and a half by 1615, it was relatively novel to use ‘actor’ in this sense: the first usage recorded in the *OED* comes from Sidney’s *A Defence of Poesie*, written around 1580. Sidney uses the word metaphorically, to contrast the creativity of the poet with the dependence upon nature which circumscribes practitioners of other sciences: ‘There is no Art delivered unto mankind that hath not the workes of nature for his principall object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become Actors & Plaiers, as it were of what nature will have set forth.’ Sidney’s usage appears to make no distinction between actor and player, although it may be noted that both are subordinate to the dramatist, nature. The author of ‘An Excellent Actor’, however, seems to have been more alert to the differing valencies of the two words. ‘Player’ implies recreation and frivolity; ‘actor’, however, asserts the value of personation as a form of action, and it is therefore appropriate that this word is chosen when a positive, approving characterisation is to be given.

The characterist’s use of ‘actor’ rather than ‘player’ runs parallel to a noticeable tendency on the public stage in the late sixteenth century, as I will argue in this chapter: actors tried to define their livelihood as a form of work, rather than play, in an attempt to assert its legitimacy against opponents who characterised them as idle. I will begin by outlining the change in the social position of the theatre that implicated acting in a wider debate about the place of recreation in cultural life, before going on to examine the actors’ self-defence in plays where their profession was represented. In the final section, I will argue that writers for the companies of child actors that reappeared in London at

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3 In order to avoid repetitiousness, however, I use the two words interchangeably in this thesis.
the end of the sixteenth century depicted a different relation of acting to work, in an
effort to distinguish them from the adult players.

Undoubtedly, the status of the actor and the nature of his work changed over the
course of the sixteenth century. The thriving commercial theatre that was in evidence in
London by 1600 simply had not existed a hundred years before; E. K. Chambers writes
that by this date acting had begun ‘to take its place as a regular profession, in which
money might with reasonable safety be invested, to which a man might look for the
career of a lifetime, and in which he might venture to bring up his children’ (i, 309).
However, the way in which critics have understood this change has itself altered over
the last fifty years. Chambers attributed it to direct interventions by the executive in the
theatre industry, such as the formation of the Queen’s Men in 1583 and the creation of a
royally-sanctioned duopoly of playing companies in London in 1597. Muriel Bradbrook
has similarly argued that when in 1572 the right to license acting troupes was restricted
to noblemen and justices, the effect was to ‘define the actors’ status, restrict the number
of licensed troupes, and so by a process of concentrating ability to foster the growth of
professionalism’. The assumptions underlying the views of Chambers and of
Bradbrook, however, are open to question. Firstly, their teleology is dubious. The word
‘profession’ is invoked by both, but strictly speaking, early modern actors can only be
called professionals in the broad sense which distinguishes them from amateurs: they
earned money through playing. Acting in the early modern period certainly never
became a profession in the sense that law was a profession, or medicine was becoming
one, as I shall argue in a later chapter. Nor, for that matter, did actors have a great deal
in common with urban tradesmen. While, according to G. E. Bentley, the ‘basic

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hierarchy' of individual acting companies resembled that of the guilds, they lacked 'professional organization and structure': 'they had no central organization of all troupes in the profession, like that of the Lord Mayor and Council, and nothing like the tight organization of the regular guilds such as the Ironmongers or Stationers with their own system of Master and Court and set regulations for all units of the same trade'. In the absence of an actors' guild there was no body to formalise the status of London actors, to say who could and could not be an actor, to enforce a standard for theatrical production, to prescribe uniform conditions of apprenticeship, and so on. Instead, actors derived their social position from their attachment, however much a 'legal fiction', to the retinue of a member of the nobility. This seems effectively to have been the case even before it was explicitly made a prerequisite for legitimate playing in 1572: with one exception, all the acting companies recorded as visiting Norwich between 1540 and 1572 are referred to as servants of nobles or of members of the royal family, suggesting that the authorities there considered other actors to be vagrant according to existing laws. Indeed, the fact that the 1572 Act partly served to codify an existing state of affairs points to a second assumption shared by Chambers and Bradbrook: that it was executive intervention in the form of legislation directed at actors that brought about the changes they perceive. The research of David Bevington, Glynne Wickham and others, however, has shown how the evolution of the early modern theatre was more organic than this. Professional actors, for example, were not a new phenomenon in Tudor

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6 Bradbrook, p. 39.
7 *Records of Early English Drama: Norwich 1540-1642*, ed. by David Galloway (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 1-56. The exception is 'certen spanyardes and ytalyans who dawsyd antyck [...] & played dyuere proper bayne ffeetes', to whom a payment was recorded in 1546-47 (p. 21). In two instances from 1541-42 and 1542-43, payments to unnamed players are recorded, though in the latter case the recipients may have been the Earl of Arundel's players, who are named shortly afterwards (pp. 5-8).
England. Bevington points out that Henry VI was entertained by ‘interluders’ in 1427; his reading of *Mankind* (1465-70) demonstrates that professional actors also toured away from court. Over the following pages, I want to argue that the change in the status of actors which took place over the course of the sixteenth century can be understood, not simply as a professionalisation, but rather as a gradual reorientation in relation to the idea of work brought about by wider social, economic and religious trends.

Arguably the most important factor in this reorientation was the decline in civic drama (mystery plays in particular) and the growth in the number of touring companies. By its nature, the mystery play worked in harmony with the rhythms of civic life. Taking place on a religious festival, such as Corpus Christi, it did not disrupt economic production; based on the scriptures, it amplified religious teaching. It was acted by members of the craft guilds, and therefore did not inflict a class of professional players on the social structure. In different ways, Anne Barton (writing as Anne Righter) and Michael D. Bristol argue that this form of theatre should not, or not simply, be seen as recreational. Barton sees it as an extension of religious ritual, a ceremony whose audience were participants rather than spectators: ‘While the performance lasted, audience and actors shared the same ritual world, a world more real than the one which existed outside its frame.’ Bristol argues that structurally it occupied the position of carnival in mediaeval society: ‘Because of its capacity to create and sustain a briefly

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9 Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe*, pp. 11, 15-17. Bevington points out that *Mankind*’s actors solicit the audience for money; the variety of place names in the script, simple stage, small number of properties, and cast of six suggest itinerancy. Except where indicated, dates of performance throughout this thesis are from Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, &c.,* rev. by S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964).

intensified social life, the theater is festive and political as well as literary – a
privileged site for the celebration and critique of the needs and concerns of the *polis*.\(^{11}\)

The decline of this theatre took place at different points of the sixteenth century in
different cities, and for different reasons. In Coventry, for example, the demise of the
Corpus Christi cycle was connected to a more general drop in that city’s prosperity: in
1539 Mayor Coton complained to Henry’s chief minister Thomas Cromwell that ‘at
*Corpus christi tide* / the poore *Comeners* be at suche charges *with* ther playes &
*pagyontes* / that thei fare the worse all the yeire after’.\(^{12}\) However, it is also the case
that, as Harold C. Gardiner and Glynne Wickham have separately argued, the mystery
plays were ‘deliberately extirpated’ as papist relics under Henry, Edward and
Elizabeth.\(^{13}\) In 1571 and 1574, for example, mayors of Chester were summoned before
the Privy Council to explain why they let the mystery cycle be performed, in the latter
instance against the express wishes of the Archbishop of York and the President of the
North.\(^{14}\) Popular feeling may also have militated against the plays: the Mayors List for
Chester records that in 1571 they were played despite the fact that ‘manye of the Cittie
were sore against the setting forthe therof’, though it does not record whether their
scruples were religious or financial.\(^{15}\)

The decline of civic drama coincided with an increase in the use of drama for a
variety of purposes by monarchs and the nobility. Suzanne Westfall shows that as well
as retaining players and dramatists for their private entertainment, Tudor nobles

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\(^{14}\) Wickham, 1, 115.

encouraged them to tour, both to defray the cost of keeping them fed and clothed and to ‘ensure that [their own] political, economic, and artistic prominence was visibly represented throughout the land’. The content of the plays was itself of political import:

During the consolidation of Tudor power, when the role and even the definition of nobility were undergoing cataclysmic revision, the interludes provided effective opportunities for the noble patron to express his philosophical or political views, in an attempt to reinforce his particular perception of the social order.

With the advent of the Reformation, powerful Protestants used the drama to discredit the Pope and to assert Henry’s religious authority: John Bale’s anti-Catholic plays *Three Laws* and *King Johan* were written under Cromwell’s patronage in the late 1530s, for example.\(^{16}\) John Foxe later wrote that players, printers and preachers had been the ‘triple Bulwark against the triple crown of the Pope, to bring him down’.\(^{17}\) It is difficult to say how far plays like Bale’s encroached upon the popular stage, because records of nobly-sponsored companies playing at civic (as opposed to household) venues tend to specify only the companies’ patrons rather than the drama performed. Furthermore, as with the decline of civic theatre, these companies became a familiar presence in different cities at varying points of the century. They had reached Norwich by the 1540s, but in Coventry 1574 is the watershed date so far as their appearance in the record is concerned.\(^{18}\) However, a general trend, whereby a decline in civic drama coincided with a greater penetration of the towns by nobly- or royally-sponsored acting companies, with or without designs of religious reform, can be clearly identified.

The Reformation also modified the relation between acting and civic life in less direct ways. The dissolution of the monasteries deprived the poor of a vital network of support; in combination with rent increases and land enclosures, this contributed to the

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\(^{16}\) Westfall, pp. 125, 122, 156, 118-9. See also White, p. 13; Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, pp. 96-98.

\(^{17}\) Quoted in White, p. 44.

\(^{18}\) *REED: Norwich 1540-1642*, p. 1; *Coventry*, p. 265.
phenomenon of 'masterless men', able-bodied itinerant poor seen by the authorities as a threat to order and stability, a social problem demanding legislative solutions:

the reason for regulating the unemployed was not a shortage of labour, as in the later Middle Ages. Rather it was the rising numbers of able-bodied poor that troubled officials [...]. The masterless man represented mutability, when those in power longed for stability. He stood for poverty, which seemed to threaten their social and political dominance. Fundamentally, in prescribing that the vagrant be employed, governments were preoccupied with a problem of disorder.¹⁹

How many of this swollen body of the unemployed went on to become actors is unknown. However, it is the case that from 1572 onwards, vagrancy legislation begins for the first time to refer explicitly to the unlicensed actor as vagrant.²⁰ The fact, noted earlier, that the authorities in Norwich allowed only royally- and nobly-patronised companies to play there shows that actors were already subject to the vagrancy laws. Nevertheless, the classification of ‘Comon Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towaredes any other honorable Personage of greater Degree’ as ‘Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers’ in an act of 1572 (14 Eliz. I c. 5) implies an increasing perception of actors as part of the problem of masterlessness (Chambers IV, 269-71). Nor was it necessarily an easy matter to tell legitimate actors apart from illegitimate ones. The Chamberlain’s Accounts for Norwich in 1590 record a payment of ten shillings to ‘the lorde shandos players’, and then, immediately after, a further payment of twenty shillings ‘in rewarde to a nother Company of his men that cam w/th lycens presently after saying yat thos that Cam before were counterfetes & not the Lord Shandos men’.²¹ Even if actors were in effect


²⁰ Earlier Tudor vagrancy statutes that make no reference to actors include 11 Hen. VII (1494), c. 2; 22 Hen. VIII (1530), c. 12; and 27 Hen. VIII (1535), c. 25, although both the first and third of these prohibit the playing of unlawful games. See The Statutes at Large, from Magna Charta, to the Twenty-fifth Year of the Reign of King George the Third, Inclusive, ed. by Owen Ruffhead, rev. by Charles Runnington, 10 vols (London: Charles Eyre and Andrew Strahan; William Woodfall and Andrew Strahan, 1786), ii, 73, 147, 229.

²¹ REED: Norwich 1540-1642, p. 98.
subject to vagrancy law before 1572, the Act made explicit the narrowness of the line separating legitimate actors from illegitimate masterless men – a narrowness confirmed by the experience of the Norwich authorities.

With the decline of the mystery plays and the expansion of the touring companies, a form of theatre that was an expression of civic life and took place in harmony with civic rhythms was replaced by one that came from outside and may have had propagandistic designs. The former was a holiday, amateur drama which did not provide its performers with a livelihood; the latter was performed on days that may not have been religious festivals, by individuals who may not have had another source of income. In some instances nobly-sponsored drama seems actively to have disrupted civic life: freemen of Norwich were banned in 1588-9 from attending plays because they were acted on the Sabbath, had given rise to brawls and murder, and were an allurement to vice.\(^2^2\) Even when they passed off without violence, however, the visits of playing companies may have given rise to psychological disturbance. Peter Greenfield writes,

> The players’ visit to a town provided a temporary escape from the unchanging regimen of work, and of familial and civic duties, imposed by the social order. More dangerous was that the players themselves represented a life of constant festival, of freedom from the authority of master, guild, and city, of freedom to determine one’s own time, movements, and actions.\(^2^3\)

In the provincial towns, drama’s status seems to have changed: playing became less of a local ritual, more of a foreign entertainment.

While the relationship between players and polis was just as fraught in the City of London as in the provinces, the situation was crucially different in that, as Andrew Gurr puts it, ‘Only London was large enough in population to make it advantageous for the

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\(^2^2\) REED: Norwich 1540-1642, p. 91.

companies to stay any length of time'.\textsuperscript{24} Whereas the level of demand for plays in provincial cities permitted only a few performances before a company would have to move on, London's vastly larger size permitted a longer residency. That this was the case by, at the latest, the 1570s is evident from the building of a permanent stage at the Theatre in Shoreditch in 1576.\textsuperscript{25} Such a permanent presence gives rise to a very different relationship with civic and religious institutions to that enjoyed by a company that arrives, performs and departs. Whereas the arrival of a touring company constitutes a brief irruption of play into a community's working life, a group of actors with a permanent presence does not so much disrupt working life as compete with it. This repetition of performance itself modifies the status of play, making it less of a festival activity and more like the daily grind of tradesmen: 'If all the year were playing holidays, | To sport would be as tedious as to work' (\textit{I Henry IV}, 1. 2. 204).\textsuperscript{26}

The feeling that drama was an attraction that rivalled the duty to work did not appear overnight. To begin with, the attitude of the Mayor and Corporation of London seems to have been a more general sense that public playing was against the interests of the City. They banned it in 1563 and 1567 because of the risk of plague; the document announcing the 1567 ban notes the 'great multitudes of people' attending plays 'on the Saboth dayes and other solempne feastes commaundd by the church to be kept holy' (Chambers, \textit{IV}, 266-67). The City authorities' stated concern is with plays distracting the populace from religious observance, rather than from work. Again, the Act of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The Red Lion theatre had been built at Whitechapel in 1567: see Janet S. Loengard, 'An Elizabethan Lawsuit: John Brayne, his Carpenter, and the Building of the Red Lion Theatre', \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, 34 (1983), 298-310. However, Herbert Berry points out that this was not 'an imposing structure built to house plays for many years', and doubts whether it should be called the first permanent London playhouse: see Herbert Berry, 'The First Public Playhouses, Especially the Red Lion', \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, 40 (1989), 133-48 (p. 145).
\item \textit{The Riverside Shakespeare}, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 851. Further references to this edition are given in the text.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Common Council of 6 December 1574, which placed heavy restrictions on where and when companies could perform, mentions the (offstage) sex and violence, as well as robbery and sedition, that take place when plays are performed; the unchaste speech uttered in the plays themselves; the withdrawing of the populace from divine service on Sundays and holidays; the encouragement to the poor to waste their money; and the danger from plague and collapsing scenery. However, there is no accusation that plays distract people from work (Chambers, iv, 273-76). This may be because playing on weekdays was not as common as it would later become, although in 1564 Bishop Grindal had referred to players setting up ‘bylles’ — presumably of advertisement — ‘daylye, butt speciallye on holydayes’ (Chambers, iv, 266-67). However, a crucial change in the status of playing in London took place in 1576 with the building of the Theatre, which was followed soon after by the Curtain and the playhouse at Newington Butts. Hereafter, as Margreta de Grazia writes, ‘the theater became free to occupy its own time and space’. The ability to play was no longer subject to the owner of a venue that had been built for another purpose, such as an inn, deciding to turn an afternoon over to drama. As William Ingram points out, the strictures of a 1574 Act of Common Council anyway made this decision a much more difficult and expensive one to make: owners of inns and other playing spaces now had to present the Common Council with the texts of plays they wanted to have performed, to have the premises approved, to post bonds for good behaviour, and to contribute to the poor rates. Once players had a space of their own — and that in the liberties, outside the direct jurisdiction of the City authorities — they could also control the timing of their performances, playing as often as it was possible to do so. It would be hazardous to say that weekday playing, and hence the potential to attract people away from work, at once increased; but accusations

by successive London mayors that the theatres were having an anti-productive effect. 
all date from after 1576. In 1582 the Lord Mayor forbade freemen of the livery 
companies from allowing ‘any of ther servants, apprentices, journemen, or children, to 
repare or goe to annye playes, peices, or enterludes, either within the cittie or suburbs 
thereof, or to annye place witheout the same’ (Chambers, iv, 287). In 1592 he 
complained to John Whitgift that because of plays ‘the prentizes & seruants’ were 
‘withdrawen from their woorks’, and asked him to intercede with the Master of the 
Revels to have them banned in London (Chambers, iv, 307-08). Petitioning Lord 
Burghley in 1594 not to let the Swan be built, the Lord Mayor complained that 

our apprentices and servants ar by this means corrupted & induced hear by to 
defraud their Maisters, to maintein their vain & prodigall expenses occasioned by 
such evill and riotous companie, whearinto they fall by these kynd of meetings, to 
the great hinderance of the trades & traders inhabiting this Citie. (Chambers, iv, 
316-17)

Although the Lord Mayor of course had public order in mind when bemoaning the 
presence of servants and apprentices at plays, the reference to ‘the great hinderance of 
the trades & traders’ shows that he was also using the loss of productivity as an 
argument. Finally, the Lord Mayor complained to the Privy Council in 1597 that plays 

maintaine idlenes in such persons as haue no vocation & draw apprentices and 
other seruantes from theire ordinary workes and all sortes of people from the 
resort vnto sermons and other Christian exercises, to the great hinderance of 
traides & prophanation of religion established by her highnes within this Realm. 
(Chambers, iv, 322)

It may be mentioned in passing that along with the building of the Theatre and its 
successors, another factor which may have led to an increase in the number of workers 
absconding to the playhouses was a measure introduced by the City authorities 
themselves. In the wake of the Paris Garden accident of 1583, ‘where by ruyn of all the 
scaffoldes [...] a greate nombre of people [were] some presentlie slayne, and some 
maymed and greavouslie hurte’, they complained to Lord Burghley, who agreed to ban 
playgoing on the Sabbath; although the persistence of bans on Sunday playing after this
date suggests that the original measure was not successfully enforced, this would
nevertheless almost certainly have increased the amount of playing that took place on
weekdays, and hence the potential of plays to disrupt working life (Chambers, iv, 292).
While on the one hand the City authorities expressed concern about the theatre’s
capacity to interfere with work, however, on the other they appear to have been happy
to reap the rewards of its economic success. As I noted earlier, from 1574 they were
using money gained from the licensing of playing spaces to pay for poor relief; the
Privy Council’s permission for the building of the Fortune theatre in 1600 was given
only after the inhabitants of Finsbury had sent them a letter testifying that not only was
the proposed site near Finsbury Fields and so no great disturbance, but also ‘the
Erectours of the saied howse are contented to give a very liberall porcion of money
weekelie, towards the releef of our Poore, The nomber & necessity whereof is soe
greate that the same will redounde to the contynuall comfort of the saied Poore’
(Chambers, iv, 327-28). It was not only in the paying of poor rates that the theatres
integrated themselves into the London economy: the Privy Council’s decision to let the
Rose theatre be reopened in about 1592 came after Lord Strange’s Men had sent them a
petition to that effect, citing their own difficulty in meeting overheads and the fact that
‘the use of our plaiehouse on the Banckside, by reason of the passage to and frome the
same by water, is a greate releif to the poore watermen theare’. They enclosed a letter
from the watermen in support of this (Chambers, iv, 311-12).

The relation of the theatres to the rest of the urban economy in the latter half of the
sixteenth century has therefore an element of irony to it. As playing becomes, in a
sense, more like work (repetitive, geographically fixed, carried out on weekdays,
generating money that can be fed back into the economy in the form of poor rates), so
the City authorities increasingly complain about its capacity to distract workers. Some
critics have argued that many of the antitheatrical tracts which appeared in the years following 1576 constituted another line of attack by the Lord Mayor and Corporation—that they encouraged hack-writers and churchmen to continue in print and pulpit their campaign against the theatres. Muriel Bradbrook contends that 'the City Fathers appealed to their clerical mercenaries' to attack plays; Andrew Gurr suggests a little more cautiously that on occasion, 'particularly in the years after the first theaters were established, 1576-84, the Lord Mayor may have financed pamphleteers like the former playwright Stephen Gosson to attack the irreligious iniquities of playgoing'.29 Certainly, the fact that the first verso of Anglo-Phile Eutheo's *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (1580) prominently displays the arms of the City of London suggests that at least one antitheatricalist received encouragement from the city authorities.30 Other critics, however, have argued that writings against the theatre have a more complex motivation. Laura Levine identifies in them an anxiety about the power of theatre to transform the self—this anxiety taking the form at first of a 'vague sense that theatre could somehow soften the responses of the audience', and then in the seventeenth century of 'the fear—expressed in virtually biological terms—that theatre could structurally transform men into women'.31 Jean E. Howard and David Scott Kastan both see antitheatrical literature as motivated by a wider cultural concern. For Howard, 'the tracts as a whole show the enormous pressure placed on certain ideological positions by changing social conditions and practices, of which the theater becomes a convenient symbol'; Kastan argues that they give voice to 'the cultural

30 Anglo-Phile Eutheo and Salvianus, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (London, 1580).
anxiety about the fluidity of social role and identity’. Finally, Jonas Barish sees them as symptoms of a transhistorical ‘disapproval of the theater’ of ‘nearly universal dimension’. Certainly, anxieties about gender and about social identity are readily discernible in much antitheatrical literature; likewise, some of the literature seems so venomous as to suggest an instinctive prejudice of which the stated arguments are merely rationalisations. However, one problem inherent in all these analyses is that they regard antitheatricalism as a distinct cultural phenomenon that can be explicated by one or another theory. This may be an effect of E. K. Chambers’ decision to take extracts from certain texts and to group them together under the heading of ‘documents of criticism’, thereby subsuming them within his argument about the theatre’s struggle for acceptance in the face of civic and religious opposition (Chambers, iv, 184-259). Under closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the earlier texts do not focus primarily upon the theatre, and that their criticisms of it should be seen in the context of their wider concerns.

It is evident from the title of John Northbrooke’s A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes &c. Commonly Vsed on the Sabbath Day, Are Reproued by the Authoritie o f the Word of God and Auntient Writers, first published in 1577, that his field of interest extends beyond stage plays alone. Broadly speaking, his argument concerns itself with the proper use of time. The main text begins with Age asking Youth why he has not attended church; it transpires that Youth spent the Sabbath asleep after gambling through Saturday night. Age insists that all time, not merely the Sabbath, should be spent in the service of God, and concludes from the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 20, and the parables of the

talents in Matthew 25 and Luke 19, 'that wee oughte to waste and spende no time, nay, no houre in ydlenesse, but in some good exercise. &c. as it maye onelye redounde to the glorie of the immortall name of God, and profite of our neyghboures'. Naturally, this creates a dualism between time used properly and time used improperly. Examples of the misuse of time are the excessive enjoyment of things we need in moderation, such as food, sleep, and recreation. The last of these is permissible in so far as after it one may 'more chearefully retume to his ordinarie labour and vocation'. Excessive recreation, however, constitutes idleness:

Idlenesse is a wicked will giuen to rest and slouthfulnesse, from all right, necessarie, godly, and profitable workes. &c. Also ydlenesse is not onely of the body or mynde to cease from labour, but especially an omission or letting passe negligentlye all honest exercises: for no day ought to be passed ouer without some good profitable exercises, to the prayse of Gods glorious name, to our brethrens profite, & to our selues commoditie and learning.

Idleness, too, leads on to other sins. But Northbrooke above all insists that it is an evil in itself, a failure to use time for its allotted purpose. When he comes to criticise plays, he takes this argument a stage further. Playgoing is one of the many activities Northbrooke attacks as a waste of time that should be put to better use; similarly it is a prodigal use of money that should be given to the poor or 'to the mariage of poore Maydens, high wayes, or poore schollers'. As well as being idle, however, the theatre is actively corrupt: the buildings are no better than brothels, and the gestures of the players are lewd and filthy.34

As with Northbrooke’s work, the full title of Stephen Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579) indicates the breadth of his concerns: it contains ‘a plesaunt inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters, and such like Caterpillers of a Commonwelth’. Whereas

Northbrooke deals with the proper use of time, however, Gosson is concerned with art. His antitheatricalism is part of a wider questioning of the value of poetry, which ‘dwelleth longest in those pointes, that profite least’. Like Northbrooke’s theatre, poetry for Gosson is not only idle, but actively corrupt; no wonder Plato banished poets, those ‘effeminate writers, vnprofitable members, and vtter enemies to vertue’ from his Republic. Poetry once had a noble function: ‘too haue the notable exploytes of woorthy Captaines, the holesome councels of good fathers, and vertuous liues of predecessors set downe in numbers’ – this both distracted its feasting listeners from their drinking, and filled them with the desire for emulation. However, it is now abused, serving only hedonistic purposes, and thereby encouraging wanton behaviour; its allurement ‘drawes the mind from vertue, and confoundeth wit’. As with Northbrooke, specific criticisms are made against the stage. Its fictions are spectacular and therefore all the more alluring; theatres allow the sexes to mingle and prostitutes to ply their trade; players by overdressing defy sumptuary law. Gosson’s central criticism of plays, however, is one to which poetry is also subject: they are idle, and they corrupt by seducing the reason with vanities. As with Northbrooke, an attack on the theatre has a wider context. This fact is confirmed by the scope of Thomas Lodge’s *A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse* (1579-80), which, like Sidney’s contemporaneous *The Defence of Poesie*, devotes most space to answering the general criticism of poetic fiction *per se* rather than that of the theatre in particular.

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In their different ways, the tracts of Northbrooke and Gosson can both be seen as
illustrating the cultural trend towards utilitarianism identified by Russell Fraser in *The
War Against Poetry*, whereby artistic fictions are condemned for their ‘lack of utility’.37
Theatre-going is condemned as a waste of time, stage plays as an abuse of art. Although
Philip Stubbes’s *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) is a third tract in which
antitheatricalism is not the main thread, but rather only one element of a more wide-
ranging argument, it differs from its fellows in this respect. Stubbes reprehends a vast
range of contemporary wrongdoing, his representative interlocutor in the tract’s
dialogue convinced by the overwhelming prevalence of all types of sin that ‘the fearfull
daie of the Lord cannot be farre of’.38 Stage-plays are only one of a huge number of
abuses against which, in the light of impending apocalypse, Stubbes launches his
invective, including excess in apparel (upon which he treats at great length), whoredom,
gluttony, drunkenness, covetousness, usury and swearing.

By the time of Stubbes’s treatise, however, the nature and status of literary attacks
upon the theatre were changing. Works had begun to appear which did indeed take the
stage as the principal object of their criticism: the first of these seems to have been
Anglo-Phile Eutheo’s *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters*, of
1580. In some respects, Eutheo can be credited with inventing antitheatrical literature as
a genre. Although, as we have, seen, *The Schoole of Abuse* is not primarily concerned
with the stage, Eutheo enlists it as the ‘first blast’; his own work provides two more
such blasts, in the form of a translation of an antitheatrical section of Salvianus’s *De
gubernatione Dei*, followed by a ‘third blast’, apparently by Eutheo himself. Some of
his arguments against the theatre recall Northbrooke and Gosson: plays are ‘publike

enemies to virtue, & religion; allurements vnto sinne; corrupters of good manners; the cause of securitie and carelesnes; meere brothel houses of Bauderie; and bring both the Gospel into slander; the Sabboth into contempt; mens soules into danger; and finalie the whole Commonweale into disorder'. He also shares their tendency to categorise as idle time not spent in the service of God: ‘I would to God you would bestowe the time you consume in those vanities in seeking after virtue, and glorie’. More than either Gosson or Northbrooke, however, and perhaps because of his sponsorship by the Corporation of London, Eutheo’s tract is informed by economic arguments against the theatre on the grounds of idleness. He criticises noblemen for retaining players as their servants:

since the reteining of these Caterpillers, the credite of Noble men hath decaied, & they are thought to be couetous by permitting their seruants, which cannot liue of themselues, and whome for neerenes they wil not maintaine, to liue at the deuotion or almes of other men [...].

By such infamous persons much time is lost; and manie daies of honest trauel are turned into vaine exercises. Wherein is learned nothing but abuse; poore men liuing on their handie labor, are by them trained vnto vnthriftines; scholers by their gaudes are allured from their studies.

It is not entirely clear whether the poor men and scholars referred to in the final sentence are understood to be led into idleness by attending plays or by acting and writing them, but the essential point is clear: actors both follow an idle means of living that is no more than beggary, and encourage others away from their proper work with their vain shows. More than in Gosson or Northbrooke, the actors themselves come in for criticism: ‘are they not commonlie such kind of men in their conuersation, as they are in profession? Are they not as variable in hart, as they are in their partes?’. Eutheo denigrates actors’ social status: rather than being noblemen’s servants,

they are of the most part of men either of auctoritie, or learning held for vagabondes, & infamous persons; they maie aptlie be likened vnto droanes, which wil not labor to bring in, but liue of the labors of the paineful gatherers. They are therefor to be thrust out of the Bee-hiue of a Christian Common-weale.39

Two works from the 1580s, Stephen Gosson's *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions* and William Rankins' *A Mirrovvr of Monsters*, demonstrate similar tendencies to Eutheo's. The first of these, as its title suggests, concentrates upon plays in particular rather than poetry in general; it is also more extreme than is *The Schoole of Abuse*, advocating (as Arthur Kinney puts it) 'not the amendment and regulation but the abolition of plays'. In addition, it demonstrates a greater concern with the actor in particular as well as with the theatre. The player's 'idle occupation' is branded as God's enemy; its practitioners should be expelled from the commonwealth. Like Eutheo, Gosson attacks the conduct of players: though they insist that their productions can have a morally beneficial effect, 'the dayly experience of their behauiour, sheweth, that they reape no profit by the discipline them selues'. They do not earn their livelihood by legitimate means, being either 'men of occupations, which they haue forsaken to lyue by playing, or common minstrels, or trayne vp from theire childhoode to this abominable exercise & haue now no other way to gete theire liuinge'. Gosson hopes accordingly that 'such as haue lefte theire occupations, eyther be turned to the same againe, or cut of from the body as putrefied members for infecting the rest'. More than Gosson or Eutheo, Rankins similarly criticises players, calling them 'consuming caterpillars', 'serpents', 'sent from their great captaine Sathan [...] to deceiue the world'. He portrays the Theatre in Shoreditch as the venue for a marriage between Pride and Lust, attended by more abstract nouns which he believes to be applicable to players: Flattery, Ingratitute, Dissention, Blasphemy, and (the 'cheefe masker') Idleness. The last of these is 'the roote of mischiefe, and originall of vices'; players 'doo not onelie

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41 Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions* (London, 1582), sigs B3', C3', [C7']', [G6]', [G7]'.
exercise themselves in all kind of Idlenesse, but minister occasion to manie to incurre the like'.

Other than Stubbes's *Anatomie*, which is something of a throwback, works of the 1580s that criticise the theatre tend to differ from those of the previous decade in several important respects. They are concerned solely with the theatre, rather than with wider issues of which the stage is only one aspect. Their focus has widened, or shifted altogether, from playgoing to playacting. Finally, they employ economic arguments against the stage, representing actors as unproductive drones who entice workers from their labours. One might expect actors to have used the stage to defend themselves from these accusations; however, while the actor and dramatist Thomas Heywood wrote an *Apology for Actors*, published in 1612, I have found only one instance where such a defence was explicitly articulated in the theatre, a (now lost) 'playe of playes' which Gosson refers to as having attempted to answer the criticisms he made in *The Schoole of Abuse*. However, onstage representations of actors in the 1590s — though they are usually peripheral to the main action of the plays in which they appear — can be read as reactions to the criticisms of Gosson, Northbrooke and their fellows. Initially, the representations are negative, depicting a histrionic incompetence against which the 'real' actors can define themselves. Over the course of the decade, however, the relationship between the fictional and actual actors becomes more complex, and increasing play is made on the ideological framework which enables the entertainment purveyed by the actors to be designated the product of work.

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42 William Rankins, *A Mirrovr of Monsters* (London, 1587), fols 2r-2v, 8r-9r.
I will begin with *The Taming of a Shrew* (c. 1588-93), not because it is necessarily
the earliest of the plays I want to examine but because its intervention in the debate
about acting and work is the simplest. Like Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, it
uses the framing device of a trick played on a drunkard whereby he is persuaded that he
is a lord recovering from illness. To accomplish the deception, the actual Lord uses
players in his service (they are explicitly referred to as ‘your plaiers’ in line 61) who
have felicitously arrived, presumably from touring. The players are represented as
buffoons, mistaking their words:

SANDER  Marrie my lord you maie haue a Tragicall
  Or a comoditie, or what you will.
THE OTHER  A Comedie thou shouldst say, souns thout shame vs all. (l. 70)

Their Lord does not bother to explain the nature of the deception he intends to
perpetrate, merely telling the players that they must not be distracted by their auditor,
who is ‘something foolish’. His simplification is happily accepted:

SANDER  Oh braue, sirha Tom, we must play before
  A foolish Lord, come lets go make vs ready,
  Go get a dishclout to make cleane your shooes,
  And Ile speake for the properties, My Lord, we must
  Haue a shoulder of mutton for a propertie,
  And a little vinegre to make our Diuell rore. (l. 95)\(^4^4\)

The dirty shoes remind us of the actors’ lowly status; the shoulder of mutton may be a
subterfuge to add to their presumably meagre diet, as well as being an additional
homely detail. Finally, the roaring devil is a mediaeval hangover that makes the players’
repertoire sound dated. However, the play seen by Sly and by us subverts the
expectations set up in the Induction, being a modern, romantic comedy set in Athens
(although the shoulder of mutton does make an appearance). There is nothing in the text
to suggest that it should be badly acted. A gap is thus created between the actors

references in the text are to this edition; speech prefixes have been standardised, as in plays quoted
throughout this thesis.
performing the ‘real’ *Taming of a Shrew* and those who are imagined as performing it within the fiction set up by the Induction. The modernity, competence, and professionalism of the real-life actors is magnified by means of contrast with the fictional ones.

This claim of greater aptitude must have had some validity. An urban environment where several companies were competing for the attentions of a finite audience and where playing was increasingly becoming a daily event almost certainly fostered a superior technique to that of earlier actors. It would also have necessitated hard work. Peter Thomson concludes from some instances where the Henslowe papers reveal both the date when the manuscript of a play was delivered and the date when its run of performances began that actors in the 1590s had to pack a great deal of rehearsal into a short time; a total of twenty-four hours might be all the time available to rehearse an entire play.  

The articles of agreement made between Robert Dawes and Lady Elizabeth’s Men when he joined them in 1614 are a slightly later testimony to the growing need for personal work-discipline: they prescribe financial penalties if he should ‘at any tyme faile to come at the hower appoynted’ to rehearsals, fail to arrive promptly for performances ‘ready apparerled’, or if he should ‘happen to be overcome with drinck’ at the time of performance (Chambers, II, 256). It is the sense of acting as a skill acquired through careful practice and diligent training that lies behind the gentle mockery of the clownish troupe in *The Taming of a Shrew*. By implication, the labour and craftsmanship that have gone into the ‘real’ play are emphasised.

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45 Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare’s Professional Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 93. Tiffany Stern, however, has more recently argued that ‘plays could be allotted a varying amount of time for preparation depending on when they were put on within the theatrical season, and […] different kinds of play were allotted different portions of preparation time: more for a tragedy; less for a farce’ – Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p 55.
A similar process is at work in Anthony Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (early 1590s?). Munday's engagement in debate about the status of actors is intriguing in the light of the fact that he may, under the pseudonym of Anglo-phile Eutheo, have been the 'setter forth' of *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plaies and Theaters*. As in *The Taming of a Shrew*, the actors in *John a Kent* are peripheral to the main plot; and they, too, seem intended to magnify the professionalism of players performing the piece as a whole. 'Turnop w^th his crewe of Clownes, & a Minstrell' are rustic amateurs who stage unsolicited entertainments and expect payment in return (l. 334). They put on a brief pageant for two passing lords, Morton and Pembrook, in which the former is signified by a moor holding 'a Tun painted with yellow oker' and the latter by 'a Porrenger full of water [and] a pen in it' (l. 369). Morton and Pembrook are told by the son of Chester, the players' feudal lord,

> My Lordes, my fathers tennants after their homely guise, welcom ye with their countrey merriment, How bad so ere, yet must ye needes accept it. (l. 389)

One function of these clowns is to contrast with the two magicians of the play's title, whose more sophisticated trickery is also depicted in terms of theatre. In their battle to obtain the hands of Marian and Sydanen for two rival pairs of would-be bridegrooms, a masque and a play are used. John a Kent laments early on the fact that his victory has been too easy, and determines to make things more difficult for himself: 'Must the first Scene make absolute a play? | no crosse? no chaunge? what? no variety?' (l. 530). At the same time, however, Turnop and company are also set up as the foils of the actors who are performing them and the other parts. The former are inept amateurs who

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perform in the context of a society where theatre is a way of rendering feudal dues and therefore need not be a quality product. The latter, it is implied, are skilful professionals who must be entertaining in order to survive within the nascent theatrical marketplace of the early modern capital.

In *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, the majority of which is thought to be have been written by Munday around the same time, depictions of players likewise have both a thematic significance and an extra-dramatic resonance. In one respect, the presence of players within the fiction underlines More's own quasi-histrionic abilities. The historical More, of course, likened politics to 'Kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the more part plaied vpon scafoldes'. In the play, More's political talents have a decidedly theatrical aspect, whether he is using his rhetorical gifts to calm the rioting Londoners, or stage-managing miniature dramas like that in which he has his servant dress up as him to deceive Erasmus. Towards the end of the play, the condemned More explicitly compares himself to an actor: 'I confesse his maiestie hath bin euer good to me, and my offence to his highnesse, makes me of a state pleader, a stage player, (though I am olde, and haue a bad voyce) to act this last Sceane of my tragedie' (1. 1931). Earlier in the play, the arrival of the Lord Cardinal's players, and the absence of one of their number who has run off to fetch a false beard, gives More the opportunity to demonstrate his histrionic and improvisational talents when he steps into the breach to take the part of Good Counsel. When More and his guests have gone in to dinner, one of the actors says,

*doo ye heare fellowes? would not my Lord make a rare player? Oh, he would vpholde a companie beyond all hoe, better then Mason among the Kings players:*

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did ye marke how extemprically he fell to the matter, and spake Lugginses parte, almoste as it is in the very booke set downe. (l. 1150)

As well as helping to underline the theme of politics and theatre, however, the player scene in *The Book of Sir Thomas More* once again modifies the audience's perception of the actors. The performance is an unscheduled pre- and post-dinner entertainment, chaotic to the extent that an amateur has to take over one of the parts. The play itself is (by Elizabethan standards) highly old-fashioned, as are the other works in the repertoire of the Lord Cardinal’s Men:

the Cradle of Securitie,  
hit nayle o’th head, impacient pouertie,  
the play of foure Pees, duies and Lazarus,  
Lustie Iuuentus, and the mariage of witt and wisedome. (l. 919)

The play eventually performed features an inevitable Vice who flourishes an equally inevitable dagger, whose speech (like that of the other characters) consists of clumsy dactyls and hoary rhymes:

Back with those boyes, and saucie great knaues,  
what, stand ye heere so bigge in your braues?  
my dagger about your coxecombes shall walke,  
if I may but so much as heare ye chat or talke. (l. 1068)

More himself, before the play commences, manifests an attitude to the players that is not so far from that of Chester’s son in *John a Kent*. The performance is not a product to be judged good or bad, but an offering to be welcomed in the spirit in which it was meant. To his wife’s pessimistic prediction as to the play’s quality, More replies, ‘I am sure theyle doo their best, | they that would better, comes not at their feaste. [...] if Arte faile, weele inche it out with looue’ (l. 992). To a certain extent, Munday’s depiction of the players, their play, and More’s reception of it, is to be seen as an attempt at historical verisimilitude. A side-effect, however, is once more to set up a contrast between the inept players giving a private performance of an old-fashioned play, and the modern actors that Munday imagines performing a sophisticated play on a daily basis in
a purpose-built theatre. The fact that More is able to improvise the character of Good Counsel serves to underline both his virtuosity and the simplistic, predictable nature of *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, while implicitly denigrating the professional expertise of actors whose work can so easily be imitated by a gifted amateur.

In this respect, *The Book of Sir Thomas More* is typical of the plays that have been examined so far. By depicting actors who lack technical skills and who purvey an inferior product that is more feudal offering than commodity, the plays conversely imply that the Elizabethan actor is a craftsman who has acquired his proficiency through application and who is offering up his skills within a competitive marketplace. As such, they intervene in the debate about the legitimacy of recreation, arguing that the actor is not an idle rogue or vagabond, whose plays are a deceit to inveigle money out of honest citizens, but rather a trained professional earning money through legitimate work.

Two of Shakespeare's plays from the 1590s, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, appear to convey a similar message but in slightly different ways. The first of these may be a rewriting of *The Taming of a Shrew*, or conceivably *A Shrew* could be a rewriting of it – dating Shakespeare's play, which first appeared in the 1623 Folio, depends on which of these one takes to be the case. At any rate, Shakespeare's treatment makes better sense in realist terms: rather than having clownish actors with an old-fashioned repertoire perform a modern and sophisticated romantic comedy, he depicts actors whose demeanour is more in keeping with the play they perform. The Lord treats them with a respectfulness that anticipates Hamlet's:

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LORD  Do you intend to stay with me to-night?
2. PLAYER  So please your lordship to accept our duty.
LORD  With all my heart. This fellow I remember
      Since once he play'd a farmer's eldest son.
      'Twas where you woo'd the gentlewoman so well.
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I have forgot your name; but sure that part
Was aptly fitted and naturally perform’d.
1. PLAYER I think ’twas Soto that your honor means.
LORD ’Tis very true; thou didst it excellent. (Ind. 1. 81)

The presentation of the players is much more low-key than in *A Shrew*; it is also more confident, showing no need to ridicule them in order to magnify their real-life equivalents. Their work is an accomplishment that, when well-carried out, is memorable and praiseworthy. Shakespeare’s play creates an overlap between the real and fictional players, such that praise for the one is implicitly praise for the other.

A similar overlap between the two sets of actors exists in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In one sense, of course, they are set up in clear contrast to each other: the bumbling amateurs who follow conventional trades by day, and whose hilariously bad performance is an offering rather than a commodity, against the professionals of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Puck’s closing speech, however, emphasises the parallels between them. ‘If we shadows have offended’ (V. 1. 423) – ‘we’ presumably meaning the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, since Puck has now taken on the role of Epilogue – recalls both Peter Quince’s prologue (‘If we offend, it is with our good will’, V. 1. 108) and Theseus’s excusing of the play (‘The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them’, V. 1. 211). The relationship between the two groups of actors is thus more complicated than in any of the other plays mentioned so far: at the same time, the mechanicals both aggrandize their real-life equivalents by means of contrast (as in *The Taming of a Shrew*, *John a Kent*, and *Sir Thomas More*) and, in a curious sense, stand for them. Accordingly, the scenes that show the rehearsals for the play, as well as giving occasion for the mechanicals to be in the wood so that Titania can fall in love with Bottom, emphasise to the audience the labour that has gone into the performance they are watching. Indeed Philostrate, when
telling Theseus why he should not let Pyramus and Thisbe be performed, focuses to a striking extent on the work their rehearsal has entailed. The players, he says, are

Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,  
Which never labor'd in their minds till now;  
And now have toiled their unbreathed memories  
With this same play, against your nuptial. [...]  
It is not for you. I have heard it over,  
And it is nothing, nothing in the world;  
Unless you can find sport in their intents,  
Extremely stretch'd, and conn'd with cruel pain,  
To do you service. (v. 1. 72)

The mental labour – memorising lines and rehearsing their delivery – that goes into even the worst of plays is made evident. At the same time, however, the very fact that rehearsal is depicted onstage has a further significance, one which is connected with the terms in which patrons of the drama advocated its performance in the face of civic objection.

The actual reasons why, as Chambers put it, ‘the palace was the point of vantage from which the stage won its way, against the linked opposition of an alienated pulpit and an alienated municipality, to an ultimate entrenchment of economic independence’, are uncertain (Chambers, I, 3). Recently, some critics have argued against the assumption that the grounds for this support were aesthetic rather than political. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean point out that puritans on the Privy Council in the 1570s and 80s, such as Walsingham, Leicester and Knollys, would have been well aware of the theatre’s potential as a propaganda tool; they opposed the arguments of the stage’s detractors because:

From their perspective, the danger was not so much that zealous reformers would harm a form of entertainment in which the queen took special pleasure, but that the radical reformers would drive the reform movement apart from a developing
English culture and create a division which the government would find unbridgeable.\(^{51}\)

Whatever the real motives behind the Privy Council’s support for plays, however, the fact remains that their stated reason was the Queen’s taste for dramatic entertainment. In the 1574 patent authorising Leicester’s Men to play in London and throughout the realm, Elizabeth announces that they are licensed to play ‘aswell for the recreacion of oure loving subiectes, as for oure solace and pleasure when we shall thincke good to see them’ (Chambers, ii, 87). In subsequent documents the reference to the recreation of Elizabeth’s subjects is dropped, however, and only the Queen’s own ‘solace’ is still used as a justification, perhaps in order to evade arguments about the legitimacy of recreation: writers and preachers might fulminate against the idleness of commoners, but they could hardly deny the Queen her entertainment. A 1578 letter from the Privy Council requiring the London authorities to allow various companies to play mentions that ‘the companies aforenamed are appointed to playe this tyme of Christmas before her Majestie’ (Chambers, iv, 278; Chambers’ paraphrase). Another letter of 1581 requests that a ban on playing be lifted now that the plague has abated, on the grounds of ‘the releife of theis poore men the players and their redinesse with conuenient matters for her highnes solace this next Christmas, which cannot be without their vsuall exercise therein’ (Chambers, iv, 283-84). The same justification is used in letters of 1582 and 1583 (Chambers, iv, 287-88, 295-96). The status of playing, therefore, has acquired a new aspect. The plays acted in the London playhouses are to be seen, not as performances in their own right, but as rehearsals for a more important performance over the holiday season. Rather than giving their audiences a finished product, the playing companies are in effect allowing them (for a price) to watch them at work, practising for the all-important Court performance. In this light, the fact that...
Midsummer Night's Dream lets us see the process of rehearsal acquires a new significance. The audience's vision of Bottom and company at work rehearsing foregrounds the notion that the play as a whole is, in effect, a rehearsal by the Lord Chamberlain's Men and not a final performance. We are watching the labour that goes into the product, not the product itself. In this sense, the rehearsal scenes in A Midsummer Night's Dream are a staging of one of the fictions that permit the public performance of drama by designating it work, not recreation.\textsuperscript{52}

A further twist is given to this notion of drama as rehearsal in Munday's The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon (entered Stationers' Register 1600), the first of that dramatist's two Robin Hood plays.\textsuperscript{53} Like Sir Thomas More, the Downfall is set in the reign of Henry VIII; but this time the intention is not to demean the actors who are represented within it. Rather, the play begins with the courtier Sir John Eltham knocking at the door of the poet Skelton, having just given Henry 'my seruice in suruaying Mappes' (l. 10). Skelton is concerned:

\begin{quote}
Then twill trouble you, after your great affairs,  
To take the paine that I intended to intreat you to,  
About rehearsall of your promis'd play. (l. 14)
\end{quote}

Eltham reassures him: the King himself has asked him to make sure the play be performed as requested. The cast, socially, is extremely mixed, containing not only Skelton, Eltham, and Sir Thomas Mantle, but also a Clown and other commoners. The actors rehearse the dumb show, which Skelton (as Friar Tuck) interprets, concluding:

\begin{quote}
The manner and escape you all shall see.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} Even if the play was written for an aristocratic wedding, as some critics have suggested, the Quarto advertises it as having been 'sundry times publickely acted' by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Textual Notes, Title). For a survey (and eventual rejection) of the arguments for the Dream as an occasional play, see Gary Jay Williams, Our Moonlight Revels: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in the Theatre (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp. 1-18.

ELTHAM Which all, good Skelton?
SKELTON Why all these lookers on:
   Whom if wee please, the king will sure be pleas’d. (I. 108)

The players then go on to complete their rehearsal, which consists of the whole of the
Robin Hood play with occasional interruptions. In its depiction of a rehearsal, and the
insistence that such an activity involves labour, or ‘paine’, the Downfall resembles A
Midsummer Night’s Dream; but clearly, Munday has gone a step further as far as the
complexity of the relation between real and fictional actors is concerned. Here, almost
the whole of the play purports to be a rehearsal, before a dimly imagined audience, of a
drama that will be performed before Henry, much as the public performance of
Munday’s play is supposedly a rehearsal for a future performance at Court. Tiffany
Stern has argued that the play is meant to be imagined as a rehearsal before the Master
of the Revels, into whom ‘by sleight-of-hand we, the audience, have been transformed’;
however, there is no basis for this in the text, and the fact that the rehearsal is a dress
rehearsal at Skelton’s house makes it seem decidedly unlikely (II. 21, 1). Rather, I
would suggest that by turning the whole play into a rehearsal, Munday makes the
Downfall formally embody one of the arguments for the public theatre’s existence.

