Enter the Crowd
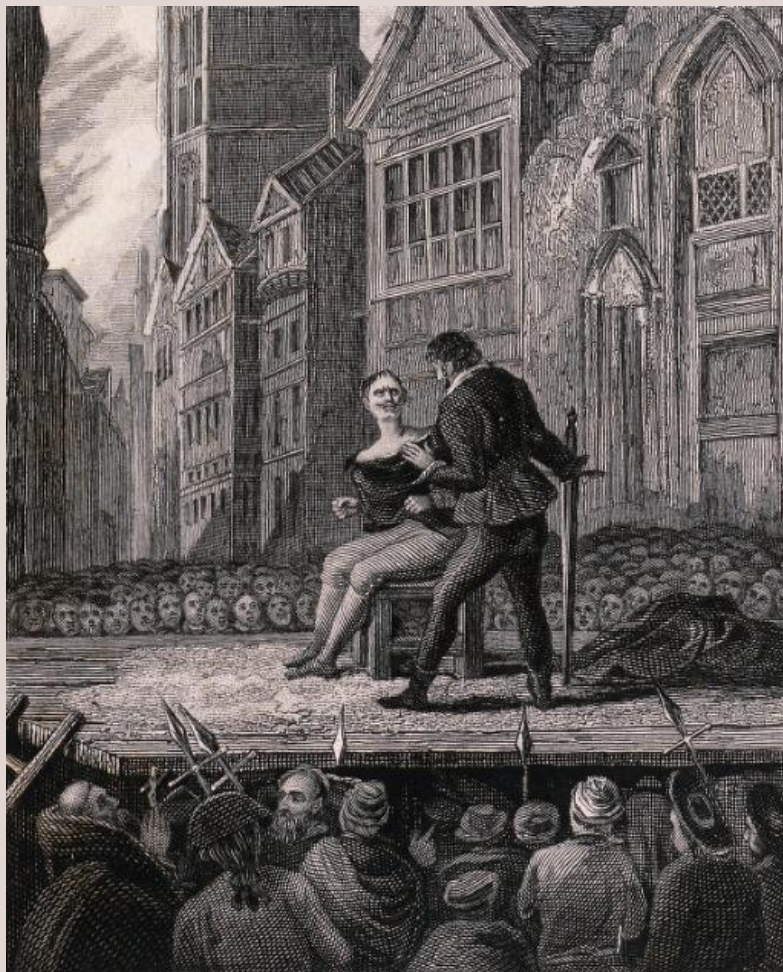# Social Communication in Early Modern England

Selected papers from the 11ᵗʰ IASEMS Graduate Conference

**The British Institute of Florence
Florence 12 April 2019**

Edited by Maddalena Pennacchia and Iolanda Plescia

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Social Communication in Early Modern England

Selected Papers
from the "Enter the Crowd – Social Communication
in Early Modern England"
Graduate Conference
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Front cover: "A man about to be beheaded on a scaffold surrounded by a crowd of spectators." Line engraving with etching. - Wellcome Collection, United Kingdom - CC BY.

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Introduction

Maddalena Pennacchia and Iolanda Plescia

The 2019 IASEMS Graduate Conference saw a number of early career scholars gathering at the British Institute of Florence, as has been a tradition of the Italian Association of Shakespeare and Early Modern Studies for more than a decade now: the Graduate conference is a space for early career researchers who have just obtained their doctorate or are close to completing it, while senior scholars take on the role of chairs and animators of the sessions, also delivering two keynote talks that set the tone for the day's proceedings. The format has served IASEMS well over the last few years and has attracted a good number of researchers from abroad as well as from Italy.

This volume, then, arises from the 2019 conference, which was devoted to a subject that no one at the time could have imagined would become so crucial in the Covid era which was to follow: mass and social communication (ironically, the topic selected well before the beginning of the crisis for the 2020 conference, which was postponed to 2021, was infection and toxicity in Early modern England!). We have all come to discover in the past few years how closely tied mass communication and public health are. We believe that the reflections that emanated from the conference on the idea of the early modern crowd, and on vertical/horizontal communication with the public, has been a rewarding line of research: the "figure of the crowd" that emerges from the papers here presented is an only apparently indistinct entity which must be studied in its multidimensional nature – an entity which in the early modern age could be imagined as a large group of people but also, more often and disquietingly, in a time of such political unrest, as throng, horde, mob, rabble.

The 2019 edition of the conference thus focused on the multifaceted connections between communication and the crowd in early modern English literature, language and culture. Of course, London featured as a protagonist in many of the papers we heard, a selection of which makes up this volume: indeed, John Stow's *Survey of London* (1598) provides a narrative of a crowded city whose identity was being shaped by masses of people arriving from outside the city boundaries. In the early modern period, the crowd seems to be associated with contradictory ideas of uniformity and disorder, coherence and monstrosity, and with potential sovereignty. It embodies a cultural space of variability and instability, reflecting contemporary social and political anxieties. In a context shaped by urgent nationalistic political agendas, public communication and rhetoric played a vital role: investigating the nexus between communication and the crowd meant exploring arenas of debate and political control, representations of collective identities and leadership, but also networks of relationships.

The theatre was itself, of course, a powerful medium of mass communication. The goal of many of the papers presented was in fact to develop an understanding of the various ways in which the tie between public communication, politics and collective identity is inscribed in early modern English literature and culture. Many of the papers here presented address topics highlighted in the conference call, including representations of the crowd in early modern writing, rhetoric and politics in theoretical treatises, the rhetoric of public communication in proclamations, speeches, sermons, public discourse and the construction of class, gender, national identity, the construction of the citizen(s), and dissenting voices, communication and mass control in drama, narrative strategies in communication, rhetoric and propaganda across

genres, the shaping and questioning of collective identities, the figure of the orator and popularity, theatre, communication and audiences, crowds, networks and urban spaces in early modern writing.

The papers here published have undergone a lengthy revision process, as is customary after each IASEMS Graduate conference, which also sees its mission, post-conference, as that of creating and fostering a writing space for early career scholars. This has been possible, in the case of the present volume, thanks to the generous and meticulous engagement of a number of colleagues who, as anonymous reviewers, helped the editors to highlight in great detail the strengths and weaknesses of each paper. We are proud of the result and thank our authors for their enthusiasm and patience in bearing with the publishing process, which has been particularly long and winding due to the unexpected global events we all went through. We thank the British Institute of Florence, as well, for hosting the conference and providing the customary publication venue, in the open access form that is so crucial to the dissemination of scholarship. Eschewing ambitions of completeness on such a broad subject, it is the purpose of this brief introduction by the two conference convenors, Maddalena Pennacchia and Iolanda Plescia, to return to some of the topics of their talks, each tackling two different facets of mass communication – which in the course of discussion became a broader consideration of *social* communication: one strongly based in theatrical text and practice, with Pennacchia's reflection on communication in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and one, explored by Plescia, linked to a sentiment of social anxiety which arose from a new awareness of the processes of collective identity building through language.

Moving the Crowd: Communication and Power in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

The necessary connection between the people and the channels through which it is possible to address them as one living organism is at the heart of *Julius Caesar*'s dramatic structure. This famous tragedy stages the most iconic urban space of the antiquity by conjuring up the Roman crowd watching, listening and commenting on what happens in the streets and squares of the city, as well as their reactions to it and the impact of such reactions on the city life and even on history. More specifically, it tries to show the people in action as a "crowd", that is "a large number of persons gathered so closely together as to press upon or impede each other" (OED), that is a tumultuous multitude whose powerful but unstable strength can be used as an invincible weapon by those who know how to handle it.

The threat that the mere kinetic force of a mass can pose may be inferred by the fact that the word 'crowd', which occurs only once in *Julius Caesar* and as a transitive verb (to crowd, that is "to press in", "to crush", OED), is dramaturgically related to the Soothsayer who uses it when he is afraid of being squeezed to death by the "throng" following Caesar "at the heels". The danger surrounding Caesar becomes through the Soosthsayer's words very tangible:

> […] Here the street is narrow.
> The throng that follows Caesar at the heels,
> Of senators, of praetors, common suitors,
> Will crowd a feeble man almost to death.
> I'll get me to a place more void, and there
> Speak to great Caesar as he comes along (II, 4, 38-43).

Though a "feeble man", as the Soothsayer describes himself, he possesses "a tongue shriller than all the music", in Julius Caesar's own words when they meet for the first time (I, 2,19). A warning voice, the Soothsayer's, that needs, however, "a place more void" in order to rise over

the deafening uproar of the many, making more explicit the tactile and auditory sensations raised by the "throng" and the problem of the relation between "he who knows" and the mass of the people who don't.

In fact, the focus on the crowd is also a focus on the transformation that the communication system can undergo when historical and political crises of relevance happen, which is why Caesar's death (and not his military triumphs) is the dramatic pivot in Shakespeare's version of the story, a turning point as important in the history of communication as it is in history *tout court*. The first three acts of the play, those set in Rome, are not simply a study of the crowd but of the cogency that old and new forms of communication can have on it. The crowd becomes a key factor in the rising and falling of political leaders: in the play politicians no longer speak to a limited number of senators and tribunes of the people in the Senate House but to a mass of illiterate people in the Forum who need a good show in order to be persuaded about whom to cheer for. What interests Shakespeare in the first place when looking for inspiration in the historical sources that were available to him is the public debate that sprang from this famous death and how political opponents could rhetorically contend in a public space to "move" the "stones" of Rome, that is its "people", thus causing a social landslide. Consequently, the war of words in which Brutus and Antony are engaged in the marketplace, their speeches being a remarkable invention by Shakespeare not to be found in his sources, prefigures the battle of Philippi and, under many respects, is even more important than that: Rome *as* its people, the *populus romanum* of the famous SPQR acronym (*senatus popolusque romanum*), is won there and then. That wars are won through rhetorics and not only through military action is no doubt a brilliant lesson in politics for the Elizabethans.

But, if in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare makes an implicit parallel with the historical situation of London – a city whose boundaries were fast expanding and whose population was growing at an incredibly fast rate – where and how was it possible in London, as it was in ancient Rome, to address the people? As Ian Munro contended, back in 2005 in *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London*:

> with the staging of crowds plays tried to negotiate their relationship to their urban audience […] In the act of staging, Rome connects with London in still more complex ways, in the context of the urban multitude and the position of the theatre as an institution […] (Munro 2005: 143).

In his book Munro usefully explores what he calls "the *function* of the crowd: as a dramatic motif, as a theatrical manifestation, and as a social presence" (Munro 2005: 2).

The crowd as a social presence was very much related to the new space specifically invented in the Elizabethan age for the gathering of a large number of people: the playhouse. In sixteenth-century London, the playhouse might be considered as a new institution, partly independent from the Crown and the City Council, which worked as a mass medium. It disseminated stories and ideas for the unprecedented flows of people gathering in the liberties of Southwark, for example, where they could enjoy a thoroughly new entertainment experience. When writing about Shakespeare's life, Stephen Greenblatt dwells on the crowd that must have struck his imagination when he arrived in London, connecting it precisely to *Julius Caesar*:

> It is the London crowd – the unprecedented concentration of bodies jostling through the narrow streets crossing and re-crossing the great bridge pressing into taverns and churches and theatres – that is the key to the whole spectacle […] In *Julius Caesar* he returned to the spectacle of the bloodthirsty mob roaming the streets in search of the conspirators who have killed their hero Caesar (Greenblatt 2004: 169).

The playhouse, therefore, becomes a place of representation of the crowd, a mirror held to the masses attending the plays, and in this respect it contains the people within its round walls. But

it is also a place of dissemination, for the crowd once out of the wooden O could and actually did contaminate the city of London with uncontrollable meanings that originated in that space of "liberty".

A space of liberty and also of learning, for it is indeed through the means of the public theatre that Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights made Roman history known to all theatre-goers in an age when the doors of culture, together with those of the Grammar Schools and Universities, were closed for the majority of them. As Asa Briggs and Peter Burke put it:

> On the whole […] early modern Europe was a society of restricted literacy in which only a minority of the population (especially males, townspeople and Protestants) could read and fewer still could write. Hence the importance of what has been called 'mediated literacy', in other words, using literacy for the benefit of the illiterate (Briggs and Burke 2005: 26-27).

Playwrights in the Elizabethan and Jacobean age can rightfully be considered as "literacy mediators". The University Wits, or the playwrights who, like Shakespeare, had had at least the possibility to attend a grammar school, were pioneers of the cultural industry: they earned money by disseminating classical contents via the stage for the multifarious audiences of the playhouses, where most of the people could not read and had no real chance to leaf through books dealing with the ancient past. And as a literacy mediator Shakespeare appropriated "Rome", adapting it to a medium which not only was born for mass entertainment but whose "architecture" could even be thought to have been inspired by Roman amphitheatres (Pennacchia 2012: 104-17). And attached to the history of Rome came all sorts of exempla of political and social behaviours.

The dramatic motif of the crowd was mainly taken by Shakespeare from North's Plutarch (1579), that is from biographical narrative. More specifically he used passages, sometimes even word by word, from the "Life of Caesar", the "Life of Brutus" and the "Life of Antony", adapting them for the stage, that is turning them into a playtext which seems to revive a memory of Ancient Rome performed by the living word of the theatre, one that implies a high emotional involvement of both onstage and offstage audiences. An involvement that, at least onstage, leads to action, with the risk of creating an imitation effect on those who were attending the play.

It is no coincidence that the verb to "move" is frequently used in association to the word "people". Here are a few examples. While trying to persuade Brutus that he is mistaken in consenting Antony's funeral oration for Caesar, Cassius says "Know you how much the people may be moved/ By that which he will utter?" (III, 1, 251-52) and, when Antony hears that Brutus and Cassius have fled the city, he remarks "Belike they had some notice of the people,/ How I had moved them." (III, 2, 267-68); the verb "move" is also associated with the word "stones", a metaphor used by Marullus for Rome's populace as "senseless things" (I, 1, 32-3) which will be emphatically reprised by Antony in the famous lines:

> […] were I Brutus,
> And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
> Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
> In every wound of Caesar that should move
> The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny (III, 2, 222-26).

In North's Plutarch the crowd is not given the same prominence and the same amount of interaction with its leaders (either the tribunes or the senators) as in Shakespeare's adaptation of the sources for the stage. Clearly the playwright expands on that; in fact, the play opens exactly with a short but meaningful scene where the two Tribunes of the people, Flavius and Marullus, are trying to scatter "certain *Commoners*" (I.1.sd), as they are called in the stage

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directions, who are gleefully celebrating the return of Caesar from the victorious campaign of Spain against Pompey's sons (a historical event that happened in October 45 BC). Two Commoners speak, a Carpenter, who is only given one line, and a Cobbler, who instead quite extensively defies the Tribunes' authority, engaging them in a vivacious and even impertinent verbal exchange, profiting from the carnivalesque atmosphere of the "holiday" they have decided to take. In his comment on the scene Jan H. Blits argues that

> the republic was always ruled by public speech and hence ultimately by authoritative opinion […] The cobbler, signifying the late republicans' growing unwillingness or inability to be governed in this manner, hardly allows himself to be ruled by the tribunes' speech, and his recalcitrance is matched by both what he says and how he says it. In this most important respect, the people's traditional spokesmen are first "put to silence" (I.2.275) by the people themselves (1981: 53-4).

However, if we consider that these Commoners are also a representation of the London crowd, the fact that it is precisely a Cobbler, a mender of shoes, the one who "lead[s] these men about the streets" (I, 1, 26) as Flavius says, acquires a particular relevance. For the Cobbler, with his art, keeps people trodding around, which means appropriating and circulating "the affairs of the Capitol" as Ian Munro highlights in his monograph – though with reference to *Coriolanus*, another Roman play in which the people play a keyrole – and consequently "turning the governance of Rome" – and its 'twin', London – "into their private entertainment" (2005: 108). The focus on the movement of people, is a focus on the circulation of ideas and feelings that cannot be stopped and thoroughly regulated and controlled by those who should rule. And in fact, the Tribunes reproach the commoners who are decking Caesar's statues with ornaments and offers, for their ungrateful behaviour towards Pompey, whom they used to love once. They accuse the people of having forgotten all too easily someone who was their hero not long before; these sudden changes of behaviour and shifts of affection in the crowd, which easily turns from "lovers" to haters, will be further put under study in the play, in particular in the third Act, where the reception of the famous orations by the people in the crowd is the key to the actual denouement of the story.

Particularly innovative is the way Shakespeare arranges on stage the "manifestation" of the crowd in *Julius Caesar*. The playwright's way of showing the crowd is fascinating, for he "invented" a technique which would become, two centuries later, typical of another mass-medium, that is cinema. Like in film editing, he alternates close-ups and long shots, as, for instance, in the first scene of the first Act, where as spectators we are given a view of the crowd in close up, while it interacts, through the Cobbler, with the Tribunes; after that, from the second scene of the first act on, we only perceive the crowd from a distance; its offstage shouting is heard by Brutus thrice: "What means this shouting?", Brutus asks Cassius, "I do fear, the people/ Choose Caesar for their king" (I, 2, 84-85). And soon after that it is Casca who vividly reports the unstable and easily led behaviour of what he calls "tag-rag people" (I, 2, 257). But it is only in the crucial second scene of the third Act, where Brutus and Antony deliver their respective speeches, that the crowd is again showed in close up, as it was in the opening scene, impersonating the 'many-headed multitude"; it is here that "citizens" are given lines that make us understand their reception of the orators' words. Here are they addressed both by Brutus and Antony as "countrymen", that is people from the same country that share the same geographical space, same language and institutions, same traditions.

A relation between the words "citizen", ("an inhabitant of a city or town; esp. one possessing civic rights and privileges" OED), and "countryman" seems to exist in the text, if we get back for a moment to the first scene. After having sent the commoners to their homes, Marullus informs the offstage audience that it is "the feast of Lupercal" (I, 1, 64), a festival that was celebrated in mid-February; such a feast is described in *The Life of Romulus*, in North's Plutarch, where it is defined as "the feast of woulves" (98):

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[…] a feast of great antiquitie, and instituted by the Arcadians, which came in with Evander: albeit the name of woulves is as common to the females, as the males, and so it might perhappes be called, by reason of the woulfe that brought up Romulus. For we see those which ronne up and down the cittie that daye, and they call Luperci, doe beginne their course in the very place where they saye Romulus was cast out. ([1579] 1895: 98-99).

Like all festivals, the Lupercalia creates a sense of community by celebrating the foundation myth of Rome: the story of the twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were nursed by a she-wolf. By compressing the time and merging the two historical episodes of the celebration of Caesar's triumph in October and the Lupercalia in February, Shakespeare seems to stress the connection between the two events; what is shared by the "citizens", who Brutus and Antony later address as "countrymen" in their respective funeral orations, is their "wolfishness". The "wolfishness" of the Romans is to be found, as Clifford Ronan notes, not only in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* where it appears most evidently, but "in numerous English Roman Plays"; what is more important, though, is that the mythical "wolfishness" of the Romans provides "a tyrannical savagery without which [Rome's] greedy urge to acquire and dominate other lands would be doomed to failure" (1995: 137). The parallel between Romans or "countrymen" and "wolves" becomes an extended metaphor which runs across the whole first macro-sequence of the play (Acts I to III), and it appears at its most uncanny in the episode of the murder of Cinna the poet, which happens in the short but disquieting third scene of the third act, when the doomed victim – almost a human sacrifice – is literally torn to pieces by an angry and hungry crowd ritualistically crying in one voice "Tear him, tear him" (III, 3, 32): as if they were turned into one monstrous, wolfish body.

At the end of the day, they who understand how to move a powerful entity as the crowd is, just like Antony who unleashes the "dogs of war" (III, 1, 292) to revenge Caesar, will be able to win the political game and rule the country: this is the greatest truth Shakespeare picks from Roman history and shows his own "countrymen" in *Julius Caesar*.

The Crowd Speaks/Speaking to the Crowd. Early Modern English and Collective Identity

Shakespeare is credited with shaping the language of his age in a way that has unfortunately been often misunderstood, as scholarship has tended to focus on the flashy topic of his supposed neologisms, now shown to have been quite fewer than has been thought (Hope 2016): as Pennacchia's foregoing reflections show, we would do better to concentrate on the way the playwright shaped communication, linguistic strategies and rhetoric performance, accepting that while his use of the building blocks of language is often daring and striking, the mark he has left has little to do with introducing words, and much more to do with showing us what can be done with the resources that exist in language. In this section, however, I deal not with communication strategies in particular, but rather with the broader question of the ways in which language was viewed at a time when increased circulation of people, goods and books led to a revision of ideas surrounding social and popular communication.

Well beyond Shakespeare's world, the problem, or the opportunity, of communication was very much present in the minds of early modern English writers, especially in this age of "language-building" – a time, that is, when the English language was in search of identity, undergoing a crucial moment of enrichment by means of borrowings and word formation, driven in large part by the wave of translations inspired by a renewed relationship to the classics and to the works of the continent. Debates surrounding language were intensely concerned with

such issues as variability and instability, prestige and nationalism, rhetoric, and collective identity. Although the age was still fundamentally comfortable with variation, in transition as it was between orality and written culture (Hope 2010), a desire for uniformity, for what Richard Mulcaster called "right writing" (Mulcaster 1582), and a need for tools to achieve it, was clearly emerging. The titles of the grammars and orthography books produced in Shakespeare's age attest to such a need, and some seem to allude to the crowd of people, the "unlearned", the as yet indistinct mass that would benefit from such efforts: Thomas Smith, *Dialogue Concerning the Correct and Emended Writing of the English Language* (1568), John Hart, *An Orthographie* (*A Method or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned, Whereby They May Bee Taught to Read English*), 1570; William Bullokar, *Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech*, 1580; and of course Mulcaster's *Elementarie*, 1582, with its vindication of English as a language as suited to all communicative purposes as the more prestigious ones: "I do not think that anie language, be it whatsoever, is better able to utter all arguments, either with more pith, or greater planesse, than our English tung is, if the English utterer be as skillfull in the matter, which he is to utter" (Mulcaster 1582: 258). Well before the advent of a dictionary in the comprehensive sense, Mulcaster's declared aim was to "gather all the words which we use in our English tongue […] out of all professions, as well learned as not" (166). Gathering, collecting, offering "at large": early lexicographers aspired to deal with a wider audience, one whose knowledge and ability to communicate needed to be shaped and directed.

Such a search for uniformity could undoubtedly hide the beginnings of a fear of disorder, one which would culminate with the Restoration and Thomas Sprat's passionate plea that "sober and judicious men" should take "the whole mass of our language into their hands" (Sprat [1667] 1772: 42), to correct and amend it. Times had certainly changed: the Renaissance in England, on the other hand, was an era still essentially at ease with variation, in which grammars sought to describe rather than tame (Hope 2010). Yet as Hope also reminds us, early modern English culture was obsessed with the idea of controlling language, rhetorically, against what we would today call "spontaneity". The inability to control language is a "descent from the human" to a sub-human, monstrous level (Hope 2010: 40-41). How does the crowd speak? How does the anonymous, individual participant who makes up the crowd, speak? The faceless man in the crowd is the opposite of the scholar, the rhetorician, the politician, the monarch, choosing and weighing words carefully. The common man, the man of the street, like Ajax in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* – as Hope further notes – can be "languageless, a monster" who will "answer nobody" (III, 3, 267), in contrast to Ulysses' skillful mastery of words.

