

**RUDE MECHANICALS: STAGING LABOR IN THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH
THEATER**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
the University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2011

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
KENNETH P. DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Rude Mechanicals: Staging Labor in the Early Modern English Theater

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University of Pittsburgh, 2011

This dissertation explores the relationship between the early modern theater and changing conceptions of labor. Current interpretations of the theater's economic dimensions stress the correlation between acting and vagrant labor. I build on these approaches to argue that the theater's connection to questions of labor was far more dynamic than is often thought. In particular, I argue that a full understanding of the relationship between the theater and labor requires that we take into account the theater's guild origins. If theatricality was often associated with features of vagrant labor, especially cony-catching and rogue duplicity, the theater also drew significantly from medieval guild practices that valued labor as a social good and a creative force. I contend that the theater's residual guild structure invests representations of labor with an ennobling and humanizing support. In a variety of plays, from Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* to Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, theatrical techniques like disguise and deception gesture towards vagrancy while also enabling laborers of various stripes to affirm their skillful creativity. Plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* depict theatricality as an act of labor, a craftsmanlike endeavor rather than a commodity or mere function of commercial forces. In doing so, the plays carve out a space of artistic autonomy for the theater while affirming the creative power of labor.

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“A poem, as I have told you, is the work of the Poet; the end, the fruit of his labour, and study. Poesy is his skill, or Craft of making: the very Fiction itself, the reason, or form of the work.”

- Ben Jonson

PREFACE

On Shrove Tuesday, March 4, 1617, a group of Clerkenwell apprentices rioted in response to the movement of their favorite acting company, Queen Anne's Men, from the public Red Bull playhouse in Clerkenwell to a new, private playhouse, the Cockpit, located in the exclusive neighborhood of Drury Lane. The apprentices wreaked havoc on the Cockpit; one account written by John Chamberlain describes how these apprentices “fell to great disorders, in pulling down of houses, and beating of guards that were set to keep rule, specially at a new playhouse, some time a cockpit, in Drury Lane, where the queen's players used to play.”¹ A letter to the Privy Council highlights the anger and violence displayed by the apprentices, describing how “there were diverse persons slayne, and others hurte and wounded, the multitude there assembled being to the number of many thousands as wee are credibly informed.”² The riot was eventually quelled, though not before the apprentices inflicted significant damage on the theater and those people who unwisely attempted to stop them. Even still, the apprentices had anger to spare, and organized another riot the following year, again on Shrove Tuesday.

¹ Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941-68), 1:161.

² Ibid.

The precise cause of this riot remains unclear. Contemporaries who chronicled the event offer no concrete explanation, relying instead on stereotypical assumptions about apprentices' "lewde and loose" nature.³ The idea that the riot was the product of the apprentices' hotheaded disposition is echoed in more recent accounts of the event. Andrew Gurr, for instance, claims that the apprentices' decision "to attack the Cockpit ahead of the northern ampitheatres and the Blackfriars.... suggests that they were taking revenge for the loss of their plays."⁴ Although revenge may have played a role in the riot, it is important not to overlook the larger socioeconomic dimensions of the event. To suggest that the apprentices were acting out of revenge risks representing the apprentice community in its entirety as irrational, driven by unthinking passion. Underneath the event's violence is a more coherent narrative of the emerging class tensions that were beginning to shape London society. In a recent intervention into this discussion, Mark Bayer reminds us of the distinct class aspects of the conflict: not only could the apprentices not afford the more lavish environs of Drury Lane; their working-class understanding of the theater as carnivalesque entertainment rather than cultural capital would have clashed with the elitism of the Drury Lane crowd. In short, the move of Queen Anne's Men from Clerkenwell to Drury Lane staged, quite literally, a tension between two distinct ways of seeing the theater. As Bayer contends, "the moral economy of the Clerkenwell apprentices conflicted with the market-driven model followed by the troupe who were motivated by profitability, the accumulation of cultural capital, and increased social respectability."⁵

In addition to a violation of a working-class moral economy, the Cockpit riot also points up an aspect of the early modern theater that is often neglected. The riot indicates the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Andrew Gurr, *Jacobean Public Theatre* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 171.

⁵ Mark Bayer, "Moving UpMarket: Queen Anne's Men at the Cockpit in Drury Lane, 1617," *Early Theatre* 4 (2001): 142.

inextricable connection between the theater and laboring identity. This connection permeates early modern theatrical debates, which were often framed around the changing conditions of labor. The theater's critics and state powers often treated members of the theatrical community as little more than vagrant laborers, dispossessed members of the new economy. Phillip Stubbes, for instance, referring to the statutes against vagrancy, asks his readers: "And is it not true? liue [actors] not vpon begging of euery one that comes? Are they not taken by the lawes of the Realm for roagues and vacabounds?." ⁶ Members of the theatrical community, however, saw themselves and their profession in a far more dignified light. Nathan Field suggests a double standard at work in anti-theatrical logic, explaining that acting should be seen on an equal footing with all other trades:

Why, neither Christ nor they by their letters patents incorporated either the mercer, draper, goldsmith, or a hundred trades and mysteries that at this day are lawful, and would be very sorry to hear the sentence of damnation pronounced against them, and simply because they are of such a trade; and yet there are faults in all professions, for all have sin, may be freely spoken against. ⁷

As suggested by Field's defense of acting, one important source of the actor's dignity was the theater's lingering guild tradition, which offered an alternative conception of both acting and labor that stressed the guilds' deeply entrenched aura of respectability. As this dissertation will demonstrate in greater detail, members of the theatrical community are represented, in pamphlets and on the stage, not as vagrants or dispossessed laborers but as craftsmen in control of their theatrical and professional identities.

⁶ Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* (London: 1583), 91.

⁷ Nathan Field, "Letter to Revd. Mr. Sutton," in *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 277.

The accounts of the Cockpit riot articulate the laboring dimensions of the theater. Chamberlain revealingly explains that “the ‘prentices, or rather the unruly people of the suburbs, played their parts in diuerse places” as they rioted.⁸ In this description the apprentices are like unruly actors, which echoes standard condemnations of actors as choosing a life of vagrancy over one of respectable labor. The accounts of the riot also focus a good deal of attention on the objects of the apprentices’ wrath. According to Chamberlain, the apprentices cut “the players’ apparel in to pieces, and all their furniture, and burnt their play-books and did what other mischief they could.”⁹ Edward Sherburne echoes this destruction, complaining that the apprentices “broke open [the players’] trunks, and what apparel, books, or other things they found they burned and cut in pieces.”¹⁰ The apprentices’ anger does not appear to be an act of mindless revenge; on the contrary, it is targeted at the material conditions of the theatrical world: the props, playbooks, and even the actors themselves. By destroying these things, it is as if the apprentices are reclaiming the theater for themselves.

This dissertation looks at the tensions surrounding labor and the stage, arguing that the conflict exhibited by the Cockpit riot permeates early modern drama. Through an exploration of the relationship between the early modern theater and changing conceptions of labor, this dissertation demonstrates that early modern drama can be seen as a poetics of labor that articulates the tension between a traditional moral economy of labor and England’s new economy. Current interpretations of the theater’s economic dimensions stress the correlation between acting and vagrant labor. I build on these approaches to argue that the theater’s connection to labor was far more dynamic than is often thought. In particular, I argue that a full

⁸ Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 161.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edward Sherburne, in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, eds. Glynne William Gladstone Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 629.

understanding of the relationship between the theater and labor requires that we take into account the theater's guild origins. If theatricality was often associated with features of vagrant labor, especially cony-catching and rogue duplicity, the theater also drew significantly from medieval guild traditions that understood labor to be a social good and a creative force. I contend that the theater's residual guild structure invests representations of labor with an empowering and humanizing support. In a variety of plays, from Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* to Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, theatrical techniques like disguise and deception gesture towards vagrancy while also affirming traditions of skilled labor. Other plays, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* push against commercial trends by depicting theatricality as an act of labor, a craftsmanlike endeavor rather than a commodity or mere function of the market. In doing so, the plays open up a space in which the social meanings of artistic creation and of labor can be negotiated.

I trace the labor history of the English theater, from its guild roots to its commercialization, to demonstrate how drama interrogates the proto-capitalist objectification of labor. Viewing the theater from this perspective helps us to see drama as directly implicated in a crucial transitional moment in England's history. In showing that early modern drama was shaped by struggles to define labor, I offer a new way to think about the social and economic aspects of the stage. Focusing on the economic dimensions of the theater allows us to see the theater as an arena in which the conditions of labor are actively explored.

Chapter One, "'Professions and Occupations of Plays': Labor and the Stage," re-examines discourses about the theater in terms of changing conceptions of labor. Through considerations of anti-theatrical documents, defenses of acting and poetry, as well as state and guild records about the status of labor, I argue that the theater reproduces, in unique ways, the

preoccupation of laborers and state authorities who were struggling to make sense of the decline of skilled labor. I build on previous discussions of the connection between theatricality and vagrancy to demonstrate that these studies tell only half of the story. I show that while the theater's critics saw actors as vagrant laborers, actors saw themselves as skilled craftsmen. I argue that the early modern theater stages a hybrid formulation of early modern labor, channeling the vagrant energy of London's dispossessed into the theater's residual guild framework.

Chapter Two, "The Labor of Drama in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," reads *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a negotiation of the theater's relationship to the market. In contrast to interpretations that see the play validating the professional commercial theater over against medieval theatrical traditions, I argue that the play associates theatricality with the so-called rude mechanicals, the artisan-actors whose performance at Duke Theseus's wedding harkens back to medieval mystery cycles and civic theater. Opposite the rude mechanicals is Puck, or Robin Good-Fellow, who has a multivalent presence within the play. I demonstrate that he is at once an itinerant actor, an unruly laborer, and an agent of exchange or "translation." Drawing on contemporary discussions of fairies, I argue that Puck gives form to some of the perceived destabilizing consequences of England's new economy. To this extent, I show that the play expresses a certain anxiety about a commercial theatrical culture that renders acting dependent on the fetish of money and consumerist desire. The mechanicals, whose clownish behavior makes them at once a source of laughter and stubbornly resistant to "translation," serve as counterpoints to the deterritorializing energy of the market.

Chapter Three, "'You Mar our Labour': Acknowledging Work in *The Tempest*," expands the previous chapter's discussion by arguing that *The Tempest* registers an anxiety over the

immateriality of theatrical performance. Within the play theatrical performance and the performance of labor overlap in suggestive ways. I take as the starting point of my analysis the Boatswain's complaint that his aristocratic passengers "mar" the labor of the boat's crew, suggesting that the play as a whole explores this dynamic as it pertains to the relationship between theatrical professionals and the paying audience. By emphasizing the material and skillful labor of theatrical performance, the play seeks to distance itself from market commodification. In doing so, it also articulates a critique of a socioeconomic system that disavows the importance of labor to justify exploitation.

Chapter Four, "The Laboring Body and Artisanal Consciousness: *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*," explores the corporeal dimensions of laboring identity and experience, looking specifically at representations of artisanal laborers. Through readings of Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, as well as a variety of guild and artisanal documents, this chapter explores how laboring bodies resist dominant class efforts to elide the value of productive activity. In these plays, aristocratic and mercantile attitudes toward labor are displaced by a vision that embraces the laboring body as the source of social and economic value. In opposition to aristocratic and mercantile worldviews, the plays affirm an artisanal consciousness, a perspective that views the social in terms of the sensuous activity that underpins the production process. The plays, in short, offer a thoroughly embodied vision of the social world, one in which social and economic value derives neither from an essential birthright nor from the impersonal circulation of goods on the market, but must be enacted through sensuous communal labor.

Chapter Five, "'The Humour of Necessity': Dispossessed Labor and Subjectivity in Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*," further explores the bodily aspects of laboring identity.

Through examinations of literary responses to vagrancy and rogue culture, the chapter builds on interpretations of early modern humoral theory as reproducing social relations. In early modern discussions of the humours, I show, economic hardship is consistently regarded as the limit point of humoral control and regulation. Economic necessity – the basic need for survival – is dangerously immune to humoral knowledge. Where humoral control falters, there the laboring subject begins to speak for itself, its agency determined not by the norms prescribed by humoral order but by brute necessity. Humoral theory anxiously negotiates the subjectivization of economic necessity. I explore this theme as it appears in Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour*. What Jonson’s Brainworm calls the “humour of necessity” represents, I contend, the humoral translation of poverty into a subjective orientation. By staging the humour of necessity, the play articulates an insurgent subject position that actively struggles against socioeconomic conditions of dehumanization, in part by representing vagrancy itself as a form of skillful labor.

1.0 “PROFESSIONS AND OCCUPATIONS OF PLAYS”: LABOR AND THE STAGE

There are two primary resources that offer a glimpse into the conditions of early modern labor. The first, early modern economic documents like the Statute of Artificers, is somewhat obvious. The second resource is perhaps less so. The world of early modern theater offers a rich articulation of the concerns, anxieties, and tensions that informed early modern labor. While the laboring dimensions of the theater have been touched upon, especially regarding the common association of acting and vagrancy, more needs to be said about the complex intersection of early modern labor history and the stage. By placing the early modern debate surrounding the theater into dialogue with economic documents detailing the changing conditions of labor, this chapter seeks to shed light on the interrelationship between laboring and the stage. While antitheatrical critics often represent actors as vagrant laborers, actors and playwrights represent themselves as skilled artisans, laborers in control of their craft. More precisely, actors and playwrights draw on the theater's guild traditions in order to push against both critics of the theater and the commercial forces that were profoundly altering the theater.

1.1 EARLY MODERN LABOR IN CONTEXT

The Elizabethan Statute of Artificers and its subsequent amendments and revisions identify a serious problem with England's socioeconomic situation: a large number of artisans and agrarian laborers, it would seem, had developed a troublesome proclivity for unemployment and general idleness. The Statute, however, expresses confidence that this dilemma can be remedied if everyone conforms to standard labor practices, adhering, in particular, to the longstanding norms for apprenticeship and wages. It is only from a lack of respect for these practices that "a multitude of Inconveniences groweth amonge Artificers, to the impoverishinge decaye and utter rewyn of manye of them their wives, children, and familyse, which causeth great encrease of Roges vagaboundes and thieves."¹

The Statute's often sermonizing tone suggests a failure on the part of state officials fully to understand the social and economic changes responsible for the depreciation of labor. As it is represented in the Statute, poverty is the product not of shifting socioeconomic circumstances but of personal agency, so that the increase of rogues and vagabonds can be resolved if everyone simply follows the rules prescribed by tradition and enumerated in the Statute. The state is hopeful that the law, "beinge duelie executed, shoulde bannyshe idleness, avaunce husbandrie, and yelde unto the hyred persone bothe in the tyme of scarcitie and in the tyme of plenty a convenient proporcion of Wages"². That the Statute did not have the desired effect is perhaps no surprise, and the state, desperate to reduce vagrancy, adopted increasingly violent measures to rehabilitate the poor and idle. It became the position of the state and social critics that the majority of vagrants fell into the category of "sturdy beggars," who were perfectly capable of

¹ "The Statute of Artificers," *Tudor Economic Documents*, eds. Richard Tawney and Eileen Power, (London, 1961), 353.

² *Ibid.*, 335.

working but chose, for whatever reasons, not to do so. Those vagrants deemed “sturdy” were subjected to whipping, branding, boring through the ear, imprisonment, and possible execution.

The dynamic interaction between dispossession and desperate state intervention exemplifies what Marx, looking in particular at early modern England, labeled the process of primitive accumulation, the “pre-history of capital” that consists in “nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.”³ “And this history,” Marx continues, citing especially the Statute of Artificers and the statutes on rogues and vagabonds, “is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.”⁴ But while the conspicuously violent manifestation of this history may make it easy to identify, there has been no consensus regarding the precise causes of the expropriation of labor and the emergence of capitalism. Standard accounts of early modern England’s economic situation, exemplified by the Dobb-Sweezey debate of the mid-twentieth century, stress the structural determinants that yielded the emergence of capitalism as a distinct stage in England’s history. The debate alternates between endogamous and exogamous factors in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Dobb contends that feudalism’s decay was primarily internal to the feudal mode of production, the result of unsustainable peasant exploitation at the hands of the aristocracy. On the other side of the debate, Sweezey locates the prime mover of feudalism’s decline in the rise of international merchant activity and the growth of urban centers.⁵ The debate and the subsequent investigations that it inspired go a long way towards explaining the changing infrastructural conditions and relations of production that fostered capitalist development, though it has the negative effect, as Richard Halpern has pointed out, of converting the idea of primitive accumulation “directly from a theoretical to a historical ‘stage’,” thereby subsuming the complex

³ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 875.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Maurice Dobb, ed. *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978).

and myriad elements of the capitalist system's emergence within simplified categories of historical analysis.⁶

Importantly, the reduction of a complex historical process to an abstract category or stage is precisely the opposite of Marx's approach to primitive accumulation. Marx offers various causal interpretations to explain capitalism's emergence – enclosure, intra-class strife within the aristocracy, the Reformation – but the touchstone of his analysis, the fact to which he continuously returns, is the massive increase of vagrant labor throughout England. Primitive accumulation is never depicted by Marx as an all-encompassing structural event, but rather as a gradual process that saw the rise of “free workers,” “unprotected and rightless proletarians” with only their labor power to sell.⁷ In keeping with his dialectical method, Marx's interpretation of early modern England begins not with totalizing categories like feudalism or capitalism, but with the basic building block of these broader categories: labor. In focusing on labor, Marx seeks not so much to explain early capitalism as to offer a reconstruction of the social, political, and personal experiences engendered by this period of profound instability. If we are to view the early modern period as the historical location of capitalism's emergence, it is not enough to posit a simple teleology that finds feudalism replaced by capitalism, as if the latter grew out of the former as the logical next step in economic development. For Marx's point in considering primitive accumulation is to depict the transition from feudalism to capitalism as a *process* that occurs at the level of lived experience. And like any process that affects real people in real circumstances, the emergence of capitalism is not a telos but a dynamic interaction between infrastructural forces and the people who have to cope with them. Here Marx's choice to describe this process as a history of blood and fire takes on its full weight: it was not feudalism,

⁶ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 69.