Such a reading of the play needs to acknowledge the possibility that the Induction
may not have appeared in the play’s public performance at all, as Celeste Turner argues
on the basis of Henslowe’s ten-shilling loan to Henry Chettle in earnest for a comedy
and ‘for mendinge of Roben hood for the corte’. While the idea of a performance at
Court advertising itself as a rehearsal for a performance at Court has its attractions, John
C. Meagher has argued that the ‘unsettled and unfinished’ nature of the printed text

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54 Stern, p. 51.
'makes it improbable that Chettle's additions, composed some nine months after the settled and finished version of the play had been presented to the Admiral's Men, are in any way represented here'. Although the assumption that Munday would necessarily have presented the Admiral's Men with a 'settled and finished version of the play' may be disputed, it does seem unlikely that an inconsistent text would represent the play as it was performed at Court. Furthermore, there are aesthetic grounds for assuming that the Induction was a feature of the play as Munday conceived it for the public stage. There is a running joke whereby Friar Tuck's speech repeatedly lapses into Skeltonics; this only makes sense if we imagine that Skelton himself is playing Tuck, and has slipped out of character, an interpretation confirmed by Sir John Eltham's complaint that 'you fall into your vaine, | Of ribble rabble rimes, Skeltonicall, | So oft, and stand so long, that yon [sic] offend' (l. 2234; cf. l. 890). These moments, fostering the conceit that we are watching a rehearsal of the Robin Hood play rather than the real thing, do not detach easily from the Downfall as a whole, suggesting that they were in the play from the start. Clearly, their function is partly comic; however, Munday's blurring of the performance of the Admiral's Men and that of Skelton and his fellows should be seen in the context of his earlier interest in the legitimising of acting as work. The presence of Henry's courtiers within the performance realises the idea of actors as servants of royalty: by taking Elizabethan justifications of the public actor's status and placing them in the Henrician period, Munday gives them both publicity and pedigree.

The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon is my final example of a tendency in plays of the 1590s, when representing actors, to do so with a view towards defining contemporary theatrical performance as work. Several methods were used to achieve

57 See also l. 846, 1587, 1592, 1601, 2491.
this end. Some plays depicted the actors of the past as amateurish, inept and old-fashioned in order to contrast them with the skilful professionals by whom they were portrayed. Shakespeare, in *The Taming of the Shrew* (and later in *Hamlet*), has one of his characters explicitly praise the fictional actors, and by extension the real actors playing them. In plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the *Downfall*, a more complex relationship between real and fictional actors obtains, one that plays on the idea of public drama as a rehearsal for a performance at Court. Common to all these instances is an underlying theme that acting is not play but work: this can be seen both in the insistence that the actor is a skilled professional, and in the emphasis on rehearsal (and by extension public performance, which was another kind of rehearsal) as difficult and laborious. However, to define oneself as a worker is not the only use that can be made of the idea of work; and in the remainder of this chapter, I want briefly to argue that dramatists writing for the revived children's companies at the end of the 1590s related acting to work in an altogether different manner.

This was partly due to the different relationship between dramatists and actors that obtained in the children's theatre. As David Mann points out, dramatists writing for the adult companies relinquished a large degree of artistic control to the actors themselves, who were in a position to change, rearrange, and cut parts of plays; writers such as Greene and Nashe bemoaned 'the humiliating necessity of university graduates to write for the stage and the exploitation they thereby suffered at the hands of the grasping and upstart players'. The fact that the actors in the private theatres were children, however, gave dramatists a great deal more independence: 'Not only did the poets have more opportunity to join the managements of the Children's companies and share their financial rewards, but they had much greater artistic freedom to develop new forms,
and, with a receptive, relatively select audience, to introduce new content'. Writers for this stage were able to minimise the importance of the actors' contribution: in Jonson's prologue to *Cynthia's Revels*, performed by the Children of the Chapel in 1600 or 1601, he boasts that the play affords 'Words, aboue action: matter, aboue words' (Prologue, l. 20). The words written by the dramatist, and the 'matter' they contain, are privileged above the way the children's 'action' gives them expression. Again, at the close of Marston's *Antonios Revenge*, performed at Paul's around the same time, the ghost of Andrugio says that the unhappy end of Mellida would be fit material for a drama:

And, ô, if ever time create a Muse,  
That to th' immortal fame of virgine faith,  
Dares once engage his pen to write her death,  
Presenting it in some black Tragedie,  
May it prove gratious, may his stile be deckt  
With freshest bloomes of purest elegance;  
May it have gentle presence, and the Sceans suckt up  
By calme attention of choyce audience. (v. 6)\(^6\)

The tragic poet is conceived as speaking directly to his attentive audience; there is no mention of the medium, the actors, by which his words are conveyed.

Confusingly, though, the same dramatists who minimise the contribution of actors in this fashion seem at pains elsewhere to remind their audiences of the actors’ presence. The Induction to *Antonio and Mellida* (performed 1599-1600), the predecessor of *Antonios Revenge*, studiously emphasises its own theatricality. The children appear as actors, not in the personae they will adopt in the play proper; the mood is slightly chaotic since, as the actor playing Piero says, 'we can say our parts: but wee are

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[^60]: The *Plays of John Marston*, ed. by H. Harvey Wood, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934-39), i, 133. References in the text are to this edition, which is not lineated.
ignorant in what mould we must cast our Actors’ (Induction). To some extent, this witty metatheatrical playfulness is its own justification; it also allows Marston to incorporate satirical prose characters in his drama, as the children describe the individuals they are to personate. However, it also requires the audience to accept the (presumably fictional) notion that *Antonio and Mellida* has not been rehearsed, at least not in the sense that (for example) *Pyramus and Thisbe* has been rehearsed. The boys have committed their parts to memory (‘we can say our parts’), but have not acted them out before, being ‘ignorant in what mould we must cast our Actors’, and each apparently not knowing which parts his fellows will be performing.

Reavley Gair ascribes the fiction of unrehearsedness to the fact that, he surmises, *Antonio and Mellida* was the first play staged by the revived Paul’s company: the Induction is ‘at once apologetic (with an implied request for the tolerance of inexperience) and invitational (soliciting response from the audience in guiding the future development of this theatrical enterprise)’. However, this does not explain why other inductions at the private theatres present the actors in a similar fashion. At the beginning of *Cynthia’s Revels*, three of the actors appear, squabbling over who is to read the Prologue; when they have drawn lots to decide, the winner summarises the play’s argument, satirises the tobacco-smoking gallants who are presumed to constitute the audience, and finally reads the Prologue. As in *Antonios Revenge*, the Induction serves to introduce some of the characters of the play, and display the author’s wit in characterising contemporary types; at the same time, the studied chaos gives a similar impression of unrehearsedness:

1. Pray you away; why fellowes? Gods so? what doe you meane?
2. Mary that you shall not speake the Prologue, sir.

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3. Why? doe you hope to speake it?
2. I, and I thinke I haue most right to it: I am sure I studied it first.
3. That's all one, if the Authour thinke I can speake it better.
1. I pleade possession of the cloake: Gentles, your suffrages I pray you.
   (Induction, l. 1)

Clearly, while the children know their lines, there has been no actual rehearsal of them – not of the Prologue, at any rate. A practice that is emphasised in the adult theatre, with a view to stressing the work that has gone into dramatic production, is here minimised. A final example appears at the beginning of *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1600), when one of the children comes onto the stage to explain a delay in getting the play started. We are told that the author was

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loth,
Wanting a Prologue, & our selves not perfect,
To rush upon your eyes without respect:
Yet if youle pardon his defects and ours,
Heele give us passage, & you pleasing scenees [...] 
And for our parts to gratifie your favour,
Weele studie till our cheekes looke wan with care,
That you our pleasures, we your loves may share. (Induction)
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The fact that the actors are ‘not perfect’ in their lines is stressed; the work the speaker anticipates doing (‘Weele studie till our cheekes looke wan with care’) is not rehearsal, but the learning of lines, an activity that befits the children’s schoolboy status.

While the greater power and independence of dramatists writing for the private theatre may serve to explain the marginalising of actors, it does not explain these instances, where actors come on stage to advertise the play’s unrehearsedness. Stern’s reading of them is similar to my reading of the *Dream* and the *Downfall*, namely that what looks like a performance is actually supposed to be a rehearsal:

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By resolutely insisting that their performances were simply ‘rehearsals’ for their ‘real’ performances in court and by performing only two or three times a week (separating themselves from adult players who needed to perform daily to support themselves), the boys gave themselves the mystique of court players. And their
'rehearsal' is shown to be so near to performance as to be, literally, indistinguishable from it.\textsuperscript{62}

I would dispute this: Jonson and Marston imply that their plays are unrehearsed, but unlike Munday, they never explicitly state that what is being performed is a rehearsal. This, indeed, would make a nonsense of the fact that the speaker in \textit{Jack Drum's Entertainment} apologises for the play's unrehearsedness, something that, if it were meant to be a rehearsal, would go without saying. When Stern talks of the boys' separateness from 'adult players who needed to perform daily to support themselves', however, and the suggestion that they 'disdained to be more prepared' than they were, she is closer to my own reading of the scenes, which is based on the fact that all of the examples date from the first years of the revived child companies. Although theatre historians have disagreed on the exact nature of the demographic split between audiences at the public and private theatres, there does seem to be a consensus that the children's companies attempted to entice audiences away from their adult competitors.\textsuperscript{63}

As such, metadramatic commentary such as that found in Inductions can be seen as an attempt at self-definition, whereby the child companies tried to identify precisely how their product differed from the adults'. An important theme seems to have been social exclusivity, which was fostered by higher pricing: Gurr puts the basic cost of a seat in one of the amphitheatres at one penny, rising to sixpence for a room in the gallery, whereas prices in the halls began somewhere between three and six pence and rose to two shillings and sixpence.\textsuperscript{64} Dramatists seem to have used the different class of audience that could therefore be found at the private theatres as a selling point. In \textit{Jack Drum's Entertainment}, one character says of the theatre at Paul's,

\textsuperscript{62} Stern, p. 43.


\textsuperscript{64} Gurr, \textit{Playgoing}, p. 27.
I would argue that dramatists' emphasis on the amateur status of actors constitutes one element of this attempt to create an ethos of exclusivity at the private theatres. The children are ostentatiously distanced from the idea of work which their adult competitors were so keen to emphasise. In order to explain why writers might have thought that an emphasis upon idleness would attract an elite audience to their theatres, however, it will first be necessary to explore an issue central to this thesis: the relationship between work and social status. This will be the business of my next two chapters.
Chapter 2. Work and Status in Shakespeare: to *Henry V*

In the last chapter, my key argument was that the ambiguous status of acting in the late sixteenth century drew actors into a wider debate about work and idleness. They were charged both with earning money through play, and with enticing other groups in society away from their own work. In response, theatrical depictions of actors in the public theatre of the 1590s attempted to present acting as work, whether by contrasting the performers with fictional amateur actors, by asserting the dignity of the actor’s profession, or by invoking the notion that public playing was in fact a rehearsal for appearances at court. Dramatists writing for the revived children’s companies at the end of that decade, however, seem to have stressed the amateurism of the performers, and the lack of rehearsal that went into production. Whatever their precise reasons for this may have been — and I hope that this chapter and the one that follows will go some way to answering that question — it is apparent that an activity’s status as work is not fixed: acting is and is not work, depending upon who is carrying it out and under what conditions, and upon who is classifying it and why. More generally, the idea of work itself increasingly seems a somewhat elusive and nebulous concept.
In this chapter and the one that follows, I shall argue that one social group for which the notion of work was particularly problematic in the early modern period was the privileged class—a group by definition exempt from manual labour, but which, in response to new social conditions, began to use the idea of work to justify its status. At the same time, though, increased social mobility caused many gentlemen to place greater stress on such forms of behaviour as idleness and conspicuous expenditure, whether in order to distance themselves from ‘upstarts’ or to bolster their newly-acquired gentility. These contradictory uses of the idea of work by the privileged affected theatrical production in several ways. Factors such as patronage, censorship, and the need for legitimacy in the face of the Corporation of London’s hostility bound the theatre, tightly though not exclusively, to the ruling elite; and one effect of this, I argue, was that some plays presented on the public stage in the 1590s were means by which the elite’s validation of its activities as work was promulgated before a socially mixed audience. However, the radical reorganisation of the theatre industry that took place around the end of the sixteenth century, giving rise to what Andrew Gurr calls a ‘social shift in playgoing priorities which splits the period in two’, changed this state of affairs.¹ In the face of the child companies’ deliberate attempt to attract the privileged, a company that wished to compete for this audience had to stop propagandising for the elite, and start appealing to their prejudices: to speak to them, rather than for them. This, I argue, is reflected in a change in the way the idea of work, and in particular its relation to social status, is treated in plays written for the public stage.

My analysis in these two chapters concentrates on the plays of Shakespeare. I justify this decision on the grounds that he was leading dramatist for the Lord Chamberlain’s /

King's Men, a company which more than any other reshaped itself at the turn of the century in the face of the challenge posed by the children's companies. The replacement of their fool Will Kemp by Robert Armin encapsulated a shift to a more urbane drama; their move from Shoreditch to Southwark made them more accessible to playgoers from London's fashionable West End. I focus on Shakespeare in particular for two reasons. Firstly, and unusually, he wrote almost all his plays for the same company, so that his output reflects that company's changing fortunes. Secondly, it seems to me that his plays engage with questions of gentility and status, more perhaps than those of any other playwright. It would be hazardous to conjecture as to why this might have been the case, although Katherine Duncan-Jones has recently argued on the basis of Shakespeare's acquisition of a coat of arms for his father in 1596, and his apparently unsuccessful attempt of 1599 to quarter the Arden coat of arms with that of Shakespeare, that it was 'important to him to be accepted and respected not only as what Shylock calls "a good man" — a man of financial credit and substance — but also as a "gentleman" '. 2 One effect of my critical methodology in these chapters, which focus on the ways in which the material conditions of the theatre affected dramatic representations of work, is that biography tends to be sidelined. However, facts such as those highlighted by Duncan-Jones are a reminder that Shakespeare as an individual was a participant in the wider cultural trends with which I am concerned.

To begin with, however, I want to clarify what I mean when I refer to the privileged class, and then to explore what might be called the social semiotics of work: the way in which work was bound up with questions of status and class identity. In this chapter I use a variety of terms — privileged, elite, noble, gentle — to denote roughly the same

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group, that is, the relatively small portion of society that through birth, education, government service or, increasingly, purchase, had earned the right to call themselves gentlemen and gentlewomen. This variety of terminology is intended partly to avoid repetitiousness and partly to reflect the verbal inconsistency of early modern writers in their own references to this class. However, it also lays me open to the charge of inexactitude: as Lawrence Stone writes, those ‘who profess to be unable to distinguish between a gentleman and a baronet, a baronet and an earl, betray their insensitivity to the basic presuppositions of Stuart society’. I have tried to stay alert to such distinctions. Nevertheless, gentleman, baronet and earl had much more in common with each other, as possessors of gentility, than they did with the rest of the population; Stone himself writes, ‘On the broad view this was a two-class society of those who were gentlemen and those who were not’. Peter Laslett similarly comments, ‘The term gentleman marked the exact point at which the traditional social system divided up the population into two extremely unequal sections.’ A group of five per cent. or less ‘owned most of the wealth, wielded the power and made all the decisions, political, economic and social for the national whole’. This notion of a two-class society, or, as Laslett sees it, a one-class society, is borne out by contemporary accounts such as that of the Elizabethan educationalist, Richard Mulcaster:

> All the people which be in our countrie be either gentlemen or of the commonalty. The common is deuided into marchauntes and manuaries generally, what partition soeuer is the subdiuident. Marchandize containeth vnder it all those which liue any way by buying or selling: Manuarie those whose handy worke is their ware, and labour their liuing.

Even taxonomies, such as that put forward in William Harrison’s *The Description of England*, which identify a multi-class society seem to imply an underlying two-class

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model. Harrison divides the commonwealth into gentlemen, citizens and burgesses, yeomen, and a fourth class comprising day labourers, poor husbandmen, landless retailers, and artificers; however, he devotes a great deal more space to discussion of the different grades of gentility (prince, duke, marquess, earl, viscount, baron, knight, esquire, gentleman) and to the definition of a gentleman than he does to the other social groups he identifies. Harrison also echoes Mulcaster’s analysis in associating manual and mercantile work with those outside the gentle elite. In a passage which I will examine in more detail in the next chapter, he says that a gentleman is someone who can ‘live without manual labor’. Many early modern writers take this as being the defining feature of a gentleman, viewing manual labour and high social status as incompatible. In 1531, Thomas Elyot denied those who work with their hands any share in the government of the realm, arguing that ‘the potter and tynker, only perfecte in theyr crafte, shall littell do in the ministration of iustice’. A century later, in 1634, Henry Peacham wrote, ‘Whosoever labour for their livelihood and gain have no share at all in nobility or gentry’. Such writers could cite no less an authority than Cicero, who in his *De officiis* placed strict limits on the means by which gentlemen could earn their living, and rejected tax-gathering, usury, hired labour, retail merchandise, and handicrafts as vulgar or dishonest.

Early modern writers seem, on the basis of the accounts quoted above, to have been perhaps surprisingly frank about the exemption from work that membership of the elite brought with it. One might expect that a privileged minority would need to find terms in

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which to justify its privilege; and, indeed, for centuries they had found that justification in war. Laurence Humphrey wrote in 1563 that the reason why ‘our forefathers dischargd the Nobles of baser craftes, was not for they shoulde walowe and freeze in ydlenes: but to practise warlike feates and employe good artes’. He was referring to the mediæval notion that gentlemen’s freedom from manual labour was based on their duty to defend the realm. I quoted some examples of this in my Introduction: Thomas Wimbledon’s statement that ‘To knighthode it falleth to letten wrongs and thefftes to ben done, and to maintain Goddes law and them that ben techers thereof, and also to kepe the londe from enemies of other londes’; a Dominican preacher’s image of the Church as a body, with ‘knights to defend it in the manner of hands’. Edmund Dudley, the grandfather of the Elizabethan Earls of Warwick and Leicester, wrote around 1510 that whereas ‘the good lyf of all the commynaltie in substance standith in trew labor and lawfull busynes’, the purpose of the nobility is ‘to defend the poore people from all wronges and Iniuries’, and ‘euer to be reddy to defend your prince, the churche and the realme’. As Humphrey’s remarks suggest, this conception of nobility was to some extent still current in the Elizabethan period. Although humanist writers had stressed to a novel extent the importance of learning in fashioning a gentleman, it was still taken as axiomatic that (as Castiglione’s Lodovico da Canossa puts it) ‘the principall and true profession of a Courtyer ought to be in feates of armes’. It is this assumption that underlies Elyot’s recommendation of physical exercise: ‘it maketh the spirites of a man more stronge and valiant, so that by the

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hardinesse of the membres, all labours be more tollerable'. The words 'stronge and valiant' indicate that the labours Elyot means are on the battlefield; the exploits of Leicester, Sidney and Essex suggest that many of the elite associated their status with martial endeavours at least until the end of Elizabeth's reign.

However, as historians such as Lawrence Stone and Mervyn James have argued, the nobility's status and sense of identity at this time were in the midst of a change which had begun at the start of the Tudor period; and this made the traditional justification of their privilege on the grounds of military service less easy to maintain. Humphrey's reference to 'our forefathers' locates it in the past; and although Harrison writes that gentility can be earned through 'service in the room of a captain in the wars', this is only one of several possible routes to it that he mentions. In 'English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642', Mervyn James identifies a change in the nobility's conception of honour, which led to 'the emergence of a "civil" society in which the monopoly both of honour and violence by the state was asserted'. He argues that whereas the nobility's martial code of honour had in the mediaeval period often placed them in conflict with their rulers, Tudor monarchs succeeded in making themselves the fount of honour, using the heraldic order to control access to the nobility. Many of the 'new men' they created were ennobled for their political rather than their military service, and members of the existing nobility increasingly felt that honour precluded their rising up against the monarch. At the same time, a growing number of books such as Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* (1494) and Baldwin et al's *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) promoted what James calls the 'moralisation of politics', placing limits on the

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14 Elyot, l, 169.  
15 Harrison, p. 114.
circumstances in which gentlemen could use violence. All of these developments reduced the extent to which membership of the elite could be identified with military valour. The arguments put forward by Lawrence Stone in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* are in many ways similar to James's; his observations about the demilitarisation of the aristocracy form part of a wider analysis of the period of crisis through which he sees it as passing during the reigns of Elizabeth, James and Charles. Stone gives several reasons for the changing attitude of the nobility to war. Firstly, 'During the long period of peace from 1562 to 1588 the nobility lost the habit of military service, and even during the war years of the 1590's only a minority took an active part in military campaigns.' The nature of war was also changing; as it became more professionalised, it became less appealing to a gentleman. 'A military commander had now to be an expert in logistics, in transport and victualling, in engineering and administration.' Monarchs themselves, moreover, were keenly aware of the threat a militarised aristocracy posed to their own security. Elizabeth deliberately undermined the power-base of northern earls, such as Derby, Shrewsbury, Northumberland, Westmoreland and Cumberland, whom she feared might be won over to the Catholic Queen of Scots: Northumberland was deprived of the Wardenship of the Middle March, and the loyal southerner Hunsdon was put in charge of Berwick and the East Marches. In the wake of the 1569 rebellion, the Earls of Northumberland were confined to Sussex, away from their traditional power-base; the Earls of Westmoreland were exiled and lost their estates; and other nobles likewise moved south or had their lands sequestered. Elizabeth used her powers of patronage to make the Court, rather than the nobles' traditional strongholds, the arena where power was held and contested.  

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17 Stone, pp. 239, 265, 251-7.
In the circumstances identified by James and Stone, the use of gentlemen's involvement in war as a justification for their exemption from work was clearly less tenable. Furthermore, as I argued in my Introduction, various social conditions, such as problems of productivity and masterlessness, contributed to a growing sense of the importance of work; and, in particular, the increased wealth and importance of yeomen, merchants, and tradesmen may have encouraged the clearer expression of some of their values, such as diligence, thrift, and sobriety. As Christopher Hill writes, while the idea that every Christian must earn a living through work had been 'the lower-class heresy throughout the centuries', 'The propertied class had always been able to suppress it until the sixteenth century; but then it won its way to respectability, thanks in part at least to the growing social importance of the industrious sort of people.' Partly, perhaps, because of this shift in the balance of power, and partly as a criticism of idle monks and friars, senior prelates increasingly emphasised the duty of every member of the commonwealth to labour in his or her vocation, citing in their support texts such as Paul's dictum in II Thessalonians 3.10 that 'if there were anie, which wolde not worke, that he shulde not eat'. Nor were they shy of applying this doctrine to the aristocracy. Hugh Latimer commented on Paul's words in a 1549 sermon, 'It were a good ordinance in a commonweal, that every man should be set on work, every man in his vocation,' and elsewhere insisted,

unto great men God alloweth hunting and hawking at some times; but it is not their chiefest duty whereunto God hath called them: for he would not that they should give themselves only to hawking and hunting, and to do nothing else. [...] the chiefest thing to which God hath ordained them is to execute justice, to see that the honour and glory of God be set abroad: this is the chiefest point in their calling, and not hawking and hunting, which is but an accident.

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Laurence Humphrey, who was president of Magdalen and would go on to be Dean of Winchester, argued in 1563 that whereas it was permissible for the commons 'sometimes to toye, to tryfle, to dalye', nobles should 'steare in the common welth and trauyle in publike affayres'. One who 'neither knowes nor coueytes learning, nor in trauaile of his body, or exercise of mind, passeth the course of his weary life: but spendeth his yeares in pleasure ease & rest: haunteth plaies, feastes, bathes & bankettings' cannot be called noble. Finally, William Perkins not only attacked monastics and vagabonds for their idleness, but also insisted that 'miserable and damnable is the state of those that being enriched with great liuings and reuenewes, doe spend their daies in eating and drinking, in sports and pastimes, not imploying themselues in seruice for Church or Commonwealth'.

Those who felt that the nobility had a duty to the commonwealth other than that of waging war could also appeal to classical precedents. As well as referring to Biblical injunctions to work, for example, Humphrey cites Plato's remarks on the duties of guardians in the Republic, Cato working through the night for the good of the commonwealth, Cicero's social advancement through eloquence and industry, and Cincinattus at his plough. Brian Vickers has argued that Renaissance writers inherited from the Romans a conception of leisure that was largely negative: 'Otium is to be understood most frequently in opposition to the active life expected of a Roman citizen, when it connotes idleness, luxury, the "easy life" in a context where the mark of the

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21 Humphrey, sigs [A6]’, [I2].
23 Humphrey, sigs [A3]’, [A6]’, [G7]’, [I7]’.
good man is to be active, and is therefore treated with vituperation'. 24 As I mentioned in my Introduction, this ethic was embodied in Cicero’s widely-read *De officiis*, which despite arguing that certain ways of earning a livelihood are inappropriate for gentlemen, also maintains that a life of involvement in commonwealth affairs is preferable to a life of retirement. 25

While on the one hand the nobility’s involvement in war was decreasing, and their scope for idleness greater than ever, new intellectual trends placed a growing emphasis on the universal duty to labour. The Protestant argument was perhaps the most potentially damaging one, as commoners had greater access to the Bible than to classical or humanist texts. Accordingly, it is in religious writings that the privileged classes can be seen most clearly to be fending off potential criticism. The *Book of Homilies*, first printed under Edward VI and then reprinted by Elizabeth in 1562, contains ‘An Homilie against Idleness’, which repeats the Pauline injunction that all must work only in order to qualify it. The homily insists that ‘when it is said, all men should labour, it is not so straitly meant, that all men should [sic] use handy labour’. Instead,

whosoever doeth good to the common weale and societie of men with his industrie and labour, whether it be gouerning the common weale publikly, or by bearing publike office or ministery, or by doing any common necessary affaires of his countrey, or by giuing counsell, or by teaching and instructing others, or by what other meanes soeuer hee bee occupyed, so that a profit and benefit redound thereof vnto others, the same person is not to be accounted idle, though he worke no bodily labour, nor is to be denied his liueng (if hee attend his vocation) though hee worke not with his hands. 26

25 Cicero, p. 73.
Work is no longer defined in terms of the readily identifiable outward sign of manual labour. Instead, its meaning has been extended to cover any activity that benefits the common weal; this is an elastic definition, as phrases such as ‘any common necessary affaires’ and ‘what meanes soeuer’ testify. John Jewell, in An Exposition upon the Two Epistles of the Apostle St. Paul to the Thessalonians (published posthumously in 1583), goes a stage further. He takes to task those who believe ‘Kings and counsellors, bishops, preachers, and all other sorts of learned men’ disobey Paul’s commandment by living idly; in fact their mental work is harder than the physical work of other men. ‘The toil which princes take, and the great cares wherewith they are occupied, pass all other cares in the world.’

In a 1586 exposition on the same text, Thomas Tymme directs the accusation of idleness against Catholic monks and priests, and goes on to follow the Homily in arguing that ‘whatsoever he be that doth any manner of way seeke to benefite the society of men by his industrie, whether it be in gouerning a familie, or in dealing in publique or priuate affayres, eyther in counsayling, or in teaching, or by any other manner, of way, the same is not to be reckoned among idle persons’. This notion that the exercise of public duties is a form of work achieved expression in Elizabeth’s descriptions of her own relationship with the commonwealth she governed: at the dissolution of Parliament in April 1593 she assured the Lords and Commons that the care you have taken for myself, yourselves, and the commonweal, that you do it for a prince that neither careth for any particular – no, not for life – but so to live that you may flourish. For before God and in my conscience, I protest (whereunto many that know me can witness) that the greatest expense of my time, the labor of my studies, and the travail of my thoughts chiefly tendeth to God’s service and the government of you, to live and continue in a flourishing and happy estate.

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27 John Jewell, An Exposition upon the Two Epistles of the Apostle St. Paul to the Thessalonians, ed. by Peter Hall (London: B. Wertheim, 1841), 274. See also Latimer, i, 214, ‘I know no man hath a greater labour than a King’.

28 Thomas Tymme, The Figure of Antichriste, with the Tokens of the End of the World, Most Plainly Disciphered by a Catholike and Diuine Exposition of the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians (London, 1586), sigs [K6], [K7].

In texts such as homilies and religious commentaries, which were available to the masses in oral or written form, the privileged classes of early modern England overtly defended themselves against accusations of idleness by characterising their activities as work. In examining whether the theatre was another public medium which they turned to their advantage in this way, it is necessary to take up a position with regard to the issue of the drama’s ideological status. Did it reinforce or subvert the views of the dominant classes? Over the last two decades, British commentators in particular have questioned what they see as the assumption that dramatists subscribed to the world-view of their rulers. E. M. W. Tillyard has been criticised, for example, for presenting Shakespeare as a proponent of the so-called ‘Tudor myth’, ‘a scheme fundamentally religious, by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God’s Providence, and of which Elizabeth’s England was the acknowledged outcome’. In fact, writes Jonathan Dollimore, it is not only the case ‘that most of Shakespeare’s history plays fail to substantiate this (non-existent) unitary myth, but also that some of them have precisely the opposite effect of revealing how myth is exploited ideologically’. Rather than attacking such mystifications outright, however, ‘Jacobean tragedy discloses ideology as misrepresentation; it interrogates ideology from within, seizing on and exposing its contradictions and inconsistencies and offering alternative ways of understanding social and political process’. Catherine Belsey has similarly argued for the oppositional status of the drama, which rather than being separate from material struggles is ‘a focus of the contests for the meaning of subjectivity and gender.

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which can also be identified elsewhere. Other critics, however, have taken a more pessimistic view of the early modern stage’s potential for radicalism. Stephen Greenblatt argues that it derives much of its theatrical power from the power-displays of the state; and, as with manifestations of political authority, subversion is invoked only to be contained or dispersed. The ‘apparent production of subversion is [...] the very condition of power’. Leonard Tennenhouse relates theatrical to political power by pointing out the two very different milieus, court and public stage, between which dramatists found themselves. In order to reconcile these, they had in their fictions to identify the interests of the nation at large with those of the aristocracy: ‘His special relationship to the court [...] situated the dramatist in a position to transform the materials of courtly discourse into forms which gave substance to a nationalist ideology.’

Seen in this way, two theoretical conceptions of the political status of early modern drama appear to be at a logical impasse. One argues that what appears to be state propaganda is in fact revelation of the conditions of propaganda’s production; the other, that what appears to be subversion is in fact the containment of subversion. One possible route out of this is to examine theatre’s material history: the forms of its patronage and control, its audience composition, the resistance against which it had to struggle, and so on. Admittedly, this cannot provide a definitive picture of the drama’s ideological situation, firstly because we do not have access to as many facts as we might wish, and secondly because those facts do not contain self-evident truths but rather are

subject to modern interpretation. Nevertheless, it may expose some of the forces that helped to shape the dramatic productions whose dialogue is recorded, reshaped and distorted in the texts we have. In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to sketch out some of the material conditions which seem to have had a bearing on those productions’ ideological content.

One crucial sense in which the theatre differed from the pulpit as a means of ideological dissemination is in the fact that theatre attendance was not compulsory. Playing companies therefore depended for their success on the ability to attract customers. Indeed, as I argued in the previous chapter, it was London’s massive population that made the establishment of a permanent theatre there practicable at all; as such, its very existence, let alone its day-to-day success or failure, was predicated on audience demand rather than pressure from above. The fact that the theatre was commercially driven was seized upon by its critics or satirists, from Philip Stubbes, who complained in 1583 that players lived ‘vpon beggyng of euery one that comes’, to John Cocke, who wrote in 1615 of a ‘common Player’ that ‘howsoever hee pretends to have a royall Master or Mistresse, his wages and dépendance prove him to be the servant of the people’. Any analysis of the theatre’s political role that sees it simply as inculcating the ideology of the dominant class, therefore, must encounter the objection that such a theatre could not survive without appealing to the beliefs already held by its intended audience.

Furthermore, at least in the 1590s, that audience was extremely varied. Even analyses, such as that of Ann Jennalie Cook, which emphasise the financial importance

for theatre companies of the social elite within their audience recognise the
fundamentally heterogeneous character of the crowds who went to watch plays. As
Cook puts it, 'Anyone with the price of admission could spend an afternoon seeing a
play. At various times, especially on holidays, many among the masses enjoyed
dramatic entertainment, and on any given day ordinary people made their way into the
theaters.'36 Andrew Gurr argues for a more socially mixed audience, at least in the early
part of the period: 'Up to the revival of the boy companies and the hall playhouses in
1599 the artisan and servant classes joined with the citizens and gentry at playhouses.'37
As with sermons, therefore, playgoers brought a variety of opinions, viewpoints and
prejudices with them to the theatres, and would therefore in many cases have been
resistant to any propagandistic message that may have been promulgated there.

Finally, it can be argued that the style of drama prevalent on the early modern stage
was often of a kind difficult to appropriate as the medium for any single ideology.
Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, the professional drama can be seen as
having superseded its festive relative, it still retained some carnivalesque, anti-
authoritarian elements. In Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater, Robert
Weimann emphasises Shakespeare's debt to popular dramatic forms and folk culture,
whilst in Carnival and Theater, Michael D. Bristol draws on Bakhtin's criticism of
Rabelais to underline how 'In Renaissance England [...] the theater objectified and
recreated broadly dispersed traditions of collective life that were also represented and
disseminated through anonymous festive manifestations such as Carnival.'38 Even at

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36 Ann Jennalie Cook, The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576-1642 (Princeton:
37 Gurr, Playgoing, p. 66.
38 Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social
Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, ed. by Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1978); Michael D. Bristol, Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of
moments when plays appear to support the dominant ideology, this ludic aspect of their nature appears simultaneously to undercut it. Stephen Longstaffe, for example, has argued that although the main current of the riot scenes in 2 Henry VI tends towards the demonisation of Jack Cade and his supporters, carnivalesque elements of their language, as well as the fact that Cade may well have been performed by Will Kemp, the resident clown of Lord Strange's and then the Lord Chamberlain's Men, give the rising a festive as well as an horrific air. Kemp himself, as a clown in the Tarltonesque vein, exemplifies the tendency of some early modern actors to use speech or gesture (in Hamlet's words) 'more than is set down for them' (III. 2. 39), and this divergence from the script may well have constituted another difficulty facing those who tried to hijack the stage for political purposes. Furthermore, with their frequent multiple authorship, their diverse narrative and verbal sources, and their inherent formal basis in dialogue, plays of this period were quintessentially polyphonic, and tended against the imparting of any single ideology.

However, while the early modern theatre was indeed sustained by audience demand, and retained some of the anti-authoritarian ethos of its festive ancestor, it also had roots in patronage and propaganda. The travelling actors of the early sixteenth century, as I have already argued, helped to advertise the prominence and promulgate the views of their noble patrons; during the Reformation, they were used to discredit the Pope and legitimise the authority of Henry. Richard Dutton has pointed out that, at the very beginning of Elizabeth's reign, Cecil seems to have encouraged a playing company to

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put on a drama mocking Philip II. This instance perhaps exemplifies the usual model for direct intervention by patrons in the theatre: whereas it is difficult to imagine that nobles would have had the time or inclination to ensure that all plays staged by their companies expressed their political views, they do appear on occasion to have used the drama for specific purposes. The predictions in Henry V of Essex’s victorious return from Ireland tally with the association of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men with the Essex faction that can be deduced from the private performance of Richard II on the eve of their attempted coup, for example. Some historians of the theatre, however, have argued that the relationship between playing companies and their patrons was more far-reaching. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth Maclean, in their study of the Elizabethan Queen’s Men, see them as ‘a company designed to increase the prestige of their patron throughout the land, to harness the theatre in the service of a moderate Protestant ideology, and to add a vivid group of travellers who might serve the council’s needs for secret information about recusants or foreign visitors in more than one way’. At any rate, whatever the precise relationship between players and the nobility, it is certainly the case that companies required aristocratic patronage in order to play legally, and that the need to retain their patron’s approval would at the very least have placed limits on the prevalence of certain types of radicalism in the drama.

A more obvious limit on what the theatre was allowed to express was the state censorship carried out by the Revels Office. In recent years, Richard Dutton has proposed a re-evaluation of this institution, arguing that the Master of the Revels was ‘as much a friend of the actors as their overlord’ and that his ‘“allowance” made for a range and complexity of expression on the social, political and even religious issues of

the day that was remarkable, given the pressures on all sides to enforce conformity or
to repress comment altogether'.\textsuperscript{43} More generally, Annabel Patterson has argued that
during the period, "the indeterminacy inveterate to language was fully and knowingly
exploited by authors and readers alike" in order to evade censorship.\textsuperscript{44} However, the
1589 injunction that players submit their books to the Master of the Revels and "two
others, the one to be appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other by the
Lord Mayour of London" was occasioned by "the players tak[ing] upon themselves to
handle in their plaies certen matters of Divinitytie and of State unfitt to be suffred",
suggesting that one aspect of his role was indeed to limit what could be said on stage.\textsuperscript{45}
There is a clear instance of the Master of the Revels taking steps to prevent the staging
of politically sensitive material in the case of \textit{Sir Thomas More}, where Tilney's
manuscript notes instruct the players to omit representation of the 'Ill May Day' riots
against the Lombards, as well as their cause, altogether, presumably in view of current
tensions between native Londoners and the Huguenot community.\textsuperscript{46}

A third determinant of the drama's ideological content is an issue upon which I
touched in the last chapter: the stage's need to assert its institutional legitimacy in the
face of protest from London's civic authorities and other opponents of the theatre. These
frequently emphasised the dangers to public order posed by the theatre, an issue that
must have carried some weight with Elizabeth's Privy Council; Ket's rebellion had
begun at the performance of a play, and the feltmakers who rioted in June 1592 were
said by the Lord Mayor of London to have "assembled themselves by occasion &

\textsuperscript{43} Dutton, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{44} Annabel Patterson, \textit{Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early
\textsuperscript{45} Chambers, iv, 306.
pretence of their meeting at a play. Richard Helgerson has argued that dramatic representations of popular protest were intended to distance the theatre from public disorder of this kind:

If there was, as I have suggested, a special relation between popular revolt and the public theater, it was [...] a relation of intense and unremitting hostility. But hostility is itself a form of relation, one no less significant than the solidarity it denies. Popular revolt, and perhaps popular culture generally, was the theater’s dark other, the vestigial egalitarian self that had to be exorcised before a more gentrified, artful, and discriminating identity could emerge.

He also underlines the paradoxical status of the theatre, where members of the artisanal class made money by imitating their betters, in an institution that was furthermore ‘patronized and protected by the crown and the higher nobility but dependent for a great part of its income on a popular audience, a theater whose very success put extraordinary pressure on its class identity’. To resolve this ambiguity (all the more intricate in that many of the writers of the plays were university-educated and saw themselves as socially superior to the actors), the theatre attempted to distance itself from the ‘base’ element of its audience. In Pierce Pennilesse (1592), Thomas Nashe writes that far from distracting prentices from their work, the playing companies ‘heartily wishe they might bee troubled with none of their youth nor their prentises; for some of them (I meane the ruder handicrafts servants) neuer come abroade, but they are in danger of vndoing’.

Rather than giving a simple answer to the question of drama’s ideological situation, a brief consideration of the material conditions in which dramatists wrote and actors performed plays reveals only how complex and various were the forces influencing theatrical production in early modern England. When one’s focus narrows to the

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47 Chambers, iv, 310.
individual play, however, it is sometimes possible to be more specific. I would argue
that this is the case with regard to the first play whose representation of aristocratic
work I want to examine, *2 Henry VI*, as it exemplifies the three ways I have identified in
which material factors encouraged the drama to express the opinions of the rulers rather
than the ruled. To begin with, in Shakespeare’s first tetralogy of histories the influence
of his theatrical patron may be discerned. Admittedly, as Andrew Gurr writers,
‘Shakespeare’s place in any of the early companies is uncertain’. However, the fact that
a ‘strong run of figures from the Stanley family goes all through the first Henriad and
into *Richard III*, where the Earl of Derby crowns Richmond’, does make it seem more
than plausible that the first tetralogy was written for Lord Strange’s company, Lord
Strange being the title of Ferdinando Stanley, son of the Earl of Derby.\(^5^0\) Strange was,
writes Honigmann, ‘a direct descendant of the Cliffords represented in *Henry VI*’, as
well of John Stanley, who was entrusted with the guarding of the Duchess of Gloucester
on the Isle of Man, and who is sympathetically portrayed in *2 Henry VI*, II. 4, and
Thomas Stanley, whose strategic vacillation between Richard III and Richmond at
Bosworth Field is tactfully reinterpreted in *Richard III*.\(^5^1\) The positive treatment of
Strange’s ancestors in these plays may well be a sign of his patronage influencing their
content. Although we know that the latter two parts of *Henry VI* were performed by
Pembroke’s Men, and *Richard III* by the Lord Chamberlain’s, the apparent reference to
*3 Henry VI* in Thomas Greene’s *Groatsworth of Wit* of 1592 suggests that it was
performed before June of that year, when the theatres closed, and that part two was
performed earlier still. This makes it unlikely that they were written for Pembroke’s
Men, who were not formed until 1592; *Richard III*, too, could well have been written

\(^{51}\) E. A. J. Honigmann makes the case for Shakespeare’s membership of Lord Strange’s Men in
*Shakespeare: The ‘Lost Years’* (Manchester: University Press, 1985), pp. 59-76; the question of whether
Shakespeare spent time in Lancashire prior to coming to London, however, is not relevant to this thesis.
while the theatres were closed in 1593, before Strange's death and the formation of the Lord Chamberlains' Men in 1594.\(^{52}\)

Another feature of 2 Henry VI that seems to align it with the governing class is its treatment of Cade's rising. Richard Wilson argues that like the roughly contemporaneous Jack Straw and The Massacre at Paris, the play makes a deliberate effort to distance the drama from members of the lower social strata and from popular disorder in general.\(^{53}\) Critical opinion, admittedly, is far from unified on this point. As I mentioned earlier, Steven Longstaffe sees Cade's rising as carnivalesque, while Lucy de Bruyn has similarly stressed the subversion rather than its containment: 'economic oppression, together with the lack of recognition and respect shown by their betters, often caused bitter discontent among the people for which they had no legal redress so that a vicarious expression of it on the stage was particularly welcome to them'.\(^{54}\) However, a comparison of Shakespeare's treatment of the rising with that in his main source, Hall's The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York (1548), makes an argument that the rising is presented positively very difficult to sustain. As Richard Wilson points out, Hall's Cade prohibits murder, rape and robbery, a detail which Shakespeare omits (although Hall regards this as mere 'colour' to win the people's hearts).\(^{55}\) More striking is what Shakespeare adds to Hall's account, in particular the rebels' vehement hatred of the written word. If Shakespeare took this detail from Hall's description of the 1381 peasants' revolt, he was again guilty of

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\(^{52}\) Andrew Gurr, 'Three Reluctant Patrons and Early Shakespeare', Shakespeare Quarterly, 44 (1993), 159-74 (p. 160).

\(^{53}\) Richard Wilson, Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 42. Wilson's implication that 2 Henry VI was a reaction to the feltmakers' protests of June 1592, however, is chronologically problematic.


\(^{55}\) Wilson, p. 60; Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, ed. by Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-75), iii, 115.
omission in disregarding Hall’s explanation of the rebels’ behaviour: ‘they purposed
to burne and destroie all records, evidences, court-rolles, and other minuments, that the
remembrance of ancient matters being remooved out of mind, their landlords might not
have whereby to chalenge anie right at their hands’\textsuperscript{56} In \textit{2 Henry VI}, however, the
antiliteracy is bloody and apparently motiveless, as with Cade’s punishment of the
Clerk of Chartham, hanged ‘with his pen and inkhorn about his neck’ purely for being
able to sign his name (iv. 2. 109). It is difficult to disagree with Phyllis Rackin’s
observation that the riot scenes, although ‘[p]otentially subversive, […] seem finally
designed to justify oppression’. She also points out that unlike the rising in \textit{Sir Thomas
More}, they do not appear to have been censored, another reason for assuming that the
play was consistent with the ideology of the ruling class.\textsuperscript{57}

The vision of the aristocracy’s social role that is expressed in \textit{2 Henry VI} is
correspondingly orthodox. At the beginning of the play, when the articles of peace
between the English and French have been revealed, Gloucester criticises them in front
of the other nobles. Did not Henry V

\begin{verbatim}
spend his youth,
His valor, coin, and people, in the wars?
Did he so often lodge in open field,
In winter’s cold and summer’s parching heat,
To conquer France, his true inheritance?
And did my brother Bedford toil his wits,
To keep by policy what Henry got? (l. 1. 78)
\end{verbatim}

He emphasises both the physical suffering and the mental work that have gone into the
acquisition and maintenance of England’s French territories, a line of argument that
continues with his reference to the ‘deep scars’ received by his listeners (l. 87) and how
he and Bedford have ‘Studied so long, sat in the Council-house | Early and late’ (l. 90);

\textsuperscript{56} Bullough, iii, 131.
‘And shall these labors and these honors die?’ (l. 95). Warwick likewise represents the French lands as having been won by physical exertion:

Anjou and Maine? myself did win them both.
Those provinces these arms of mine did conquer,
And are the cities that I got with wounds
Deliver’d up again with peaceful words? (l. 119)

When Gloucester has left the stage, shortly followed by his enemies Cardinal Beauford, Buckingham, and Somerset, Salisbury remarks of the last three, ‘While these do labor for their own preferment, | Behooves it us to labor for the realm’ (l. 181); what Richard Helgerson calls the play’s ‘vision of an aristocracy committed to the service of the commons’ is explicitly articulated in terms of work. The opening scene thus poises the play between mediaeval and Tudor notions of the role of the nobility. It emphasises their duty of ‘trew defence’, as Dudley calls it, and unambiguously represents military service in terms of manual labour, reminding us of the bodily hardship and exertions that went into the capture of the French territories. However, it also invokes mental labours, the toiling of wits, and time spent in council.

Service of the common good through mental labour, and eloquence in particular, is repeatedly depicted as an aristocratic duty throughout the play as a whole. In III. 2 Warwick succeeds in calming the ‘spleenful mutiny’ of the ‘rude multitude’ in the wake of Gloucester’s death (ll. 128, 135); later in the scene, Salisbury’s successful articulation to the King of their grievances against Suffolk deters them from having to ‘by violence tear him from your palace, | And torture him with grievous ling’ring death’ (l. 246). Again, in IV. 8 it is the speeches of Buckingham and Clifford that ultimately quell the rebellion by persuading the masses to desert Cade. However, the single figure in the play who is associated to the greatest degree with the responsible use of

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58 Helgerson, p. 207.
59 Dudley, p. 66.
eloquence is Gloucester himself. This may reflect the humanist interests of the
historical Duke Humphrey, a central figure in the transmission of Renaissance learning
to England. His literary adviser, Pietro del Monte, who originally came to England in
1435 as collector of the papal revenues, persuaded him to take the humanist scholar Tito
Livio into his household, and, after his departure in 1440, sent him many books from
Italy and put him in touch with humanists such as Bruni and Decembrio. These helped
him to assemble ‘a remarkable library, containing not merely the usual works of
theology and scholastic philosophy, but also the best translations of Plato, Aristotle and
Plutarch, the whole of the extant text of Livy, most of the key works of Cicero, and a
large number of modern humanist treatises, including works by Petrarch, Salutati,
Poggio, Bruni and Decembrio’, many of which volumes he presented to the University
of Oxford, ‘thus making available the first major collection of humanist texts for public
use’. Although Shakespeare, like Hall, does not foreground Gloucester’s literary
interests, the Duke’s eloquence is frequently alluded to in the play, implying that
Shakespeare knew of his importance as a scholar as well as a statesman. Indeed, the
ground is prepared in 1 Henry VI, where the Bishop of Winchester tears up the bill
Gloucester has written against him and charges him to make his accusation ‘without
invention, suddenly’, rather than ‘with deep premeditated lines, | With written
pamphlets studiously devis’d’ (III. 1. 5, 1). Gloucester tells him to

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\text{Think not, although in writing I preferr’d}
\text{The manner of thy vile outrageous crimes,}
\text{That therefore I have forg’d, or am not able}
\text{Verbatim to rehearse the method of my pen. (I. 10)}
\]

It is emphasised, therefore, that Gloucester’s speech is as eloquent as his writing is
fluent. In 2 Henry VI, his long denunciation of his rivals’ plots is greeted with sneering
comments on the verbal dexterity of ‘smooth Duke Humphrey’ (III, 2. 65). Suffolk says

he has 'twit our sovereign lady here | With ignominious words, though clerkly
couch'd', when Gloucester quibbles on a remark of the Queen's, Buckingham says
'He'll wrest the sense and hold us here all day' (II. 178, 186). After Gloucester's death,
one of his murderers testifies to the effect his words have had on him: 'What have we
done? | Didst ever hear a man so penitent?', and the Cardinal remarks, 'I did dream to-
night | The Duke was dumb and could not speak a word', once again characterising his
enemy as an eloquent speaker (III. 2. 3, 31). The Duke's popularity is also repeatedly
mentioned, as when the Queen complains that 'By flattery hath he won the commons'
hearts' (III. 1. 28); the implication may be that Cade's rebellion would have been
quelled earlier had the King had Gloucester's eloquence at his disposal, as in the section
which Shakespeare seems to have written for Sir Thomas More the hero's speech brings
the Ill May Day riots to an end. More generally, Gloucester's role as counsellor is
emphasised, whether in the appointment of a regent over the French in I. 3 or in the
unmasking of the fraudulent Simpcox in II. 1.

The fact that 2 Henry VI places as much stress upon the nobleman's need to be
eloquent and to provide wise counsel as upon his more traditional military duties may
explain another element of the play to which I have briefly alluded, the depiction of the
commons as homicidally illiterate. Although Cade is the spokesman for this attitude, his
supporters give their assent to it, responding to the Clerk's admission that he can sign
his name by crying, 'He hath confess'd! away with him! he's a villain and a traitor' (IV.
2. 107). It may be that given Salisbury's comments about his peers' duty to 'labor for
the realm', the dualism of warriors and workers is no longer practicable as a means of
marking off the gentle from the base; it is replaced by the dualism of the literate and the
ignorant. The demonising of the rebels can be read, not only as a means by which the
theatre dissociated itself from popular protest, but as a means by which a notion of the
ruling class serving the commonwealth through intellectual labour is indirectly promulgated.

If anything, the idea that government is a form of work is articulated more explicitly and more prominently in the second tetralogy of histories. From the very beginning of Richard II, Richard's inefficacy as a ruler is emphasised. In the first scene, he is unable to command peace between Bullingbrook and Mowbray; in the third, he forestalls the trial over which he himself presides, and, sentencing the disputants to banishment, prolongs and worsens rather than resolving the challenge to his authority. The fourth scene shows him to be fiscally incompetent, 'enforc'd to farm our royal realm' in order to meet the expenses of the Irish wars, since 'our coffers, with too great a court | And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light' (l. 43). He decrees that his deputies be given blank charters, 'Whereeto, when they shall know what men are rich, | They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold' (l. 49), and welcomes the news of Gaunt's terminal illness: 'The lining of his coffers shall make coats | To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars' (l. 61). Richard is shown doing the work of government, and doing it badly. As York complains in II. 1, he is deaf to counsel, his ear

stopp'd with other flattering sounds,
As praises, of whose taste the wise are fond,
Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound
The open ear of youth doth always listen;
Report of fashions in proud Italy,
Whose manners still our tardy, apish nation
Limps after in base imitation. (l. 17)

Richard's triumvirate of flatterers, Bushy, Bagot and Green, are later described by Bullingbrook as 'caterpillars of the commonwealth, | Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away' (II. 3. 166), a phrase also used in William Harrison's Description of England, which was affixed to the 1587 edition of Holinshed's Chronicles. Harrison applies it to able-bodied beggars who counterfeit illness: 'they are all thieves and
caterpillars in the commonwealth and by the word of God not permitted to eat, sith
they do but lick the sweat from the true laborer's brows and bereave the godly poor of
that which is due unto them to maintain their excess'. As I mentioned in the last
chapter, it also appears in the full title of Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse*, where it is
applied to poets, pipers, players and jesters. A phrase more commonly used to decry the
socially destructive idleness of members of the lower social strata is here applied to
Richard's court; one reason for this may be the novelty of the notion that idleness is
reprehensible when practised by the nobility.