As we continue to reflect upon narratives of order gradually imposed on linguistic disorder, it is however necessary to remember that English was far from a homogeneous language to begin with, and there was no uncontaminated condition to return to, *pace* the purists of the age. "[L]anguages have never really been as separate as we often understand them to be, and in fact the normal condition of people, texts, and social space is one of 'interlinguicity,' which we take to denote a condition where multiple languages continuously cohabit systems of meaning" (Saenger 2014: 6). I have come back to this idea many times in the past few years, and have found the category of interlinguicity to be infinitely fruitful in thinking about Shakespeare's modes of communication. The pressing of "other" languages onto English – viewed by some as under siege from more prestigious languages – is to Shakespeare a normal reality of life, one that he was even "eager to integrate" into his plays, in which he introduced Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, and Welsh – once again, in doing this "he was entirely typical of other dramatists of his time, and in fact of London as a whole" (Saenger 2014: 8). The voices of the city, early modern London as Babel, are yet another facet of the crowd, which demands representation. What does the interlinguistic condition mean in terms of what we think of as

"collective" linguistic identity in the early modern age? And how might we revise notions about the rise of English as a national language in light of its porous, multilingual nature?

There is thus a crucial intersection to be taken into account when thinking about the growth of reading audiences alongside the well-established theatrical audience: it is one in which the pursuit of linguistic prestige and linguistic anxiety are two sides of the same coin, as attested by the inkhorn controversy, the question of whether to borrow or not to borrow, and of how one should communicate with the general public, and with "learners". In the words of John Cheke:

> I am of this opinion that our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangeled with borowing of other tunges, wherin if we take not heed by tijm, ever borowing and never payeng, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tung naturallie and praisablie utter her meaning, when she bouroweth no counterfeitness of other tunges to attire her self withall, but useth plainlie her own, with such shift, as nature, craft, experiens and folowing of other excellent doth lead her unto, and if she want at ani tijm (as being unperfight she must) yet let her borow with suche bashfulnes, that it mai appeer, that if either the mould of our own tung could serve us to fascion a woord of our own, or if the old denisoned wordes could content and ease this neede, we wold not boldly venture of unknowen words (1561).

Purity, simplicity, unmingled language versus the sophisticated touch of Latinate forms: we know, of course, which party won this particular battle of words, with English continuing to grow and welcome foreign words, as it still does today, though at a slower pace during this peak of its status as global language of communication. Shakespeare is interested in representing multilingual environments, even satirising them, enabling us to reflect upon the functions of foreign languages within the theatre as well as drawing the audience into what might be conceived as a constant translation exercise. The abundance of foreign, classical-sounding roots in *Troilus and Cressida*, the parody of a Latin lesson in the *Taming of the Shrew*, to mention only two cases, are moments in which theatrical enjoyment must have been mixed with anxiety or curiosity on the part of those who were not "in the know". What kind of communication do we have when Shakespeare uses words that would *not*, quite probably, have been understood by the masses at the theatre? Words like *orgulous*, which was already obsolete, or *oppugnancy* in *Troilus and Cressida*, a hapax in the Shakespearean canon with very few other attestations at the time – words in which only the learned might recognise etymological clues. Indeed, the abovementioned Latin lesson scene in *The Taming of the Shrew* (Act III, Scene 1) is one in which different layers of meaning play out to different members of the audience: a mock lesson in translation produces comic effects when a suitor disguised as schoolmaster and the object of his attention, Bianca, "translate" verses from Ovid only to thinly veil their discourse of love, with Bianca mistrusting her suitor but playing along in the mock translation. However, only those who in the audience could remember the passage – a celebrated one from the *Heroides*, often used to memorise adverbs of place in Latin – would be able to appreciate the irony that the passage actually refers to a letter written by Penelope, the wooed woman *par excellence* and the most faithful of wives, to Ulysses: underscoring Bianca's coquettishness by contrast, as well as harking back to the main theme of courtship in the play. The scene may thus not only be read as a jest, but it also points to the fact that the prestige and power associated with Latin were still very much alive: while knowledge could be mediated by the theatre for the benefit of the illiterate, as Pennacchia has reminded us, layers of meaning, allusion and depth – even in a comical context such as this – could still be lost on the crowd's ears. At the same time, the very sound of Latin and Latinate words, as well as the classical strategies of repetition and careful *dispositio* – this is still an oral/aural culture, as we know – are enough to evoke cultural influence, even without conveying the full meaning of the words. And the weight of linguistic authority can crush a crowd into submission, as Shakespeare has taught us only too well.

These are just some of the pressing linguistic issues that were tied to the national language-building project, in dialogue and confrontation with the classical heritage in a rapidly evolving culture: in order to reflect on communication, it is necessary to dwell on the diversified nature of early modern English speech/linguistic communities, and on the ways in which they dealt with the anxieties that arose from their self-awareness as communicators for a new age. Many questions remain open, and are variously explored in the endless case study that Shakespeare is to anyone interested in early modern England: was the building of a shared linguistic identity a question of innovating or rather renovating, recuperating roots from the past, and coming to terms with them in new ways? How far can we go in considering language a function of identity and an identity-shaping tool, when no language exists as a whole and separate entity from the ones surrounding it and penetrating it? These are necessary preliminary questions when thinking of the crowd, and of the ways in which messages were conveyed to it, in both horizontal and vertical dynamic relationships, as the essays here collected show.

Enter the essays

The essays selected for publication deal with the topics foregrounded in the previous paragraphs in various ways, and from the vantage point of different specialisations. The first two essays are concerned with the dramatic depiction of, and engagement with, crowds and audiences. In the opening essay, "Shaping Early Modern Society: The Influence of City Comedies on Social Classes' Behaviour and Self-Perception", Annalisa Martelli reflects on the consequences of London's rapid demographic growth and the economic transformations in the early modern period, which led to the perception of the city as crowded and dangerous. At the same time, and perhaps for these very reasons, London life became an interesting subject to Jacobean playwrights: Martelli looks at the ways their plays engage and even manipulate audiences, by mirroring their social behaviour, giving rise to the genre of the city comedy. Focusing on Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* and the collective drama *Eastward Ho!* by Ben Jonson, John Marston and George Chapman, Martelli discusses the complexities and satirical tones of the plays, which interact with their audiences by questioning common beliefs and urban stereotypes, as well as exploiting the topics of social mobility and social competitiveness. Beatrice Righetti's essay, "Who's in control? Dramatic agreements and ideal audiences in Shakespeare's and Jonson's plays", also explores the relationship between plays and audiences, considering prologues as privileged sites of negotiation of dramatic agreement. Dramatic agreements, she suggests, may function as a standpoint to investigate the opinion of her chosen playwrights – Shakespeare and Jonson – on the role of "mass audiences" in the theatrical make-believe process. Selecting plays which present dramatic agreements – Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, *Poetaster*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part II* and *Henry V* – Righetti identifies common concerns about the ways in which audiences engage in theatrical representation, thinking of dramatic agreements as transitional tools which help ease the crowd into fictional worlds.

The three essays that follow consider royal communication in a historical, fictional-historical, and cultural context. In his essay "Official Communication and Political Innovation in the English Revolution", Jack Sargeant takes his cue from the political and religious division that had led England to the brink of civil wars by the spring of 1642. He analyses the use, and abuse, of official texts by both opponents, King and Parliament, in their attempt to convince the people to fight on their respective sides. Sargeant takes into consideration the public communiqués of that fraught time, thinking in terms of production, dissemination and suppression of information and political innovations: such a perspective illuminates the critical question of the relationship between the masses and sites of authority. Both King and

Parliament took full advantage of the spectacular nature of political communication, Sargeant shows, carefully curating the ritualistic presentation of their proclamations. Nicholas Thibault also asks a political question in his essay, *"'The best friend that the poor e'er had': Counsel and the Possibility of Mediation in* Sir Thomas More*"*, wondering whether a king's counsellor can ever really be a friend to the people. The question was debated in the early modern world, and Thibault chooses to address its relevance to a history play, the collaborative work *Sir Thomas More*, in which the Catholic champion and martyr stands out as an ideal mediator between his king, Henry VIII, and the common people – in contrast to the usual depiction of counsellors as closer to the important royal figures they serve than to the indistinct mass of the people. *Sir Thomas More* is in itself an important example of early modern representation of mob scenes, as it dramatises the 1517 xenophobic riots of Ill May Day. And yet, though the play shows a real possibility of dialogue between counsellor and people, Thibault argues, it does so in the form of an ideal that can only be mourned for. Finally, in the essay that closes our volume, "Early Modern King–Commoner Ballads: Tools of Social Communication?", Csilla Virág considers the possibility that the popular genre of the king-commoner ballad contained a subtle, possibly unintentional, but important communicative function. While the tales here considered all share a simple motif – a lonely king meets a commoner, establishes contact and enjoys a merry time with him, all the while going unrecognised, then reveals his royal identity and rewards his subject – their structure is in some cases more complex and enables the exploration of feelings of interconnectedness and social belonging. Viràg thus posits that such ballads, widely circulated on broadsides in early modern England, could be considered as tools of social communication, aimed at strengthening community ties and easing social tensions.

Taken together, the essays provide a multi-faceted and rewarding exploration of the conference theme, not only investigating the ways in which the crowd was represented onstage, but also relating the early modern crowd to the theatrical audience and considering the crowd itself as the intended audience of a powerful political communication that could be just as spectacular as the theatre in early modern England.

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Shaping Early Modern Society: The Influence of City Comedies on Social Classes' Behaviour and Self-Perception

Annalisa Martelli

"She is grown so great that I am almost afraid to meddle with her. She's certainly a great world, there are so many little worlds in her […] She seems to be a glutton, for she desires always to be full […] She may be said to be always with child, for she grows greater every day than another" (Lupton 1632: 1).

A Crowded City

Since the Elizabethan period and through the seventeenth century, London experienced an extraordinary urban and demographic growth. Many labels were attached to the town in order to describe its unprecedented transformation, yet Donald Lupton's image of a voracious and fertile woman vividly depicts the crowded and chaotic universe London had turned into. From a twenty-first century perspective the image of a crowded city is generally associated with a lively and stimulating environment. Nonetheless, that was not the idea early modern political powers had about the overpopulated London. Crowds were a cause for concern at the time; to quote Alfred Harbage: "Elizabethans had a very real fear of the potentialities of a crowd" (1941: 14). Indeed, people who gathered together could not only give rise to public disorders and tumults, but, even more dangerously, they could influence each other and generate group action (Menzer 2001: 22). A massive yet homologous population could be good for the government − if controlled and "domesticated" − or, on the contrary, might represent a terrifying threat, if allowed to develop an autonomous and unpredictable behaviour.

However, early modern society followed a rigid hierarchical structure, which also prevented lower classes belonging to different economic groups from joining forces with each other. In other words, it was thanks to those "many little worlds" mentioned by Lupton that collective interest disintegrated into many diverse interests. Indeed, the concerns of the middle classes were obviously different from those of the gentry and even more distant from those of artisans and labourers. Social class divisions thus made London society appear as a multi-headed monster[1] rather than as a chaotic wasps' nest. In this landscape, only economic supremacy mattered, so that the wealthiest social groups were also those who most greatly affected public and political affairs: in practical terms, they held both economic and social control. Thus, we may reasonably rephrase the crowd control issue as the manipulation of the "inferior crowds". Social conflicts are then an obvious correlative to London social transformation and regulation.

With its new complexity and vital force, London urban life started to become an attractive subject for Jacobean playwrights. The urban narrative developed by early seventeenth-century drama provides a "surprising new thickness of realistic details" (Stage 2018: 6) but also a series of stereotyped characters and dramatic conventions. However, the most interesting aspect of

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[1] A widely used expression in this period: Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (II, 3, 16-17) is just one of the numerous cases where we find it.

these new plays is their way of engaging and manipulating audiences by reproducing their social environment and their social behaviour. In this paper, I will focus on a specific genre of the new Jacobean drama, city comedy, analysing two quite peculiar examples: Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* and the collective drama *Eastward Ho!* by Ben Jonson, John Marston and George Chapman. My main purpose is to shed light on the complexity and the brilliant satiric mode of these two comedies which, playing with dramatic and social clichés, sought to interact with their spectators and compel them to reconsider their common beliefs and stereotyped visions of those chaotic and conflicting Jacobean worlds.

Dramatising Early Modern London: the success of city comedies

"London's population doubled, from 100,000 to 200,000 between 1580 and 1600, and doubled again by 1650, to 400,000" (Gurr 1987: 51). This demographic growth was fuelled by massive migration from the countryside and, to a lesser degree, from abroad (Germany in particular). Due to the increasing population, London's geographical area was expanding frenetically: "beyond the city's wards and parishes, the suburban areas surrounding the city were also bursting with new population and increasing numbers of residents" (Stage 2018: 11). Hence, in the seventeenth century London's population was not only extremely numerous but also quite heterogeneous in its social composition. Language was a problem too in this "polyphonic" crowd: the English vernacular, with all its varieties, began to become a concern for many Elizabethan and Jacobean writers.[2] Moreover, the phenomenon of social mobility often redefined people's status with the result that social conflicts were inevitable.

Even ignoring the numerous dramatic references to the world as a theatre and vice versa, the mutual interchange between drama and real life is unquestionable. In the Jacobean period, in particular, the synergy between the city of London and London's theatres seemed stronger than ever, and that was mainly due to the commercial nature common to both. As the Duke of Wirtenberg wrote, London looked like a "large, excellent, city of business" where "most of the inhabitants are employed in buying and selling merchandize and trading in almost every corner of the world" (Brenchley Rye 1865: 7). At the same time, the theatre started assuming all the traits of a commercial business, with the opening of several new theatres between the 1590s and the 1610s (the Swan in the 1595, the new Globe in 1599, the Fortune in 1599/1600 and the Hope in 1614) and the reopening of private theatres in 1604 after the Plague (Blackfriars and St Paul), making theatre companies even more competitive. The drama offered under these new conditions counted on the variegated social composition of theatre audiences, with private theatres seeking to appeal to more intellectual and high-class spectators while public theatre plays targeted a mixed audience. However, both private and public theatres showed a growing interest in dramas which were focused on contemporary socio-historical transformations. Seventeenth-century plays seem very much involved in exploring social class anxieties, the instability of the new class hierarchy and the "Machiavellian" strategies people adopted to pursue social climbing. To narrate these overwhelming changes, playwrights radically transformed traditional dramatic genres (we have the rise of tragicomedy and an increasingly grotesque mood running through Jacobean tragedy), but above all they gave birth to a new comic subgenre, "city comedy", which proved to be the best dramatic form for depicting early modern London.

Mostly thanks to Brian Gibbons, city comedy is now acknowledged as a "distinct genre with a recognizable form" (1968: 1). As Gibbons points out, "the first decade of the Jacobean age had witnessed a sudden profusion of comedies satirizing city life" (1968: 1). These plays

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[2] See Heather C. Easterling 2007, especially the first chapter "Noise of a Thousand Sounds", pp. 17-45.

combine a parody of inherited conventions, mainly taken from Elizabethan drama, with a satire specifically addressed to social classes and their greedy and predatory attitude towards their social antagonists. The satire provided by city comedies is often a partisan one, related to the specific audience the play was expected to appeal to. The urban setting is obviously a key element of city comedies, along with some critical insights into the most important historical changes of the time (first of all, those brought by the arrival of the new King James I); however, the degree of realism which shapes this comic subgenre is still debated. In general, we may assume that city comedy distinguished itself from other dramatic genres for presenting real and recognisable London spaces and everyday elements, but it was steeped in dramatic and literary conventions as well: the Italian comedy, the rake's progress, the coney catching pamphlets, to cite some influences. There is an extraordinary variety in plots, satiric tone and messages developed through city comedies; nonetheless, a sort of triangular scheme seems to recur which involves the three most representative social categories of this period – citizens, merchants and gallants – doubled by a similar and symmetrical feminine scheme including three typical women figures – whores, widows and maidens (Leinwand 1986: 7). Money and the promise of a better status are the only engines which drive the characters' actions; in a city which rather resembled a big marketplace, people witnessed the transformation of all human relationships and interactions into sordid transactions.

Although city comedy is universally recognised as the dramatic genre which more than others brought London life on stage (Mehl, Stock and Zwierlein 2004: 4), one should not overestimate its apparently documentary value. As Kelly Stage reminds us, "Plays are not exact representations, nor must they even be realistic versions of the urban world. They are commentaries and recreations of elements of urban negotiation" (Stage 2018: 6). The role of drama as the mimetic medium *par excellence* is to reflect rather than reproduce reality, singling out some meaningful representations of it and directing "the attention of the audience to moments on stage" (Dawson and Yachnin 2001: 96)[3] so as to communicate a play's intended messages. The case of city comedies is no different. City comedies hold a lens (often a distorting one) to the most sordid aspects of the new society. When city comedies such as Middleton's and Jonson's are praised for their unprecedented realism[4] critics actually mean that they unveiled the deeper and unspeakable sides of seventeenth-century men[5].

The new genre mainly exploits the social conflicts and economic competition of its age. Significantly, Leinwand classifies city comedies according to what social class they want to lampoon underlying how the treatment of some representative figures of Jacobean society, such as merchants or gallants, varies in order to please a specific audience. Again, rather than realistic versions of social categories, we are provided with social types, that is to say, stereotyped characters which stand for the main actors of social mobility. The reason behind this practice is that "theatre articulates human hopes and fears, the same hopes and fears that grow out of men's and women's perceptions of their place in society and of their relations to others in that society" (Leinwand 1986: 4). City comedy playwrights, then, aim to bring on stage dramatic transfigurations of social types based on their perceptions of their social antagonists. In this perspective, the new genre proposes human representations which are closer to reality than nineteenth-century naturalistic portraits: they offer an insight into people's self-other perception.

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[3] Dawson names this practice "scopic control" (Dawson and Yachnin 2001: 96).

[4] See T.S. Eliot's exaggeration about Middleton's photographic realism of Moll in *The Roaring Girl* (1963: 93) or Inga-Stina Ewbank 1969; or Pier Paolo Frassinelli 2003. See also Jonathan Haynes's idea of Jonson's social realism in Haynes 1992, and Richard Cave', Elizabeth Schafer', Brian Woolland's study (2005: 100), where we find the idea of Jonson's naturalism.

[5] Douglas Bruster, for example, claims that Middleton, Jonson and other playwrights managed to capture early modern England's materialism (2001: 238).

Furthermore, the reductive depiction of city comedies towards social figures also serves a didactic purpose:

> When the exaggerated types that populate a city comedy's intrigues suggest the discrepancy between merchant-as-type and merchant as a bundle of flesh-and-blood particulars, the play challenges its audience's self-serving prejudices (Leinwand 1986: 7).

City comedy had a successful reception, dominating both private and public theatres in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Consequently, city comedies reached a wide and mixed audience, thus playing a crucial role in shaping early modern society, especially as to its consideration of social transformation and social roles. In other words, city comedy provided seventeenth-century playgoers with an original medium to look "through" rather than "at" their times. What is more, it also enlightened its audience about people's self-other perceptual dynamics.

In this paper I want to analyse two city comedies which clearly exemplify how the new genre often proposes a skewed and exaggerated version of society: *Michaelmas Term* and *Eastward Ho*. I chose these because they express, though with two different satiric goals, a similar didactic aim: to exhibit the absurdity of social prejudices and of city comedy itself, which tended to oversimplify social dynamics.

Michaelmas Term

Michaelmas Term (*MT*), written around 1604-1605, deals with two social climbers Quomodo and Lethe and their plans to acquire respectively a piece of land and a rich wife. Quomodo tries to fool the rich landowner Easy, with the aid of his friends and diabolic helpers Shortyard and Falselights. Lethe courts Quomodo's daughter in order to marry her and acquire her estate but he is distracted by a country wench who pretends to be a gentlewoman. Quomodo, following an unreasonable and paranoid impulse, fakes his own death in order to observe his family's behaviour, but he then discovers the love affair between his wife and Easy and sees his daughter marrying a man he strongly disapproves of. The outcome is reversed and those who are initially expected to be fooled (the naïve gentleman and the women) are those who fool their own cheaters.

The play is mostly set in the street, thus confirming the urban environment as a key element of city comedy. It also deals with Jacobean topoi and problems, such as the never-ending conflict between merchants and gallants, the plague of debts and bureaucratic traps and the arranged marriages. Except for those elements, the play seems to display city comedy clichés and dramatic conventions, but they are so easily recognisable and emphasised that the fictional layer is a mere transparent veil, showing the true face of London: a big market play hosting a cannibalistic society. The comedy pivots on one main theme: people are driven by desire, which can be sexual or economic in nature, and Jacobean London is the promised land where all desires come true, and where cunning people can "harvest" others' fortunes ("and what by sweat from the rough earth they draw / is to enrich that silver harvest", *MT*, Ind, 11-12).[6] As mentioned, in *MT* everyone longs for something. Quomodo wants land in order to achieve gentry status, Easy strives to act like a gallant and to invest his fortunes properly, and Lethe covets a good marriage to escape from his low origins. Women in the play also desire a better life: Thomasine desires a new husband able to satisfy her sexually and the Country Wench

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[6] All quotations from the play are from Middleton [1604] 2000.

aspires to be a lady. In order to reach their goals, each of the characters tries to exploit someone else. Quomodo initially gulls Easy, Lethe courts the wealthy Susan and Easy becomes Quomodo's friend but in a way that relates to the old concept of friendship as a medium for enhancing new economic relations. At the same time, Susan courts Easy hoping to find in him a better husband than Quomodo, and the Country Wench exploits her sensuality to gull gallants. In this intricate web of desires and Machiavellian plans, the salient features of city comedy are meticulously showcased: Quomodo is the usurer; Easy is the gullible gallant and also the one who cuckholds the senex Quomodo; Thomasine is the sexually neglected citizen's wife and the low-born characters Lethe and Country Wench are the aspiring upstarts. By means of all these conventions, Middleton clearly seeks to emphasise the dramatic clichés, making the plot so overtly fictional that it almost denounces its all-metadramatic nature. We clearly realise this with a grotesque and caricatured character like Quomodo, who makes recourse to such violent rhetoric when exposing his plans against gallants that he inevitably provokes laughter: "to murder his estate" he says, instead of "to bankrupt" (I, 2, 107-109) and then, speaking of his social status, he boldly exclaims "We undo gentlemen daily" (II, 3, 59-60). Another element revealing the self-evident metadramatic structure of the play lies in the several symmetrical schemes in the plot: Lethe and Quomodo long for a better status, a longing which in both cases assumes sexual connotations since Lethe courts Susan and Quomodo "courts" Easy's land (indeed he often refers to the dreamed land as a seductive woman): "Oh, that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate, parcel of land, like a fine gentlewoman" (*MT*, II, 3, 91-93); "I am as jealous of this land as of my wife" (*MT*, IV, 1, 117); Lethe's mother and his mistress's father unknowingly become their children's servants, being unable to recognise them in the gentry's attire; the Country Wench fools Lethe with his own strategy, that is to say, faking her status.

What Middleton does in his play is basically to please the audience with an apparently conventional city comedy pattern, but he also wants to make sure the audience is aware of the totally artificial nature of his drama. In order to make his play overtly metadramatic, Middleton also twists some conventional elements of city comedy. Quomodo is supposed to be the villain, but he is "a truly comic one who takes such delight in his craft that we cannot seriously consider him an evil force" (Covatta 1973: 96). Easy, as the name suggests, should be the gullible gentleman, but in the end, he reveals himself to be far more cunning than Quomodo: initially, he trusts his cheater, establishing with him a sort of father-son relationship, but at the same time he pays attention to Quomodo's cunning mastery: "I'll think upon your counsel hereafter for't" (*MT*, III, 4, 145). So, in the end the "son" defeats his "father" breaking him and "stealing" his wife and yet he does not seem a mischievous figure, when we learn he respectfully waits till Quomodo's "death" before accepting Thomasine's advances. Easy' and Thomasine's immoral relationship too seems more "licit" when we apprehend how Quomodo used to ignore his wife domestically and sexually.