⁷ Marx, 874, 876.

as an abstract historical category, that was the victim of emerging capitalism but flesh and blood laborers.

Thinking the early modern period as one of socioeconomic change therefore means to think from the perspective of labor, which as a social category is at the center of this change. It is thus not surprising that one of the most sustained engagements with England's socioeconomic turbulence, the above noted Statute of Artificers, approaches the problem, as its title indicates, through the prism of labor. Especially suggestive about the Statute is its seemingly genuine interest in protecting laborers from exploitation and destitution. Though often violent and largely ineffective in its implementation, the document itself is not entirely heartless. There is a fundamental sense of ethical frustration expressed, as we are told that

thos that have passed their youths in service as apprentices should be in a certeyne securitye when thei come to aige of a sufficient and staied state of livinge to mainteyne theimselfes and their wifes children and family with. But contrary wise, when thos that were never bounde and brought up as apprentices, accordinge to the true meaninge of the statute, shalle directly against the same intrude theimselfes, and sett upp occupye use and exercise occupacions, or be sett on worke therin as iourney-men, Then thos that were bounde & served as apprentices in fourme aforesaid, shalle lacke worke and maintenaunce.⁸

If the state is determined to solve the problem of vagrancy, this is not an entirely superficial concern. The increase in vagrancy and the decline of skilled labor speaks to a larger deterioration of England's moral economy of rights and obligations. In early modern England, even "purely economic matters... were informed by social concerns," which meant that the rise of vagrancy and proletarianization was primarily read not as an economic issue but as a social and ethical

⁸ *TED*, 358-359.

one.⁹ The Statute's frustration seems to derive precisely from the violation of this principle of social and economic integrity: the failure to reward apprentices with a means of livelihood exposes a disturbing trend toward the separating out of the economic from the social. The decline in employment for former apprentices evinces the rise of a system of labor driven by purely economic imperatives, rather than the reproduction of skilled labor. The dignity and prestige of skilled labor have become subordinated to the purely economic pursuit of cheap production.

The Statute's attention to shifting conditions of labor focuses primarily on the diminishing boundary between skilled and unskilled labor. Traditionally, the distinction between the two forms of labor was integral to the reproduction of skilled craftsmanship. It was common for young men in the early stages of their apprenticeship to perform rudimentary labor alongside the master's servants and other household laborers. This initial encounter with labor was temporary, and the young apprentice, as he gradually acquired the skills of his trade, was expected to leave behind the world of unskilled labor.¹⁰ The result was a core of "permanent privileged jobs of relatively extensively trained workers surrounded by relatively unskilled workers in short-term employment."¹¹ There was thus a constant tension between skilled and unskilled labor within and surrounding the guild system, though this tension in fact seems to have been productive of the careful preservation of skilled craftsmanship. Indeed, guilds took, or were at least expected to take, considerable pride in the quality of their work. Artisanal and guild ideology encouraged artisans "to be faithful producers of items for public consumption, and for this reason craftsmen were required to work with their shop windows and doors open, visible to

⁹ James Richard Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25.

¹⁰ See Llana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 109-132 for a discussion of the working conditions of young apprentices.

¹¹ Farr, 149.

public scrutiny.”¹² Being in close proximity to unskilled labor meant that artisans felt constant pressure to distinguish themselves and their craft from their unskilled counterparts.

The state’s effort to reinforce this distinction with the Statute of Artificers signifies the collapse of the guilds’ ability to regulate the quality of labor on its own behalf. The guilds were no longer considered to be capable of maintaining the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor, and it was now the burden of the state to preserve the integrity of the traditional labor system. Thus the Shipwrights charter of 1612 finds it necessary to emphasize that “because many vnskilled persons and such as haue not beene brought vp as Apprentices in the said Art, or Mistery” have been nevertheless working in the trade, it is ordained that no one shall work as a carpenter or shipwright “vnlesse he shall haue serued therein as an apprentice seauen yeares at least.” (48) The state’s need to reiterate what should have been standard protocol – the seven year apprenticeship required for full access to a trade – speaks to the dramatic breakdown of the traditional labor system. The Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers, in 1595, expressed a similar concern that the unique skills of the company were being reduced by incorporation into competing trades, demanding “that no freeman of this company shall take any manner of taske work in London or the suburbs thereof of any Mason, Carpenter, Playsterer or other workman that taketh any thing belonging to this company by taske.”¹³ The Carpenters’ Company likewise complained about workers who participate in other mysteries “so that by any bargayne or deuice for their owne priuate commodity they maye finish the same (ie their work project) good cheape.”¹⁴ Guild records of the period attest to the growing need to reinforce boundaries between the different skilled labor groups in the face of a profit motive that blurs those boundaries.

¹² Ibid., 21.

¹³ The Guildhall Library, MS 38446.

¹⁴ Edward Basil Jupp, *Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters of the City of London* (London: 1887), 148.

Further indicative of the changing status of labor is the state's gradual weakening of its policies towards skilled labor. In the original Statute, the state anxiously addresses the diminishment of skilled labor: "Through the idleness of those [skilled] professions so many embrace them that they are only a cloak for vagabonds and thieves, and there is such a decay of husbandry that masters cannot get skillful servants to till the ground without unreasonable wages."¹⁵ In this account, the guild system, far from a repository of quality craftsmanship, has become little more than a refuge for vagabonds, the identity of artisan no longer a status to be acquired through years of training but a disguise that can be easily adopted and manipulated. In the 1615 revision of the Statute, however, there is a distinct effort to loosen the restrictions on the mobility and flexibility of labor. The Statute concludes that the transition from skilled to unskilled labor is acceptable in certain circumstances, for instance when an artisan "is infirm in body, and weak in strength, whereby he is not able to use that Trade" to which he apprenticed.¹⁶ In contending that "to debar [the injured artisan] of all other Trades, which are more befitting his crazy body, were somewhat unreasonable," the Statute subtly undermines a central element of its original argument.¹⁷ While still asserting a basic difference between skilled and unskilled forms of labor, the revised Statute legitimates the flexibility of labor. The Statute now tacitly accepts that labor cannot be reduced to rigid categories, effectively sanctioning the very process of mobility that it originally sought to contain.

It is also possible to read the original Statute as laying the groundwork for deskilling while appearing to oppose it. As Herbert Applebaum argues, the Statute "made apprenticeship compulsory, but provided no system of regulation."¹⁸ Consequently, a large number of "luckless

¹⁵ *TED*, 326.

¹⁶ *TED*, 381.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Herbert Applebaum, *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 275.

apprentices were crowded into unsanitary dwellings, where they were overworked and underfed.”¹⁹ In short, the Statute can be seen as marking the official replacement of the guild system, as it had traditionally existed to protect the quality and privileges of labor, with its opposite, as apprenticeship began to function more and more as a mechanism for generating underpaid wage laborers instead of craftsmen. Indeed, during Elizabeth’s reign, the percentage of apprentices who never finished their terms rose to three-fifths.²⁰ However we read the Statute, one thing is clear: by the time the Statute was revised in 1615, mobility from skilled labor, protected by extensive guild rights, to wage labor outside the purview of the guild system was not an exception but the norm. Proletarianization was the defining feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean labor.

If the Statute constituted a massive expansion of state control over labor practices, the state proved to be no more effective than the guilds when it came to preserving the integrity of labor. The desperation and panic experienced by the artisanal community as it witnessed its economic security steadily erode is captured in artisan and apprentice petitions to the state. A 1624 petition of the cloth-workers of London is especially urgent. Referring seemingly to the Statute of Artificers, the petition begins by reminding the state of its responsibilities to the laboring community, noting that “Maiesties most noble Progenitors, Kings and Queenes of England, the State haue from time to time had an especiall care for the imployment and setting on worke of the said Artizans, and thereupon haue made diuers good prouisions for their reliefe.” That the cloth-workers find it necessary to emphasize this “especial care” suggests that the state has been remiss in its responsibilities, at least from the perspective of those most affected by

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth Century London* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 311.

economic turbulence. The petition proceeds to enumerate the consequences of the state's inaction:

some [laborers] are enforced for want of worke to betake themselves to labour in the Citie as Porters, Waterbearers, and in other such like meane callings; others to returne home into their Countries, and there to be either chargeable to their friends, or to follow husbandry and dayly labour; others to depart the Realme to diuers remote parts in the world, where the secrets of their Art are disclosed, to the preiudice of those Artizans that remaine at home; and others for lacke of imployment are fallen to idlenesse and begging, and betake themselves to other euill courses, to the great scandall of the gouernment of this Commonwealth. And if the Petitioners should not in some measure get worke from the Drapers of London, they might for the most part of them perish for want of food.²¹

The artisan's labor, the petition implies, derives its value from its inscription within a social network of obligations extending all the way to the Crown. As the petition makes clear, however, this sense of social continuity and order has been fundamentally destabilized by the blight of poverty. Labor finds itself an outside presence, struggling to reconnect with the larger socio-political order to which it had once belonged. Like the Statute, the petition recognizes that something has gone drastically awry, and that traditional laboring existence is increasingly untenable. But unlike the Statute, the petition resists any urge to translate the movement from skilled to unskilled labor into a problem of personal moral responsibility. The petition recognizes external factors as the primary cause of the artisanal community's deteriorating condition – the impoverished artisans have been “enforced” to their condition due to a lack of jobs, and further harm to the guild system in the form of the dissemination of trade secrets follows from this basic determinant. But the petition is similar to the Statute to the extent that it does not identify a

²¹ Anon, *The humble Petitoin of the Artizan Cloth-workers of the Citie of London* (London, 1624), 1.

fundamental cause of impoverishment: the precise reason for disappearing jobs is never explicated. The result is a desperate appeal to the state, the one entity whose political power might impose order on an increasingly disordered economy.

A primary source of the hardship expressed in the petition was in fact unrelated to the state. Some of the most profound changes to labor were the result of the increasing use of the putting-out system, or *verlagssystem*, which preserved artisanal production while shifting control over production away from the guilds and into the hands of the merchant class. Putting-out operated insidiously, transforming labor relations from within the guild structure and under the noses of the laborers whose protections were being eroded. With the putting-out system, Braudel explains, “all the sectors of craft life were touched, and the guild system was gradually being destroyed, although outward appearances were maintained.”²² It is because of the stability of outward appearances that we find such an array of competing interpretations and anxiety directed toward changing conditions of labor. The guilds, as an infrastructure intended to preserve the relative stability of the artisanal community, appeared intact even as its operation was becoming more and more oriented towards profit. As the guilds came increasingly to function as instruments of capital accumulation, “the ruthless exploitation of journeymen and apprentices was the only means by which those master craftsmen who had become dependent on capitalist entrepreneurs could turn any profit at all.”²³ The transformation of the guilds and skilled labor was thus a gradual process, a sort of primitive accumulation within the guild system itself. The dictates of emerging capitalism required a flexible form of labor, which could be employed for its extensive skills but just as easily exploited as a protean and abstract productive force.

²² Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, Vol. 1: The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 317.

²³ Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Policing the Early Modern Proletariat: 1450-1850,” in *Proletarianization and Family History*, ed. David Levine (New York: Academic Press, 1984), 171.

Consequently, labor found itself in a strangely indeterminate position within the mode of production. Located within an institution which existed, at least ostensibly, to maintain skilled labor, artisans nevertheless increasingly found themselves being treated as a source of cheap, itinerant labor by their guild masters and state authorities.

The social relations that constituted the world of labor were thus changing in dramatic ways, even if the traditional guild system appeared formally intact. The result, as we have seen in the discourses surrounding the period's socioeconomic turbulence, was a struggle to make sense of an ambiguous situation by scrutinizing the place of labor in a changing society. Labor, as a social category and as a force of production, became a contested site of interpretation. A truism of Marxian theory is that capitalism can only perpetuate itself by disavowing the presence of labor, the collective grave digger of the system. What is unique about the early modern period, however, is that this repression of labor had not yet taken effect. The early modern period was more forthright in engaging directly with questions of labor. Michael Uebel and Kellie Robertson, for instance, point out that labor was of central importance in the medieval and early modern worlds, since the religious reduction of labor to "an undesirable, even morbid, 'thing', compelled preachers to strengthen the connection between laboring and the totality to which it naturally belongs."²⁴ Labor could thus serve as a primary mediating category through which broader social and economic developments were explored and interrogated. As traditional laboring practices and social relations were eroded by a rapidly expanding market system, labor began to appear as the locus of wide-ranging socioeconomic turbulence, the nexus point of change and instability.

The precise cause of the emergence of capitalism is a perennial question of historical analysis. My project does not offer systemic and causal explanations of how or why capitalism

²⁴ Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel, "Introduction," in *The Middle Ages at Work* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 7.

appeared in England when it did. Instead, the intention is to explore how labor was negotiated in this moment of transition. As Robert Duplessis has noted, if causal economic explanations are difficult to establish, what is clear about the early modern economic context is the rapid expansion of itinerant and unskilled labor. In the period,

the proportion of the population wholly dependent on wages for their livelihood increased substantially... At the same time, they entered into new relations with the capitalist entrepreneurs who came to own the productive resources and employed wage labor to operate them. Much of the European population was proletarianized, in short, long before and in the absence of capital-intensive, power-driven factories.²⁵

Duplessis' observation helps us to avoid thinking about early capitalism reductively as an abstract and impersonal system, emphasizing instead the real subject of this history, the mass of dispossessed laborers who were forced to struggle for survival. A central challenge in the early modern period – for the state, for social observers, and for laborers themselves – was to give meaning and form to a seemingly chaotic alteration of the social relations and conditions of labor.

1.2 LABOR AND THE STAGE

Studies of the past two decades have shown that the theater was a central location in which these concerns about labor were taken up and negotiated. These studies typically focus on the relationship between vagrancy and theatrical performance. From this perspective, the theater is an extension of vagrant culture, the aesthetic form of early modern drama itself functioning as an

²⁵ Robert S. Duplessis, *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 296.

articulation of dispossessed labor's social placelessness. Recently, Paolo Pugliatti has suggested that "the mendicitas of beggars and the mendacia of players may have been the object of the same antitheatrical prejudice."²⁶ Pugliatti's argument takes literally accusations by the state and antitheatrical critics that actors not only encouraged vagrancy but were often vagrants themselves. For Pugliatti, the state's inclusion of "All Fencer Bear-wardes common Players of Enterludes and Minstrelles wandring abroad" on its list of rogues and vagabonds indicates a general anxiety regarding theatrical deception.²⁷ What disturbed critics and authorities about acting and vagrancy was that both modes of deception attested to the human capacity to "construct fiction."²⁸ Actors and vagrants survive by altering their identities, their very existence defined by a protean inventiveness rather than a fixed place within the social hierarchy.

Bryan Reynolds formulates a similar argument, noting "the performative and philosophical similarities and connections between the public theater and criminal culture."²⁹ Reynolds sees the relationship between vagrant culture and the theater as a prime instance of what he calls transversal power, a concept that "observes that all societies are governed by an assembly of sociopolitical 'conductors' ... which powerfully affect the circulation of social power."³⁰ The theater was "transversally empowered and connected to criminal culture," conducting the circulation of social energy from the vagrant community to the state.³¹ Questionable about Reynolds' interpretation of transversal dynamics is the suggestion that the theater was somehow empowered by its proximity to vagrant culture. If we can assume that the harsh economic reality that led to criminality and vagrancy was not experienced as an

²⁶ Paola Pugliatti, *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate: 2003), 10.

²⁷ *TED*, 355.

²⁸ Pugliatti, 10.

²⁹ Bryan Reynolds, *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Power and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 128.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

empowering condition by those who suffered it, we can also safely assume that the theater would not have uncritically embraced this condition as a source of social or aesthetic empowerment, especially when actors themselves were regularly classified as vagrants by the theater's enemies. While both Pugliatti and Reynolds are correct to see the simultaneous growth of vagrant culture and the professional theater as more than mere coincidence, both tend to accept antitheatrical rhetoric at face-value, reinforcing the idea that the theater was an active agent of vagrancy and criminal culture. These studies, in short, respond in the affirmative to Stubbes' question: "And is it not true? liue [actors] not vpon begging of euery one that comes? Are they not taken by the lawes of the Realm for roagues and vacabounds?"³²

While there was indeed an anxiety regarding shifting identities directed at both vagrants and actors, antitheatrical rhetoric, like the discourse against vagrancy, is often rooted in a more prosaic economic concern: the place of labor within the social order. For critics of the theater, the proteanism of acting is not the fundamental cause of reproach, but is rather taken as a symptom of changing relations of labor. In a dialogue written by John Northbrooke, for instance, Age and Youth have a conversation about the source of the actor's iniquity. Age explains that actors should be condemned because

their trade is such an idle loitering life, a practice to all mischief, as you have heard.

YOUTH: If they leave this life, and become good true labourers of the commonwealth, to get their own living with their own hands, in the sweat of their face, shall they not be admitted and taken again to the Lord's table, and afterward to be reputed and taken for honest men?

³² Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* (London: 1583), 91.