Richard's prioritising of pleasure over the business of government is indicated by his
comments when he is no longer able to govern. Languishing in Wales, he asks 'Say, is
my kingdom lost? Why, 'twas my care, | And what loss is it to be rid of care?' (III. 2.
95). Descending from Flint castle in the subsequent scene, he compares himself to
'glist'ring Phaëton, | Wanting the manage of unruly jades' (III. 3. 178). Primarily, the
comparison seems to refer to his inability to control his rebellious subjects; more
generally, it implies a disdainful approach to government, as if it were a team of horses
whose direction is beneath his notice. In the scene that follows, the Gardener reflects
upon his own work, making it an emblem of the duties Richard has neglected:

O, what pity is it
That he had not so trimm'd and dress'd his land
As we this garden! We at time of year
Do wound the bark, the skin of our fruit-trees,
Lest being over-proud in sap and blood,
With too much riches it confound itself;
Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have liv'd to bear and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down. (III. 4. 55)

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61 Harrison, p. 183.
The Gardener represents Richard's dethronement as a consequence of his 'waste of idle hours' that should have been spent trimming and dressing his land. The horticultural conceit may owe something to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, where husbandry is valorised as preparation for government. Cyrus of Persia is praised for his expertise in both war and gardening, and is described showing a visitor his plants: 'All these that ye se, I haue measured them, and sette theim in order, and I can shewe you some trees, that I haue set with myne own handes' (Hervet's translation). Here, the use of the idea is purely metaphorical: there is no implication that had Richard been a gardener he would have been a better king. However, by comparing the management of 'great and growing men' with the training of fruit-trees, and (presumably) the discarding of flatterers and parasites with the lopping away of '[s]uperfluous branches', the Gardener encourages us to see government in terms of manual labour, reinforcing its status as work.

If Shakespeare depicts Richard as an idle man unwilling to take on the work of kingship, then to some extent Bullingbrook is set up as a contrasting figure in this respect. He sees his activities in laborious terms, remarking 'A while to work, and after holiday' as his army sets off from Bristol (III. 1. 44); his confident riding of Richard's horse Barbary may be meant to suggest that he, at any rate, does not want the manage of unruly jades, an impression consolidated when Richard uses the word again in reacting to the news: 'That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand' (V. 5. 85). However, another aspect of Bullingbrook's depiction seems profoundly subversive of the idea that government is a form of work. After his banishment, Richard recounts how

Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,

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Observ’d his courtship to the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles. (I. 4. 23)

Bullingbrook’s ability to court popularity is a theme that is taken up again towards the end of the play, when the Duke of York describes his spectacular entry into London to the Duchess, remembering how ‘all tongues cried, “God save thee, Bullingbrook!”’ (V. 2. 11), ‘Whilst he, from the one side to the other turning, | Bare-headed, lower than his proud steed’s neck, | Bespake them thus: “I thank you, countrymen” ’ (l. 18). York’s description of Richard’s own bearing underlines the theatricality of this conspicuous and successful self-display:

As in a theatre the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious,
Even so, or with much more contempt, men’s eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard. (l. 23)

The comparison suggests that Henry’s success in wresting kingship from Richard is related to the superior acting skills of the former, and the histrionic inferiority of the latter.

Richard II is not the first occasion on which Shakespeare links power and theatricality; as Anne Barton has observed, for example, Richard III is ‘[a]ssociated almost remorselessly with the theatre’. However, there is a very real difference between the types of theatricality which Richard III and Henry Bullingbrook typify.

From his opening soliloquy, Richard lets the audience know that he is acting: ‘I am subtle, false, and treacherous’, he says (I. 1. 37), before in the very next scene carrying out the theatrical tour de force of wooing Lady Anne over Henry VI’s coffin. He is able

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to ‘seem a saint, when most I play the devil’, and explicitly compares himself to ‘the
formal Vice, Iniquity’ (I. 3. 337, III. 1. 82). This latter comparison associates Richard
with a particular form of acting, one which relied upon complicity with the audience, as
in the scene from *Sir Thomas More* quoted in the last chapter; and although he gains the
trust of his fellows, we are always aware of his villainy. Indeed, as Richard’s fortunes
rise the ability to deceive appears to desert him. In III. 6 the Scrivener says of his
indictment of Hastings, ‘Who is so gross | That cannot see this palpable device? | Yet
who’s so bold but says he sees it not?’ (I. 10). In the subsequent scene Buckingham
castigates those ‘dumb statues’, the citizens, for refusing to speak in Richard’s praise;
they themselves do not ask that he be made king, but rather, when Buckingham
articulates this demand for them, they give their (presumably terrified) assent (III. 7. 25).
As such, Richard’s power from this point on derives, not from his ability to deceive, but
from his power of life or death over anyone who might disagree with him; and as the
play shows, this is not enough to enable him to hold on to the crown. Bullingbrook,
however, takes neither his fellows nor the audience into his confidence. Even at Flint
castle he continues to insist that he has come back to England purely to regain his
lordship, and that he will lay his arms at Richard’s feet ‘Provided that my banishment
repeal’d | And lands restor’d again be freely granted’ (III. 3. 40); ‘the obscurity of
Bullingbrook’s motives makes it impossible to determine whether his victory represents
the will of God or the triumph of his own Machiavellian strategy’. As an actor, he is
both less transparent and more successful than Richard III.

The implication that Bullingbrook gains the kingship because he is better at
dissembling and at courting popularity than Richard II supports Leonard Tennenhouse’s
reading of the second tetralogy as showing how ‘authority goes to the contender who

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64 Rackin, p. 68.
can seize hold of the symbols and signs legitimizing authority and wrest them from
his rivals to make them serve his own interests'.

It also sits rather uneasily alongside
the propagandistic agenda that I have identified in Shakespeare’s histories. According to
one reading, the playwright echoes the homily against idleness, officially-sanctioned
biblical commentary, and Elizabeth’s own representation of herself by portraying
government as work, and suggesting that Richard’s idleness in carrying it out is
responsible for his downfall. According to another, Shakespeare subversively implies
that kingship is a matter of successful image-manipulation. One way of reconciling
these opposing aspects of the play might be, as in Greenblatt’s reading of Henry IV, to
suggest that what looks like subversion is really the containment of subversion.
However, I now want to suggest that they can also be attributed to the different
circumstances in which Shakespeare wrote the first and second tetralogies.

As I mentioned earlier, Wilson and Helgerson have both argued that 2 Henry VI was
written at a time when it was important for the theatre to dissociate itself from popular
protest, an imperative reflected in other plays such as Jack Straw and The Massacre at
Paris. The instability of its situation is borne out by the closure of the playhouses in
summer 1592, apparently in reaction to the clash between the feltmakers and the knight
marshal’s men, although the closure was extended by plague. Furthermore, if 2 Henry
VI was indeed first performed by Lord Strange’s Men, then it would appear to have
been written for a company whose patron, though technically a potential heir to the
throne, was very much on the periphery of power: one of the ‘decorative but feeble
butterflies’ whom Peter Thomson contrasts with ‘the industrious officers of Tudor

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65 Tennenhouse, p. 83.
government from Thomas Cromwell to Walsingham and the Cecils. By the time he came to write *1 Henry IV*, however, Shakespeare's position had changed considerably. Andrew Gurr has argued that Howard and Carey consciously set out to create a duopoly of playing companies when they established the Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men in 1594; this encouraged stability, limited competition, and meant that there were two companies on whose resources to draw for performances at court, as well as placing the actors themselves on a much firmer footing with respect to the city. Whereas (according to my reading) in plays such as *2 Henry VI* Strange's Men had buttressed their position by expressing the ideology of the ruling class to a socially mixed audience, the Lord Chamberlain's Men seems to have been able to contemplate appealing specifically to the privileged as playgoers. This, at any rate, is one way of interpreting James Burbage's purchase in February 1596 (coincidentally, the year Shakespeare managed to obtain a coat of arms for his father) of property in the Blackfriars, which he spent six hundred pounds converting into a playhouse that summer. His plan was thwarted in November by a petition to the Privy Council from the leading residents of Blackfriars (ironically, including George Carey himself) objecting to the siting of a theatre in the district. Gurr describes the significance a move to the Blackfriars would have had for the Lord Chamberlain's Men:

> the smaller hall playhouse was much closer to the area where the wealthiest playgoers lived. Potentially it was an ingenious solution for the problem of replacing the Theatre, and an emphatic shift up-market, from the amphitheatre serving primarily the penny-paying standers in the yard to the 'private' or 'select' kind of audience which expected seats and a roof over their heads.

Burbage's plan failed in the short term; but it does give an indication of the changing priorities of his company, priorities which Richard Helgerson sees as having influenced

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67 Gurr, 'Three Reluctant Patrons', p. 35.
68 Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 23.
Shakespeare's output. Whereas the histories staged in Henslowe's theatre are relatively popular in their sympathies, focusing on victims of royal power such as Sir John Oldcastle and Matthew Shore, 'Shakespeare's history plays are concerned above all with the consolidation and maintenance of royal power.' They promulgate an anti-populist history 'designed to elevate Shakespeare and his art out of the company of the base mechanics with whom playwriting had inevitably associated him'.^ In the latter instance Helgerson refers to the social aspirations of the playwright rather than those of his company; but we can widen his terms of reference to suggest that the second tetralogy may have presented history from the perspective of the nobility because the Lord Chamberlain's Men were increasingly trying to appeal to the social elite, rather than to speak for them. Richard IPs subversive revelation of the mechanics of power can therefore be seen as a gesture of complicity with audience members who themselves identified with the ruling class, and its ideological contradictions as a response to the social diversity of its intended audience.

There is another way in which the treatment of government in the second tetralogy may reflect the theatrical auspices under which Shakespeare wrote it. Whereas the Stanleys were, by the 1590s, largely excluded from political power, the Careys were in the ascendant. Henry Carey, the first Lord Hunsdon, was a member of Elizabeth's Privy Council; he and his son George, who took over from him as patron of Shakespeare's company on Henry's death in 1596, had played a prominent part in the suppression of the Northern Rebellion of 1569, which might explain the prominence given to the rebellion in the two parts of Henry IV. In the DNB, Thompson Cooper tells us that the younger Carey was knighted in Sir William Drury's 1570 expedition against

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^ Helgerson, pp. 234, 240.
^ Stone, pp. 251-53.
the Scots, ‘having greatly distinguished himself by his intrepidity in the field, and
still more by a challenge to Lord Fleming, governor of Dumbarton’; this last detail may
account for Hal’s challenge to Hotspur in *1 Henry IV*, v. 1-2, which is Shakespeare’s
invention. 71 Leaving aside such specificities, however, the change of patron from the
declining Stanleys, victims of Elizabeth’s suspicions as to the loyalty of the northern
Earls, to the flourishing Careys may underlie the more general concern of the second
tetralogy with the problems experienced by a new dynasty in establishing itself, and the
means by which it acquires legitimacy.

For whatever reasons, Shakespeare seems to express two divergent views of
government in *Richard II*. According to one, the successful monarch is a worker;
according to the other, he is something resembling a player. Both of these views
continue to be put forward in the two parts of *Henry IV*. In the opening line of the first,
the King is ‘shaken’ and ‘wan with care’; but it is the second part in particular which
seems to illustrate, in the person of Henry, Jewell’s remark that the ‘toil which princes
take, and the great cares wherewith they are occupied, pass all other cares in the world’,
and to anticipate Elizabeth’s emphasis, in the Golden Speech of 1601, upon the ‘cares
and troubles of a crown’. 72 In his soliloquy in *2 Henry IV*, III. 1, he envies the ‘many
thousand of my poorest subjects [...] at this hour asleep’, and laments how Sleep will lie
‘in smoky cribs, | Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee’ or ‘with the vile | In loathsome
beds’, or even ‘upon the high and giddy mast | Seal up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his
brains | In cradle of the rude imperious surge’, while leaving ‘the kingly couch | A
watch-case or a common ’larum bell’ (ll. 4, 9, 15, 18, 16). He concludes, ‘Uneasy lies
the head that wears a crown’ (l. 31). Later, Clarence refers to ‘Th’ incessant care and

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71 Bullough, iv, 163.
72 Elizabeth I, p. 342.
labor’ of Henry’s mind (IV. 4. 118), and Hal echoes his father’s contrast between the

sleep of the poor and the powerful, addressing the crown:

O polish’d perturbation! golden care!
That keep’st the ports of slumber open wide
To many a watchful night, sleep with it now!
Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet,
As he whose brow with homely biggen bound
Snores out the watch of night. (IV. 5. 23)

Thinking, when he wakes, that the Prince wished him dead, Henry laments the

ungratefulness of sons: ‘For this the foolish over-careful fathers | Have broke their sleep
with thoughts, their brains with care, | Their bones with industry’ (I. 67). Indeed, one

significant contributory factor to the strain under which Henry labours is the behaviour

of his son. Upbraiding Hal with it in Part One, he invokes the figure of his royal

predecessor: ‘The skipping King, he ambled up and down, | With shallow jesters, and
rash bavin wits’ (III. 2. 60). The Prince is explicitly compared to the idle monarch whom

Henry supplanted: ‘As thou art to this hour was Richard then | When I from France set
foot at Ravenspurgh’ (I. 94).

The implicit contrast between the care-worn father and idle son is somewhat

compromised by the fact that Hal’s dissoluteness is, as we are told very early on,

feigned. In associating with Falstaff, his plan is to

   imitate the sun,
   Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
   To smother up his beauty from the world,
   That when he please again to be himself,
   Being wanted, he may be more wond’red at. (I. 2. 197)

Like his father in Richard II, Hal is acting, for politic purposes. However, whereas in

that play Shakespeare seems to set up two rival oppositions – between idleness and

industry, between good and bad acting – that imply contradictory notions of kingship,

here he attempts to resolve them. Since C. L. Barber wrote in 1959 that the relationship
between Falstaff and the Prince 'can be summarized fairly adequately in terms of
the relation of holiday to everyday', Hal's sojourn with Falstaff has often been seen as a
period of festive misrule, and his eventual repudiation of him has been associated with
the stringency of Lent.\(^3\) Michael D. Bristol argues that whereas 'Falstaff's girth, his
perpetual drinking and eating, his disrespect of time, place and person are typical
features of Carnival as a festive persona', his 'Lenten antagonist' Hal 'is a “stockfish”
who continually chastises Falstaff and admonishes him in respect of a less abundant
future'.\(^4\) Hal's fraternising with Falstaff is accordingly a temporary aberration; Graham
Holderness has argued that Hal's speech in 1 Henry IV, ii. 1 sets up an opposition
between work and holiday, with the latter as a 'temporary release' whose 'strictly
limited function is that of confirming, by a liberation as temporary as it is violent, as
impermanent as it is affirmative, statutory authority and constituted order'.\(^5\) Hal's
speech certainly does invoke the opposing values of work and holiday:

\[
\text{If all the year were playing holidays,} \\
\text{To sport would be as tedious as to work;} \\
\text{But when they seldom come, they wish’d for come,} \\
\text{And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents. (l. 204)}
\]

However, his use of the work/play dichotomy is more complex than Barber allows
when he writes that 'for him Falstaff is merely a pastime, to be dismissed in due
course'. Hal begins his speech by saying of Falstaff and company, 'I know you all, and
will a while uphold | The unyok’d humor of your idleness' (l. 195). In the Riverside, G.
Blakemore Evans glosses 'unyok’d humor of your idleness' as 'undisciplined tendency
of your frivolity', whereas in Arden II A. R. Humphreys gives 'unbridled inclination'

\(^4\) Bristol, p. 204.
for ‘unyok’d humor’. By extension, ‘uphold’ must mean something like ‘consent to’, ‘participate in’, or even ‘finance’. If, however, the ‘humor’ is not an unbridled animal but the burden itself, with no yoke to attach it to a carrier, then in choosing to ‘uphold’ it Hal is presenting himself, not the idleness of Falstaff and his associates, as the animal; idleness becomes a burden, and dissoluteness, work. This interpretation makes good sense in the light of Hal’s subsequent observation that ‘If all the year were playing holidays, | To sport would be as tedious as to work’. The implication of this phrase is that just as a year full of holidays would make festivity tedious, so a youth spent in the role of model heir would make a worthy kingship predictable rather than impressive. The comparison of an unimpeachable youth with holiday has as its corollary the implication that for Hal to spend his youth in riot is not, in fact, idleness, but work.

The idea that Hal, in feigning dissoluteness, is actually working may have its origins in the theatrical depictions of acting as work that I highlighted in the last chapter. In the context of the second tetralogy of histories, it can be seen as a way of reconciling two competing views of kingship: as work, and as strategic self-display. In fact, when Henry chides Hal in the speech in 1 Henry IV, III. 2 to which I have already alluded, he represents the two as interconnected. He takes his son to task for his laxness in failing to attend Council meetings:

The place in Council thou hast rudely lost,
Which by thy younger brother is supplied,
And art almost an alien to the hearts
Of all the courts and princes of my blood. (l. 32)

Unaware of Hal’s long-term strategy, he goes on to describe his absenteeism not only as idleness, but as incompetence in managing his image. Henry would never have become king ‘Had I so lavish of my presence been, | So common-hackney’d in the eyes of men, |
So stale and cheap to vulgar company' (l. 39); rather, ‘By being seldom seen, I could not stir | But like a comet I was wond’red at’ (l. 46). Thus Henry ‘dress’d myself in [...] humility’, ‘Thus did I keep my person fresh and new, | My presence, like a robe pontifical, | Ne’er seen but wond’red at’ (ll. 51, 55); the references to clothing emphasise the calculated display that underlay his public appearances. An intimate scene whose archetype would appear to be a father’s chiding of a prodigal son for his idleness actually takes the form of a dissembler criticising bad acting; although the repeated echoing of the phrase ‘wond’red at’, which also appears in Hal’s ‘I know you all’ speech, suggests that the Prince’s tactical riot bears more resemblance to Henry’s own cultivation of regal mystique than he knows.

Despite Hal’s vindication of himself in his impressive military performance at the end of Part One, it is not until Henry is near death in Part Two that he begins to feel his son can be trusted with the kingship. Warwick’s insistence that Hal’s behaviour is not mere idle riot, that in fact ‘The Prince but studies his companions | Like a strange tongue’ (IV. 4. 68) does not seem to convince him. Hal’s premature acceptance of his crown confirms his suspicions as to what his reign will be like:

Harry the Fift is crown’d! Up, vanity! Down, royal state! All you sage counsellors, hence! And to the English court assemble now, From every region, apes of idleness! (iv. 5. 119)

However, in his reply Hal makes clear his knowledge of how onerous kingship is, remembering how he upbraided the crown, ‘The care on thee depending | Hath fed upon the body of my father’ (l. 158). Perhaps responding to this invocation of the care with which he is so familiar, the dying King gives his son advice that, in its emphasis both on the labours of kingship and the importance of dissimulation, recalls his speech in the previous play. Referring again to the crown, he recounts ‘How troublesome it sate upon
my head' (l. 186), but also how he has retained it, not only in 'quarrel and [...]

bloodshed' (l. 194) but also through policy:

I cut them off, and had a purpose now
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days. (l. 209)

The intended crusade which at the beginning of Part One Henry represented as being
motivated by piety turns out to have had more cynical purposes; and his advice
proleptically undermines the heroic actions of Henry V.

In the final play of the tetralogy, Shakespeare does not let Henry make any
suggestion that his kingly work consists in acting. Only one brief hint to that effect
comes in the second scene, when the Archbishop of Canterbury attempts to persuade the
King that with wise husbandry of his human resources, it is possible to invade France
while safeguarding England's Scottish borders. In a passage heavily indebted to Virgil's
Georgics, iv. 158-68 and to Aeneid, l. 430-6, he illustrates his argument with reference
to the practice of honey-bees:

They have a king, and officers of sorts,
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home;
Others, like merchants, venter trade abroad;
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
Make boot upon the summer's velvet buds,
Which pillage they with merry march bring home
To the tent-royal of their emperor;
Who busied in his majesty surveys
The singing masons building roofs of gold,
The civil citizens kneading up the honey,
The poor mechanic porters crowding in
Their heavy burthens at his narrow gate,
The sad-ey'd justice, with his surly hum,
Delivering o'er to executors pale
The lazy yawning drone. (l. 2. 190)

In this speech, Canterbury integrates kingly work into the work of the commonwealth. The monarch of the bees is portrayed as one of many workers of various types, magistrates, merchants, soldiers, masons, citizens, mechanics; 'busied in his majesty', he 'surveys' the rest. The task of surveillance is one that Henry performs twice in the play: in IV. 1 he spies in person upon the common soldiers, and in II. 2 Bedford says that the king has monitored the traitors Scroop, Cambridge and Grey, obtaining 'note of all that they intend, | By interception which they dream not of' (l. 6). Because Henry's activities in IV. 1 do not constitute the kind of calculated royal self-display that I have highlighted in previous paragraphs, I see them as surveillance rather than acting; however, Canterbury does seem to portray the management of a regal image as work when he talks of the king being 'busied in his majesty'.

Canterbury's speech can also be seen, however, as an attempt to formulate a politically sophisticated model of monarchical work, rather than simply emphasising the cares of princes. His image of the bees is meant to illustrate his remark,

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Therefore doth heaven divide
The state of man in divers functions,
Setting endeavor in continual motion;
To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,
Obedience: for so work the honey-bees,
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach
The act of order to a peopled kingdom. (l. 183)
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After his description, he concludes,

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I this infer,
That many things, having full reference
To one consent, may work contrariously,
As many arrows loosed several ways
Come to one mark. (l. 204)
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The diversity of human work is fixed in its 'endeavor' at the 'aim' of 'obedience'; the question of to whom this obedience is owed is answered in line 190, 'They have a king, and officers of sorts'. That Canterbury means the King in particular is confirmed by his identification of 'one consent' to which the different forms of work have 'reference'.

The figure of the surveying monarch, 'busied in his majesty', is what legitimises activities in the commonwealth as work. Canterbury anticipates (or Shakespeare echoes) the Homily's insistence that whoever 'doeth good to the common weale and societie of men [...] is not to be accounted idle, though he worke no bodily labour'; however, the common good is explicitly centred upon the monarch.

This particular social model has its limitations. One important one is articulated by Williams in IV. 1, and although he is speaking about the French wars, his remarks have a wider relevance:

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs, and arms, and heads, chopp’d off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all, 'We died at such a place'—some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing, when blood is their argument? (iv. 1. 134)

The miraculous outcome of Agincourt, where the English losses are limited to four men of name and twenty-five others (iv. 8. 103-6), defuses this question, and here Henry ducks its full implications by referring only to the King's responsibility for the state of men's souls when they die: 'The King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers' (l. 155). But Williams undermines the assumptions of Canterbury's speech by suggesting that the will of the monarch may not be harmonious with the best interests of his people. Given that Henry's father advised him to go to war abroad in order to deter competitors to the crown, and given that Canterbury's reason for wanting
war is to prevent Henry from taxing the Church, as he reveals in the play’s opening scene, his concern seems to be justified.

The fact that this objection is articulated by a character called Williams, to whom the king gives a glove full of crowns (IV. 8. 57), might lead us to assume that the glover’s son William Shakespeare shared his unease at Canterbury’s vision of a labouring commonwealth whose work is validated by the consent of a labouring king. However, my own reading of the representation of the work of government in Shakespeare’s histories is concerned primarily with tensions arising from more material imperatives: in particular, the conflict between the need to promulgate the view that government is a form of work, and the need to appeal to an audience that saw itself as politically sophisticated. In the next chapter, however, I want to shift focus slightly, and to isolate what I see as the inherently problematic relationship between work and nobility as a factor that influenced Shakespeare’s treatment of the privileged class in some plays of the 1600s.
Chapter 3. Work and Status in Shakespeare: Hamlet and After

In the long final scene of Hamlet, after the Prince accepts Laertes’ challenge, Horatio questions the wisdom of his decision: ‘You will lose, my lord’ (v. 2. 209). Hamlet, however, is more optimistic. ‘I do not think so; since he went into France I have been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds’ (l. 210). This revelation of ‘continual practice’ comes as something of a surprise. It contradicts Hamlet’s statement to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he has ‘foregone all custom of exercises’ (II. 2. 296), as well as the more general mood of melancholy torpor which he has manifested through much of the play; it is difficult to imagine the same Prince who wished his ‘too too sallied flesh would melt’ (I. 2. 129) spending time making that flesh firmer through exercise with the foil. Gertrude’s comment on her son’s performance during the bout – ‘He’s fat, and scant of breath’ (v. 2. 287) – also seems to belie Hamlet’s statement that he has been in training. This minor crux of the play was highlighted in September 2000 when Simon Russell Beale took on the role of Hamlet for the National Theatre. Many critics saw fit to comment on Beale’s stature, often making reference to the passages

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quoted above. The Guardian’s Michael Billington told us that Beale ‘is not athletically built: indeed he mockingly pats his stomach when announcing he has “forgone all custom of exercises”.’  

Peter J. Smith wrote in Cahiers Elisabéthains, ‘When he illustrated the difference between his father and his uncle by comparing himself mockingly to Hercules […] we could see his point entirely and when, during the climactic sword-fight, Gertrude remarked that “He’s fat, and scant of breath” […] there was no need (as so often in production) to cut or adapt the line.’  

As these remarks indicate, there is ample basis in the text for a Hamlet who is ‘somewhat stocky’; yet the fact that critics found Beale’s figure to be noteworthy suggests that such a Hamlet runs contrary to expectation. Perhaps this expectation is dictated not by the content of the play but by traditions of casting – a prejudice that would not have affected audiences who saw Richard Burbage take to the stage around 1600. However, reviewers’ comments about Beale highlight an ambiguity as to Hamlet’s physique that is present in the text; and, I would argue, this ambiguity derives from a contradiction inherent in the way the Prince is characterised. In a sense, there are two Hamlets in Hamlet.

The first Hamlet is the one who soliloquises,

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter! (l. 2. 129)

Brian Vickers has argued that suicidal despair such as that exhibited by Hamlet in this speech was considered in the early modern period to be a manifestation of sloth. In the

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first book of *The Faerie Queene*, IX. 40. 1-2, for example, Despair recommends suicide to the Redcross Knight as offering ‘eternall rest | And happie ease’, and insists that ‘Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas, | Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please’ (l. 8).\(^6\) Hamlet’s third soliloquy seems to bear out Vickers’ argument that suicide was associated with sloth: death ends ‘The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks | That flesh is heir to’ (III. 1. 61). Were it not for ‘the dread of something after death,’ ‘who would fardels bear, | To grunt and sweat under a weary life’ (l. 75)? Life is a painful labour from which death offers release; this is what makes suicide so attractive. In the first soliloquy, Hamlet’s desire for death, and wish that suicide were not divinely proscribed, derives from a more general disenchantment: ‘O God, God, | How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable | Seem to me all the uses of this world!’ (l. 2. 132). Again, this can be read as a symptom of sloth: Robert Burton wrote some years later that one cause of melancholy was ‘Idlenesse, (the badge of gentry) or want of Exercise, the base of body and minde, the nurse of naughtinesse, stepmother of discipline, the chiefe author of mischiefe’.\(^7\) Hamlet, of course, explicitly confirms his own ‘want of exercise’ later on in the play. His description of the world as ‘an unweeded garden | That grows to seed’ (l. 135) may recall *Richard II*; this would imply a criticism of his own deficient husbandry. Going on to lament his mother’s hasty marriage, he complains that Claudius is ‘no more like my father | Than I to Hercules’ (l. 152); once again the notion of idleness is implied, as the prince contrasts himself with the hero who, at the crossroads, chose the path of Virtue rather than Pleasure, and went on to accomplish the twelve labours.\(^8\)
After his encounter with the Ghost, Hamlet’s idleness acquires a new dimension: rather than being simply an aspect of his everyday demeanour, it is specifically associated with his failure to carry out revenge. The Ghost tells him,

I find thee apt,
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. (i. 5. 31)

Failure to avenge Old Hamlet would constitute dullness, fatness, forgetting; his duty requires him to be apt, to stir. The Ghost’s words establish a pattern that persists in the play: in Hamlet’s soliloquies, he does not, like Kyd’s Hieronimo, ponder God’s injunction that ‘vengeance is mine’ (Romans 13. 19, Hebrews 10. 30, Deuteronomy 32. 35), but rather takes the rectitude of vengeance for granted and berates his inactivity. In so far as a regicide is being described, Pyrrhus’s deed has affinities both with that committed by Claudius and that intended by Hamlet. However, the use of the word ‘vengeance’ means that the lines are more applicable to the Prince; and they serve to connect revenge with manual labour. Pyrrhus is set ‘a-work’; his blows are compared to those of the Cyclops in Vulcan’s smithy. Reacting to this vocabulary, Hamlet in his subsequent speech applies words to himself that have overtones of idleness: he is a ‘rogue’, a ‘dull and muddy-mettled rascal’, ‘John-a-dreams’ (ll. 550, 567-68). Rather than doing the deed, he must ‘like a whore unpack my heart with words, | And fall a-

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cursing like a very drab’ (l. 585). In the ‘To be, or not to be’ speech, the idea of
vengeance as work modifies the terms in which Hamlet thinks of suicide. As I
mentioned earlier, he desires death as the end of a life of labour and hardship; it seems,
however, as if his dread at the idea of killing himself, because of the possibility of
dreams after death, is conflated with his self-disgust at failing to kill Claudius, so that
suicide changes from being the logical end of sloth to being an example of work:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (l. 82)

Much as Pyrrhus resembles both Hamlet and Claudius, and Priam both rightful king and
usurper, these lines are equally applicable to suicide and revenge; and the tendency to
view vengeance as work – an ‘enterprise’, an ‘action’ – affects the terms in which
Hamlet considers killing himself.

In Hamlet’s final soliloquy, of IV. 4, he continues to bemoan his tardiness in
prosecuting his revenge, particularly in view of the ‘twenty thousand men’ who ‘Go to
their graves like beds’ in the wars between Norway and Poland (ll. 60, 62). He appears
to recall the Ghost’s injunction to ‘stir in this’ when he says,

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake. (l. 53)

Hamlet’s failure to kill Claudius means that he has failed to live up to the standards of
greatness and honour he espouses here. This may explain why in II. 2, as well as
referring to himself as an idle ‘rogue’ and ‘rascal’, he also calls himself a ‘peasant
slave’ (l. 550), an epithet that appears less consistent with the accusation of idleness:
revenge is something that Hamlet’s noble status calls on him to accomplish, and
accordingly his inactivity marks him out as socially base. The effect of this is that
the idea of vengeance links high social status with work: Hamlet’s nobility requires him
to carry out an action which, as I have tried to show, the play consistently depicts in
laborious terms.

However, the melancholy Prince who longs for death as an end to laborious life, has
stopped taking his accustomed exercises, and regards his revenge as work but berates
his idleness in failing to carry it out, is not the only Hamlet we see in the play. There is
another Hamlet, who not only has the intellectual energy to make fools of lesser
characters, but who scores two hits before Laertes can touch him. The problem of this
Hamlet is not how to rouse himself out of idleness and accomplish his revenge, but how
to live in Elsinore with the knowledge of what the Ghost has told him, and how to
conceal that knowledge long enough to establish its veracity. Of course, staging the play
means showing Claudius his hand; but his dissembling at least buys him enough time to
do that much. Like his slothful double, this Hamlet uses the language of work and
idleness to describe his actions; but rather than overcoming his idleness in order to
accomplish work, he must go to work while appearing to be idle.

In I. 5, less than a hundred and fifty lines after telling the Ghost of his desire to
‘sweep to my revenge’ ‘with wings as swift | As meditation, or the thoughts of love’ (I.
29), Hamlet informs Horatio and Marcellus of his intention ‘To put an antic disposition
on’ (I. 172). This can be interpreted in several ways. It may be just the first of the
Prince’s many deferrals of revenge; it may be a manifestation of his histrionic
obsession, his delight in acting for its own sake: compare v. 2. 30, ‘Or I could make a
prologue to my brains, | They had begun the play’. More charitably, however, it can be
seen as a sensible strategy to adopt given his situation. Hamlet may not yet have
conceived the suspicions about the Ghost he voices at II. 2. 598 ('The spirit that I have seen | May be a dev’l'); but he must face the practical difficulty, not only of killing Claudius, but also of proving his guilt to his fellow Danes. As such, he must find a way of going about his business in Elsinore while appearing to be idle; and feigned madness is his method. The notion that Hamlet is working while appearing not to is repeatedly alluded to in the play. Firstly, the language used to describe Hamlet’s madness puns on the work/idleness dichotomy. When at II. 2. 280 he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that their modesties ‘have not craft enough to color’ the fact that they were sent for, the word ‘craft’ suggests both dissembling and manual labour, linking acting and work. In the subsequent scene, Guildenstern recalls Hamlet’s words when he tells Claudius of his ‘crafty madness’ (III. 1. 8); again, the Prince tells his mother at III. 4. 188 that he is only ‘mad in craft’. Although the feigning of madness is a kind of work, however, the effect is the appearance of idleness. This notion is suggested in II. 2 when Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ‘I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw’ (I. 378): madness is linked with the inability to recognise workmen’s tools. The play quibbles on two alternative meanings of ‘idle’, that is, ‘slothful’ and ‘mad’: as Claudius, Gertrude and the others enter in III. 2 Hamlet says to Horatio ‘They are coming to the play. I must be idle’ (I. 90); his mother rebukes him for his ‘idle tongue’ at III. 4. 11. Hamlet also gives his madness the appearance of idleness in his use of what Annabel Patterson calls the language of ‘popular sports and inversion rituals’. Witness his ballad-singing to Polonius in II. 2. 406-18, his reference to himself as ‘your only jig-maker’, and his lament ‘For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot’ (III. 2. 125, 135). He associates his behaviour with play rather than work to hide his activities at Court. This pragmatic aspect of Hamlet’s studied idleness calls to mind

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George Puttenham's advice in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) that the courtier poet should be constantly dissembling, 'whereby the better to winne his purposes & good aduantages'. The courtier should appear busy when he is actually idle; or, by contrast, 'as I haue obserued in many of the Princes Courts of Italie, to seeme idle when they be earnestly occupied & entend to nothing but mischieuous practizes, and do busily negotiat by coulor of otiation'. That word 'otiation' perfectly encapsulates the kind of active, dissembling idleness that Hamlet professes.

So far, the conceit that there are two Hamlets in *Hamlet* may seem reminiscent of my reading of the histories. In the last chapter, I identified a tension between their depiction of government as work and their implication that successful kingship is matter of acting. The notion of two Hamlets, one of whom berates himself for an idleness which he feels ill befits his noble status, the other of whom is working hard at pretending to be idle, is perhaps merely the same idea writ large. However, as well as being undertaken for reasons of policy, Hamlet's studied idleness has wider semiotic implications. In v. 2, he tells Horatio of how he wrote the death warrant of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

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I sat me down,
Devis'd a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labor'd much
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me yeman's service. (1. 31)
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As Jonathan Goldberg has pointed out, this deliberate carelessness had historical analogues. He quotes the lament of a writing-master in the ninth dialogue of Juan Vives' *Linguae Latinae Exercitatio* (1538) of how the nobility think it fine and proper . . . not to know how to shape their letters properly. You would think that it was a lot of chickens scratching about; unless you know beforehand who the writer was, you’d never guess . . . . We see them signing

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letters composed by their secretaries with totally illegible signatures; nor would you know who sent the letter unless you were told by the bearer or you recognised your correspondent's seal.

Goldberg goes on to tell us that ‘Guicciardini [...] reports in his Ricordi that as a young man he too scorned the skill of writing fair, but then came to recognise that such ability opened the way to royal service’. Similarly, when Hamlet needs to adopt the discourse of official power, he modifies his hand. But his earlier belief that it was base to write fair, and his reference to the skill as ‘yeman’s service’ (and therefore proper to a social class inferior to his own), not to mention that it is so degrading as to be something worth labouring to forget, is revealing. It tells us that Hamlet shares with the nobles Vives mentions an understanding of gentility that sits uneasily with the language of work he has used to describe his revenge. I suggested earlier that this understanding of vengeance as work places Hamlet alongside earlier protagonists such as Gloucester in Henry VI, and Prince Hal: work is compatible with gentility, and indeed one’s duty as a nobleman or prince requires one to carry out actions that are to be thought of in laborious terms. Here, however, Hamlet appears so antipathetic to the idea of work that he will labour to forget a skill that belongs to his social inferiors. This is not merely the sprezzatura appropriate to a renaissance courtier, who (in Castiglione’s words) should ‘eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and daungerous rock, Affectation or curiosity and (to speak a new word) to use in every thyng a certain Reckelesness, to cover art withall, and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it wythout pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it’. One can infer that the ideal courtier would make writing beautifully look easy; but Hamlet deems the skill beneath him, and has tried to forget it altogether. His is a ‘hand of little employment’ (v. 1. 69), in calligraphy as in more

arduous labour. His feigned idleness, therefore, is not only politic: it is a practice with a wider social valency.

In his distaste for anything that might look like manual work, Hamlet participates in a cultural trend amongst the privileged classes which ran contrary to that identified in the previous chapter. As I pointed out there, the demilitarisation of the nobility that took place in the Tudor period led to their having to find new justifications for their exemption from work. A humanistic ethos of public service was emphasised in homilies, religious literature and, I argue, some drama. However, structural changes in society during the early modern period helped bring about the evolution of other notions of proper aristocratic behaviour. I would argue that the most important is the sheer increase in the size of the privileged class, attributable perhaps to two factors in particular. Firstly, the growth of a secular education system to fill the public service roles no longer occupied by clerics created a new class of men who could call themselves gentle by virtue of their university education. Robert Greene, the son of a saddler, and Christopher Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, both benefited from this. Secondly, social status was becoming increasingly commodified. One cause of this also derived from the Reformation: as vast tracts of church land came into the possession of the monarchy, these could both be used to enrich and ennoble loyal servants of the Crown, and be sold off to individuals who had become wealthy through, for example, retail trade, and now wished to join the landed classes. Indeed, the tendency of the newly rich to seek to acquire the trappings of the existing aristocracy is one that Stone stresses in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*: 'Since there was plenty of land on the market there arose no proud dynasties of merchants, no hereditary strain of lawyers (except through younger sons), no unbroken sequence of professional politicians.' When one owned land one could live off one's rents, maintaining the leisured lifestyle of a
gentleman; and indeed, 'The result of rapid changes in land ownership was an unprecedented torrent of claims for arms in the early Elizabethan period. In the thirty years between 1560 and 1589, over 2,000 grants were made, followed by at least another 1,760 from 1590 to 1639'. One of these, of course, was to a Stratford glover in 1596. The effective purchase of gentility by wealthy commoners was observed with varying degrees of outrage by contemporary writers. Laurence Humphrey complained in 1563 of the 'great or rather to great multitude' of those who have 'by fraude, guile, and deceit, like ill meanes, or princes blinded iudgement, bought or purchased Nobilytie'; Richard Mulcaster opined that 'of all the meanes to make a gentleman, it is the most vile, to be made for money'. Probably the fullest, and almost certainly the most often quoted, statement about the commodification of status comes from William Harrison's *Description of England*. Harrison wryly describes how those gentlemen whose ancestors did not come to England with William the Conqueror do take their beginning in England after this manner in our times. Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whoso abideth in the university giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or, beside his service in the room of a captain in the wars or good counsel given at home, whereby his commonwealth is benefited, can live without manual labor, and therto is able and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman, he shall for money have a coat and arms bestowed upon him by heralds (who in the charter of the same do of custom pretend antiquity and service and many gay things), and thereunto being made so good cheap, be called master, which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen, and reputed for a gentleman ever after.

As Harrison says, there were several ways of entering the privileged class in early modern England. Obviously one could be born into it; one could acquire gentility through a university education, or the practice of law or medicine, or military service; ultimately, however, Harrison in effect throws up his hands and admits that anyone who

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can afford it can acquire a coat and arms, provided they are able to ‘live without manual labor’ and ‘bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman’.

These last remarks of Harrison’s introduce the question of the semiotics of gentility, or the significance of external attributes such as how one earned a living and generally comported oneself. As more commoners acquired gentility during Elizabeth’s reign, a tendency that was mirrored with knighthood during James’s, these externals became more important as signifiers of gentility.\textsuperscript{17} If anyone who was rich enough could buy a coat of arms, then that coat by itself proved little; instead, greater store was set by more complex indicators of status, both for upstarts and for gentlemen of long standing.

Barnaby Rich wrote how, in the current time of peace (1609),

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all our strife and contention is, who shall sit aboue the salte, who shall goe next the wall, who shall stand formost in the Herauldes bookes, and who shall goe before, and who shall come behind.

[... ] it is growne to a general controversie, not onely amongst the inferior sorte of those that would faine be reputed to be Gentlemen, but likewise amongst the better sort of those that be knowne to be Gentlemen by birth, and others that by their places and professions are gentelized, and worthy to bee so esteemed.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

As Harrison’s remarks show, perhaps the single most important signifier of gentility was the ability to live without manual labour; and this was often exaggerated into a virtual cult of idleness. Robert Burton wrote that ‘idlenesse is an appendix to nobility, they count it a disgrace to worke, and spend all their daies in sports, recreations, and pastimes, and will therefore takes no paines; be of no vocation: they feed liberally, fare well, want exercise, action, employment, (for to worke, I say they may not abide) and company to their desires’.\textsuperscript{19} Maurice Ashley quotes Viscount Conway: ‘We eat, and

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\textsuperscript{17} Whereas in the forty-five years of Elizabeth’s reign eight hundred and seventy eight men were knighted, James dubbed nine hundred and six in the first four months of his reign alone. His creation in 1611 of the new title of baronet may be taken as an indication of how far knighthood had become devalued currency. See Stone, pp. 71-74, 77-79.

\textsuperscript{18} Barnaby Rich, \textit{Roome for a Gentleman; or, The Second Part of Favites} (London, 1609), fols 2r-3r.

\textsuperscript{19} Burton, i, 240.
\end{footnotes}
drink and rise up to play and this is to live like a gentleman, for what is a gentleman but his pleasure?’. These attitudes may have been encouraged by the air of idleness that seems to have been more prevalent in James’s court than his predecessor’s. As early as 1584, Mary Stuart’s envoy commented in a letter to Mary’s secretary that James was ‘too idle and too little concerned about business, too addicted to his pleasure, principally that of the chase, leaving the conduct of business to the Earl of Arran, Montrose and the Secretary’; in 1607, the Venetian ambassador wrote that ‘his Majesty is devoted to the chase and to his pleasures, and hates all the trouble and anxiety of Government’. In his famous description of King Christian IV of Denmark’s visit to England in 1606, and the chaotic and drunken entertainment he received at Theobald’s, Sir John Harington reminisced about the days of Queen Elizabeth, telling Mr Secretary Barlow ‘I neer did see such lack of good order, discretion, and sobriety, as I have now done’, and lamenting that, the Gunpowder Plot forgotten, ‘we are going on, hereabouts, as if the Devil was contriving every man shoud blow up himself, by wild riot, excess, and devastation of time and temperance’. I would suggest that it was to this sentiment – the association of idleness with gentility – that dramatists for the children’s companies were aiming to appeal when they insisted on the amateur status of the child actors. As I have already argued, they tried to foster an image of exclusivity; and one important way in which this exclusivity was imagined was in terms of distance from the world of work: an auditor at St Paul’s would not be ‘pasted | To the barmy Jacket of a Beer-brewer’. A decade later, Thomas Dekker made clear in The Gull’s Horn-Book (1609) how the very act of going to the theatre could be seen as conspicuous consumption of time, a display of one’s freedom from the obligation to work just as the wearing of costly clothes was a

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display of one’s wealth. He tells his gentlemanly readers, when at plays, to criticise loudly: thereby ‘you publish your temperance to the world, in that you seem not to resort thither to taste vain pleasures with a hungry appetite but only as a gentleman to spend a foolish hour or two because you can do nothing else’. One does not go to the theatre for enjoyment’s sake, but to advertise one’s freedom from other obligations. The private theatres’ ‘extensive use of music – a concert of an hour’s duration before the play began, a variety of instrumental and vocal renderings between the acts’ – can be seen, not only as an additional aesthetic pleasure for the discerning playgoers, but also as a device that by drawing out the duration of the theatrical experience made its consumption of time all the more conspicuous. The notion that the actors themselves are not trained professionals but schoolboys who have not even rehearsed their performance is quite in keeping with this sense of the private theatres as places conceptually distant from the idea of work.

The marketing of the private theatres as an elite commodity can be seen as having important long-term effects upon the London theatre industry. As David Farley-Hills has suggested, it presented the ‘danger of the Globe becoming regarded as unfashionable or fit only for the stinkards’. Existing theatre companies had to react to a new threat to their incomes and status; and they seem to have done this in different ways. Andrew Gurr sees the move of the Admiral’s Men from the Rose to the Fortune, built by Henslowe and Alleyn near Finsbury Fields in 1600, as one aspect of a policy to appeal ‘more narrowly and explicitly to the city and citizens than to the lawyers and gentry’, an argument I shall examine in more detail in a later chapter. However, while

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the Lord Chamberlain’s Men continued to perform plays that seem to have been
designed to compete with the Admiral’s – devil plays such as *The Merry Devil of
Edmonton* (1604 or earlier), domestic dramas such as *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (1605-08),
citizen plays like *The London Prodigal* (1603-05) – Gurr believes that they decided also
to ‘compet[e] with the boys and their new fashions’. 26

This, indeed, was an understandable reaction, since the Lord Chamberlain’s Men
seem already to have been attempting to reposition themselves in the theatrical
marketplace. As I argued in the last chapter, James Burbage’s purchase of the
Blackfriars property in 1596 suggests that he had been contemplating the possibilities of
a more exclusive theatre that would cater to the elite. The company’s relocation to the
Globe in 1599, two years after Burbage’s death and the exhaustion of the lease on the
Theatre, which had forced them into temporary residence at the Curtain, can be seen as
a half-way move in the same direction: Farley-Hills points out that a playhouse on the
south bank of the Thames was ‘ideally situated not only for attracting city clientele over
London Bridge, but also for the “wiser” and freer spending sort from the West End of
London and Westminster who had easy and comfortable access by water across the
Thames’. 27 Wealthier playgoers and students from the Inns of Court could get to the
Globe directly across the river, rather than having to traverse the City as they had to the
Theatre or Curtain. While the new amphitheatre would continue to attract a city
clientele, it was more accessible to the wealthy than its predecessor had been.

It is unclear whether the departure of Will Kemp from the Lord Chamberlain’s Men
in 1599 was connected to this shift up-market, or whether it occurred for some other

27 Farley-Hills, pp. 7-8.
reason. However, the type of clowning he represented does seem to have been associated with the lower social strata. Some thirty years later, a character in Richard Brome’s *The Antipodes* would describe improvisatory clowning as having been ‘allowed’ only ‘in the days of Tarlton and Kemp, / Before the stage was purg’d from barbarism, / And brought to the perfection it now shines with’. Kemp’s barbarism seems to have consisted in features of his clowning which he shared with his predecessor Tarlton: unscriptedness, bawdry, and complicity with the audience, elements which were combined in the jigs for which Kemp was famed. Kemp’s replacement Robert Armin, however, seems to have represented an altogether different sort of comedy. David Wiles describes him as ‘an intellectual, a Londoner, and as well attuned to Renaissance notions of folly as to the English folk tradition’; the roles Shakespeare wrote for him involve less complicity with the audience, and a higher social status and linguistic register. Whether or not Kemp left voluntarily – and the reference to slanderous ‘Ballad-makers and their coherents’ as ‘Shakerags’ in *Kemp’s Nine Daies Wonder* (1600) may indicate some animosity – the fact that he was not replaced with a clown of a similar sort to himself implies that his departure allowed the Lord Chamberlain’s Men to move away from a style of humour that had lower-class associations to one perhaps more in keeping with a gentle audience.

The overt attempt by the children’s companies to attract a socially privileged audience, and the potential threat this represented to the adult companies, thus seem to have given greater urgency to an animus already evident in the Lord Chamberlain’s company. This urgency may be expressed in the text of *Hamlet*, with its various

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allusions to the developments described above. Most notoriously, Rosencrantz’s
mention of the ‘little eyases’ (II. 2. 339) is a clear reference to the children’s companies,
although its precise relevance has been hotly debated, not least because it is unique to
the First Folio and its derivatives. So is his assertion that the boys carry away
‘Hercules and his load too’ (I. 361); but Hamlet’s promise to remember the Ghost
‘whiles memory holds a seat | In this distracted globe’ (I. 5. 96), another apparent
reference to the new theatre, is in all three texts. All three contain his injunction that the
players ‘let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them’ (III. 2.
38), although only in the first Quarto does he go on to ridicule the fool who ‘keepes one
suite | Of feasts, as a man is knowne by one suite of | Apparell’ (Textual Notes, III. 2. 45),
and whose jests gentlemen record in their tables. The proscription of improvisatory
clowning does read, as Wiles suggests, like an invitation to the audience to ‘notice the
loss’ of Kemp.

Hamlet does sometimes seem like a play unusually aware of the material
circumstances of its production, and I would argue that this makes my own reading of
the play less schematic than it might otherwise appear. I have attempted to identify a
division in the Prince’s character between a sense of idleness as reprehensible and a
sense of the image of idleness as something to cultivate, whether for reasons of policy
or social status. I would suggest that this reflects a tension within the privileged class
itself between an insistence that activities such as government constitute work, and a
fetishising of idleness as signifying gentility. The reason why this tension achieves
expression in Hamlet is because the play was produced during a period when a set of
circumstances – the relocation to the Globe, the departure of Kemp, the revival of the

31 In Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare’s Time (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2001), pp. 103-26, for example, Roslyn Lander Knutson assigns the passage to 1606.
32 Wiles, p. viii.
children’s companies – combined to make the position of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men with respect to the social elite a question of crucial importance. This compounded an uncertainty that had already informed the representation of kingship in the second tetralogy of histories: was the company speaking for the elite to the masses, or appealing to the elite’s own prejudices? The doubleness of Prince Hamlet is the result.