In light of this parodic treatment of the city comedy genre, we could assume that Middleton does not mean to provide any moral message with his play – Quomodo's and Lethe's final punishment, in fact, is just another city comedy cliché and not at all an admonishment against greed *MT*'s recourse to the old-fashioned structure of the "morality play", with Quomodo and Lethe initially appearing as Vice figures and Thomasine and Easy looking like Virtue characters, a satirical punch at a moralistic and puritan perspective, since it is quite obvious, by the end, that Vices and Virtues are interchangeable roles for Middleton.

The author, it seems, wanted the audience to focus on the play itself, to think about the ridiculously trivialised version of society it proposes and to connect that with their own tendency to stereotype social groups. We can therefore conclude that "MT does its utmost to permit an audience to question conventional assumptions" (Leinwand 1986: 52). Looking at the caricature characters acting on the stage, early modern spectators become aware of their

own stereotyping judgments towards other people, and thus reconsider hurried impressions as dangerously misleading.

Eastward Ho!

Eastward Ho! (*EH*) (1605) anticipates *MT* in its attempt to undermine social and dramatic conventions; nonetheless, its satirical aim is more deeply embedded in English dramatic and literary background. Not only does the drama bring on stage a range of stereotyped social figures, but it also plays with expected city comedy patterns and exaggerates them in order to reveal their absurdity.

The play is a collective effort by Chapman, Marston and Jonson, and as the title suggests, it is an explicit parody of Webster and Dekker's *Westward Ho!* (1604). However, *EH* goes beyond mere parody by employing an original satire which presents "all classes in a mood of critical enjoyment which depends neither on sympathy for, nor antagonism against, any particular class" (Petter 1973: xxvii). In other words, *EH* was conceived as a comic attack on the partisan social satire that city comedies typically conveyed.

The plot combines the prodigal-son theme with some traditional dramatic figures and an accurate insight into the contemporary historical context. The three prodigal figures are represented by Quicksilver, Gertrude and Sir Petronel. Quicksilver is the idle apprentice of the goldsmith Touchstone who, dismissed by his master for his bad behaviour, leaves to seek his fortune. Gertrude is Touchstone's daughter and decides to marry a gentleman in order to become a lady. Sir Petronel is a penniless new-made knight who marries Gertrude to inherit her lands.

Petronel and Quicksilver set out on a voyage to make their fortune in Virginia, so they embark eastward down the Thames. Before leaving, Petronel decides to fool Security, an old usurer, taking his young wife with him on the ship. During the journey, while the two prodigals imagine their new life, they compare their idyllic future with their unhappy present, thus making some satirical hints regarding the catastrophic consequences of King James's arrival, in terms of the subversion of social order. A tempest surprises the travellers: Quicksilver and Petronel are washed to the Isle of Dogs; Security, confused by the storm, thinks he has seen his wife on a lifeboat with Petronel and leaves to run after her, but he is cast upon Cuckold Haven; Winifred, the would-be unfaithful wife, lands at the site of the nunnery of St Katherine. In the end, the prodigals are able to return home, where, thanks to an alchemical trick performed by Touchstone's good apprentice Golding, the play ends with the pre-existing social order finally re-established.

EH is a lively celebration of the city – in line with city comedy ethos – but also a parody of the dramatic genre. Its satirical structure plays with the dramatic conventions and with the moral values that English theatre generally put on stage. First of all, the play presents us with two sorts of characters: those who are entirely moral, and those who are totally bad and mischievous. Touchstone, his daughter Mildred, and the good apprentice Golding belong to the first group, while the usurer and the prodigals stand for the immoral self-seeker society of the Jacobean period. The almost Manichean division intends to be both a satire of puritan morality and a parody of allegorical drama, whose obsolescence here equates with that of city comedies. *EH* brings on scene characters who perfectly fulfil the expectations of city comedy audiences. The usurer Security, like the voracious Quomodo, is only interested in exploiting other people for his own profit. His greediness is particularly exaggerated through the motto he often repeats when introduced to a possible "client": "How I do hunger and thirst to have the honour to enrich you" (*EH*, II, 3, 141-142), or "I do hunger and thirst to do thee service" (*EH*, II, 3, 191-192). The fortune-seeker attitude of Quicksilver is emphasised by showing us the gradual phases of

his attempted social climbing. From the very beginning he boasts a gentry background ("my mother's a Gentlewoman and my father a Justice of Peace", I, 1, 24-26A2) and he spends a lot of time with gallants (actually trying to deceive and rob them[7]). After being dismissed as an apprentice, he goes to a usurer and considers becoming a merchant. Then he leaves for a land promising wealth and prosperity and, when arrested, he immediately repents, in order to be re-integrated into the merchant world and to avoid being economically and socially banned. Gertrude is Quicksilver's feminine equivalent. She too is dismissed by her father and excluded from her fortune, but she has gentry origins ("a piece of Land she has, t'was her Grandmother's gift" I, 1, 85-86, A3), and tries to regain her status by marrying a knight. Her desire for social climbing is comically underlined by her desire to take over her mother's role: "I mother, I must be a Lady to morrow and by your leave mother […] I must take place of you, Mother. […] my coach horses must take the wall of your Coach-horses," I, 2, 88-101, B). However, Gertrude proves to be a caricature version of a lady with her mixture of arrogance and affectation, and she cannot help revealing her real status because of her ridiculous way of talking and her lack of grace (in Act I, 1, she tries to act like a gentlewoman but she cannot stop swearing and she often trips on her bulky new gown). Petronel is the cliché type of the impostor-knight who "stole" his title thanks to the inflation of honours fostered by James I; he also stands for the penniless gentleman who marries a rich heiress in order to recover his fortune; at the same time, since city comedy conventions required the gallant to court a citizen's wife, he is involved in the apparent cuckolding of Security.

If the "bad characters" of *EH* caricature the rake topoi in city comedy, so do Touchstone, Mildred and Goulding regarding the virtuous figures prescribed by the genre. Touchstone is the "good merchant", whose virtue allowed him to obtain his riches "by little and little", and never from the misfortunes of others:

> As for my rising by other men's fall, God shield me! Did I gain my wealth by ordinaries? No. By exchanging of gold? No. By keeping of gallants' company? No. I hired me a little shop, fought low, took small gain, kept no debt book, garnished my shop, for want of plate, with good wholesome thrifty sentences, as 'Touchstone, keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee' (I, 1, 41-46, A2r).

Touchstone's frequent preaching about honesty and his motto "Think upon it" turn him into a sort of biblical figure (Kay 2012: 399), so that he becomes the parodic mask of "Virtue"; similarly, Golding and Mildred prove to be unrealistic models of modesty when they ask Touchstone to use the left-overs from Gertrude and Petronel's wedding banquet for their celebration.[8]

Along with Jill Phillips Ingram (2004: 25), one could speculate that *EH* sought to compare the "moral way to economic success", symbolised by Touchstone and Golding, who stand for "bourgeois collectivism", and the immoral and cannibalistic one, symbolised by Quicksilver and Petronel. Like Middleton in *MT*, the *EH* playwrights too never wanted to convey any moral messages, but they sought, rather, to raise questions about the audience's critical reception of city comedy and the representation of society in city comedy. *EH* is an amazing accumulation of dramatic conventions and city comedy social types where the satirical focus is literary parody more than Jacobean society. We may therefore assume that Chapman, Jonson and Marston's comedy was designed to expose the obsolescence of the city comedy genre and its inability to reflect social conflicts and social types through merely stereotyped characters and plots.

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[7] "I am entertained among gallants, true. Frank, right. I lend them moneys, good. They are spent, must not they strive to get more? And to whom?" (I, 1, 26-27).
[8] As David Kay reminds us (2012: 404), in this episode, Marston Chapman and Jonson also wanted to make a parodic reference to *Hamlet* I, 2, 180. This makes it even more evident that the primary aim of *EH* was literary parody rather than social satire.

Therefore, the only didactic message *EH* seems to provide is more similar to an aesthetic lesson than to a real admonishment: the comedy invites Jacobean spectators to soundly judge the artistic quality of plays and to avoid mistaking dramatic conventions for real world dynamics.

Conclusion

City comedy played an important role as an instrument of investigation into Jacobean social conflicts and anxieties. Nonetheless, the comic subgenre held a lens, rather than a mirror, to seventeenth-century society, thus distorting and modifying social types and social dynamics in order to reflect social prejudices and perspectives. City comedies presented the audience with characters which almost resemble allegorical figures: they embodied vices or virtues according to the social class the play was meant to please. However, in some city comedies a twofold satiric goal was pursued, which intended to mock the audience by providing it with caricaturised characters and plots that were self-evidently conventional. Spectators were thus invited to recognise in these plays their own tendency to develop stereotyped visions of their social equals or antagonists and to realise how they were naively pleased by dramatic conventions rather than by an accurate analysis of their times.

In *Michaelmas Term*, Middleton plays with the audience's expectations and dramatic taste by presenting two villains as heroes who are quite comical in their obsessions with social climbing and whose surprising naiveté leads to their defeat in the end at the hands of their own victims. The role of the cheater and the cheated are interchangeable in the play as in life.

Eastward Ho! stages the questionable dramatic taste of Jacobean playgoers by unmasking the absurdity of the patterned conventions of city comedy. The play is a hilarious accumulation of traditional city comedy plots, which are mixed up with symbolic characters from older drama to emphasise the ridiculous and quite old-fashioned schemes of the comic subgenre. So, the idle gentleman is at the same time an impoverished knight, an heir-hunter, a prodigal figure, and a seducer of citizens' wives. *EH* aims to be a satire of the dramatic taste and beliefs of the audience by unveiling the fact that city comedy types do not reproduce real social types but merely unrealistic and impossible-to-be-stereotyped individuals.

We can therefore conclude that city comedies contributed to shaping the early modern audience's perspectives on and prejudices regarding their socio-historical context. Although the comic subgenre adopted a light and ridiculous tone, it fostered the rise of social stereotypes which affected the way social classes perceived each other. In other words, while city comedies played with the causes and dynamics of social conflicts, they also influenced them. Sometimes, however, city comedy playwrights invited their spectators to receive their work in a more critical way and to look through it so as to find some unexpected lessons applicable to real life. Thus, unconventional city comedies, such as *Michaelmas Term* and *Eastward Ho!*, could actually be seen as anti-city comedies, managing to turn the genre's aims and schemes upside down, in order to encourage the audience to reconsider their own beliefs and social behaviour.

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Who's in control? Dramatic agreements and ideal audiences in Shakespeare's and Jonson's plays

Beatrice Righetti

Prologue and dramatic agreement

In the last decades, early modern scholars have often addressed prologues as privileged dramatic features which can shed light on the relationship between the playwright, the audience and the dramatic performance.[1] This relationship is often a thorny topic to address as it involves the engagement of an unprecedented democratic, "mass audience". "Public theatres had an average capacity of between 2500 and 3000 people, […] [and] about 21,000 people, about 13 per cent of the London population, went to the theatres in a given performance week in 1605 — the one year for which he is able to work out the figures" (Donaldson 1983: 75). In this context, playwrights had to deal for the first time with a "mass audience", which was characterised by different cultural backgrounds and theatrical tastes. Thus, early modern prologues conveyed an "agreed pretence" (Butterworth 2014: 2), that is a compact, between the playwright and the audience to regulate spectators' entrance in the make-believe process of theatre-making as they provided theatre-goers with a dramatic framework on which they could ground their attitude towards and judgement of the play. Although agreed pretence is mostly a tacit agreement since it upholds "as long as the spectator voluntarily consents to witness the performed theatre", sometimes it assumes an explicit form in a specific sub-genre of the early modern prologue, namely the dramatic agreement (Butterworth 2014: 2).

According to Bruster, while "a high of 64 per cent of surviving plays originally performed from 1580 to 1589 have prologues", these numbers started to decrease from the 1590s, when only "a low of 31 per cent of surviving plays performed from 1590 to 1599" featured them (Bruster and Weimann 2004: 13-14). Although this apparent decline stopped at the rise of the new century (Bruster and Weimann 2004: 13-4), playwrights started to question the role of prologues as openings of their plays: while some overtly expressed their dislike for them ("The date / is out of such prolixity: / We'll have no Cupid hoodwink'd with a scarf, / […] Nor no without-book prologue, faintly spoke / After the prompter, for our entrance", *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4.1-9), others used this chance to vary them in both form and content (Bruster and Weimann 2004: 13-4). This latter creative attempt developed that sub-genre of the prologues which is now identified as dramatic agreement.

It may be useful to remind that average "prologues from dramas of the commercial playhouses are between 15 and 35 lines long" (Howard 1980: 18) and conveyed a number of functions, such as offering background information ("Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene, / From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, / Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean", *RJ*, 1-4) and granting the novelty of the plot ("That is, to day, / The name of what you are met for, a new Play", *The Devil is an Ass* 1938: 163).

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[1] See Schneider 2011, Stern 2004 and Palmer 1982.

Offering "'the ground' against which the particular events of a dramatic work are 'figured' or 'fore-grounded'" (Howard 1980: 198), prologues also aimed to redirect the audience's emotional response to the play to obtain a positive reception of it ("Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play", *Henry V*, 35). These functions are all carried out by dramatic agreements as well, which may also resemble in form either short prologues or long inductions: the dramatic agreement to *Henry V* is 35 lines long, while the one to *Bartholomew Fair* is over 150 lines long. However, dramatic agreements specifically unveil the dramatic mechanisms underlying the "agreed pretence" between playwrights, actors and audience. It may be suggested that their main aim is to increase theatre-goers' awareness of their role in theatre-making and to show them how they can successfully perform it.

In this paper, I chose to analyse the dramatic agreements in the production of two playwrights who have often been compared and contrasted also in terms of their relationship to their audience, namely Ben Jonson (1572–1637) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616). To do so, I selected the only five plays of theirs which feature dramatic agreements: Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1601), *Poetaster* (1601), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and William Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part II* (1596–99) and *Henry V* (1598–99). I have decided not to include the dramatic agreement embedded in Shakespeare' *Henry VIII* due to the still debated attribution of the play. My working hypothesis is that, while sharing a common structure, Jonson and Shakespeare developed an expansion of the dialogical and interactive relationship with their audience by means of dramatic agreement in two antithetical, yet complementary ways. Despite their usefulness in questioning the playwrights' attitude towards contemporary audience, I would stress the fact that these dramatic agreements belong to a wider intellectual game between Jonson and Shakespeare. The playwrights' welcoming or scornful attitudes towards contemporary audience derive from a specific dramatic pose chosen by the authors and unveiled by the frequent references to their meta-dramatic exchange in their dramatic agreements: *Poetaster*'s "armed Prologue", for instance, is echoed in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* ("prologue arm'd", *Troilus and Cressida* 22) just like some of Shakespeare's plays are referred to in Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour*, where the "servant-monster" may hint to Caliban in *The Tempest*, also suggested by the reference to "Tales, Tempests and Such Drolleries", while the "nest of antics" almost certainly refers to the dance of twelve satyrs in *The Winter's Tale* (IV, 4).

Still, dramatic agreements may prove an interesting standpoint from which to peek into Jonson's and Shakespeare's opinion of the imagination and role of "mass audience" in the make-believe process of theatre. To do so, I will borrow from the prologue to *Henry V* the term "cipher" and I will use it as a metaphor to describe Jonson's and Shakespeare's dramatic agreements and attitudes towards the audience more at large. Attested from 1528, "cipher" as "[a]n arithmetical symbol or character (0) of no value by itself, but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position" (OED 2021: 1a online) will be used to refer to Shakespeare's belief in the generative possibilities of the playwright's and the audience's imagination. Their creative attempts work to bring "theatrical ciphers", namely the bare facts of performance, to life according to the terms of the agreed pretence. While Shakespeare's "cipher" seems to look at the numberless, creative opportunities given by imagination, Jonson's works the other way around. Defined as "[a] secret or disguised manner of writing […] by making single words stand for sentences or phrases, or by other conventional methods intelligible only to those possessing the key" (OED 2021: 5a online), Jonson's "cipher" refers to the dramatic performance as a dramatic code to be properly understood in order to avoid misinterpretations which may lead to serious accusations ranging from particularity to sedition.

Understanding the dramatic code: Jonson's dramatic agreement as "cipher"

In Jonson's dramatic agreements in *Every Man in His Humour* (1601), *Poetaster* (1601), and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the metaphor of the "cipher" refers to the dramatic code which the audience must properly understand to access the imaginative framework offered by the author and consequently to enter the creative process as a whole. This code does not simply include the playwright's choice of words and topics but, most importantly, his intention in writing, which may be easily misinterpreted.

Some of Jonson's main concerns over the correct deciphering of the dramatic code derive from his own experiences with dramatic writing and its connections to the socio-political context it was embedded in. In 1597, for instance, Jonson was imprisoned as co-author of a lost play by the Pembroke's Men, *The Isle of Dogs*, "which was deemed by the Privy Council so offensive that it very nearly tipped the balance in favour of those, like the City of London authorities, who wished to eradicate the public playhouses altogether" (Dutton 1996: 65). A few years later, Jonson had to face further problems with the law due to his writing of *Poetaster* (1601), which was met with such hostility that he had to answer to the Lord Chief Justice, and of *Sejanus* (1603), which cost him an examination by the Privy Council and an accusation of popery and treason (Cave et al. 1999: 118). Despite Jonson's plea of innocence as he dissociated himself from all the works he co-authored, thus including *The Isle of Dogs*, *Eastward Ho* (1605) led to even worse consequences: this satire on the Scots caused both Jonson and Chapman, the third co-author being Marston, to be imprisoned and almost have their ears and nose cut off (Dutton 1996: 92-3). These traumatic experiences led Jonson to warn his readers about the pitfalls in miscomprehensions of the dramatic code in his Epistle to *Volpone* (1607): "[T]here are that profess to have a key for the *deciphering* of everything; but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or give leave to these invading interpreters to be over-familiar with their fames, who cunningly, and often, utter their own virulent malice under other men's simplest meanings" (Jonson 1937, my emphasis). To "utter their own virulent malice under other men's simplest meanings" may recall the dangerous habit of "application", that is of looking for references to a specific person behind the fictional identity of a given character. Since Jonson was accused of "particularity, libel of identifiable individuals, sedition" (Dutton 1996: 110), he often tried to avoid personal references in his plays. As he puts it in the second Prologue to *Epicoene* (1608):

> If any, yet, will (with particular slight
> Of application) wrest what he doth write;
> And that he meant or him, or her, will say:
> They make a libell, which he made a play (11-14, my emphasis).

According to him, misinterpretations of the playwright's code seem to be mainly due to the spectators' malice and ignorance, which are recurring themes in his dramatic agreements. The prologue to *Poetaster* appropriately opens with Envy which aims to wrest the playwright's writing and intention and find faults in them. Taking advantage of the Prologue's momentary absence, Envy asks the audience to arm themselves with "triple Malice" and ruin the author's work by means of "applications, / Spie-like suggestions, priuie whispering, […] senselesse glosses, and allusions" (24-40). These disruptive instruments depend on the audience's active use of imagination to "traduce, corrupt, apply […]" (54) and turn what they see and hear onstage into what they *think* they see and hear. To limit such dangers, Prologue expresses the need of an "armed *Prologue*" (6) and a "forc't defence" (11) to stress the playwright's confidence on

his good work and morality ("His mind it is aboue their iniuries", 28) and identify detractors and ill-judgers despite those "faire and formall shapes" (10) they can assume.

The wishes of Prologue seem to be fulfilled by the comic, perhaps parodic, dramatic agreement opening *Bartholomew Fair*, which provides a more rigorous framework where to inscribe the audience's problematic excesses of imagination. An innovative kind of induction, it appears as an "Agreement" which includes a number of specific "[a]rticles drawn out in hast betweene our *Author* and you" (60). Rooted in stiff, juridical language, it is delivered by two authoritarian characters, the Book-holder and the Scrivener, whose aim is to provide the audience with specific instructions on how to decipher the dramatic code and consequently to formulate "grounded judgement[s]". This meta-dramatic agreement addresses any spectator, "as well the curious and enuious, as the fauouring and iudicious" (75). This "democratic" inclusion may be justified by the fact that anyone hearing the play is already a legitimate participant to the dramatic performance thanks to another kind of contract: by paying the price of the ticket, the audience had already become subject to a theatrical compact which regulated their status as spectators and the rules of the playhouse they had to follow. This commercial detail is nothing marginal to Jonson, who equates the spectators' economic wealth, displayed by the cost of their ticket, with the quality of their judgement. Quite satirically, this economic threshold is also "the only kind of discrimination between one level of intelligence and another the audience is capable of understanding" (Leggatt 1981: 237). The Book-holder makes this economic and intellectual difference explicit when he reads that "it shall be lawfull for any man to iudge his six pen'orth, his twelue pen'orth, so to his eighteene pence, 2. shillings, halfe a crowne, to the value of his place: [...] if he drop but six pence at the doore, and will censure a crownes worth, it is thought there is no conscience, or iustice in that" (87-96). However, "money might not be the final determinant of intelligence or judgement" (Dutton 1996: 49) so that Jonson needs to find a complementary criterion according to which the audience can objectively judge his play. This may be identified as free will. The following article clarifies that each spectator must trust their own judgement alone and avoid external influences coming from "invading interpreters":

> [...] It is finally agreed, by the fore-
> Said hearers, and *spectators*, that they neyther in themselues
> Conceale, nor suffer by them to be concealed any State-
> Decipherer, or politique Picklocke of the Scene, so solemnly
> Ridiculous as to search out, who was meant by Ginger-
> Bread-woman, who by the Hobby-horse-man, who by the
> Costard-monger, nay, who by their Wares.
> [...]
> But that such
> Person, or persons *so found, be*
> *Left discovered* to the mercy
> Of the Author, as a forfeiture to the Stage and your *laughter,*
> Aforesaid (135-147, my emphasis).

The reliance on other people's opinion may favour the development of "conjuring means" as application and "Censure by *Contagion*", which may lead to more serious consequences than the rejection of a play. The compound "state-decipherer" is useful in this sense as it makes explicit the tight connection between socio-political consequences ("state") and the understanding of the dramatic code ("decipherer"). As shown by Jonson's own experiences, it was not rare that playwrights were charged with serious crimes due to misinterpretations of their plays.

Among what may bias the proper decoding of the dramatic "cipher", these prologues specifically focus on the audience's ignorance and imagination and on the way to limit the eventual misreading they may cause. The potentially de-generative role of imagination in the make-believe process is first addressed in *Every Man In His Humour.* Although necessary to access any make-believe framework, plays featuring "*Tales, Tempests,* and such like *Drolleries*" (*Bartholomew Fair*, Induction, 133) in particular enhance the audience's imagination by means of "popular errors", such as the disruption of the unit of time ("To make a child, now swadled, to proceede / Man, and then shoote vp, in one beard, and weede, / Past threescore yeeres", 7-9) and the use of specific scenic tricks ("Where neither *Chorus* wafts you ore the seas; […] nor roul'd bullet heard / To say, it thunders", 15-19). These devices show the audience how to expand their mind and develop their imaginative capabilities; however, they do not provide them with suggestions on how to control this mental tool. If boundless, the audience's imagination risks reaching the other end of the spectrum and turning from a generative into a de-generative tool. As explained in *Poetaster*, sometimes imagination acts as a fruitful soil where ignorance can prosper: if excessively enhanced, it may be used by some spectators to cross the dramatic border between fiction and non-fiction even when it is not necessary. In this case, imagination risks to favour ill-judgers such as "state-decypherers" by providing them with mental means through which they can fill the gaps between onstage characters and real-life people, easing the application process and risking to "damn the author" for good ("Or that will pretend to affirme (on his own *inspired Ignorance*), what *Mirror of Magistrates* is meant by the *Iustice*", *Bartholomew Fair*, 141-142). The adjective "inspired" seemingly points to ignorance as the result of a creative mental process, as a more general bias of understanding potentially supported by the powers of imagination. As Redwine Jr has observed, "from *Volpone* onward . . . 'licence, or free power, to illustrate and heighten our invention' is more likely to be attacked as a dangerous tendency of an illiterate age than to be defended on the grounds of classical precedent" (Redwine Jr quoted in Dutton 1996: 93).