AGE: Yes, truly.³³

The condemnation of acting hinges on a contradiction: as a mode of idle behavior acting designates a failure to engage in a reputable form of labor; at the same time, however, acting is a trade in itself. Actors are represented here not so much as idle laborers but as anti-laborers, their way of life actively undermining the normative organization of labor. It is almost as if the theater is capable of transforming itinerant labor into its opposite, establishing the uprootedness of the vagrant community as a new trade. The actor's itinerant shape-shifting is thus depicted not as an evil in itself, but as a reflection of the broader problem of destabilized relations of labor.

Samuel Cox expresses a similar concern about the relationship of acting to poverty, lamenting that actors are allowed "to make professions and occupations of plays" while "our brethren" are "ready to starve and die of penury" in the streets (168).³⁴ In this formulation, acting is not the abandonment of a proper occupation or mode of labor, but a trade in its own right, and as such it is distinct from the extreme poverty experienced by the vagrant community. Cox offers a relatively nuanced critique of acting, refusing to condemn the theater in its entirety. In particular, he is supportive of medieval civic theater, in which "certain artisans in good towns and great parishes, as shoemakers, tailors, and such like... used to play where it was lawful for all persons to come."³⁵ Unlike commercial actors, artisan-actors did not make "their playing an occupation of idleness all the whole year, but an occupation only at certain festival times of rest when the people are free from labour."³⁶ Cox's critique takes as its object not acting itself, but more precisely acting that blurs the boundary between labor and festive misrule. Cox's vision of

³³ John Northbrooke, "A treatise wherein Dicing, Dancing, vain Plays or Interludes," in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, eds. Glynne William Gladstone Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161.

³⁴ Samuel Cox, in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, 168.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

acting is thus inscribed firmly within a traditional theory of the carnivalesque as a temporary safety valve, an opportunity to turn the world upside down so that it can be more easily set right again. Like Northbrooke, Cox describes the commercial theater in terms of a contradiction, emphasizing its capacity to make “an occupation of idleness.” Where medieval civic theater functioned to reproduce a standard system of labor, temporarily embracing idleness only to reaffirm the importance of diligent work, the early modern theater has institutionalized idleness as a legitimate form of labor.

At once a locus of disorderly idleness and an organized occupation, then, the commercial theater marks the merging of festive misrule and everyday practices of labor. In the theater, its critics observe with horror, carnivalesque flexibility is a constitutive aspect of laboring identity and not its momentary suspension. As John Cocke asserts, the “statute hath done wisely to acknowledge [the actor] a rogue errant” since his nature “is compounded of all natures, all humours, all professions.”³⁷ Unlike the rigidly defined labor of the artisanal mode of production, the actor’s labor is abstract and versatile. In the same way that the economic discourse of the period, exemplified by the Statute of Artificers, is concerned with the emergence of a new form of abstract and itinerant labor, these critics see a similar dynamic playing out in the commercial theater. Antitheatrical rhetoric focuses on the troubling way that the theater has paradoxically organized vagrant labor into a skilled trade. Hence Gosson’s observation: “Most of the Players haue bene eyther men of occupations, which they haue forsaken to lyue by playing, or common minstrels, or trained vp from their childhoode to this abhominable exercise & now haue no other way to gete their liuing.”³⁸ According to Gosson, actors are dispossessed laborers, former

³⁷ John Cocke, “A Common Player,” in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, 179-180.

³⁸ Stephen Gosson, *Playes confuted in fiue actions* (London 1582).

“men of occupations,” and at the same time subject to traditional occupational practices – like apprentices, they are “trained vp from their childhoode” to become actors.

To claim that the theater organized the energy of the vagrant community into a skilled occupation is not to suggest, along with Reynolds, that the theater embraced vagrancy and was empowered by it. On the contrary, defenses of the stage are notable for reproducing many of the same complaints as antitheatrical critics. There is a longstanding assumption amongst scholars of the early modern theater that actors must necessarily have seen the theatrical world differently than its critics. That this dynamic is not borne out has troubled scholars for some time. Barish was at a loss to explain why “defenses of the stage that survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tend to be feebler than the attacks on it.”³⁹ As he observes, “The defenders still share too many of the prejudices of their opponents to conduct an effective rebuttal.”⁴⁰ The guiding assumption is that the theater’s defenders, as actors and playwrights themselves, should not have shared these prejudices, which means that their weak defenses must be the product of argumentative flaws rather than expressions of conviction.

But what if actors and playwrights in fact agreed with antitheatrical prejudice to a certain degree, especially regarding the theater’s charged relationship to vagrancy? Thomas Heywood tellingly begins his defense by distancing himself and his profession from vagrant culture, explaining that “I will neither shew my selfe ouer-presumptuous, in scorning thy fauour, nor too importunate a beggar, by too seruilly intreating it.”⁴¹ By marking his project off from any form of begging, Heywood lends credence to Stubbes’ accusation that actors live “vpon begging of euery one that come” to the theater. Significantly, Heywood’s defense focuses very little

³⁹ Jonas A. Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1981), 117.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴¹ Thomas Heywood, *An apology for actors* (London 1612).

attention on the commercial theater, instead citing examples from England's past and the classical tradition. He notes, for instance, how "amongst other commendable exercises in this place, the Company of Skinners of London held certaine yearely solemne playes."⁴² Heywood follows Cox, shielding acting from criticism by invoking artisanal civic theater. As with criticism of the theater, Heywood's defense hinges on the distinction between a mode of theater that encourages idleness and vagrancy, and one that is a direct extension of artisanal life. A similar logic informs Ben Jonson's discussion of professional writing. The author, he contends, "knows it is his only Art, so that carry it, as none but Artificers perceive it. In the meantime perhaps he is call'd barren, dull, lean, a poor Writer... by these men, who without labour, judgement, knowledge, or almost sense, are received, or preferr'd before him."⁴³ Like so many artisans of the time, Jonson affirms the value of skilled labor against unskilled, which he registers as a threat to his professional identity and sense of artistic worth. Artists "without labour" who nevertheless gain success are strikingly similar to the unskilled laborers who were seen as displacing properly trained artisans to the detriment of the guild system.

Studies that find the theater embracing the protean energy of vagrant culture reproduce a standard argument regarding the theater's relationship to changing economic circumstances. This interpretation was first formulated in detail by Agnew, who argues that "the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater furnished a laboratory of representational possibility for a society perplexed by the cultural consequences of its own liquidity."⁴⁴ From this view, the theater, as a commercial institution and a fluid aesthetic form, is a cultural reflection of the socioeconomic sphere. Thus, according to Montrose, the production of plays is best understood in terms of the market: "It is a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ben Jonson, "Discoveries," in *Ben Jonson's Literary Criticism*, ed. James D. Redwine, Jr. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 12.

⁴⁴ Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 54.

gauge of the social value, and the market value, accruing to their protean skills that at least some of these player-entrepreneurs... managed within a remarkably short time to metamorphose themselves into relatively respected citizens.”⁴⁵ As with theories of the vagrant-theater connection, readings that see theatricality embracing and reproducing market forces unwittingly echo the antitheatrical rhetoric that sought to reduce the theater to a market. But here, too, what we actually discover amongst members of the theatrical community is a more complex attitude toward the theater as a marketplace. Dekker sardonically describes the theater as “your Poets Royal-Exchange, vpon which, their Muses (they are now turned to Merchants) meeting, barter away that light commodity of words for a lighter ware than words, plaudits and the breath of the great beast which, like the threatenings of two cowards, vanish all into air.”⁴⁶ Douglas Bruster cites this passage to argue that “London’s public and private playhouses came to stage scenarios which represented, reflexively, the market’s extensive cultural implications.”⁴⁷ Dekker’s formulation, however, makes clear the unease with which actors and playwrights viewed the market orientation of the theater. For Dekker, the commodification of the theater is not a source of protean energy but instead marks the economic reification of cultural production, as the classical relationship of inspirational generativity between the poet and his muse is replaced by the impersonal financial calculation that defines mercantilist exchange relations.⁴⁸

So how do we explain the attitudes of actors and playwrights towards England’s turbulent economic situation? To suggest that the theater was a function of socioeconomic forces,

⁴⁵ Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 38.

⁴⁶ Thomas Dekker, *The guls horne-booke* (London 1609).

⁴⁷ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 10.

⁴⁸ For discussions of the theater’s vexed relationship to emerging commercial culture, see Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare’s Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

reproducing, is aesthetic form, the dynamics of vagrancy and the market, is to ignore the theatrical community's anxious and often overtly resistant responses to both vagrancy and artistic commodification. At the same time, however, the theater was indeed commercially driven, and actors were often "vagrant" relative to traditional standards of labor and social status. There is another socioeconomic factor that sheds light on the contradictions and tensions informing theatrical discourse. What has largely been overlooked by scholars of the theater's socioeconomic context is its relationship to guild structures. If the theater was to a certain extent a market place and a location of vagrancy and other forms of dispossessed labor, it was also intimately connected to residual guild traditions that were in many ways diametrically opposed to the new economy. Although by the early modern period the guild system, as already noted, was on the decline, subject to putting-out and increasingly exploitative labor practices, it still had an important role to play as a part of London's social and economic infrastructure. Apprentices constituted roughly one-tenth of the Tudor London population, though many of them failed to attain citizenship and were employed as unskilled laborers.⁴⁹

In large part, the failure to account for the theater's relationship to guild culture and structures is due to the long-standing theory that London's suburbs, where the playhouses were located, constituted a radical break with the moral, social, and economic order that defined the city proper. Drama, which Mullaney describes as having "moved out into the Liberties to appropriate their ambivalent terrain for its own purposes," is interpreted as an active articulation of the suburbs' disorder, a conscious translation of the new social and economic environment into aesthetic form.⁵⁰ For John Twynning, literature of the period was a way to negotiate suburban chaos, as "London's anxious citizen found himself peering nervously over the real and

⁴⁹ Rappaport, 232.

⁵⁰ Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 136.

metaphorical walls of the City into the mass of seemingly unregulated space around him.”⁵¹

Underpinning the idea that the theater belonged firmly to a brave new world of market forces and dispossessed labor is the assumption that London’s livery companies, like its legal system, had no authority to regulate labor and economic relations in the suburbs. As Joseph Ward has argued, however, “Despite the consensus among scholars that companies were impotent beyond the City’s walls and border, many of London’s guilds and – perhaps more important – their members exerted influence in the suburbs and Liberties.”⁵²

The guilds’ presence in the Liberties is in fact demonstrated most clearly by the overlapping of acting companies and London’s livery companies. There was no specific livery company dedicated to organizing and regulating acting as a trade, though the vast majority of sharers in acting companies had connections, in one form or another, to other legally recognized companies. Some of these connections are straightforward, like Ben Jonson’s pre-authorial training as a bricklayer. In other instances, training as an actor seems to have been modeled on the apprenticeship system, even when the actors themselves had no direct contact with specific trades. Henslowe’s diary records one Thomas Hearne who “Hath couented him selfe to searue me & not to departe frome my company till this ii yeares be ended.”⁵³ Other documents suggest that the shorter-term covenant contract was understood as a form of apprenticeship. A contract for Martin Slater’s children’s company at the Whitefriars establishes that “all the children are bound to the said Martin Slater for the term of three years,” during which time Slater “shall not wrong or injure the residue of the said company in parting with” any of the children “without the special consent and full agreement of the residue of his fellow-sharers, except the term of his or

⁵¹ John Twynning, *London Dispossessed: Literature and Social Space in the Early Modern City* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 66.

⁵² Joseph Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 28.

⁵³ R.A. Foakes, ed. *Henslowe’s Diary* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 238.

their apprenticeship to be fully expired.”⁵⁴ There are also examples of well-established actors personally training aspiring actors as apprentices without any mediation through a guild structure or a children’s acting company. In Augustine Phillips’ will we find him leaving to “Samuel Gilburne, my late apprentice, the sum of 40s” and “to James Sands, my apprentice, the sum of 40s... to be delivered unto him at the expiration of his term of years his indenture of apprenticeship.”⁵⁵ Both Gilburne and Sands, we know, acted in plays for the King’s Men.

The theater’s loose implementation of guild practices and standards seems to be the primary reason that scholars have long overlooked or downplayed the theater-guild connection. “Confusion has arisen,” Bentley speculates, “from the assumption that the players were as strict and uniform as the great London companies which could punish irregularities in their own courts.”⁵⁶ The acting companies’ hybrid mix of covenant service and apprenticeship clearly undermines any such assumption. There is also the fact that the theater was a commercial institution, placing it opposite the guilds which traditionally functioned as a conservative economic system geared toward subsistence production. The guild structure would not have been the ideal organizational form for the theater’s commercial production. Furthermore, London’s livery companies themselves were often as wary of the theaters as any Puritan preacher. A standard contract of apprenticeship would stipulate that an apprentice “shall not play at cards, dice, table or any other unlawful games. He shall not haunt taverns nor playhouses, nor absent himself from the master’s service day or night unlawfully.”⁵⁷ The Grocers Company sought to distance its apprentices from suburban life entirely, barring them from attending any “dauncing

⁵⁴ Qtd. in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, 271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁶ Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare’s Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 119.

⁵⁷ Qtd. in Rappaport, 235.

schole or of fence, or learn or use dauncing or masking, or should use any dicing or any other play, or haunt any tennis court, common bowling-alley, cock fight or brothel house.”⁵⁸

It is thus clear that to identify the theater as a guild would be a gross oversimplification. The acting companies shared many traits with the guilds, especially regarding training practices, but they were also in many ways radically distinct from any of England’s standard guild structures. It is, however, just as overly simplistic to conclude from these factors that the theater, as a commercial institution, spurned the guild structure in favor of market liberty. The early modern theater was not a radically new innovation, after all, but in many ways the product of a long social and cultural evolutionary process. Drawing on the work of Michael O’Connell, Helen Cooper explains that the early modern theater adopted the “incarnational aesthetic” of the medieval religious drama to formulate a bodily theatricality, a mode of drama that physically “acts its action.”⁵⁹ The medieval theater, moreover, took acting and theatrical performance every bit as seriously as its professional successor. Medieval plays, which were staged exclusively by guilds, “often focused not only on specific devotional interests of the guild but also on aspects of construction that involved the craft skills of the confraternity.”⁶⁰ Far from a break with the acting of the medieval past, if anything the early modern professional theater extended and institutionalized the guild tradition’s emphasis on acting as a means for displaying skilled craftsmanship.

There were also practical reasons for the early modern theater to maintain contact with its guild roots. As Stephen Orgel points out, association with guilds could have “conferred on [the

⁵⁸ Qtd. in Baron Heath, *The Worshipful Company of Grocers* (London: 1869), 92.

⁵⁹ Helen Cooper, “Shakespeare and the Mystery Plays,” *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* eds. Stuart Gillispie and Neil Rhodes (London: Arden, 2006), 20. See also Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ Clifford Davidson, *Technology, Guilds, and Early English Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publication, 1996), 17.

theater] a degree of respectability that must have seemed finally to put to rest the traditional actors' taint of vagrancy and marginality."⁶¹ Just as quickly as Orgel opens up a fascinating suggestion by noting the conflicting definitions of actors' laboring identities, he forecloses on it by claiming that the guild association put to rest all anxieties and tensions regarding actors. On the contrary, as we have seen, debates about the theater were often framed around the actor's status as a laborer and the role of the theater in the changing relations of production. I want to suggest that the tension between respectable, artisanal guild labor and vagrant labor was an open and dynamic one. Actors did not simply play up guild associations for a bit of prestige. Instead, members of the theatrical community, whether actual guild members or at the very least those in touch with the standards and practices unique to the guild system, drew on the theater's guild roots for the same reason that artisans of the period affirmed the value of their skill against the depreciation of labor. The very real material connections between the theater and the guilds meant that the theatrical community, like the laboring community at large, was threatened by the process of proletarianization and deskilling. At stake for many members of the theatrical community was the economic security as well as the social prestige attached to the guild system. After all, one had to be a member of a livery company in order to possess the freedom of the city, or London citizenship, which was necessary in order to produce and sell goods. And as Jonathan Gil Harris notes, "Actor-sharers often found it useful to retain their official artisanal affiliations, particularly as a means of legitimizing master/apprentice relations with boy-actors that would otherwise have been illegal."⁶²

⁶¹ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 68.

⁶² Jonathan Gil Harris, "Properties of Skill: product placement in early English artisanal drama," in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.

The early modern theater is thus perhaps best understood as a transitional socioeconomic institution, informed at once by a guild-derived organization of labor and a commercially driven form of production. It is precisely this transitional or hybrid status that makes the theater such a sensitive register of labor's changing situation. Indeed, although greatly outnumbered by critiques of the stage, defenses of theater and poetry share with their antitheatrical counterparts a distinct attention to questions of labor. Nathan Field, in one of the most concise and persuasive defenses of the theater, frames acting entirely around its relationship to other trades and occupations. He begins by noting that "in God's whole volume (which I have studied as my best part) I find not any trade of life except conjurers, sorcerers, and witches, ipso facto damned."⁶³ He continues, describing trades and professions as a continuous spectrum of labor rather than in terms of moralizing binaries between good and bad, Christian and heathen occupations:

Why, neither Christ nor they by their letters patents incorporated either the mercer, draper, goldsmith, or a hundred trades and mysteries that at this day are lawful, and would be very sorry to hear the sentence of damnation pronounced against them, and simply because they are of such a trade; and yet there are faults in all professions, for all have sin, may be freely spoken against.⁶⁴

In a relatively short piece of writing, Field chooses to stress the laboring dimensions of the theater, directly equating acting with "a hundred trades and mysteries" in England. One explanation for this emphasis is Field's personal background as a child actor. Field was kidnapped – or impressed – by a child acting company on his way to school one morning. Despite efforts by his parents to secure his release, Nathan spent the rest of his life in the theater, eventually becoming one the more respected actors (as well as a less successful playwright) in

⁶³ Nathan Field, "Letter to Revd. Mr. Sutton," in *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 277.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

England. His defense of acting suggests that he had no hard feelings for his kidnappers, and his emphasis on acting as a trade suggests that he may have even perceived his training as a form of apprenticeship.