The circumstances of *Hamlet*’s production were exceptional; none of the plays written in the half-decade or so after it is so radically split in its conception of gentility. In his opening speech in *Measure for Measure*, the Duke unambiguously highlights the business of government; but Angelo’s failure as a deputy does not stem from idleness. Lear’s announcement of his intention ‘To shake all cares and business from our age, | Conferring them on younger strengths, while we | Unburthen’d crawl toward death’ (1. 1. 39) certainly emphasises the burden of care that kingship involves; but his decision to put it by does not derive from any sense that such care is degrading, and none of the competitors for kingship in this play or *Macbeth* prides himself on appearing unoccupied. In the later Roman plays, however, Shakespeare does seem to revisit the thematic territory of *Hamlet*, working out its implications in a much more thoroughgoing way. In *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, the tension between rival conceptions of nobility is a means by which important theatrical effects are achieved.

Perhaps the central question of *Antony and Cleopatra* is that of how we are to interpret the character of Antony. Should we accept Cleopatra’s vision of an ‘Emperor Antony’ whose ‘legs bestrid the ocean’ (V. 2. 76, 82), or is he, as Philo says, merely the ‘triple pillar of the world transform’d | Into a strumpet’s fool’ (1. 1. 12)? Critical opinion is extremely divided. J. Leeds Barroll has argued that the play should be seen in the context of ‘the ancient cultural tradition within which tragedy grew’, whereby
misfortune is the result of human misjudgement. As such, 'the respectful pity emanating from Shakespeare’s tragic art vouches not for the sanctity of his heroes’ principles but for the quality of those battles they have fought with themselves'.

Geoffrey Miles sees Antony as a failed Stoic who tries to fix his identity through suicide but bungles the attempt. Robert S. Miola, however, argues that although Antony is ‘flawed’, the trajectory of the play minimises our awareness of this: ‘Cleopatra’s monument in Alexandria finally occupies the center of our interests and sympathies’.

Similarly, Janet Adelman writes that although ‘uncertainty of judgement [is] characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra’, the movement away from the ‘structure of framing commentary and of shifts of scene’ towards the end of the play means that we ‘tend more often to accept the lovers’ evaluation of themselves, to take them at their word, because we are more often permitted to identify ourselves with them’. Perhaps most radically, Barbara Bono sees the play as a ‘transvaluation’ of Virgil:

Philo’s [moralistic] interpretation of the lovers’ action is [...] grounded in centuries of orthodox interpretation of the Aeneid and the virtues of Roman culture [...]. It culminates in Antony’s tragic sparagmos, the dissolution of his character [...]. This judgement is effectively reversed by Cleopatra’s imaginative transformations as, through the divided catastrophe of the play, she turns Antony’s suicide into her triumph.

As Miola, Adelman and Bono all point out, while Antony is clearly flawed, the play itself seems to work in such a way as to minimise our sense of this during the final act, and to legitimise Cleopatra’s vision of him. An important factor in the production of this effect is Shakespeare’s treatment of his source material. Vivian Thomas writes,

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anyone comparing Plutarch's portrayal with Shakespeare's central characters is immediately struck by the extent to which the dramatist omits several important references to their actions and attitudes in order to maintain sympathy with them. Shakespeare's Octavius Caesar, on the other hand, is a more calculating and manipulative character than his counterpart in Plutarch.

As Thomas shows, Shakespeare omits any mention of the disastrous way in which Antony mismanaged the Parthian campaign, in which over thirty thousand men died; the fact that he had Cicero killed and dismembered; the two children Octavia had by him; and his betrayal of his followers by fleeing at Actium. On the other hand, Cleopatra's charms are accentuated, and Octavius is made cold to the point of inhumanity. One interesting aspect of this is the omission of his womanising tendencies; it does appear that Shakespeare is attempting to make him 'the antithesis of Antony'.

By setting up this contrast between Antony and Caesar, Shakespeare encourages us to view Antony's failings in a more positive light. His sensuality seems preferable to Caesar's coldness: Octavius appears to have feelings only for his sister, and even her he pushes into a loveless marriage of convenience. Antony is profligate; but the line between profligacy and magnanimity is fine, and Enobarbus's receipt of his treasure in Caesar's camp comes after a description of the unsympathetic way his new master has entertained his fellow traitors (iv. 6. 11-17). In the face of Cleopatra's majestic death, we can agree with her that 'Tis paltry to be Caesar' (v. 2. 2); his material victory seems hollow.

Jonathan Dollimore has suggested that Antony's defeat by Caesar should be seen in the context of the 'unprecedented decline of the power, military and political, of the titular aristocracy' which he argues took place in the early modern period, and which I

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discussed in the last chapter. Antony is vanquished because he subscribes to an obsolescent conception of nobility as residing in personal valour, a conception encapsulated in his futile gesture of challenging Caesar to single combat. I would agree with this up to a point, but would question the assumption that Antony’s conception of nobility is mediaeval: in some of its particulars, it seems very close to the ethos of gentility that was evolving in the Jacobean period. Although challenging Caesar to single combat may seem like an outdated gesture, in reality the duel was just entering its great age: ‘The number of duels reported by contemporaries reached a peak in the second decade’ of the seventeenth century, as Stone writes. When he determines to fight Octavius by sea ‘For that he dares us to’t (III. 7. 29), thereby giving himself up ‘to chance and hazard’ (I. 47), the love of gambling for high stakes allies him with the nobleman of the English present, not the past: in the London of the late 1590s ‘the 5th Earl of Rutland was losing between £1,000 and £1,500 a year, in Paris his friend Southampton was undermining his estate by losing up to 18,000 crowns on a game of tennis, and staking up to 4,000 crowns during a single evening at cards’. Finally, Antony’s love of feasting is was shared by the early modern aristocracy, whom Stone describes as having been engaged in a ‘sustained carnivorous orgy’. By comparison with the ‘whole bore inclosed in a pale workmanly guilt by a cooke hired from Bristoll’ on which Lord Berkeley feasted, or the ‘foure huge brawny piggs, pipeinge hott, bitted and harnised with ropes of sarsiges, all tyde to a monstrous bag-pudding’ with which Sir George Goring celebrated Prince Charles’s birthday in 1618, ‘Eight wild-boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there’ (II. 2. 179) seems decidedly lacking

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in imagination.\(^\text{40}\) Rather than being obsolescent, Antony’s values are quintessentially Jacobean.

When Antony is reconciled with Cleopatra after Actium, he proposes

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one other gaudy night. Call to me
All my sad captains, fill our bowls once more;
Let’s mock the midnight bell. (III. 13. 182)
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Caesar’s instruction to his generals at IV. 1. 15 to ‘feast the army’ might recall these lines; but the comment, ‘we have store to do’t, | And they have earn’d the waste’ makes him appear mean-minded rather than sensible. Caesar is repeatedly associated with financial calculation in the play. He may tell Cleopatra that he is ‘no merchant’ (V. 2. 183), but this is to be taken no more seriously than his subsequent claim that ‘we intend so to dispose you as | Yourself shall give us counsel’ (I. 186), when in fact he means to lead her in triumph. Pompey tells us that ‘Caesar gets money where | He loses hearts’ (II. 1. 13), an accurate assessment of how Octavius manages to accumulate wealth rather than, like Antony, personal loyalty. When, on Pompey’s barge, we see Antony telling Caesar how the Egyptians ‘take the flow o’ th’ Nile | By certain scales i’ th’ pyramid’ in order to predict the year’s crop (II. 7. 17), we can deduce that Caesar has been asking Antony about the economics of Egyptian agriculture, as if anticipating the role of ‘universal landlord’ ascribed to him by Thidias at III. 13. 72.\(^\text{41}\) Even as it is coming into existence, the Roman Empire is depicted as nothing more glorious than a business concern: Pompey recounts at II. 6. 34 how the triumvirs ‘have made me offer | Of Sicily, Sardinia; and I must | Rid all the sea of pirates; then, to send | Measures of wheat to Rome’. The land of the empire itself is something that can be traded with; it is this

\(^{40}\) Stone, pp. 249-50, 569, 558, 559-60.

\(^{41}\) Thomas, p. 131.
materialism that Pompey seems to allude to when he calls the triumvirs 'Chief factors for the gods' (l. 10).

When Enobarbus describes how Antony first saw Cleopatra, he tells us that he ‘did sit alone’, ‘Enthron’d i’ th’ market-place’ (II. 2. 215). The implication appears to be that before the encounter, he inhabited the Roman world of financial calculation that Caesar represents, and that he deserts it for Cleopatra. More precisely, Cleopatra’s world is one that can accommodate merchandise without being cheapened by it: custom, a word that implies trade as well as habituation, cannot ‘stale | Her infinite variety’ (l. 234).

Although she describes herself as one of those ‘that trade in love’ (II. 5. 2), it is only to her detractors that she appears whorish; as Enobarbus says, ‘vildest things | Become themselves in her, that the holy priests | Bless her when she is riggish’ (II. 2. 237).

Caesar describes how Antony and Cleopatra ‘in chairs of gold | Were publicly enthron’d, ’I’ th’ market-place, on a tribunal silver’d’ (III. 6. 3), and although the idea of enthronement in the market place partially recalls the speech of Enobarbus quoted above, the lovers have transformed their environment, turning it from a place of commerce into a place of worship:

His sons he there proclaim’d the kings of kings:
Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia
He gave to Alexander; to Ptolomy he assign’d
Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia. She
In th’ abilments of the goddess Isis
That day appear’d, and oft before gave audience,
As ’tis reported, so. (l. 13)

The idea of the market and of financial calculation are applied both to Caesar and to the lovers; but whereas Caesar is identified with it, the lovers transcend it. His victory is made to seem tawdry and materialistic, their defeat glorious and idealistic.
It should be pointed out, though, that the terms of this opposition are informed by arguments about the nature of gentility which were extremely current during the early modern period. As Stone puts it, amongst the nobility 'active participation in a trade or profession was generally thought to be humiliating. The man of business was inferior to the gentleman of leisure who lived off his rents'. With the authority of Cicero, as I pointed out in the last chapter, writers on gentility frequently insisted on its incompatibility with merchandise. John Ferne wrote in 1586, 'Merchaundizinge, is no competent, or seemelye trade of lyfe, for a gentleman'. He went on to point out that the inhabitants of Venice and Genoa thought differently, but that those of Naples by contrast 'determine him onely to be the perfectest Gentleman, that may leade the most idle and vacant life (an error too farre crept into the hearts of English Gentlemen at this day) and therefore, the Neapolitane thinketh it a scandall to his Gentrie, either to attend the base trade of Merchandising, or the necessarie care of his patrimonie'. Instead he 'thinketh the sitting on Theaters, the beholding of Playes, and the riding of Coursers, sufficient notes of perfect Gentlenes'. Not only does Ferne see merchandise as unsuitable for gentlemen, and believe that many English emulate the Neapolitans in equating gentility with idleness; playgoing, in Naples at least, is implicated in this conspicuous idleness in a way that foreshadows the London companies' competition for a gentle audience at the turn of the century. In 1602, William Segar reiterated Ferne’s views, saying that the English gentleman lived 'as one that accounteth it no honour to exercise Marchandize'. Dudley Digges, writing in 1604, does not go so far as some writers in thinking that gentlemen must be completely idle: 'I euer thought nothing worse for Gentlemen than idlenesse, except doing ill', he writes, but nevertheless voices

42 Stone, pp. 39-40.
his opinion, 'To play the Merchants was only for Gentlemen of *Florence, Venice, or*
the like that are indeede but the better sort of Citizens'. ⁴⁵

As well as shaping the opposition between Caesar and the lovers, the belief that
merchandise is not a seemly occupation for a gentleman is used by Shakespeare in the
characterisation of Coriolanus, who predicated his sense of identity on the rejection of
exchange. As Lars Engle puts it, the play 'presents Roman politics in economic terms,
as the exchange of one value for another in a public consensual market, and Coriolanus
sets himself and his nobility against precisely this aspect of his world'. ⁴⁶ He refuses
material recompense for his deeds at Corioles: he 'cannot make my heart consent to take
| A bribe to pay my sword' (I. 9. 37). He seems to ascribe a transcendent value to his
valour, such that it cannot be rewarded in material terms: his solitary entry into Corioles
can be seen as a deliberate attempt to distance himself from his fellow-soldiers who, he
knows, will not be brave or foolhardy enough to come with him. Lartius extolls this
priceless singularity: 'A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art, | Were not so rich a jewel'
(I. 4. 55). Thus, when Martius declines payment, his claim of solidarity with the other
soldiers undercuts itself: ‘I do refuse it, | And stand upon my common part with those |
That have beheld the doing’ (I. 9. 38), he says, emphasising that his fellows only beheld
what he actually performed. His acceptance of the name Coriolanus is characteristic: he
will take a reward that is intangible, whereas material recompense would imply that his
deeds had an exchange-value.

Coriolanus's reluctance to solicit votes from the people stems from this same refusal
to engage in trade. Repeatedly, the tradition whereby a would-be consul, dressed in

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⁴⁵ Thomas and Dudley Digges, *Four Paradoxes; or, Politique Discourses* (London, 1604), p. 77.
rags, appears in the forum to beg citizens' acclamation is described as a 'custom' (II. 136, 142; II. 3. 87 ['customary'], 117, 142, 168); as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the word implies merchandise as well as familiarity. Again, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare follows North in translating 'forum' as 'market-place', and this serves to emphasise what Coriolanus sees as the commercial element of the ritual. Brutus tells Sicinius, when they discuss the possibility of Coriolanus becoming consul,

> I heard him swear,  
> Were he to stand for consul, never would he  
> Appear i' th' market-place, nor on him put  
> The napless vesture of humility,  
> Nor, showing (as the manner is) his wounds  
> To th' people, beg their stinking breaths. (II. 1. 231)

To show to the citizens the wounds he had obtained in their service would, believes Coriolanus, be to commodify them, to give them an exchange value rather than an absolute worth. He exits when Cominius is about to tell the Senate of his deeds, refusing to 'hear my nothings monster'd' (II. 2. 77); told on his return that he must ask the people for their suffrage, he laments the indignity of having

> To brag unto them, 'Thus I did, and thus!'  
> Show them th' unaching scars which I should hide,  
> As if I had receiv'd them for the hire  
> Of their breath only! (I. 147)

When he meets the citizens in the forum, he continues to use the language of trade, but feels so demeaned by his behaviour that he conflates it with references to beggary:

> CORIOLANUS [...] 'twas never my desire yet to trouble the poor with begging.  
> 3. CITIZEN You must think, if we give you any thing, we hope to gain by you.  
> CORIOLANUS Well then, I pray, your price a' th' consulship?  
> 1. CITIZEN The price is, to ask it kindly.  
> CORIOLANUS Kindly, sir, I pray let me ha't. I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private. Your good voice, sir, what say you?  
> 2. CITIZEN You shall ha't, worthy sir.  
> CORIOLANUS A match, sir. There's in all two worthy voices begg'd. I have your alms, adieu. (II. 3. 69)

In his speech of defiance before his banishment, he continues to regard his relationship with the plebeians in terms of buying and selling:
Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
Vagabond exile, fleaining, pent to linger
But with a grain a day, I would not buy
Their mercy at the price of one fair word,
Nor check my courage for what they can give,
To have't with saying 'Good morrow.' (III. 3. 88)

Interaction with the common people, in the form of asking for mercy and asking for votes, is imagined in terms of hire, purchase, exchange, beggary; in order to make sense of this, an audience needs to accept, or at least appreciate, the assumption that it is degrading for a gentleman to engage in commerce.

Shakespeare’s dramatic use of early modern presuppositions about the nature of gentility seems much more deliberate in Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus, where it is an important element of characterisation, than in Hamlet, where the Prince’s sense of his noble identity is more ambiguous. It would be an overstatement to say that this was because Shakespeare increasingly identified his audience as privileged: although the King’s Men began playing at the Blackfriars in 1608, the fact that they continued to play at the Globe (and expensively rebuilt it when it burned down in 1613) implies that his company, at least, saw the non-gentle members of its audience as important. However, these plays, unlike the histories, do not employ the propagandistic argument that government is a form of work; rather, their effect depends on the assumption that for a gentleman to engage in merchandise is degrading. Whatever the nature of their audience may have been, they make use of the prejudices of the privileged.

One reason why the insistence that gentlemen must not practise merchandise appears so frequently in early modern texts was, as one might suspect, because growing numbers of them were actually doing just that. This was partly due to greater social

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mobility, both upward and downward. On the one hand, as I pointed out earlier, merchants were able to purchase gentility; on the other, many younger sons of noble families were apprenticed to urban trades. However, financial circumstances were also forcing the landed gentry into new forms of behaviour. At least until 1590, their rental incomes failed to keep pace with general price inflation; the ethos of competitively conspicuous consumption that Stone identifies as coming into existence encouraged a degree of expenditure, on building, clothes, gambling, and even lawsuits, that exacerbated this situation. R. H. Tawney has argued that those landlords who were willing to rationalise their estates, to speculate, to buy and sell in bulk, to raise their rents, and to keep careful accounts – in short, to treat their estates as businesses and to disregard feudal obligations to their tenants – were the ones best able to meet the ‘wave of rising prices’. Some contemporaries lamented this new businesslike attitude of landowners: Thomas Wilson wrote in 1600 that the common people were

much decayed from the States they were wont to have, for the gentlemen, which were wont to addict themselves to the warres, are nowe for the most part growen to become good husbandes and knowe as well how to improve their lands to the uttermost as the farmer or countryman, so that they take their farmes into their handes as the leases expire, and eyther till themselves or else lett them out to those who will give most; whereby the yeomanry of England is decayed and become servants to gentlemen, which were wont to be the glory of the Country and good neighbourhood and hospitality.

This development may underlie Caesar’s interest in the flow of the Nile, and his description as the ‘universal landlord’. However, one new form of money-making which does not seem to have attracted such opposition was investment in joint-stock companies. As Theodore Rabb explains, whereas traditional regulated companies required would-be merchants to undergo a seven-year apprenticeship before they were

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48 In The Cities Advocate, in this Case or Question of Honor and Armes; Whether Apprentiship Extinguisheth Gentry? (London, 1629), Edmund Bolton argues that such men retained their gentle status.
49 Stone, pp. 184-88, 547-86.
allowed to trade, anyone could invest in a joint-stock company; at least a fifth of
investors during this period were non-merchants. 52 In fact, 'nearly twelve hundred
gentry and nobility invested in trading and colonizing companies between 1575 and
1630 - a remarkable figure, considering their traditional avoidance of the world of
business'. 53 Rabb suggests that the reason why so many of the privileged were able to
overcome their scruples about earning money through trade was because profit was not
the sole motivation: 'spectacular explorations, such as the search for the North-West
Passage', appealed to their desire for prestige, and Rabb notes that whereas
propagandists for colonial ventures stressed the potential profits when appealing to
merchants, they used talk of the land, climate and hunting opportunities to sway
gentlemen. 54

As well as being a common form of financial speculation amongst the privileged, the
colonial enterprise was also remarkable in forcing many gentlemen who actually
embarked on voyages to the New World into the unfamiliar position of having to carry
out manual labour. The novelty of this situation is evident from William Strachey's 'A
true reportory of the wracke, and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight; vpon, and
from the Ilands of the Bermudas: his comming to Virginia, and the estate of that
Colonie then, and after, vnder the gouernment of the Lord La Warre, July 15. 1610'.
This document was eventually published in Purchas his Pilgrimes in 1625; somehow, in
some form, it seems to have found its way into the hands of William Shakespeare in
time for elements of it to be incorporated in The Tempest. 55 Strachey's account of the

52 Theodore K. Rabb, Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of
54 Rabb, Enterprise and Empire, pp. 31, 35.
55 See William Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. by Morton Luce, 6th edn, rev. by Frank Kermode (London:
storm at sea makes clear how the nascent colonial enterprise was causing gentlemen
to drop their traditional opposition, not only to merchandise, but also to physical work:

Then men might be seene to labour, I may well say, for life, and the better sort,
euen our Gouernour, and Admirall themselues, not refusing their turne, and to
spell each the other, to giue example to other.

[...] there was not a passenger, gentleman, or other, after hee beganne to stirre
and labour, but was able to relieue his fellow, and make good his course: And it is
most true, such as in all their life times had neuer done houres worke before (their
mindes now helping their bodies) were able twice fortie eight houres together to
toile with the best.\textsuperscript{56}

As Stephen Greenblatt observes, “The “unmerciful tempest” that almost sank Sir
Thomas Gates’s ship, the Sea Venture, provoked an immediate collapse of the
distinction between those who labor and those who rule, a distinction, we should recall,
that is at the economic and ideological center of Elizabethan and Jacobean society.\textsuperscript{57} In
the face of death, all had to work in the common interest – a situation that created a
theoretical problem. Although different commentators from the period had different
notions of what constituted gentility, almost all were agreed on one essential point:
gentlemen did not carry out manual labour. Strachey reinforces this idea when he
remarks that some of those on the ship ‘in all their life times had neuer done houres
worke before’. Their status being based on idleness, how did they manage to maintain it
when that idleness was no longer practicable?

Firstly, the privileged on the Sea Venture upheld what may be seen as a form of
sumptuary law. Strachey tells how ‘The common sort stripped naked, as men in Gallies,
the easier both to hold out, and to shrinke from vnder the salt water’. As well as having
the practical applications Strachey mentions, the fact that the better sort remained
clothed maintained their separateness. The terms in which the work of the privileged is

\textsuperscript{56} Samuel Purchas and others, \textit{Purchas his Pilgrimes}, 5 vols (London, 1625), iv, 1736.
\textsuperscript{57} Stephen Greenblatt, \textit{Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance
described are also notable, however: ‘the better sort, euen our Gouenour, and
Admirall themselfes’ pitch in, ‘not refusing their turne, and to spell each the other, to
giue example to other’. Their work is described as a form of leadership: Strachey
chooses to emphasise, not the work’s necessity in terms of manpower, but its
importance in setting a good example. A later example may clarify the distinction:
Strachey describes how, when the party is camped on Bermuda, one Frubusher starts to
build a pinnace, ‘for the furtherance of which, the Gouenour dispensed with no travaile
of his body, nor forbare any care or study of minde, perswading ([sic] as much and
more, an ill qualified parcell of people, by his owne performance, then by authority,
thereby to hold them at their worke’.\textsuperscript{58} It is not because his labour-power is needed that
the Governor helps Frubusher, but rather because it gives him the opportunity to
exercise his governance: his travaile of body is a ‘performance’, an alternative means of
persuasion to direct authority. What appears to be work turns out to be playing. In
another document which slightly postdates the writing of \textit{The Tempest}, the idea of play
is again invoked when gentlemen’s labour is described; here, however, the accent is on
recreation rather than performance. In \textit{The Proceedings of the English Colonie in
Virginia}, W. Symonds describes how John Smith, after being made President by the
colonists, committed some to work under the oversight of the Council and took thirty
others five miles away from the fort to work with him. These thirty included two
gentlemen in their number:

\begin{quote}
strange were these pleasures to their conditions, yet lodging eating, drinking,
working, or playing they doing but as the President, all these things were carried
so pleasantly, as within a weeke they became Masters, making it their delight to
heare the trees thunder as they fell, but the axes so oft blistered there tender
fingers, that commonly every third blow had a lowd oath to drowne the echo
[...].
By this, let no man think that the President, or these gentlemen spent their times
as common wood-hackers at felling of trees, or such-like other labours, or that
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} Purchas, iv, 1736, 1743.
they were pressed to any thing as hirelings or common slaves, for what they did (being but once a little inured) it seemed, and they conceited it only as a pleasure and a recreation. Yet 30 or 40 of such voluntary Gentlemen would doe more in a day then 100 of the rest that must be prest to it by compulsion.\textsuperscript{59}

As in the description of the storm at sea, it is emphasised that the gentlemen are unused to this sort of activity (their 'tender fingers' are blistered by the axes). They are nevertheless soon more adept at it than their more experienced social inferiors (thirty or forty gentlemen would achieve more than a hundred 'of the rest'); the work they perform is voluntary (they are not pressed to it 'as hirelings or common slaves'); and finally, they enjoy it. They find 'delight' in hearing the trees fall, and regard the work 'only as a pleasure and a recreation'. As in Strachey's letter, but this time more obviously, it is emphasised that what appears to be work is in fact play.

It is perhaps not surprising that Shakespeare was able to make use of Strachey's letter. Several of his Jacobean plays depict the transplantation of characters from noble backgrounds into unfamiliar, inhospitable environments: Lear on the heath, Coriolanus banished from Rome, Timon digging for roots outside Athens, Marina in Mytilene, Perdita in Bohemia. The Virginian narrative lay in a thematic direction in which Shakespeare was already travelling. Before discussing \textit{The Tempest}, however, I want to examine \textit{Cymbeline}, a play in which the paradox of aristocratic labour is resolved in terms remarkably similar to those used by Strachey and Symonds. \textit{Cymbeline} differs from the earlier plays referred to above in that Shakespeare engages with the question of how a sense of gentility can be maintained over a long period of time in an environment not favourable to it. In the Welsh scenes, Belarius repeatedly insists that the nobility of the princes he has taken into his care is inborn, derives from their 'nature':

\textsuperscript{59} W. S[ymonds], \textit{The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia since their First Beginning from England in the Yeare of our Lord 1606, till this Present 1612, with All their Accidents that Befell Them in their Journies and Discoveries} (Oxford, 1612), pp. 48-49.
How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature!
These boys know little they are sons to th' King,
Nor Cymbeline dreams that they are alive.
They think they are mine, and though train'd up thus meanly
I' th' cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them
In simple and low things to prince it much
Beyond the trick of others. (III. 3. 79)

Despite not knowing that they are princes, Guiderius and Arviragus are naturally
princely in thought and deed, more so than those who affect a princely ‘trick’, a regal
manner; the oafish Cloten, prince through his mother’s marriage rather than by birth,
comes to mind here. Belarius frequently remarks upon the princely behaviour of his
charges: when Arviragus goes off to minister to the sick Fidele in iv. 2, he observes, ‘O
thou goddess, | Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon’st | In these two princely
boys!’ (l. 169); and when they are impatient to fight the invading Romans in iv. 4, notes
that ‘The time seems long, their blood thinks scorn | Till it fly out and show them
princes born’ (l. 53). His confidence is justified by their heroic performance against the
Romans, rescuing the king and fending off the entire Roman army. Peggy Muñoz
Simonds argues that the valour of the princes has been fostered by the savage nature of
their upbringing: in the play, Shakespeare deploys an ‘iconography of primitivism’
which ‘ironically portrays the savage life as virtuous and instructive in contrast to life in
a depraved court’. Certainly, the fact that the Welsh wilderness can produce two
princely boys seems to be intended as a satirical commentary on court decadence;
however, Simonds ignores Belarius’s sustained and deliberate efforts actually to prevent
the boys from declining into primitivism. Ingrained though their nobility may be, it
seems to be something his pedagogy must maintain. When we first encounter him, he
uses the scanty teaching materials at his disposal – the landscape itself – to educate
them. The low roof of their cave, which forces them to stoop, ‘Instructs you how t’

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adore the heavens, and bows you | To a morning's holy office' (III. 3. 3). He tells them to climb a hill, and to 'Consider, | When you above perceive me like a crow; | That it is place which lessens and sets off' (l. 11). He then instructs them to ponder the tales he has told them 'Of courts, of princes, of the tricks in war' (l. 15). At the end of the scene he says that the boys' warlike impulses are proof of their noble nature; but their expression is stimulated by his stories of 'The warlike feats I have done' (l. 90). We are left to wonder whether they would still be so princely were it not for Belarius; and indeed, Arviragus complains about the effect their savage life has had on them:

We have seen nothing.  
We are beastly: subtle as the fox for prey,  
Like warlike as the wolf for what we eat;  
Our valor is to chase what flies. (l. 39)

Belarius answers this with a speech on the depravity of civilisation; but Arviragus's words do raise the issue of whether having to hunt for food has not only compromised their noble status as (so they think) sons of a courtier, but dehumanised them, rendered them 'beastly'.

The business not only of having to catch but also to cook and serve their own food has a problematic relationship with the princes' gentility, because it constitutes labour of the sort that was thought to be incompatible with high social status. Maurice Hunt has argued that it is precisely the fact that 'Belarius and the young princes must labor to make primitive nature yield the bare necessities of life' that makes their lengthy sojourn in Wales so morally uplifting. It seems to me, however, that this is to ignore not only the complexity of the Jacobean attitude towards work and its relation to status, and Arviragus's qualms about the dehumanising effects of hunting for food, but the way in which hunting is treated by Belarius. Hunt says that for Belarius and the princes, 'hunting is important work – not simply idle sport', but I would argue that the opposite
seems to be the case. When he sends the boys off to hunt, Belarius says that ‘He that strikes | The venison first shall be lord o’ th’ feast, | To him the other two shall minister’ (III. 3. 74). This looks like an attempt to answer Arviragus’s criticisms by imposing a hierarchy on the hunt, making it something other than simply depredation.

In *Shakespeare and the Hunt*, Edward Berry explores the semiotics of hunting in the early modern period, finding it to be ‘one of the most significant royal activities and manifestations of royal power’. It was quintessentially associated with the aristocracy: as George Gascoigne writes in the prefatory poem to *The Arte o f Venerie* (1575), ‘Hunting was ordeyned first, for Men of Noble kinde.’ Indeed, in 1603-4, 1605-6, and 1609-10, the game laws were changed precisely in order ‘to exclude social climbers like Shakespeare, to keep the sport within the higher gentry and aristocracy’. It was also primarily a recreational activity, albeit one permeated with regal symbolism, rather than an economic one; ‘In the dominant hunting culture in the period [...] hunting “for the pot” was treated with contempt.’ Strangely, Berry pays little attention to *Cymbeline*, regarding its treatment of the hunt as a critique of the notion that ‘hunting prepares young men for war’ on the basis that the princes’ valour is shown to be due to nature rather than nurture. I would argue, however, that Shakespeare problematises the respective claims of nature and nurture; and one aspect of Belarius’s pedagogy is to minimise the stigma of hunting ‘for the pot’ by imposing a hierarchy on it and making it a symbolic activity. This is stressed a second time when they return from hunting. ‘You, Polydore, have prov’d best woodman, and | Are master of the feast’, he says (III. 6. 28): appropriately, the King’s elder son takes the superior position. He goes on to say, ‘Cadwal and I | Will play the cook and servant, ’tis our match’. As Anne Barton has pointed out, although the use of the word ‘play’ in this manner is ‘a trick of speech

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which seems to have been enormously popular with Elizabethans in general', in Shakespeare it often acquires 'an openly theatrical meaning'; and indeed, I would argue that in this instance it is not merely conventional, but is an attempt by Belarius to reconcile his and Cadwal’s gentle status with the demeaning necessity of cooking and serving food. As in Virginia, what seems to be work is actually referred to as play, impersonation, when it is carried out by gentlemen. Belarius repeats the locution at IV. 2. 164 when he says ‘You and Fidele play the cooks’; the repetition, I believe, gives weight to the argument that an attempt is being made to find a way of describing servile or manual labour as performed by the privileged.

If there is a resemblance between the way gentlemen’s labour is rationalised in Virginia and by Belarius, being represented as play in each instance, direct influence seems less likely than the simple coincidence of Shakespeare and the colonists using similar strategies for describing gentlemen at work because they were products of the same culture. Although the former is just possible, in view of the fact that Strachey’s letter reached England in September 1610, Cymbeline does not read like a play about the colonial experience. By contrast, critics have been fairly confident that at some level, The Tempest relates to events in Virginia. As I remarked earlier, the play echoes the terms of Strachey’s letter; nor was this the only connection between Shakespeare and the Virginian enterprise. Among the investors were his old patron, the third Earl of Southampton; the third Earl of Pembroke, a dedicatee of the First Folio; and the same Dudley Digges who had written in 1604 that ‘To play the Merchants was only for Gentlemen of Florence, Venice, or the like that are indeede but the better sort of

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Citizens’, and whose brother Leonard contributed a poem to the First Folio. As Peter Hulme has pointed out, however, these facts by themselves mean little, and indeed over the last two decades critics have tended to argue that the play is implicated in a wider ‘discourse of colonialism’ rather than seeing it as commenting directly on the events narrated by Strachey, at least in terms accessible to the modern reader. Paul Brown regards *The Tempest* as ‘an intervention in an ambivalent and even contradictory discourse’, an unsuccessful attempt to mystify relations between coloniser and colonised. Francis Barker and Peter Hulme similarly relate Prospero’s denial of Caliban’s claim to the island, and his use of Caliban’s attempted rape of Miranda to justify this dispossession, to the rhetorical strategies of European colonisers, while discerning a tension in the play between exposure and condoning of Prospero. Thomas Cartelli examines the use of the play both in colonial and postcolonial discourse. In all of these instances there has been an understandable tendency to equate Prospero in particular with the colonising power. As such, an obvious contrast can be discerned between the ways *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* show members of the privileged class coping with the experience of life in inhospitable conditions, and in particular the need to carry out ungentlemanly labour. Belarius rationalises the work of hunting, cooking, and serving food as play, while Prospero uses the strategy of enslaving the island’s inhabitants and making them work for him. Ariel performs magical tasks for Prospero, whereas Caliban ‘does make our fire, | Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices | That

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profit us'; therefore, 'We cannot miss him' (I. 2. 311). This last statement is confusing; bearing in mind Prospero's command over spirits, such that he can control the weather, create lightning, and wake the dead, it seems odd that he needs a monster to do menial work. Stephen Orgel finds one answer in Caliban's statement that 'I am all the subjects that you have' (I. 2. 341): 'In a significant sense, it is Caliban who legitimises Prospero's rule', by giving him someone to govern. Peter Hulme, however, highlights a wider ambiguity in the play as to precisely what Prospero's magic can and cannot accomplish. It can affect people's bodies but not their minds; it seems to have been inactive in Milan and at sea, but active soon enough after Prospero's arrival on the island to be able to free Ariel; it can cause lightning and uproot trees from the ground but not make fire or shift logs. As Hulme perceptively remarks,

The text is not concerned with the exact configuration of Prospero's magical powers, but rather with two broad distinctions: Prospero's magic is at his disposal on the island but not off it; it can do anything at all except what is most necessary to survive. In other words there is a precise match with the situation of Europeans in America during the seventeenth century, whose technology (especially of firearms) suddenly became magical when introduced into a less technologically developed society, but who were incapable (for a variety of reasons) of feeding themselves.

Although Hulme's reading is compelling, it might be pointed out that one character in the play who, as an Italian, can presumably be associated with colonisers rather than colonised does perform manual work. The fact that Ferdinand, as well as Caliban, is shown carrying logs is one of several elements of the play (such as its Mediterranean setting, the fact that Caliban's parents were not from the island, and the eventual departure of the Italians) that preclude a simplistic view of it as foreshadowing the enslavement by Europeans of non-Europeans. Critics have reconciled the ostensible proto-colonialism of the play with the spectacle of aristocratic labour in various ways.

71 Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 128.
Terence Hawkes argues that the task of log-bearing 'functions as a symbolic means of contrasting Ferdinand with Caliban'. The former accepts 'work's moral, restraining function', whereas the latter's rejection of work and his attempt on Prospero's life 'draw him into the referential field of a specific Elizabethan and Jacobean bugbear, the "masterless man" who haunted the margins of that society and (supposedly) the suburbs of its cities'.

Paul Brown writes that the 'discourse of sexuality in fact offers the crucial nexus for [some] domains of colonialist discourse'. Accordingly, the imposition of manual labour on Ferdinand constitutes a legitimation of power through the 'channelling of desire into a series of formal tasks and manoeuvres and, finally, into courtly marriage'. Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, by contrast, defines him as an unruly 'other' who must be mastered. While not wishing to discount such interpretations, I would argue that a more obvious way of locating Ferdinand's labour within the context of the Virginian enterprise is to remember what Jeffrey Knapp calls the 'scandalous truth [...] that colonization requires work', and to compare the prince's way of dealing with the demeaning nature of aristocratic labour with the strategies employed in the narratives of Strachey and Symonds.

At the beginning of III. 1, Ferdinand observes,

There be some sports are painful, and their labor
Delight in them sets off; some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone; and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead,
And makes my labors pleasures.

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73 Brown, pp. 51, 63.
The passage implies a notion inherent to this thesis: the slipperiness of the categories of work and play. If a sport is painful, and involves labour, can it be a sport at all? In his rationalising of his own labour, Ferdinand makes the opposite transformation, of work into play: the knowledge that he is serving Miranda turns his labours into pleasures. He goes on:

I am, in my condition,
A prince, Miranda; I do think, a king
(I would, not so!), and would no more endure
This wooden slavery than to suffer
The flesh-fly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service, there resides,
To make me slave to it, and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man. (1. 59)

This is a mystification. Ferdinand claims to be enduring manual labour for Miranda’s sake; in fact, however, he endures it because Prospero can compel him to, as when, his sword drawn, he was charmed from moving (1. 2. 467 s.d.). He actively deploys chivalric topoi of knightly service to change manual labour into an expression of devotion. This can be called play in two senses: in so far as his labours are pleasures, they are recreational; in so far as Ferdinand claims to be Miranda’s servant rather than Prospero’s slave, he is play-acting. In both respects, Ferdinand’s manner of dealing with the fact of labour recalls the details of Virginia narratives. In calling his labours pleasures, he brings to mind what Symonds says about the wood-cutting gentlemen; in play-acting, he reproduces Strachey’s transformation of the shipboard labours of Gates into performance.

In *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, as in the later Roman plays, Shakespeare makes dramatic use of the assumption that gentility precludes labour. However, the way in which he does this is much less assertive: rather, the plays question how this assumption can be maintained in the face of hostile circumstances. In the case of *The Tempest*, it
may be that Shakespeare was influenced by Strachey's description of all classes on board ship working for their lives; but it is much less likely that in writing *Cymbeline*, the dramatist was aware of the fortunes of the colonists. However, it does appear that during the early modern period, many gentlemen were engaged in economic behaviour of a form unsanctioned by traditional canons of gentility; and this innovation may underlie the way Shakespeare enlists our sympathy for Antony and Cleopatra above Caesar, his characterisation of Coriolanus, and his depiction of labouring nobles in *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. 
Chapter 4. Ben Jonson and Professionalism

During the last two chapters, I have discussed the use made of the idea of work by the privileged class. In particular, I have tried to highlight two contrasting practices: their social role was imagined in terms of work, with the labour of government being emphasised; but in the context of increased social mobility, many stressed the importance, at the least of not practising manual or mercantile labour, at the most of idleness, in the definition of a gentleman. In the current chapter, I will continue to examine the tension between these opposing ways of using the idea of work. However, I want to move away from the question of how the practices of different social groups affected the content of the drama, and to look at the use made of work by an individual writer for the stage, Ben Jonson, in his own representation of himself as an author.

I choose to concentrate on Jonson in particular because, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, he was deeply concerned with problems of self-definition, with the creation of a social role for himself as a poet. As Richard Helgerson has pointed out, in his insistence that a modern poet might be something other and more serious than either a gentlemanly amateur or an entertaining hack, Jonson was anticipated only by Spenser;
and his belief that such a poet might write for the stage without compromising himself was entirely novel. 'Horace had never written for the public theaters'.¹ David Riggs stresses this novelty to the point of ascribing epochal significance to Jonson: 'Since his career coincides with the rise of the literary profession in England, his personal success story takes on the characteristics of a cultural phenomenon: in following his rise we are also witnessing the emergence of authorship as a full-time vocation'.² Various critics have examined the strategies used by Jonson to define the terms of this vocation. Helgerson sees Jonson as successively rejecting existing conceptions of the author: the Ovidian amatory poet, the inspired Spenserian vates, the satirist, the hack dramatist.³ Richard Dutton focuses on his strategic use of other literary authorities, and his creation of 'spaces and shapes' for himself in the critical apparatus of his prologues and prefaces.⁴ Katherine Eisaman Maus points to the influence of Latin writers on his conception of authorship; Richard C. Newton argues that Jonson used the print medium both to proclaim his distance from the world of the theatre, and to advertise a stable, coherent authorial self.⁵

In this chapter, I will suggest that much as groups in society can be seen as having used the idea of work to define themselves, so Jonson used it as an individual in elaborating his conception of the author. However, its place in that conception is more complex than has sometimes been supposed; indeed, the contrasting uses made of work by members of the privileged class are both in evidence in his writings about

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³ Helgerson, pp. 111, 122, 139, 152.
authorship. Furthermore, in some important respects they resemble the writings of early modern lawyers and physicians about their own professions, a fact which may derive from the similarity of their respective positions. In order to explain why I believe this was so, however, I want to begin by examining the ambiguous status of work within Jonson’s conception of authorship.

Notoriously, and throughout his career, Ben Jonson represented his activities as a poet in terms of work. In the ‘apologetical Dialogue’ appended to Poetaster, Jonson describes himself as ‘I, that spend halfe my nights, and all my dayes, | Here in a cell, to get a darke, pale face, | To come forth worth the iuy, or the bayes’ (Epilogue, l. 233). In the dedicatory epistle to Volpone, he tells of how he has ‘labour’d [...] to reduce, not onely the ancient formes, but manners of the scene’ (Epistle, l. 105). His poem ‘To the Memory of my Beloued, the Avthor Mr. William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Vs’, prefixed to Shakespeare’s 1623 folio, argues that he ‘Who casts to write a liuing line, must sweat, [...] and strike the second heat | Vpon the Muses anuile’ (viii, 392); in Timber: or, Discoveries, Jonson, following Pontanus, describes a poem as ‘the worke of the Poet; the end, and fruit of his labour, and studye’ (l. 2375).

This tendency did not pass unnoticed, either by Jonson’s friends or his enemies: from relatively early on in Jonson’s career, it was already commonplace to refer to his works as industrious or laboured. In 1605, he was described in Sir Thomas Smith’s Voyage and Entertainment in Rushia as ‘the elaborate English Horace that giues number, weight,
and measure to every word, to teach the reader by his industries', while a contributor to the quarto of *Sejanus* praised 'thy graue, and learned toile, | That cost thee so much sweat, and so much oyle' (XI, 374, 317). In a Latin poem prefixed to *Volpone* John Donne told Jonson that his genius and labour rendered him equal to the ancients; in 1616, Robert Anton praised Jonson's 'labor'd Muse' (XI, 318, 351). Other writers, however, criticised the poet in similar terms. D. H. Craig takes Samuel Daniel's 1604 criticism of masque-writers who 'would faine have the world to think them very deeply learned in all misteries whatsoever' as an attack on Jonson: Daniel goes on, 'let us labour to shew never so much skill or Art, our weaknesses and ignorance will be seen, whatsoever covering we cast over it'. At some time after 1623, George Chapman criticised Jonson's 'Labord and Vnnaturall' scenes; a little less aggressively, in a poem perhaps dating from 1632, and affixed to the 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*, Leonard Digges tells how audiences, 'ravish'd' with Brutus and Cassius, 'would not brook a line | Of tedious (though well laboured) *Catiline*' (XI, 409, 496).

Since Dryden in 1667 contrasted Shakespeare, 'taught by none', with 'labouring Johnson', critics have usually accepted at face value Jonson's insistence on the labour which has gone into his art. In the 1880s, J. A. Symonds identified in Jonson the 'fixed idea that scholarship and sturdy labor could supply the place of inspiration'; in 1960, Jonas A. Barish contrasted Jonson's adoption of 'a rhetorical mode associated with improvisation' with 'his fervent belief in the hard labor of composition'. Writing of the semiotics of the 1616 folio *Workes*, Newton argues that 'At least as much artisan as artist, Jonson capitalizes on the ambiguity of “maker” to emphasize the craft and

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8 *Critical Heritage*, p. 260.
technique of art'; Rosalind Miles calls Jonson 'a relentless and self-conscious craftsman, who gave his life to the work demanded by his art'. Some critics, however, have begun to focus on what Ian Donaldson calls the 'tensions and contradictions of Jonson’s position as an author'. As Donaldson points out elsewhere, Jonson’s ‘own collections of verse and prose are significantly entitled The Forest, The Underwood, Timber, and the promise which these titles offer – of spontaneous organic growth, of multiform things “promiscuously growing” – is as important to an understanding of Jonson’s aesthetic as is the imagery of artisanship, labour, and rational planning'.

Katharine Eisaman Maus contrasts the stress upon labour in Jonson’s poetic theory with both the sterile competitiveness which pervades his comedies and satiric epigrams, and the mystification of social relationships in the poems of praise and the masques. The representation of poetry as work is therefore a way of transcending the contradiction between opposed conceptions of the poet implied by these different genres: ‘in Jonson’s conceptual scheme, the pain and difficulty that attend creation are the signs of its genuineness. The laboriousness of artistic production seems to allow him to exempt himself both from the implausibilities of his ideal worlds, and from the reductiveness of his satiric ones.’

Richard Dutton has similarly represented Jonson’s authorial persona as the fruit of tensions between the different literary systems within which he wrote:

He was involved, often simultaneously, in the old system of courtly, aristocratic and civic patronage (to that extent remaining locked into the expectations and practices of earlier ages), in the commercial world of the playhouses, and in the print culture where the future was to lie (in those spheres anticipating many of the changes that were to overtake authorship in succeeding generations). No one else

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in his time had such a wide and various experience of the possibilities of authorship.  

The tension between the different systems within which Jonson operated appears particularly acute when one considers the problematic status of work for the privileged class for which he wrote his masques and much of his epideictic poetry. As I have attempted to show over the two preceding chapters, while some members of the social elite were attempting to justify their position by representing their activities as work, the competition for status led many to stress their idleness and to denigrate labour as incompatible with gentility. Although Katherine Duncan-Jones has recently contrasted Jonson with the upwardly-mobile Shakespeare, arguing that ‘as the stepson of a bricklayer and, from October 1598, a branded and convicted felon, he was well aware that he had no chance whatsoever of being granted armigerous status’, Jonson’s recent biographers have represented him as a man greatly concerned with his own social standing. W. David Kay believes that Jonson saw his family history as ‘a tale of gentility denied’, and argues that ‘much of the motivating power behind his ambitious literary career was the desire to regain the social position which he believed to be his birthright’. The account of his background which Jonson gave to Drummond supports Kay’s analysis:

His Grandfather came from Carlisle & he thought from Anandale to it, he served King Henry 8 & was a Gentleman his father Losed all his estate under Queen Marie, having been cast in prison and forfeitted, at last turn’d Minister So he was a Ministers son, he himself was Posthumous born a moneth after his fathers decease, brought up poorly, putt to school by a friend (his master Cambden) after taken from it, and put to ane other Craft (I thinke was to be a Wright or Bricklayer) which he could not endure, then went he to ye low Countries but returning soone he betook himself to his wonted studies. (l. 234)

14 Dutton, pp. 2-3.
Jonson thus portrayed himself to Drummond as having come from a line of gentlemen, but having been forced, because of his family’s poverty, to learn a trade instead of completing his time at Westminster School. Whether or not we take his story at face value, Jonson at least seems to have been concerned to present himself as a gentleman. Although the first three legal records alluding to his status describe him variously as a player, a yeoman, a bricklayer, and a citizen, a citation for recusancy from 1605-06 refers to him as ‘Armiger’, in apparent contradiction of Duncan-Jones’s assertion (I, 217-19; XI, 571-72, 579). In fact, according to Jonson’s friend Camden, the term means not ‘gentleman’ but the slightly higher rank of ‘esquire’, and is attributed to ‘whosoever have any superiour publicke office in the Commonweale, or serve the Prince in any Worshipfull calling’, amongst others; I have found no further occurrences of it in official documents concerning Jonson. He is, however, from this point on usually referred to as being a gentleman (e.g., I, 228; XI, 582). It may be, as Riggs conjectures, that Camden, as Clarenceux King of Arms, helped to obtain this rank for his former pupil, though the relevant documentation is lacking. At any rate, however firm Jonson’s claim to gentility, the desire for social advancement can certainly be seen as a consistent feature of his career from about 1600 onwards. His decision to write for the Children of the Chapel may have been motivated by the fact that the balance of power in their theatre was tilted from actors to dramatists; but, as I have already argued, the child companies seem also to have consciously associated themselves with the social elite. By that date, too, Jonson seems already to have been seeking aristocratic patronage, having written an acrostic epitaph on Margaret Radcliffe, the ‘Ode to James, Earl of Desmond’, the Proludium and Epode to Robert Chester’s Love’s Martyr, dedicated to Sir John Salusbury and his wife, the ‘Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of

18 Riggs, p. 116.
Rutland’, and the ‘Ode Enthousiastike’ to Lucy, Countess of Bedford.\textsuperscript{19} Poems such as these, and the sequence of court entertainments which began with the Althorp entertainment written for Queen Anne and the Prince of Wales in 1603, can be seen as attempts to make a living as a writer from a source other than the theatre; it may or may not be a coincidence that the year in which Jonson was awarded his ‘annuity or pension of one hundred markes of lawfull money of England by the yeare’, 1616, was the same year in which he commenced his decade-long retirement from the public stage (I, 231-32). The award of an honorary MA at Oxford in 1619 may have consolidated his entitlement to be called a gentleman (I, 234-35); it appears that he may have missed out on a higher honour, since Joseph Mead wrote to Sir Martin Stuteville in 1621 that he had heard from a friend ‘that Ben Jonson was not knighted, but scaped it narrowly, for that his majestie would have done it, had there not been means made (himself not unwilling) to avoyd it’.\textsuperscript{20}

Given the social aspiration which Jonson’s career would seem to suggest, his undeniable tendency to portray artistic creativity as a form of labour is, to say the least, unexpected. As a writer of Court entertainments, he was catering for a society that did not consider the practice of labour anything to boast about; indeed, when courtiers found occasion to deride Jonson they did so by calling attention to his status as an ex-labourer. In 1618, Nathaniel Brent wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton of Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue

\begin{quote}
The maske on 12th night is not commended of any poët is growen so dul y\textsuperscript{e} his devise is not worthy y\textsuperscript{e} relating, much lesse y\textsuperscript{e} coping out. divers thinke fit he should retourne to his ould trade of bricke laying againe. (X, 576)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Riggs, p. 67.
Despite his vulnerability to insults alluding to the lowly trade he once practised, however, and to whose London guild he was admitted in 1598-99 (xi, 571-72), Jonson himself used inferior status as the grounds of his dismissal of other poets a year later, when he told Drummond ‘that Sharpham, Day, Dicker were all Rogues and that Minshew was one’, ‘that Markham [...] was [...] but a base fellow’ and ‘that such were Day and Midleton’ (Conversations, ll. 51, 166). Such insults appear elsewhere in his writings: the term ‘play-wright’ (possibly Jonson’s coinage), which he uses in Epigrams XLIX, LXVIII and C (viii, 42, 49, 64), has overtones of manual labour, as Dutton notes when he compares it to ‘wheelwright’.\(^\text{21}\) In ‘An Expostulation with Inigo Jones’, too, much of Jonson’s scorn rests on a sense of the inferiority of manual labour: ‘Painting & Carpentry are ye Soule of Masque. [...] This is ye money-gett, Mechanick Age!’ (viii, 404).