Unlike his colleagues, Jonson tries to limit the backlashes of such dramatic mistakes. In *Bartholomew Fair*, the reference to the entrance prices, for instance, may guide the spectators' judgement and thus reactions towards the play so that "each level of the audience sticks to the kind of response most natural to it" (Leggatt 1981: 238). Besides showing the audience how to judge, Jonson strives to deprive them of tricky imaginative means. The author honours his poetic muse by showing "deeds, and language, such as men doe vse", thus favouring dramatic representations which mirror nature and truth as much as possible. Accordingly, his dramatic agreements too point to the importance of pursuing nature and truth in plays as a remedy against the audience's dangerous excesses of imagination: just like they do with the audience's humoral dysfunctions, playwrights must "with an armed and resolved hand" – or with an "arm'd prologue" – strip spectators' imaginative dysfunctions "[n]aked as at their birth" to help them heal. This may be done by presenting the audience with "an Image of the times" since it does not require dangerous imaginative leaps and does not fuel "inspired Ignorance" so that spectators can access the dramatic "cipher" merely by focusing on the actions and dialogues happening onstage.

The "figure" as meta-theatrical addition: Shakespeare's dramatic agreement as "cypher"

Jonson's dramatic agreements can be compared to a "cipher" in its connotation as "a secret or disguised manner of writing […]" which requires a proper interpretative key to access it. Shakespeare's dramatic agreements may also be compared to a "cipher"; still, in this case, this metaphor hints to "a symbol or character (0) of no value by itself, but which increases or

decreases the value of other figures according to its position". When referred to the dramatic context of play making, the theatre itself, actors and stage props can be considered "ciphers" to the audience's interpretation. As the prologue to *Henry V* underlies, the stage by itself is nothing but a materially limited place where seemingly senseless actions take place. Only when supported by imagination, can its bare materiality work as a "cipher" for both the audience and the actors. Thanks to the "Muse of fire", dramatic "ciphers" can assume any shape and "dramatic value" so that the "unworthy scaffold" may become "the vast fields of France", actors may be transformed into soldiers, kings, braggarts and wooden swords into sharp weapons. Thus, the Shakespearean "cipher" seems to act as a potentially endless generative element as it contains in itself the seeds of numberless possible identities and realities:

> O, pardon! since *a crooked figure* may
> Attest in little place a *million*;
> And let us, *ciphers* to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work (Prologue, 1, 14-18, my emphasis).

The multifaceted nature of the "cipher" implies its characteristic feature of constantly standing for something else than itself. To Jonson, such an interpretative openness creates links between fictional and non-fictional worlds which may lead to thorny crossings of socio-political borders, as shown by the habit of application. The existence of such links is less problematic to Shakespeare. Although these generative elements create connections between fictional and non-fictional worlds too, they do not go so far as to potentially hint to the socio-political context existing outside the theatre but address the real, material dimension of theatre only and work as meta-theatrical devices to ease the transition between the realm of reality and that of fiction. In the following passage, rhetorical questions set the imaginative spectrum the audience is allowed to operate as they lead spectators from the minimum imaginative value of the "cockpit" to the maximum one of France and Agincourt:

> […] Can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt? (*Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 11-14).

However, Shakespeare seems concerned as much as Jonson with the audience's relationship with playgoing. As Kernan explains, Shakespeare "did not harangue and instruct his audience directly like Ben Jonson, but he did often put an audience on stage in ways which suggest, very obliquely, his conception of the relationship of playwright, play, actors and audience" (1983: 78). Avoiding comic "articles of agreements", Shakespeare uses play-within-the-plays to show the audience what they should and should not do to enter the make-believe process properly. Usually, these meta-dramatic representations feature an aristocratic audience commenting with various degrees of scorn and condescension on the unsatisfactory play put on by lower-class actors. In *Hamlet*, for instance, as soon as the Prologue of the play-within-the-play appears onstage, the prince interrupts it and comments on the action. He does not leave the drama its time to develop properly and eventually spoils the main events of the play and rushes the action at a faster pace than the actors':

> LUCIANO. Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
> Considerate season else no creature seeing,
> Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
> With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
> Thy natural magic and dire property

On wholesome life usurp immediately.

Pours the poison in his ears.

HAMLET. 'A poisons him i'th' garden for his estate. His
Name's Gonzago. The story is extant and written in
Very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the
Murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife (III, 2, 248-251).

Similarly, in the *Tempest,* Antonio and Sebastian remain sceptical about the imaginative dimension of the play and do not allow even its status of temporary illusion (IV,1) (Kernan 1983: 84). An opposite but complementary disruptive behaviour consists in taking the dramatic performance too literally. Bottom's constant interruptions of the play ruin the atmosphere and leave the spectators in a limbo between fiction and non-fiction ("This is the silliest stuff that e'er I heard", *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1, 205). One of the main points of Shakespeare's dramatic agreements seems to consist in showing the audience which behaviour may spoil the dramatic performance: since "too much disbelief breaks off Shakespeare's internal plays as frequently as too much belief" (Kernan 1983: 84), the members of the audience are to take on a very sensitive role as they are asked to "accept and [be] moved by the play as if it were real, while at the same time knowing that it is not literally true" (Kernan 1983: 84) in order to support the suspension of disbelief (Hammond 1987: 148). However, Shakespeare's dramatic agreement is not thoroughly based on the audience's "rooted" judgements and on their obedience to the playwright's creative rules as they also stress the importance of the proper use of the "cipher" to create an imaginative horizon common to the actors and the audience. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, Lord's instructions to his huntsmen show the importance of sharing a "collective understanding" and imaginative framework to sustain a dramatic performance and make it successful:

LORD. […] Sirs, I will practise on this drunken man.
What think you, if he were convey'd to bed,
Wrapp'd in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,
A most delicious banquet by his bed,
And brave attendants near him when he wakes,
Would not the beggar then forget himself?

FIRST HUNTSMAN. Believe me, lord, I think he cannot choose.

SECOND HUNTSMAN. It would seem strange unto him when he wak'd.

LORD. Even as a flatt'ring dream or worthless fancy.
Then take him up, and manage well the jest (Induction, 1, 34-42).

It may be suggested that Shakespeare's dramatic agreements include imaginative solutions which are entirely self-contained in the dramatic experience of playgoing and bear no reference to the external, socio-political context. "Ciphers" are thus necessary to access the fictional world of theatre by overcoming its material limits:

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake;
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, 1, 89-92).

Theseus mentions "noble respect" as a way to fill the gaps in the "bare facts" of the stage. However, it may be suggested that such a respect implies a wide use of imagination as it must depict actions and people onstage, who are nothing but the "shadows" of the events and characters they should bring to life (Kernan 1983: 86). Since a successful staging of a play seemingly depends on the audience's access to its imaginative powers, playwrights need to include dramatic elements which could ease spectators' fundamental engagement in the make-believe process of theatre. "Ciphers" seem particularly fitting this function due to their "democratic" nature. By a stretch of the imagination, we may use Rumour's description of itself to better explain what a "democratic" nature of the Shakespearean "cipher" may be and how it affects its relationship with the audience.

> Rumour is a pipe
> Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
> And of so easy and so plain a stop
> That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
> The still-discordant wavering multitude, unfold
> Can play upon it (*Henry IV Part II*, Prologue, 1, 15-20).

Like Rumour, the "cipher" can be considered a "pipe" suitable for any kind of player composing the "still-discordant wavering multitude" attending commercial playhouses. Both of them rely on the hearers' imagination on which they ground a very similar process of dramatic expansion: Rumour multiplies one story into numberless versions of it as much as the "cipher" stands for limitless versions of the same image originally conceived by the playwright himself. Imaginative expansion and "democratic" inclusion play a fundamental role in the success of any rhetorical (for Rumour) and theatrical (for the "cipher") illusion. For this reason, they are often addressed in Shakespeare's dramatic agreements. Inclusion is signalled by the use of plurals forms ("let us, ciphers to this great accompt, / On your imaginary forces work", *Henry V*, 18-19) and direct addresses to the spectators ("Open your ear; for which of you will stop / The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?", *Henry IV Part II*, 1-2). These features provide the audience with the recognised status of imaginers and put them in an equal relation with the community of actors as key participants to the success of the impending play (Bruster and Weimann 2004: 35). Besides developing such a sense of community, dramatic agreements also need to provide spectators with the imaginative tools to expand their minds and creative skills so that they can enter the same dramatic framework as the actors. To do so, Shakespeare often relies on the power of suggestive images. The role given to visual expressiveness may depend on early modern drama reliance on *ekphrasis*, namely "a literary device in which a painting, sculpture, or other work of visual art is described in detail" (OED 2021: online).[2] The creation of highly suggestive images would help the author turn vague concepts into visible representations which were thus easier to be recalled and remembered. Bate, for instance, claims that the iconicity of Hamlet's monologue lies "not [in his] words that stick in the spectator's mind, but [in] the visual image that is made possible by the stage prop of the skull" (1998: 216). Visuality also helps preserve the original meaning of the theatrical images throughout the centuries: unlike words, which often undergo processes of (re-)interpretation, such graphic features as those employed in Shakespeare's plays are almost impossible to be altered since their imaginative power and expressivity tightly link them to a specific character and plot (Heffernan 2004: 91).

The importance of visuality, inclusion and imaginative expansion in Shakespeare's make-believe process is clearly expressed in the prologue to *Henry IV Part II*. Rumour helps theatre-goers feel like members of the same imaginative community by showing them with powerful

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[2] See also Meek 2009 and Spurgeon 1935.

images how similar they are both in their outward appearance ("well-known body" anatomised) and in their imaginative engagement in the play ("Open your ear; for which of you will stop / The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?", 1-2). Rumour also relies on visuality to ease spectators' appropriation of the imaginative terms on which the play will develop ("I run before King Harry's victory, / Who, in a bloody field by Shrewsbury, unfold / Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops, / Quenching the flame of bold rebellion", 23-26). Also, the prologue to *Henry V* employs suggestive images to engage the audience and help it participate in the dramatic representation of the play. To do so, this dramatic agreement avoids Jonson's commercial and juridical terms and focuses on the power of "invention". The audience's, and we may say the actors' too, imagination is invoked from the very beginning of the prologue in order to transform the theatre into an epic painting where "the warlike Harry, like himself / Assume the port of Mars" (*Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 5-6). As already shown in the induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, no act of re-creation can be performed without the agreement of the parties involved in the imaginative process due to the need of a common frame of reference. In the body of the prologue, Shakespeare introduces the key to his imaginative proposal and sums up the terms of his dramatic agreement in eight lines only:

> Or may we cram
> Within this *wooden O* the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
> O, pardon! since a *crooked figure* may
> Attest in little place a million;
> And let us, *ciphers* to this great accompt,
> On your *imaginary forces* work.
> *Suppose* within the girdle of these *walls* (*Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 12-19, my emphasis).

The transition from the "wooden O" to the "girdle of these walls" represents a bridge between the first half of the prologue about the limitation of "this unworthy scaffold" and the second half where suggestive cues instruct the audience on what to think to enter the theatrical illusion. Such an imaginative jump is made possible only thanks to "figure" and "ciphers", placed in the middle of the prologue as its ideological core. They are both crooked, blurred elements, which stand for an infinite number of possible outcomes and thus vary according to what is added to them, just like the "zero" to which they had been initially compared. This complex dramatic account is characterised by a bi-directional movement: on the one hand, the audience must take on an active role as it consciously makes an imaginative effort to co-create otherwise unstageable scenes; on the other, the actors and the playwright must enable the spectators to understand on which frame of reference the audience is supposed to exercise their imagination. "Ciphers" are thus signalled by means of cues which may appear as verbs such as "suppose", "think", "piece out", visual aids such as costumes and stage props, and powerful images. This attention to the visual and, more generally, imaginative quality of theatre-making is stressed in the concluding lines of the prologue:

> *Piece out* our imperfections with your *thoughts*;
> Into a thousand parts divide on man,
> And make *imaginary puissance* (*Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 23-25, my emphasis).

We may infer that "imaginary" and "thoughts" hint at two different aspects of imagination. "Imaginary" is coupled with "forces" and "puissance" and may thus refer to the creative effort the audience must put in visualising the stage: spectators have to be aware of the frame of reference given by the playwright, decode it properly and follow the instructions embedded in it to succeed in overcoming the material limitations of theatre. While "imaginary" may suggest

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the audience's more passive role of assimilating, decoding and following the playwright's information, "thoughts" may address its active role. Matched with "piece out" and "deck", "thoughts" may refer to two complementary actions which highlight the audience's powers to create and enhance the imaginative framework they are given. "*Piece out* our imperfections with your thoughts" seemingly points to the imperfect nature of the play: because of the material limitations of the stage, the play would become perfect – and thus complete, representable – only if its imaginative gaps were filled by the creative efforts of someone other than the playwright. Such an active role of the audience in the creative process of staging a play is taken a step further by the expression "For 'tis your thoughts that now must *deck* our kings". This may imply that the audience is also allowed not only to complete the draft created by the author but also to "decorate" it in accordance with his guidelines. Spectators are thus asked to expand their imagination to consequently expand the stage and the scene, which will eventually acquire full creative potential. I would suggest that the theme of expansion may also be found in the prologue to *Henry V*, which describes the theatre as a "wooden O". Referring to the traditional circular shape of theatres, "O" may also suggest two actions fundamental to any performance: the act of speaking, as it recalls the image of an open mouth, and that of hearing, as it suggests the rotund circularity of sound and recursion of the echo, necessary to actors to make their voice during the performance. The image of echo may recall the generative powers of the "cipher": by propagating a sound, echo embeds numberless variations of it as much as the "cipher" stands for infinite declensions of the one image originally conceived by the playwright.

These comparisons may help us draw the tentative conclusion that Shakespeare's dramatic agreements show his attention to – rather than concern with – the audience's imaginative capabilities. As Jonson, Shakespeare is aware of the possible backlashes deriving from excesses of imagination. He provides the audience with visually powerful cues ("Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth", *Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 26-27) and simple but effective instructions ("Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts", *Henry V*, Prologue, 1, 23) to manage their creative skills and access to the dramatic dimension of playgoing. However, Shakespeare stresses the importance of the reliance on the "Muse of fire" and on those "popular errors" loathed by Jonson himself, which instead he uses to increase the recursive, open nature of his "ciphers". By doing so, Shakespeare provides the audience with those mental tools which can expand their sensorial and imaginative experiences and successfully carry out their creative role of artists rather than art critics.

What's in an ideal audience?

The analysis of Jonson's and Shakespeare's dramatic agreements seemingly hints at common concerns over the audience's engagement in dramatic representations. Such a specific attention to theatre-goers may derive from the rather democratic nature of playgoing. As mentioned in the opening section of this paper, commercial playhouses welcomed about "13 per cent of the London population" (Harbage 1941: 4), namely an audience of very different cultural backgrounds and dramatic tastes. To ease mass audience's participation in the make-believe process of theatre, Jonson and Shakespeare relied on dramatic agreements as tools of transition from the non-fictional to the fictional world: Jonson's dramatic agreements may be compared to "ciphers" as dramatic codes since they provide the audience with the interpretative key to access the true meaning of the play, while Shakespeare's may hint at "ciphers" as null figures which can assume different shapes and dramatic values according to the playwright's and audience's intentions. As already suggested, these two different uses of the dramatic agreement lead to the identification of two different ways of managing the audience's entrance in the make-believe process. Like Littlewit, who turns Leander into a dyer's son and has to clarify the

puppets' lifeless nature to the malicious Puritan spectators, Jonson feels the need to "*shrink* the scene to fit the limited minds of his patrons" and to expose the practical mechanisms behind dramatic representations to help theatre-goers gain access to his theatrical dimension.

In his dramatic agreements, Shakespeare too shows the mechanisms of the stage. Unlike Jonson, who uses them to limit spectators' excesses of imagination, Shakespeare points to these gaps between fiction and non-fiction and stresses the need for spectators to bridge the two with sympathetic imagination. In Jonson's dramatic agreements, "cyphers" seemingly highlight the differences between "the world of the self-contained play, [the] awareness of the contrivances and mechanisms of the stage" (Craig 1983: 99) and the socio-political context. In Shakespeare's, such differences must be mentally reduced so much that they blend in one theatrical experience. To create such a "swelling" scene, which embeds both reality and fiction, spectators "must view the self-contained world of the play not merely as actors speaking lines, nor as real men and women fighting, loving and dying, but as a 'shadow', or a 'dream'" (Craig 1983: 99) or a wider "cypher" to access by means of their imagination.

This reading may imply that both playwrights aimed to create not only the fittest theatrical scene for their audience but also the fittest audience for their theatrical scene. Jonson's features of his "ideal audience" (Salingar 1991) may be identified in negative terms. His dramatic agreements highlight what he would not like to find in spectators willing to see his plays. In *Every Man in His Humour*, for instance, Jonson points to the audience's biased "understanding" by "ignorance" or popular taste. Such flaw is apparent, for instance, when spectators prefer "roul'd bullet heard / To say, it thunders; […] tempestuous drumme / Rumbles, to tell you when the storme doth come" over "deeds, and language, such as men doe vse :/ And persons, such as Comoedie would chuse" (Prologue, 19-21). Later in *Poetaster*, Jonson attacks the potentially dangerous habit of application, usually fuelled by spectators' or fellow playwrights' "envy" and "malice". These opponents are defined by specific descriptions ("base detractors and illiterate apes") which highlight the differences between one another in the degree of their critical engagement with the play: while the action of "detracting" implies a voluntary critique and manipulation of reality, "illiteracy" works often unconsciously, passively, so that it jeopardises any basic understanding of the events onstage. In *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson is even more explicit in defining his ideal audience: according to him, ideal spectators should be aware of their judgemental capacities, which are often symbolised by the price of their ticket ("if he drop but six Pence at the / Door, and will Censure a Crowns worth, it is thought / there is no Conscience, or Justice in that", 94-96), they should exercise their free will in appreciating or criticising a play ("It is also agreed, That every Man here exercise his / own Judgment, and not Censure by *Contagion,* or upon / *trust,* from anothers Voice, or Face, that sits by him", 97-99) and expose the malicious workings of "state-decypherers", who try to wrest the playwright's work ("it is finally agreed, by the / foresaid hearers and *spectators,* That they neither in / themselves conceal, nor suffer by them to be concealed, / any *State-decipherer,* or *Politick Picklock* of the *Scene,* so solemnly / ridiculous, as to search out, who was meant by / *Ginger-bread-woman*", 135-140). As Leggatt explains, Jonson is aware that, as a playwright, he can only "determine the material of the play" and that spectators are too a plastic and heterogenous group to be easily led towards "rooted" judgments. The only way to exert some control over them is to turn spectators into theatrical material as well. His dramatic agreements seem to be strategic to reach this aim: instructing the audience on how to behave and react, they turn spectators into fixed characters, into theatrical material, whose dramatic judgement and imagination can be easily predetermined and checked upon. By doing so, Jonson finally can control not only the spectators' reactions, but "the conditions of performance" more in general and "take the risk out of theatre" (Leggatt 1981: 238).

Shakespeare too warns against the unpredictable responses stemming from mass audiences; however, his ideal audience is positively characterised by wide imaginative capabilities. His

dramatic agreements avoid references to commercial and socio-political dimensions which remind the audience of the external world. Rather, they focus on the fictional events about to unfold within the "wooden O" and on the audience's participation in them. Instead of a behavioural one, Shakespeare draws an imaginative framework which spectators must agree on and implement by individual creative attempts ("Think when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth", *Henry V,* Prologue, 26-27). It may be suggested that both Shakespeare and Jonson wish for an audience who can properly understand the dramatic code of their plays. However, I would suggest that Jonson mainly refers to the importance of discerning the verbal code of a play, while Shakespeare makes reference to the importance of mastering its imaginative one.

Despite the detailed instructions offered in their dramatic agreements, both Jonson's and Shakespeare's idealisations of the perfect audience are destined to implode (Grene 1980: 15). Shakespeare has to comically admit the problems deriving from granting the audience too much imaginative freedom when Christopher Sly goofily blurs the distinction between fiction and reality. Similarly, Jonson has to acknowledge the limits of the imaginative restrictions he imposes as soon as he understands that they will not stop the ill-judgements and accusations of those who "insist on seeing through the conventions of the theatre" (Martin and Pesta 2016: 12), as he admits in *Ode to Himself*:

> Come leave the lothed stage,
> And the more lothsome age:
> Where pride, and impudence (in faction knit)
> Usurp the chair of wit!
> Indicting, and arraigning every day
> Something they call a Play.
> Let their fastidious, vaine
> Commision of the braine
> Run on, and rage, sweat, censure and condemn:
> They were not made for thee, lesse, thou for them (*The New Inn,* Vol. VI: 492).

These comic debacles lead to reconsider the focus of Jonson's and Shakespeare's dramatic agreements. The exposure of spectators' imaginative errors, limits and possibilities does not aim to create an "ideal" audience; rather it strives to start a conversation with spectators on their role in a successful dramatic representation. Jonson offers his opinion on "popular errors" as much as Shakespeare tries to suggest how to properly "deck" his scenes by means of powerful images ("the warlike Harry, like himself, / Assume the port of Mars", *Henry V,* Prologue, 5-6). This narrative strategy, which Kernan defines as "theatrical metaphysics" (1983: 84), explains the dramatic mechanisms underlying dramatic creation to make spectators more aware of their fundamental role in supporting the glassy foundation of theatre-making. Rather than an "ideal", passive audience of hearers who silently accept the unfolding of the play onstage, Jonson and Shakespeare seem to look for an "understanding and responsive" audience (Grene 1980: 15) who actively uses the dramatic code to temporarily join the theatrical illusion. As Kernan explains, a successful play requires not only "the art of the playwright and the skill of the actors but a complex attitude on the part of the members of the audience in which they accept and are moved by the play as if it were real, while at the same time knowing that it is not literally true" (1983: 84). To do so, spectators need to follow the playwright's instructions, often embedded in dramatic agreements, and apply them for the duration of the play. This attitude may be fitly described by Ulysses' words in *Troilus and Cressida*: an "understanding and responsive" spectator is someone

> Who, like an arch,

Reverberates
The voice again, or, like a gate of steel
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
His figure and his heat (III, 3, 121-124).

To "receive and render back" mirrors the bidirectional movement of theatre-making, where the playwright offers creative hints and the audience develops them according to their imaginative skills. This image may also refer to the creative process taking place within the spectators' inwardness. By suspending their disbelief, the audience should first be ready to "receive" the play without opposing interpretative obstacles to it, then to deck it with personal, suitable touches by means of imagination and lastly to hand it back to the actors and playwright in its newly expanded shape. As functional co-creators of a communal imaginative discourse, the audience's role is not dissimilar to the actors'. As such, spectators too need to be instructed on how to enter the make-believe process in time and adjust their creative attempts to that of the people onstage. It may be thus suggested that dramatic agreements address theatre-goers as just another performer who needs specific cues and imaginative framework to enter the stage dimension and support the theatrical illusion for the duration of a play.

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Official Communication and Political Innovation in the English Revolution

Jack David Sargeant

By the spring of 1642, political and religious division had brought England to the brink of a civil war that culminated, seven years later, in the execution of King Charles I by Parliament and the establishment of a republican state. In this paper, I will analyse the ways in which official texts were used and abused by the warring authorities of King and Parliament throughout and immediately beyond the so-called "militia crisis" of 1642, in which Charles and his opponents at Westminster attempted to convince ordinary people to fight in their respective armies. I will argue that, through the public communiqués of these critical months, King and Parliament made and concealed political innovations; and furthermore, that the production, dissemination and suppression of official texts brought political elites into confrontation with critical constitutional questions of the relationship between king and Parliament. In so doing, I seek to historicise the operational logic of political authority, demonstrating how the production and legitimation of power was conditioned by a certain early modern understanding of aesthetic experience. Both King and Parliament paid close attention to the material form and ritualistic presentation of their proclamations and declarations, each seeking to use the "spectacular" nature of contemporary politics to express the legal force of their commands.