But in addition to invoking his personal background, Field's reference to the specifically religious character of trade locates his perspective within a distinctly medieval conception of labor. "The religious character of occupational groups ended with the Reformation," after which point labor came to be seen as a mechanism for spiritual self-discipline rather than an activity intricately related to spiritual meaning.⁶⁵ Whereas, within the Protestant framework, labor is valuable primarily insofar as it orients one's spiritual being toward discipline and thus salvation, for the medieval guild, on the contrary, labor is divinely sanctioned and expressive of spiritual vitality. Serving as "the intersection of economic and religious life," the religious confraternities associated with the guilds allowed artisans to extend the guild network of social and economic relations to spiritual life.⁶⁶ In defending acting as a trade that is comparable to England's other guild occupations, Field not only draws on his personal experiences with the theater, but also situates the stage within a medieval framework of labor. Since, in the medieval world, "both the rules of fraternities and the economic teaching of the Church" grew out of a context of "personal economic relations," Field's religious tone attempts to inscribe acting within a traditional communal framework.⁶⁷ Acting, as a trade, is not an individualistic enterprise but rather part of an intricate network of social, economic, and spiritual meaning. Field is thus more than an actor and playwright in this defense: he speaks on behalf of all artisanal laborers who, according to

⁶⁵ Charles Summerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 78.

⁶⁶ Farr, 229.

⁶⁷ R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 28.

Joyce Appleby, were being separated “from the moral economy of production and sustenance” and reduced to “supernumeraries, without a place, without a prescribed life role.”⁶⁸

If Field’s defense of the theater posits an explicit connection between acting and the guilds, other defenses are often more subtle. This is especially true of defenses and discussions of poetry, which tend to incorporate artisanal conceptions and practices into their accounts of poetic creation without directly identifying the creative process with the guild system. Poets are often depicted as being distinct from other mechanical and artistic producers for the reason that their creativity is fundamentally original, inventive rather than derivative. For Puttenham, poets are “above all other artificers, scientific or mechanical,” and it is “of poets thus to be conceived, that if they be able to devise and make all these things of themselves, without any subject of verity, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods.”⁶⁹ Sidney echoes this conception of creativity with his claim that the poet “dooth growe in effect, another nature, in making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe formes such as neuer were in Nature.”⁷⁰ For both Puttenham and Sidney, then, poetry is autopoietic, a mode of constitutive self-creation. The idea of creative autopoiesis is not new, of course. Aquinas posited a distinction between natural and artificial bodies, identifying the latter with the productive capacity of the artisan to bring forth something new into the world. Aquinas contends that “art acts on a matter provided by nature, and the form that is introduced by the artisan is an accidental form, shape and the like.”⁷¹ But where Aquinas establishes a conceptual distinction between the natural and the artificial, Sidney bases his theory of the creative power of poetic immanence on the more

⁶⁸ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 52.

⁶⁹ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 14.

⁷⁰ Philip Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie* (London 1595).

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, “On Aristotles *de anima*,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1998).

practical matter of skill. The artisan/artist brings forth something new because “the skil of the Artificer, standeth in that Idea or Fore-conceite of the work, & not in the work it selfe.”⁷²

Sidney’s approach to creation is thus process-oriented, at odds with an emerging market system that locates value in the finished product of labor, the commodity, rather than the skillful process of production. That Sidney identifies his understanding of poetic creation with a distinctly artisanal conception of labor is made clear in his discussion of the poetic

Arkitecktonike, which stands, (as I thinke) in the knowledge of a mans selfe, in the Ethicke and politick consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing onely; euen as the Sadlers next end is to make a good saddle: but his farther end, to serue a nobler facultie, which is horsemanship, so the horsemans to souldiery, and the Souldier not onely to haue the skill, but to performe the practice of a Souldier.⁷³

Sidney’s use of the architectonic seems to denote knowledge and action that is not only systematic but foundational. The Sadler’s skilled labor is architectonic to the extent that it establishes the foundation on which horsemanship and soldiery – in short, aristocratic identity – can thrive. For Sidney, poetry, as the foundation of systematic ethical and rational knowledge, is comparable to the foundational function of skilled labor relative to the reproduction of social order.

As an aristocrat, however, Sidney is careful, like Puttenham, to elevate poetic labor above other forms of artifice, explaining that “Poetrie, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princelie to moue towards it, in the most excellent work, is the most excellent workman.”⁷⁴ Although Puttenham’s and Sidney’s aristocratic backgrounds prevent them from identifying directly with laborers, the focus of their discussions resonates with the anxieties and crises that

⁷² Sidney.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

informed the worlds of artisanal production and the consumption of goods. Just as laborers pushed back against the deskilling and commodification of their labor, and just as consumers increasingly faced “the problem of how to identify skilled workers” as more and more unskilled labor was employed, the poet encountered a similar dilemma as his labor was mocked and devalued by reformers and critics.⁷⁵ It is not difficult to see in these writings a concern similar to Dekker’s nervousness regarding the “Poets Royal-Exchange,” though in these instances attention is directed toward the depreciation of the labor of artistic production rather than the products themselves.

It is perhaps appropriate that one of the most sustained engagements with the labor of poetic creation comes from Ben Jonson, the bricklayer turned poet-playwright. “The Poem,” explains Jonson, “is the work of the Poet; the end, and fruit of his labour, and study. Poesy is his skill, or Craft of making: the very Fiction itself, the reason, or form of the work.”⁷⁶ Like Sidney, Jonson is careful to depict poetry as a skillful process rather than as a product for consumption. He describes poetic ability as a combination of natural essence and acquired skill. The successful poet possesses a “perfection of Nature” but also a determination to improve his art through practice: “If his wit will not arrive suddenly at the dignity of the Ancients, let him not yet fall out with it, quarrel, or be overhastily Angry: offer, to turn it away from Study, in a humour; but come to it again upon better cognition; try an other time, with labour.”⁷⁷

The idea that artisanal skill is both essential and acquired through difficult training is central to guild ideology, functioning as a strategy by which to regulate membership. According to one account:

⁷⁵ Ward, 28.

⁷⁶ Ben Jonson, *Discoveries*, ed. GB Harrison (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Workmanship and Skill is the gift of God, and not one in ten proveth a Workman; yet it is requisite, that all such as have been brought up all the dayes of their Life in a Trade, and cannot attain to the Excellency of Skill that is required, should live by the baser part of their Science, when they cannot attain the better, which is working in Oyl and Side those Flats, Posts and Windows, etc.⁷⁸

Although fundamentally essential, artisanal skill must also be refined through rigorous practice and training, so that not anyone can claim mastership through reference to God-given sanction. By reproducing this nuanced conception of labor in his discussion of poetry, Jonson accomplishes two things: on the one hand, as with the guilds, it offers a way to secure the division between skilled and unskilled production. At the same time, it captures the social and pedagogical nature of the artisanal labor process, which also serves to regulate the quality of production. The acquisition of poetic skill suggests a pedagogical relationship between the master poet and his apprentice. Master poets are able “to stand of themselves, and work with their own strength,” while “it is fit for the beginner, and learner, to study others, and the best.”⁷⁹ The poet, then, despite his personal renown and success, must be aware of his duties as a teacher: “Therefore a Master should temper his own powers, and descend to the other’s infirmity.”⁸⁰ The master is responsible not only for producing poetry of the highest quality, but also – and perhaps more importantly – for ensuring the reproduction of the social relations that underpin that production process.

Laurie Ellinghausen has recently argued that Jonson’s poetic theory is founded on a “Platonic duality,” in which his “representations of labor take two forms: one, as part of the earthly realm, which he aligns with the business of theater and the printing house; and two, as an

⁷⁸ *TED*, 138.

⁷⁹ Jonson, *Discoveries*, 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

abstract ideal that becomes the locus for virtuous, diligent composition from the ideal poet.”⁸¹ Ellinghausen thus sees Jonson investing his poetic theory with a mind/body distinction, so that poetry, while borrowing the metaphors of labor, does so in a way that subordinates manual and material production to the immaterial production of ideas. As we have found with Jonson and other defenders of the theater and poetry, however, the invocation of labor is more than metaphorical, reflecting the shifting conditions of labor that affected artisans and artists alike. I want to suggest that poets, playwrights, actors and artisans of the period share a common discursive formation, and thus a common subject-position, which unites these categories of producers in shared opposition to emerging market dynamics. In formulating their defenses and theories, poets, playwrights, and actors draw on the same discursive and material resources as the declining artisanal class and its defenders, deriving reassurance and strength from a guild framework that emphasizes skilled labor’s traditional rights, privileges, and aura of respectability.

Jean Howard has argued that early modern “drama enacted ideological contention as much as it mirrored or reproduced anything that one could call the dominant ideology of a single class, class function, or sex.”⁸² The contestation of the theater is especially relevant to the topic of labor, which, like the theater, was liminally situated between the medieval past and the new world of the market. The theater – and London more generally – was at once a location of vagrant, dispossessed labor, and a lingering guild tradition, and this dynamic, I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, allowed the theater to serve as a space in which the social place of labor could be negotiated. The theater seems to have channeled the protean energy of vagrant culture for its own purposes, but rather than exploit it, this energy is given an organized

⁸¹ Laurie Ellinghausen, *Labor and Writing in Early Modern England, 1567-1667* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 65.

⁸² Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

form and grounding on the stage. Responding to antitheatrical critics, Thomas Overbury describes acting in this way:

All men have been of his occupation: and indeed, what he doth feignedly, that do others essentially: this day one plays a monarch, the next a private person. Here one acts a tyrant, on the morrow an exile: a parasite this man tonight, tomorrow a precision, and so of divers others. I observe, of all men living, a worthy actor in one kind is the strongest motive of affection that can be: for when he dies, we cannot be persuaded any man can do his parts like him. Therefore the imitating characterist was extreme idle in calling them rogues.⁸³

Unlike the theater's critics, who respond to the theater's paradoxical merging of idleness and organized occupation with confusion and disgust, Overbury affirms the versatility of acting while representing it as a skillful endeavor, so that a good actor, though lacking an essential identity, is irreplaceable and unique in his talent. Being vagrant in one's labor is transformed into a positive condition: the actor is not an idle vagrant or a rogue but, on the contrary, a skillful practitioner of all occupations and trades. Acting, with all of its connotations of vagrancy and duplicity, is a skilled trade, and the early modern theater, as it is understood by its contemporaries, is a unique forum in which to negotiate the place of labor and drama in a radically changing world.

⁸³ Thomas Overbury, "An Excellent Actor," in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, 181.

2.0 THE LABOR OF DRAMA IN A *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Puck directly addresses the audience and asks forgiveness "If we shadows have offended," the fiction of the play and the reality of the theater merge (5.1.409).¹ In this brief moment, we are reminded that the "shaping fantasy" of the fairy world to which Puck belongs has been, all along, the shaping fantasy of theatrical performance (5.1.5). But as is suggested by Puck's address, the fantasy vision created by the theater depends ultimately on the more mundane matter of financial sustainability.² Just as the rude mechanicals of the play are wary of offending their patrons, the commercial actors, represented here by Puck, are aware of their need to maintain the enthusiasm and support of the paying audience. This acknowledgment implicates the theater in an impersonal system of financial patronage and exchange. The address suggests that the commercial theater must be as imaginatively boundless as the heterogeneous desires of an audience that consumes theatrical performance as a commodity.

But Shakespeare's theater does not uncritically reflect or reproduce the commercial environment to which it belongs. The metatheatrical address to the audience, while acknowledging the market culture of the theater, also draws attention to the complex labor of performance that is so central to the action of the play. Although we are presented, in the final moments of the play, with a commercial actor – or "shadow" – who defends his profession, the plot itself hinges on a tension between, on the one hand, the abstract and protean performativity

¹ All references are to William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (Methuen, 1979).

² Thomas Betteridge argues that this tension between fantasy and the banality of economics is central to Shakespeare's comedies: "The ultimate fantasy that preoccupies Shakespeare in his late Elizabethan comedies is that his plays are something more than commodities produced to be brought and sold to the audience." Thomas Betteridge, *Shakespearean Fantasy and Politics* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005), 74.

characteristic of commercial theater and, on the other hand, a far more restrained and reflexive form of performance. Bottom and his fellow artisans, the so-called rude mechanicals, represent the limit point of commercially driven theatricality. As artisan-actors, they evoke the guild system out of which medieval drama grew. This chapter argues that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in fact identifies the theater with the figures of the rude mechanicals, who are guided in their actions not by any protean imagination but by the blunt reality of life as a laborer.³ The play's artisans, in different ways, act as counterpoints to a deterritorializing energy that the play associates with the emerging market economy. To this extent, I argue, the play expresses a certain anxiety about a commercial theatrical culture that renders acting dependent on the fetish of money and consumerist desire. By pitting artisan-actors against the fairy world's disturbingly impersonal logic of "translation" and exchange, the play articulates an alternative vision of theatrical performance, drawing from the medieval guild tradition which saw the theater not as a commercial market-place but as a creative expression of autonomous and self-determining labor. In doing so, the play carves out a space of artistic autonomy for the theater while affirming the creative power of laborers.

³ For discussions of the relationship between theatrical performance and commercial forces, see in particular Steven Mullaney, *License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Doula Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), and Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theater* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2.1 “THOU ART TRANSLATED”: EXCHANGE IN THE GREEN WORLD

That *A Midsummer Night's Dream* explores issues of desire and marriage is clear.⁴ The “problem” that must be resolved through escape to the green world centers on Hermia’s transgression of patriarchal authority, as she defies her father’s right to “dispose of her” as he wishes (1.1.43).⁵ Theseus too wrestles with the conflict between sexual desire and patriarchal constraints, complaining that the sluggish pace of time is “Like to a step-dame or a dowager / Long withering out a young man’s revenue” (1.1.4-5). The earliest moments of the play thus indicate an overlap of sexual and financial categories. As Theseus’s complaint suggests, the satisfaction of sexual desire is as much an economic problem as it is an ideological one. Theseus’s desire is obstructed by the closed system of the traditional marriage market, in which the act of consummation is predicated on an act of carefully regulated financial exchange. The marriage market, from this view, functions to channel the flows of both sexual desire and financial wealth into normative ideological constraints.

But as the play soon makes clear, desire is not easily contained. Just as early modern England’s emerging money economy requires the free circulation of wealth within an open market, a dramatic shift from the feudal conservation of wealth in the land, Hermia’s desire, like Theseus’s, resists the “unwished yoke” of the traditional, closed marriage system (1.1.81). Theseus responds to Hermia’s transgression in a way that further cements the interconnection of desire and money, reminding her that she is “but as a form in wax / By [Egeus] imprinted,” and

⁴ See Louis Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture,” *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 31-64; Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (Cranberry, NJ; London: Associated Universities Press, 1995) 98-115; and Bruce Boehrer, “Economies of Desire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 33 (2004): 99-117.

⁵ I use the term green world as it is developed by Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 182-184.

therefore without power to resist his patriarchal command (1.1.49-50). Frederick Turner notes the relationship between the wax stamp and the stamping of coins, contending that the lovers escape to the green world out of resistance to the constraint and containment implicit in the act of stamping. The message of the play, according to Turner, is that “wax or metal will reject an improper stamp: not because they reject all stamps, but because they crave the right kind of stamp.”⁶

While Turner’s reading of the stamp is suggestive, the more interesting implication of the metaphor, it seems to me, is not the struggle for individualism and identity but the way it sets up a tension between alternative economic models. The play’s green world does not seem to be an escape from the social, cultural, and economic pressures of Athens so much as a reformulation of them. In terms of the overlap of sexual and financial economies, the green world is an open market of exchange relative to the closed patriarchal market of Athens. Thus Lysander informs Hermia that they must travel to his aunt, who has “a dowager / Of great revenues, and she hath no child” (1.1.157-58). The aunt’s unclaimed dowager contrasts with the coercive property system invoked by Theseus. The green world is not a fantasy space, an escape from reality. Instead, it is the location of an alternative circulation of value, a world where revenue and property are not tied to a patriarchal structure of power but circulate freely. The revenue that Lysander seeks is not constrictive but on the contrary facilitates his and Hermia’s transgressive desire.

The framing of the lovers’ patriarchal transgression around primarily economic concerns enables the play’s representation of desire to articulate an inchoate economy of exchange, the lovers’ unruly desire giving form to the tumultuousness of England’s new economy. Jean-Joseph

⁶ Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare’s Twenty-First Century Economics: The Morality of Love and Money* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 100.

Goux's theory of numismatics offers a useful theoretical framework for approaching this overlapping of financial and sexual or libidinal economies. The economic function of money, for Goux, intimately informs the larger process of the social construction of meaning. Collapsing the orthodox Marxian dichotomy of base and superstructure – or economy and culture – Goux argues that the logic of money and exchange constitutes the very substance of cultural production:

The money form casts its light upon all centristic tendencies, upon the very formation of a center, the process of centralization; upon all notions of radiation from a center: monocentric, monocephalous, heliocentric thought, concepts of pivot, of axle, of a brilliantly sublime focus that illuminates and rules the particular and the accidental. Speech, money, sex, phallus, monarch – each is the central authority of a set of which it is, nevertheless, another member.⁷

Money is not only materially but isomorphically linked to social, political, and cultural organization, representing all transcendental signifiers that override difference and translate heterogeneity into sameness. In a similar manner, the play's sexual/romantic plot immediately encodes a financial problematic, as the lovers' struggle to escape the patriarchal Law becomes at once a struggle to escape the centralizing pressure of the closed patriarchal market system. Competing conceptions of love – as patriarchally regulated or companionate – formulate divergent economic models, so that the green world becomes not so much a fantasy space as a free market, where desire, and by extension money, can circulate freely.