Jonson’s attitude to work thus seems increasingly complex and contradictory. On the one hand his writings insist, in a manner seized upon by friends, detractors, and modern critics alike, that his poetry is the product of hard work. On the other, his eagerness to be seen as a gentleman, and his willingness to attack his enemies as base mechanics, imply social attitudes that sit uneasily alongside his characterisation of the poet as craftsman. I mentioned earlier that his strategies of self-presentation are similar to those of contemporary lawyers and physicians; in fact, I want to suggest in this chapter that the language of professionalism, and the idea of the profession, may have offered Jonson a means by which he could portray himself as a worker without compromising his social status. The fact that his practice was so similar to theirs may be one reason for his frequent anti-professional satire, with Jonson seeking to deny the resemblance;

\(^{21}\) Dutton, p. 60.
however, at least until *The Alchemist*, he sometimes appears to parody and subvert his own use of professional discourse.

In *Self-Crowned Laureates*, Helgerson explains his use of the word ‘professional’, and his refusal to apply this ‘objectionable’ term to the three poets he examines:

Sometimes, as in John Buxton’s *Elizabethan Taste*, it assumes its etymological sense and refers to ‘professed’ poets, to the exclusion of publicly less ambitious writers like Dekker, Heywood, and Shakespeare – writers who, in Buxton’s words, were ‘hors concours’ to the world of courtly patronage. But just as often, as in G. E. Bentley’s *Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time* (and in the remainder of this book), ‘professional’ specifically excludes the ‘professed’ poets and is reserved instead for the Dekkers, Heywoods, and Shakespeares, the writers who made their living from the public theater. And sometimes, as in J. W. Saunders’ *Profession of English Letters*, it means either or both indiscriminately.22

Helgerson’s distaste for the term stems from the fact that it operates within two contrasting systems of differentiation. The professional poet can be distinguished both from the hack writer without a publicly-professed sense of vocation, and from the amateur who does not write for money. It might be argued, however, that the fluidity of the word is an integral part of its meaning, both in literary and wider contexts. In fact, J. W. Saunders, in the work to which Helgerson refers, seems entirely alert to its problematic status:

The very word *profession* is singularly rich in connotations and overtones, and it would be unfair and unwise to define it too precisely. Originating as a term for an act or professing, an open declaration or avowal, it came to imply a dedication to a particular vocation or calling, and then the vocation itself and the collective body of people engaged in it. Traditionally the three great professions are those of divinity, law, and medicine; but the word has been applied to many other vocations, to all forms of employment, in fact, which are not mechanical and which require some degree of learning, in particular to callings of learned, scientific or artistic kind.23

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23 Saunders, p. 31.
Saunders’ summary addresses several of the principal issues with which the
definition of the word ‘profession’ is concerned. As he says, it has its origins in the idea
of an open avowal. Margaret Pelling explains,

A member of a religious order ‘professed’ when he or she took in public the final
vows of commitment to the religious life. After the Reformation the term rapidly
acquired a range of secular applications, having as their common denominator the
theme of public commitment or open avowal.\(^\ref{24}\)

In one sense, therefore, a member of a profession (the word ‘professional’ is not
recorded by the *OED* in any except its rare religious sense before the eighteenth
century) is someone who has announced his or her commitment to a certain way of life.
Wilfrid Prest has argued that the traditional identification of the professions as law,
medicine and divinity, to which Saunders also alludes, ‘probably came in the first
instance via the higher faculties of the medieval universities, whose degrees served as
licenses both to teach and to practise, or profess, the disciplines of theology, physic and
law’. However, in the early modern period the term often has a wider application than
this: colloquially ‘it was possible to speak of the profession of plumber, or shepherd’\(^\ref{25}\)
Thus, at its most extreme level of generality the term is a virtual synonym for ‘calling’.
However, as Saunders points out, although the number of callings to which it can be
applied has increased beyond the classic three, it still commonly implies a ‘degree of
learning’. We may thus cautiously accept Prest’s definition of the professions as ‘non-
manual, non-commercial occupations sharing some measure of institutional self-
regulation and reliance upon bookish skills or training’, while retaining a sense of the
range and complexity of the term.\(^\ref{26}\) An important effect of the ‘non-manual, non-
commercial’ nature of professional work meant that it was seen in the early modern

\(^{24}\) Margaret Pelling, ‘Medical Practice in Early Modern England: Trade or Profession?’ in *The


period as compatible with gentility: to return once again to Harrison’s formulation, ‘Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm [...] or professeth physic and the liberal sciences’ can be considered a gentleman. The professions thus provided a framework for earning a livelihood without compromising one’s social status; or indeed, for acquiring gentility. Although entry to the Inns of Court, for example, was theoretically limited to ‘Gentlemenne, and that of three discents at the least’, Prest estimates that in practice, between 1590 and 1639 up to ‘a quarter of the members admitted to the inns [...] could have come from non-gentry or non-peerage families’. A legal education thus permitted movement from yeoman or citizen status to gentility.

In some respects the sixteenth century can be seen as the crucial period for the development of the legal, clerical, and medical professions. One reason for this was the Reformation. As Rosemary O’Day explains, with the dissolution of the monasteries, ‘many men who had previously been accepted as members of a separate clerical estate [...] were now gradually reclaimed into the world of laymen – teachers, clerks and administrators, lawyers, doctors and scholars’. More generally, the decline in the power of the Church which the Reformation precipitated made the secular professions a more attractive career than the clergy for ambitious young men. Also, legal affairs which had been the province of the clergy passed over to secular lawyers; for instance, after Henry VIII prohibited the teaching and practice of canon law, it was civil lawyers who took over the business of the ecclesiastical courts. The medical and legal professions themselves underwent important structural changes in the sixteenth century. In 1518, Henry VIII granted a royal charter to the College of Physicians (later the Royal

College), thus giving medical practitioners both a corporate identity and unprecedented powers of self-regulation and licensing. As for the law, the massive growth in the amount of legal business over the sixteenth century – Prest estimates that the quantity of business handled by the King’s Bench and the Court of Common Pleas more than trebled in its latter half – had important implications. Whereas in the mediaeval period the right to plead in the higher courts had been restricted to serjeants at law,

the rising demand for legal services […] created unprecedented professional opportunities for the apprentices of the inns of court, including some who had barely begun to argue moots ‘ouster le barre’. Despite attempts from the 1530s onwards to prevent such imperitii from appearing as advocates in Westminster Hall, the minimum standing required of an utter-barrister before he could plead in open court progressively declined.

With the case of Broughton v. Prince in 1590, for a law student to have been called to the bar (allowed to argue cases ‘ouster le barre’, or outside the bar, of his inn of court) was recognised as enough to give him the right to ‘audience as a counsellor before the superior common-law courts’.

Some recent historians of the professions, however, have tried to redress what they see as a tendency to overemphasise the importance of qualified physicians and of lawyers called to the bar when writing the histories of law and of medicine. In some respects an important precursor of this approach was Keith Thomas’s Religion and the Decline of Magic, which emphasised the role of cunning men and women in a society where ‘medical science was helpless before most contemporary hazards to health’ and the ‘organised medical profession […] had little to offer’. More recently, Margaret Pelling and Charles Webster, in their study of early modern medical practitioners,

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31 Prest, The Rise of the Barristers, pp. 5-6, 74-75.
examine not only physicians but also surgeons and apothecaries, traditionally
thought subordinate in the medical profession’s ‘tripartite division of labour’,
unlicensed practitioners, midwives, and nurses. They tell us that ‘English surgeons of
the later sixteenth century were led by men of sound learning and assured skill [who]
produced useful translations of texts selected discriminatingly from recent medical
literature’, and that indeed, it is ‘difficult to avoid the impression that the elite of the
Barber-Surgeons Company were, in the last decades of the century, making a more
active and original contribution to medicine than their colleagues in the College of
Physicians’. As for the unlicensed practitioners, their number included ‘[s]uch
celebrated medical writers of the Tudor period as Sir Thomas Elyot, William Bullein,
Robert Recorde and John Hester’.

Pelling argues elsewhere, however, that much
medical care during the period was offered gratis or paid for in kind, so that it has
tended to go unrecorded. Accordingly, ‘a small elite of academically qualified
physicians’ tends to dominate the history of the profession, a phenomenon often
exacerbated by the prejudices of its chroniclers. As for the law, Christopher Brooks
emphasises the number and importance of legal practitioners other than those called to
the bar. Legal clerks were not merely copyists: they ‘dealt with individual clients, gave
advice, organized litigation, and sometimes held other legal offices outside their own
courts’. Attorneys ‘acted for defendants or plaintiffs involved in lawsuits and were
responsible for helping to further the cause by keeping abreast of procedural
developments and by framing pleadings so that cases could be considered by the
judges’. Their role was thus analogous to that of the modern solicitor; although the term
‘solicitor’ referred in the early modern period to those who sometimes acted as

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33 Margaret Pelling and Charles Webster, ‘Medical Practitioners’, in Health, Medicine and Mortality in
the Sixteenth Century, ed. by Charles Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 165-
235 (pp. 165, 176-77, 185).
34 Margaret Pelling, The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early
intermediaries between attorneys and their clients, especially if the client lived far from the London courts. Whereas attorneys had to be sworn in by the officers of courts in which they wished to practise, soliciting was largely unregulated, and it is to these legal practitioners that William Harrison refers when he mentions 'sundry varlets that go about the country as promoters or brokers between the pettyfoggers of the law and the common people'. As Brooks and Prest both point out, however, there was in practice a great deal of overlap between the work carried out by the barristers and by these other legal practitioners. In the first half of the sixteenth century at least, some Inns of Court men not yet called to the bar acted as solicitors; conversely, solicitors and attorneys had the right to act as advocates in certain courts. Furthermore, the modern rule against a client having direct access to a barrister did not apply. In his plan in The English Lawyer (1631) for a 'Treatise touching the Counsellor or Practizer of the Lawes', Doddridge gives as the three main duties of a barrister not only 'his Pleadings for his Client' but also 'the drawing of Assurances and Conveiances' and 'Private Counsell given at home in his Chamber to his Client'. In effect, as Prest tells us, barristers' work 'overlapped with that of attorneys, solicitors, scriveners, and laymen lacking any formal qualifications'.

Whereas in theory both the legal and medical professions were divided between a university-educated elite and a lower stratum that ranged from licensed attorneys, surgeons and apothecaries to unlicensed solicitors, dispensers of legal advice, and medical practitioners, in practice the boundary was decidedly fluid, and it can certainly

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37 Sir John Doddridge, The English Lawyer: Describing a Method for the Managing of the Lawes of this Land (London, 1631), sig. [A3]'.
be argued that in the medical profession, many practitioners from outside the College were just as able as their competitors within it. Accordingly, rather than seeing the sixteenth century as an era of professionalisation, we might regard it as a period during which some legal and medical practitioners increasingly attempted to prevent others from encroaching on what they saw as their prerogatives. Some of the means by which they did this were institutional ones. The College of Physicians frequently exercised its right to fine and imprison both unlicensed practitioners, and surgeons and apothecaries who strayed from their respective writs of surgery and dispensing into the offering of medical advice. Between 1572 and 1603 it dealt with over a hundred cases of illicit practice, including at least twenty surgeons and between fifteen and twenty apothecaries. As for the law, the governors of the Inns of Court increasingly insisted on the exclusion of attorneys, while the call to the bar became the qualification for the right to plead in common law courts.

These attempts by the professional elites to define themselves as bodies while restricting the rights of their inferior competitors extended into the medium of print: in a variety of texts, physicians and senior lawyers emphasised their distinctness from, and superiority to, other medical and legal practitioners. Perhaps the single most important model they used in order to accomplish this was the notion of liberal and servile occupations elaborated by Aristotle in the *Politics* and modified by Cicero in his *De officiis*. Cicero enumerates the ways of life appropriate for those of high status: 'the professions in which either a higher degree of intelligence is required or from which no small benefit to society is derived – medicine and architecture, for example, and teaching – these are proper for those whose social position they become'.

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39 Clark and Cooke, 1, 60-1, 145, 152, 157.  
40 Wilfrid Prest, 'Lawyers', in *The Professions in Early Modern England*, pp. 64-89 (p. 80).
merchandise and agriculture are also commended, as is the law, to which Cicero
devotes a great deal of his attention. Inappropriate for a gentleman, however, are the
unpopular jobs of tax-gathering and usury; similarly vulgar

are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual
labour, not for artistic skill; for in their case the very wages they receive is a
pledge of their slavery. Vulgar we must consider those also who buy from
wholesale merchants to retail immediately; for they would get no profits without a
great deal of downright lying; and verily, there is no action that is meaner than
misrepresentation. And all mechanics are engaged in vulgar trades; for no
workshop can have anything liberal about it.  

In an earlier chapter, I indicated that Cicero’s formulation could be used by early
modern writers to justify a two-class model of society, dividing it into the gentle and the
vulgar. The professional elite, however, used it in on a smaller scale as a means of
rhetorically dividing legal practice and health care between an upper branch
(themselves) that could be represented as gentle, and a lower branch that could be
characterised as base. The upper branch is socially beneficial and of higher intelligence;
the lower consists of wage-slaves, cozeners, and manual labourers.

Frequently, the professional elites characterise the labour of their inferior competitors
as mechanical. This was easier for physicians, who could point to the manual work
carried out by apothecaries in preparing medicines and to the etymological basis of the
word ‘surgery’, via ‘chirurgy’, in the Greek χειρο (hand) and εργος (working). John
Cotta seems to allude to this when he writes that surgeons pride themselves on ‘the
operary vses of a skilfull and well exercised hand in wounds, incisions, amputations of
sphacelate parts and the like’. John Securis similarly writes that the apothecary’s is:

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one of the ‘mechanicke artes’ and that surgery is a ‘manuell arte’.\footnote{John Securis, *A Detection and Querimonie of the Daily Enormities and Abuses Committed in Physick* (London, 1566), sigs [C7]'', [E7]''.} Lawyers attempted to make a similar point when emphasising the scribal, and therefore manual, nature of the work carried out by their inferiors in the legal profession. John Stephens, in his satirical *Essays and Characters* (1615), writes of ‘A Lawyers simple Clarke’:

> ‘He trembles therefore alike with all Handicrafts, [...] to thinke if he should offer violence in the Court: for vpon his Palmes & Fingers depend his In-comes.’\footnote{John Stephens, *Essays and Characters: Ironicall, and Instructive*, 2nd edn (London, 1615), sig. [YSp].} Of course, the implication of theft as well as the allusion to scribal work debases the clerk still further.

A more sophisticated version of this denigration of manual work was conceptual division between the different types of learning that members of the upper and lower branches of the professions were presumed to bring to their work. The terms of this division were encapsulated in the term ‘empiric’, used variously to describe medical charlatans as well as surgeons and apothecaries. The physician E. D. explains,

> The name of an Empirike is deriued fro/w the Greeke word which signifieth experience: and by an Empirike is, as you know, vnderstood a Practitioner in Physicke, that hath no knowledge in Philosophy, Logicke, or Grammar: but fetcheth all his skill from bare and naked experience.\footnote{E. D., *The Copy of a Letter Written by E. D. Doctour of Physicke to a Gentleman, by Whom It Was Published* (London, 1606), pp. 20-21.}

On the basis of their liberal education, learned physicians could portray themselves as having a theoretical knowledge of medicine; other practitioners would be unable to treat conditions they had not seen before. As John Cotta put it, ‘how can experience giue prescription for those things whereof it hath not had experience?’.\footnote{Cotta, p. 12.} A similar division obtained in the legal profession: Serjeant William Sheppard’s reference to ‘empirics of
the law' makes the analogy explicit.\textsuperscript{47} Bacon elaborates the same concept more fully in \textit{The Advancement of Learning}, when he explains the desirability of learning in statesmen:

we see it is accounted an errour, to commit a naturall bodie to Emperique Phisitions, which commonly haue a few pleasing receits, whereupon they are confident and adventurous, but know neither the causes of diseases, nor the complexions of Patients, nor perill of accidents, nor the true methode of Cures; We see it is a like error to rely vpon Adovcates or Lawyers, which are onely men of practise, and not grounded in their Bookes, who are many times easily surprised, when matter falleth out besides their experience, to the preiudice of the causes they handle.\textsuperscript{48}

The legal elite insisted that they, unlike the attorneys, possessed 'a theoretical, as distinct from a merely practical or procedural, knowledge of law'.\textsuperscript{49}

As E. D.'s definition of an empiric shows, the vehicle for the kind of theoretical learning which elite lawyers and physicians thought desirable was a liberal education in the humanist disciplines. In practice, this led to a certain fetishising of the classical languages, possession of which was one of the terms in which professional superiority manifested itself. Physicians such as John Cotta and lawyers such as Thomas Nash enclosed their writings with copious sidenotes illustrating their remarks with references to classical authorities.\textsuperscript{50} Particularly in medicine, where many treatises were written in Latin or Greek, ignorance of these languages could be portrayed as leading to a deficiency of knowledge. In F. Herring's 1602 translation of Johann Oberndoerffer's \textit{The Anatomyes of the True Physition, and Counterfeit Mounte-banke}, the former is described as beginning his studies 'thoroughly furnished, with those Arts and Tongues, which are most requisite and necessary in a Physition', whereas the mountebanks 'rush

\textsuperscript{47} Quoted in Prest, 'Lawyers', p. 69.
\textsuperscript{49} Prest, \textit{The Rise of the Barristers}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{50} Thomas Nash, \textit{Qvaternio; or, A Fovrefold Way to a Happie Life} (London, 1633).
into *Apolloes* Temple, with vnwashen handes, and vnlettered heads'. John Securis makes obvious this exclusionary use of the classical languages when he inveighs against the translation of medical books:

If Englyshe Bookes could make men cunning Physitions, then pouchemakers, thresher ploughmen & coblers mought be Physitions as well as the best, yf they can reade. Then wer it a great foly for vs to bestow so much labor and study all our lyfe tyme in the scholes and vniuersities. Securis' latter remark implies that the labour expended in acquiring the classical languages somehow validates the superiority of the learned professionals; and indeed it must be said that for all the denigration of manual work, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon mental labour by lawyers and physicians alike. William Fulbecke writes of the 'extreame diligence' needed to study law, John Cotta that medical education must be 'watered with the dew and sweate of painfull studie'. Professional inferiors are often portrayed as idle by contrast: Obemdoerffer's mountebank 'cannot abide to take any paines or trauell in studie', whereas Cotta characterises empirics' miracle cures as unChristian: 'God hath giuen nothing vnto man, but for his trauail and paine'. Stephens' clerk 'may bragge of the Vniuersitie, and that hee hath commenced; yet hee can hardly tell you by learning the first vse of Parchment; though it concernes him neerely; for being once in a Colledge, and now a Clearke, it seemes plaine that he was an arrant rakehell'. Such practitioners are interested only in money: 'all that [empirics] hunt after is how they may inrich themselves, though it be with the losse, not of the

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52 Securis, sigs B2'-B2''.
54 Obemdoerffer, p. 5; Cotta, p. 35.
55 Stephens, sig. [Y8]'.
goods alone, but of the liues of men also’. Sir John Davies blamed long-drawn-out law cases on ‘the corruption of some needy sollicitors, (who picke their liuing out of the busines they followe, & are loath to quench the fier that maketh them warme)’. By contrast, the learned practitioner is motivated by a sense of civic duty: of all professions, writes Davies, law is ‘most meritorious for the good effectes it doth produce in the common wealth’, while William Fulbecke writes that the chief aims of the law are ‘God his glory’, ‘to administer Justice to al’, and ‘the good estate of the people’. As for the physician, ‘His maine and principall drift and endeavur [...] is, that as a faithfull friend, and well-willer of Nature he may religiously, unspottedly, & charily preserve the precious healt and life of man’. This devotion to the needs of human individuals and the good of the commonwealth entails a level of financial disinterestedness. E. D. writes that the learned physician, knowing that some diseases are incurable, ‘doth freely and ingenuously professe (though he be many times dismissed for his labour) that they admit of no perfect cure, and will not feed men with a false hope, that he may be fed by their purses’. Stephens’ ‘honest Lawyer’ will likewise refuse money in cases where it would compromise his honesty: ‘he is alwaies more diligent to maintaine wronged pouerty, then attentiue to allow iniurious Greatnesse: he can as freely refuse a prodigall, or enforced bounty, as hee can accept or demand due recompence’. The financial relationship between professional and client, to return to Cicero’s formulation, is not the demeaning one of employer and wage-earner. As Davis explains when he writes of payments to lawyers, ‘the fees or rewardes which they receaue are not of the nature of wages, or pay, or that which wee call salery or hire, which are indeede duties certeine, & growe due by contract for labour or

56 E. D., p. 18.
57 Sir John Davies, Le Primer Report des Cases & Matters en Ley Resolues & Aduges en les Courts del Roy en Ireland (Dublin, 1615), sigs *5", *7"; Fulbecke, fols 1'-2'.
58 Oberndorffer, pp. 6-7.
59 E. D., pp. 16-17.
60 Stephens, sigs O3'-O3".
seruice, but that which is giuen to a learned Counsellor, is called honorarium & not merces, being indeede a gift which giueth honor as well to the Taker as to the giuer.\(^6\)

In their published writings, barristers and physicians make use of a number of dichotomies in order to figure their distinctness from attorneys, clerks and solicitors, or from surgeons, apothecaries and unlicensed medical practitioners: mental versus manual work; theoretical versus practical knowledge; liberal education versus ignorance of the classical languages; hard work versus idleness; disinterested public service versus venality and greed; fees versus wage labour. Their writings parallel more material attempts to prevent those other practitioners from encroaching upon areas they saw as rightly belonging to them. Their efforts may have been all the more strenuous because the differences between themselves and their competitors were not so great as they may have liked to think: the duties of barristers overlapped with those of their inferiors in various respects, while the medical expertise of physicians was often no greater than that of unlicensed practitioners.

It would be misleading to overstate the degree of similarity between their position and Jonson's own. For one thing, as I stressed at the beginning of this chapter, the role he created for himself was virtually unprecedented: though Spenser had anticipated his suggestion that poetry could constitute a vocation rather than a gentlemanly accomplishment, his representation of dramatic writing as something more than demeaning hack-work was entirely new. By contrast, physicians and lawyers belonged to bodies, the College of Physicians and the Inns of Court, with a corporate identity and history. Nor, indeed, does Jonson seem to have wanted to identify himself as one member amongst a company of poets or dramatists: his conception of the poet is

\(^6\) Davies, sig. *10f*.
strikingly solitary. Another effect of his exceptional status was that there was no institutional machinery he could use to bolster it: while the College had legal sanction for its attempts to prevent unlicensed practice (ultimately unsuccessful as they may have been), and there were formal restrictions upon who had the right to be heard in the various courts of law, there was no body to regulate the writing of plays other than the laws of supply and demand and the ambiguous authority of the Revels Office.

Nevertheless, some similarities can be identified between their respective situations. Firstly, it might be argued that one way of seeing Jonson’s career is as that of a professional manqué. His father, he claimed, had been a clergyman. His own foreshortened career at Westminster, had he won a scholarship to one of the Universities, would have fitted him out for the Church or the secular professions; his later escape from Tyburn by claiming benefit of clergy may be regarded as an illustration of this. He dissuaded Drummond from poetry ‘for that she had beggered him, when he might have been a rich lawer, Physitian or Marchant’; he also said he had ‘a minde to be a churchman’ (Conversations, ll. 615, 330). However much seriousness we ascribe to these statements, it would seem that Jonson at some level regarded the professions as careers he might have followed; perhaps he saw the adoption of the role of poet as a means by which he could similarly combine the earning of a livelihood with the maintenance or acquisition of social status. He may have been familiar with the herald John Ferne’s opinion that gentility could be acquired through the Church, military service, a legal career, medicine, and practice of one of the seven sciences; ‘To a Poet also Lawreat in his profession, let not a Herald be nice in the deuising of a coate of Armes, for so much as the skyll of Poesyn is very laudable and prayse-worthy.’

Perhaps a more important attribute he had in common with the professional elite,

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however, is that while he seems to have been concerned to establish his social and literary superiority to his competitors, he faced the problem that in many ways his own activities were difficult to differentiate from theirs. Complex though his attitude to the theatrical marketplace may have been, 'the commercial theatre that Jonson represented as so threatening to his art was in fact its very ground and condition'; and Jonson himself had participated in some of its most characteristic practices. According to Dekker, he himself was an actor-turned-playwright; many of his early works seem to have been collaborations, from The Isle of Dogs to Sejanus and Eastward Ho. For all his affected disdain for theatrical war-horses such as The Spanish Tragedy, he furnished Henslowe with additions to that play in 1602, the same year as he satirised the adult companies in Poetaster. Kate McLuskie has suggested that one motivating factor in the poetomachia was Dekker's resentment at 'Jonson's presumption to be above the market' and insistence on his distinctiveness, when in fact the two playwrights had collaborated on Page of Plymouth and Robert II, King of Scots and indeed would both go on to write speeches for James's triumphal entry to London, and plays for the child companies. 'In 1600 Jonson and Dekker could not so easily have been assigned to different cultural camps as their modern reputations might suggest.' The writers of The Return from Parnassus (1606; written 1601-2) referred to him as a 'meere Empyrick, one that getts what he hath by observation', and wrote that 'he were better betake himselfe to his old trade of Bricklaying'; it would seem that his own literary

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64 The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-61), i, 326, 350 (Satiremastix, i. 2. 354-8, iv. 1. 127-36).
productivity was initially thought to be closer to that of the lower than the upper branches of the professions.^^

As a poet keen to distinguish himself and his activities from other writers with whom in fact he had a great deal in common, Jonson bears a degree of comparison with legal and medical professionals who were in a similar position. As I shall argue, the terms in which he represents himself as an artist are very similar to those employed by the elite members of those professions. First, however, I want to suggest that one reason for this resemblance may be Jonson's many recorded friendships with lawyers, some of whom, such as Francis Bacon, were among the most senior of their day. In fact, in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Ben Jonson and the Inns of Court', Christopher Baker identifies forty-three documented, probable, and possible relationships between Jonson and the members of those societies.^^ These contacts begin relatively early in Jonson's career. In the Folio dedication of Every Man Out of his Humour to the 'Noblest Novrceries of Humanity, and Liberty, in the Kingdome: The Innes of Court', Jonson observes, 'When J wrote this Poeme [1599], J had friendship with diuers in your societies' (Dedication, ll. 1, 8). In the light of Baker's argument that the play was not only written with the tastes of Inns of Court members in mind, but also draws upon structural and stylistic features of the Inns' Christmas revels, we might tentatively identify two of these men as John Hoskyns and Richard Martin. Not only is there documentary evidence of their later friendships with Jonson; these two were involved in 'the revel of Le Prince d'Amour, acted perhaps in the Christmas festivities of 1597-8' at

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67 Critical Heritage, p. 87.
the Middle Temple.  As Jonson remembered in the folio dedication of *Poetaster*, Martin would be ‘a noble and timely undertaker, to the greatest justice of this kingdom’ for that play’s ‘innocence, as for the Authors’ (Dedication, l. 10). As for Hoskyns, Aubrey writes that his son Sir Bennet Hoskyns ‘told me, that when he desired to be adopted his Son: No, sayd he, ‘tis honour enough for me to be your Brother; I am your fathers son: ’twas he, that polished me: I doe acknowledge it’ (i, 179). Hoskyns’ fellow-Templer and friend, Benjamin Rudyerd was the subject of three admiring and friendly epigrams from Jonson, CXXI-CXXIII (VIII, 78). When Jonson was released from prison in 1605 after another brush with the authorities, this time over *Eastward Ho*, among those he feasted was the jurist John Selden, who in the preface to *Titles of Honor* (1614) mentions his recourse to ‘the well-furnished Library of my beloved friend that singular Poet M. Ben: Jonson’ (xi, 383).

Hoskyns and Martin, as well as other Inns of Court men such as Christopher Brooke, William Hakewill and John Bond, as well as Jonson himself, are among those whom Thomas Coryate appears to identify as the ‘right Worshipfull Fraternity of Sireniacal Gentlemen, that meet the first Fridaie of every Moneth, at the signe of the Mere-Maide in Bread-streete in London’, although the wording of his letter is somewhat ambiguous. Jonson continued to be on friendly terms with lawyers in later life: he told William Drummond in the winter of 1618-19 of Lord Chancellor Francis Bacon’s remark to him on setting out for Scotland that ‘he loved not to see poesy goe on other feet’ than dactyls and spondees (*Conversations*, l. 334), while Edward Hyde, later Earl of Clarendon, was a friend of Jonson’s while a law student at the Middle Temple in the

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71 *Thomas Coryate Traveller for the English Wits: Greeting* (London, 1616), pp. 37-47. The letter is dated 1615, though as Coryate had left England in 1612 it probably refers to meetings that were already taking place then. See also I. A. Shapiro, ‘The “Mermaid Club”’, *Modern Language Review*, 45 (1950), 6-17.
late 1620s. We can also hypothesise friendships of some sort between Jonson and those Inns of Court men for whose literary works he wrote prefatory poems, such as those for Cinthias Reuenge (1613) by John Stephens, whose Essays and Characters I have already discussed, and those for the second volume of Britannia's Pastorals (1616), by William Browne (VIII, 383, 386). Jonson's laudatory epigrams to prominent lawyers such as Edward Coke and perhaps Anthony Benn (Underwood XLVI and XXXIII) may also indicate acquaintance, though their tone is less familiar than those to Rudyerd and to Bacon (Underwood LI) (VIII, 217, 186, 225). Finally, Epigrams XXIII, LV and XCVI (VIII, 34, 44, 62) testify to Jonson's friendships with two Inns of Court men more famous for their poetry, John Donne (himself one of the Sireniacal Gentlemen) and Francis Beaumont.

I have been unable to uncover any comparable relationships between Jonson and professional physicians; epigram XIII, 'To Doctor Empirick', is satirical and its target anonymous, and anyway need not refer to an individual of whom Jonson had experience (VIII, 31). His friendships with lawyers, however, are worth mentioning, not only because of their number and cordiality but because they evidently influenced Jonson intellectually. Selden was an important source of information about the basis of the Deuteronomic prohibition on transvestitism and its applicability to the stage (II, 214). Timber incorporates lengthy passages taken from Hoskyns' Directions for Speech and Style and Bacon's The Advancement of Learning (II. 2090-124, 228-2289). While similarities between Jonson's arguments and those of legal and medical professionals may be attributable merely to their shared classical and humanist heritage, therefore, or

to their being fellow participants in a wider cultural trend, there is also a possibility that it may result from the poet’s many relationships with lawyers.

As I mentioned earlier, Christopher Baker has argued that *Every Man Out* is stylistically and formally influenced by Inns of Court drama. Lawyers’ professional discourse, too, may have begun to influence Jonson. The Character of Asper portrays him as a disinterested public servant: ‘He is of an ingenious and free spirit, eager and constant in reproofe, without feare controuling the worlds abuses. One, whom no seruile hope of gaine, or frosty apprehension of danger, can make to be a Parasite, either to time, place, or opinion’ (Character of the Persons, I. 2). He insists to Mitis and Cordatus upon the fearlessness with which he unmasks vice, afraid of ‘no strumpets drugs, nor ruffians stab, [...] No brokers, vsurers, or lawyers gripe’ (Induction, I. 23). He goes on, indeed, to compare himself to a medical practitioner, offering ‘phisicke of the mind’, ‘pills to purge’ affected gallants; he uses the physician analogy again fifteen lines later (ll. 132, 175, 190). The very fact that Jonson needs to resort to comparison, however, rather than letting Asper explain his role in its own right, may indicate a fundamental uncertainty with regard to the place of the poet in society. Although the climax of the play – where Macilente becomes Asper once more, in one version because he has run out of objects of envy and in the other because of the presence of the Queen – seems intended to deflect accusations of envy from Asper onto his alter ego, the former’s desire to expose vice sometimes seems to be motivated, if not by envy, then at least by a sadistic self-righteousness: ‘Ile strip the ragged follies of the time, | Naked, as at their birth [...] and with a whip of steele, | Print wounding lashes in their yron ribs’ (I. 17).

His claim to be a disinterested servant of the public good is arguably compromised by this apparent delight in satire for its own sake.
A similar ambiguity as to the poet’s role may be discerned in *Cynthia’s Revels.*

This was the first play Jonson wrote for the private theatre; and, as I argued in an earlier chapter, part of his project in the Induction seems to be the representation of the Blackfriars company as socially superior to its adult competitors. This renders problematic the role it seems to suggest for the poet. Like Asper, Criticus (Crites in the Folio) is a public-spirited praiser of virtue and exposers of vice, in his masque revealing the vanity of the courtier participants. However, the Prologue emphasises that in *Cynthia’s Revels* Jonson is limiting himself to an audience of the social elite: ‘To other weaker beames, his labours close: | As loth to prostitute their virgin straine, | To eu’rie vulgar, and adult’rate braine’ (Prologue, l. 6). Similarly, in the play it is only Cynthia and her attendants who can be said to benefit from Criticus’s masque. The limited nature of the service Criticus provides is paralleled by ambiguity as to his role. As masque-writer, one would assume him to be a poet; but Mercury’s encomium on him makes no reference to literary production, and in the Induction he is described merely as a ‘retired scholler’ (l. 8).

In *Poetaster,* however, Jonson’s conception of the role of the poet is both clearer and more fully elaborated. This development can be attributed to the complex nature of the poetomachia, in which *Poetaster* seems to have been Jonson’s final sally. In part, this was a ‘war’ between rival theatres: *Poetaster* makes more explicit the denigration of the adult companies that had been implied in *Cynthia’s Revels.* At the same time, though, it was a clash between individuals. *Poetaster* continues, and foregrounds, the satire upon Marston and Dekker which had perhaps begun as early as *Every Man Out,* it responds to Marston’s apparent attacks on Jonson in *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* and *What You Will,* and anticipates that of Dekker (and probably Marston) in *Satiromastix.* Accordingly, Jonson was fighting a war on two fronts. While the terms of his attack on
Dekker, as an ignorant hireling of a socially and artistically inferior theatre, partake of his characterisation of the adult companies in general, Marston, as an Oxford graduate and Inns of Court drop-out with claims to gentility, was an altogether different target. As Tom Cain points out, the satiric stance he had adopted in *What You Will* was that that of the ‘dégagé (if hardly urbane) gentleman, Quadratus’.

It can therefore be argued that the Poetomachia forced Jonson to clarify his artistic position by requiring him to repudiate both ‘dilettantes and hacks’, to use Helgerson’s terms. By defining himself against both gentleman amateur and hireling playwright, Jonson placed himself in the position of the professional, priding himself on his industry while stressing the free and dignified nature of his work. Indeed, it is noteworthy that *Poetaster* is the first play in which Jonson uses derivatives of the word ‘profession’ to describe poets and poetry. In the first instance, Ovid is challenged by his father, ‘Name me a profest poet, that his *poetrie* did euer afford him so much as a competencie’ (i. 2. 78), while in the second, Caesar asks Mecoenas, Gallus, Tibullus and Horace their opinion of Virgil, as gentlemen ‘of his profession’ (v. 1. 76). Ovid senior’s question implies the ideas of vocation and avowal which have been identified as central to professionalism; Caesar’s enquiry has a different emphasis, suggesting the notion of a profession as a body of men. In both of these instances Jonson plots a middle course between the trajectories of Dekker and Marston, as will be plain in his depictions of Crispinus and Fannius as respectively ‘Poetaster’ and ‘play-dresser’ (v. 3. 218, 220).

74 Helgerson, p. 21.  
75 It is applied to other vocations in *Every Man in*, ii. 1. 4 and v. 1. 3; *Every Man Out*, Character of the Persons, i. 85 and iii. 6. 137-38; and *Cynthia’s Revels*, ii. 3. 54.
Crispinus is portrayed very much as one who stands on his gentility: 'vouchsafe
the sight of my armes, Mistresse', he asks Chloe, 'for I beare them about me, to haue
'hem seene' (II. 1. 94). He is motivated to write poetry by lust: 'since you like Poets so
well, your loue, and beauties shall make me a Poet', he tells her, before departing to
obtain the requisite gown and garland (II. 2. 76). For him, poetry is a sudden and
temporary affectation: 'we are new turn'd Poet' (III. 1. 23). Fannius, by contrast, is 'a
dresser of plaies about the towne, here' (III. 4. 322) – the term not only puns on
Dekker's name but characterises his writing as manual or mercantile labour. At the end
of the play he is told to keep to his citizen station: 'put on | That coate, and cap; and
henceforth, thinke thy selfe | No other, then they make thee' (V. 3. 576). He is the
players' paid slanderer: 'we haue hir'd him to abuse HORACE, and bring him in, in a
play, with all his gallants' (III. 4. 322). He is also uneducated: part of his libel on Horace
reads, 'I know the authors from whence he ha's stole, | And could trace him too, but that
I understand 'hem not full and whole' (V. 3. 312).

Horace's status as professional, however, distinguishes him from both these
conceptions of the poet. This is made particularly clear in the scene where Caesar asks
his opinion of Virgil: 'HORACE, what saist thou, that art the poorest, | And likeliest to
enuy, or to detract?' (V. 1. 77). The idea of the profession offers a different index of
worth from that of rank or money. Gallus and Tibullus are Virgil's social superiors; yet
it is Virgil whom Caesar sits beside himself. Horace's inferior social status does not
prevent him from being considered a poet; indeed, he insists that it does not stop him
thinking well of Virgil: 'for my soule, it is as free, as CAESARS' (l. 90). As a
professional, Horace can place himself alongside his social superiors; the stress on his
freedom contrasts him with the paid slanderer Fannius. Nor is Caesar offended by his
frankness: 'Thankes, HORACE, for thy free, and holsome sharpnesse: | Which pleaseth
CAESAR more, then seruile fawnes. | A flatterd prince soone turns the prince of fools’ (l. 94). As Tom Cain says, ‘Jonson expounds the poet’s social role and responsibilities, projecting the Horatian ideal of a tolerant and urbane moralist whose disinterested wisdom is heeded by the greatest of monarchs’; he is to be distinguished from Crispinus, for whom poetry is a gentlemanly affectation and serves no wider good.  

The simultaneous stress on the poet’s social duty and his freedom is recapitulated in the Apologetical Dialogue, unprinted until 1616 but apparently spoken onstage in 1602, where the Author states his position at length and defends himself from the accusations of his detractors. When Polyposus relates their charge of slowness, he replies, ‘I would, they could not say that I did that, | There’s all the ioy that I take i’ their trade, | Vnlesse such Scribes as they might be proscrib’d | Th’ abused theaters’ (Epilogue, l. 195). The word ‘trade’ characterises inferior writers as mercantile; ‘scribes’ anticipates Stephens by representing their work as manual rather than mental. The Author goes on to say that their output might be surpassed in both quality and volume ‘If a free minde had but the patience, | To thinke so much, together, and so vile’ (l. 203). Slow production is justified by an opposition of the free mind which does not lower itself to that kind of work, and the hacks who do. He goes on to lament ‘that these base, and beggerly conceipts | Should carry it, by the multitude of voices, | Against the most abstracted worke’, separating himself from his competitors by stressing their inferior social status (l. 205). But the preference of ‘the drunken rout’ for bad poetry

would make a learn’d, and liberall soule,
To riue his stayned quill, vp to the back,
And damne his long-watch’d labours to the fire;
Things, that were borne, when none but the still night,
And his dumbe candle saw his pinching throes:

76 Poetaster, ed. by Cain, p. 9.
As well as implicitly comparing it to the labours of birth, Jonson stresses the arduous nature of poetic labour; but while he has characterised bad poets as manual or mercantile workers, the superior poet is ‘learn’d, and liberall’. He is indifferent to the popular taste, more concerned with ‘his owne free merit’ than ‘their reeling claps’.

To a certain extent, Jonson draws in the Apologetical Dialogue upon opinions expressed by the historical Horace in his epistle Ad Pisones, the Ars poetica: a preference for slow, laborious production, and a sense that theatre audiences have degenerated. However, in opposing the good to the bad poet, Jonson also sets up dichotomies which, while not incompatible with the Ars, are not made explicit therein: between high and low social status; between mental and manual or mercantile work; between freedom and dependency. These rest upon a conceptual division between different types of work which Jonson inherits from Cicero and which he shares with the elites of the legal and medical professions.

In the person of Ovid, however, Jonson explicitly contrasts the poetic and legal professions, as the young poet rejects the career his father has chosen for him: ‘OVID, whom I thought to see the pleader, become OVID the play-maker?’ (i. 2. 8). Obviously, one reason for this is because it is historically accurate, as Jonson makes clear in the Apologetical Dialogue (Epilogue, ll. 116-24); but it is not a fact that Jonson necessarily needed to incorporate in the play, and it is one that he emphasises by having Ovid speak in l. 1 the same lines from Amores i, 15 that he cites in the Dialogue: ‘Or that I studie not the tedious lawes; | And prostitute my voyce in euerie cause’ (l. 1. 47). Much as he

77 See Jonson’s translation (viii, 338-55), particularly lines 36, 55-56, 300-02, 587-92.
elaborates his conception of the poet’s vocation by contrasting the true poet Horace with the poetaster Crispinus and play-dresser Fannius, so he achieves a similar end by contrasting Ovid with the morally compromised figure of the professional lawyer, who, as a persuasive user of language, is perhaps the professed poet’s nearest neighbour. This effect is compounded in an exchange between Lupus and Tucca which appears only in the Folio, but which Herford and the Simpsons suspect was, like the Apologetical Dialogue, spoken on stage in 1601 and suppressed:

LUPUS Indeed, yong PUBLIVS, he that will now hit the marke, must shoot through the law, we haue no other planet raignes, & in that sphære, you may sit, and sing with angels. Why, the law makes a man happy, without respecting any other merit: a simple scholer, or none at all may be a lawyer.

TUCCA He tells thee true, my noble Neophyte; my little Grammaticaster, he do’s: It shall neuer put thee to thy Mathematiques, Metaphysiques, Philosophie, and I know not what suppos’d sufficiencies; If thou canst but haue the patience to plod inough, talke, and make noise inough, be impudent inough, and ’tis inough.

LUPUS Three bookees will furnish you.

TUCCA And the lesse arte, the better. Besides, when it shall be in the power of thy cheu’rill conscience, to doe right, or wrong, at thy pleasure, my pretty ALCIBIADES. (I. 2. 117)

This passage sets the terms for the anti-legal satire of Jonson’s subsequent career. The greed implied by the ‘angels’ pun recurs frequently, from Voltore through Picklocke in The Staple of News to Practice in The Magnetic Lady. As Lupus says, however, remuneration does not depend on mental acumen or application, being available to the ‘simple scholer’ if he ‘haue the patience to plod inough, talke, and make noise inough’.

The portrayal of legal language as mere talk or noise is another idea that Jonson will explore more fully in Epicoene and The Staple of News, the stress on the ugliness and obscurity of lawyers’ jargon. And Tucca’s comparison of the legal conscience to cheveril, the material from which reversible gloves were made, alludes to the accusation that lawyers took fees from both sides, anticipating both the name of Sir Paul Eitherside

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78 ‘It is significant that two insertions of the Folio strengthen the satire on lawyers and players, two classes who protested strongly against the treatment of their order in the original text’ (iv, 193).
79 See Epicoene, iv. 6. 13-19, and The Staple of News, iv. 4. 103-08.
in *The Devil is an Ass* and epigram xxxvii: ‘No cause, nor client fat, will CHEV’RILL leese, | But as they come, on both sides he takes fees’ (viii, 38).

Much as Lupus anticipates Jonson’s subsequent depiction of lawyers, so does Eudemus in his next play, *Sejanus*, embody the key features of his satire on physicians. Jonson invariably stresses the extent to which the physician’s profession associates him with the lower bodily strata: Sejanus, asking Eudemus for information about his patients, insists ‘I doe not aske you of their vrines, | Whose smel’s most violet? or whose seige is best? | Or who makes hardest faces on her stool?’ (I. 304). Almanach’s curses upon Pennyboy Senior in *The Staple of News* are scatological in character (ii. 4. 93-7); in *The Magnetick Lady*, Rut diagnoses Placentia’s malady as

\[
\text{\textit{Tymanites} (which we call the Drum.)} \\
\text{A winde bombe ‘s in her belly, must be unbrac’d,} \\
\text{And with a Faucet, or a Peg, let out,} \\
\text{And she’ll doe well: get her a husband. (ii. 3. 19)}
\]

When Eudemus appears onstage again in the second act of *Sejanus*, he is shown ministering in private to Livia; Jonson frequently shows how physicians abuse their privileged access to ‘ladies’ priuacies’, whether as perpetrators or facilitators of sexual impropriety (ii. 301). Eudemus himself engineers a secret meeting between Livia and Sejanus; in *Epicoene*, Dauphine responds to Truewit’s offer to make the collegiates fall in love with him by saying that if it came about, ‘I would say thou had’st the best philtre i’thè world, and couldst doe more then madame MEDEA, or Doctor FOREMAN’ (iv. 1. 148). The physician of whom in *Cynthia’s Revels* Phantaste says ‘all hee doo’s is physicke, I proteste’ would appear to have taken personal advantage of his relationship with his patient (ii. 4. 93); in *The Forest*, VIII, Jonson refers to women who are ‘mann’d | With ten Emp’ricks, in their chamber, | Lying for the spirit of amber’ (VIII, 105). It is
only cosmetics that Eudemus administers to Livia, but this itself is the occasion for a bawdy pun Jonson also uses in *The Alchemist*, II. 6. 34:

LIVIA. What do ye now, EVDEMUS?  
EUDEMUS. Make a light *fucus*,
To touch ye ore withall. (II. 71)

He also supplies her with poison to kill her husband; Philautia in *Cynthia’s Revels* says that if she ruled over the court of Gargaphie, ‘if I saw a better face then mine owne, I might haue my doctor to poyson it’ (IV. 1. 168), whereas Morose protests, when Epicoene asks for a doctor to be sent for him, ‘What, to poyson me, that I might die intestate, and leaue you possest of all?’ (IV. 4. 54).

Jonson’s portrayal of both lawyers and physicians tends to rely on stock themes of avarice, unintelligible jargon, and double-dealing in the first case, and scatology, sexual impropriety, and poison in the second. To some extent, this is an effect of the way characterisation works in Jonsonian comedy, whose ‘cast of characters is not its outstanding feature. Each has only his characteristic move, as in chess, and the object of the game is to see what new combinations have been brought about’. However, in *Poetaster* Jonson makes a deliberate attempt to contrast the venal lawyer with the more idealistic poet (though that poet is not the hero Horace, but Ovid, towards whom Jonson’s attitude seems to be more mixed). A similar opposition can be discerned in Jonson’s next comedy (barring *Eastward Ho*), *Volpone* (1605-06). Mosca’s speeches in the first act to Voltore and Corbaccio contain typically Jonsonian descriptions of the greedy, duplicitous lawyer, and of physicians, who bleed their patients dry of money and then kill them ‘by experiment; | For which the law not onely doth absolue ’hem, |

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But giues them great reward’ (l. 4. 29). In the dedicatory epistle, by contrast, Jonson portrays his ideal poet as an altogether different type of professional, as one who

is said to be able to informe yong-men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great vertues, keepe old-men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to child-hood, recouer them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things diuine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the businesse of mankind. (Epistle, l. 23)

This representation of the poet as servant of the commonwealth recalls *Poetaster*, though its emphasis is different, appearing to ascribe to him almost mystical healing powers; in fact, Jonson is drawing here upon Minturno’s *De Poeta* (IX, 683). Jonson uses the passage, however, as part of an argument about the role of the poet which has more in common with those of his counterparts in the legal and medical professions than with those of the neoclassical critic. In detailing ‘the offices, and function of a Poet’ (l. 21), Jonson is, as in *Poetaster*, trying to separate the true from the false poet, this being ‘an age, wherein *Poetrie*, and the Professors of it heare so ill, on all sides’:

> It is certayne, nor can it with any fore-head be oppos’d, that the too-much licence of *Poetasters*, in this time, hath much deform’d their Mistris; that, euery day, their manifold, and manifest ignorance, doth sticke vnnaturall reproches vpon her: But for their petulancy, it were an act of the greatest iniustice, either to let the learned suffer; or so diuine a skill (which indeed should not bee attempted with vnclean hands) to fall, vnder the least contempt. (l. 11)

Jonson separates the ignorant poetaster from the learned practitioners of a divine skill. I take the reference to unclean hands to refer to the lack of a classical education; that makes sense in the context, and would be analogous to F. H.’s reference to the unlearned mountebank’s ‘vnwashen handes’. He goes on to criticise the poetasters in language suggestive of manual and mercantile labour. There is ‘nothing remayning with them of the dignitie of Poet, but the abused name, which euery Scribe vsurps’ (l. 34);

Jonson (as a ‘learned or liberall soule’, in a phrase that recalls the Apologetical Dialogue) abhors ‘the present trade of the stage […] where nothing but the filth [the Quarto reads ‘garbage’] of the time is vtter’d’ (l. 87). It is not entirely clear whether
Jonson is referring to these writers or the 'Kings, and happiest Monarchs' (l. 99) who used to be poets' patrons when he claims to have 'labour'd, for their instruction, and amendment, to reduce, not onely the ancient formes, but manners of the scene, the easinesse, the propriety, the innocence, and last the doctrine, which is the principall end of poesie, to informe men, in the best reason of liuing' (l. 105). It is evident, however, that as in Poetaster, Jonson creates a division between uneducated scribes who, for financial gain, cater to the debased appetites of the multitude, and the poet, who labours for the betterment of the commonwealth. This dichotomy is shared not with Minturno or Horace, but Cicero and, more immediately, contemporary professionals.

The arguments of the epistle, however, are complicated by the depiction in the play proper of Scoto of Mantua, Volpone's mountebank alter ego. As several critics have pointed out, in trying to sell his dubious panacea Scoto 'exploits the same self-justifying strategies Jonson himself uses quite seriously in his prefatory epistle'. Like Jonson, Scoto refers to 'our profession' (ll. 2. 44). As Jonson distinguishes himself from poetasters, so Scoto scorns 'ground Ciarlitani' (l. 49); but, just as theatregoers prefer inferior plays, so 'these meagre staru'd spirits, who haue halfe stopt the organs of their mindes with earthy appilations, want not their fauourers among your shriuel'd, sallad-eating artizans' (l. 62). He emphasises the wide beneficent effects of his 'blessed unguento, this rare extraction, that hath only power to disperse all malignant humours, that proceed, either of hot, cold, moist, or windy causes' (l. 94), recalling the passage taken by Jonson from Minturno that describes the poet's curative powers. Scoto emphasises that 'I haue nothing to sell' and that 'I despise money' (ll. 72, 181); again,

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this can be compared to Jonson's disavowal of financial motivation; and finally, Scoto’s insistence that ‘I spared nor cost, nor labour, where any thing was worthy to bee learned’ (I. 162) brings to mind Jonson’s stress on hard scholarly labour.