Previous scholarship has demonstrated the remarkable and transformative force of the Revolution's attendant pamphlet polemic on political culture.[1] Less attention has, however, been paid to the role played by developments in traditional modes of public political communication, such as proclamations and declarations, despite the avenue this offers for a greater understanding of the relationship between the political "centre" and the peripheries in the early modern period. I will here attempt to address this oversight, focusing in particular on the King's attempts to communicate with the public in 1642-3, and the constitutional implications of Parliament's attempts to censor his communiqués. I will argue that, through attempting to halt the publication of royal proclamations from 1642, Parliament made a fundamental claim to political sovereignty. Revolutionary implications were thus intrinsic to parliamentary action from before the outbreak of civil war proper. In so doing, I hope to contribute further to our limited understanding of the function of royal proclamations, recently described by Chris Kyle as "one of the most overlooked categories of printed material in the field of early modern history" (2015: 771).

Finally, I hope to explore the role of aesthetics in the production of early modern political authority. As Davide Panagia has recently written, "the proliferation of appearances, like the proliferation of words, is a feature of political life in general" (2016: 8). From at least the times of Machiavelli, politicians have been concerned with the "staging" of political theatre: it is by and through spectacle that power is authorised. Yet the aesthetics of politics, its sights and sounds, are simultaneously a *sine qua non* of democratic politics, permitting accountability and participation. I will conclude by suggesting that the very public conflict created by the militia

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[1] There is a large and important body of work on this topic. See, for instance, Skerpan 1992; Achinstein 1994; Wiseman 1998; Raymond 1996; Peacey 2004; Como 2012; Peacey 2013; Peacey 2015; Como 2017.

crisis may have contributed to a transformation in subjectivity, by which ordinary people increasingly came to conceive themselves as political actors, rather than merely passive subjects.

The outbreak of war

In March 1642, having declared there to be an "imminent Danger" to King, Parliament, and kingdom caused by the "Rebellion and Insurrections" of "Papists, and other ill-affected Persons", Parliament passed the Militia Ordinance, the instrument through which it sought to mobilise the country's county militias, small groups of locally organised and sporadically trained amateur soldiers (Mendle 1992: 133). The king responded little over a month later by issuing his first Commission of Array, which was likewise dispatched into the provinces once drawn up and approved. These texts essentially sought to compel Englishmen across the country to enlist for their respective armies. Both, in their own ways, were novel political instruments, and innovations were seen as malign and dangerous in early modern England (Zaret 2000: 40-1). In order to try to convince Englishmen to join their ranks, King and Parliament thus sought to use official texts and their public performance to conceal the novelty of their commands. The Commission of Array, for example, was portrayed as a revival of a medieval instrument by the same name (Cust 2013: 292). It was in a gesture towards this supposed precedent that the Commissions of Array were written in Latin; according to contemporary Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, the Commissions were "grounded upon a statute made in the fifth year of king Henry the Fourth, and in the very words in Latin prescribed by that statute" (1826 3: 572). The Commissions of Array were therefore symbolic documents, whose ostensibly archaic form was designed to convince the English people of the ancient legitimacy of the King's commands.

The Commissions' being in Latin, however, caused chaos when royalist officials carried them into the provinces. Most English people could not read Latin, and neither could at least some of the officials tasked with publishing them in the country. In the Midlands city of Leicester, for example, the royalist emissary Henry Hastings, who was unable to read Latin, offered up an unconvincing interpretation in English. The town clerk of Leicester was able to read Latin, and reportedly read the document aloud before the assembled townspeople. Yet, as they could not understand him, they were left confused, and according to the same pamphlet account, "answered nothing" (Anon. 1642b: sig. B2v). Royalists had seemingly anticipated the problem of the language barrier, and printed a proclamation in English that comprised an explanation and justification of the measure (Rushworth 1721-2, 4: 659-61). The damage had, however, been done, and parliamentarians capitalised on the breach between language and meaning, signifier and referent. According to the Earl of Clarendon, attempts to implement the Commissions of Array were thwarted by "the other party", who "translated it into what English they pleased; persuading the substantial yeomen and freeholders, that at least two parts of their estates would, by that commission, be taken from them; and the meaner and poorer sort of people, that they were to pay a tax for one day's labour in the week to the king" (Hyde 1826 3: 198). The Commissions, of course, said nothing of the sort, but it was sufficient that parliamentarians were able to insinuate that a crypto-Catholic King was guilty of popish obscurantism, and his Commissions of Array were a characteristic exploitation of ignorance and mystique.

At the same time, however, Parliament was making innovative moves of its own. Not only was it disseminating printed copies of its Militia Ordinance, much like a royal proclamation, but it also sought to prevent the publication of several proclamations, including those pertaining to the Commissions of Array and the Militia Ordinance. This was a drastic measure: proclamations were not merely legislative mechanisms but public events, performances of royal

and local authority reified through the textual form. They were signed by the King and printed before being sent to the provinces, and came into legal effect after they were "proclaimed" by local officials (Lehto 2013: 235). The fact that they were seen and heard was vital to their legal force, and their publication was at least occasionally accompanied by the beating of drums. After being read out they were usually left to be displayed in a prominent public place, often in a town's market square (Shapiro 2012: 26). During the civil war, royalist officials reiterated instructions to this effect, as in the case of the garrisoned town of Dartmouth, whose governor was instructed to affix any proclamation "upon some posts or walls where it may be publicly seen, to the end that all men who shall pretend ignorance to our commands may be less inexcusable" (Devon Record Office, 1392M/L1643/46).[2] Just as particular was a letter sent to the mayor and sheriffs of Chester by the royalist commander Prince Rupert a few months later, ordering the "Publique Proclamation" of a royal order "on three Severall markett daies […] openlie in open markett" (British Library, Harley MS 2135, fol. 29r). By emphasising the importance of the public visibility of royal commands, Rupert was reiterating both the intrinsic authority of the royal proclamation, and the idea that one could only be held responsible for defying an order if one was aware of it – in other words, by having seen or heard the proclamation during or after its publication. At his treason trial in 1649, the prominent Leveller John Lilburne invoked this very logic in his defence, referring to an "old, and not yet repealed" act that stipulated that legislation only took effect after having been "proclaimed in every Hundred and Market-towne" across the country (Varax 1649: 86).

Proclamations served at least two interrelated, even indistinguishable functions for the monarch. Firstly and most obviously, they informed subjects of what was and was not right and legal conduct. Secondly, through the ritualistic form of their public presentation, proclamations reified the very authority by which their diktats were legitimated: a feedback loop that rendered it possible for the monarch to rule by decree when necessary.[3] Charles I affirmed this right in a 1641 declaration, which stipulated that the right to rule through proclamation was "inseparably annexed to our regal authority to restrain mischiefs and inconveniences […] growing in the common weal" (*CSPD* 1640-41: 443). As civil war between the monarch and Parliament grew ever more likely, however, Parliament began to take radical and unprecedented steps towards preventing the production, dissemination and publication of proclamations. Suddenly, the operative logic of proclamations was subject to a violent and public intrusion by a Parliament increasingly eager to undermine the notion of kingly sovereignty.

Proclamations and parliamentary censorship

By May 1642, Charles I had declared that the parliamentary Militia Ordinance, printed and executed without royal assent, was illegal, and disseminated the message through a run of royal proclamations. Parliament swiftly responded, ordering that the King "recall his Declarations and Proclamations against the Ordinance" (*CJ* 2: 596). A day later, they went further, requesting the drawing up of a declaration "to shew the Illegality of such Proclamations" (*CJ* 2: 596-7). However, the King's travelling press was by now hard at work in York, the city to which Charles had escaped after fleeing London in March, and his proclamations continued to be dispatched across the country for publication (Sessions 1988: 151). By the end of June, and in the midst of the militia crisis, the Commons referred the question of the legality of three proclamations — including one "to inform the Subjects of the Lawfulness of the Commissions

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[2] See, for example, the payment of the Canterbury corporation to a drummer "at the proclaiming of a proclamation" in 1644: Canterbury Cathedral Library, CC/F/A/25, fol. 241v. For the Dartmouth quote, see Devon Heritage Centre (Devon Record Office) 1392M/L1643/46. I am grateful to Professor Jason Peacey for these references.

[3] Another function of proclamations was the dissemination of news, for which see Kyle 2015.

of Array" — to a parliamentary committee. Within days, Parliament had issued a general ban on "Proclamations, […] which are, or shall be, contrary to any Order […] of the said Houses of Parliament" (*CJ* 2: 643, 652).

The militia crisis was, therefore, the catalyst for Parliament's incursion into what was considered, at least by Charles and his associates at the royal court, to be a keystone of the monarchical prerogative. An understanding of the significance of such measures was revealed in 1643, probably during the treason trial of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. He had acted as one of Charles's closest advisers and was commonly blamed for introducing provocative Arminian innovations into the national church, understood by many puritans as a means of re-establishing Catholicism by the back door. Laud's innovations were vehemently criticised in numerous illicit pamphlet publications, including by poet and future parliamentarian propagandist John Milton, who published five anti-prelatical tracts up to April 1642 (Campbell 2004: online). Laud was found guilty of treason and executed by Parliament on Tower Hill in London in January 1645. A deposition made two years earlier by a London soapmaker, Edwin Gryffin, recounted an episode in which Laud had railed against "contemnours or breakers of Proclamac[i]ons", declaring "That if I live and sitt in this place, I will make a Proclamac[i]on equall with a statute lawe. And speaking further of the Kings power and p[re]rogative […] That those that fell uppon the King should be brused, but those that the king fell uppon should be broaken to peic[e]s" (The National Archives, SP 16/499, fol. 271r-v). The authority of proclamations was very clearly bound up with the ultimate problem of sovereignty.

As soon as the militia crisis began, partisan pamphlets poured off of printing presses mounting constitutional defences of the King or of Parliament. Many of these texts were printed by authority, such as Charles's answer to Parliament's declaration on the illegality of the Commissions of Array, which bore the imprint of Robert Barker, the King's official printer. This pamphlet was very clearly designed to convey the authority of its message: its format mimicked that of a royal proclamation, featuring the Stuart coat of arms and a body text printed in Gothic black-letter type. It spoke to the profound constitutional implications of the militia crisis, asserting that the monarch was superior to Parliament, who had no authority "to […] do any thing, but what they were first summoned by Our Writ to do" (Charles I 1642: 5-6). It accused Parliament of an unprecedented constitutional innovation in attempting to "impose any thing upon the Subject without the Kings consent" to the destruction "of the long established Rights and Liberties of the King and Subject" (Charles I 1642: 5-6). In contrast, parliamentary declarations invoked "the Fundamentall Laws of the Land" in defence of its ability "as the representative body of the Kingdom, to make an Ordinance by Authority of both Houses, to settle the Militia" (Parliament 1642: 3). These were, to be sure, absolutely irreconcilable positions, in which the King and Parliament each asserted their sovereignty over the other. It was in the publication of official communiqués that this theoretical contradiction first presented itself in the political field.

Parliament had three ways to try and enforce the ban on the publication of royal proclamations. The most obvious was to try to stop proclamations being printed at all. By November 1642, MPs had twice unsuccessfully summoned Robert Barker to appear before the House, as well as ordering that no printer may "print any thing that concerned the Parliament, without first acquainting this House therewith" (*CJ* 2: 625, 724, 835). Seemingly unbeknownst to parliament, Barker was likely in prison for debt at the time, but other printers — including Barker's grandson Christopher — continued to operate the King's portable printing press under Robert's name (Westbrook 2004; Plomer 1907: 13-14). Failing to stop proclamations being published, Parliament's second option was to try to arrest messengers that carried them into the provinces for publication. Here they had at least some success. In August 1642, one messenger was arrested by "some gentlemen" in the county of Hertfordshire after fixing a royal

proclamation "upon a post in the town" (*CJ* 2: 720). The messenger was brought before Parliament and imprisoned, and his "Bag [of] Letters" confiscated (*CJ* 2: 720). He was relatively lucky, as a year later a messenger arrested by the sheriffs of London was found to be carrying several bundles of proclamations and writs from the King's court at Oxford, accused of being a royal spy, and executed after trial "by Martial Law" (Bates 2012: 189; *CJ* 3: 307).

Parliament's third and final measure to stop the publication of royal proclamations was to target officials who were tasked with receiving and publishing them in towns across the country. Parliament received various reports that local officeholders had published royal proclamations contrary to the orders of the Houses, and quickly moved to punish those involved. This included the deputy mayor of Reading, who was imprisoned after saying of the parliamentary declaration on the Commissions of Array that "He would take no Notice of it; nor of any thing else that came from the House". The mayor of Salisbury was likewise committed to London's Gatehouse prison for publishing the "Proclamation against the Ordinance of the Militia, and other Proclamations for the Commission of Array" (*CJ* 2: 666, 696). Though the decision of some local officials, such as the deputy mayor of Reading, to continue publishing proclamations in defiance of Parliament was clearly ideological, it was not always so obviously the case. Officials were understandably worried about retaliation from both King and Parliament alike. That contemporaries were conscious of the risk of royalist reprisal is betrayed by an anonymous correspondent writing from Nottingham upon Charles's visit to the city in 1642, fearing that the mayor would be imprisoned for "not publishing Proclamations sent to him and other things" (Anon. 1642). As it was, Charles made his disapproval known rather more prudently: the King refused to accede to the convention of offering the mayor his hand to kiss.

The particular significance of Parliament's interference into the publication of royal proclamations was, therefore, both practical and theoretical, insofar as it forced parliamentarian elites to confront the radical logic that underpinned their war against the King. Initially, parliamentarian rhetoric was founded on the notion that it was fighting a fundamentally conservative war. Parliamentarians claimed that the King, by following the malicious advice of devilish advisers, had been guilty of unconstitutional religious and political innovations, and that Parliament was waging war against Charles in order to preserve England's "ancient constitution". However, by granting itself the power to censor royal proclamations, Parliament was making an innovative incursion into the monarchical prerogative. Such censorship bore the hallmarks of latent ideas of parliamentary sovereignty. By attempting to prevent the publication of royal proclamations, Parliament was placing an effective limitation on the royal power to rule by decree.

Proclamations and the radical materiality of the "Renaissance episteme"

The operativity of proclamations, as with much of the ceremonial insignia of the monarchy in the early modern period, rested in their existence as material objects.[4] This was not only because the obvious limitations of contemporary communicative technologies meant that political orders were necessarily physical; but also because of the peculiar *mentalités* of the early modern period. Here we may take our theoretical lead from Michel Foucault's "Renaissance episteme", a concept used to denote the ways in which people during the Renaissance understood language and symbols to be enmeshed within the fabric of the world, rather than as a free-floating system of signification. In short, Foucault suggested that to the Renaissance mind, there was no distinction between the signifier and its referent: they were one and the same: "The crown made the king" (1994: 49).

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[4] See, for example, the analysis of the crown jewels in Jack Sargeant 2020.

More recent studies of the period have advanced interpretations of early modern *mentalités* that are strikingly similar to Foucault's own. Whereas modern, Cartesian subjectivity is predicated on the existence of an irreducible gap between the objective world and the subjective experience of each discrete subject, such a distinction would have been essentially alien to those in seventeenth-century England. Aesthetic experience was understood to reveal universal truths about the world and its creator; actions and words were never understood to be merely symbolic or superficial, but always-already loaded with meaning, uncloaking the inner intentions of those by whom they were undertaken or spoken. It is this that explains why early modern people so frequently "discovered" evidence of malevolent plots to destroy kingly rule and the Protestant settlement. To speak seditiously was itself an act in contradiction of good government, and a sin against God (Cressy 2010: 9). For Garthine Walker, "[i]n early modern culture [...] verbal utterance was understood to be a form of action, not merely its weak, binary other" (2003: 99). Analogously, Juliet Fleming has argued for an approach to early modern writing practices in which meaning exists "within, rather than in spite of, the sensuous elements of writing": in other words, within the very material form of texts (2001: 24). Giorgio Agamben's "genealogical" investigation into the ontology of power has concluded that it is nowhere to be found but in the very materiality of its acclamation and signification. We can observe its effects, but never its elusive force per se. That is because power itself is an empty void, at once brought into being and veiled by the material trappings that are used to hide "what is in itself pure force and domination" (Agamben 2011: 212, 242-3). Just as Foucault claimed that the crown made the king, so Agamben has affirmed that the King needs the crown. Power is reliant upon its aesthetic trappings to the extent that it is indistinguishable from them. This was particularly obvious in the early modern period, where power was underwritten by a series of elaborate gestures which, in John Walter's words, "extract[ed] a quotidian and embodied recognition of [the] superiority" of power-holders (2009: 125).

Here, I wish to suggest that the ritualistic form of the proclamation, both in its ceremonial publication, and in its material appearance — its bearing of certain recognisable symbols, such as the royal coat of arms, and so on — served a similar function. Contemporaries recognised proclamations and their associated rituals as bearing the force of monarchical authority: they were not merely marks of royal power, but complicit in its production. The act of proclaiming was a public speech event that, in the words of Maurice Bloch, "reproduc[ed] the ranking system by displaying it" (Bloch quoted in Wood 2007: 108). This explains why, even prior to the civil war, speaking words against royal proclamations could result in swift, severe punishment: the very social order was propped up by the iteration and reiteration of such ritualistic events. In August 1640, for example, two men were arrested after triggering a fight in a London inn with "some words [...] spoken against his Majesty's proclamation" (*CSPD* 1640-41: 30). This was not an isolated case. Yet such episodes also speak to the fragility of royal power; or rather the ways in which its inherent materiality could be used as a tool of resistance against royal policy. During civil war, it became markedly more difficult for royalists to police this choreographed performance of power, and in turn, it became easier for parliamentarians and other opponents of royal authority to subvert it.

While parliamentarians were eager to undermine royal authority, they were not necessarily keen to destroy its symbolic structure. After all, only a smattering of the most radical MPs were interested in genuine social levelling (Hill 1986: 63). The result, in some instances, was parliamentarian officials seeking rather to co-opt and subvert the traditional form of a proclamation's publication in an act of theatrical disavowal. The most spectacular case is from Bristol, in March 1643, while the town was under parliamentarian occupation. On one Saturday, Governor Nathaniel Fiennes burst into the city's bustling market square, arriving at the high cross "attended by a Troope of Horse". It was, according to one pamphlet, the "chiefe Market day, when the Market was fullest that the news might be carried into all parts of the Country".

The day before, a royal proclamation had been published in the city by the town serjeant, forbidding seamen and mariners to take employment under Robert Rich, the Earl of Warwick, who had secured control of the navy for Parliament in the early summer of 1642 (Kelsey 2004; Anon. 1643). On Fiennes's command, a parliamentary declaration was read, before he boldly announced that "the Proclamation published the day before was a scandalous and libellous paper, and such as deserved to be burnt by the hand of a publique Hangman". Fiennes then held a pistol to the same town serjeant that had published the proclamation against Warwick, and demanded he set it ablaze, threatening to shoot if the burning text was not held high enough for all to see. The incident was later described by a royalist correspondent as a "blaspheme" against "His Soveraigne", King Charles (Anon. 1643b: 7-8).

The textual form of the proclamation was thus the instrument through which fundamental political concepts were openly contested. Fiennes's example was not a one-off. Another radical parliamentarian MP, Henry Marten, was accused in a pamphlet published after the Restoration of having "tore in pieces, with [his] own hands, the Kings Commission of Array" (Anon 1662: sig. A3r). In July 1642, at the height of the militia crisis, one Mr. Castle from the Oxfordshire town of Abingdon affirmed before the Commons that "certain Proclamations were proclaimed […] by the Serjeant of the Town […] And that the Proclamations were watched every Night" (*CJ* 2: 666). The reference to the "watching" of the proclamations is unusual, and perhaps indicative that extra precautions were taken to prevent such incendiary texts being torn down by those that opposed the King. The performative logic of the proclamation meant that their destruction was not just an act of iconoclasm, but a politically operative deed that challenged the inherent authority of the royal word. If proclamations were not seen or heard, their legal force was open to contestation. It is remarkable that Fiennes sought to co-opt the ritual form of the proclamation in his act of disavowal, preserving but repurposing the established symbolic structure of royal power to Parliament's own ends. It was a spectacular performance of public politics; not merely an attempt at intimidating Bristol's dissident royalists, but a public challenge to their very understanding of the origins of monarchical power.

The subsequent invocation of blasphemy by the royalist pamphleteer represented an oblique appeal to the divine right of kings.[5] As Francisca Loetz has suggested, however, such an invocation of blasphemy is not, or not merely, related to metaphysical questions of faith, but a concept denoting a social "norm transgression that may undermine the legitimacy of […] claims to power" (2009: 2). When the royalist pamphlet declared Fiennes's conduct to be sinful, it was concurrently reasserting the divine as the legitimate source of royal authority and political power – precisely the kind of notion that parliamentarians had to challenge in order to legitimise their own cause. At the same time, Fiennes's obstruction of the execution of a royal proclamation inevitably entailed a challenge to the notion of monarchical sovereignty. Fiennes himself had articulated a vague notion of the foundational rights of Parliament in a speech in opposition to the enforcement of the Et Cetera Oath in 1640, an oath that affirmed the divine origins of royal authority. In his speech, Fiennes had declared it "a great wrong to those that shall bee Parliament-men, that their freedome shall bee taken away being bound up by an Oath, not to consent to the altering of a thing, which it may bee fit and proper for a Parliament to alter" (1641: 15). His burning of the proclamation in Bristol three years later is surely but the logical end point of the principle that Parliament had a right to alter or obstruct royal policy.

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[5] For more on the Stuart notion of divine right, see J.P. Sommerville 1999. In this analysis, such an absolutist theory "existed in the minds of many English people, not just in the ravings of a few eccentric clerics" (50).

Conclusion: A new political subjectivity?

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to show that proclamations were not merely instructions for the proper legal conduct of subjects, but also ritualistic artefacts complicit in the reproduction of monarchical power. By taking steps to prevent their publication from 1642, parliamentarians disrupted this practice while staking their own claim to sovereignty. This claim was in part theoretical, made with discursive invocations of "fundamental laws" and the so-called "ancient constitution", but it was also made in practice, through the very act of censoring the King's proclamations. To conclude, I wish to draw out the potential implications of these actions by integrating my findings into previous analyses of the relationship between communicative practice and political subjectivity in the 1640s. My broad claim is that the experience of textual contestation during the militia crisis was one of a series of events by which members of a public previously excluded from politics came to be conceived, and conceive of themselves, as political actors in their own right.

As suggested above, the peculiar exigencies of war, and the need for King and Parliament to raise armies, created a radically novel context in which rival authorities competed to win the approval of the people at large. In so doing, they relied less upon aesthetic spectacle, and increasingly upon political argumentation. Sharon Achinstein has noted that the political writers of the 1640s "envisioned their readers as those who witnessed the clash of opposing political ideologies, and who would participate in what was becoming a public discourse". These writers prepared their readers for political debate by giving them "practice in defending themselves against their own and their opponents' resistances, counterclaims, and questions" (Achinstein 1994: 103). It is now well-known that political pamphlets were ubiquitous, and their audience national in scale. The greater availability of printed material during the 1640s meant that a pamphlet could be acquired particularly cheaply: an eight-page pamphlet could be bought for a penny, or, in David Cressy's calculations, "little more than the cost of a drink" (2007: 300). This was just one of the ways that the business of politics became increasingly public during the 1640s. Ann Hughes has suggested that the public participation in civil war indemnity cases had a similarly educative function, providing a platform for those of relatively humble backgrounds to reflect "on profound questions of legality, justice, necessity and tyranny" (1986: 71). John Walter's work on the parliamentarian Protestation oath of 1641 has revealed the manifold ways in which it was invoked to justify the participation of ordinary people in political action throughout the revolutionary period, according "a share in the political process to groups otherwise marginalized or excluded from the political nation" (2017: 153).