David Marshall has noted that the play “dramatizes an economy of exchange.”⁸ Bruce Bohrer, more recently, points out that it is through the “exchange of love objects [that] the

⁷ Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 45.

⁸ David Marshall, “Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” *ELH* 49.3 (1982): 568.

play's various plots achieve their resolution."⁹ Boehrer sees this emphasis on exchangeability ultimately interrogating the play's heteronormativity, but it is also worth thinking more about the play's broader structural dependency on the logic of exchange. The green world, as we are reminded again and again, is a place of "translation," in which the Law gives way to the free-play of desire and lovers become interchangeable. When Helena informs Hermia that if she could only possess Demetrius, "The rest I'd give to be to you translated," she hints at the awesome power of exchange, which not only renders individuals interchangeable but facilitates the very erasure of one's unique identity (1.1.191). When, later, Hermia asks, "Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?," the comedy of the situation is haunted by a sincere sense of horror, a realization that there may no longer be any fundamental reality behind the shaping fantasy of desire, and that identity has been (perhaps permanently) dissolved in the act of translating reality into fantasy (3.2.273). Nothing is quite the same once the "unwished yoke" of the Law is broken and the deterritorializing circulation of love objects is set in motion. Demetrius feels as if he is "Half sleep, half waking," even as Egeus tries to re-impose normative order by "beg[ing] the law, the law upon [Demetrius's] head!" (4.1.146,154). The reinstatement of the Law would signal the return to the closed economy of desire that we left in Athens. But the lingering of the dream complicates this return to normalcy, suggesting the arrival of a new economy of desire that thrives on flexibility and fluidity, an economy of desire that is not entirely subject to the fixed command of the Law. Thus Demetrius remains enamored of Helena even after waking, his translated desire escaping the "peril of the Athenian law" that seeks to recuperate it (4.1.152). While the other characters, upon waking, submit willingly to their pre-arranged romantic partners, Demetrius's continuing desire for Helena serves as a reminder that, after the night's

⁹ Boehrer, 99.

strange events, it will no longer be possible to fully separate reality from fantasy. If the exchange economy is emancipatory, freeing desire from patriarchal authority, it is also frightening.

In this regard, I agree with Jan Kott's contention that the exchangeability of lovers is "the most peculiar characteristic of this cruel dream; and perhaps its most modern quality. The partner is now nameless and faceless. He or she just happens to be the nearest."¹⁰ The reduction of the inter-subjectivity of love to a random relationship between love objects is perhaps disturbingly modern because it accords with a socioeconomic model that systematically replaces subjective particularity with the generic sameness of objects. But if the contemporary audience is inclined to take such a reifying system for granted, accepting it as the natural order of things, Shakespeare's play grapples with this configuration of social relations in its earliest emergence. The ineluctable force of love functions as an expression of the anxiety-producing nature of exchangeability, capturing the peculiar way in which exchange can both unite and separate, simultaneously collapsing identities and reinforcing the divide between individuals. Lysander's promise to Hermia that they are "Two bosoms interchained with an oath, / So then, two bosoms and a single troth" proves untenable (4.2.46-49). If Lysander and Hermia appear to have merged through their confession of mutual love, this interchangeability of selfhood does not forge an indissoluble bond, as Hermia's response hints: "But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy, / Lie further off, in human modesty" (2.2.55-56). This strange separation in unity conveys nicely the logic of exchange that orders the green world, a logic in which things are made interchangeable, transformed into an apparent unity, and for that very reason driven further apart. The act of exchange brings differences together momentarily, only to dissolve that connection in the process of circulation. No sooner do Hermia and Lysander close their eyes than the link that "interchains" them is severed. The exchange of love oaths is meaningless precisely because they

¹⁰ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (New York; London: Norton, 1974), 219-220.

are exchangeable. Helena sums up this dilemma when she confronts Lysander, who has confessed his love to her: “Your vows to [Hermia] and me, put in two scales, / Will even weigh; and both as light as tales. (3.2.131-32) When oaths of love are rendered interchangeable, “truth kills truth” (3.2.129). The exchange of love oaths negates their particular qualities – the substance of their truth.

The play’s emphasis on the negative consequences of exchange suggests that the green world is a place where social and economic tendencies can be confronted and critiqued, and not Frye’s escapist world of wish fulfillment.¹¹ Indeed, the central conflict between Titania and Oberon centers on the question of exchange. Titania’s determination to keep the Indian child for herself encodes her resistance to the exchange process. In refusing Oberon’s attempt to acquire the child, Titania states, “The fairy land buys not the child of me” (2.1.122). Marshall argues that, in invoking mercantile imagery, Titania “is perpetuating rather than rejecting terms that inscribe people in a system of economic relations.”¹² But the context of Titania’s words indicates precisely the opposite, suggesting that, in her eyes, the child is somehow removed from the world of exchange. She resists Oberon’s efforts to “buy” the child precisely because she knows that it is not mercantile imagery but an actual act of exchange that would perpetuate the system of economic relations. Titania mentions the boy’s mother, a mortal who “sat with me on Neptune’s yellow sands, / Marking th’embarked traders on the flood” (2.1.126-27). The mother, Titania continues, would often imitate the traders “and return again / As from a voyage rich with merchandise” (2.1.133-35). Titania’s account of her relationship with this mortal woman

¹¹ Frye argues that the green world is comparable “to the dream world that we create out of our own desires” (183). Recently, Hugh Grady has qualified the play’s green world as “an ideal space, clearly designated as such, in which it is possible to represent and contemplate determinate human wants and desires in various stages of satisfaction, to reflect on human needs and their impediments, and to imagine alternatives to the world as it currently exists.” Hugh Grady, “Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics: The Case of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.3 (2008): 28.

¹² Marshall, 586.

emphasizes what Titania imagines should be the distance between the fairy world and the human realm of trade. The mother and Titania watch trade from afar, and relate to it only through playful imitation. From Titania's perspective, the green world of the fairies should be distinct from the practices of exchange and trade. What upsets her, then, and what is at the heart of the marital discord, is not Oberon's stubborn pursuit of the child, but the fact that this pursuit opens the fairy land to vulgar economic processes.

Oberon shows himself to be an enthusiastic practitioner of exchange. The magical herb that he applies to Titania's eyes, which will eventually enable him to acquire the child, is a metaphorical rendering of exchange value:

Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes:
The next thing then she waking looks upon
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, on bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape)
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
And ere I take this charm from off her sight
(As I can take it with another herb)
I'll make her render up her page to me. (2.1.175-185)

The magic juice, which is responsible not only for Titania's love for Bottom but also the interchangeability of the Athenian lovers, facilitates the exchange that Titania had sought to resist. All objects of love become interchangeable in this description, their particular qualities erased by the equalizing passion unleashed by the magic herb.

Even Oberon comes to recognize the violence of his actions. He recounts to Puck how he “did upbraid [Titania] and fall out with her” for doting on Bottom (4.1.49). The magic spell seems to have worked too well, the illusion becoming disturbingly real as Titania’s comic deception veers into sheer degradation. He notes how the “fresh and fragrant flowers” in Bottom’s coronet displayed “round and orient pearls [that] Stood now within the pretty flowerets’ eyes / Like tears, that did their own disgrace bewail” (4.1.54-56). If the magic spell has enabled Oberon to acquire the changeling, it is also a “hateful imperfection of [Titania’s] eyes” that must be quickly corrected (4.1.62). Oberon’s disgust with Titania’s passive submission to the spell indicates that the illusion that facilitates relations of exchange is not total. Though the success of Oberon’s plan suggests that illusion has become integral to the functioning of ideology and power, his jealousy over Titania’s and Bottom’s relationship is also a sign that the reality of suffering and humiliation has not been entirely obscured.

If Oberon sets in motion the economy of exchange, it is Puck who acts as the play’s primary agent of exchange. In the service of his master, Puck is responsible for weaving the dream in which the lovers as well as Titania lose themselves. As a character, Puck represents one of Shakespeare’s most sustained engagements with popular English cultural traditions. To what extent Shakespeare was familiar with fairy myths is unclear. Dianne Purkiss contends that “it is questionable whether Shakespeare knew *anything* about fairies from oral sources at all, as opposed to from the writing of the burgeoning folklore industry, especially those of Reginald Scot.”¹³ Regina Buccola takes issue with the wholesale dismissal of Shakespeare’s popular knowledge, suggesting that Purkiss is guilty of a “back construction predicated on the current reception of folk belief as a specialized, second-class study, whereas the study of Shakespeare is

¹³ Diane Purkiss, *At the bottom of the garden: a dark history of fairies, hobgoblins, and other troublesome things* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 158.

required of all who profess to be literate and cultured.”¹⁴ How much Shakespeare personally knew about popular folklore may be a somewhat moot issue. After all, if Shakespeare was drawing on the writings of Scot and others, certainly those writers were drawing on England’s deep-rooted folk beliefs and practices. Unless we are to believe that Shakespeare constructed a fairy mythology around Puck *ex nihilo*, a narrative sharing no continuity with folkloric tradition, then we must assume at least some connection between his fairies and the popular image of fairies and the supernatural.

While Purkiss’s confidence that Shakespeare was hermetically sealed off from folk culture is rather questionable, Buccola’s counter argument seems to assume that there is a correct or authentic version of the fairy tradition with which Shakespeare was in touch. But the idea that popular culture and belief are easily identifiable seems to overlook the nature of the popular, which by its very definition is not reducible to any standard or official mode of discourse. Indeed, for de Certeau, popular beliefs and fantasies are the precise converse of regulated forms of knowledge, “revers[ing] the relationships of power and, like the stories of miracles, ensur[ing] the victory of the unfortunate in a fabulous, utopian space.”¹⁵ For de Certeau, popular stories are malleable precisely because they facilitate the practical invention of every day life, the generation of modes of discourse and social relations which are not necessarily in keeping with the doxa of normative social order. Purkiss thus touches on the fundamental reality of fairy beliefs when she suggests that Shakespeare, in his ignorance of folk tradition, invents his own mythology with *Midsummer*, an act of interpretation which would be perfectly in keeping with the popular existence and generative circulation of fairy myths.

¹⁴ Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 29-30.

¹⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), 23.

The possible source material on which Shakespeare could have drawn attests to the multivalent interpretations that attended the Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, folklore. Reginald Scot, whom Purkiss considers the primary source for Shakespeare's Puck, represents belief in fairies, and Robin Goodfellow in particular, as the epitome of irreligious superstition. Scot argues that "they that maintain walking spirits, with their transformation, &c. have no reason to deny *Robin Goodfellow*, upon whom there have gone as many and as credible tales, as upon Witches; saving that it hath not pleased the translators of the Bible, to call Spirits, by the name of *Robin Goodfellow*, as they have termed Diviners, Soothsayers, Prisoners, and Coseners by the name of Witches."¹⁶ Scot's critique encodes a class antagonism, his condemnation of fairy lore indirectly painting the lower classes as irrational relative to the reformed bourgeoisie. Scot's engagement with the figure of Goodfellow can thus be seen as part of an effort to co-opt and contain the subversive energy of popular beliefs.

Early modern references to Robin Goodfellow often reflect this class tension. Goodfellow commonly stands in for vagrant and dispossessed laborers, his deceptive and protean playfulness figuring cony-catching techniques. One of the earliest associations of Goodfellow and rogue culture comes from Thomas Harman:

I was credibly informed that a hoker came to a farmers house in the dead of the night, and putting abacke a drawe windowe of a low chamber, the bed standing hard by the said window, in whiche lay thrée persons, a man and two bigge boyes: this hoker wyth hys staffe plucked of their garments which lay vpon them to kepe them warme, with the couerlet and shete, and left them lying a slepe naked sauing their shyrtes, and had away all cleane & neuer could vnderstand where it became. I verely suppose that when they

¹⁶ Reginald Scot, *The discovery of witchcraft* (London 1665).

were wel waked with cold, they surely thought that Robin good fellow, (according to the old saying) had bene with them that night.¹⁷

There is clearly a certain amount of humor in Harman's recounting of this story, though he also expresses, like Scot, a righteous indignation for the mystifying nature of fairy myths. Belief in the magical and wily practices of Goodfellow reflects nothing more than a failure, in Harman's view, to recognize the real problem of lower-class transgression.

In another association of Goodfellow with vagabonds and cony-catchers, Thomas Dekker attacks thieves who, after stealing from their victims, fly "to the shops of certaine brokers, who traffick only in this kind of merchandize and by bills of sale (made in the name of *Robin-goodfellow* and his crew) get the goods of honest Citizens into their hands, either detaining them so long in their chests till they be no more sought after, or else so altring them that the *Owners* shal hardly know them."¹⁸ In Dekker's description, the figure of Goodfellow extends beyond thieves and vagabonds to implicate the larger system of exchange that underpins such illegal activity. Indeed, Goodfellow designates here not so much a group of people or a class but the opaque world of mercantile traffic, where one person's property can vanish through the sleight-of-hand of buying and selling. Scot, too, invokes the market economy in his discussion of supernatural beliefs. The task of debunking superstition is a difficult one, and he speculates that "I should no more prevail herein, then if a hundred years since I should have intreated your predecessors to believe, that *Robin Good-fellow*, that great and ancient Bull-begger, had been but a cosening Merchant, and no Devil indeed."¹⁹

If Goodfellow could stand in for both vagrant laborers and the market system, it is perhaps not surprising that he could also represent acting, a profession that was simultaneously

¹⁷ Thomas Harman, *A caveat for common cursetors* (London 1573).

¹⁸ Thomas Dekker, *The Belman of London* (London 1608).

¹⁹ Scot.

associated with vagrancy and London's burgeoning market culture. Thus in *Tarlton's News out of Purgatory*, the anonymous author, pseudonymously writing as Robin Goodfellow, informs his readers that "although thou see me here in the likenes of a spirite, yet thinke mee to bee one of those *Familiares Lares* that were rather pleasantly disposed then indued with any hurtfull influence, as *Hob Thrust*, *Robin Goodfellowe* and such like spirites (as they terme them of the buttry) famozed in euerie olde wiues Chronicle for their mad merry pranckes."²⁰ Goodfellow, with his mad merry pranks, is a logical double for Richard Tarlton, the famous clown of the London theater scene. More generally, fairies might be seen as actors because, like their thespian counterparts, they "are also masters of deception, able to adopt the roles of anything and everything from beautiful, beguiling maidens to the surliest and least tractable of infants."²¹

I want to suggest that Shakespeare's Puck, rather than drawing from a single interpretation of the Robin Goodfellow myth, constitutes an assimilation of multiple interpretations. As I have argued, Puck's agency in translating identities locates him at the center of the play's dramatization of an exchange economy, and in this way reflects those interpretations that associated Goodfellow with commercial forces. And as noted before, Puck's economic dimension is linked to his role as an actor, with his most explicit appearance as an actor in the epilogue serving as an address to the commercial audience. Indeed, his epilogue directly identifies him as an actor, and his reference to himself and his colleagues as "shadows" suggests a general equation of actors and fairies.²² In addressing the audience, Puck collapses the distinction between the dream of the fairy land and the illusion of the theater, asking us to suppose we "have but slumber'd here / While those visions did appear" (5.1.411-12). More so than any other character in the play, Puck serves in the role of a performer who, much like

²⁰ Anonymous, *Tarlton's News out of Purgatory* (London 1590)..

²¹ Buccola, 40.

²² Puck himself makes this connection when he refers to Oberon as the "King of shadows" (3.2.347).

Tarlton's clown, sees his knavery as a form of entertainment, his goal to "jest to Oberon, and make him smile" (2.1.44).

But if Puck is a figure of exchange and an actor, he is also a laborer, a role consistent with the traditional folk conception of fairies as ultimately existing to aid the lower-classes in their daily toils, despite a penchant for deception and pranks. Another fairy identifies Puck as

that shrewd and knavish sprite

Call'd Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he

That frights the maidens of the villagery,

Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern,

And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,

And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm,

Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?

Those that hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,

You do their work, and they shall have good luck. (2.1.33-41)

This description is notable for its vacillation between productive and unproductive forms of labor. As much as Puck supports laborers in the performance of their duties, he is in equal part inclined to undermine that labor, his pranks increasing the amount of time and energy expended in the course of work. From the perspective of the laborer who sees his or her efforts go to waste, the products of labor reduced to milk that cannot be turned into butter and liquor with no yeast, Puck's knavery is certainly far from benevolent.²³

²³ Katherine M. Briggs, in her meticulous account of *Midsummer's* fairy background, overlooks this conflicted description when she characterizes Puck and his fellow hobgoblins as "rough, hairy spirits, which do domestic chores, work about farms, guard treasure, keep an eye on the servants, and generally act as guardian spirits of the home. Useful as they are, they are easily offended and often mischievous." Katherine M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: an examination of fairy beliefs amongst Shakespeare's contemporaries successors* (New York: Routledge, 1959), 15. Puck is far more mischievous than benevolent in the fairy's account.