It is difficult to believe that, as both a poet and a critic greatly concerned with questions of language and its use or misuse, Jonson was unaware of the similarity between Scoto’s self-justifying rhetoric and his own as exemplified in the epistle. Although, since it is addressed to the Universities in recognition of their kind reception of the play, we can reasonably assume that Jonson wrote the epistle last, this does not mean that he did not have any notion of what he would want to say in it while he wrote *Volpone*; furthermore, its arguments to a large extent recall those of the Apologetical Dialogue. What, then, are we to make of the resemblance between the arguments of the poet and the mountebank?

To begin with, it must be admitted that Jonson did not necessarily intend Scoto to be understood as a commentary upon himself. In the epistle, he laments that poetasters take on the name but not the dignity of the poet, while insisting on his own right to bear that title; similarly, Alvin Kernan argues that we should distinguish Jonson’s ‘true medicine, and *true playing*,’ from Scoto’s ‘distortion of both those arts’. Stephen Greenblatt, however, finds a more subversive attitude in the Scoto scene, saying of the claims for the poet made by Jonson in the epistle:

Now it is clear that Jonson was strongly drawn to these claims, that throughout his career he wanted very much to believe in them. But as a man with a remarkably acute ear for cant and hucksterism, he understood quite well how closely they resembled a mountebank’s patter.

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83 Greenblatt, p. 104.
This seems to imply the notion, of which Jonas Barish is perhaps the classic exponent, of Jonson as painfully at odds with the dramatic medium. It also points towards the fundamentally divided selfhood that some critics have identified in Jonson, perceiving an individual apparently beset with the desire to prescribe and observe poetic rules yet fiercely iconoclastic, portraying himself as a detached Horatian observer and amender of manners yet one ‘oppressed with fantasie’ who ‘heth consumed a whole night in lying looking to his great toe, about which he hath seen tartars & turks Romans and Carthaginions feight in his imagination’ (Conversations, ll. 692, 322).

Accordingly, the portrayal of Scoto might be seen as a safety-valve, an attempt to counterbalance the strain of creating a professional identity through self-directed satirical play, much as ‘In his merry humor, he was wont to name himself the Poet’ (1. 636). Whether or not this is an accurate analysis, Volpone establishes a pattern of comic questioning of the self-justifying language of professionalism that Jonson continues to follow in subsequent plays.

In Epicoene (1609), play on the actual word ‘profession’ is much in evidence. Jonson was still using it to describe poetry: a few months earlier, in the dedication of the Quarto of The Masque of Queens to Prince Henry, he had written that

> Yo' favor to letters, and these gentler studies, that goe vnder the title of Humanitye, is not the least honor of yo' wreath. For, if once the worthy Professors of these learnings shall come (as heretofore they were) to be the care of Princes, the Crownes they' Soueraignes weare will not more adorne they' Temples; nor they' stamps liue longer in they' Medalls, than in such Subiects labors.

(Dedication, 1. 21)

In Epicoene, Jonson refers to various forms of professing. When Truewit commends women who ‘paint, and professe it’ (1. 1. 110), the word suggests the admission of

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artifice. Clerimont's statement that Sidney 'profest himselfe' a poet (II. 3. 119)
follows on from Dauphine's remark that he 'liues by' his verses (I. 117), which in turn
quibbles on the alternative senses of immortality and livelihood; 'profest' therefore
implies both occupation and, more obviously, Sidney's revelation of himself as a poet.
Elsewhere the word has overtones of deceit rather than revelation: Dauphine tells
Clerimont and Truewit that Epicoene has misleadingly 'profest this obstinate silence for
my sake' (II. 4. 41). Artifice, if not deceit, is implied by Mavis when she criticises
gallants who 'weare purer linnen then our selues, and professe more neatnesse, then the
french hermaphrodite' (IV. 6. 30). Professing, therefore, can variously suggest artifice
and the admission of artifice, revelation of one's true self and the construction of a false
one. Arguably, all these senses should be borne in mind during act v, when Otter,
dressed as a divine, and Cutbeard, dressed as a civil lawyer, drive Morose to distraction
with their Latin terms, legal jargon, and intrusive questions. When first suggesting the
ploy, Truewit comments:

Clap but a ciuill gowne with a welt, o' the one; and a canonical cloake with
sleeues, o' the other: and giue 'hem a few termes i' their mouthes, if there come
not forth as able a Doctor, and compleat a Parson, for this turne, as may be
wish'd, trust not my election. And, I hope, without wronging the dignitie of either
profession, since they are but persons put on, and for mirths sake, to torment him.
(IV. 6. 43)

Two levels of satire are in evidence here. More obviously, there is the implication that a
simple uniform and plausible specialist vocabulary are enough to persuade the innocent
of one's professional expertise. This depends on the assumption that there is such a
thing as professional expertise to imitate. At the same time, however, there is the idea
latent in the ambiguous phrase 'either profession, since they are but persons put on' that
professions themselves are disguises, that there is nothing beneath the gown or cloak.
The subversion is very similar to that in Volpone, where we can laugh admiringly at
Volpone/Scoto's mountebank patter while wondering whether professional identity
(and, by extension, one’s identity as a literary professional) consists in anything more than mastering the appropriate discourse.

Perhaps because it was first printed in the 1616 Folio rather than in quarto, *Epicoene* has no prose epistle. In *The Alchemist* (1610), however, as in *Volpone*, Jonson discusses poetry in the prologue in terms which he seems to parody in the main text. This time, his argument incorporates a new element which once again is derived from professional discourse: the distinction between theoretical and empirical learning. He begins with a characteristic lamentation of the degenerate taste of many theatregoers: ‘the Concupiscence of Daunces, and Antickes [some quartos read ‘ligges, and Daunces’] so raigneth, as to runne away from Nature, and be afraid of her, is the onely point of art that tickles the Spectators’ (To the Reader, l. 6). He then goes on to set up a dichotomy of nature and art that seems to underlie his criticism of Shakespeare as one that ‘wanted art’ (*Conversations*, l. 50):

> But how out of purpose and place, doe I name Art? when the Professors are growne so obstinate contemners of it, and presumers on their owne Naturalls, as they are deriders of all diligence that way, and, by simple mocking at the termes, when they vnderstand not the things, thinke to get of wittily with their Ignorance. [...] I deny not, but that these men, who alwaies seeke to doe more then inough, may sometime happen on some thing that is good, and great; but very seldom: And when it comes it doth not recompence the rest of their ill. (ll. 8, 21)

This distinction between writers who are ‘presumers on their own naturals’, and those whose technique is informed by art, should be understood in the context of professional discourse, which, as I argued earlier, denigrated the purely empirical knowledge of those without a liberal education. As the unlearned lawyer or physician does not have the intellectual equipment to deal with cases which fall outside the range of his experience, so the unlearned poet can only stumble on good writing through trial and error. Indeed, the physician E. D. makes a similar admission to Jonson: that the unlearned ‘do many cures’, albeit ‘confusedly and without Arte’. But he goes on: ‘Tully
saith, he that shooteth all day long, is like to hit the marke sometimes: and they that
haue many patients may cure some in despite of Arte. John Cotta deplores the
empiric’s ‘want of true methode & the habite of right operation and practise according
to reason, (which is art)’. In the play, however, the word ‘art’ seems to have a similar
significance to ‘profess’ in Epicoene: it assumes an important status in the arguments of
the prologue, but is treated playfully in the main drama, being ascribed to the alchemical
knowledge of the con-artist Subtle. It appears with this sense twenty-seven times in the
play, as opposed to eight in Volpone. The theatrical self-consciousness of The Alchemist
has been noticed by critics: David Riggs writes of the acrostic at the beginning of the
play, ‘the wordplay on “House,” “contract,” “share,” and “act” turns the Argument into
a metadramatic commentary on the play and its auspices of production’. Riggs does
not point out, however, that as in Volpone, Jonson places in the mouths of fraudsters
arguments he himself has used to defend his status as a poet. Subtle disclaims financial
motivation, pretending to refuse Dapper’s offer of money (I. 2. 36-41). He insists to
Mammon that he, ‘in all my ends, | Haue look’d no way, but vnto publique good’ (ii. 3.
15); he emphasises his ‘labours’ therein, and that the results have been ‘Got by long
watching, and large patience’ (ii. 11-12) (compare the ‘long-watch’d labours’ of the
Apologetical Dialogue). He emphasises the slowness of his labours, and how he must
dissolve his medicine, ‘then congeale him; | And then dissolue him; then againe
congeale him; | For looke, how oft I iterate the worke, | So many times, I adde vnto his
virtue’ (I. 104). Obviously, Subtle’s aim is to obtain more money through delay; but his
words anticipate Jonson’s stress, when writing on Shakespeare, on the need to ‘strike
the second heat | Vpon the Muses anuile’ (VIII, 392), and recall the lines in Horace’s
Ars, which Jonson had already translated, that refer to Quinctilius’s advice about

86 E. D., pp. 36-38.
87 Cotta, p. 11.
88 Riggs, p. 171.
revising lines 'twice, or thrice' (VIII, 354). The scene where Subtle criticises the
country gull Kastril's unmethodical approach to argument may even be seen as
parodying Jonson's complaint in the preface that the many (the multitude in some
quartos) 'commend Writers, as they doe Fencers, or Wrastlers; who if they come in
robustuously, and put for it with a great deale of violence, are receiu'd for the brauer
fellowes' (To the Reader, l. 16).

This rather unJonsonian self-deflation may still be discerned in *Bartholomew Fair*
(1614), where Waspe's 'I scorne to be sau'd by my booke, i' faith I'll hang first' (l. 4. 7)
appears to be a reference to the plea of benefit of clergy which saved Jonson from the
death penalty for killing Gabriel Spencer, and his failure to keep Cokes under control
bears similarities to the author's ill-fated guardianship of Walter Ralegh junior on his
tour of France (*Conversations*, II. 295-305). However, Jonson does not in this play make
fun of his own use of professional discourse; in fact, I would argue that *The Alchemist* is
the last play in which he may properly be said to do so. I cannot find anything in the
speeches of Meercraft, the Scoto- or Subtle-figure in *The Devil is an Ass*, that can be
interpreted as subversive self-parody; and rather than offering Fitzdotterel magical cures
or the philosopher's stone, both of which can be seen as metaphors for the
transformative power of art, he promises him the more prosaic rewards of money and
status. In *The Staple of News*, Pennyboy Canter's description of the 'canting' poet,
'With Dimeters, and Trimeters, Tetrameters, | Pentameters, Hexameters, Catalepticks, |
His Hyper, and his Brachy-Catalepticks' (iv. 4. 55) is purely a satire on pretentious and
obfuscatory use of technical terms; it does not seem to subvert Jonson's authorial image
in the same way as the figures of Scoto and Subtle may be said to.
The disappearance of this self-parodic strain is as mysterious as its brief efflorescence. However, I would tentatively suggest that it is related to three slightly later developments: the publication of Jonson’s folio Workes in 1616; the award of a royal pension the same year; and his retirement from the public stage between The Devil is an Ass (1616) and The Staple of News (1626). Jennifer Brady has argued that the publication of the Folio had a stifling effect upon Jonson’s creativity: ‘By the last decade of Jonson’s life, the Folio had gained a canonical life independent of its author and maker. [...] The poet’s monument to himself had become an albatross’. I would suggest that it may also have affected the terms in which Jonson represented himself: the enduring object, the book, became a tangible, purchasable testimony to Jonson’s identity as an author, making his use of professional discourse less important. Around the same time, the award of a pension, and the departure from the stage, obviated the need to distinguish himself from men such as Dekker who were paid to write plays. It may be that Jonson no longer needed to employ the language of the professions in order to define himself; accordingly, the satirical play of Volpone, Epicoene, and The Alchemist became redundant.

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Chapter 5. Merchants’ Work in Dekker and Heywood

A recurrent theme of the last three chapters has been the problematic relationship between work and social status in the early modern period: for some classes, the use of the idea of work to validate their activities was complicated by its traditionally servile associations. I have concentrated on plays by Shakespeare and Jonson because the material circumstances in which they wrote made this tension a significant one for them. Over the course of his career, I see Shakespeare as having to manage the contradictory demands of propagandising for the elite, and appealing to them as an audience. Accordingly, he variously represents government as work and as theatre, and makes dramatic use of the assumption that gentlemen should not practise merchandise. As for Jonson, his representation of himself as an author is marked by a conflict between emphasis on the laboriousness of his literary creativity and his desire for social advancement; as a means of resolving this, he uses terms similar to those deployed by members of the upper strata of the legal and medical professions.

There are, however, other acting companies and other dramatists for whom this tension between work and gentility seems a less important context. As I have already
mentioned, Andrew Gurr has argued that although the Lord Chamberlain's and the Admiral's Men 'ran a similar repertory of plays' in the 1590s, the years from 1599 to 1605 'show a noticeable divergence between the playhouse south of the river and the northern playhouses'. He ascribes this largely to the revived boys' companies' attempt to appeal to an elite audience, to which the Lord Chamberlain's Men responded by 'competing with the boys and their new fashions', the Admiral's by 'catering for an increasingly narrow and conservative citizen taste'. Over the next two chapters I will examine how work is represented in plays written to cater for this supposed citizen taste. My focus will be primarily on plays by Thomas Heywood, who from about the turn of the century was a sharer in and an actor and writer for Worcester's Men, or the Queen's Men as they became; and by Thomas Dekker, who (with important exceptions) wrote largely for the Admiral's Men, the company that became Prince Henry's Men after James's accession and the Palsgrave's Men after the Prince's death in 1612.

Before I attempt to evaluate Gurr's remarks about citizen playgoers, the term 'citizen' needs to be defined more clearly. Gurr uses it to mean 'a member of a City guild who was an employer as distinct from an employee', and extends his usage to cover merchants. David Cressy's findings on descriptions of the early modern social order seem to bear out this broadness of reference: he suggests that while the social group comprising merchants, tradesmen and craftsmen was diverse, it is sometimes difficult to assign an individual a precise place within it. I would argue that 'citizen' is a useful blanket term for members of this heterogeneous group. My account of citizen playgoers also makes occasional reference to apprentices and journeymen: while not

2 Gurr, p. 53.
technically citizens, as individuals with a chance of future guild membership they
might be expected to have regarded staged representations of citizens’ work as being of
some relevance to them.⁴

As far as Gurr’s analysis of changing theatrical tastes is concerned, however, some
significant problems should be identified. Firstly, although he posits a citizen audience
to whose tastes some companies tried to appeal, the whole question of the social
composition of audiences is an extremely difficult one. He himself admits that in the
documentary evidence about playgoers collected in his Appendices there is a ‘striking
paucity of references to citizens’.⁵ Furthermore, although many of the arguments made
by Ann Jennalie Cook in The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare’s London have been
convincingly answered, her points about the affordability of theatrical entertainment
still demand consideration.⁶ To varying degrees, regular theatrical attendance by
merchants, tradesmen and apprentices was hampered both by the cost of playgoing and
by the fact that plays were performed during the working day. For a shopkeeper or
artisan to go to a play was to leave his business unsupervised; for a labourer, it meant
loss of pay; apprentices, except those from privileged backgrounds, usually had little
money, and various guild restrictions banned them from going to the theatre.⁷ A second
objection is that even if one leaves aside the question of how large the theatres’ citizen
audience might have been, Gurr’s theory of an attempt by the Admiral’s and

⁴ For the man who sweated out his years of apprenticeship and then journeywork, the odds were seven to
one that he would become a householder and have his own shop and then were roughly one in three that
one day, if he remain alive and in London, he would wear the livery and thus enter the elite of his
⁵ Gurr, p. 60.
293-306.
⁷ Ann Jennalie Cook, The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare’s London, 1576-1642 (Princeton:
in A New History of Early English Drama, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York:
Worcester's Men to appeal to that sector of society derives more from extrapolations from the repertories of those companies than from what we know about attendance at their plays. The sources he cites that characterise the Red Bull and the Fortune as appealing to a lower-class audience date from well into the seventeenth century: Thomas Tomkis's *Albumazar* (1615), Alexander Gill's 1632 verses against Jonson's *The Magnetic Lady*. Gurr might therefore be accused of imposing upon the theatrical marketplace of 1600 a situation that did not yet exist. He suggests that the plays in the Admiral's/Prince's and Worcester's/Queen's Men repertories which were inspired by Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, and other 'celebrations of the heydey of Elizabethan England', as well as some plays 'decidedly conservative citizen attitude to love and marriage', 'amount to a small campaign for citizen values'. However, Roslyn Knutson's work on the repertory of the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men shows that even after 1600 they too were staging plays which seem to have been meant to appeal to citizens: *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (c. 1599-1602), *The Freeman's Honour* (c. 1602-03), *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1603-04), *The London Prodigal* (1603-05). Some plays staged by the Children of Paul's, notably Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*, seem to validate the citizenry, complicating the assumption that citizens favoured the public, gallants and law students the private playhouses; conversely, Gurr himself produces evidence for attendance by gentlemen at the amphitheatres.

These objections can be answered to varying degrees of satisfaction. Gurr makes the point that although the references to citizen playgoers are scanty, there are several references to citizens' wives; their husbands may be omitted from the record simply because 'they attracted far less attention' than other groups. 'Given the number of

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Gurr, pp. 238, 249, 154.


citizens in London, their relative affluence, and their proximity to all the playhouse venues, it may not be wildly wrong to think of them and their lesser neighbours the prosperous artisan class as a kind of silent majority in the playhouses.\textsuperscript{11} Although for some sections of London's citizenry playgoing may not have been a wise use of time or money, 'they went anyway', as Alexander Leggatt puts it.\textsuperscript{12} While apprentices were meant to be under the control of their masters, the historian Paul Griffiths finds that '[m]any young people slipped outside the compass of their master’s authority'; furthermore, 'many householders saw little harm in allowing young people a large slice of freedom so long as the significance of work and time was not entirely forgotten'.\textsuperscript{13} Charles Whitney has argued, on the basis of references to theatregoing in guild records from the years 1582-92, that 'despite the often-cited rigors and restrictions of their lives, certain of the meaner sort did manage to show up regularly at amphitheatres or at taverns licensed to stage plays during the period in which lord mayors were lodging complaints about them'.\textsuperscript{14} The satire of Francis Beaumont's \textit{The Knight of the Burning Pestle} (1607), although it depicts a grocer, his wife, and Ralph the prentice as thoroughly unsophisticated playgoers, makes no sense if such people never went to the theatre at all. It also adds weight to the reasonable assumption that plays such as Heywood's \textit{If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody}, the second part of which (1605) represents Sir Thomas Gresham's building of the Royal Exchange, appealed to citizen tastes. The Citizen assumes that the play he is about to see will mock his class, and protests, 'why could not you be contented, as well as others, with the legend of Whittington, or the life and death of sir Thomas Gresham? with the building of the Royall Exchange? or the story of Queene Elenor, with the rearing of London bridge.

\textsuperscript{11} Gurr, p. 65.
Finally, although it is true that some plays staged at the Globe seem intended to attract citizens, the converse is not the case: none of the plays in the known repertory of the Prince’s or the Queen’s men seem intended specifically to appeal to an elite audience, although Leggatt makes the point that theatres like the Fortune and the Red Bull do not exclude the ‘educated spectator’: ‘all he has to do is leave some of his expectations behind when he enters the playhouse’.  

Despite the lack of definite evidence about the playgoing habits of London citizens, it seems reasonable to assume that they did go to the theatre, and that, as the repertories suggest, the Admiral’s/Prince’s/Palsgrave’s and Worcester’s/Queen’s Men catered more specifically for them than did the Lord Chamberlain’s/King’s Men. The higher cost excluded the less-well off from the private theatres, which, as I have already argued, tried to cultivate a more exclusive ethos. However, this theory of citizen playgoing would seem to contradict the view of the city’s relationship to the stage which I elaborated in my opening chapter. I drew there upon the ‘documents of control’ collected by E. K. Chambers, which appear to suggest that London’s citizen community, as represented by the Lord Mayor and Common Council, was ranged in opposition to the drama, making repeated attempts to close the theatres down on grounds of health, morality, public order, disruptive ness to productivity, and Sabbath-breaking. However, if citizens did go to the theatre, and if the theatre in turn tried to attract them as an audience, then it looks as if this view needs to be modified.

The first point that needs to be made in elaborating a more sophisticated model is that the citizen class was far from homogeneous. The frustrations of apprentices were

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16 Leggatt, p. 28.
not always directed merely at servingmen, for example: after they rioted on Tower Hill in June 1595, they were alleged to have planned ‘to robbe, steale, pill and spoile the welthy and well disposed inhabitaunts of the saide cytye, and to take the sworde of aucthoryte from the magistrats and governours lawfully aucthorised’. Divisions were also evident within the livery companies, whose rulers were commonly criticised for being ‘misrepresentative of the interests of the whole membership, being engaged in economic activity, usually as merchants or retailers, unrelated to that of the rank and file of artisans’. Given this lack of unity, we should not necessarily expect the attitudes of the Lord Mayor and Common Council towards the stage to typify those of the citizen body as a whole. Indeed, Charles Whitney suggests that attitudes towards the theatre varied with each Lord Mayor, identifying Nicholas Woodrofe (1580), Thomas Blanke (1583), and John Spencer (1594, 1595) as particularly vehement opponents of the stage.

At a more general level, however, the question of the relationship between theatre and city is part of a wider critical debate about what Stephen Mullaney calls ‘the place of the stage’. L. C. Knights wrote in 1937 that ‘the drama […] is a social product; in the plays produced in the early seventeenth century, if anywhere […] we should be able to trace the connection with the economic bases of society’. Over the last two decades, various critics have tried to isolate the nature of this connection. Jean-Christophe Agnew suggests an analogical relationship between drama and the marketplace, arguing

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18 Archer, pp. 102-03.
that the new institution of the professional theatre improvised 'a new social contract between itself and its audience, a new set of conditions for the suspension of disbelief'; it 'invoked the same problematic of exchange — the same questions of authenticity, accountability, and intentionality' as were posed by the changing nature of the market.\textsuperscript{22} Mullaney, by contrast, emphasises the marginality of the theatre, which occupied 'a culturally and ideologically removed vantage point' with respect to the City.\textsuperscript{23} One possible objection to both of their arguments, however, is that their attempts to locate the stage are too imprecise: Agnew sees the theatre as 'a laboratory of and for the new social relations of agricultural and commercial capitalism', whereas Mullaney's argument depends on a highly symbolic reading of urban topography.\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps a more helpful account appears in \textit{Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare}, where Douglas Bruster emphasises that the theatres were themselves commercial institutions — 'your poets' Royal Exchange', as Dekker put it.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, Bruster compares the new phenomenon of purpose-built playhouses with the construction of trading spaces such as the Royal Exchange, opened in 1570, and the New Exchange ('Britain's Burse'), opened in 1609, emphasising that the theatres were 'potentially no more marginal a part of London than their publics demanded. Places of business, they regularized and normalized carnival'.\textsuperscript{26} As 'places of business', theatres attracted investment from London's citizens: 'members of the bourgeoisie influenced the theater less as politicians


\textsuperscript{23} Mullaney, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{24} Agnew, p. xi.


or ideologues than as capitalists', as Walter Cohen puts it.\textsuperscript{27} The founders of London's theatres either were members of, or had links with, the city's merchant and craftsman community, because it possessed the necessary money and resources. John Brayne, who financed the Red Lion and the Theatre, was 'a well-to-do grocer of Bucklersbury', while Philip Henslowe was a dyer and John Cholmley, his partner in the Rose venture, another grocer.\textsuperscript{28} A number of actors, too, belonged to the urban trades: John and Lawrence Dutton, of the (Elizabethan) Queen's Men, were citizens and weavers of London, and John Heminges 'became a citizen and grocer of London in 1587'. Later in the period, John Newton, 'a leading actor in the Duke of York's-Prince Charles's Men from 1610 to 1625', was described as a haberdasher when bound over to keep the peace in 1614, and Martin Slater, who acted with the Admiral's and Queen Anne's Men, was involved in the building of the Red Bull, and managed the Children of the King's Revels, was twice described as a citizen and ironmonger.\textsuperscript{29} In her study of Edward Alleyn, S. P. Cerasano portrays Alleyn and his father-in-law Philip Henslowe as conscientious citizens:

As residents and property owners, Alleyn and Henslowe participated fully in the life of the community. By 1607 both were assessors in the parish of St Saviour's, Southwark, collecting money and tithes for the poor [...]. In 1609 Henslowe served as churchwarden, and Alleyn assumed the position the next year. By 1613 Henslowe and Alleyn, with others from the parish, purchased the fee simple of the rectory of St Saviour's 'for the perpetual good of posterity'. Soon thereafter Alleyn used his local influence to build almshouses for the parish on the site of the old Soap Yard.\textsuperscript{30}


Muriel Bradbrook, indeed, writes of Alleyn's marriage to Henslowe's stepdaughter Joan Woodward, his enrichment as a landowner, and his establishment of the College of God's Gift at Dulwich, that the 'career of an Industrious Apprentice could not be better illustrated; only by missing the knighthood he sought did Alleyn fall far short of Dick Whittington'. The real-life actor merges into the citizen hero of contemporary theatre.

The theatres themselves, as I remarked in chapter one, contributed to the life of the community by paying poor rates; indeed, William Ingram has suggested that the policy of the city authorities towards the stage may have been motivated not so much by principled opposition as by the desire to increase their revenues. He writes of the 1574 Act of Common Council, which obliged innkeepers and other owners of playing spaces to seek the Council's approval, to present it with playtexts for perusal, and to post bonds that they would keep good order with the Chamberlain of London, as well as contributing to poor rates:

One of the traditional uses of prohibitions has been to provide a context for the profitable granting of exemptions and for the equally profitable issuing of licenses authorizing others to grant exemptions. Given what else we know of City governance, this is a plausible, and not an unnecessarily cynical, construction to place on the act, especially in light of the evidence that companies of players did continue to play in the City after 1574 and that playing in innyards seems, if anything, to have increased after that date.

It would be going too far to say that the city authorities were in favour of the theatre, which does seem to have presented very real risks to public order and, in times of plague, to health; however, its presence may have had beneficial aspects. As well as contributing to poor rates, as Kathleen McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth point out, it

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provided work for ‘a range of related trades’ such as carpenters and painters. The increasing employment of dramatists in the writing of civic pageantry may indicate a growing toleration of the drama by the authorities: the first such instance is in 1585, with George Peele. In the Jacobean and Caroline periods, the shows were almost invariably scripted by playwrights: most frequently by Munday, Middleton and Heywood, but also by Dekker and Webster. In the pageant written by Dekker and Jonson to mark James’s entry into London in 1604, the part of the Genius of London was played by Edward Alleyn, an event which itself might seem to mark a rapprochement between city and stage. Lawrence Manley finds the growing importance of pageantry to be indicative of a ‘heightened civic consciousness and ceremonial assertiveness on the part of London’s leaders’, and identifies a ‘wave of civic mythmaking’ both in pageants and in ‘a corpus of works, associated mainly but not exclusively with the popular theater, devoted to the magnanimity, virtue, and chivalric clan of worthy Londoners’. Plays like Dekker’s The Shoemaker’s Holiday (1599) and Heywood’s If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, which glorify real and semi-mythical citizens of London, should thus be considered alongside the pageants that their authors also wrote, as representative of an increasing sense of citizen identity.

‘Complaints from the civic authorities dropped sharply after the accession of James’, notes Alexander Leggatt. ‘Were they cowed by the King’s action in putting the players under royal patronage? Or had they come to realise – slowly, in the manner of officials

35 Chambers, i, 133.
— that in some playhouses at least citizen values and citizen interests were being promoted?\textsuperscript{37}

A dim picture of the relationship between city and stage thus begins to emerge, whereby the theatres, though physically marginal to the city, were linked to it by various types of association. Given citizens' participation in theatrical enterprise, whether as financiers, actors, or audiences, I want in the remainder of this chapter to examine how their work was represented in those theatres which seem most enthusiastically to have sought their custom. I will be focusing in particular upon what I call mercantile work, a term I use to cover the making of money through buying and selling rather than through production. My reason for this is that mercantile work was morally problematic, and had traditionally negative associations, in a way that artisanal labour was not. This made its representation a much more difficult and ambiguous affair, particularly because the large citizen contingent which I argue attended certain theatres would not have been united in its attitude to merchandise. An apprentice not yet able to trade, a craftsman who sold the products of his own labour, a small shopkeeper, and an international merchant (to give four examples of conceivable audience members) would probably have had very different feelings about buying and selling, as motivated by their varying degrees of financial stability, the different ways in which they made money, and the extent to which they may have been indebted to richer citizens.\textsuperscript{38}

Mercantile work's problematic moral status was the result of several factors. It was part of the early modern period's classical inheritance: in the \textit{Politics}, Aristotle denounced the profit that accrues from exchange on the grounds that 'it is not in

\textsuperscript{37} Leggatt, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{38} On indebtedness, see Thomas Wilson, \textit{A Discourse Upon Usury}, ed. by R. H. Tawney (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1925), p. 58.
accordance with nature, but involves men's taking things from another'. Cicero, in a section of De officiis which I have already quoted, makes the similar point that to make profits out of exchange implies that the transaction is inequitable: retail merchants 'would get no profits without a great deal of downright lying'. Jonathan Parry argues that in the Middle Ages, Aristotle's economic ideas were given greater currency through the writings of Thomas Aquinas. More generally, however, mediaeval attitudes towards merchandise were shaped by Christianity's suspicion of riches: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, then for a riche man to entre into the kingdome of God' (Mark 10. 25). According to Jacques Le Goff, the mediaeval Church condemned mercantile profits as deriving from the illicit use of God's time:

the merchant's activity is based on assumptions of which time is the very foundation – storage in anticipation of famine, purchase for resale when the time is ripe, as determined by knowledge of economic conjunctures and the constants of the market in commodities and money – knowledge that implies the existence of an information network and the employment of couriers. Against the merchant's time, the Church sets up its own time, which is supposed to belong to God alone and which cannot be an object of lucre.

The Church's condemnation of usury, too, shaped perceptions of mercantile work.

Although, as Norman Jones points out, 'most types of financing were not usurious' by the strict letter of Church teaching, this did not necessarily represent popular feeling. For many people, Tawney writes, 'any bargain from which one party obviously gained more advantage than the other [...] was regarded as usurious'. Furthermore, mercantile work fitted only with difficulty into the mediaeval conception of society as divided into

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45 Wilson, p. 122.
oratores, bellatores and laboratores: ‘in spite of the ingenuity of theorists, finance and trade, the essence of which seemed to be, not service, but a mere appetitus divittiarum infinitus, were not easily interpreted in terms of social function’.  

A distrust of mercantile work evidently persisted into the early modern period. Francis Bacon’s qualified acceptance of usury as a necessary evil suggests a fairly permissive attitude towards financial dealings; in his essay ‘Of Riches’, however, he writes that while the ‘Gaines of Ordinary Trades and Vocations, are honest’, ‘the Gaines of Bargaines, are of a more doubtfull Nature; When Men shall waite upon Others Necessity, broake by Servants and Instruments to draw them on, Put off Others cunningly that would be better Chapmen, and the like Practises, which are Crafty and Naught’. This distrust may have been heightened during the period by the increase in the wealth, power, and importance of the merchant class which I described in my Introduction. Commentators complained that merchants’ activities did not tend towards the common good: William Harrison wrote in 1577 that their number was ‘so increased in these our days that their only maintenance is the cause of the exceeding prices of foreign wares, which otherwise, when every nation was permitted to bring in her own commodities, were far better cheap and more plentifully to be had’. It seems likely that merchants’ growing social importance contributed to the aristocracy’s insistence that they were disbarred from gentility owing to the nature of their work, which ‘consisteth of most ungentle parts, as doublenes of tong, violation of faith, with the rest of their tromperies and disceites’, as John Ferne wrote in 1586. He went on to say that

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it was less honest and necessary than the trade of ploughmen, and that merchants
were accordingly to be ranked below villeins.

Although the increasing power of merchants gave rise to resentment, however, it also
stimulated the production of books written in their defence. From the 1590s onwards, an
increasing number of works appear which insist on merchants’ social contribution, and
on the compatibility of their work both with Christian morality and with high social
status; Theodore Leinwand sees these as an ‘attempt to fashion “the merchant” and to
find a vocabulary adequate to him’. In a prefatory poem to The Marchants Aviso
(1591), John Browne emphasises how mercantile wealth enriches other classes of
society; the aviso proper takes the form of a merchant’s letter to his servant, who is
doing business for him abroad. He is to be ‘most faithful and iust in al your accompts
with every man, & defraud no man willinglie not the value of a farthing’; he must make
the kingdom of God his main aim, and help the poor and oppressed. In A Treatise of
Commerce (1601), John Wheeler uses the different technique of stressing the
universality of trade: ‘there is nothing in the world so ordinarie, and naturall vnto men,
as to contract, truck, merchandise, and traffike one with an other’. Merchants are of
great benefit to the state, ‘either for forreigne intelligence, or exploration, or for the
opening of an entrie & passage into vnknowne and farre distant partes, or for the
furnishing of monie, and other provisions in time of warres, and dearth, or lastly, for the
service and honor of the Prince, and Countrie abroad’. In The Cities Advocate,
published in 1629 but written over a decade earlier, Edmund Bolton insists that
apprenticeship to a city trade, a practice not uncommon with the younger sons of gentry,

50 Theodore B. Leinwand, The City Staged: Jacobean City Comedy, 1603-1613 (Wisconsin: University of
52 John Wheeler, A Treatise of Commerce: Wherein Are Shewed the Commodities Arising by a Well
Ordered and Ruled Trade, such as that of the Society of Merchants Adventurers Is Proued to Be (London,
1601), pp. 6, 8.
does not invalidate their status: he argues that 'the ancient wisedome, and the like ancient bounty of our Sages, did euer leaue the gates of Honor open to City-Arts, and to the mysteries of honest gaine, as fundamentall in Common-weale'. I would argue that representations of merchants in theatres such as the Fortune and the Red Bull should be seen in the context of these attempts to dignify their work as socially useful and morally unblemished.

The first play I want to examine might seem not to be about mercantile work as such, but rather the work of the craftsman: *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, by Thomas Dekker, recounts the rise of Simon Eyre from shoemaker to Lord Mayor of London, his feasting of London's prentices, and his building of Leadenhall. The play seems to fall very much into the genre of civic mythography that Manley identifies: James Knowles sees it as both 'transforming Eyre into a City hero in the mould of Dick Whittington or Sir Thomas Gresham and providing a mythology for the foundation of Leadenhall and its associated trading privileges'. The historical Eyre was not a humble shoemaker but a woollen-draper, as various critics have pointed out; by making him a craftsman rather than a merchant, Dekker renders his rise more spectacular. The play's principal source, Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, makes a similar alteration; Dekker, however, is 'far less interested than Deloney in the maneuvers by which Eyre founded his fortune'. In *The Gentle Craft*, which was entered into the Stationers' Register in 1597, it is made quite clear that Eyre's sudden enrichment is due, not to his industry as a shoemaker, but to a somewhat deceitful mercantile transaction. Eyre hears from John,

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53 Edmund Bolton, *The Cities Advocate, in this Case or Qves tion of Honor and Armes; Whether Apprentiship Extinguished Gentry?* (London, 1629), sigs A3r-[A4r].


56 Price, p. 53.
his French journeyman, of a Greek merchant who wants to get rid of his goods covertly and is therefore prepared to sell them at the discount price of £3000. Later that evening, his wife becomes agitated when he fails to come down to dinner; he tells her about the merchant, but bemoans the fact that he lacks the money he needs to buy his goods. His wife advises him to claim to be acting for an alderman of the city, then

in the morning goe with John the Frenchman to the Grecian Merchant, and with good discretion driue a sound bargaine with him, for the whole fraught of the ship, and thereupon giue him halfe a dozen Angells in earnest, and eight and twenty dayes after the deliuerie of the goods, condition to deliuer him the rest of his money.57

He can then return in the afternoon disguised as the alderman, take possession of the commodities, sell them, and repay the merchant. The discussion that leads up to this idea is prominent in the narrative, and it is made clear that – at his wife’s suggestion – Eyre is making money by deceitful means, claiming to be an individual with far more capital than he actually has in order to buy the goods on credit. In *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, however, explanation of how Eyre comes to be able to purchase the goods is relegated to a brief discussion between his foreman and his journeyman:

HODGE  The truth is *Firk*, that the marchant owner of the ship dares not shew his head, and therefore this skipper that deales for him, for the loue he beares to *Hans*, offers my master *Eyre* a bargaine in the commodities, he shal haue a reasonable day of payment, he may sel the wares by that time, and be an huge gainer himselfe.

FIRKE  Yea, but can my fellow *Hans* lend my master twentie porpentine as an earnest pennie.

HODGE  Portegues thou wouldst say, here they be *Firke*, heark, they gingle in my pocket like saint Mary *Oueries* bels. (ll. 3. 13)58

Later in the scene Eyre dons his disguise; but its purpose, to enable Eyre to obtain a level of credit that would otherwise be unavailable to him, is not made clear. Instead, Dekker stresses what David Scott Kastan calls the ‘proleptic propriety’ of the gown: his

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57 The Novels of Thomas Deloney, ed. by Merritt E. Lawlis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 144.
58 The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-61), i, 40. Further references in the text are to this edition.
foreman Hodge tells him, ‘now you looke like your self master’ (l. 104). The
moment anticipates subsequent scenes where we see Eyre, first with a sheriff’s chain,
and subsequently in his Lord Mayor’s gown – both of which are rightfully his.

Dekker’s unwillingness to focus too closely on the means by which Eyre actually
becomes rich leaves a potential gap at the centre of his narrative of rising status.
Depending on their reading of the play, various critics have placed emphasis on
different ways in which the dramatist fills it. James H. Conover points out that Eyre
uses as a deposit twenty portagues that his journeyman Hans, who is actually the
disguised nobleman Rowland Lacy, has given him. According to the logic of this part
of the plot, which is Dekker’s addition to Deloney, Eyre’s enrichment can be regarded
as a reward for his generosity in employing Lacy. Joel H. Kaplan, by contrast, argues
that we are distracted from the play’s moral ambiguities, such as Lacy’s avoidance of
service in the military campaign that maims Eyre’s journeyman Ralph, and the means of
Eyre’s enrichment, by the ‘sportive madness’ of the shoemaker’s rhetoric; Kastan
makes a similar point, stressing the play’s festive atmosphere and the ‘almost irresistible
image of social unity’ that Dekker creates. Kathleen McLuskie and Ronda A. Arab,
however, both see the shoemaker’s shop as ‘symbolic locus of harmony in the play’, in
McLuskie’s words. Arab regards this as part of a valorisation of the labouring ‘artisan
body’ in the play, which ‘puts work at the center of male identity’. Indeed, I would
argue that Dekker repeatedly tries to convince his audience that it is through hard work

59 David Scott Kastan, ‘Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in The Shoemaker’s
60 James H. Conover, Thomas Dekker: An Analysis of Dramatic Structure, Studies in English Literature,
61 Joel H. Kaplan, ‘Virtue’s Holiday: Thomas Dekker and Simon Eyre’, Renaissance Drama, n.s. 2
(1969), 103-122 (p. 113); Kastan, p. 334.
62 Kathleen McLuskie, Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994),
p. 68.
63 Ronda A. Arab, ‘Work, Bodies and Gender in The Shoemaker’s Holiday’, Medieval and Renaissance
that Eyre has become rich. This idea is most clearly articulated when Hodge, who was Eyre’s foreman and has now had the shop made over to him, exhorts his fellow workers ‘Well said my hearts, plie your worke to day, we loytreed yesterday, to it pell mel, that we may liue to be Lord Maiors, or Aldermen at least’ (iv. 1. 2). The idea that if they work hard they too can become mayors or aldermen implies that Eyre owes his status to his industry. This is a reversal of the truth: Eyre has become rich through the insider knowledge (and the money for a deposit) that he obtained from Hans/Lacy, and his ability to impersonate an alderman. Yet Hodge’s remark cannot merely be written off as being due to his own misunderstanding of the situation, as his is a view of events that the play as a whole appears to sanction. From the beginning of the play Eyre is presented as unusually hardworking, and keen to encourage this virtue in others. At Ralph’s departure, when Jane asks what will happen to her, he replies ‘Let me see thy hand laine, this fine hand, this white hand, these prettie fingers must spin, must card, must worke, worke you bombast cotton-candle-queane, worke for your liuing with a pox to you’ (i. 1. 208). Three scenes later we see him, having risen early, exhorting his servants to do the same: ‘they wallow in the fat brewisse of my bountie, and licke vp the crumbs of my table, yet wil not rise to see my walkes cleansed’ (i. 4. 2). His work-ethic is hardly puritanical – after he has agreed to employ Hans he tells his men to ‘drinke you mad Greeks, and worke like true Troians’ (i. 4. 104) – but it is no less real for that. The motif of hard work is reiterated so frequently that it seems as if Dekker wants to give the impression that it is to this that Eyre owes his rise, and to make his audience forget that it is in fact due to merchandise.

As the remarks of other critics quoted above indicate, emphasis on Eyre’s hard work as a craftsman is only one of several ways in which the actual means of his rise are mystified. Eyre’s career advice to his workmen is particularly unhelpful: ‘bee as mad
knaues as your maister Sim Eyre hath bin, and you shall liue to be Sheriues of London' (III. 2. 136). Perhaps more important than the manner of the mystification is the fact that it occurs at all: in a play that appears to glorify one of London’s worthies, not only are his origins changed from merchant to craftsman, but the fact that he owes his change of fortunes to a mercantile transaction are all but obscured. This would seem to support Laura Caroline Stevenson’s argument that early modern writers who wished to portray merchants in a positive manner had to grapple with the lack of any established idiom in which this newly-powerful group might be praised. She contends that the aristocracy’s ideological hegemony meant that writers could not praise merchants, as it were, for being merchants, ‘for their “diligence”, “thrift”, or financial talents; they praised them for being “magnanimous”, “courteous”, “chivalric”, vassals of the king’. The stress upon Eyre’s industry as a craftsman in The Shoemaker’s Holiday would suggest that the second part of this statement needs at least to be qualified; the first part, however, is well exemplified by the play’s evasiveness with regard to Eyre’s enrichment. I would argue that a persistent tradition of distrust of mercantile work, as much as residual feudalism, is responsible for it.

An apt epigraph on Eyre as he is treated in The Shoemaker’s Holiday might be a comment made by Old Fortunatus, in Dekker’s play of that name, to his two sons: ‘make not inquirie, | How I came rich: I am rich, let that suffice’ (1. 2. 189). The two plays were performed at Court only a few days apart over Christmas 1599-1600, a fact which should dissuade the critic from inflexible assumptions about their being written for citizen audiences. It is worth pointing out, though, that the triumph of Virtue over Fortune at the end of Old Fortunatus, a detail which only makes sense as an amendment

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65 Hoy, I, 18, 87.
for Court, is a somewhat compromising reversal of ideas explicitly expressed elsewhere in the play, and is evidently part of what Henslowe got when he paid Dekker on 31 November (sic) 1599 'for the altrenge of the booke of the wholl history of fortewnatus', and on 12 December 'for the eande of fortewnatus for the corte'. He had already made three payments to Dekker in November for 'abooke cald the hole hystory of ffortunatus', which seems to be a rewriting of the 'fortunatus' performances of which Henslowe's diary records in 1595-96; whether this earlier, lost version was by Dekker is unknown.\(^\text{66}\) Old Fortunatus is based on a German Volksbuch of 1509, whose first known English translation dates from the middle of the seventeenth century.\(^\text{67}\) Hoy identifies the main differences between the play and its source as firstly, its extreme compression, and secondly, its moralised reading of the characters of Fortunatus's two sons who, after his death, inherit the magic purse given him by Fortune, and the wishing hat which he has stolen from the Soldan of Babylon. Ampedo's refusal to use the magic gifts for his enrichment makes him appear virtuous in contrast to his prodigal brother Andelocia, but Vertue condemns them both at the end of the play: Ampedo 'made no vse of me, but like a miser, | Lockt vp his wealth in rustie barres of sloth' (V. 2. 275).

Hoy, however, does not mention a less obvious alteration by Dekker (or his predecessor of the 1590s) which has a more subtle, but also a more pervasive, effect on the play. Although Old Fortunatus is set firmly in the past, and the main characters are from Cyprus, much of its idiom is that of contemporary London: in particular, the prodigal Andelocia, and his servant Shadow, recall the pamphlets of Greene, and anticipate Middletonian comedy. When we first meet Andelocia, as yet unaware of his father's sudden enrichment by Fortune, he is lamenting the meanness of his fellow men: 'gold, which ryseth like the sunne out of the East Indies, to shine vpon euery one, is like a

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\(^{67}\) Hoy, I, 74.
Conie taken napping in a Pursenet, and suffers his glistring yellow face deitie to be
lapt vp in Lambskins' (l. 2. 77). He pines for the consumer goods to which his credit
will not extend: 'I am more then mad, to see silkes and veluets, lie crowding together in
Mercers shops, as in prisons, onely for feare of the smell of waxe' (l. 2. 102).
Predictably, after his father's magic purse has solved his financial problems, when we
next see him the stage direction describes him as 'very gallant' (ll. 2); the prodigal has
lost at dice and tries to borrow money from his servant. Later in the scene, when Old
Fortunatus's corpse is dragged away by Fortune and her satyrs, Shadow tells the
brothers 'by this meanes the charges of a Tombe is sau'd, and you being his heyres,
may doe as many rich Executors doe, put that money in your purses, and giue out he
dyed a begger' (ll. 2. 356). Not only the reference to the East Indies, but more generally
the whole atmosphere of these scenes, bring the old tale firmly into the 1590s; I would
argue that they also change the meaning of Old Fortunatus's enrichment in the play.
Within this context, it is not just a story of rags to riches (or rather, rags back to riches,
since there are indications at l. 2. 184 and III. 1. 318-23 that the family had not always
been impoverished): the modernising touches encourage a perception of it in terms of
the contemporary economic scene, where merchants were not only 'very rich indeed'
but also 'usually made the bulk of their fortune in one generation'.^ 68 Men such as Lionel
Cranfield and Hugh Myddleton did not inherit wealth but, like Fortunatus, acquired it
(even if being 'the younger sons of old gentry families' gave them a head-start).^ 69 The
rise of Fortunatus is explicitly a commentary on spectacular enrichment, though
Fortune, who decides to advance him to vex the souls of the kings whom she leads
chained (l. 1. 141), talks of her power to 'create Emperours and kings' and 'tumble
Princes from their thrones' (l. 1. 103, 106) rather than her responsibility for merchant

wealth. However, Fortunatus's description of his purse as 'an Indian mine in a
Lambs skinne' (l. 1. 334) recalls Marlowe's Barabas, with his 'Infinite riches in a little
roome'; *The Jew of Malta*, like *Old Fortunatus*, was in the repertory of the Admiral's
Men, who performed it regularly throughout the 1590s. Whether the allusion is
intentional is less important than the fact that a reference to vast, portable wealth in a
play of the 1590s does not operate in a vacuum, but is likely to call to mind specifically
mercantile fortunes, real and fictional. Similarly, the fact that Fortunatus gives bags of
gold to several monarchs illustrates his wealth and power, but also has a historical
analogue in the reliance of England's rulers on merchant capital. Even Fortune's
instruction that the magic purse's 'vertue ends when thou and thy sonnes end' calls to
mind dramatic analogues for the dissipation of a merchant's wealth by his prodigal son,
as with Asotus in *Cynthia's Revels* and Sim in *Michaelmas Term*.

This is by no means to say that *Old Fortunatus* is 'about' merchant wealth; clearly, it
is an updated folk-tale, not a city comedy. However, by giving the play the atmosphere
of contemporary London, Dekker (intentionally or not) encourages us to apply what it
has to say about riches to those who did become rich in the commercial environment of
the late Elizabethan period. As such, it is noteworthy that such an explicitly moral play
is wholly unconcerned with the rights and wrongs of accumulation, and instead focuses
only on expenditure, whether parsimonious, as in Vertue's judgement on Ampedo
quoted above, or excessive, as Andelocia recognises his own to have been:

Riches and knowledge are two gifts diuine.
They that abuse them both as I haue done,
To shame, to beggerie, to hell must runne. (v. 2. 173)

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Andelocia’s comment to the thief of his purse, ‘Ile teach you to liue by the sweate of other mens browes’, briefly and ironically foregrounds his own transgression of the divine exhortation to labour in Genesis 3. 19 (v. 2. 7); otherwise, speculation as to whether any stigma attaches to wealth so quickly and easily acquired – whether, as Mulcaster puts it, ‘the vilest diuices be the readiest meanes to become most wealthy’ – is forestalled. In its place is the magical fact of the purse, whose operations must be concealed. Giving it and the hat to his sons, the dying Fortunatus instructs them to ‘neuer bewray | What vertues are in them; for if you doe, | Much shame, much griefe, much daunger followes you’ (ll. 2. 310). The magic purse occupies a position in the play similar to that of Eyr’s work as a shoemaker, his madcap demeanour, his hospitality, and the other ways in which attention is distracted from the actual way in which he makes his fortune in The Shoemaker’s Holiday. It mystifies the process of accumulation.

Merchants figure prominently in the two plays that Dekker wrote with John Webster for performance at Paul’s, Westward Ho (1604) and Northward Ho (1605). Their business dealings, however, are all but invisible in the plays, which concentrate rather on the sexual tensions between citizens and gentry. Like the performing of The Shoemaker’s Holiday and Old Fortunatus at Court, their treatment of the citizens precludes simplistic assertions about the respective demographic constituencies of audiences in the public and private theatres. Although Westward Ho treats its merchants with a certain amount of ridicule, the play’s sympathies may be said to lie more with them than with the gallants, in that the merchants’ wives remain chaste in the face of temptation. In Northward Ho, a citizen restores his chaste wife’s reputation after she is

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slandered by two gallants who have tried and failed to seduce her. These two plays seem, therefore, to lend weight to Gurr’s view of the Paul’s company as ‘shifting towards the citizen side as time went on’.73

Kathleen McLuskie has argued that Dekker’s ‘later work for the public theatres shows the influence of new styles of comedy together with a new attitude to sexuality and the ways in which it could be represented’; and indeed, *1 The Honest Whore* (1604), which Dekker wrote with Middleton for Prince Henry’s Men, may owe the darker sexual themes of its titular plot to Dekker’s experience writing for a children’s company.74 Peter Ure has suggested that Middleton was responsible for the action referred to in the play’s subtitle, ‘the humours of the patient man and the longing wife’, and that the change in the character of Candido, the patient linen-draaper, which he discerns in *2 The Honest Whore* (1604-05) is due to that dramatist’s absence. He points out that Middleton had already depicted one patient man, Quieto, in his earlier play *The Phoenix* (1603-04).75 Quieto’s patience, however, is very different to Candido’s, consisting specifically in a dislike of lawsuits: he is a ‘quiet, suffering, and unlawyer’d man’, who having been ‘mad, stark mad, nine years together’ as a result of ‘Going to law’, has now recovered, and goes about curing others of the same malady.76 In the absence of conclusive evidence that one playwright was responsible for the honest whore plot, and one for the patient man, it is reasonable to consider Candido as much Dekker’s creation as Middleton’s.