There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that ordinary people took up political positions in the 1640s based on their own reflections on aspects of political thought, history, and ethics. In a vivid example that became a *cause célèbre* among radicals in Parliament's New Model Army from the mid-1640s, one Francis Wade was indicted and imprisoned in Southwark's White Lion gaol for refusing to drink to the King's health, on the grounds that Charles had renounced his claim to the throne by waging war on parliament. Wade quoted James VI and I in articulating a notion of contractual kingship, reportedly telling his drinking partner that "King James said, that the King which ruled not according to his Laws, is no longer a King but a Tyrant: and that the King had put the Parliament out of his protection, and in them the whole kingdome, Therefore no King" (Fairfax 1647: 4). Here, Wade was invoking James's own reflections on the nature of kingship to legitimate the popular right of resistance. It is clear that the allegiance of ordinary people was not necessarily crude or reflexive, but could be the result of discussions and reflections upon constitutional questions. I wish to suggest that the very public contestation between King and Parliament during the militia crisis may have had a similar effect.

The result of conflicting orders being issued by King and Parliament was that it was often up to ordinary people to decide which was legitimate. Copies of proclamations were occasionally retained by the King's supporters and used in an attempt to enforce royal orders. When travelling to the muster of the Leicestershire trained bandsmen for Parliament in 1642, one John Milles was stopped by a man, named only as "Ancient Dudley", who asked him "to what End he would go". "To serve the King", Milles replied, upon which his interlocutor declared that "The King had not Commanded him; and thereupon produced a Proclamation […] for, if he did, he said, his Estate was lost, and his Life hazarded" (*LJ* 5: 133). Whereas for some, like Dudley, proclamations retained their status as legitimate, even divine artefacts of monarchical authority, in other cases this authority broke down in the face of conflicting parliamentary diktats. While touring the western circuit in the summer of 1642, justice of the assize Sir Robert Foster recalled being showed "som[e] orders in Parlim[e]nt" by a group of men in Dorchester, "to enable them to stand upon gard for their defence" (The National Archives, SP 16/491 fol. 279r-v). Here, parliamentary orders, presumably in print, were invoked to legitimise popular initiative, in much the same way as a royal proclamation would traditionally have been. In the early 1640s, even before the outbreak of war, it became possible for Englishmen to openly declare that they cared "not [a fart] for the king nor his laws" (Cressy 2003: 36). Such episodes only intermittently appear between the cracks of the historical record, but are of great significance. Through them, we can see the micro-political meeting the macro-, as ordinary people made extraordinary verdicts on the legitimacy of state power.

From the mendacious translations of parliamentarians designed to dissuade people from obeying the Commissions of Array, to public disputes over the authority of conflicting orders, the official "paper war" that precipitated the outbreak of armed conflict forced ordinary people to reflect on precisely what was authoritative about a text. Neither their material form nor ritualistic modes of presentation could be taken as guarantees of legitimacy. The magical efficacy of the symbol gave way to an "explosion in signification" (Zaret 2000: 278), in which personal judgement became the only means of determining a text's legality. In the spring of 1643, this transformation reached its logical conclusion, when rioters in the west of England declared that "they Regard not the orders of Parlam[en]t nor the Kings proclamations, but they will doe what themselves thinke Good" (John Rylands Library, NP/72/2). As a result of their public contestation, proclamations were revealed to be disputable and reproducible signifiers rather than ineffaceable marks of an inviolable monarchical will. Through such episodes, ordinary people became increasingly cognisant of the absolute contingency of a social order that had hitherto appeared as unitary, natural and essential, and of the possibility of reshaping it by their own agency.

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"The best friend that the poor e'er had":
Counsel and the Possibility of Mediation in *Sir Thomas More*

Nicolas Thibault

Can a king's counsellor be the friend of the people? Counsellors have long been represented as friends of the king rather than of his subjects, according to the tradition of the *amici principis*, which dates back to Ancient Greece and Imperial Rome. This concept is adapted in the sixteenth century by such writers as Sir Thomas Elyot in his *Bankette of Sapience*, published in 1539, in which he refers to "the kinges councellours and companions" (1539: sig. C3v) and later by Justus Lipsius who, in his 1589 treatise *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* (translated in English in 1594), stresses the need for the prince to "procure [himself] trustie friends" (1594: sig. G2v) in order to counsel him. The need for this special relationship thus underlines how central counsel is in early modern political thought.[1] Government becomes more efficient because of such friendship which, in the humanist conception, means personal and political trust and a shared commitment to public values. Hence, this relationship does not necessarily imply love, as opposed to the relationship between the king and the commonwealth, at least as it is theorised by early modern writers. In Book 1 of Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, the character of Raphael Hythloday argues that, instead of wasting time in waging war, the king should "endeavour himself to love his subjects, and again to be beloved of them" (2008: 36). More than a century later, Francis Bacon, in his *Essay of a King*, published in 1642, would also insist on reciprocity, foregrounding "[t]he love which the King oweth to the weale-publike" (1642: sig. A2v). This is where the counsellor enters the stage: he can communicate the king's "love" to the commons while gathering information for his sovereign in return. However, in the play *Sir Thomas More* (written by Anthony Munday, William Shakespeare and others, probably performed c. 1593-97) it appears that these "channels of communication" (Rose 2016: 31)[2] do not function as smoothly as they should.

In fact, the play questions the possibility for counsellors to firmly and continually hold their middle-ground as go-betweens, as it depicts most of them as closer to the king than to the commons. This distance is perceptible not only in the way the counsellors picture the commons, but also in the way they try to address them, as though they were nothing more than a mass of potential rioters. Only Thomas More, first as a sheriff and later as a prominent member of the King's Council, stands out as the ideal mediator – and he does so by adopting a discourse of friendship in relation to the commons (and not only in relation to the king). Yet this popularity is not a trait that traditionally characterizes the figure of Thomas More at the time: he is rather depicted by early modern writers as a Catholic martyr or a heretic-hunter and as an eloquent

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[1] As Joanne Paul explains, the counsellor "is central to Renaissance humanists in England as in Europe, as the figure who mitigates the tyranny of hereditary monarchy" and whose counsel "should have profound influence over the ruler" (2020: 10).

[2] The historian Jacqueline Rose sees counsel and counsellors as "a means of political dialogue" and refers to them by using the image of the "channels of communication" which "may flow freely, or become partly silted up or only flow in one direction" (2016: 31).

and devoted statesman.[3] Even the chronicles – whether it be Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), or John Stow's *Annales* (1605) – do not highlight More's proximity towards the people; an attribute that, on the other hand, we find in the play in which the character of More stands as a friend to all. His friendly mediation thus allows for personal exchanges to take place with specific identified characters (Doll, Lincoln, or the crippled soldiers for example). This friendship seems predicated on actual bonds of affection, but in turn it suggests a form of dangerous competition between the king and his counsellor for the love of the commons. So much so, that even though More remains loyal to the king throughout the play, his special relationship with the people takes on a mildly suspicious nature: his mediation partially deviates a form of popular love which is by right due to the king (here absent from the stage) onto the counsellor himself. This can then lead us to perceive the potentially dangerous nature of "popularity" (Lake and Pincus 2006: 277). So I would like to use this play to reflect on the dual nature of the counsellor in early modern England – as both a personal and an institutional figure: to what extent can he be a friend of the monarch and of the people at the same time?

Counsellors in the play are presented as "points of contact" (Elton 1975: 195) who try to maintain connections between centre and margins, both geographically (between the court and localities) and socially (between the king, the nobles and the commons). This mediating function is emphasised by More's words persuading the rioters to surrender to the king's representatives: "Submit you to these noble gentlemen, / Entreat their mediation to the king" (6, 161-162).[4] The text echoes early modern treatises on counsel, such as Laurentius Grimaldus Goslicius's *De Optimo Senatore*, first published in Venice in 1568, which insist on the intermediate position of counsellors. Even though the whole treatise was only published in English in 1598, under the title *The Counsellor*, the first book had already been translated in 1584 and there is evidence that the Latin text had also circulated in England before it was translated.[5] In his treatise, Grimaldus Goslicius pictures the counsellor as "a meane betwixt the king and the people, [who] doe on the one side, know the office of the king, and on the other, what are the customes and lawes belonging to the people" (1598 [1568]: sig. D3r). Counsellors are supposed to develop an acute knowledge of the realm and are thus often described as the eyes and ears of the sovereign[6] – an image which is suggested in the play. Sight is mentioned by a member of the Privy Council, the Earl of Shrewsbury, who meditates on the upcoming revolt, relying on his "searching eye" for analysis: "My searching eye did never entertain / A more distracted countenance of grief / Than I have late observed / In the displeased commons of the City" (III, 5-8). As for hearing, it is hinted at when More reflects on his past office in front of the Tower: "the cry of the poor suitor, / Fatherless orphan or distressed widow, / Shall not disturb me in my quiet sleep" (14, 66-68). Yet both examples make this gathering of information problematic: Shrewsbury's vision is that of a passive spectator, unable to react efficiently, while the multiplicity of cries manifesting the people's misery turns More's office into an unbearable burden.

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[3] Miles Huggarde, for example, presents More as a "second Cicero" in *The displaying of the Protestantes* (1556: sig. H4v) whereas the Protestant writer John Cornet, in *An admonition to Doctor Story*, merely sees in him "a traitor stout" (1571).

[4] All quotations from the play are taken from the Arden Shakespeare edition (Munday et al. 2011).

[5] Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa sheds light on how popular *De Optimo Senatore* was in late Elizabethan England, explaining that it "seems to have attracted more written commentary from foreign recipients than from domestic readers"; but she also points to "evidence of *De Optimo Senatore* with a readership in England through its Venetian edition well before Varsevicius' record [in 1600]" (2009: 15, 133).

[6] Such a simile can be found in the works of the German humanist Joannes Ferrarius: "[the king] muste needes ioyne vnto hym, good and goodly menne, with whom he maie execute his office throughly. Hetherto the saiyng of Aristotle maie be referred: that kinges haue many eares, and many iyes" (1559: sig. G1v).

The knowledge of both spheres – king and commons – as described by Grimaldus Goslicius, is here not as solidly grounded as it should be. The play gives us an example of the difficult gathering and belated processing of information in Scene 3, in which three members of the Council – Shrewsbury, the Earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Palmer – and another nobleman, Sir Roger Cholmley, are shown discussing the foreigners' crimes against Londoners. But their speeches are mostly about events that we have already witnessed or heard of in Scene 1. Shrewsbury's description of a theft of doves for example – "A carpenter, as I was late informed, / Who having bought a pair of doves in Cheap, / Immediately a Frenchman took them from him, / And beat the poor man for resisting him" (3, 51-54) – is a digest of the confrontation we have already witnessed between Cavaler, the Lombard, and Williamson the carpenter, in the opening scene:

> CAVALER. Follow me no further. I say thou shalt not have them.
> WILLIAMSON. I bought them in Cheapside, and paid my money for them (1, 16-19).

Here, the repetitions only serve to confirm how slowly information is being collected. Delay is further stressed by the sudden arrival of a messenger which, in pointing out to the counsellors the urgency of the situation, pictures the four characters on stage as mere spectators being taken aback. But despite this delay, they are still supposed to carry the information to the king, yet the channels of communication seem blocked. Sir Roger Cholmley, a nobleman who does not belong to the Privy Council, points this out:

> Now afore God, your honours, pardon me.
> Men of your place and greatness are to blame –
> I tell ye true, my lords – in that his majesty
> Is not informed if this base abuse,
> And daily wrongs are offered to his subjects;
> For if he were, I know his gracious wisdom
> Would soon redress it (3, 64-70).

This failing mediation jeopardises the caring and "loving" relationship between the commons and the sovereign. More so, it almost amounts to obstruction and leads us to read what More says about his counselling office in an ambivalent way: "Our toil and careful watching brings the king / In league with slumbers, to which peace doth sing" (10, 18-19). Such an ideal description jars with what we have witnessed and makes us wonder if counsellors are actually efficient, or if protests are simply not reported to the king.

It looks as though the channels of communication might be silted, thus precluding any dialogue. This creates an impression of chaos, fuelled by the spread of contradictory messages. In Scene 7, whereas More had promised the rioters royal pardon, a messenger brings the Council's decision ordering their executions. Yet the Earl of Surrey later arrives with a message that directly contradicts the Council's decision. However, this chaotic handling of communication stems not only from the contents of the messages but also from the way they are conveyed. In this regard, counsellors such as Surrey or Shrewsbury do not seem to know how to address the commons. Both nobles fail to grasp their identity when confronted to the crowd of rioters, accumulating denominations to refer to them (a failure further underlined by the use of aposiopesis):

> SURREY. Friends, masters, countrymen –
> LORD MAYOR. Peace ho, peace! I charge you keep the peace.
> SHREWSBURY. My masters, countrymen – (6, 32-34)

Surrey even refuses to consider the rioters as "men of wisdom" (43), discarding persuasion as a possible mode of exchange. Dialogue and direct communication with the commons thus look compromised, which goes against the ideal of proximity and reciprocity counsellors should stand for.

Such a crisis in the channels of communication calls for remedies, and the figure of Thomas More is presented as a remedy to bridge the widening gap between the commons and the state. In his handling of the riot and later as a counsellor, he shows interest in specific identities and personal relationships, singling out individuals in the crowd.[7] Even before confronting the rioters, More draws a distinction between leaders and mere followers: "*These* follow for no harm, but yet incur / Self penalty with *those* that raised this stir" (5, 48-49, my emphasis). The two different demonstratives fragment the chaotic multitude and turn it into legible items. More thus minimises the threat of the multitude – which, according to the historian Ian Munro, is also a semiotic threat, with the crowd being first and foremost "an anonymous mass, whose composition is unknown and whose allegiances are unclear" (2005: 10). But More's speech also paves the way for personalised exchanges, which can help us differentiate him from the already mentioned counsellors. Whereas the nobles directly address the crowd when they arrive on stage, More's speech is carefully dramatised: he starts by talking *about* them, but his speech is then called for by Lincoln – "Shrieve More speaks. Shall we hear Shrieve More speak?" (6, 49-50). Furthermore, it is because of More's connection with one woman, Doll, that dialogue actually takes place: "Let's hear him, 'a keeps a plentiful shrievaltry, and 'a made my brother Arthur Watchins Sergeant Safe's yeoman. Let's hear Shrieve More" (51-53). By mentioning this personal connection twice, Doll acts as a mediator herself and turns More's past benevolence into a reason to listen to him.

This personal contact between More and the people is amplified by a general discourse of friendship, not dissimilar to that which Cicero describes in his *Book of Friendship* (published in English in 1550) when he refers to the good will to be displayed towards every citizen:

> But this kynd of goodnesse also should appeere towarde the common sorte. For vertue is not chorlishe, nor emptie handed, nor yet loftie: but hir custome is to defend all men, and to doe the best for them she can. Whiche thyng vndoubtedlie she would not dooe, if she disdeigned the common sorte (1550: sig. E3r).

Some early modern treatises on counsel carry the Ciceronian ideal even further, linking it precisely to the mediating function of counsellors. The Spanish writer Fadrique Furió Ceriol, in his *Very Briefe and Profitable Treatise* (translated and published in 1570), writes that a good counsellor ought to be "vniuersall and friendly to *all men*" (1570 [1559], sig. K4r, my emphasis) – and thus not just to the monarch. More fits this description, using the same term for his noble friends (Surrey and Erasmus) and for the commons (for example, when he welcomes players into his house in Scene 9). This leads the people to reciprocate: a woman at the end of the play describes him as "the best friend that the poor e'er had" (14, 44), hinting of course at what could be a simple client-patron relationship;[8] he could simply be the friend of the people because he serves their interest. However, two elements suggest that their relationship goes beyond

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[7] This attention to specific identities in the "crowd", according to Paul Yachnin, is part and parcel of Elizabethan drama: "Shakespeare does not require people to leave their social, sexual, gendered or confessional identities, or their personal histories, at the playhouse door in order to take part in debates and judgments about matters of common concern; playgoers are expected to bring their embodied, social and biographical selves with them into the playhouse and indeed are invited to disclose themselves in their responses to the action and to each other" (Yachnin 2013: 274-75).

[8] Retha M. Warnicke explains that, under Henry VIII's reign, "friendship" was a coded word for such trading relationships: "Individuals went to court to obtain both public and household offices as well as other favors for their relatives and friends, friends referring in this sense to the client/patron relationship" (Warnicke 1995: 39).

friendship of utility. First, the play stresses the importance of trust, which puts the characters on an equal footing, all having to respect their vows. More's promise to Doll and the other rioters to save their lives is a good example of it: this direct connection challenges his honesty but also his reputation, both depending on the way he is perceived by all those popular characters. The second element suggesting reciprocity is mutual benefits. More helps the commoners but they reciprocate, even though their gifts to him are more metaphorical. The tears shed by the Lieutenant of the Tower at the end of the play are thus construed as a token of friendship by More: "O sir, your kind and loving tears / Are like sweet odours to embalm your *friend*" (17, 15-16, my emphasis). This modest yet sincere expression of love in friendship echoes the "bonds of love" mentioned by Cicero, for whom reciprocity does not imply perfect equivalence: "this is to straight and to nere, to bryng freendship to be weied in ballaunce, as though there ought to be a like iompe measure of taking and receiuyng of pleasures" (1550: sig. E7r).

But the attention to the individual coexists with a more traditional vision of the commons as a whole – and with it comes a different conception of friendship, "civic friendship".[9] It is assimilated to concord by Aristotle, and later by Grimaldus Goslicius who describes the counsellor as the "champion of concord": "Of amitie groweth concord, being nothing else then ciuill amitie […]. Wherefore let our Counsellor be a defendour and champion of concord: For discord is the poison of all commonweales" (1598 [1568]: sig. L6v). More appears as such when he persuades the rioters to lay down their weapons, expressing a conception of friendship which is based here on a strict sense of hierarchy. His initial apostrophe – "good friends" – hints once again at universal friendship, yet it is offset by his reference to the great chain of being. It then allows him to recreate the image of a unified commonwealth, something we find in another passage of Grimaldus Goslicius's treatise. The Polish humanist states that where there is friendship, "no ciuill dissention can arise, and all men with one assent […] will (as Pythagoras saith) ioyne in loue and become *as it were one man*" (1598 [1568]: sig. L5rv). This final simile first makes us perceive better how More casts the multitude as a homogenous and legible group – and the unanimous responses of "All citizens" to his speech in Scene 6 prove it. But it can also be read as an invitation to sympathy, which is exactly what More does when he invites the Londoners to imagine what would happen if they were to become foreigners themselves, thus encouraging hospitality and friendship. By doing so, even though he still is a sheriff, he already acts as the ideal counsellor portrayed by Grimaldus Goslicius:

> To friendship hospitalitie is a companion, for it receiueth and courteously intertaineth not onely men knowne, but also persons vnknowne, and strangers. […] The Counsellor therefore shall not onely make estimation of friendship in himselfe, but also exhort others to doe the same. The vse of frienship in every commonweale is great, and much greater then of iustice, if therein all men constantly would perseuer (Grimaldus Goslicius 1598 [1568]: sig. L6rv).

Finally, the image of "one man" is helpful to characterise More's way of addressing the commons. Contrary to the idea expressed in some treatises, according to which shallow rhetorics is good enough for the people (whereas reason must be used in a one-to-one exchange, with the king for example),[10] More appeals to their reason and their imagination to try and convince them, as though he were talking to one single man. So what seems to emerge here is

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[9] I borrow the expression from Aristotle: see *Nicomachean Ethics* (1167b2-3) and *Eudemian Ethics* (1241a32-33) in Barnes 1985; see also Mayhew 1996.

[10] This appears in Bartholomeu Filippe's *The counseller* (1589): "they that perswade the people, séeke all means, arguments, and reasons, (though they be neuer so false) to prooue that which they goe about, and they vse all the figures that Rethorick teacheth. But to perswade one man (as *Quintilian* saith) eloquence little auaileth" (1589: sig. P2v).

a community of characters, united by direct contact and simple actions, in which a subtle negotiation between the individual and the group is made possible.

However, More's friendship with the commons suggests a form of dangerous competition with the king for their love. For the audience cannot but see the difference between the expressions of royal love, often marked by abstraction, and the much more personal and concrete bonds of friendship developed by More. This is particularly visible in Surrey's speech which concludes the riot sequence: "In hope his highness' clemency and mercy, / Which in the arms of mild and meek compassion / Would rather clip you, as the loving nurse / Oft doth the wayward infant" (7, 158-161). Here, he can only propose an *image* of love to convey the king's care for his subjects. Still, the presence of the counsellor is minimised to enhance the intensity of royal love. Surrey's role in the above-quoted passage is that of a mere spokesman who has the sole task to communicate this love to the subjects: "Then for the rest, from my dread sovereign's lips, / I here pronounce free pardon for them all" (150-151). Leaving the stage to the counsellors could therefore seem deceptive, as part of a scapegoating strategy. Cholmley's reproach in Scene 3 diverts potential criticism onto the king's advisors who are to blame for the king's unintentional ignorance. And after the riot, the juxtaposition of Lincoln's death – ordered by the Council – with Surrey's late arrival creates a similar impression: the Council acts too quickly this time, and directly contradicts the king who had decided to pardon the rioters. The references to the Council as an impersonal community – "It is the Council's pleasure" (7, 4), "The Council's warrant hastened our dispatch" (142) – thus become a perfect foil for criticism, and a way of keeping the king's image intact. Furthermore, these references are also a way of foregrounding counsellors while subsuming their personal identities.

But as far as More is concerned, his personal figure does not wholly disappear behind the institution. First, many elements in the play, such as his calls to humility, prove that the connection with London and his modest background has not disappeared. He shows it in his welcome speech to the Lord Mayor, his dinner guest in Scene 9, arguing that "they that cast an eye still whence they came / Know how they rose, and how to use the same" (9, 98-99). Yet his geographical proximity with the king seems to distance him from the commons, by bringing him closer to the centre of political influence. This is perceptible in the way popular characters are gradually turned into specific types: instead of first names, we have "the poor suitor, / Fatherless orphan, or distressed widow" (14, 66-67). This return to generic anonymity of course echoes the new impersonality of the counsellor's role, but it may also be a way of pointing to his overwhelming anxiety and his genuine care for all these different members of the commons. In fact, he even unveils how partial these generic representations are, particularly regarding soldiers. The great Council meeting in Scene 10 deals with preparations for war; but soldiers are seen as mere pawns in a grand national narrative (even in More's speech). The tone is rather different at the end of the play when More answers the Lieutenant's question as to how he spent his salary: "Crutches, Master Lieutenant, and bare cloaks, / For halting soldiers and poor needy scholars, / Have had my gettings in the Chancery" (16, 55-57). Far from being a simple emanation of the king's love, his actions rather appear as a compensation for the deficiencies of the state. So More's mediating function looks more subversive, allowing forgotten men and women to find their way to the stage and sometimes voice their concerns, therefore "revealing aspects of the commonwealth to the commonwealth" (Curtis 2009: 61).[11]

It thus seems difficult for a man who has such close ties with the people to be only a spokesman for the king. This is why the play presents More's balanced mediation between the

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[11] Cathy Curtis insists on that political dimension of Shakespearean drama which she sees as a form of counsel in itself: "While entertaining and sustaining commercial success, the plays bring forth a collection of challenging ideas which were of vital import to all degrees in society, especially compelling because they included the voices of the poor and common soldiers, as well as those of kings and chancellors, in a variety of contexts, and so many of them historically based" (Curtis 2009: 61).

personal and the institutional as both an exception and an ideal. One of the players More invites into his house, Luggins, describes him as someone familiar with everybody, wishing that "there were more of his mind" (9, 355-356) – thus suggesting that the usual relationships between the commons and the state are more impersonal. This ideal seems even more unreachable at the end of the play, once More has been definitively ejected from the sphere of power. The Second Warder of the Tower of London laments: "I think the poor will bury him in tears. / I never heard a man since I was born, / So generally bewailed of everyone." (14, 12-14) The use of boosting devices mixed with the pathetic tone underscores the loss of an ideal that can only be mourned for. The general farewell to More here echoes some of the eulogies produced for the deaths of Elizabeth's counsellors which celebrated their proximity with the commons, in particular that written by Thomas Nelson for the death of Sir Francis Walsingham in 1590:

> Farewell the comfort of the poore, that to them almes did give,
> […] Farewell to thee that for the poore thy Letters farre would'st send.
> Farewell the sutor for the poore, that seldome let thee rest,
> Farewell the fréend to fatherlesse and widdowes sore opprest (Nelson 1590).