It is difficult not to discover in the fairy's description of Puck's deviousness the figure of the able-bodied poor, toward whom writers like Harman were so hostile. Like the so-called "sturdy beggars" that were believed to abandon proper modes of labor for a life of cony-catching and idleness, Puck is fully capable of productive labor – he simply chooses not to do it. Vagrant laborers who supposedly turned to cony-catching were both an effect and a cause of England's emerging market economy. If the dispossessed workers who flooded Shakespeare's London had been deprived of their traditional means of subsistence by a steady trend towards the privatization of agrarian production, the proto-capitalist system's continued growth was predicated on the exploitation of this cheap source of labor power. Sturdy beggars and cony-catchers thus represented a serious threat to the new regime, refusing to subject their labor to the dictates of the exchange economy. "Capitalism as a mode of production," Halpern speculates, "would bring about an abstract recoding of the dispossessed classes through the system of wage labor, thus reabsorbing them into the productive regime (though under radically different conditions) and to a large degree resettling them."²⁴ Before this recontainment by the wage relation, the vagrant laborer represented the limit point of emerging capitalism, an undisciplined subject who needed to be (often through violent force) rendered amenable to the new economy.

It is thus interesting that when we next encounter Puck explicitly in the role of a laborer he is sweeping at the behest of Oberon: "I am sent with broom before / To sweep the dust behind the door," he unceremoniously informs us (5.1.175-76). Aside from his concluding address to the audience, these are the final words that he utters. Wendy Wall argues that this moment constitutes the play's co-optation and containment of the subversive popular cultural energy that Puck bodies forth. Although the "fairies may have sparked [the play's] audience to recall the

²⁴ Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 69.

fraught issues of class, gender, and region hovering around fairy discourse [...] the play ends with a cross-gendered housewife named Robin Goodfellow working efficiently in the service of a dynastic civic court.”²⁵ For all of Puck’s power to manipulate the will of others, his final act is one of menial labor. It is as if all of Puck’s proteanism and deception has been geared toward reducing him to a docile laborer. No longer an unruly unproductive laborer who foils the honest labor of country folk, Puck is now thoroughly disciplined, obediently performing work at the command of his master. Underneath his ability to translate others, to manipulate the magic of exchange, he is ultimately a docile laborer – a revelation that suggests that if he is an agent of exchange, this power is not his to control. Rather, his association with the logic of exchange only renders his labor more pliable. In the figure of Puck, acting, labor, and exchange coalesce to formulate the image of an unruly laborer who has been tamed by market mechanisms, and whose flexibility is not empowering but rather leaves him vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by his social superiors. To this extent, he embodies a reformist fantasy, giving dramatic representation to the standard anti-theatrical rhetoric that saw the market-place of the theater as a hotbed of vagrancy, and actors themselves as little more than dispossessed and unruly laborers in need of discipline.

2.2 “HERE IS A PLAY FITTED”: THE LABOR OF DRAMA

Wall’s analysis of Puck is insightful, but her overall interpretation of the status of labor in the play is challenged when we consider that Puck is not the play’s only laborer. After all, it is not Puck but the mechanicals who constitute the play’s most sustained focus on the laboring class.

²⁵ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 110-111.

And where Puck is disciplined and tamed in his role as an actor/laborer by the play's end, the mechanicals are in part "rude" because they are comically resistant to outside influences that would tame them. They are notably insular and autonomous in their theatrical labors, choosing to rehearse in the "palace wood" at night so that "we shall [not] be dogged with company, and our devices known" (1.2.94-96). There is a critical tendency to see the mechanicals as bumbling idiots, a reading that follows Puck who labels them "hempen homespuns" and "rude mechanicals" with "thick-skin." (3.1.73, 3.2.9, 13) To view the mechanics as clowns is thus uncritically to adopt Puck's hostility, an attitude which reflects his position in the play as a foil to "honest" forms of labor. Puck's view, however, is not unrivaled, for while he sees the artisan-actors as rude mechanicals, they see themselves as "dear actors" with an important civic role to play within Athenian society (4.2.40). Against Puck's dramatization of vagrant labor, the mechanicals represent a traditional artisanal-class whose labor is grounded in a protective guild structure.

The play's intertwining of guild labor and theatrical performance is not an arbitrary thematic. By depicting this troupe of actors as craftsmen, the play directly draws on the medieval mystery plays and the midsummer festivals that were organized and performed by local guilds. When the play's medieval heritage is noted by scholars, however, it is typically dismissed as little more than an homage to a bygone era of the theater. This argument is made most forcefully by Montrose, who contends that the mechanicals' presence is "an incongruous evocation, an oblique marker, of a popular and artisanal ethos that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its playwright have ostensibly left behind – a lingering trace of cultural, social, and spiritual filiation."²⁶ From this view, the play stages a mode of theatricality rooted in guild labor only so that it can be ridiculed and ultimately exorcised. In the process, Shakespeare is able to affirm the

²⁶ Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing*, 199.

sophistication of the new commercial theater over against the medieval theatrical tradition's amateurish lack of refinement.²⁷

But is this interpretation really justified? In addition to the internal tension between Puck's anti-labor and the mechanicals' embracing of their identities as artisan-actors, the play's contextual basis suggests a more complicated relationship between the commercial world of the new theater and its medieval guild origins. It is likely, for one thing, that Shakespeare was familiar with the mystery plays, if not through personal experience then through cultural osmosis. The mystery plays were not, by the time Shakespeare was writing, a distant memory, and performances continued into Elizabeth's reign. Shakespeare's theater, moreover, was not a radically new innovation but in many ways the product of a long social and cultural evolutionary process. As Helen Cooper puts it, building on Michael O'Connell's work, early modern drama adopted the "incarnational aesthetic" of the medieval religious drama to formulate a bodily theatricality, a mode of drama that physically "acts its action."²⁸ When the mechanicals are called "Hard-handed men that work in Athens here, / Which never labour'd in their minds till now," this is certainly an insult, but it also emphasizes the incarnational heritage of artisanal theatrical practice (5.1.72-73). As much as the mechanicals' awkwardly corporeal theatricality earns them ridicule from their social superiors, it also locates them firmly within the medieval theatrical tradition that formed the basis of Shakespeare's theater.

While it is difficult to determine specific references in *Midsummer* to the medieval theater and its attendant religious festivals, we can say with confidence that the theatrical

²⁷ Clifford Davidson argues that Shakespeare would have considered amateur guild acting to be "inadequate in comparison with the kind of highly professional work that was being done at the time by the dramatist's own company." Clifford Davidson, "'What hempen home-spuns have we swagg'ring here?' Amateur Actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Coventry Civic Plays and Pageants," *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987): 88.

²⁸ Helen Cooper, "Shakespeare and the Mystery Plays," *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* eds. Stuart Gillispie and Neil Rhodes (London: Arden, 2006), 20. See also Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

practices that Shakespeare inherited were inseparable from a dignified conception of labor grounded in the medieval relationship between acting and the guilds. Not only were medieval actors guild members and the performances sponsored and staged by the guilds themselves, but the staging of plays was a powerful mechanism by which the artisanal community could affirm its social worth. That the guilds took the quality of performance seriously is indicated by the self-imposed levying of fines for failure to achieve certain theatrical standards.²⁹ Medieval drama, then, and in particular the Corpus Christi plays, should be seen as more than religious worship.³⁰ The plays had immediate real-world implications, as they were “deeply immersed in the labor economy of the urban communities that produced them, functioning as an important means of status display for the guilds, as sources of income for the town, and as mechanisms of economic rule that aided in regulating labor, manufacture, and trade.”³¹

The medieval theater was thus integral to the social, cultural, and economic identity of the medieval laborer. Artisans did not put aside their laboring identities during festival periods, temporarily becoming actors. Rather, the staging of plays was a culminating moment for the guilds, their opportunity to display their social significance for all to see. On a fundamental socioeconomic level, then, the medieval theater was not, as is often argued, a carnivalesque suspension of the normative order.³² The physical labor that went into constructing the festivals’ infrastructure allowed individual guilds to exhibit their skills and craftsmanship, emphasizing,

²⁹ See Peter Happe, *English Drama Before Shakespeare* (London; New York: Longman, 1999), 23-63 for a careful and detailed account of the social and political complexities of the staging process.

³⁰ For an extended discussion of the relationship between civic politics and religious devotion in the mystery cycle, see Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006).

³¹ Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 153.

³² For discussions of the carnivalesque dimensions of medieval drama, see Kristina Simeonova, “The Aesthetic Function of the Carnavalesque in Medieval English Drama,” *Critical Studies* 3.2 (1993): 70-79; Bakhtin and *Medieval Voices*, ed. Thomas J. Farrell (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995); and Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001).

not suspending, their place within the community. Medieval plays “often focused not only on specific devotional interests of the guild but also on aspects of construction that involved the craft skills of the confraternity.”³³ The glorification of God – the festivals’ ostensible purpose – was predicated on the craftsmanship of the guilds, which were wholly responsible for constructing the complicated apparatuses that enabled the mystery plays to be staged. To render the word of God incarnate was no easy task, and guilds expended a good deal of labor and artisanal knowledge to bring it about. In glorifying God, then, the community was, by extension, glorifying artisanal labor.

Moreover, it is likely that the mystery cycles contributed significantly to the guilds’ ability to maintain economic autonomy and control over the production process. According to John C. Coldeway, “In return for the town’s most valuable gift to the craft – protection from the competition of outsiders – the guilds policed themselves and were willing to do almost anything the town council might ask.”³⁴ Thus in addition to being an opportunity for the guilds to fashion and affirm laboring identity, the mystery cycle was also structurally central to the guilds’ social and economic existence. Sarah Beckwith has suggested that this intimate relationship between cultural and economic production complicates the way we approach drama. The medieval theater cannot be seen as a reflection of economic infrastructure, since the plays themselves “are the cultural vehicles of socio-political life and the central means of their articulation.”³⁵ I would further suggest that this overlap of cultural and economic spheres holds true at the diachronic level as well, and that the early modern theater, as the heir to many of the medieval theater’s

³³ Clifford Davidson, *Technology, Guilds, and Early English Drama* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publication, 1996), 17.

³⁴ John C. Coldeway, “Some Economic Aspects of the Late Medieval Drama,” in *Contexts for Early English Drama* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 83.

³⁵ Sarah Beckwith, “Making the World in York and the York Cycle,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies* eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 265.

practices and meanings, continued to be informed by a tradition that did not distinguish theatrical performance from the labor that made it possible. Indeed, though the professional theater catered to a paying audience, and in that sense was sustained by the market, most actors were, like their medieval predecessors, guild members.³⁶

To interpret the mechanicals of *Midsummer* as clowns, mere objects of ridicule for the more culturally and dramatically advanced professional theater, is thus to argue that the early modern theater was able to disavow both its medieval guild roots and its immediate relationship to the contemporary guild system. In addition to providing a source of comedy, however, the mechanicals' clownishness taps into a traditional theatrical dynamic that was a central component of medieval drama. Greg Walker argues that medieval drama was not "sufficient unto itself as a form, but rather aimed to provoke action in the world, to initiate an emotional journey that would continue after the performance was complete."³⁷ By drawing attention to their inadequacies as actors, during their rehearsals and in the final staging of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the mechanicals make any blurring of theatricality and reality impossible. As with medieval theater, the mechanicals' "rudeness" disrupts the play's formal self-containment, encouraging the audience to reflect on the not-too-distant medieval past out of which commercial theater grew.

Just as medieval drama was not, for the actor-artisans who performed it, a carnivalesque escape from their status as laborers, Bottom and his companions never cease to be laborers. As an heir to the medieval theater, then, Shakespeare builds on a tradition that understood drama to be an expression of laboring identity. More specifically, I want to argue that the mechanicals embody this artisanal theatricality. Where Puck is an empty cipher who "mediates one character

³⁶ See Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 113-146.

³⁷ Greg Walker, "The Cultural Work of Early Drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, eds. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

to the other,” the mechanicals, and Bottom in particular, resist translation.³⁸ As a tamed laborer and a substanceless actor who submits fully to the logic of exchange, Puck articulates an anxiety about the market’s effects on both labor and the theater. In this way, Puck is directly at odds with the medieval dramatic world, in which acting and labor reinforce one another as personally and socially meaningful activities. Unlike Puck, who with his final address to the audience identifies his performative nothingness as a function of the theater’s commercial dynamic, the mechanicals are always something more than the roles they play, never losing themselves as laborers in the disorienting flows of desire into which they are thrust. Labor, as a distinct identity and way of seeing the world, is what distinguishes the mechanicals as artisan-actors, investing them with a material realness that contrasts sharply with the airy nothingness that facilitates the fairy world’s regime of exchange.

Our introduction to the mechanicals stresses their artisanal identities. As Peter Quince assigns the roles for their “interlude,” the mechanicals remain defined by their respective trades: they are addressed as “Nick Bottom, the weaver,” “Francis Flute, the bellows-mender,” “Robin Starveling, the tailor,” and “Tom Snout, the tinker” (1.2.16,38,54,57). Despite Bottom’s comical effort to play every role in the interlude, he never gets beyond his real life role as a weaver – indeed, his awkward vacillation from one role to the next only serves to highlight his thespian inadequacies as an artisan. Like the medieval artisan-actors, the mechanicals do not view themselves primarily as actors; instead, their acting reflects their civic status and sense of duty, as they participate in the interlude not out of personal choice but because they were placed on a “scroll of every man’s name which is thought fit through all of Athens to play in one interlude before the Duke and the Duchess, on his wedding-day at night” (1.2.4-7). Professional acting companies would not have referred to their performances as interludes, a term which was

³⁸ Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (New York; London: Blackwell, 1986), 25.

primarily reserved for medieval performances. Interludes were common until the early years of Elizabeth's reign, and "were superceded only when there was a radical reorganization of the dramatic activities contingent upon James Burbage's opening of The Theater in London in 1576."³⁹ The term interlude evokes a specifically amateur mode of acting, and thus serves to remind us that the mechanicals' theatrical activities and their artisanal status, while interconnected, remain distinct.

The anxiety that the mechanicals display over the possibility of offending the Duke and the Duchess with an overly realistic performance further indicates the limits of their theatricality. In contrast to the "fond pageant" that Puck stages in order to dissolve the lovers' true identities in the dreamscape of desire, the mechanicals are careful to maintain the boundary between theatrical fiction and reality. Bottom, wary of the theater's ability to shape perception, warns his companions that "if you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us" (1.2.74-76). The mechanicals' ground their sense of reality in their artisanal status, and Bottom even suggests reminding the interlude's audience "that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver" (3.1.19-20). The mechanicals thus display a marked tension between an identity based on socioeconomic place and a purely imaginative and theatrical mode of fashioning identity. They are subjectively versatile, adopting the roles prescribed by the demands of theatrical performance, but their theatricality is always predicated on an awareness of their artisanal status.

The intersection of acting and laboring establishes theatricality as a distinctly artisanal undertaking, with the mechanicals' dramatic activities consistently encompassed by their artisanal identities. When Quince, after assigning the roles for the interlude, declares that "here is

³⁹ Peter Happe, "Introduction," in *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power, and Theatricality*, eds. Peter Happe and Wim Huskin (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007), 10.

a play fitted,” he directly implicates the mechanicals’ skilled labor in the theatrical performance (1.2.60-61). Quince’s wordplay is more than a clever pun, as it suggests the transferability of an artisanal or laboring perspective into the world of drama. Theatrical performance, from a laboring view point, must be actively constructed, its component elements carefully fitted together in the same way that a joiner fits wood or a weaver ties fabric. Bottom’s desire to play every role, in this way, reflects not his clownish disposition but his artisanal perspective, as he seeks to “weave” together the disparate elements of the interlude. Similarly, the mechanicals’ endless revisions to the interlude, from Bottom’s prologue designed to put the audience “out of fear” to the last minute decision that “some man or other must represent” a wall on stage, point up their reflexive artisanal labor (3.1.20-21,63).

Patricia Parker has provided an astute reading of the play’s “joining” imagery, making the case that the artisanal identity of the players is not incidental but positions them as the figurative and material makers of the plot. There is a conceptual link between joining as a material, artisanal practice and the symbolic joining involved in logic and rhetoric, and this link is employed in the play to emphasize the mechanicals’ socio-political centrality. Joining, Parker notes, was “the foundation of the construction of order both in grammar, rhetoric, and logic and in the social and political hierarchy their ordering reflected.”⁴⁰ If the mechanicals’ joining results in the restoration of normative hierarchy -- a re-joining of social and political power through the imposition of prescribed marriage relations -- this return to order nevertheless emphasizes the fundamental role of labor in society. The representation of the mechanicals as the active makers of the story, their theatrical performance joining together the elements of the marriage plot,

⁴⁰ Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 89. See also Parker’s “Rude Mechanicals,” in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, eds. Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43-82.

situates labor as the foundation of theatrical performance and, by extension, the social order that it preserves. In the play's final act, we are reminded that it is the mechanicals' reflexive artifice that brings about the plot's resolution. Where the fairy world's magic fails to achieve a resolution of the romantic and social tensions that set the play in motion, the mechanicals' "rude" labor succeeds.

We should thus resist the urge to view the play as subordinating labor to a court system that co-opts it. While the mechanicals' service to the Duke and Duchess marks the return to normative order, suggesting a future of political and social stability, the emphasis on reestablished order also points backwards to the fairy world's regime of destabilizing translation and exchange which, as noted, continues to haunt the "real" world of Athens. Theodore Leinwand has formulated this tension between upper-class order and the mechanicals as a symptom of class conflict, contending that the play "offers accommodation and deference, but on its margins we note raised swords and threatening gallows."⁴¹ The reality of laboring existence, which could be profoundly difficult in the economically depressed 1590s, is not erased by the play's festive comedy. Indeed, the economic turbulence that forms the play's historical context and generates this class tension was often identified precisely with those elements of the proto-capitalist economy – the liquidity of social relations, the instability of normative order – that inform the logic of the green world.