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73 Gurr, p. 161.
74 McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood*, p. 115.
One argument for seeing Candido as a joint effort is *The Honest Whore*’s ambivalence as to how he ought to be regarded. In some respects the play presents him as a ridiculous, even contemptible figure. In the second scene, his wife Viola describes him to her brother Fustigo:

VIOLA. I am married to a man that has wealth enough, and wit enough.
FUSTIGO. A linnen Draper I was tolde sister.
VIOLA. Very true, a graue Cittizen; I want nothing that a wife can wish from a husband: but heeres the spite, hee haz not all things belonging to a man.
FUSTIGO. Gods my life, hee’s a verie mandrake, or else (God blesse vs) one a these whiblins, and thats woorse, and then all the children that he gets lawfully of your body sister, are bastards by a statute.
VIOLA. O you runne ouer me too fast brother, I haue heard it often said, that hee who cannot be angry, is no man. I am sure my husband is a man in print, for all things else, saue onely in this, no tempest can moue him. (I. 2. 54)

Although, despite Fustigo's comic misapprehension, Candido is not a eunuch, it is nevertheless repeatedly insinuated that his refusal to get angry compromises his masculinity, and is unnatural: he is later described as ‘the monstrous patient man’ (I. 4. 7). When Fustigo suggests that Viola anger Candido by cuckolding him, she responds, ‘Puh, he would count such a cut no vnkindenes’ (I. 2. 94); her words are borne out by his behaviour when Fustigo pretends to be a suitor, and starts taking liberties with Viola. Candido tells his protesting journeyman,

Peace, George, when she has reapt what I haue sown, Sheele say, one grayne tastes better of her owne, Then whole sheaues gatherd from anothers land: Wit’s neuer good, till bought at a deare hand. (III. 1. 31)

He is apparently confident enough in his wife’s preference for him to allow himself to be cuckolded. One way we might read this is in the light of the traditional association, identified by Douglas Bruster, of merchants and craftsmen with cuckoldry. Two of the reasons he suggests for the link are firstly, that patient, methodical labour is often seen as unmanly, and secondly, that the merchant has to let his money and goods pass into
others' hands, and that it is appropriate for this attitude to extend to his wife. Both of these reasons seem applicable to Candido. As I shall explain later, he is as patient with regard to his work as he is with regard to his wife; and, discussing her apparent infidelity, he seems to view her merely as a commodity, in that she does not lose her value by being passed from hand to hand: 'when I touch her lip, I shall not feele his kisses, no nor misse | Any of her lip: no harme in kissing is' (III. 1. 38). He refuses to get angry when a gallant, for a wager, tries to annoy him by demanding a pennyworth of lawn, cut from the centre of the piece: there is an implicit analogy with cuckoldry in that while the sheet is physically almost identical to what it was, it has been symbolically devalued.

Candido’s relaxed attitude to his wife’s chastity, and the extent to which other characters see his patience as unmanly (‘ist possible that Homo, | Should be nor man, nor woman: not once mood [...] Sure hees a pigeon, for he has no gall’, I. 5. 106) are not the only ways in which he is made to seem ridiculous. He goes to the senate house wearing a carpet because his wife has locked the trunk containing his robe, and he refuses to show anger by breaking it open; beaten up by thugs who mistake him for his apprentice, he thanks them for warming him up; ‘besides I had decreed | To haue a vaine prickt, I did meane to bleede’ (IV. 3. 105). He even remains unmoved when his wife succeeds in having him incarcerated in Bedlam. However, Candido is also given a role of moral exemplar in the play, and this sits uneasily with his status as comic butt. In the final scene, when he is freed from the madhouse, he continues to speak of his patience in terms that emphasise its importance as a Christian virtue:

It makes men looke like Gods; the best of men
That ere wore earth about him, was a sufferer,
A soft meeke, patient, humble, tranquill spirit,
The first true Gentleman that euer breathd. (v. 2. 491)

His invocation of the example of the suffering Christ makes it difficult to contradict him, at least on moral grounds. He emerges from his ordeal victorious, and it is his wife who admits defeat: 'Forgiue me, and ile vex your spirit no more' (l. 479).

I have dwelt on the ambivalence with which Candido is treated in *I The Honest Whore* because it is something that should be borne in mind when assessing the depiction of his work, an area in which Dekker departs from his previous practice. Whereas *The Shoemaker's Holiday* eschews representation of mercantile work (as I have argued, because of its supposed moral dubiousness), here the linen-draper is shown at work in his shop. As I have already mentioned, he carries through into his working life the patience he displays with regard to his wife, and this is particularly evident in the scene with the pennyworth of lawn. Although Candido is initially surprised at the request ('Our wares doe seldome meete such customers', l. 5. 70), Castruchio's threat to take his custom elsewhere immediately changes his mind. He ignores the protests of his wife: 'Such words will driue away my customers' (l. 94). When another gallant, Fluello, tries to make him confess to being irritated, he insists 'He has my ware, I haue his money fort' (l. 113). He goes on:

We are set heere to please all customers,
Their humours and their fancies: – offend none:
We get by many, if we leese by one.
May be his minde stood to no more then that,
A penworth serues him, and mongst trades tis found,
Deny a penworth, it may crosse a pound.
Oh, he that meanes to thriue, with patient eye
Must please the diuell, if he come to buy. (l. 121)

Although in one respect the incident contributes to our impression of Candido as a ridiculous figure, his explanation of his behaviour is noteworthy. Spoiling the lawn might appear foolhardy, but it is in his long-term financial interests to give his
customers what they want; indeed, his wife’s avowal to Fustigo that Candido ‘haz wealth enough’ indicates that this philosophy has served him well. Theodore Leinwand views it cynically: ‘He breaks the circle of gulling with his patience as he consistently refuses to be inflamed, but he paradoxically initiates a more subtle form of gulling as he uses his patience for profit.’\(^7\) I would argue, however, that in view of the validation of his behaviour at the end of the play, it makes more sense to see his patience here as morally exemplary, albeit comic. In that case, the portrayal of him by Middleton and Dekker is remarkable, as an instance of mercantile work being presented in a positive light. It implies that a merchant can make a profit without either ‘doubleness of toong’ or ‘violation of faith’.

If the ambivalence surrounding Candido in *The Honest Whore* does indeed derive from the play’s joint authorship, then *2 The Honest Whore*, which appears to be wholly Dekker’s creation, suggests the sense of his ridiculousness comes largely from Middleton. The problematic imputation of effeminacy is diminished when Candido’s second wife, who at their wedding had appeared to be as domineering as the first, kneels before him: ‘I disdaine | The wife that is her husbands Soueraigne’ (II. 1. 108). At the end of the play the Duke, who in part one had said that ‘Twere sinne all women should such husbands haue. | For every man must then be his wiues slaue’ (V. 2. 512), is much more positive in his verdict on Candido, whom he invites to become a courtier: ‘A Patient man’s a Patteme for a King’ (V. 2. 497). Candido’s patience in the face of provocation persists, however, as does his insistence that it is good for business. The lawn scene from part one is reprised when gallants encourage an Irish footman to get angry in Candido’s shop and tear some cambric to pieces; his response is familiar:

> My Customers doe oft for remnants call,

\(^7\) Leinwand, *The City Staged*, p. 71.
These are two remnants now, no losse at all [...] 
Thanke you Gentlemen, 
I vse you well, pray know my shop agen. (III. 3. 119)

Indeed, in its positive portrayal of citizens 2 The Honest Whore goes further than its predecessor, giving Candido a speech in praise of humility as being characteristic of them as a class. When at his wedding feast three gallants laugh at the tall hat of one of the guests, this is Candido's cue to praise the round cap worn by citizens as illustrative of the values to which they subscribe:

that's the Cap which you see swels not hye,  
For Caps are Emblems of humility;  
It is a Citizens badge, and first was wore  
By' th Romanes. (I. 3. 40)

The citizen allegiance of 2 The Honest Whore is more explicit than that of its predecessor; both plays, however, portray mercantile work as entirely compatible with moral rectitude.

If the two parts of The Honest Whore can be seen as progressions from The Shoemaker's Holiday in that Dekker finds a way to present mercantile work positively, then If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is in It (1611-12), played by the Queen's Men at the Red Bull, is a further progression in its highly negative and satirical portrayal of the merchant Barterville. In the first scene we see Pluto complaining about his devils' failure to bring enough souls to Hell; he sends three of them off, disguised respectively as a friar, a courtier, and a 'a cittie-diuel', to corrupt more (I. 1. 115). The inhabitants of friary and Court, though virtuous before the devils' arrival, are quickly seduced to sin; however, Lurchall, the third devil, finds his task more difficult:

what paines a poore Diuell  
Takes to get into a Merchant? hees so ciuill,  
One of Hell must not know him, with more ease  
A Diuell may win ten Gallants, then one of these. (II. 2. 4)
The city is presented as less corruptible than friary or Court, the merchant as more virtuous than the gallant; evidently, as in *The Honest Whore*, merchandise is quite compatible with moral rectitude. All is not lost for Lurchall, however; as he remarks to himself,

> th’ast found
> A Master, who more villenie has by hart,
> Then thou by rote; See him but play his owne part,
> And thou doest Hell good seruice; *Bartervile,*
> Theres in thy name a Haruest makes mee smile. (II. 2. 11)

The joke is that, as in Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* of four years later, a devil comes to earth and finds himself outclassed in villainy. As in a coney-catching pamphlet or Middletonian city comedy, the means by which Bartervile acquires his riches are made quite clear. He explains his intention to defraud a gallant ‘bound | To pay four hundred Crownes to free his landes | Fast morgag’de to mee’ between the hours of one and two by deceiving him as to the time (II. 2. 17); although his initial stratagem fails, at Lurchall’s suggestion he takes the money and flings it among his own so that it cannot be counted, and the lands are forfeit.

However, while the play departs from Dekker’s previous practice in not only showing a merchant at work but in depicting that work as dishonest, it also stresses Bartervile’s exceptional nature. He is the only corruptible merchant Lurchall can find; in Hell at the start of the play Pluto makes a similar complaint, when he commands,

> Be thou a cittie-diuell, make thy hands
> Of Harpies clawes, which being on courtiers lands
> Once fastend, ne’re let loose, the Merchant play,
> And on the Burse, see thou the flag display
> Of politicke banck-ruptisme: traine vp as many
> To fight vnder it, as thou canst, for now’s not any
> That breake, (theile breake their necks first). (I. 1. 115)

Although he invokes the stereotype of the grasping merchant, eager to appropriate the lands of his social superiors, which is familiar from Middleton, it is only to discard it.
There are no merchants prepared to ruin their creditors by declaring themselves bankrupt. Essentially the play's attitude towards the morality of mercantile work is the same as that of *The Honest Whore*: making profits is quite compatible with upright behaviour. Bartervile is not corrupt because, for example, he exploits shortages of commodities, charges too high a price, or lies about the quality of his goods: his wrongdoing lies in activities, such as forcing gallants to forfeit their bonds, which lie outside the sphere of simply buying and selling.

The sense that Bartervile is unrepresentative of the merchant community as a whole is reinforced in a later scene when, having perjured himself in court, he is mysteriously struck down, and the King gives away his office of Receiver. Immediately afterwards, the good courtier Octavio enters with petitions from

> Fiue hundred white heads, and scarce ten good hats,
> Yet haberdashers too, of all trades some,
> Crying out they are vndon [...]  
> by such as you are, who goe gay,
> Weare't out, booke downe more, set to their hands but neuer pay;
> Neuer in deare yeares was there such complayning
> Of poore staru'd seruants, or (when plagues are raigning)
> Mournse orphans so and widwooses, as those doe
> That owe these sorrowfull papers. (III. 3. 68)

He asks if any present are in debt to merchants, mercers, or tailors, and requests that they be made to jet 'In their owne sattins, pay for what they ha tane, | And these will goe lesse braue, tother lesse complaine' (l. 80). Dekker reverses the dynamic familiar from plays like Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* and *Your Five Gallants*: merchants who extend credit are represented, not as grasping usurers, but as the victims of debtors who refuse to pay up, to be ranked with widows and orphans. Once again Bartervile, who enriches himself through fraudulent moneylending practices, is made to seem the exception to the mercantile rule.
As well as these two contrasting portrayals, however, there is arguably a third representation of mercantile work in the play. In the first scene, Pluto's complaints about the emptiness of Hell are a response to Charon's threats to go on strike, refusing to be 'Hels drudge' any longer on account of the 'Scuruy fare' which is all he gets for his work (l. 1. 2, 8). Pluto accuses him of overpricing:

we shall haue thee
(As market-folkes in dearth,) so damned-deere,
Men will not come to hell, crying out th'are heere
Worse rackt then th'are in tavernes. (l. 24)

Charon blames the devils' idleness: 'If I must worke, let these | Thy Prentices, plye their occupation, | T'vphold hells Kingdome, more must worke then one' (l. 55). Pluto accordingly chastises them: 'Were you good Hell-hounds, euery day should bee | A Symon-and-Jude, to crowne our bord with Feasts | Of blacke-eyde soules each minute' (l. 71). He sends the three devils off in disguise, one of them promising to 'plye our thrift so well, | Thou shalt be forc'd to enlarge thy Iayle of Hell' (l. 135). The corruption of souls is discussed using the language of mercantile work: devils are apprentices who can be thrifty or idle. Souls are treated like commodities or money which the devils labour to accumulate, hoping that Hell will have to be enlarged as if it were a strongroom. When, later on in the play, they comment on their performance, they continue to use this idiom. At the priory, Shacklesoul says that Pluto never had 'Jorneyman deserude such fee', and tries to 'cast vp my reckonings, what I ha won | In this first voiage' (l. 3. 195). Towards the end of the play, Lurchall says to Pluto of Bartervile,

I am bartring for one soule, able to lade
An Argocy; if Citie-oathes, if periuries,
Cheatings, or gnawing mens soules by vsuries,
If all the villanies (that a Citty can,)
Are able to get the a sonne, I ha found that man. (iv. 2. 69)
Like Shacklesoul, he uses the metaphor of a merchant voyage to describe his success: the list of Bartervile’s attributes is faintly reminiscent of the Skipper’s boast in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* that his ship contains ‘Sugar, Cyuet, Almonds, Cambricke, and a towsand towsand tings’ (ll. 3. 119), and indeed Pluto, exhorting his prentices to labour, comes across in the play rather as a demonic Simon Eyre.

Primarily, the portrayal of the corruption of souls in terms of mercantile work serves to lighten the tone of the play: the use of everyday language to describe serious affairs prevents its morality from becoming too oppressive. At the same time, though, the devils’ description of their work undercuts the broadly favourable representation of merchandise in the play by presenting a vision of pure accumulation divorced from moral considerations. In making Bartervile an example of exceptional depravity, Dekker fails to engage with the moral questions surrounding mercantile work as more ordinarily practised. His depiction of Hell, however, can be read as an intended or unintended representation of mercantile work as carried out, not in a moral context like Candido’s, but with simple acquisition as its object.

*If This Be Not a Good Play* is apparently the last extant play by Dekker from before his imprisonment for debt in 1612. His later work, such as *The Welsh Ambassador* and *Match Me in London*, leaves the world of merchants and tradesmen for that of Fletcherian tragicomedy, and is not considered here. In the extant works up to 1611, however, I have identified an evolution in how Dekker reconciles the negative tradition surrounding mercantile work with the citizen audience I have posited for his plays. He begins by marginalising merchandise, as in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, the mystification

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79 Hoy, iii, 139-45. Hoy suggests a date of c. 1619-20 for *Match Me*, though it could conceivably date from just before Dekker’s imprisonment.
of enrichment in *Old Fortunatus* can be seen as symbolic of this. *1 and 2 The Honest Whore* depart from this practice by representing mercantile work onstage, while insisting on its compatibility with Christian ethics; the depiction of Candido in the sequel is particularly positive, with Dekker minimising the ambivalence which surrounded him in the first part. Finally, in *If This Be Not a Good Play* Dekker goes so far as to represent a merchant engaged in deceitful practice, though his exceptional status in this regard is emphasised. The depiction of Pluto and the other devils, however, hints at what mercantile work might be like when not governed by Christian ethics; although, since it is confined to the demonic realm, this theme may be said to be marginal.

Dekker’s positive depictions of mercantile work may be related, not only to the citizen audience at the Fortune but also to his own origins, as Cyrus Hoy suggests:

> Born and bred in London, he is as well acquainted with the city’s capacity to breed vice and disease as he is with the daily toil required to make a living there; yet the city remained for him a place of wonders where honest industry combined with a shrewd business sense can raise a man from humble tradesman to offices of civic dignity.\(^\text{80}\)

We might accordingly expect a slightly different attitude from Thomas Heywood, whose biographer identifies him as the son of a Lincolnshire clergyman and who, in his *Apology for Actors*, ‘speaks with evident familiarity of the university, the studies and the way of life’ at Cambridge.\(^\text{81}\) He may well have begun his literary career in 1594 with *Oenone and Paris*, ‘a close imitation’ of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* of which Joseph Quincy Adams argues that Heywood’s authorship is ‘a fair probability’.\(^\text{82}\)

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However, his early drama seems to presume a citizen audience. *The Four Prentices of London* seems, on the basis of Heywood's remark in the first extant edition (1615) that 'as Plays were then some fifteene or sixteene yeares agoe it was in the fashion', to date from the late 1590s (Epistle, l. 9). In it, the four sons of the dispossessed Earl of Bulleine become apprenticed to London trades; however, their noble blood asserts itself and all abscond to fight in the Holy Land, though vowing to wear the arms of their respective companies should they prove victorious. The play is thus a persuasive illustration of Stevenson's argument that positive representations of merchants were shaped by the aristocracy's ideological hegemony, with the livery companies achieving the honour of a nobleman apprenticing his sons to them: 'all high borne, | Yet of the Citty-trades they have no scorne' (l. 34).  

Barbara Baines and Fenella Macfarlane both point out that the play stresses the brothers' prentice identity more than their noble lineage: they depart for Jerusalem resolving to 'try what London Prentises can doe' (l. 226), and at a moment of crisis, two brothers separately express the wish that they had their fellow prentices in battle with them (l. 776).  

Nevertheless, it is still the case that they are praised for their chivalric deeds, not for any more everyday component of an apprentice's work.

Much the same is true of the first part of *Edward IV* (1592-99), where London's citizens are glorified by being 'placed [...] in a heroic setting': they defend the city, and express their loyalty to the King, by fending of the siege of the usurping Falconbridge.  

As Charles Crupi notes, however, although 'the play mythologizes heroic citizenry and

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85 Stevenson, p. 112.
identifies loyalty with virtue, it simultaneously demystifies the relationships supported by that loyalty. The citizens prevail ‘without the helpe, eyther of king, | Or any, but of God, and our owne selues’: when at the start of the play Edward is told of the rebellion, he procrastinates, determining to spend the night ‘in feast and iollitie’ with his new queen. As he sheepishly tells the victorious Londoners, ‘you may condemn vs | Of too much slacknes in such vrgent need’; he later goes on to seduce Jane Shore, the wife of one of the most courageous fighters. Edward’s own legitimacy as a monarch, indeed, is questionable given his overthrow of Henry VI, ‘held a wretched prisoner in the Towre’. The play’s sympathies are overwhelmingly with London’s citizens and apprentices, whose heroic deeds of the past are repeatedly alluded to, rather than with the idle, adulterous, and possibly illegitimate king, the usurping aristocrat Falconbridge, or the rustics whom he leads in rebellion.

Although the auspices under which The Four Prentices was first performed are unknown, its title page advertises that it was subsequently performed at the Red Bull; the two parts of Edward IV were played by Derby’s Men, whose patron was the son of the Lord Strange to whose company Shakespeare seems to have belonged in the early 1590s. Even if their content did not strongly suggest that they were intended for a citizen audience, evidence (albeit literary) that this was the case for at least one of them comes in Beaumont’s The Knight of the Burning Pestle, where the Citizen is evidently familiar with ‘the play of the Foure Prentices of London, where they tosse their pikes so’. As I mentioned earlier, the Citizen also seems to approve a play called ‘the life and death of sir Thomas Gresham’. The precise relation of this play to the two parts of

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88 The Knight of the Burning Pestle, IV. 47.
If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody is uncertain. Gresham has only a walk-on role in the first, which is concerned mainly with the imprisonment of Elizabeth prior to her reign; the second does not depict his death, and concludes with a triumphant representation of England’s victory over the Armada. Madeleine Doran suggests that the text represents an amalgamation of prior plays about Gresham and about Elizabeth; Clark makes a similar suggestion, thinking the latter may have may have been the lost Lady Jane, parts of which are believed to survive in *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. The issue is unresolved; however, since the story of Gresham, which takes up the majority of the second part, is unified within itself, the textual problem is of small relevance here. More important is the fact that Beaumont’s play appears to confirm what we might already expect, that 2 If You Know Not Me, with its focus upon the charitable deeds of a London worthy from the recent past, was popular with citizen audiences. Until recently the dominant view of Heywood’s play has been as ‘a piece of banal mercantile hagiography’ in which ‘Sir Thomas Gresham is held up as the peerless merchant’. However, critics have increasingly focused upon problems and inconsistencies which they perceive in the play’s ostensible celebration of merchandise. Kathleen McLuskie argues that the play’s ambiguity derives from its episodic structure: in order to fill the play, the action has to be varied by other plots involving Hobson and his shop, and the trickery of Gresham’s nephew John. In these actions Heywood draws on different, rather livelier dramatic traditions and the effect is to disrupt the fantasy of the magnanimous merchant.

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89 Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody Part II*, ed. by Madeleine Doran (Oxford: Malone Society, 1935), p. xvii (further references in the main text are to this edition, by line); Clark, pp. 31-32.
90 See also *Eastward Ho*, iv. 2. 70: ‘I hope to see thee one o’the Monuments of our Citty, and reckon’d among her worthies, to be remembred the same day with the Lady Ramsey, and graue Gresham: when the famous fable of Whittington, and his Pusse, shalbe forgotten, and thou and thy Actes become the Posies for Hospitals, when thy name shall be written upon Conduits, and thy deeds plaid i’ thy life time, by the best companies of Actors, and be call’d their Get-peny.’ Ben Jonson, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy and E. M. Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), iv, 588.
Barbara Baines, however, complains about the 'inadequacy of the moral perspective inherent in Heywood's treatment of certain characters'. She points in particular to the moment when Gresham, shortly after having 'daunce[d] all my care away' (I. 1532) to show his indifference at having lost a sugar monopoly for which he paid the late King of Barbary sixty thousand pounds, pays a further sixteen thousand for a pearl to be ground up and added to a cup of wine which he drinks as a toast to Queen Elizabeth (1532). 'Gresham’s gesture of drinking the priceless pearl, apparently designed to show his cavalier indifference to money, is downright idiotic [...] and morally problematic in a play that posits charity as the ultimate virtue.' It is perhaps because of such problems that in recent years the play has attracted a degree of attention atypical of Heywood’s works other than *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. The question of whether it simply reflects the inconsistencies of nascent capitalist ideology, or whether Heywood intends a critique of merchant values, implicates the play in debate over the place of the stage in relation to the City. Stevenson argues that Heywood 'asks us to admire Gresham’s ability to spend, even to lose, money', his 'aristocratic conspicuous expenditure'; Theodora Jankowski sees the play as 'historicising and legitimating capitalism'.

Theodore Leinwand, however, argues that the play interrogates the credit economy that was beginning to prevail in England; to regard it as a celebration of merchants 'is to neglect the extent to which *2 If You Know Not Me* explores the embarrassment with which its financiers encumber themselves'.

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93 Baines, p. 33.
Perhaps the fullest examination of the ways in which the play casts doubt upon Gresham’s actions and motivation comes in a recent article by Anita Sherman, who sees the play as an exploration of the ideology of charitable donation at the beginning of the seventeenth century. She writes of Gresham’s dancing and his drinking the pearl,

In my view, the play is distancing itself from Gresham’s wealth. Its ambivalence can be seen in hints about Gresham scattered throughout the play as well as in the presence of Tawneycoat and Hobson whose misfortunes and beliefs disrupt the apparent celebration of wealth.96

I substantially agree, and indeed many of the passages I note in the next few pages are ones which Sherman also identifies as contributing to an ambivalence about Gresham. However, I would argue that rather than ‘distancing itself from Gresham’s wealth’, the play foregrounds the question of how it has been accumulated, and that this interrogation of the morality of mercantile work is inseparable from the theme of charity which Sherman rightly emphasises.

At the very beginning of the play, a Barbary merchant speaks to one of Gresham’s factors in praise of Gresham, and asks, ‘How are his present fortunes reckoned?’ (l. 12). The factor replies, ‘He is a Marchant of good estimate, | Care how to get, and fore-cast to encrease, | (If so they be accounted) be his faults’ (l. 14). The parenthesis indicates that the factor does not consider these to be faults; but the locution leaves the possibility open. The merchant’s response is similarly equivocal: ‘They are especiall vertues, being cleare | From auarice and base extortion’ (l. 17). This may be read as ‘they are especial virtues, since they are clear’, or ‘they are only especial virtues when clear’ from those vices. Gresham himself then appears at the time he has promised, evidently priding himself on his honesty: ‘a Marchants tongue | Should not strike false’ (l. 23). Yet his stated intention ‘To get me a seald Patent from your king | For all your Barbarie Sugar

at a price' may raise more doubts about him (l. 31); even though this monopoly is being offered by a foreign monarch, patents were a controversial issue in Jacobean England, and one that a character had attacked in Heywood’s own *Edward IV*.97 Gresham’s subsequent speech to his prodigal nephew raises more questions about his honesty: John Gresham tells the audience that his uncle has cosened him of his patrimony, an accusation that is repeated later in the play (ll. 170-71, 922-23).

When in the next scene Gresham apprentices his nephew to the haberdasher Hobson, and Hobson offers to accompany Gresham to help him resolve his seven-year-old disagreement with Sir Thomas Ramsey, the focus shifts from the accumulation of money to its expenditure. Hobson suggests that such a long lawsuit is a gross misuse of riches: ‘Ere i’d consume a pennie amongst Lawyers, | Ide gi’ut poore people, bones a me I wold’ (l. 349). Several times in the subsequent scene, where Doctor Nowell, the Dean of Paul’s, presides over the men’s reconciliation, Hobson repeats this charge that lawsuits are a waste of money (ll. 410-21, 482-4, 488-90, 510-7, 538-9); it is the context for Gresham’s decision to bestow his money on the more worthwhile object of the Exchange (ll. 542-60). After dinner two scenes later, Nowell, evidently heartened by Gresham’s impulse to philanthropy, offers to show him and Ramsey

A Gallerie, wherein I keepe the Pictures
Of many charitable Citizens:
That hauing fully satisfied your bodyes,
You may by them learne to refresh your soules. (l. 760)

The citizens he shows them variously maintained armies and built colleges, churches, almshouses, and hospitals. He suggests that they follow the example:

Euen in the mid-day walkes you shall not walke the street,
But widowes orisons, Laysars prayers, Orphans thankes,
Will flye into your eares, and with a ioyfull blush,

97 Heywood, *Edward IV*, sig. F2'.
Make you thanke God that you haue done for them:
When otherwise theil fill you eares with curses,
Crying we feed on woe, you are our Nurses.
O ist not better that yong couples say,
You rais'd vs vp, then you were our decay:
And mothers tongues teach their first borne to sing,
Of your good deeds, then by the bad to wring. (l. 856)

Nowell seems to be portraying mercantile charity as a recompense for the morally
dubious nature of their work: it makes the difference between the poor thanking them as
their benefactors, and excoriating them as their 'decay'. According to this ethic,
Gresham's decision to build the Exchange is a dubious use of money: it does not
obviously benefit the poor, rather being a place where 'Marchants and their wiues,
friend and their friends' can go about their business unthreatened by bad weather (l. 552).

Although Sherman is right to identify charity as a central theme of 2 If You Know Not Me, I would argue that the status accorded mercantile charity in the play – as
restitution for profits that have been made at the expense of the poor – renders it
inseparable from another theme I see as central, the morality of mercantile work.
Heywood's depiction of the relationship between Gresham and his prodigal nephew
also serves to bring merchandise into question. Jack Gresham is something of a rogue,
absconding to France with the hundred pounds his uncle has sent him to collect from his
factor Timothy. When Jack, in order to evade the factor, has him arrested for debt, it
transpires that the ostentatiously puritanical Timothy has stolen five hundred pounds
from his master in order to frequent brothels. It may be the net profit that Gresham
makes out of his nephew's trickery that makes him look indulgently upon him, but
nevertheless his comments to Ramsey are noteworthy:

afore-god it hath done my heart more good,
The knaue had wit to doe so mad a tricke,
Then if he had p[r]ofited me twice so much.
He euer had the name of mad lacke Gresham.

Is the more like his Vncle, Sir Thomas Ramsie,
When I was yong I doe remember well,
I was as very a knaue as he is now.

[...] Ha, ha, mad Jack, Gramercie for this slight,
This hundred pounds makes me thy Vncle right. (I. 956)

It is the hundred pounds Jack has stolen, not the five hundred he has unwittingly saved, that makes Thomas Gresham his uncle; their similarity is in trickery, not in thrift.

Gresham’s recollection of his own youthful knavery implies that Jack’s deceitfulness, rather than being reprehensible, is excellent preparation for a mercantile career. The explicit linkage of uncle and nephew may also lead us to remember Jack’s prodigality when we see Thomas drinking the pearl.

These moments in the play, where Heywood seems to be casting doubt on the moral status of Gresham’s work as a merchant, cause interpretative difficulties. Not only might Heywood’s earlier plays, and the references to Gresham in Eastward Ho and The Knight of the Burning Pestle, lead us to expect that 2 If You Know Not Me should celebrate him, but the dominant movement of the play seems to be in a laudatory direction. It is intensely patriotic, culminating in a depiction of the Armada; the representation of Gresham partakes of this wider nationalism. The building of the Exchange enhances England’s glory: no other city in the world has anything like it (1348-76). The Queen names it the Royal Exchange and knights Gresham, unambiguously validating both. Even the dancing and the pearl-drinking are represented as contributing to national greatness: Ramsey calls him ‘an honour to all English M[a]rchants’, and Gresham tells his spectators that in him they may see ‘A London Marchant | Thus tread on a kings present’ (ll. 1556, 1561-2). The doubts Heywood raises about Gresham, though they cannot be ignored, run against the grain of the play; this might prompt charges of incoherence or ineptitude.
I would argue that a way of reconciling these two opposing tendencies in the play might be found through a reading of Heywood’s much later work, *Londoni Emporia; or, Londons Mercatura*, a pageant written for Ralph Freeman’s inauguration as mayor in 1633. It may very reasonably be objected that the bearing one text has on another written a quarter of a century earlier is doubtful; however, the demands of the pageant placed Heywood in a very similar position to that required of him by the play. It is the only one of his pageants in which Heywood offers an explicit justification of merchandise:

>The mistery whereof hath in the ancient times beene held glorious, and the professors thereof illustrious as those, by whose Adventure and Industry unknowne Countries have beene discovered, Friendship with forreigne Princes contracted, barbarous Nations to humane gentlenesse and courtesie reduced, and all such usefull commodities in forreigne Climats abounding, and in their owne wanting, made conducible and frequent, nay, many of them have not beeone onely the Erectors of brave and goodly structures, but the Founders of great and famous Cities. (l. 41)

The lines above come from the prefatory material; in the pageant proper, the Shepherd praises the cloth trade as ‘that onely Marchandize which brings | All novels wanting heere’ (l. 245), while Mercury explains that by Freeman’s ships, the finest products of distant lands

>comes frequent to our hands.  
And for transportage of some surplus ware,  
Our owne wants furnisheth what we best can spare.  
No rarity for profit or for pleasure,  
But brought to us in an abundant measure. (l. 312)

The merchant is praised for the utility of his work: he exports a country’s surplus, and brings in what it lacks. The even more glowing description from the preface, however, which praises merchants as explorers, ambassadors, bringers of civilisation, importers of necessary wares, and builders of monuments and cities, is immediately followed by an explanation of how ‘Eight Offices of Piety are in a Merchant required’. These are ‘Uprightnesse of Conscience’, ‘A seclusion or separation from all dissembling or
equivocation', 'To abandon all fraud or deceit in bargaining', 'To exercise Justice: which excludeth the practice of Injury, Extortion, and Oppression', 'To lay by all pride', 'Out of his abundance to be open-handed unto all, but especially unto the poor and indigent', 'To bridle the insatiate desire of getting', and 'To renounce all care and trouble of mind, which may hinder Divine contemplation' (l. 53). This is a highly explicit itemisation of the moral dangers of mercantile work, including dissembling, fraud, extortion, and acquisitiveness; all the more so for appearing in a work designed to celebrate, and funded by, London's merchant community. As such, it offers an intriguing parallel to *2 If You Know Not Me*, which praises a London merchant for a citizen audience while casting doubt upon his integrity. I would suggest that the two works are evidence for the view of Heywood that McLuskie extrapolates from *An Apology for Actors*, as 'insisting on the theatre's social and moral status'. The Apology is a polemical defence of Heywood's profession, and as such should not be read as a straightforward statement of aesthetic intent. However, Heywood's statement that plays 'present men with the ugliness of their vices, to make them the more to abhor them' seems eminently applicable to his practice in *2 If You Know Not Me*. Rather than, like Dekker, either ignoring the nature of a merchant's work or insisting on its straightforward compatibility with Christian ethics, Heywood emphasises its problematic aspects, encouraging his audience to emulate that which is praiseworthy, and eschew that which is not.

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99 McLuskie, Dekker and Heywood, p. 6.
100 'An Apology for Actors' (1612) by Thomas Heywood; 'A Refutation of The Apology for Actors' (1615) by I. G., ed. by Richard Perkinson (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1941), sig. G.'
Chapter 6. Women’s Work in Dekker and Heywood

Throughout this thesis I have tried to relate early modern drama to wider social struggles over the meaning of work by concentrating on some of its material aspects, such as actors’ attempts to acquire legitimacy, the theatre’s roots in patronage and propaganda, and companies’ need to attract audiences; and also on the personal and professional aspirations of one writer for the stage, Ben Jonson. I do not consider these to be the only, or indeed necessarily the most important ways in which the world outside the playhouse shaped that within it; however, I have found them useful as being often more readily identifiable than authorial intention, or than the less concrete, though perhaps more pervasive forms of influence that exist at the level of a culture’s unarticulated tensions, desires and fears. The limitations of this strategy become clear, however, when one attempts to make similar connections between the situation of women in early modern England and their representation in the drama. As Kathleen McLuskie puts it, women ‘were less likely to be the producers of literary and theatrical culture and were only problematically its consumers’. ¹ In other words, dramatic

representations of women were largely staged by, and for, men; as far as the theatre's material aspects are concerned, women were decidedly marginal.

This marginality, however, must not be exaggerated: recent theatre history has done much to overturn the assumption that women were entirely excluded from theatrical production in the early modern period. As S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies write, 'contrary to traditional thinking, women did participate in the theatrical culture of the English Renaissance – as authors, translators, performers, spectators and even as part-owners of public playhouses'. Amongst other documents, the collection they edit contains four full-length plays by women: Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antonie* (1595), Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), *Love's Victory* (c. 1621) by Mary Wroth, and *The Concealed Fancies* (c. 1645) by Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish. As for female players, Stephen Orgel points out that 'women commonly appeared as dancers in court masques throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and under the patronage of Henrietta Maria [...] they took speaking roles in court plays as well'. He has evidence of 'two women apparently routinely performing professionally as theatrical singers in 1632'; furthermore, it appears that 'foreign actresses were acceptable on the English public stage, at least from time to time'. Ann Thompson deduces from the material collected in the *Records of Early English Drama* that 'women did indeed take part in unlawful games and dancing (especially morris dancing on Sundays); they acted in Christmas shows and in pageants to entertain royal

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visitors; they were paid for singing, dancing and playing musical instruments; they were exhibited as freaks, and they were granted licences to exhibit freaks'.

Women were also both patrons of and investors in the drama. As Cerasano and Wynne-Davies point out, 'patronage of playing companies by women was a trend begun by Queen Elizabeth I'; when James made royal patronage compulsory, 'women at court were perceived as equal to their male counterparts in this regard'. Anne was patron of two professional theatre companies, Queen Anne’s Men and the Queen’s Revels company; according to a letter written by the French ambassador Beaumont, she attended performances 'in order to enjoy the laugh against her husband'. She was also an important influence in the production of court masques: in his prefaces to *The Masque of Blackness* (II. 21-22) and *The Masque of Queens* (II. 10-13) Jonson credits her creative input. Women also took part in the enterprise of the professional theatre: Susan Baskerville obtained 'genuine financial control over Queen Anne’s company' when she inherited her husband’s share in it in 1612, while the widows Mary Bryan and Margaret Gray bought respectively a share and a half share in the rebuilt Fortune theatre in 1622.

Perhaps the way in which the largest number of women influenced dramatic production, however, was as members of audiences. Women of all classes evidently attended the theatre, from the serving-women whose theatregoing Edward Hake attacked in 1567 to Lady Ann Halkett who in the 1630s grouped together with some

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5 *Renaissance Drama by Women*, pp. 158-59.
8 *Renaissance Drama by Women*, p. 159.
female acquaintances to pay a footman to escort them to plays. In some dramatic texts, such as the epilogue to *As You Like It*, women are addressed as a specific group within the audience; on the basis of such passages, Richard Levin has argued that 'during the Renaissance women were generally regarded as a significant component of the theatre audience, and that their interests and feelings seem to have been taken into account by at least some of the playwrights of the period'. Much of the evidence for female theatregoing in the early modern period, however, comes from male-authored texts which criticise it as immodest and conducive to unchastity. The author of the *Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* wrote of citizens' wives who 'haue euen on their death beds with teares confessed, that they haue received at those spectacles such filthie infections, as haue turned their minds from chast cogitations, and made them of honest women light huswiues'; Stephen Gosson called the theatres 'snares vnto faire women', though it is unclear whether the women are conceived as the threatened or the threat. Jean Howard has suggested that one reason for male disquiet may have been because in the theatre, women became 'unanchored from the structures of surveillance and control “normal” to the culture and useful in securing the boundary between “good women” and “whores”'; indeed, ‘in the theater women were licensed to look – and in a larger sense to judge what they saw and to exercise autonomy – in ways that problematized women’s status as object within patriarchy'. Theatregoing may thus have been a liberating and transgressive act for early modern women.

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Recognition of the many ways in which women did contribute towards theatrical production, however, should not obscure the domination of the professional stage by men. Cerasano and Wynne-Davies acknowledge that ‘none of the plays reproduced here was ever put on in a public theatre’, Orgel that ‘the professional theatre companies of Shakespeare’s time included no women’.\(^{13}\) Female characters were played by men, and their speeches were written by men. As for theatrical patronage, notwithstanding Queen Anne’s alleged fondness for seeing her husband ridiculed onstage, there is no firm evidence that either Queen Anne’s Men or the Children of the Queen’s Revels catered specifically to this taste in their public performances. And it might be argued that even as theatregoers, women had considerably less autonomy than men. The fact that Ann Halkett and her friends needed a male escort if they wanted to attend the theatre appears to confirm Andrew Gurr’s comment that ‘women were presumed to be respectable if they were accompanied by a man, and to be whores if alone’. Admittedly, this statement may be criticised for reproducing the simple distinction between respectable women and whores which, Howard argues, was blurred by the act of theatregoing; furthermore, the documents Gurr uses to support it describe the playgoing habits of gentlewomen or wealthy citizens’ wives, and so may not be applicable to women of all classes.\(^{14}\) However, as will become apparent in the course of this chapter, the view that married women should not leave their home unaccompanied was frequently voiced in early modern English society, and social pressures against their attending the theatre alone may well have compromised their ability to choose what plays to watch, when.

Women’s inferior legal status in early modern England may have had a similar effect. As the author of The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights (1632) put it, ‘Women have no voyse in Parliament, They make no Lawes, they consent to none, they abrogate

\(^{13}\) Renaissance Drama by Women, p. 3; Orgel, p. 4.
none.' By marrying, a woman relinquished most of her property rights: while 'That which the Husband hath is his owne', 'That which the Wife hath is the Husbands'. Mary Prior summarises the situation more fully:

Under common law the legal identity of the married woman was merged with that of her husband. The wife was described as feme coverta. Her husband, her baron, was both her 'sovereign' and 'guardian'. She was incapable of owning property or making contracts.

As well as having repercussions for the status of women's work, as I shall explain later on, this meant that a married woman did not enjoy the same legal right to dispose of her property as her husband did. Clearly, the actual amount of financial independence a woman was allowed would have varied from household to household; but legally speaking, wives who wanted to attend the theatre depended on their husbands' approving the expenditure. The married woman's status as feme coverta should also be borne in mind with regard to the three women identified earlier as theatrical shareholders: each one was a widow, and therefore feme sole, with 'no legal constraints which would handicap her in trade'.

The fact that women do not appear to have written for or acted on the public stage, the ostensible failure of their theatrical patronage to have affected plays' content, the limited nature of their participation in the business of playing, and their restricted autonomy as theatregoers all tend to confirm McLuskie's statement that in the theatre as elsewhere, 'women in the period had a different relationship with their culture than men'. The historian David Underdown finds that early modern playwrights were 'preoccupied by themes of female independence and revolt', but observes that, since

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17 McLuskie, p. 227.
writers for the public stage were male, 'the plays usually reflect the patriarchal consensus'. Lisa Jardine argues that 'educational treatises, pamphlets on manners, spiritual tracts, sermons and literature' all served as propaganda for patriarchy. Other writers, however, have emphasised the difference between the stage and other media of ideological dissemination. Kathleen McLuskie argues that 'Elizabethan dramatists inherited not only a set of ideological assumptions about relations of men and women but also the dramatic structures within which these were enacted'. Commercial imperatives encouraged dramatists to recycle stock characters, plots and ideas about gender that were not always in harmony with one another. Karen Newman makes a similar point about drama's 'liminal position' between elite and popular traditions: 'its generic conventions and rhetorical tropes problematize its representations of femininity'. Furthermore, the possibility that, as I discussed earlier, female theatregoing was a transgressive act that enabled women to watch and judge should discourage a conception of women as passive consumers of patriarchal propaganda. In The Ghost of Richard the Third (1614), Christopher Brooke has the speaker recount women's reactions to the admonitory spectacle of Jane Shore in what appears to be Heywood's Edward IV:

But now her fame by a vild play doth grow;
Whose fate the women so commisserate,
That who (to see my justice on that sinner,)
Drinks not her teares: and makes her fast, their dinner?

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20 McLuskie, p. 124.
By the ghost's estimate, women sympathised with Shore rather than condemning her. Stephen Orgel argues that the very spectacle of male actors dressing up as women may have empowered female playgoers by suggesting that gender was performative rather than innate: 'to see the youth in skirts might be to disarm and socialize him in ways that were specifically female, to see him not as possessor or master, but as companionable and pliable and one of them – as everything, in fact, that the socialized Renaissance woman herself is supposed to be'. Juliet Dusinberre goes even further than this, suggesting that some plays of the period were not inadvertently but deliberately feminist. She regards Shakespeare as having transcended the 'ideas about women' he inherited from his culture: 'Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal'.

However, when one considers the extent of women's exclusion from theatrical production and consumption as detailed above, it seems reasonable to point out that there was little to encourage dramatists to depart from orthodoxy when representing women. The content of Shakespeare's history plays may have been affected by the identity of his patrons, the social composition of audiences at the Red Bull and the Fortune may have influenced playwrights' treatment of merchants; but outside the Court, women do not seem to have had such a stake in the drama that it would have been worthwhile for any writer or company to represent their interests in particular. Levin admits that despite the occasional instances he finds of plays making direct appeals to women, 'men seem to have dominated the audiences and the playwrights'

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23 Orgel, p. 81.
conceptions of those audiences’. Overwhelmingly, in the playhouses, women were spoken of and at rather than for or to.

Given the fact that women’s relationship with the stage was different from men’s, what, culturally speaking, should one imagine theatrical representations of women’s work to be doing? To begin with, as I suggested earlier, one might expect that the drama would repeat and reinforce prevailing assumptions about the nature and status of female labour. Perhaps the fullest insight into these assumptions can be gained from the numerous books on marriage printed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which often discuss the proper division of labour in the marital relationship. Such works are notably consistent in their prescriptions. Firstly, they invariably insist on the importance of male superiority, following Paul’s dictum in Ephesians 5. 22: ‘Wiues, submit your selues vnto your housbands, as vnto the Lord.’

The notion of female submission is perhaps the single feature of marital relations upon which writers treat at greatest length and with greatest vehemence; and it has important implications for the status of a wife’s work. Rather than working for herself, she is her husband’s ‘helper’. As the author of _Covnsele to the Husband: To the Wife Instruction_ (1608) puts it, the good wife ‘laboureth in her place for her husbands quiet, for his health, for his credit, for his wealth, for his happines in his estate more then for her selfe, and counteth...

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28 Dod and Cleaver, sig. F3'; Smith, p. 76.
his in all those respects her owne'. The wife’s subjection, and the fact that her work only has validity when carried out for his benefit, sometimes gives rise to the impression that she is little more than a chattel: Dod and Cleaver write, ‘if we haue regarde vnto commoditie and profite, there is nothing that giueth so much as doth a good wife, no not horses, oxen, servants or farmes’. The comparison implies that the wife is at best a servant, at worst, property.

As well as being subordinate to her husband, the wife is imagined as carrying out a very different form of work. ‘What so euer is to be done without the house / that belongeth to the man / & the woman to studye for thinges within to be done / and to se saued or spent conueniently whatsoeuer he bringeth in.’ The husband invariably carries out productive labour outside the home; the wife stays within it, saving or spending what he has accumulated. The non-productive character of female work is frequently emphasised: ‘That which her care for the most part tendeth vnto, is sauing’. Barnaby Rich, even when stressing that ‘great things comes in’ by the good wife’s diligence in disposing of household goods, says that she brings in ‘nothinge that is of her owne earning, gotten with her owne handes’. Her virtues are negative rather than positive ones: ‘to ouersee and to set all thinge in good order / and to beware that nothynge be loste’, as Miles Coverdale translated Bullinger, or as Becon put it, to ‘loke vnto her house: to prouide that nothing perish, decay, or be lost thorow her negligence: to se that whatsoeuer be brought into the house by the industry, labor and prouision of her husband, be safely kept & warely bestowed’. The denigration of a wife’s labour

29 Ste. B., pp. 46-47.
30 Dod and Cleaver, sigs K4’-K5’.
31 Bullinger, sig. I2’.
32 Dod and Cleaver, sig. [F5’].
34 Bullinger, sig. I3’; Becon, 1, sig. XX3’.
implicit in such accounts, which portray it merely as not squandering what her husband’s work has accumulated, becomes more explicit in Dod and Cleaver:

And order consisteth in this, that the Husband follow his businesse, Trafficque, or calling, without any molestation of the Wife, who ought not to meddle or controle him therein, but with great discretion and gentlenesse, as also the Husband is not to deale but soberly, and in great discretion with affaires that are proper to the Wife. [...] as the husband cannot well abide that his wife should shewe herselfe more skilfull and wise in his businesse then himselfe:) [sic] so cannot the wife suffer that her Husband should despise and account her a Foole, by medling with her small household affaires.\footnote{35 Dod and Cleaver, sig. M4.}'

At the beginning of the passage, the authors seem to be prescribing separate spheres of labour in which husband and wife each have autonomy, their work of equal value; but by the end, the assumption that the husband’s public business is of greater consequence than his wife’s ‘small household affaires’ becomes apparent.

The notion of female labour as fundamentally unproductive is reinforced by references to it as being conducive to chastity. Dod and Cleaver write that women should ‘occupie themselues in some honest labour to keepe them from idlenesse, and the euils that issue there-from’.\footnote{36 Dod and Cleaver, sig. [F7].} The phrase ‘some honest labour’ implies that what women do is less important than its usefulness as a distraction from misbehaviour. Becon similarly writes that a woman’s duty is ‘in fyne, continually to remain at home in their house diligentlye and vertuously occupied’.\footnote{37 Becon, i, sig. XX3.} ‘Occupied’, again, is not the same thing as ‘productive’. Women’s textile work in particular is often ascribed importance not because it is productive, but because it is conducive to chastity. The instance \textit{par excellence} of chaste, non-productive textile labour is Homer’s Penelope, unweaving by night what she wove by day; however, early modern writers such as John Northbrooke and Richard Brathwait also used the more Christian example of Demetrias:

\footnote{35 Dod and Cleaver, sig. M4.} \footnote{36 Dod and Cleaver, sig. [F7].} \footnote{37 Becon, i, sig. XX3.}
Saint Hierome counsayled the mayde Demetrias to eschue ydlenesse. And therfore when shee had made an end of hir prayers, he willed hir to go in hande with wooll and weauing, that by such change of workes the dyies seeme not long. He bid hir not to worke, for that she was in any pouertie (being one of the noblest women in Rome) but that by such occasion of working, she shoulde put out of hir mynde foolish and filthie imaginations and fantasies. Northbrooke emphasises the unimportance of material reward: rather, Demetrias's labour is valuable as a deterrent to lust. Similarly, the notion that the home is the proper sphere of female labour is justified by Henry Smith on the grounds that it restricts opportunities for lasciviousness:

wee call the Wife, Huswifwe, that is, house wife, not a street wife like Thamar, not a field wife like Dinah, but a house wife, [...] & therefore Paule biddeth Titus to exhort women that they be chast, & keeping at home: presently after Chast, he saith, keeping at home, as though Home were Chastities keeper.

The salutary moral effect of women's work is emphasised at the expense of its economic value.

Early modern books on marriage such as those referred to above imply a view of female labour as subject to male authority, confined to the home, and unproductive. The novelty of these notions has been questioned: Kathleen M. Davis, for example, argues that there is little essential difference between Protestant and Pre-Reformation books of marital advice. Furthermore, the writers' use of canonical texts, particularly Genesis, Proverbs, and the Pauline letters, might lead one to assume that there was nothing new in their prescriptions. However, the accounts of social and economic historians suggest that they were not reiterations of long-held views, but reactions to new circumstances.