The play presents a very similar phrasing when a woman mourns More's fate in Scene 14: "Ah, gentle heart, my soul for thee is sad. / Farewell, the best friend that the poor e'er had." (14, 44-45). This ideal description, by underlining More's attention to the destitute, thus ranks him as one popular counsellor among many other well-known figures (including zealously Protestant ones). But these three passages, in which More is praised by other characters, also clearly point to an awareness of the painful discrepancy between ideals and their embodiments. And the same kind of lucidity is to be found in treatises on counsel which often set forth, to quote Ceriol's translator, an "imagined patterne to be considered onely vvith the minde" (1570 [1559], sig. Q2r). More's disappearance thus reminds us that all this was just a parenthesis; and his final conversation with the woman requesting his help marks the end of mediation: "But the King / Has ta'en the matter into his own hand; / He has all I had. Then, woman, sue to him" (14, 39-41). The focus is once again on the close relationship between the king and his subjects, discarding any intrusive mediators. However, this proximity is deceptive, for without conciliar mediation, the possibility of direct communication with the king seems not only an ideal but above all a complete fantasy.

To conclude, we may say that by dramatising a crisis in the channels of communication, the play questions the very proximity that is supposed to exist between kings and their subjects. This provoked the displeasure of the Master of the Revels who censured several passages, in particular Cholmley's criticism of the king's counsellors (Clare 1990: 54). But we can now wonder if their failed mediation is the main cause of the crisis or if it is only a symptom of an unbridgeable gap between the commons and the state. The play does not give us a definitive answer and complicates things further by presenting the remedy to such a crisis as an unreachable and potentially subversive ideal: indeed, the perfect mediator as embodied by More – both a friend of the people and of the prince – does not last long in the sphere of politics. For even though he maintains these two allegiances, they do not bear the same weight: it is his failure to comply with the king's orders that causes his death. Still, this sudden disappearance, added to the king's absence from the stage, conversely points to the truer nature of his friendship with the people. After all, More does not walk alone towards death but still surrounded by friends,[12] while the isolated figure of the king remains in the background.

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[12] "the higher I mount the better I can see my friends about me" (17, 61-62).

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Early Modern King–Commoner Ballads: Tools of Social Communication?

Csilla Virág

The monarch mingling unrecognised with his subjects is a well-known motif for everyone, even from childhood tales. For the Hungarian audience, this means the jovial folktale hero, King Matthias, while in early modern England, it was a King Henry meeting the miller, or a King Edward passing his time with the tanner. The stories themselves vary, but the story type is, and has been, popular in all European cultures (Hutjens 2009: 74). In this paper, I will examine a group of these stories, the king–commoner ballads and poems. These products of late medieval and early modern English literature share the same core story: a king, unaccompanied by his court, meets one of his subjects from the lower ranks of society, the commoner. Unrecognised by the subject, the king spends a shorter or longer period of time (usually a night) with him. At the end of the joyful visit, the king unveils his true identity, and instead of punishing him (as the commoner had anticipated), rewards the subject. Each text adds different elements to the story, such as challenges and feasts, or the subject's visit to court, but the essence of the plot stays the same.

In spite of the genre's obvious popularity,[1] little scholarly attention has been dedicated to the individual examination of the poems themselves. They are typically discussed in connection with, or as a supplement to sixteenth and seventeenth-century dramas about disguised kings. Recently published works, considering primarily the ballads and poems (or at least examining them alongside, not as supplementary to the dramas), are mainly concerned with defining the genre, focusing on outlining the corpus of texts belonging to the tradition, and occasionally comparing the texts to one another. Rochelle Smith comprehensively enumerates the texts featuring this story type, discussing their subversive qualities and noting how the late medieval poems – comic in tone and marked by social criticism – turned into idealising, jovial ballads. However, she does not discuss in detail the possible reasons for these changes (2010). In his recent monograph Mark Truesdale reads and interprets the texts through the carnivalesque elements (such as the double feast), and the surveillance exercised by the ruler, using theories of Michel Foucault and Mikhail Bakhtin (2018). While providing the most comprehensive study of the genre to present day by thoroughly analysing the inner system of the poems and ballads, and identifying many of the changes or differences, the monograph's main focus is not to map out the texts' social context and to entertain the question whether the changes mentioned by previous authors, and remarked upon by him as well, could be the imprints of socio-cultural changes of the period, and if yes, how (Truesdale 2018).[2] Having considered all this, on the following pages I aim to put into focus this little-discussed topic, and while introducing the king–commoner tradition and its changes, I aim to explain why these changes occurred. For

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[1] Between 1578 and 1690, 14 ballad titles implying king–commoner content can be found in the Stationers' Register (Smith 2010: 303).

[2] Other important and (more or less) recent scholarship concerned with the ballads that need to be mentioned here: Linda Hutjens 2009, Elizabeth Walsh 1975, even though the latter focuses mainly on motifs standing alone, taken out of their texts, and the disguised king in the title is a bit problematic, the kings rarely being disguised (only unrecognised) in the texts.

this, a comparison with another element of popular culture, one working through similar motifs in a possibly similar way, and undergoing changes in the same period, might be a rather useful tool. The (subversive) popular festivities of late medieval and early modern England shall be examined alongside the king–commoner texts, in order to identify similarities in their ways of working, and in changes affecting their status in the examined period, which could have affected one another.

But first and foremost, we need to identify the corpus to be examined in this paper. Different scholars consider different texts to be parts of the tradition (some count texts written in mixed verse and prose, some reject the early printed ones, etc.), but the core of the corpus is commonly agreed upon to be the same nine texts. Of these nine texts, two are excluded from this paper: *Rauf Coilyear* and *A Gest of Robin Hood*. The first, *Rauf Coilyear* is a Scottish text, and I wish to concentrate primarily on texts coming from England. And even though the *Gest of Robin Hood* has been treated as a king–commoner text (e.g. Truesdale 2018: 15, 167-169, 178), it does not entirely fit the pattern. The king only appears as the last one of Robin's several guests, and the purpose of the meeting is not to spend time together, but to resolve a conflict. Ballads from the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century are also left out from the scope of this paper, just as are those texts that do feature a king and a commoner, but not the concealment of identity, or the time spent together in merriment (such as *The Pore Man and the King*, in which the amicable king helps out the witty commoner in his tight financial situation). The ballads from the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century are left out, partly because the civil war had such an impact on popular culture that mapping these changes and effects is beyond the reach of this paper (for the detailing of such impact see for example Fox 2000: 253-257), and partly because these texts have a core story slightly different from the ones discussed here. A king meets a commoner and they spend some time together, just as in the late medieval and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, but the king is not a Henry or an Edward from the ancient history of England, but rather a contemporary monarch (such as William III). Thus, the whole working of the texts is somewhat different: they don't use the commonly shared past but rather contemporary (fictitious) events.

All in all, seven texts remain as the core of this investigation. Four of these are late medieval poems, and three are early modern ballads. The medieval texts are the *John de Reeve*, a 910-line long text written around 1450, surviving in a single manuscript copy from the middle of the seventeenth century, the British Library Add. MS 27879, or Percy Folio (edited in Furrow 2013 and Furnivall & Hales 1868: 2/550-594); *King Edward & the Shepherd*;[3] *The King and the Barker*, a text dated to around 1468, surviving in a rather fragmented version, with only 228 lines extant in the Cambridge University Library Ee.4.35 (for its edition see Ritson 1791: 57-66); and *The King and the Hermit*.[4] As seen, all of them survive in single copies. The three ballads from the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century can muster a lot more witnesses, due to the fact that they are broadside ballads. Broadside ballads are products of cheap print, appearing in the sixteenth century, and becoming massively popular in the seventeenth century. The texts, printed on a single sheet of paper and often illustrated, were sold in the street, in alehouses, at fairs, etc. by ballad vendors or pedlars. These mass-produced items reached virtually every layer of society, not just because they were cheap, and were also

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[3] The text's date of origin can be placed between 1400 and 1450, and it survives in a single manuscript copy (Cambridge University Library MS Ff.5.48). The ending of the text is missing – the manuscript, in its incomplete form, has 1090 lines. For its latest edition see Furrow 2013, for the list of other editions see Furrow 2013: Introduction. The following quotations are from this edition.

[4] The text can be dated to around 1500, its fragmented witness is found in the Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61, containing 525 lines of the text. For its latest edition, see Furrow 2013, for its other editions see Furrow 2013: Introduction. The following quotations are from this edition.

being circulated orally (by the ballad vendors, or other performers singing them out loud), but also because they were printed in black letters, the most easily readable typeset. In the first year of school, children learnt how to read from printed texts, usually in black letters. Only in later years did they move on to learn writing, and thus to learn reading the handwriting. Many (or most) children were taken out of school after a year or so, when they became old enough to start working around the house or business, or when the costs of education, now involving the cost of paper, ingredients of ink, and pens necessary for writing, proved to be unaffordable (and unprofitable). As a result of this, many people, and even poorer children, learnt how to read a text printed in the easy black letter typeset, but had no ability to decipher roman or white letters, let alone handwriting (on the levels of literacy and the schooling system's use of letter types see for example Fox 2017: 135-136; Spufford 1981: 18-44 or Fox 2000: 41). Another key factor in the ballads' popularity was the broad range of topics they offered: discussion of contemporary political events, news, stories of love, horror or adventure, texts of popular piety could all be found in the assortment (for more details on the broadside ballads in general see for example Watt 1993: 1-15; Nebeker 2007; McShane 2011). As these ballads were mass-produced, pouring from the printing press, it is hardly surprising that the three ballads, *King Alfred and the Shepherd*,[5] *King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth*,[6] and *King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield*[7] have numerous copies surviving today (whereas the late-medieval poems have single witnesses).

As seen, based on their dates of origin, the texts can be divided into two different groups: a late-medieval one, from the fifteenth century, and an early modern one, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This time gap naturally carries with itself certain changes or differences between the two groups. The first and most obvious one is a difference in length. The late-medieval texts are a lot longer, as shown also by the fragmented ones: *John de Reeve* 910 lines, *King Edward and the Shepherd* 1090 lines (fragmented), *The King and the Barker* 228 lines (heavily fragmented), *The King and the Hermit* 525 lines (fragmented). Compared to these, the broadside ballads are significantly shorter: *King Alfred and the Shepherd* 256 lines, *King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth* 156 lines, *King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield* 240 lines. This change can easily be explained by the latter texts' medium itself: a broadside ballad, printed on a single sheet of paper, cannot possibly run longer than approximately 200–250 lines (even less, if heavily illustrated). In addition, specific elements are absent from the ballads, and they seem to have a rather different mood in general, than the late-medieval poems. While, for example, the poems articulated criticism towards, or grudge from the commoner's side against the lords, the ballads show little signs of such conflicts (Truesdale 2018: 17-20, 210). The late-medieval texts offer more detailed forms of social realism: the weather turns stormy, firewood is scarce, the commoner is hungry, and abused by the king's soldiers (Smith 2010: 304-306). The broadside ballads on the other hand offer idyllic pictures of the world: the commoner is not suspicious of the stranger he happens upon in the woods, and has no complaints to be made about his everyday life. The characters themselves seem more simplified as well: the commoner is not crude or churlish, driven by suspicions, just a simple person, the king is not prone to make

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[5] The title first appears in the Stationers' Register in 1578 (Truesdale 2018: 221). The text has six broadside copies extant, for some of them and for editions see Truesdale 2018: 263-264, n31. Copies unmentioned by Truesdale: EBBA 20272, 20240, 32007. The following quotations are from the EBBA 20272.

[6] The text dated to around 1600 is an adaptation, a later version of *The King and the Barker* (Truesdale 2018: 239). Surviving copies of the text: EBBA 30112, 31887, 20749, 31888. The following quotations are from the EBBA 30112.

[7] The title first appears in the Stationers' Register in 1624 (Truesdale 2018: 205-206). Eight broadside ballad copies survive. For copies and editions, see Truesdale 2018: 261-262. Copies unmentioned by Truesdale: EBBA 35495, 20252, 32229. The text can also be found in the mid-seventeenth-century manuscript, also containing the *John de Reeve* poem, the *Percy Folio* (British Library Add. MS 27879). For this edition see Furnivall & Hales 1868: 2/147-157. The following quotations are from EBBA 33170.

mistakes or offend his host, but is rather an all-knowing, wise ruler (Smith 2010: 313). The very reason behind this unlikely meeting is transformed as well: instead of being a question of life or death for the king, wandering alone in the wilderness, as in the late-medieval poems, in the ballads he leaves his court on purpose, pursuing an encounter with a commoner, which is known to be a jolly "pastime."

> The which King Alfred liking well,
> forsooke his stately Court:
> And in disguise unknowne went forth,
> to see that Joviall sport (*King Alfred and the Shepherd*, 5-8).

> In Summer time when leaves grew greene,
> and birds sitting on every tree:
> King Edward would a hunting ride,
> some pastime for to see (*King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth*, 1-4).

As such, the encounter previously proving to be a lifesaver for the ruler, now transforms into a nice way to spend the royal afternoon, while general cheerfulness fills the world of the ballads (Truesdale 2018: 215; Hutjens 2009: 87). Mark Truesdale views this as the ballad tradition turning from rebellious (those being the poems) into conservative (2018: 221). Considering some possible reasons behind this change, I would propose that the ballads show a milder, or more neutral version, leaving behind the dramatic mood and the criticising tone, in order to become more suitable for a wider audience.

To see this, it is important to point out that the late-medieval poems, based both on specific elements in their content (such as the king, reunited with his court, mocking the commoner), and on the characteristics of their genre (their length running several hundreds, even thousands of lines, spread in exclusive manuscript circulation), should be considered to be products of an elite culture. Whereas the sixteenth and seventeenth-century ballads target a lot wider audience (including, but not limited to, the earlier elite audience), being products of cheap print and popular culture, and thus being consumable and consumed by virtually all layers of society. The poems and the ballads thus come from essentially different registers, sharing the same subversive core story, which serves as a ground for comparison. Some pairs of texts form an undeniable connection between the two groups, the broadside ballad parties being to obviously related to the earlier, elite poems, sharing exact names and specific plot points (see the example of *The King and the Barker* and *King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth*) in addition to important, but more general motifs. Still, they functioned in front of different audiences, in periods both socially and culturally different. The important question could be why these specific motifs characteristic of king–commoner texts, such as the temporary elevation of the characters from their own social contexts, the questioning of authority, and the transgression of social boundaries appeared and seem to have enjoyed popularity in both registers, even if being a bit more moderate in the ballads.

Changes in literary consumption and reading habits during the sixteenth century might shed further light on the question of the different registers. As texts started to pour from the printing presses by the dozen every day, in cheap format, and as more and more people acquired basic reading skills, and as the printed texts – through oral dissemination, while being advertised or consumed – seeped back to oral culture, they became accessible to a wider and wider audience. Literary texts entered the market of cheap print, a market serving a larger and more diverse audience than the codices before, with more diverse tastes and demands. The texts had to adapt to these new, more diverse demands, in order to remain marketable, and thus a worthy investment for authors, publishers, and vendors. As cheap print started to incorporate even the lowest layers of society into its potential audience, episodes of the king and his court mocking

the commoner had to be excluded, as they would have made the texts unenjoyable for a large part of the audience. The shortening of the texts (apart from the obvious material limits), and the simplification of the plot and narration can also be explained by the fact that a large part of this extended audience was incapable of consuming and enjoying longer and more complicated texts by listening to, let alone by reading them. As such, the texts had to become shorter, the plot and narration easier to follow. These simplified versions usually omit social comment and criticism, most likely to avoid triggering any possible hostility towards specific groups of the audience and society, rendering themselves displeasing for those groups.[8]

Therefore, the early modern ballads are products optimised for the popular market, and this can be identified as the main reason for their differences with the late-medieval poems. However, the essence of the plot remains to be the questioning of authority, and the transgression of social norms and class boundaries, in both registers, showing an interest shared by diverse layers of society. To better understand the wide-ranging fascination with this story type, I will examine the texts and their main motifs through comparison with another manifestation of late-medieval and early modern (popular) culture that uses motifs of transgression, transmission of power, etc.: the communal festivities; and by entertaining the thought of a community-forming function, newly acquired by the story type when entering the broadside medium.

In addition to the similar motifs detailed below, a fundamental characteristic shared by the festivities and the texts is their fascination with history. The kings appearing in the king–commoner tales are always presented as historic rulers of England. It is made obvious by them bearing typical English royal names, but they have no individual attributes, personalities specific to one historic ruler or another. For instance, King Edward could denote any of the Edwards, and all of the kingly characters appear in the texts as jovial, benevolent, merry figures.[9] This is characteristic of these texts' general treatment of history: the events are set in the historic past of England, but naturally not at a specific date, only lingering somewhere in the "heroic past" (Spufford 1981: 224). Still, this generalised past is a lot more relatable for the audience, compared to the Edwardian times represented in chronicles, since this version of the past is represented by everyday people (tanners, millers) and everyday emotions (cheer, anger), presenting even the king himself in a lot more graspable, engageable form (Woolf 1991: 183). This evoked past is also a common past, shared by all the people of England, and the figure of the king is a symbolic representation of the whole country. By featuring his figure, and leaning on the shared history, the texts have the ability to create a sense of belonging between any groups of consumers, even those coming from very different social classes (Shrank 2017: 30). Noble, gentry and commoner alike can have a connection (naturally not necessarily in the same way) to the abstract figure of the historic king, representing the country's past, which is their past. Thus, this shared history has the ability to put all these different types of people on the same side of the table.

Besides alluding to a shared history, which is a very common element in the communal festivities as well, the other cornerstone of the texts – the crossing of social boundaries – is often carried out through ritualistic elements, and these could very easily remind the audience of characteristic elements of early modern popular festivities. As the texts themselves were very

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[8] On the broadened audience of the popular market, and how the same texts could have been appropriated by very different sorts of people, see Chartier 1999; on optimising other genres and types of texts, such as Robin Hood ballads or romances, for the popular market, see Watt 1993: 257; Wiggins 2012: 125-126, 138; Spufford 1981: 227, 232-233. The shift in the audience of the Robin Hood stories has already been discussed at length by many scholars, for a short overview see Spufford 1981: 231.

[9] Even if a text identifies its Edward as Edward I ("Of that name were kinges three, / But Edward with the long shankes was hee, / A lord of great renowne" *John de Reeve*, 16-18.), it has no further importance regarding his personality, or any events of the story.

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often consumed together (especially for example in taverns, or other places of leisure, Fox 2000: 26-27), just as the popular or communal festivities, we must ask the question whether they could have had (to a certain extent) a similar effect on the communities participating in their consumption. So, focusing on parts highlighting this connection between the texts and popular festivities, I will aim to present how they could have had a similar effect on communities of early modernity. While presenting this similarity between them, I will also try to show the parallel of the changes affecting both the texts and the festivities, and how these might explain why the king–commoner texts gained such popularity entering the market of cheap print.

Popular festivities and the texts

In the following, the term communal or popular festivity will be used to denote all those festivities in which the whole of a community (a town, parish, village) participated. These were religious (e.g. Christmas), seasonal (May Day, sheep shearing) or other local festivities (celebration of a local patron saint, local historical event) etc. It should be emphasised that these festivities must not be thought of as identical members of a large group, as they all had different motivations and were carried out differently.[10] Considering this, it would be far from my intentions to suggest that all these festivities and holidays are alike and thus can be regarded as identical realisations of one general event of merriment, and we can consider each and every one of them to be working in the exact same manner. There are, however, certain aspects and effects of the festivities that scholarship mostly agrees upon to work in specific ways, often because they are shared by most realisations of the same festival. I will mainly rely on these aspects and effects in the following examination, but it must be borne in mind that broadly generalising the festivals is to be avoided, as each and every realisation of them has several individual aspects and traits that must be taken into account if dealt with the specific event. But as I am not aiming to examine specific events or specific realisations of the festivities, the aspects and effects agreed upon by scholarship shall suffice for my comparison. Of the popular festivities one group seems to provide more basis for comparison than others. These are the festivities characterised by subversion, misrule, and the temporary rearrangement of social hierarchy. We can also find resemblance with non-subversive festivities as well, but this shall be applied in the following only sparingly, focusing mainly on the subversive festivities.

Previous scholarship has offered numerous interpretations and methodologies treating these subversive festivities. Victor Turner's state of *communitas* must be mentioned, in which members of a community, while participating in a temporary ritual, a celebratory state, are elevated from their place in the social hierarchy and are placed on an equal level (1977: 131-165). They all become participants in the ritual or celebration, just as the king and the commoner in the texts are temporarily moved out of their regular positions, and placed literally at the same table, and on the same level. Based on the thoughts of Charles Phythian-Adams, many scholars interpret these communal festivities as consolidations of already existing social hierarchies and structures, by re-enacting, recreating those in the hierarchies of the festivities (e.g. where specific people can stand etc.). In another interpretation, these festivities were tools of social protest, at the same time reflecting and outlining, but still upholding differences within the community (Billington 1991, Lindenbaum 1996). Somewhat uniting these latter two interpretations, a third one attributes the function of stabilising and consolidating the already

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[10] Even different realisations of the same festivity, in different contexts, cannot necessarily be considered equal: the May Day in London and in a small country village must have had very different connotations and dynamics; they were massively different in size, just to mention the most obvious factor. Due to this, when considered for its own cultural and social context, each and every occasion of festivity should be examined in its individual form (Humphrey 2001: 35-41).

existing systems to these festivities, by temporarily turning them upside down through acts of misrule (Hutton 2005: 75). This is the same safety-valve theory, coming from Bakhtin, which is so often used concerning carnivals and any other carnivalesque festivities featuring subversion of hierarchy (Bakhtin 1984, Humphrey 2001: 11-21). According to this, on the special day, the rules of society can freely be broken for the day (or the duration of the festival), allowing the members of the community to release tension built up either between individuals or groups of the (local) society. The subversion appearing in the king–commoner tales can also be interpreted alongside the carnival-theory, the king's visit being a safety valve. Hereafter, I will be using this interpretation for both the texts and the popular festivities themselves (the carnival-theory has been used before to interpret the texts, see Truesdale 2018).

However, as mentioned before, the texts show resemblances with non-subversive celebrations as well (such as those of local history). While using the temporary unruliness and the pressure release provided by it, in order to reinforce the local community for the characters within the story itself, they also build on pieces of the common, shared culture, emphasising the belonging of those participating in the consumption of the texts. Based on both this and the safety-valve function, the popular festivities without doubt can be identified as events having a key role in forming and upholding feelings of identity and belonging within a community (for such opinions see Wrightson 1990: 41-42; Underdown 1987: 44; Stokes 2001: 247). They were vital in keeping the often shaky and sensitive social balance. Their importance and role were realised and commented upon by contemporaries as well, such as by William Piers, bishop of Bath and Wells, speaking of church feasts:

> […] for the civilizing of the people, for their lawful recreations, for composing differences by meeting of friends, for increase of love and amity as being feasts of charity, for relief of the poor, the richer sort keeping then open house, and for many other reasons (Hindle 1995: 158. For the date and the somewhat more accurate text see: Bruce 1863: 275-6. On the festivities' social function see Wrightson 1990: 41-42; Hindle 1995: 157-158).

Popular festivities in early modern England

Both the texts featuring the story type and the festivities themselves went through important changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although these changes were necessarily different in nature: the story type entered a new medium and register, while the festivities came under harsh attacks and criticism. In this period, we find the popular festivities amidst the crashing waves of the Reformation and the ever-changing regal attitudes, once discouraging, once encouraging them. This tendency in the long run – by the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century – resulted in the gradual suppression of the festivities (Hutton 1994: 111-152, 153-199). They first came under attack during Henry VIII's reign, after the beginning of the English Reformation. This primarily affected religious festivals or holy days, such as celebrations of the patron saint and the foundation of the churches, which were now to be held uniformly on the first Sunday of October (Underdown 1987: 47; Hutton 1994: 74). Other seasonal, local historic, secular festivities also came under attack during Edward VI's Protestant reign, just to be restored (alongside with Catholicism) under Mary I (Hutton 1996: 300-301; Hutton 1994: 95). Elizabeth I's reign brought a relative tranquillity – naturally the festivities had to adhere to the new Reformed manners, and some were cut back, but not as fiercely as under Edward's reign. Church-ales could flourish again from the 1560s, and plays were once again performed at Corpus Christi celebrations – even if the processions themselves were still banished (Hutton 1994: 113-114; Hutton 1996: 367-368).

Still, the festivities started to go into a slow but certain decline in Elizabeth's reign, in which the increasing Protestant attitude of the population must have had an important role (Hutton 1994: 142-144). James I followed in the steps of Elizabeth, though with a slightly more Sabbatarian attitude – but he did not give in to the radical Puritan demands, wishing to banish merriment altogether.[11] Under James I, not especially the festivities, but rather specific days came under restriction, especially Sundays – but being the day when people had the most time to engage in recreational activities and merriment, even this proved to be a huge restraint. Throughout his reign we see a constant negotiation with the factions of Parliament growing ever more Puritan, and thus ever demanding more strongly the banishment of festivities. The publication of the *Book of Sports* in 1618, or the vetoing of the Sabbatarian bill in 1621 (Hutton 1994: 154-183) can be regarded as stages of these negotiations. Upon ascending to the throne, Charles I ratified the bill previously vetoed by his father and Elizabeth before him, suppressing the celebration of both secular and religious holidays even more, in accordance with Puritan demands. Later on, he tried to ease tensions a bit, by allowing for example church-ales to be held on Sundays. Just as previously, during Charles' reign we see constant negotiations with and between the Parliament, Puritans, and more permissive groups of society. However, these negotiations proved to be somewhat less successful than before, as tensions surrounding the topic kept growing and growing (Hutton 1994: 185-199). As a result, popular festivities kept diminishing and became points of confrontation between local Puritans and more allowing groups of the communities. The 1640s and the Civil War brought radical actions against merrymaking and recreations, resulting in a decline never seen before (Hutton 1994: 200-226).

Seeing that the popular festivities went through important changes in the same period as the texts examined in this paper, the former shifting in form and the latter in genre, their comparison seems further justified, and it raises the question whether these two tendencies were joined in their motivations, or somehow one change affected the other. This is especially intriguing given the fact that the same subversive motifs and elements have important roles in both manifestations of popular culture.

The shared motifs

The first motif to be discussed is the revelling of the different social classes together. This is rather obvious in the texts, considering the base of the whole story type: the king and the commoner spend their time together in merriment. The commoner within the texts' world has no idea that he is entertaining his king, but his identity is constantly emphasised for the audience. This is accompanied by transference of authority and power: the king as a guest is under the roof and authority of his host and must follow the commoner's orders and rules. In the festivities, different layers of society can be seen revelling together both actually and symbolically. A symbolic realisation of this phenomenon was when the celebrating people chose (mock) kings and queens from amongst themselves to lead the festivity. One of the most common occasions for this was the May Day, with a May or summer king and his court, often in elaborate costumes, imitating the royal court (Hutton 1996: 296-299). These (mock) kings were part of many other festivities besides the May Day, and they could also appear leading

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[11] Sabbatarianism, or more distinctively Puritan Sabbatarianism, emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century in England, and urged the strict observance of Sabbath, or the Lord's Day. This day (every Sunday) was to be spent in worship and devotion, while all merrymaking and recreational activities were to be avoided. Since many festivals had some Catholic origin (as feasts of patron saints, for example), or involved immoral activities (such as drinking and dancing), the practice of these was to be avoided on any day of the week, and above all on Sundays. Due to the keeping of Sunday as Sabbath, Puritan Sabbatarians are first-day Sabbatarians, and are not to be confused with seventh-day Sabbatarians.

processions (Hutton 1996: 249; Ashley 2001: 10).[12] Each and every group of the local society participated in these processions, thus the "king for a day" led the whole local community within the context of the celebration. Still, in these cases, the symbolic representation of a monarch might be the most important (Hutton 1994: 30). Through the figure of the king (often accompanied by a queen) we see a temporal transference of power based on a social agreement (Stokes 2001: 242-243). This placed the different groups and classes of society in the common, shared context of the holiday, moving them as a whole, a community, all subjects to their (mock) king. And through the "king and his court" narrative of the event, the uppermost layer of society, otherwise not present in the local community, became symbolically involved in the revel, and through that in the community (for examples of the same from Wales see Suggett 1996: 100-101). This made the figure of the monarch (and the court) more conceivable and relatable (Jacobs 2006: 138).

It is also interesting to see the actual realisation of the different groups of society celebrating together, and of actual transference of power, taking place in this context. A most typical form of this is the Lord of Misrule figure, appearing typically (but not exclusively) during the Christmas festivities. The transference of power accompanying this role (filled by someone from the lower layers of the group or society) had been present from the twelfth century, appearing first in France. In ecclesiastical context, we can mention the Feast of Fools, Asses, or Sub-Deacons (Hutton 1996: 129-130). In secular context, a lower member of the household was chosen as Lord of Misrule and was responsible for the orchestration of the festivities during the holidays (Hutton 1994: 10; Phythian-Adams 1990: 249-250). In the royal court, this still meant the temporal elevation of some noble person, but in (rural) gentry households the actual lower sort, the servants played this role. During the Christmas celebrations, in matters concerning the entertainments, the whole household, including the real lord of the house, was submitted to the person named Lord of Misrule (Hutton 1996: 138). In these cases, the transference of power works in a way very similar to the texts' transference of power: the commoner is elevated into the position of power. His lord, or his king follows his orders, making the commoner the *de facto* lord for the night. In the texts this happens without the commoner realising it at the time, but the texts themselves constantly remind the audience of this upside-down setting. Due to this, the safety-valve function, triggered by the transference of power, is not manifested in the commoner of the story's world, but in the audience, which expects the transference of power almost as a scheduled event in these texts (just as in the festivities). The fact that the texts constantly refer to the king as "the king", not as "the guest" etc. also helps the audience, putting themselves in the commoner's position, forget that the commoner doesn't actually know that he is entertaining the king. The stories of the once upon a time king's personal adventures bring him closer, make him (and through him, symbolically, the whole of the better sort) more relatable and graspable, just as the May Day and other celebrations featuring a mock king.

The second motif found both in festivities and texts is the communal feasting. This appears in five of the seven texts, and is mentioned in the other two, the *King and the Barker*, and its later version, the *King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth*, but is not carried out in the end. A very characteristic motif of the texts is the double feast, during which the commoner first presents his guest with a rather humble dinner, consisting of simple dishes like dry bread and salted meat. The king asks his host whether a somewhat more delicious dinner could be served, and the commoner, having made his guest swear he will not let anyone, especially the king know, has such a feast served up that could easily rival courtly feasts, the venison of which is usually poached from the king's woods. This double feast can, and has already been interpreted

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[12] Choosing mock kings and leaders for celebrations was naturally not unique to England. For French mock king elections (*reynage*), and their role in political-social negotiations see LeRoy Ladurie 1979: 175-228.

as a "world turned upside down", a carnivalesque episode, which dissolves the differences and hierarchical boundaries between the king and the commoner (Truesdale 2018: 111-114). The double feast also implies that there is no inherent difference between the taste (and by extension: the nature) of a king and of a commoner: both prefer the tasty venison over the year-old salted bacon. The commoner does not enjoy eating base food just because he is of base origin.[13] Through this interpretation, the feasts also demolish the social boundaries between king and commoner, bring the ruler and the ruled closer to one another, and point to the fact that there is no inherent difference between them (and between people in general) (Smith 2010: 308-309).

However, these are interpretations reached through the thorough examination of the texts' inner system, and they might not actually have come into play in all cases of appropriation. A lot more obvious resemblance can be pointed out with the festivities: the actual communal feasting of different social groups. These served as a vital and rather common element of different local communal festivities. They were to be found at church-ales, organised in the parish's churchyard, producing income, meant to be spent on charity later. The whole local society participated in these events, including the gentry, who often sponsored them as well (Hutton 1996: 295-297; Suggett 1996: 85-86). Apart from having a vital role in local poor relief and the church's maintenance, these church-ales and the feasts spent at them played a fundamental part in the formation and sustainment of the local community, by bringing the members of the said community closer to one another within the framework of a celebration. The peace bringing and mediating qualities of the dinner held at the Goodrich churchyard is remarked upon by the local constable (before going into further details concerning the atrocities that happened following the said dinner, because of alien people not respecting their ancient customs of merrymaking):

> [...] to bee merrye in most neighbourly and friendly sorte accordinge to the antient custome of the saide towne and Countrey those holy daies tyme out of mynde vsed with mirth musique and dansing without entent of hurt to anye personn but to make peace and love betweene all neighbours (Klausner 1990: 74).

Similar feasts, with food often provided by the local elite can be found on many other festivities, such as on the Midsummer Day celebrations (Hutton 1996: 371-373). John Stow in his *Survey of London* praises these celebrations of Midsummer, with the "wealthier sort" keeping an open table for all, reconciling differences and dissolving enmities through the shared meals:

> In the Moneths of Iune, and Iuly, on the Vigiles of festiuall dayes, and on the same festiuall dayes in the Euenings after the Sunne setting, there were vsually made Bonefiers in the streetes, euery man bestowing wood or labour towards them: the wealthier sort also before their doores neare to the said Bonefiers, would set out Tables on the Vigiles, furnished with sweete breade, and good drinke, and on the Festiuall dayes with meates and drinks plentifully, whereunto they would inuite their neighbours and passengers also to sit, and bee merrie with them in great familiaritie, praysing God for his benefites bestowed on them. These were called Bonefiers aswell of good amitie amongst neighbours that, being before at controuersie, were there by the labour of others, reconciled, and made of bitter enemies, louing friendes, as also for the vertue that a great fire hath to purge the infection of the ayre ([1603]: 101).

These are most certainly somewhat exaggerating opinions, and one does not have to necessarily think that sworn enemies indeed became loving friends just by sharing a slice of bread and a cup of ale; nevertheless, the abundance of praising opinion permits us to attribute

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[13] On the ideas concerning the naturally, inherently different tastes of the different social classes ("the simple taste of simple people"); and theories about types of food considered to be fit and healthy for the different classes (of which the double feast can be seen as a mocking reflection) see Montanari 1994: 68-97, esp. 82-90.

a positive effect to these feasts on the community. In the king–commoner texts, the exact same shared feast of the better and the meaner sort can be seen, which is left unrecognised by the commoner until the very end. But the audience is once again constantly reminded that the elite is feasting with the poor, and thus might constantly be reminded of the actual communal feastings, and by extension of the positive, community forming effect they possess.

The next motif to be examined is also connected to the feasts in the texts, and this is the drinking game played during dinner. Although appearing in only two of the texts (*The King and the Hermit*: 334-381, *King Edward and the Shepherd*: 313-370), it is still worth mentioning. When the wine is served during dinner, the commoner proposes to drink it while playing a game. The rules are rather simple: one of them says an expression, *Fusty bandias* in the *King and the Hermit*, and *passilodion* in the *King Edward and the Shepherd*, and drinks from the cup.[14] The other party answers with the proper term (*King and the Hermit*: *Strike pantner*, *King Edward and the Shepherd*: *berafrynde*), receives the cup and empties it. Just as in the case of the double feast, here too the king and the commoner are brought to the same level when the king learns a custom native to his subjects (Smith 2010: 310). Furthermore, this episode also resembles the tradition of wassailing, practised typically at Christmastide, which is also a game based on drinking (alcoholic drinks). Dating from at least the fourteenth century, during wassailing a drink was served in a huge wassailing cup or bowl. The leader of the wassailing group said *wassail* (Old English for "your health"), and was answered by the rest with a *drinkhail* (Old English, also for "your health"). Then he drank from the cup or bowl, and then passed it on, and the game went on in this manner, until all the drink was gone. By the seventeenth century, this custom was accompanied by wassailers going from house to house, performing the "drinking act" at each door, and often receiving some sort of reward (food, money etc.) for it (Hutton 1996: 31-32; Hutton 1994: 13). The drinking games appearing in the texts, using nonsense words, could easily have reminded the audience not just of the habit of wassailing, but of all the Christmastide festivities, the joyful, festive mood associated with them.

Throughout the above-mentioned details, the festive periods of winter (Christmas) and spring–summer (May Day, Corpus Christi, Midsummer Eve etc.) were present heavily. Considering this, it is not so surprising that the texts themselves seem to connect to the communal festivities through their timing. This timing obviously did not mean a definite year or any given date, as the texts lack any of those, casting themselves into the mythical past (as mentioned above). Instead, they often place the events to a specific period or time of the year, and when they do, it is the spring–summer (festive) time of the year. Three of the seven texts mention a specific time at all, when the events took place, and all three of them imply this period. In the *King Edward and the Shepherd* the king rides out from his castle on a May morning, whereas in the *King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth* or in the *King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield* he does so on a summer day:

> Oure kyng went hym in a tyde
> To pley hym be a ryver side
> In a mornyng of May (*King Edward and the Shepherd*, 13-15).

> In Summer time when leaves grew greene,
> and birds sitting on every tree:
> King Edward would a hunting ride,
> some pastime for to see. (*King Edward and the Tanner of Tamworth*, 1-4).

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[14] Both these expressions, and their answers are nonsense words. For a possible deciphering and explanation of them see *King and the Hermit*, note to line 341, and *King Edward and the Shepherd*, note to lines 317 and 320.

All a long summer's day rode the king pleasantly
With all his princes and nobles each one (*King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield*, 7-8).

The spring–summer period was especially suitable for large popular festivities involving the whole community, be they religious or secular, partly because these required large spaces. Accommodating a big crowd indoors during winter would need a large heated building or room, which normally proved difficult to find. The natural solution to this problem was to hold celebrations out in the open air, at a time of year when heating was provided by nature itself, namely in spring and summer. Thus, these months became a preferred and typical time of popular festivities (Hutton 1996: 294). It does not seem exaggerating to suppose that setting the texts in this season could have easily made a connection in the audience's mind between the festivities and the stories themselves. As mentioned before, the summer king was a prominent figure of the seasonal merrymakings, thus the timing is rather fit for the story of a king dwelling unrecognised with a commoner, who is temporarily elevated to the ruling position as well.

These motifs just recounted are shared by the communal festivities and the texts, and seem to work in similar ways in both. Through them, the texts acquire the safety-valve and community building effects of the festivities, and we can easily suppose that an audience familiar with the festivals could have easily been reminded of them, and of their atmosphere by the texts. And by reminding the audience of the festivities, the texts might also have transmitted and created the same sense of belonging and community that manifested itself during the celebrations. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that both facets of early modern popular culture were communal events: the texts were usually consumed in a communal way (on a gathering, in the streets or at an alehouse, Fox 2000: 26-27, 41; Watt 1993: 1-26), just as the festivals were frequented, and thus consumed as a community. We must naturally take into account that listening to or reading a text, even if done together as a community, can hardly have an effect as intense as participating in a May Day celebration, for example. Therefore, we must attribute a somewhat less powerful, less intense effect to the texts. However, it seems to be a plausible conclusion that the king–commoner texts had, to a certain extent, a similar community-forging effect on society, just as the popular festivities.

Changes and transformations

The connection of the texts with the popular festivities offers a new point of view, helping to understand why this motif of subversion, and the story type itself could prevail so well in cheap print, in broadside ballads. If we accept the theory detailed above that the texts could have possessed a certain community-forging, stress-relieving, (group) identity-forming effect, similar to the popular festivities, then we might understand why these texts entered the popular market, and were sold by the hundred (if not thousand) at the exact same time when the festivities themselves were being suppressed. They might have stepped up into the role of a substitute for the festivities: having (to a certain extent) the same effect, and now, through their new medium, being cheap, shorter, and possessing a more followable narration, reaching the same audience as the festivities themselves: the whole society. As the number of festivities was ever decreasing, a void to be filled was left behind: people still needed opportunities to release tension, for the healthy functioning of communities. The king–commoner ballads, the cheap texts, accessible everywhere and in any way, consumed often as a group (Schwegler 1980: 438), can be seen as likely candidates for a substitute.

We have seen how they worked in a way similar to the festivities themselves: the meaner and the better sort, the lowest and highest layers of society are placed on the same level in the context of the festivities and in the context of the king's visit in the texts, just as in the feastings

and drinking games typical at the celebrations and at the royal visit. The texts even position themselves to the typical festive period of the year. Through these shared motifs, through both of them featuring a subversive narrative, both could have had similar effects. This, conjoined with the texts' transformation into ballads in the sixteenth century, their popularised, mass-consumed nature through cheap print offered an alternative, which provided (to a certain extent) the same results, but in ways so different that it could not have been criticised and attacked for the same reasons as the festivities. And as a result, the texts probably have become an important tool of social communication, being the new medium through which tension could be released, a medium which could mediate between groups of society, and bring them closer to one another. In order to reach this goal, the texts needed to please all of the very diverse tastes of their new, enlarged audience. Thus, when comparing the late-medieval poems and the early modern ballads with the communal festivities, we might get a better understanding of why the subversive story type could work in different registers. Also, we might get a better understanding of why it was at the same time vital and possible for the story type to enter the broadside medium and the popular register: the emergence of the cheap print products coincided with the decline of the communal festivities, which could have created a higher demand for texts reminding their audience of the festive atmosphere.

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Contributors

ANNALISA MARTELLI completed her PhD in Comparative Literatures at the University of Florence in 2020. In 2017 she published an article titled "*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* e l'influsso del *Chisciotte*". In 2021 she published a book titled "The Good Comic Novel: la narrativa comica di Henry Fielding e l'importanza dell'esempio cervantino". She is currently investigating the influence of *Don Quijote* on post-colonial English literature.

MADDALENA PENNACCHIA is Full Professor of English Literature at Roma Tre University and Coordinator of the PhD Programme of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Her main research field is intermediality in relation to literary texts. She has published extensively on Shakespeare, Jane Austen, the biopic, education and digital natives, literary tourism and she is currently working on the relationship between music and storytelling. She is in the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* where she serves as reviews editor. Her publications include *Literary Intermediality* (2007, ed.), *Tracce del moderno nel teatro di Shakespeare* (2008), *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome* (2010, co-ed.), *Shakespeare intermediale. I drammi romani* (2012), *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic* (2014, co-ed.), *Turismo creativo e identità culturale* (2015, co-ed.), *Adattamento, appropriazione, condivisione di un classico*: Pride and Prejudice *di Jane Austen* (2018 - winner of the ANDA Prize - Associazione Nazionale Docenti di Anglistica 2022), *Shakespeare and Tourism* (2019, co-ed), *Textus - Biopics of British Celebrities 2010s* (2020, co-ed), *Cahiers Élisabéthains - Shakespeare and European Geographies: Borders and Power* (2022, co-ed), *Lingue e Linguaggi - Experiencing Shakespeare in a Digital Environment* (2022, co-ed). She is Director of the Gigi Proietti Globe Theatre Silvano Toti Archive (2020, ongoing). She collaborates with RAI Scuola and RAI cultura and invented the radio shows *Babel Songs* and *Globe Talks* for Roma Tre Radio.

IOLANDA PLESCIA is an Associate Professor of English in the Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies of Sapienza University of Rome, where she teaches history of the English language, stylistics and literary translation, and is the current director of the MA degree in English and Anglo-American Studies. She has published work on Shakespeare's language, early modern translation, multilingualism, early modern scientific language, the circulation of Galilei's work in English. She has produced the first Italian edition of Henry VIII's *Letters to Anne Boleyn* (Nutrimenti, 2013) as well as new annotated translations of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (Feltrinelli, 2015), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Feltrinelli, 2018), and the collaborative early modern play *Sir Thomas More* (co-edited, Feltrinelli, 2022). She edited a special journal issue on Shakespeare's language (*The Shape of a Language – Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*) in 2017, and her co-edited book (with D. Montini) *Elizabeth I in Writing: Language, Power and Representation in Early Modern England* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018. She has been a member of the editorial board of *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* since 2012, and is currently the President of *Iasems – Italian Association of Shakespeare and Early Modern Studies*. In addition to her work on the early modern period she is also a founding member of the *Italian Virginia Woolf Society*, and her interest in Woolf has led to her translation of *Flush: a Biography* for Feltrinelli (2019), and a forthcoming new translation of *Between the Acts*.

BEATRICE RIGHETTI is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Aosta Valley and a former doctoral student in Linguistics, Philology and Literature at the University of Padua. Her doctoral project deals with the reception of the early modern paradoxical writing and woman's question as regards the literary figure of the talkative woman in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Italy. Her main case study is the character of the Shakespearean shrew. She has published on early modern English women writers and on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and contributes to two digital projects directed by Silvia Bigliazzi ("Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination", SENS; and "Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England", CEMP) and to "From Paradise to Padua" directed by Alessandra Petrina.

JACK SARGEANT is Lecturer in Early Modern History at the University of Manchester. He completed his PhD at University College London in 2021, having previously studied at the University of Amsterdam. He is a historian of political and economic life in early modern Britain, specialising in the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. His doctoral research examined how ideas about the material world conditioned the production and contestation of political authority in the 1640s, suggesting a revolutionary break between understandings of authority as a natural, eternal quality of people or things, and as a particular, spatially embedded and historically contingent social relation. Some of this research has been published in the *Historical Journal* and in *Historical Research*.

NICOLAS THIBAULT is a former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Paris) and is currently completing a PhD on counsel and counsellors in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean English history plays at Sorbonne University under the supervision of Line Cottegnies. He has recently published an article on "The Intelligibility of History and the (In)visibility of the Bruised Bodies in *Sir Thomas More*" in a 2021 issue of the *Sillages Critiques* journal (VALE, Sorbonne University). From 2018 to 2021, he taught English and American literature and British history at Sorbonne University. Since 2022, he is a research and teaching assistant at the Languages Department of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University. His areas of interest include early modern drama, the representation of counsel and political history.

CSILLA VIRÁG is about to finish her PhD at Eötvös Loránd University. Her dissertation focuses on minstrels and their role in society in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Her research approaches the question both from a historical perspective, focusing on the musicians' institutions (guilds, companies, etc.) and their place in the local cultural-political scenery and negotiations; and from a literary historical perspective, examining the texts (mainly ballads) performed by these individuals. Csilla is currently an associate research fellow at the Eötvös Loránd Research Network's Institute of History, being a research assistant for The Diplomacy of Small States in Early Modern South-eastern Europe ERC project.

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