For one thing, the strict division of labour by gender, with husbands working outside the

39 Smith, p. 79.
home and women inside, does not seem to have obtained in late mediaeval Europe.

Martha Howell writes that ‘[w]ork both for the market and for subsistence often took place in the household itself’; this meant that women were able to combine duties such as childcare with other forms of work. 41 As a result, the gender division of labour was not so strict: Anne Laurence argues that ‘it is almost impossible to differentiate between the male and the female contribution to the domestic economy’ of subsistence households. 42 At all levels of society, similar work was carried out by women and men: in the country, women helped to bring in the harvest; aristocratic women managed estates when their husbands were absent on legal or military business; the wives of tradesmen kept accounts, managed the shop, and participated in their husbands’ crafts. 43 The level of wives’ involvement in their husbands’ businesses is evident from the fact that ‘marriage to a member of the Gild conferred upon a woman her husband’s rights and privileges; and as she retained these after his death, she could, as a widow, continue to control and direct the business which she inherited from her husband’. 44 Participation in trade was not necessarily confined to helping one’s husband: in London, ‘custom allowed the wife of a merchant to be regarded as a feme sole merchant, provided that she practised a different trade from her husband’. 45

The late mediaeval period should not be idealised, however, as a golden age for women. Judith M. Bennett insists that women’s work in the Middle Ages ‘tended to be low-skilled; it usually yielded low remuneration in terms of either wages or profits; it

44 Clark, pp. 150-51.
45 Laurence, p. 125.
was regarded with low esteem’. Even though widows had the right to operate as mistresses of their craft, it appears that few actually did so; they often lost this right on remarriage. Although women became guild members through their husbands, they were generally excluded from the public offices and duties that membership conferred upon men. And legally speaking, women were subordinate to their husbands, their property passing from their control when they married. As a result of these factors, women were more vulnerable than men during times of hardship, especially in urban areas. Whereas ‘[i]n easy times, journeymen were less anxious and might permit without complaint some infiltration by women into what they saw as their sphere of activity’, ‘Complaints were more common in periods of economic strain, particularly when the labour supply was overabundant and rising prices outstripped wages’. Ann Laurence writes that ‘with the price rises of the 1540s, companies and gilds became much more protective of their male members’ interests’; according to Steve Rappaport, ‘in the 1540s some companies took steps to drive married women from work outside the household, including activities associated with their husbands’ businesses’. In 1547, carpenters’ wives were instructed not to buy building materials; in 1548, clothworkers were told not to let their wives or maidservants work in shops or tenters, or carry cloth through the streets.

Women’s relative lack of independence also meant that they suffered in the face of the large-scale economic changes that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth

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47 Laurence, p. 50.
49 Hufton, p. 93.
centuries. Increased landlessness and the growth of wage-labour meant that production increasingly took place outside the home; this both meant that women had to provide for their households 'through purchase rather than production', and 'prevented the employment of the wage-earner’s wife in her husband’s occupation'. Margaret King writes,

As long as the craftsman or trader was an individual whose place of business and place of residence were the same and whose own economic status was assured by his ties to guild structure or the urban patriciate, his wife or widow had access to public economic life. Women suffered when, in the latter two centuries of the Renaissance (particularly in some areas of England and Flanders), such conditions shifted in favor of larger economic units organized outside of the home.

Even master tradesmen and craftsmen who worked at home were more able than before to employ skilled journeymen to do work their wives had previously done, due to the 'increasing availability and relative cheapness of wage labor'; 'The masters, moreover, were encouraged to do so by guild regulations and status prescribing the hiring of skilled labor to assist in some production processes'. Women who had previously earned money in small-scale industries – brewing is the prime example – were forced out when such industries became more large-scale and capitalised.

Economic change did not only reduce women’s capacity to participate in productive work, however, some historians have argued that it affected the status of the domestic work they continued to do by giving rise to what Joan Kelly describes as ‘the notion of home as a refuge from the world of work’. As Merry Wiesner summarises this view, ‘the meaning of work changed because of the rise of capitalism from a medieval notion

53 Cahn, p. 47.
of work as all tasks which contributed to a family’s sustenance, to work as participation in the market economy and particularly in production’; therefore, as Eli Zaretsky puts it, ‘While housewives and mothers continued their traditional tasks of production – housework, child-rearing, etc. – their labour was devalued through its isolation from the socialized production of surplus value.’ This may explain the emphasis on the unproductive nature of women’s ‘small household affaires’ in much marriage literature. This literature, indeed, would now seem not to have been repeating familiar prescriptions, but reflecting a world in which both the nature and status of women’s work were changing.

However, books on marriage can also be seen as having had a more active role with regard to women’s changing status. In part of his controversial but influential argument about the changing nature of the English family, Lawrence Stone writes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, upper- and upper middle-class families became both more nuclear and more affective. He attributes this change partly to Protestantism, which did not exalt celibacy to the same extent as Catholicism, and partly to the growing power of the state:

Two very important methods used to strengthen the power of the state were first the destruction of the political power of aristocratic kinship and clientage; and secondly, a deliberately fostered increase in the power of the husband and father within the conjugal unit, that is to say, a strengthening of patriarchy.

I mentioned earlier Kathleen Davis’s objection that Protestant marriage manuals were substantially similar to their pre-Reformation equivalents; other historians have challenged Stone’s idea of a rise of ‘Affective Individualism’. However, there is both

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57 Stone, p. 135.
58 For an outline of some arguments against Stone, see Laurence, pp. 11-13.
literary and non-literary evidence for a ‘a deliberately fostered [...] strengthening of patriarchy’ in reaction to what David Underdown calls the early modern ‘crisis of order’ characterised by ‘population growth, inflation, land shortage, poverty and vagrancy’.

Underdown points to the many instances in local court records from about 1560 to 1640 of women being punished for scolding, brawling, refusing to enter service if single, and dominating their husbands. Susan Cahn notes that county wage assessors justified mandating higher wages for married men than single men or women, and directing the preferential hiring of married men, as a reaction to the problems of masterlessness and unemployment:

married men bore responsibility for entire families while the unmarried supported only themselves. Providing married men with work and wages could, therefore, reduce although rarely eliminating the burden of the man’s family on the parish. But, the commissioners also argued, it would allow the man to assume his proper role as master within his family.

Writers’ insistence on the importance of male rule within the household, and that women stay within the home, can be seen as the literary equivalent of such policies. Indeed, they frequently make a connection between order and hierarchy within marriage, and the well-ordered commonwealth. In the case of Dod and Cleaver, the link is both metaphorical and causal: ‘A Householde is as it were a little common-wealth, by the good Gouernment wherof, Gods glory may be aduanced, the commonwealth [...] benefited, and all that liue in that familie receiue much comfort and commoditie.’

Suzanne Hull finds that books written for women had a similarly repressive agenda, viewing them as ‘tools or weapons used to manage or control the female population’:

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59 Underdown, pp. 116-17, 119.
60 Cahn, pp. 30-31.
61 Dod and Cleaver, sig. [A7]; see also Ste. B., p. 40; Perkins, sig. ¶3.
'Women were told over and over and over that they were inferior, that they had lesser minds, that they were unable to handle their own affairs.'

If we choose to regard such literature, not simply as expressing orthodox views of women's work, but as actively encouraging women's confinement within the home and their exclusion from commerce, the question arises as to whether the drama, rather than being the passive reflector of the dominant ideology, had a similarly repressive agenda. Mary Wack finds one late mediaeval instance where this seems to have been the case. She argues that two scenes apparently added in the sixteenth century to the Chester mystery cycle, one of which shows Mrs Noah refusing to board the ark because she wants to stay drinking with her gossips, and the other of which shows Mulier, a tapster and brewster, being dragged back to hell for trade violations, may have been meant to reinforce and justify laws enacted in Chester during the 1530s which regulated the sale and production of alcohol and forbade women between the ages of fourteen and forty from working as tapsters. Unsurprisingly, given the Corporation of London's ambivalent attitude towards dramatic production later in the century, it is difficult to find any comparable links between the representation of women's work on the professional stage and the regulation of female labour in the capital. However, there are several reasons for suspecting that some playing companies at least might have intended to depict women's work in a negative light. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, women's very presence in the theatre was a controversial issue. The same authors who delineated the precise nature of wifely duties deplored female theatregoing: Thomas Becon, for example, wrote that 'aboue all thinges the mother shal take hede, y' her daughters be no

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 idle gadders abrode vnto vayn & light pastimes or playes'.\textsuperscript{64} The pamphlet in which John Northbrooke recommended needlework as a means of banishing ‘foolish and filthie imaginations & fantasies’ is better known to students of the theatre for its denunciation of the stage, as I explained in chapter one. In his 1617 poem \textit{The Bride}, Samuel Rowlands wrote ‘A modest womans home is her delight [...] At publike plays she never will be knowne’.\textsuperscript{65} The danger to female chastity posed by the playhouses constituted one of the most potent arguments of opponents to the theatre; it was perhaps in reaction to these arguments that defenders of the stage insisted on plays’ edifying effect upon women. The ‘Maydens of London’ wrote in 1567 that ‘in a godly play or enterlude [...] may be much learning had: for so lively are in them set forth the vices and vertues before our eyes, in gestures and speach, that we can bothe take learning and pleasure in them’.\textsuperscript{66} Heywood wrote in \textit{An Apology for Actors} (1612):

\begin{quote}
Women [...] that are chaste, are by vs extolled, and encouraged in their vertues, being instanced by \textit{Diana}, \textit{Belphebe}, \textit{Matilda}, \textit{Lucrece} and the Countesse of \textit{Salisbury}. The vnochaste are by vs shewed their errors, in the persons of \textit{Phrine}, \textit{Lais}, \textit{Thais}, \textit{Flora}: and amongst vs, \textit{Rosamond}, and Mistresse \textit{Shore}.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Dramatists may have felt that they needed to put this theory into practice by writing plays that praised the virtues of domesticity and female submission in marriage. The tension between this imperative and the transgressive nature of female theatregoing could explain the paradoxical attitude towards gender that can be discerned in some early modern plays: several critics have noted, for example, that while Moll Frith’s

\textsuperscript{64} Becon, t, sig. CCC3'.
\textsuperscript{65} Gurr, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{66} Fehrenbach, p. 301. Fehrenbach argues on the basis of the specialised legal knowledge displayed in the letter that its author was in fact a lawyer or law student (pp. 287-88); Ann Rosalind Jones hypothesises ‘a collaboration of women servants with a sympathetic man writing from the Inns of Court’, in ‘Maid servants of London: Sisterhoods of Kinship and Labor’ in \textit{Maid s and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens}, pp. 21-32 (p. 28).
\textsuperscript{67} ‘An Apology for Actors’ (1612) by Thomas Heywood; ‘A Refutation of The Apology for Actors’ (1615) by I. G., ed. by Richard Perkinson (New York: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1941), sig. G'.
transvestism in *The Roaring Girl* can be read as deeply subversive, it is counterpointed by Moll’s own highly conservative views about love and marriage.\(^{68}\)

A second reason why we might expect to find negative attitudes towards women’s work in some early modern playhouses follows on from my arguments in the previous chapter about the audiences at theatres such as the Fortune and the Red Bull. If they did indeed contain a large constituency of merchants and tradesmen, then it seems unlikely that plays staged in those theatres would have opposed contemporary trends such as the employment of waged journeymen to perform duties previously carried out by wives, and the increasing number of guild restrictions on the work members’ wives and female servants could do outside the home. Furthermore, if it is the case that in these theatres commercial activities were valorised as work, then one might expect a corresponding diminution in the respect accorded to non-commercial domestic labour. Such a pattern may be discerned in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, for example, in which Ronda Arab finds both an ‘exaltation of male artisans’ and a concomitant marginalisation of women’s contribution in Eyre’s household, as well as the repeated undercutting of Eyre’s wife Margery with sexualised verbal abuse.\(^{69}\) Because of the nature of their audience the Rose, the Fortune, the Boar’s Head and the Red Bull can be seen as more deeply and materially implicated than other theatres in the social and ideological changes with regard to women’s work that I have outlined in the first part of this chapter; and accordingly, in the remainder of it I will be concentrating on plays written by Heywood and Dekker for companies acting at those playhouses.


\(^{69}\) Ronda A. Arab, ‘Work, Bodies and Gender in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 13 (2000), 182-212 (pp. 197-98).
Thomas Heywood’s play *The Rape of Lucrece* (1606-08) differs noticeably from Shakespeare’s poem of the same name in the prominent role ascribed to Sextus Tarquin’s mother and Lucius Tarquin’s wife, Tullia. Like Lady Macbeth, she is depicted from the beginning of the play as an assertive woman ambitious for herself through her husband: she would, she tells him, ‘Be what I am not, make thee greater farre | Then thou canst ayme to be’ (l. 70). She is plainly frustrated by the limitations her sex places upon her, and exhorts Tarquin accordingly:

I am no wife of Tarquins if not King:  
Oh had I love made me man, I would haue mounted  
Above the base tribunals of the earth,  
Vp to the Clouds, for pompous soveraignty.  
Thou art a man, oh bare my royall mind,  
Mount heauen, and see if Tullia lag behinde. (l. 96)

Whereas Shakespeare places the whole burden of guilt upon Tarquin, who ‘caused his own father-in-law Servius Tullius to be cruelly murd’red’ (Argument, l. 2), Heywood emphasises Tullia’s parricidal desire for rule more than her husband’s ambition. ‘We must be bold and dreadlesse: who aspires, | Mounts by the lives of Fathers, Sons, and Sires’ (l. 116). She is graphically presented as a violator of order and hierarchy:

Tarquin’s murder of Servius is precipitated by a stand-off between father and daughter in which each commands the other to kneel (ll. 275-76), and when Tullia subsequently stumbles over the corpse of Servius, she commands her charioteer to drive over it, ‘For mounted like a Queene t’would doe me good | To wash my Coach-naves in my fathers blood’ (l. 350). By giving such prominence to Tullia and her ambition, Heywood makes female power, and power over women, central themes of his play. Tullia’s ambition is presented very much as a crime against patriarchy; it also has implications for our reading of her husband’s character. Junius Brutus, feigning madness, is told to leave the

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Senate; he sarcastically replies, ‘who would seek innovation in a Common-wealth in publike, or be over-rul’d by a curst wife in private, but a fool or a mad-man?’ (l. 201). A connection is made between Tarquin’s treason and Tullia’s dominance of him: the play exemplifies the topos of humanist discourse identified by Lorna Hutson, whereby a husband’s ability to govern his wife and household signifies and demonstrates his ability to govern a commonwealth.\(^2\) It also participates, of course, in the more general linking of household and commonwealth that is often a feature of tracts on marriage.

Heywood’s decision to stress Tullia’s parricidal intent and Tarquin’s inability to govern her explains another distinctive feature of his treatment of the Lucrece story, whereby he significantly expands one detail of the existing narrative. In Shakespeare’s version,

the principal men of the army meeting one evening at the tent of Sextus Tarquinius, the King’s son, in their discourses after supper every one commended the virtues of his own wife; among whom Collatinus extolled the incomparable chastity of his wife Lucretia. In that pleasant humor they all posted to Rome, and intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial of that which every one had before avouched, only Collatinus finds his wife (though it were late in the night) spinning amongst her maids; the other ladies were all found dancing and revelling, or in several disports. (Argument, l. 8)

As per the familiar topos, textile work denotes female chastity. Heywood, however, makes a good deal more of this part of the story, ascribing great importance to Lucrece’s domestic management. As Marilyn Johnson puts it, his is the only version of the history in which ‘Lucrece is made a model of the good housewife’.\(^3\) When we first see her, she is chastising a male and a female servant for overfamiliarity with each other, thus fulfilling Dod and Cleaver’s prescription that a wife must monitor the

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manners and behaviour of the members of her household. The terms of Collatine’s subsequent wager on his wife’s virtue refer specifically to her abilities as a housewife:

She of them all that we find best imploid,
Devoted, and most huswife exercisd,
Let her be held most vertuous, and her husband
Winne by the wager a rich horse and armour. (l. 1515)

When we next see Lucrece, she justifies her refusal either to go to bed or to let her maids do so on the grounds of her duty to her husband:

But one houre more and you shall all to rest:
Now that your Lord is absent from this house,
And that the masters eye is from his charge,
We must be carefull, and with providence
Guide his domestick businesse. (l. 1532)

Several things are noteworthy about the terms in which Lucrece represents her domestic work. One is that she regards it not as her work but her husband’s: it is ‘his domestick businesse’, for her to guide. Another is her stress that for her to be in charge of the household is an unusual state of affairs and obtains only when ‘your Lord is absent from this house’, a notion similarly implied by her subsequent statement that it befits ‘Good huswifes, when their husbands are from home, | To eye their servants labours’ (l. 1546). Heywood seems to be wary of implying that the situation he depicts, where a woman is in charge of domestic duties instead of under the charge of her husband, is normal. However, it becomes increasingly doubtful whether it is the needs of the domestic economy that necessitate her overseeing her servants. When she declines an invitation to a party, she explains ‘wives should not stray | Out of their doors their husbands being away’ (l. 1564); there is no hint that anything other than propriety requires her to stay at home. She tells her maids, ‘whilst you sow He reade’ (l. 1574); I have already mentioned the notion of sewing as valued more for keeping women occupied than for its economic benefits, while Lucrece’s reading is certainly not productive.

74 Dod and Cleaver, sig. [D6]’.
When her husband and his party arrive, it is evident that the other wives have all been enjoying themselves. As Collatine says to his companions,

See Lords, thus *Lucrece* revels with her maids,
In stead of ryot, quaffing, and the practise of high lavoltoes to the ravishing sound of chambring musique, she like a good huswife is teaching of her servants sundrie chares. (l. 1593)

When Horatius Cocles cries ‘*Love* ile buy my wife a wheele, and make her spin for this trike’ (l. 1602), this does not appear to be because he wants her to contribute to the domestic economy but because it will keep her at home in his absence. Female labour is valued not for anything it might produce but because it is a means by which women may be controlled, as is clear from Lucrece’s final speech after the men depart:

before the charme of sleepe,
Cease with his downy wings upon my eyes,
I must goe take account among my servants
Of their dayes taske, we must not cherish sloth,
No covetous thought makes me thus provident,
But to shunne Idlenesse, which wise men say,
Begets ranke lust, and vertue beates away. (l. 1698)

As in the glosses of Northbrooke and Brathwait on Jerome’s advice to Demetrias, the absence of any economic motive is emphasised; instead, female labour is valorised as a deterrent to lust.

There is an obvious thematic relationship between the way Heywood represents Lucrece and Tullia. Tullia does her best to transcend her subordinate position within the Roman patriarchy: she effects the killing of her father in order to make herself queen, and dominates her husband. Lucrece, by contrast, accepts her subordination in the household and the state, reacting to her husband’s desertion of her for the wars by saying, ‘*Husbands and Kings must alwayes be obaid*’ (l. 1692). Far from Lucrece wanting her father dead, her father, on hearing Tullia crow over Servius’s corpse, says:
I have a Daughter, but I hope of mettle,  
Subject to beter temperature, should my Lucrece  
Be of this pride, these hands should sacrifice  
Her blood vnto the Gods that dwell below,  
The abortiue brat should not out-live my spleene. (l. 293)

Lucretius replaces the image of a dead father with that of a dead daughter. Thus, although Heywood makes a great deal of Lucrece’s housewifery, it functions within the context of the opposition of her and Tullia. Its non-productive status is emphasised; instead, it is a means of keeping Lucrece within the home, and a sign of her obedience to her husband.

There are several ways in which Heywood’s treatment of Lucrece might be related to the social and ideological changes I described in the first part of this chapter. Firstly, the representation of her domestic work as unproductive, consisting of reading and monitoring the servants, may reflect the increasing location (real and perceived) of productivity outside the home. Secondly, the fact that it is not valued for being productive but as a sign and agent of chastity and subordination suggests that the play participates in the ‘strengthening of patriarchy’ identified by historians such as Stone. Finally, and most confusingly, it may be noted that it is difficult to imagine a woman such as Lucrece attending the theatre. If we assume that when the play was acted ‘by Her Majesties Servants at the Red-Bull’, as the title-page puts it, there were women in the audience, then there was a noticeable gap between their behaviour in going to a playhouse, something that the Queen’s Men and the Red Bull’s owners had a financial interest in their continuing to do, and the ideal of feminine confinement to the household that the play appears to hold up. One possible explanation is that Heywood was reacting to criticism of the theatre for enticing women from the home: he accepts its premises, creating an edifying fiction that valorises female domesticity.
If housework is seen as a way of keeping women chaste, then it follows that work outside the domestic sphere renders them vulnerable to the attentions of men. As Linda Woodbridge points out,

The drama is full of women who mind the store – shopkeepers' wives who serve customers, often in their husbands' absence. Outside the servant class, the only other city women who worked and brought in money were whores. The inference is obvious.

Woodbridge sees the sexualised depiction of female shopkeepers as a phenomenon of the private theatres: her main example is Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*. This leads her to regard it as a symptom of class tension between citizens and gentlemen: it is partly a 'reaction against the liberty of city women,' partly 'literary revenge on the affluent London citizenry which was gaining so much power at the expense of the aristocracy'. Certainly, the sexually voracious citizen's wife is largely absent from the public stage; however, on several occasions Dekker and Heywood present the shop as the scene of seduction or attempted seduction. This calls into question Woodbridge's assertion that plays on the public stage either 'display genuine enthusiasm for the shop-minding wife' or, more often, 'are defensive about the practice', assuring the audience 'that a wife who attends customers is not necessarily fair game'. In fact, the manner in which female shop-workers are represented on the public stage is testimony to serious anxieties about the dangers to chastity posed by women's work.

The likelihood should first be admitted, however, that the principal function of women's shop-work for playwrights such as Heywood and Dekker is as a plot-device. The workers themselves are not active seducers, but the passive objects of seduction or

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Woodbridge's latter remark is compromised by her choice of examples: for the first, from *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, see below; the second, from *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill* by Dekker, Chettle and Haughton, is spoken by a character whose work has already brought her into contact with her suitor and eventual husband.
attempted seduction: the shop is therefore an environment in which they can be
brought into contact with men without offending against propriety, as they might if they
appeared in the street, the tavern, or the theatre. Nevertheless, the way in which the plot-
device is employed deserves comment. The first instance I want to examine is in The
*Shoemaker’s Holiday*. After the departure of her husband Rafe to serve in the French
wars, Jane has left Simon Eyre’s household to work in a sempster’s shop. Hammon,
whom Rose has rejected as a suitor, turns his attention to Jane: in III. 4 he enters the
shop where she works, wearing a muffler because ‘thrise haue I courted her’ without
success (l. 3). Their conversation runs as follows:

JANE  Sir, what ist you buy?
   What ist you lacke sir? callico, or lawne,
   Fine cambricke shirts, or bands, what will you buy?
HAMMON  That which thou wilt not sell, faith yet Ile trie: [Aside.]
   How doe you sell this handkercher?
JANE  Good cheape.
HAMMON  And how these ruffes?
JANE  Cheape too.
HAMMON  And how this band?
JANE  Cheape too.
HAMMON  All cheape, how sell you then this hand?
JANE  My handes are not to be solde.
HAMMON  To be giuen then. (l. 21)76

Trying to persuade Jane to sell or give away her hand, Hammon uses the same language
to purchase and to seduce. A more sophisticated version of precisely the same stratagem
is used in Heywood’s *1 Edward IV*. Jane, the wife of goldsmith Matthew Shore, is
temporarily alone in the shop, having sent a prentice on an errand. King Edward, who
first saw her at a dinner to celebrate the repulsion of Falconbridge’s siege of London
and was instantly attracted to her, enters the shop in disguise.

JANE  What wold you buy Sir that you looke on here?
KING  Your fairest jewell, be it not too deare.
   First how this Saphire Mistresse that you weare?

76 *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1953-61), i, 58. Further references to this edition are given in the text.
JANE  Sir it is right that will I warrant yee,
      No jeweller in London showes a better.
KING  No, nor the like, you praise it passing well.
JANE  Do I? no, if some lapidarie had the stone, more would not buy it then I can
demound. Tis as wel set I thynke as ere yee saw.
KING  Tis set indeed vpon the fairest hand, that ere I saw.
JANE  You are dispose to iest, but for value, his maiestie might weare it.
KING  Might he ifaith?
JANE  Sir tis the ring I meane.
KING  I meant the hand.
JANE  You are a merrie man,
      I see you come to cheape, and not to buy. (H2'-H3')

This sort of banter goes on for another forty lines, with Jane fending off Edward's
flirtation, until he discovers himself and she kneels, whereupon Shore returns, and the
King, going back into character, departs. He returns shortly afterwards but departs
again, refusing to be served by Shore. By this time the goldsmith has guessed who the
client is and what he wants; he laments, 'Keepe wee our treasure secret, yet so fond, |
As set so rich a beautie as this is, | In the wide viewe of euery gazers eye' ([H4]).
Confounding his wife and his wares, he uses the same topos that Edward, like Hammon,
has used as a seduction technique.

The idea of the shopper who comes to bargain, not for goods but for their vendor,
recurs in Heywood's The Wise Woman of Hogsdon (c.1604), where Luce's question
'what ist you lack? [...] what would you have?' gets the answer, 'Thee' (I. 214).
Dekker can still be seen using the device perhaps as late as 1620 in Match Me in
London, albeit with the twist that the King purports to be shopping for gloves for a lady
whose hand is the same size as that of Tormiella, who is looking after the shop; her
trying them on can therefore be the occasion for bawdy jokes along the lines of 'Pray
(faire Lady) does it not come on too stiffe?' (II. 1. 155). Underlying all these scenes is

77 Thomas Heywood, The First and Second Parts of King Edward the Fourth: A Facsimile Reprint of the
Unique Copy of the First Edition (1599) in the Library of Charles W. Clark, ed. by Seymour de Ricci
(Philadelphia: Rosenbach, 1922). References in the main text are to this edition, by signature.
the notion that a woman who puts herself in the market as a vendor risks becoming a commodity. This, however, gives a doubtful status to her labour. Is she a worker in her own right, or an object to be bought and sold?

This tension is at its most acute in the figure of the prostitute, who is the literal embodiment of the idea that the woman who works is making herself sexually available. On the one hand, the prostitute can be seen as the woman worker par excellence: as Garrett A. Sullivan Jr writes, for early modern authors 'prostitution [...] is seen as the clearest example of labor performed by a woman outside the supervision of men (despite a male clientele and male ownership of brothels). However, the fact that her work consists of selling herself turns her from worker into commodity. The tension between the prostitute's two identities is of great thematic importance in the first part of The Honest Whore, by Dekker and Middleton, as this is a play where women and things repeatedly get confused. We are told in the first scene that 'Queenes bodies are but trunckes to put in wormes' (I. 1. 57) and that 'women when they are aliue are but dead commodities, for you shall haue one woman lie vpon many mens hands' (I. 88). Dead objects, however, are animated and sexualised: linen can be described as 'the purest shee that euer you fingerd since you were a gentleman', (I. 5. 24), and a ruff and a poker can be 'ingendring together vpon the cup-bord' (II. 1. 14). This confusion of women and objects is encapsulated in the person of the 'mingled harlot' Bellafront herself (II. 1. 314), or rather in the speech where Hippolyto offers to 'teach you how to loath your selfe' (II. 1. 316). His character of the prostitute oscillates between different paradigms of female labour.

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Hippolyto begins by saying that a prostitute is so light because she has no soul:

‘heauens treasure bought it, | And halfe a crowne hath sold it’ (l. 333). The syntax, however, denies her agency in the transaction by making ‘halfe a crowne’ the subject of the second line. Rather, she is passive, ‘like the common shoare, that still receiues | All the townes filth’. A few lines later, however, he seems to be making her a more active physical worker – ‘y’are as base as any beast that beares’ (l. 335) – yet instantly qualifies this by emphasising her lack of ownership of herself: ‘Your body is ee’ne hirde, and so are theirs’. He goes on: ‘For gold and sparkling iewels, (if he can) | Youle let a lewe get you with christian’. The word ‘let’ seems to be ascribing free will and choice to the prostitute; but again, Hippolyto revokes this idea by representing her choice as compromised by her enslavement to money: ‘Could the diuel put on a humane shape, | If his purse shake out crownes, vp then he gets’ (l. 341). He returns to the image of the beast of burden – ‘Whores will be rid to hell with golden bits’ – but then moves on to describe the prostitute not as beast but vendor: ‘So that y’are crueller then Turkes, for they | Sell Christians onely, you sell your selues away’. The notion of a divided selfhood implied by the idea of selling oneself is one that Hippolyto picks up some twenty lines later, after stressing how the prostitute is both hated and inconstant: ‘You put on rich attires, others eyes weare them, | You eat, but to supply your blood with sin’ (l. 365). She does and does not wear her clothes; the way her eating is described seems to imply a disjuncture between herself and her blood. The money she earns is not her own:

And this strange curse ee’ne haunts you to your graues.
From fooles you get, and spend it vpon slaues:
Like Beares and Apes, y’are bayted and shew tricks
For money; but your Bawd the sweetnesse licks.
Indeed you are their Journey-women, and doe
All base and damnd workes they list set you to:
So that you n’ere are rich. (l. 367)
The word ‘Indeed’ seems to imply a continuity between the images of performing animal and journey-woman; but the relationship is not obvious. Instead, Hippolyto’s speech reads like a list of striking but inconsistent ideas as to what a prostitute actually is. There is no coherent notion of what her work involves: she is variously a commodity, a common shore, a beast of burden, a hireling, a vendor, a performing animal, a journey-woman. This last image is itself paradoxical, in that while there are recorded instances of female apprentices, the fact that women became members of companies through their husbands rather than by virtue of fulfilling an apprenticeship made the status of journeyman a peculiarly male one.80

In its concern with questions of work and of money, albeit in a manner that is hardly sympathetic towards its subject, Hippolyto’s speech is actually quite unusual as a dramatic description of the prostitute. More typically, as Jyotsna Singh writes, ‘the category of the whore is deployed in male fantasies in ways that elide the reality of prostitution as a social and economic institution’; the economic aspect of phenomena such as prostitution is marginalised by what Linda Woodbridge describes as ‘the Renaissance habit of conducting all arguments in moral terms’.81 In Dekker’s sequel to the play, for example, the arguments used by Hippolyto and Bellafront when they debate prostitution do not focus on the body, the sexual act, or money to anything like the same extent. Monticelso’s ‘perfect character’ of a whore in Webster’s The White Devil, performed at the Red Bull in 1612, describes prostitutes as ‘Sweete meates which rot the eater’, ‘coosning Alcumy’, ‘the trew matteriall fier of hell’ (III. 2. 83, 89); the

focus is moral, and disgust at venereal disease is also evident, but there is no interest in the economics of prostitution.\textsuperscript{82}

Another reason why Hippolyto's speech is of particular interest, however, is because of its sheer incoherence, whereby incompatible visions of the prostitute coexist: on the one hand, as vendor or worker, on the other, as commodity. I would argue that in fact, this incoherence is merely a heightened version of a tension that already exists in dramatic depictions of women who work in shops, whereby the implication that for women to carry out commercial work endangers their chastity coexists with an ambiguity as to whether or not they can really be said to be working. All three women in the scenes described earlier are sewing; this would not deserve comment, since Jane Damport and Luce are both in sempsters' shops, were it not for the fact Jane Shore, too, enters 'with her worke in her hand' (H2\textsuperscript{t}), her embroidery is unconnected with the business of the shop, a goldsmith's. Furthermore, when her husband speaks to Jane's uncle the Lord Mayor about his suspicions, he points out

\begin{quote}
Though in my shop shee sit, more to respect,  
Her seruantes dutie, then for any skill,  
Shee doth, or can pretend in what we trade,  
Is it not strange, that euer when hee comes,  
It is to her, and will not deale with me? (K\textsuperscript{V})
\end{quote}

The remark is only in passing, but it still serves to emphasise that the work Jane does in the shop is not the same as that which he performs when he is there; and this may lead one to wonder whether one effect of the motif of textile work in these three instances is not to complicate the status of what the women are doing. Rather than carrying out commercial work, they are performing the more stereotypically female work of

\textsuperscript{82} The Complete Works of John Webster, ed. by F. L. Lucas, 4 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), 1, 139.
embroidery. In *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, Luce explicitly differentiates what she is doing from the business of minding the shop when she says to Joseph, ‘Doe you attend the shop, Ile ply my worke’ (1. 201). Something seems to be hindering the dramatists from simply depicting these women ‘attending the shop’; instead, they must be occupied with their needles. And yet, the stress on their embroidery would seem to run contrary to these scenes’ underlying conceit whereby the women, by doing shop-work, are unwittingly putting themselves up for sale.

One explanation for this may lie in the fact that different aspects of the ideological work which I have suggested Heywood and Dekker were trying to accomplish in their drama were incompatible. In so far as they may have tried to counter criticism that the theatre enticed women from their homes by writing plays which idealised feminine domesticity, the implication that women’s commercial work was a danger to chastity served, perhaps, this ideological end. The same notion may also reflect the desires of many of London’s citizens that women be kept out of the marketplace: while a woman like Jane Shore, helping her husband in his business, would hardly have constituted a major form of competition, the wider implication of Heywood’s depiction of her – that women who buy and sell are compromising their virtue – is one that tradesmen who vied for business with women probably welcomed. However, I have also suggested that these playwrights’ championing of male merchants and tradesmen may have involved a marginalising of women’s economic contribution, and that more generally, they may have been influenced by a wider devaluing of women’s work that was the result of socio-economic change. This may underlie the insistence that women who look after the

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83 Wendy Wall has suggested that it is the fact that Jane is carrying out domestic work that arouses the king: see ‘Forgetting and Keeping: Jane Shore and the English Domestication of History’, *Renaissance Drama*, n.s. 27 (1996), 123-56 (p. 141).
shop are not actually working, or that the prostitute, though she is both a vendor and a labourer, is ultimately just a commodity.

Another possible reason for playwrights’ reluctance to accept that women are working, however, may operate at a deeper conceptual level. In the final part of this chapter, I want to posit the existence of an inherent incompatibility during the early modern period of the idea of women and the idea of work – some forms of work at least. This incompatibility derived from the way in which many writers grounded their discussion of work and gender in the body. As Karen Newman puts it, ‘In the early modern period, the female body is the site of discourses that manage women: by continually working out sexual difference on and through the body, the social is presented as natural and therefore unchangeable, substantiated, filled with presence.’

By relating the division of labour to physical differences between men and women, these discourses naturalised and universalised it.

I mentioned earlier the frequent assignment of different spaces and activities to men and women in early modern marriage literature, whereby the man carries out productive work outside the home and the woman remains within it to keep and use what he has accumulated. Though biblical passages are frequently cited as justification for this view, the paradigm derives, as Lorna Hutson says, ‘from a text entitled Oeconomicus, written by the Socratic philosopher Xenophon, and from its derivative, a pseudo-Aristotelian text of the same name’. As the author of the latter explains, ‘Providence made men stronger and women weaker, so that he in virtue of his manly prowess may be more ready to defend the home, and she, by reason of her timid nature, more ready to keep

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84 Newman, pp. 4-5.
85 Hutson, p. 21.
watch over it; and while he brings in fresh supplies from without, she may keep safe what lies within. Though writers, such as Dod and Cleaver, who claim to provide a specifically Christian view of marriage are clearly indebted to these texts, they tend to prefer the Bible as a source of quotations; by contrast, humanist works such as Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (translated 1561), Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), and Thomas Heywood’s *ТеwaiKσιον* (1624) stay much closer to the wording of Xenophon or (more commonly) pseudo-Aristotle. Only Heywood specifically names Aristotle, but it is evident that the other authors are using his *Oeconomicus* as their source, as in the instance of Smith:

The naturalest and first conjunction of two toward the making of a further societie of continuance is of the husband and the wife after a diverse sorte ech having care of the familie: the man to get, to travaile abroad, to defende: the wife, to save that which is gotten, to tarrie at home to distribute that which commeth of the husbandes labor for nurtriture of the children and family of them both, and to keepe all at home neat and cleane. So nature hath forged ech part to his office, the man sterne, strong, bould, adventerous, negligent of his beautie, and spending. The woman weeke, fearefull, faire, curious of her bewtie and saving.

An important feature of the passage is that the basis for the division of labour by sex is the perceived difference in male and female bodies and character: male strength and courage versus female weakness and timorousness. However, rather than the division of labour being a pragmatic response to sex difference, the authors invoke Providence or Nature as a force that has invented sex difference as a means of achieving the division of labour. This would appear to support Thomas Laqueur’s thesis that in the early modern period, the differences between the social roles of men and women, rather than being artificially constructed, were considered as ‘part of the order of things’,

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predetermined and immutable: ‘sex, or the body, must be understood as the epiphenomenon, while gender, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or “real”.’⁸⁸ Laqueur’s ascription of a hegemonic status to this understanding of gender may be questioned; as I shall explain later, Janet Adelman has also criticised the manner in which he bases his argument upon Galenic theory, as well as some of the more dubious conclusions that literary critics have drawn from his findings. However, writers’ frequent use of the pseudo-Aristotelian paradigm meant that the notion of the physical differences between men and women being designed by God or Providence to equip them for different forms of labour had a wide currency in the early modern period. Other authors made similar connections between bodily difference and the division of labour. According to Ian Maclean, Martin Luther ‘refers playfully in his Tischreden [no. 55] to the scholastic belief that the different shape of men and women is accountable to the latters’ imperfect formation, claiming that it is not because of insufficient generative heat and body temperature that women have wide hips and narrow shoulders, but rather a sign that they have little wisdom and should stay in the home’.⁹⁹ A mid-seventeenth century translation of a gynaecological work by the Dutchman Nicholas Fontanus repeats his assertion that ‘women were “made to stay at home and look after household employments”. Their work was accompanied “with much ease without any vehement stirrings of the body” therefore “hath provident nature assigned them their monthly courses”.’ A translation of Pliny promulgated the notion of menstruating women as inimical to agricultural productivity: ‘If they touch any standing corn in the field it will wither and come to no good. […] Look they upon a sword, knife or any edged tools, be it never so bright, it waxeth duskish, so doth the lovely hue of

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ivory. The very bees in the hive die. Conversely, other writers seem to have believed that agricultural work was inimical to women's fertility, 'that country women whose work brought them plenty of exercise menstruated only briefly'. In his compendious Γυναικείον, Heywood implies that the form of women's bodies makes them naturally unsuited to warfare when he recounts a practice of the Amazons: 'one of their breasts they reserve safe and untouched, with which they give suck to their infants; the right breast they burn off, that with the more facility they may draw a Bowe, thrill a Dart, or charge a Launce'.

Early modern writers would seem to have inherited from classical authors, in particular the often-quoted Xenophon and pseudo-Aristotle, the habit of basing the gender division of labour upon providentially-ordered bodily difference; this made it much harder to conceive of women doing men's work, and vice-versa. In order to examine how this affected theatrical representations of working women, I want now to look at The Roaring Girl (1604-10), by Middleton and Dekker, staged by the Prince's Men at the Fortune. Displaying as it does the spectacle of an independent woman who dresses in men's clothes, refuses to marry, beats men in fights, and cants with thieves, The Roaring Girl has understandably caught the attention of critics interested in early modern notions of gender. Marjorie Garber argues that the play's concern with London's expanding marketplace means that it 'theorizes the constructedness of gender in a disconcertingly literal way': 'the fetishization of commodities is the cover for the fetishization of body parts'. Jean Howard stresses the play's ostensible conservatism

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90 Fletcher, Gender, Sex and Subordination, pp. 62-63.
92 Heywood, Γυναικείον, p. 223.
and points out that Moll chastises effeminate men and unchaste women, but
nevertheless argues that 'the fact of her cross-dressing destabilises the very essentialist
binarisms that the “corrective” cross-dresser overtly wishes to uphold'.

Alison Findlay finds Moll’s insistence that she will ‘please my selfe’ (V. 1. 319) to be a rejection of ‘the
traditional roles allotted to women as nurturing figures who serve the interests of others
in the household’, and relates this to female playgoers’ departure from the home in
search of theatrical pleasure.

None of these critics, however, discusses one feature of the play that appears to bring
together sexual and economic issues: on its title page, which depicts Moll in masculine
attire with phallic sword and tobacco-pipe, appear the words ‘My case is alter’d, I must
worke for my liuing’, a phrase absent from the play’s main printed text. Cyrus Hoy
interprets it as a satirical reference to the real-life Mary Frith’s incarceration in the
Bridewell workhouse after she appeared in 1611 on the Fortune stage, where she made
‘immodest & lascivious speaches [...] in mans apparrel & playd vpon her lute & sange
a songe’. Gustav Ungerer sees Moll’s taking the stage as an attempt to reinvent
herself: the wording of the frontispiece ‘sealed the demystification of Mary Frith’s
sexual and gender ambiguity, signaling her desire to legitimate her profession and to
earn her livelihood as a cross-dressed entertainer’. However, given the play’s themes
of transvestism and hermaphroditism, surely two likelier interpretations hinge on the
meaning of ‘My case is alter’d’, a twist on the more commonplace ‘the case is
altered’. Firstly, it can be taken as a pun on Moll’s masculine clothing. Secondly, it

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94 Howard, ‘Sex and Social Conflict’, p. 179.
95 Findlay, p. 87.
98 On the legal origins of this phrase, see Ben Jonson, ix, 305-06.
can be taken in a bawdier sense, as reference to her sexual organs, along the lines of
‘Vengeance of Jinny’s case!’ in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV. 1. 62, or ‘Would I had studied a yeere longer i’the Innes of Court, and’t had beene but i’ your case’, in
*Bartholomew Fair*, III. 5. 279.\(^9^9\) The phrase alludes to the suggestion, made several times in the play, that Moll’s masculinity may be more than sartorial. The insinuation, it must be emphasised, seems to be meant teasingly rather than seriously: I am not suggesting that Dekker and Middleton really intend us to think that swaggering around London in male attire has caused Moll to acquire a penis. Janet Adelman, indeed, has found that acceptance of the Galenic ‘one-sex’ paradigm, whereby female bodies are considered to be structurally homologous but inferior versions of male ones, was not so widespread during the Renaissance (even among medical writers) as Thomas Laqueur’s arguments might imply; the notion that people in the early modern period believed participation in male-gendered activities could turn women into men, and vice-versa, may, she suggests, reflect the preoccupations of the present more than the beliefs of the past.\(^1^0^0\) However, the success of jokes such as the tailor’s comment to Moll that, if she wants ‘the great Dutch slop’ (II. 2. 77), ‘Your breeches then will take vp a yard more’ (I. 80), depends on a playful half-belief in Moll’s hermaphroditism. What, though, does the idea that she may have an altered ‘case’ have to do with working for a living?

Women’s work is evidently a theme of *The Roaring Girl*. In the persons of Prudence Gallipot and Rosamond Openwork, the play repeats the cliché about the unchastity of women who work in shops, although these are more actively sexual than Luce, Tormiella, or the two Janes. In II. 1, the gallants Goshawk and Laxton joke about the

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\(^1^0^0\) Janet Adelman, ‘Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model’ in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 23-52 (pp. 25-26).
infidelity of citizens’ wives, playing on Mistress Gallipot’s work as a tobacconist:

‘Oh sir tis many a good womans fortune, when her husband turns bankrout, to begin
with pipes and set vp again.’ ‘And indeed the raying of the woman is the lifting vp of
the mans head at all times’ (l. 10). The insinuation is borne out by the fact that Laxton is
engaged in an affair with Prudence, while Rosamond, told of her husband’s supposed
adultery, determines to ‘saddle him in’s kind’ by going with Goshawk to Brentford (iii.
2. 173). This would appear to confirm the wisdom of Moll’s advice to Master
Openwork, ‘Prithee tend thy shop and preuent bastards’ (ii. 1. 353), and Master
Gallipot’s comment, ‘a shop-boord will serue | To haue a cuckold’s coate cut out vpon’
(iv. 2. 278). The shop is imagined as the frequent scene of seduction. Both affairs are
unconsummated, but as Moll observes, this is due more to the deficiency of the suitors
than the chastity of the wives (ii. 1. 288-91).

Women’s shop-work is not only presented as a risk to chastity, however: once again,
its very status as work is questioned, this time through the play’s depiction of Moll
herself. Moll emphatically does ‘worke for my liuing’: we see her earning money on
several occasions. Laxton gives her ten angels when, as he thinks, he is arranging an
assignation with her (ii. 1. 259-60); when they meet at Gray’s Inn Fields she returns
them, saying ‘Ten angels of mine own, I’ue put to thine, | Win em, and wear em’ (ill. 1 .
62). Defeated in their fight, Laxton gives up the purse (l. 120). Sebastian Wengrave
pays her for fictional music lessons, though it is unclear whether he gives her the full
forty shillings (iv. 1. 151). Seeking to entrap her, Sir Alexander gives her a further four
marked angels (l. 201); at the end of the play he replaces them ‘thrice double’ (v. 2.
255). Though such activities hardly constitute steady employment, Moll insists on their
dignity, making clear that despite her ‘Moll Cutpurse’ soubriquet she does not practise
petty theft (v. 1. 284-301), as well as emphatically remaining chaste. After her fight with Laxton, she says

    If I could meete my enemies one by one thus,
    I might make pretty shift with 'em in time,
    And make 'em know, shee that has wit, and spirit,
    May scorne to liue beholding to her body for meate,
    Or for apparell like your common dame,
    That makes shame get her cloathes, to couer shame. (III. 1. 131)

She insists that it is possible for a woman with 'wit, and spirit' to make her own living without being a prostitute. Her words explicitly pity poor women forced to that exigency; but more generally, the fact that she so clearly works for her money implicitly denigrates the shop-work of the citizens' wives. Their money is not their own, their work is subordinate to that of their husbands; Moll, by contrast, works for herself, and she is seen accepting the proceeds.

Moll is, however, abnormal; and her abnormality is frequently figured by other characters in bodily terms. Sir Alexander, admittedly not a sympathetic witness, calls her

    A creature [...] nature hath brought forth
    To mocke the sex of woman. — It is a thing
    One knowes not how to name, her birth began
    Ere she was all made. Tis woman more then man,
    Man more then woman. (l. 2. 130)

Sir Alexander goes on to say that she 'straies so from her kind | Nature repents she made her' (l. 214). According to Mistress Gallipot, 'Some will not sticke to say shees a man and some both man and woman' (II. 1. 186-7). Laxton describes her appreciatively in terms that are decidedly suggestive: 'Shee slips from one company to another, like a fat Eele be tween a Dutchmans fingers' (l. 184). And, as I have mentioned, the scene with the tailor is full of sexual innuendo: 'I know my fault now, t'other was somewhat stiffe betweene the legges, Ile make these open enough I warrant you' (II. 2. 84). These
repeated jokes to the effect that Moll may be something other than a woman affect the meaning of her financial independence. Rather than being proof that a woman can work for a living and stay chaste, it is, like her martial prowess and her spatial mobility, depicted as only one aspect of a freakishness that is imagined in anatomical terms.

In this respect, The Roaring Girl, while presenting the spectacle of a strong and independent woman, ultimately seems wholly consistent with the other plays I have discussed which contrive both to dissuade women from working outside the home and to devalue their work when they do so. Moll’s ability to earn a living is an implicit rebuke to the citizens’ wives who are dependent on their husbands; but it also compromises her femininity, seeming to lead on naturally to the possibility, however playfully entertained, that she might not be a woman at all.
Conclusion

The treatment of women’s work on the early modern stage illustrates, once again, the elusiveness of work as a concept. Activities, such as shop-work, that were carried out by both sexes were given a specific meaning when performed by women: not only were they supposed to endanger chastity, but their very status as work was called into question. As for women’s work within the home, its significance as both testimony to and preserver of chastity overshadowed any sense of its productivity. Plays thus both devalued women’s work, and discouraged it when it took certain forms. I have suggested that in this regard they may have reflected changes in the nature of work, as production increasingly moved outside the home. However, they may also have had a more active role in strengthening patriarchy and reflecting the interests of male citizens in their audiences, as well as responding to accusations that the theatre irresponsibly enticed women abroad.

As with the other types of work I have discussed, therefore, the theatre’s representation of women’s work was influenced by several factors that linked it to interested groups in society. Over the course of this thesis, I have variously identified
links of patronage, audience membership, and ownership of playhouses. People
directly involved in the theatre, such as actors, and playwrights like Ben Jonson, also
used the stage to situate themselves in relation to the idea of work. However, the
preceding chapter also demonstrates some of the limitations of this model of the
relationship between drama and society. Firstly, when a group is excluded from
dramatic production, as I have argued that women largely were, it is difficult to isolate
how its members' attempts to define themselves achieved dramatic expression: one is
restricted to discussion of the way in which they were constructed by more powerful
groups. Secondly, however, while some aspects of the depiction of women's work in
theatres like the Fortune and the Red Bull can be attributed to vested interests and to
wider social trends, these in themselves do not explain more deeply-rooted assumptions.
The treatment of Moll Frith in The Roaring Girl seems to imply that ideas of femininity
and of work were so difficult to reconcile in the early modern period that for a woman
to be both a chaste and an independent worker rendered her very womanhood doubtful.
This confirms what, in truth, hardly needs confirming: that the nature of dramatic
representations cannot be ascribed simply to material relationships between the theatre
and its patrons, audiences, and owners.

Indeed, while I have tried to focus on such relationships, details that seem
inconsistent with them have repeatedly suggested themselves. While the attempt to
attract an elite audience for the children's companies may have led to a different ethos
of acting being promulgated in plays written for the public and the private theatres, the
metatheatrical playfulness of, for example, The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon
is perhaps not so very far from that of Antonio and Mellida or Cynthia's Revels. What I
have portrayed as an attempt in Henry V to synthesise a model of a commonwealth
labouring for a labouring monarch is subverted by the unanswered questions of
Williams. In Volpone, Epicoene, and The Alchemist, Jonson appears to parody the same professional discourse he has used to create the role of poet. In 2 If You Know Not Me, Heywood seems to glorify Sir Thomas Gresham for a citizen audience, only to hint that fortunes such as his are built through cozenage and squandered on conspicuous display. And while Edward IV might seem to discourage women’s commercial work, it seems from Christopher Brooke’s poem that women commiserated with Jane Shore’s fate rather than simply being admonished by it. In all of these cases, a discussion of the relationships between the theatre and groups who were using the idea of work in wider society illuminates the way in which work was treated on the stage; but it does not explain it fully. Certain aspects of plays seem, simply, to diverge from the way in which one might expect these relationships to lead them. In my Introduction, I talked of attempting to isolate ‘the cultural work the theatre itself was doing’. In trying to do so, however, I have constantly been reminded that even in this respect, the theatre was a place, not just of work, but of play.
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