References to the consequences of a rapidly expanding market system are common in early modern discourse. John Wheeler expresses satisfaction with the rise of England's exchange economy, explaining that "all the world choppeth and changeth, runneth and raveth after marts,

⁴¹ Theodore Leinwand, "'I Believe We Must Leave the Killing Out': Deference and Accommodation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," in *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler (New York; London: Garland, 1998), 153.

markets, and merchandising, so that all things come into commerce.”⁴² Thomas Nashe, on the other side of the discussion, associates exchange with London society’s decay. Exchange is a fundamentally destabilizing system, since “Hee that buyes must sell, shrewd Alcumists there are risen vp, that will pick a merchandise out of euery thing, and not spare to set vp their shops of buying and selling euen in the Temple.”⁴³ Where Wheeler interprets the mutability characteristic of exchange as a positive social force, Nashe sees it as undermining the most sacred of principles. Both accounts, positive and negative, anticipate Marx’s observation that with capitalism, where all things are reduced to their abstract exchange value, “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.”⁴⁴ Thomas Dekker applies a strikingly similar analysis to the theater: “The theater is your poets’ Royal Exchange, upon which their Muses, that are now turned to merchants, meeting, barter away that light commodity of words for a lighter ware than words – plaudits and the great beast which, like the threatenings of two cowards, vanish all into air.”⁴⁵

Midsummer’s dramatization of exchange gives this anxiety about the theater as an exchange market powerful immediacy, and it is thus significant that, of all the characters, only the mechanicals are resistant to the process of translation. The awkwardness of the mechanicals’ bumbling presence is not, in this context, comedic so much as it is a central articulation of the class conflict that Theinwand locates at the play’s margins. When Bottom is affixed with the ass’s head, Snout’s exclamation that “thou art changed!” suggests that Bottom has fallen victim to the fairy world’s system of exchange. Significantly, however, Bottom does not register this

⁴² Qtd. in Jill Phillips Ingram, *Idioms of Self-Interest: Credit, Identity, and Property in English Renaissance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5-6.

⁴³ Thomas Nashe, *Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem* (London 1613).

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 248.

⁴⁵ Thomas Dekker, *The guls horne-booke* (London 1609).

change, imagining that his colleagues are playing a prank on him, and announcing that “I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid” (3.1.119-120). When Titania arrives on the scene and professes her love for Bottom, he dismisses her overture, noting that she “should have little reason for that” (3.1.137-138). Even the pampering by his fairy servants is not enough to convince him of his new gentle status in the fairy world. When Mustardseed inquires, “What’s your will?,” Bottom answers that he “must to the barber’s, monsieur, for methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face.” (4.1.21-25). If in the eyes of other characters, Bottom has been translated, his old laboring identity exchanged for a radically new identity, he continues to see himself as Bottom the weaver. Jan Kott, furthermore, presents the fascinating possibility that the entire episode of Bottom’s transformation might have been designed to be terrifyingly “real”: “From antiquity up to the Renaissance,” he notes, “the ass was credited with the strongest sexual potency and amongst all quadrupeds was supposed to have the largest and hardest phallus.”⁴⁶ The translation of Bottom into a donkey is not intended as escapism, a retreat into the airy nothingness of imagination where all things are (ex)changeable and nothing is what it seems. On the contrary, it functions to reaffirm the actuality of bodily existence, so that Bottom, in his translation, becomes uncannily more real, not less.

Bottom’s fixed identity functions as a critique of and resistance to exchange in two interrelated ways. First, Bottom contrasts radically with Puck, who, as an unruly laborer who submits to the endlessly transgressive logic of exchange, is directly at odds with Bottom’s inability or unwillingness to lose his laboring identity in the fairy world’s nexus of translation. Where Puck’s solipsistic proteanism reduces him to an empty agent of exchange, Bottom’s inviolable attachment to his artisanal social position renders him relatively immune to the process of translation. Second, in differentiating Bottom from Puck as two fundamentally

⁴⁶ Kott, 227.

different ways of relating labor to the exchange economy, the play also presents us with two visions of theatrical performance as it relates to mechanisms of exchange. Puck approaches acting as a vehicle for his translating magic. When he first encounters the mechanicals rehearsing the interlude, he responds not by disrupting the rehearsal as an invasive outside force, but by participating in the performance: “What, a play toward? I’ll be an auditor; / An actor too perhaps if I see cause” (3.1.73-74). Puck seems to see the mechanical’s theatrical performance as an opening for his schemes.

For Bottom, in contrast, theatrical performance is a way to resist the subjective erasure of translation. Upon awakening from his dream, he struggles to recall the events that have transpired. This proves a nearly impossible task, however, and Bottom proclaims in frustration, “Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream” (4.1.205-206). But if Bottom alone cannot recall the dream, theatrical performance can: “I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called ‘Bottom’s Dream’, because it hath no bottom, and I will sing it in the latter end of a play, before the Duke” (4.1.212-216). Whereas the aristocratic victims of Puck’s magic actively seek to forget and repress the events of the dream, Bottom hopes to bring the dream to life with drama. Theatrical performance, with its material support in labor, will keep alive this “most rare vision” in which a rude mechanical is ennobled and lavished with respect (4.1.203).⁴⁷ Bottom’s ability to preserve his laboring identity throughout the dream episode allows him to “join” together the dream and reality, thereby short-circuiting the process of translation. The dream is not repressed but subjectivized by Bottom, made a part of him and denied its presence as a frightening alien intrusion. Hence he awakens by immediately calling on

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the class dimensions of Bottom’s dream, see Annabel Patterson, “Bottom’s Up: Festive Theory in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothea Kehler (New York; London: Garland, 1998), 165-178.

his companions to inform him “when my cue comes,” as if his activity as an artisan-actor had never been disrupted by Puck’s scheming (4.1.199).

The frustration expressed by the mechanicals over Bottom’s absence from the final rehearsal further articulates Bottom’s confidence in the theater’s privileging of labor. Snug laments that Bottom has ruined a great opportunity for them all, since with the interlude “we had all been made men” (4.2.17-18). Flute seconds this frustration, convinced that the Duke would have given Bottom “sixpence a day for playing Pyramus... He would have deserved it: sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing” (4.2.21-24). Whether justified in reality or not, the mechanicals imagine theatrical performance as a forum in which their labor will be validated and appreciated. The theater is the space in which the economic and social value of labor can be fantasized, elevated above the daily toil and hardship of laboring existence.

And yet, despite the mechanicals’ fantasy of the theatrical validation of labor, it is tempting to discover the precise opposite dynamic playing out during the actual staging of the interlude. Indeed, it is possible to interpret the final act as reinforcing the authority of state power over the theater and acting in general. Barbara Freedman makes this argument most forcefully, contending that the relationship between the Duke and the mechanicals is “tailored along the lines of an idealized pact between feudal lord and gratefully submissive servant.”⁴⁸ Certainly Theseus seeks to represent theatrical performance as a politically and socially marginal activity:

Our sport shall be to take what they mistake:

And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect

Takes it in might, not merit.

... Trust me, sweet,

⁴⁸ Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 155.

Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome,
And in the modesty of fearful duty
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence. (5.1.90-103)

Like the mechanicals who stage it, the interlude is rude, an unrefined expression of “tongue-tied simplicity” in need of noble patronage and refinement (5.1.104). The political power of the state is the active partner in the theater-state relationship, investing performance with the meaning it deems fit.

Theseus thus seeks to perpetuate the logic of translation, exchanging the mechanicals’ rude performance for a noble entertainment. But this is not at all what happens. If at the level of explicit content the Duke is in control of interpretation, at a formal level the mechanicals set the framework in which the interlude is received. With the performance, discursive class markers are inverted, as the mechanicals speak in verse and the aristocratic audience speaks in prose. This contradiction between the final act’s explicit content and its formal organization complicates Theseus’s pretensions to interpretative authority, since in the very act of interpreting the interlude he is compelled to adopt a lower-class prose style. The mechanicals thus establish the contours of the final act’s discursive environment. Furthermore, in structuring the mechanicals’ verse dialogue in a way that retains their “rudeness” – for example: “To show our simple skill, / That is the true beginning of our end” – the play is careful to avoid reproducing the fairy world’s identity-erasing translation (5.1.110-111). Although the mechanicals abandon their usual prose for verse, their actual laboring identity is still present. With the concluding performance, then, the mechanicals articulate a vision of the theater in which labor – in its material realness and with its irrepressible sense of social worth – is alone capable of disrupting the economy of

exchange, giving concrete form to an otherwise immaterial and formless shaping fantasy.

Theatrical performance here does not erase laboring identity but, on the contrary, expresses it.

The mechanicals' concluding performance captures a central ideological dimension of *Midsummer*, which, far from relegating the theater's guild dimensions to the medieval past, keeps them alive on the stage.

In brief conclusion, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be read as a response to the early modern theater's commercial context. I have argued that *Midsummer* actively pushes against the reduction of theatrical performance to an impersonal economic logic. The play accomplishes this resistance by drawing on the rich guild tradition that still informed the early modern theater. The mechanicals embody the theater's guild culture, formulating a mode of theatricality in which theater is inextricably bound to the practicalities of laboring existence. In this version of the theater, performance is not determined by market forces – dramatized in the play by the fairy world's magical powers of translation – but is instead seen as the product of labor. In attempting to ground performance in the materiality of labor, the play simultaneously articulates a vision of the laboring class that opposes the dispossession and proletarianization that defined early modern London's socioeconomic environment. Theatricality and labor reinforce one another, the overlapping categories giving form to a claim for the social worth of both theatrical performance and labor.

3.0 “YOU MAR OUR LABOUR: ACKNOWLEDGING WORK IN *THE TEMPEST*”

The Tempest is typically read as one of Shakespeare’s most imaginative plays. This is understandable: the action of the play occurs on a magical island where anything seems possible, and details the efforts of a statesman-turned-magician as he endeavors to subject the inhabitants of the island to his seemingly boundless will. The play is rich in elaborate stagecraft and technical effects that emphasize the fantastic malleability of the island’s reality. For many scholars, the play’s reveling in imaginative possibilities articulates Shakespeare’s utopic desire for ideal theatrical performance, a vision of “an almost ideal theater on a magical island where the playwright’s powers were seemingly limitless.”¹ From this view, the play’s magical elements express the creative power of the playwright who, like the successful magician, fashions the world in accordance with his unique creative and artistic vision. David Bevington has recently claimed that *The Tempest* constitutes the culmination of Shakespeare’s dramatic development, contending that the play presents a world “in which the great arbiter of human behavior and the great presider over human destiny is the dramatist himself.”² In these accounts, the play becomes an exercise in artistic omnipotence, an assertion of Shakespeare’s own world-making poetic and dramatic authority.

And yet, the play’s attention to imaginative possibility is haunted by a competing concern with the boundaries and limitations that impede pure will. Prospero’s first account of the circumstances of his exile involves a critique of his abandonment of “worldly ends” for the

¹ Alvin Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare’s Image of the Poet in the English Public Theater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 135.

² David Bevington, *Shakespeare’s Ideas: More Things in Heaven and Earth* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 221.

“closeness and the bettering of my mind” (1.2.89-90).³ His rejection of worldly ends has had the further consequence, he explains, of encouraging Antonio’s political ambitions. Prospero’s trust in Antonio, his “confidence sans bounds,” fostered Antonio’s pursuit of power until “he needs will be / Absolute Milan” (1.2.97, 109). In contrast to the critical consensus, this chapter will argue that *The Tempest* is heavily invested in thinking through the limit points of performativity. The chapter begins with a consideration of the play’s depiction of labor as a constitutive component of the island’s political dynamic, before examining how the play’s representation of magical and theatrical performance addresses the place of labor in the early modern theater. With its overlapping discourses of political power, magic, and theatricality, the play engages in a critique of precisely the kind of absolute and boundless performative creativity that is so often attributed to it. In formulating its critique, the play returns again and again to the role of labor as a fundamental determinant of conditions of existence, including existence in the world of the theater. Like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare’s final play expresses a marked anxiety about the reduction of artistic labor to “a baseless fabric” that will “dissolve” like an “insubstantial pageant” (4.1.151, 154-155). To the extent that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage, then, it is a farewell that acknowledges the labor of performance: it may say goodbye to the stage but not to the craft of the theater.

³All references are to William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

3.1 LABOR AND REALPOLITIK, OR THE LIMITS OF POWER

Prospero's exile on the island serves as an opportunity to resolve the political inadequacies that resulted in his loss of power and banishment from Milan. Although Prospero identifies Antonio's pursuit of absolute power as the cause of his banishment, he also accepts personal responsibility, blaming his own neglect of "worldly ends" and "O'er pric[ing] all popular rate" for the reclusive study of esoteric magical knowledge (1.2.89, 92). Prospero positions his magical studies against political power, explaining to Miranda, "The government I cast upon my brother, / And to my state grew stranger, being transported / And rapt in secret studies" (1.2.75-77). It is not the pursuit of magical knowledge itself that Prospero now condemns, but the disconnect between these "secret studies" and the requirements of effective political governance.⁴ Despite "being so reputed / In the dignity, and for the liberal arts / Without a parallel," Prospero had no practical grasp of affairs of state (1.2.72-74). Prospero's story suggests that the island is not the location of a fantastic and solipsistic magical indulgence, but on the contrary a space in which to harmonize knowledge and practical conditions and limitations. Indeed, in establishing the context of his tale, Prospero emphasizes not his power but rather the limitations of his current situation: he may be a masterful magician, but in practical terms this means that he is only the "master of a full poor cell" on a secluded island (1.2.20). Moreover, his magic is limited to the confines of the island: it is only when his companions from Milan are in immediate proximity to the island that he is able to bring about the "direful spectacle of the wreck" on which his machinations hinge (1.2.26).

⁴ Jeffrey Knapp connects this critique to a critique of colonialism: "Shakespeare's dramatization of the colonial antimaterialist as lord of little more than magic books... represent[s] one mode of English expansion as self-destructive foolery or madness." Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire Nowhere: England, America, Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 222.

Prospero's account of Antonio's rise to power complicates readings that find the play affirming an ideal form of theatricality. If the island is a space where "the most fundamental questions about the power of plays [can] be dramatized without concern for the ability of the actors, the attention of the audience, or the ability of the theater to create illusory spectacle," the play also uses the political conflict between Prospero and Antonio to express a certain unease about precisely such an ideal of performativity.⁵ It is, after all, Antonio's rise to power that in fact entails this mode of pure theatricality: having "no screen between this part he played / And him he played it for, he needs will be / Absolute Milan" (1.2.107-108). The self, in this formulation of theatrical performativity, is inseparable from the performative act. Just as Prospero, whose "library / Was Dukedom large enough," retreats into a world of self-indulgence, Antonio's political performance is defined by self-interest (1.2.109-110). Antonio's political ambition is thus predicated on a model of performance that operates without concern for external limitations. An expression of unhindered political will power, his rise to power is described as a form of theatrical performance, as it is made possible "out o'th'substitution / And executing the outward face of royalty / With all prerogative" (1.2.103-105). Prospero interprets Antonio's coup as the adoption and performance of a role: with Prospero in seclusion, the role of Duke was available to a new performer.⁶

Prospero's newfound concern for "worldly ends" in politics echoes Machiavellian realpolitik. Far from the stock villain of the early modern stage, the caricature of Machiavellian doctrine who "strutted the stage in innumerable guises, committing every conceivable crime,"

⁵ Kernan, 135.

⁶ Kathryn Barbour offers an insightful interpretation of the performative nature of political power in the play, identifying a "tension between the metaphorical and the physical aspects of bodies – the body of the monarch as well as the bodies of his or her subjects – that underlies Prospero's experiments in power and punishment in *The Tempest*." Kathryn Barbour, "Flout 'em and Scout 'em and Scout 'em and Flout 'em: Prospero's Power and Punishments in *The Tempest*," in *Shakespearean Power and Punishment: A Volume of Essays* ed. Gillian Murray Kendall (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Universities Press, 1998), 160.

the play constitutes one of early modern drama's most careful and intellectually nuanced engagements with Machiavelli's thought.⁷ Michael J. Redmond has recently argued that Prospero's Machiavellianism "underlines his transformation from a bookish hereditary duke to a competent participant in the covert power politics of the Italian Renaissance."⁸ But even this emphasis on power politics risks reducing Prospero's Machiavellian strategizing to villainy. The distinction between the Machiavellian caricature and the Machiavelli of political realism is especially important for distinguishing modes of political performance and agency within the play. In contrast to the blood-thirsty villain of the early modern stage, the Machiavellian prince is motivated not by a lust for iniquity but by a profound sensitivity to the dialectic between historical conditions of possibility and political agency. "I believe," Machiavelli explains, "that a prince will be fortunate who adjusts his behavior to the temper of the times, and on the other hand will be unfortunate when his behavior is not well tuned to the time."⁹ The prince's political fortunes are determined not by divine order but by strategic calculation, an ability to recognize and take advantage of the practical reality of historical contingency.

From this view, the play's most astute practitioners of realpolitik appear, at first glance, to be the would-be usurpers of Alonso's authority, Antonio and Sebastian. Their violation of moral precepts and hereditary order in the interest of political ambition suggests a Machiavellian political realism. Like Machiavelli's prince, Antonio and Sebastian recognize the agentic dimensions of fortune, observing that though "destiny" has shipwrecked them, they are now in a position "to perform an act / Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come / In yours and my discharge" (2.1.250-252). "Th' occasion speaks thee," Antonio informs Sebastian, defining the

⁷ Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation, 1500-1700* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 56.

⁸ Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 123-24.

⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York; London: Norton, 1980), 71.

parameters of political power in terms of Machiavellian *virtú* rather than divine order (2.1.203). Power, for Antonio, is relative, the product of one's ability to interpret and act upon circumstances. As he watches Alonso and his followers sleep, he imagines the ease with which he might murder them, noting that if their sleep "were death... why, they were no worse / Than now they are" (2.1.258-260). Indeed, in the unique context of the shipwreck, Alonso is "No better than the earth he lies upon" (2.1.279). Contingency begins to override divine right, as the position of King is reinterpreted as something open for the taking rather than immutable and God-given.

It is here, however, as Antonio and Sebastian contemplate the propitious circumstances of the island context that their Machiavellian realism begins to slip into conventional dramatic caricature. Strategic political calculation is elided by brute force, and Sebastian encourages Antonio: "Draw thy sword – one stroke shall free thee from the tribute which thou payest, / And I the King shall love thee" (2.1.290-292). The referent of Sebastian's call for violence is himself, the future King. Machiavelli's advice regarding violence, on the contrary, is always aimed at the preservation of social order rather than at the indulgence of personal ambition. His observation that the prince should not be afraid of "being called cruel for what he does to keep his subjects united and loyal" is far from an invitation to engage in violence for the sake of personal gain.¹⁰ Here brute political power, the power of the sword, is still understood in accordance with the *civitas*, or the responsibility for political power to foster the common good. Unlike the ideal Machiavellian prince, Antonio and Sebastian subordinate political and social stability to boundless personal ambition and desire.

While Sebastian and Antonio's attention to propitious "occasion" gestures toward Machiavellian precepts, their disregard for the broader sociopolitical consequences of their

¹⁰ Ibid. 47.

actions, as well as their conspiratorial embrace of violence, belies any claim to political realism. What their political ambition lacks is a practical understanding of their circumstances and the corresponding limitation of their desire for power. Their Machiavellian pretensions fail primarily due to Prospero's anticipation of their behavior. Ariel explains his intervention to prevent Alonso's murder:

My master through his art foresees the danger
That you, his friend, are in, and sends me forth –
For else his project dies – to keep them living. (2.1.297-299)

Prospero's protection of Alonso is not an expression of political duty to his king, nor is it the result of any particular moral prerogative: instead, it reflects his broader project to restore political order in Naples, which requires that Alonso remain alive. Where Sebastian and Antonio hatch their plan for political power on a whim and for the purposes of personal ambition, Prospero's return to politics is carefully designed in accordance with practical circumstances and is, at least ostensibly, aimed at the social and political good of Naples.¹¹

The entire conspiracy between Sebastian and Antonio seems to be an instrument in Prospero's own political calculation. Curt Bright has suggested that "Prospero is responsible for setting up the conspiracy. He certainly creates the conditions by having Ariel put them to sleep."¹² The success or failure of the conspiracy hinges on knowledge of true conditions of political possibility. What appears to be a propitious "occasion" to Sebastian and Antonio is in

¹¹ Incidentally, it is appropriate from this perspective that "Prospero discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess" during his final wondrous spectacle (5.1.172-13). Chess was a central element of Tudor political education, and indeed "Elizabeth played with her tutor Roger Ascham (and that careful schoolmaster Prospero obviously included chess instruction on Miranda's syllabus): as Queen, she counted it among her chief recreations." Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor, "Ferdinand and Miranda at Chess," *Shakespeare Survey* (1982), 115.

¹² Curtis Bright, "'Treasure doth never prosper': The Tempest and the Discourse of Treason," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.1 (1990), 16.

fact its opposite, as their attempted treason becomes, in the end, another source of political power for Prospero. He appears, in the final act, to forgive Antonio, though this is ambiguous:

But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,
I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you,
And justify you traitors. At this time
I will tell no tales. (5.1.126-129)

Orgel sees this as political strategy, Prospero's check-mate as it were, since he "still has his usurpation and attempted murder to hold against his brother, things that still disqualify Antonio from his place in the family."¹³ Indeed, Prospero's manipulation of the conspiracy constitutes the play's most nuanced expression of Machiavellian realism, as Prospero affirms Machiavelli's advice that "a shrewd prince will lay his foundations on what is under his own control, not on what is controlled by others."¹⁴ Prospero's knowledge of political reality provides him with an important advantage over his adversaries. Sebastian and Antonio, on the contrary, only imagine that the situation on the island is theirs to control. Like Gonzalo's utopia, their political ambition is "nothing," a fantasy detached from political reality (2.1.170).

The play's insights into the constitution of political power, however, are not confined to Sebastian's and Antonio's conspiracy. Where Sebastian's and Antonio's political scheming points up the significance of a realistic methodology in the formation of political power, it is in fact the play's other political conspiracy that most fully illuminates the limitations and determinants of power. The subplot involving Stephano and Trinculo mirrors the conspiracy between Sebastian and Antonio in significant ways. In particular, like their aristocratic counterparts, Stephano and Trinculo base their political ambitions on an overestimation of their

¹³ Stephen Orgel, "Introduction," *The Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 54.

¹⁴ Machiavelli, 49.

influence and resources on the island. In response to Caliban's detailed account of Prospero's magic, Stephano confidently concludes that he can kill Prospero and that Miranda. He brazenly claims that he and Miranda "will be king and queen" (3.2.105-107). The absurdity of Stephano's and Trinculo's political and class presumptions indicates the carnivalesque function of their ambition. Their drunken reveling turns the political conspiracy into an instance of Bakhtin's grotesque realism, the purpose of which "is degradation, that is, the lowering of that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20).¹⁵ Grotesque realism demystifies official ideology by placing it into an unfamiliar context that exposes and deconstructs its normally inscrutable operation. Ironically, then, the more absurd and unrealistic Stephano's and Trinculo's calculations become, the more effectively are they able to illuminate the material underpinnings of aristocratic political power. By bringing Sebastian's and Antonio's political perspective down to earth, as it were, the subplot's grotesque realism illuminates the play's discourse on political realism.

Significantly, where Sebastian's and Antonio's political scheming evinces a fantasy of boundless will power, Trinculo and Stephano focus on the very practical matter of how best to exploit Caliban as a source of labor. Caliban is approached as a laborer who can be manipulated to serve Trinculo's and Stephano's personal ends. Stephano describes Caliban in terms that point up his shapelessness and malleability as a laborer: he is alternately a "servant-monster," a "man-monster," and a "lieutenant-monster" (3.2.3, 11, 14). Caliban's exact identity – whether he is "a man or a monster" – is irrelevant (2.2.24). Indeed, what matters is the extent to which this indistinctness can be turned to profit. In England "would this monster make a man," Trinculo speculates: "When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a

¹⁵ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19-20.

dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms!” (2.2.29-33). While it may be tempting to read the reference to an Indian as evidence of the play’s colonialist agenda, it is important to keep in mind that Trinculo’s commodifying and exploitative gaze also encompasses England’s vast vagrant population. Implicit in Trinculo’s assessment of his discovery of Caliban is thus a crucial distinction between “lame” beggars and those who, like Caliban, can be manipulated and put to use as a source of profit. Before even contemplating political power, Trinculo’s initial concern is with how to make subservient labor profitable.

As Paul Cefalu has argued, Trinculo and Stephano are able to control Caliban by subjecting him to the commodity system, as Prospero is replaced “with the more amorphous master that is capital.”¹⁶ Indeed, where Caliban’s submission to Prospero is based on the fear of physical punishment if he resists, his submission to Trinculo and Stephano is mediated by the “celestial liquor” that they offer him (2.3.111). The liquor, as a commodity, blinds Caliban to the nature of his circumstances, leading him to confuse subjection with liberation. He “swear[s] upon that bottle to be thy true subject,” while at the same time celebrating his emancipation from Prospero’s tyranny (2.2.119). In the same breath that Caliban submits to Trinculo and Stephano, he abjures his servitude to Prospero:

No more dam I’ll make for fish,
Nor fetching in firing
At requiring,
Nor scrape trenching, nor wash dish:
‘Ban, ‘Ban, Ca-Caliban
Has a new master – get a new man! (2.2.175-181)

¹⁶ Paul Cefalu, *Revisionist Shakespeare: Transitional Ideologies in Texts and Contexts* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 43.

This rejection of servitude paradoxically follows on the heels of his promise to his new masters to “show thee the best springs; I’ll pluck thee berries; / I’ll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough” (2.2.154-155).

Caliban’s willful subjection to precisely the same sort of servitude that he disdains raises the question of just what he hopes to gain from his new situation. For Cefalu, Caliban’s actions, and in particular his full embrace of the “celestial liquor,” suggest a subjectivity that accords with capitalist ideas of agency. Caliban now puts “his labor-capacity to a self-interested end,” allowing him to exercise “at least a precarious and ironic degree of freedom.”¹⁷ There is, from this view, a certain empowerment in Caliban’s decision to swap masters, to the extent that he will profit as much as Trinculo and Stephano will. This reading, however, downplays the subjugation entailed in Caliban’s relationship to his labor power. For Trinculo and Stephano, labor is purely a function of economic profit, which is why Stephano repeatedly emphasizes the need to “keep [Caliban] tame” and thus capable of being instrumentalized in the pursuit of economic gain (2.2.66-67). Doing this requires that Caliban misrecognize the conditions of his labor. Thus is Caliban able to promise to “dig thee pig-nuts” and “bring thee / To clust’ring filberts” at the same time that he rejoices in his new-found “freedom” (2.2.162, 164-165, 181). His misrecognition of the conditions of his labor seems less like self-fashioning and self-interest than what Marx describes as the way in which capitalism manages to conceal the exploitative nature of labor. The emergence of capitalism requires the creation of “free workers” who “neither form part of the means of production themselves, as would be the case with slaves, serfs, etc., nor do they own the means of production, as would be the case with self-employed peasant proprietors. The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of

¹⁷ Ibid., 43.

production of their own.”¹⁸ Caliban is precisely this kind of “free” laborer. In exchange for liquor, his labor is translated into an impersonal object to be used for profit. Paradoxically, then, Caliban’s apparent freedom corresponds to the commodification of his labor.

As the play progresses, however, Caliban develops a more empowering understanding of his labor. The plan to “knock a nail into [Prospero’s] head” and gain political power complicates this mystification of Caliban’s laboring status (3.2.60). The success or failure of Caliban’s proposed insurrection will hinge on his self-awareness as a laborer. He begins to articulate this awareness when he responds in frustration to Ariel (who is pretending to be Trinculo) by threatening to “take [Trinculo’s] bottle from him” so that “He shall drink naught but brine, for I’ll not show him / Where the quick freshes are” (3.2.64-66). This announcement echoes Prospero’s acknowledgement to Miranda that his entire operation on the island requires Caliban’s labor:

But as ‘tis,
We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
That profit us. (1.2.310-313)

In this acknowledgment, Prospero suggests that he too understands the centrality of labor to political power. In addition to anticipating the political moves of his adversaries on the island, Prospero is also profoundly sensitive to the material labor that supports his larger political scheme. Caliban’s echoing of Prospero’s acknowledgement marks the first instance in which he acquires consciousness of the central importance of his labor to the politics of the island. It is also the beginning of a profound shift in the power relation between him and his new masters. From this point on, it is Caliban, and not Trinculo and Stephano, who shapes the conspiracy plot.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*. (New York; London: Penguin, 1990), 875.

In particular, his perspective becomes increasingly practical in focus, as he instructs Trinculo and Stephano to concentrate on “that good mischief which may make this island / Thine own forever” (4.1.216-217). When Trinculo becomes distracted by Prospero’s wardrobe, Caliban takes command of the situation: “Let it alone, thou fool, it is but trash” (4.1.223). He implores them not to “dote thus on such luggage” but to “do the murder first” (4.1.231-232). The inversion of the master-servant relation is thus the product of an awareness of and self-control over one’s labor: Caliban has come to understand the hard labor on which political power is predicated, in this case the “good mischief” that will depose Prospero.¹⁹

It is around the relationship between labor and political power that the play’s two conspiracy plots converge. Prospero has many opportunities to prevent the consummation of Sebastian’s and Antonio’s political coup. What makes the eventual moment of intervention unique is that Sebastian and Antonio have turned their attention to the issue of labor. They decide to actualize their plan because, as Antonio observes, Alonso and his followers “are oppressed with travail” and thus “cannot use such vigilance / As when they are fresh” (3.3.17-19). Although this may seem to be a minor remark, Antonio’s focus on “travail” and “vigilance” is a tidy articulation of Caliban’s own coming-to-consciousness of the ability of his labor to influence relations of power. In intervening at this particular moment, Prospero echoes Caliban’s insights into the political implications of labor. If the conspiracy plots articulate a vision of Machiavellian theatrical power, they do so in a way that draws out the material constraints on such performativity.

¹⁹ Studies have discussed Caliban’s counter-discursive power over language, though little has been said about the way this discursive empowerment hinges on Caliban’s empowering manipulation of his labor. For a sustained discussion of the discursive dimensions of Caliban’s power, see Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

The conspiracy plots thus come together to formulate a unique vision of realpolitik, one in which power is grounded in the knowledge and manipulation of labor. The performance of labor, and not competing claims of legitimacy and right, is identified as the lynchpin of power. The Machiavellian understanding in which political power must be actively performed in accordance with practical considerations is given a new twist. As Prospero, Caliban, Antonio, Sebastian, Trinculo, and Stephano all discover, political calculation is inseparable from the labor that provides the material support for political projects. In staging the short-comings of Prospero's political history, the play demystifies the operation of political power by acknowledging the inextricable link between the performance of political power and the labor that sustains it.

3.2 ACKNOWLEDGING WORK

Discussions of the play that attend to the question of labor often overlook its relation to the representation of political power. And even those studies that do explore *The Tempest's* concern with labor often see the play, in one way or another, marginalizing labor. In an important study of Shakespeare's preoccupation with labor in the late plays, for instance, Maurice Hunt contends that, in *The Tempest*, "The working mind... take[s] precedence over physical labor," so that the representation of physical labor can be seen to encode the play's primary interest in artistic and intellectual work.²⁰ This preference for non-physical labor is evident in the opening scene, which while "valoriz[ing] physical labor," depicts it as "fail[ing] to achieve its end."²¹ According to

²⁰ Maurice Hunt, *Shakespeare's Labored Art: Stir, Work, and the Late Plays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 259.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

Hunt, it is Prospero's magical labor, and not the sailors' physical labor, that controls the storm at sea.

The way we interpret the opening scene's representation of labor depends, however, largely on what we imagine the purpose of that representation to be. While it is true that the sailors' labor fails to save the ship from the storm, the scene nevertheless manages to stress the value of their skilled labor. It is indeed the prospect of failure, of utter destruction in the storm, that highlights the importance of skilled physical labor. The Boatswain explicitly opposes his crew's labor to aristocratic privilege: "You mar our labour. Keep your cabins – you do assist the storm," he tells his meddling aristocratic passengers (1.1.13-14). The opening scene throws into relief a tension between symbolic appearances, such as the roles individuals play and the power differentials inscribed within the aristocratic status system, and the brute necessity of survival. In response to Gonzalo's call that the Boatswain "be patient," the Boatswain replies: "When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin; silence! Trouble us not" (1.1.15-18). The Boatswain suggests that social convention must be adapted to the dictates of reality. In the context of the storm, physical labor is more valuable than aristocratic privilege. Thus if Prospero's magical labor is responsible for the storm, it is an act that seems intended to depict labor as possessing fundamental social and existential value.

In this moment of crisis, the social hierarchy is suspended. The Boatswain's comments indicate that political authority and class distinctions function normally to conceal the social import of labor. The Boatswain remarks that he will yield to Gonzalo's meddling advice "if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present," in which case "we will not hand a rope more – use your authority" (1.1.21-23). The force of the Boatswain's remark hinges on the tacit recognition that political and class authority lacks all practical meaning in this

life and death situation. The Boatswain answers Sebastian's onslaught of complaints and curses with a simple rejoinder: "Work you, then" (1.1.42). Antonio can only respond with further insults: "Hang, cur, hang, you whoreson insolent noisemaker!" (1.1.43-44). The irony, of course, is that Antonio and Sebastian, and not the Boatswain, are the useless noisemakers, their class privilege reduced to impotent pontificating when faced with the imperative to labor.²²

Hunt is undeniably correct to see Prospero's magic as a form of labor. However, this magical labor is not presented as somehow superior to other forms of labor, including physical labor. Indeed, the play makes a distinct effort to associate Prospero's magical/theatrical labor with the skilled physical labor performed by the sailors. The wedding masque that Prospero stages for Ferdinand and Miranda parallels the conflict of the opening scene. In response to Ferdinand's comment that he hopes to "live here ever," Prospero admonishes him to silence:

Sweet, now, silence!

Juno and Ceres whisper seriously.

There's something else to do. Hush, and be mute,

Or else our spell is marred. (4.1.126-129)

Just as the Boatswain castigates the aristocrats for marring the sailors' labor, Prospero attempts to prevent the marring of his magical/theatrical labor. The emphasis on marring suggests a correlation between skilled physical labor and magical performance. Far from establishing a dichotomy between the sailors' physical labor and Prospero's immaterial labor, this parallel

²² For discussions of the class tension in the opening scene, see Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial writing in the English Renaissance, 1545-1625* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 245-247; Linda Anderson, *A Place in the Story: Servants and Service in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Universities Press, 2005), 191-94.

suggests that Prospero is another version of the Boatswain. As a magician and theatrical director, Prospero occupies the same space as the Boatswain relative to his audience.

Both Prospero and the Boatswain see their labor as threatened by an unappreciative audience. Just as Prospero's political experimentation on the island brings about a reconciliation between theory and practice, reinforcing the need to account for the material limitations and constraints on political power, the Boatswain attends to the determining forces of reality – the storm and the need to engage in physical labor for survival – rather than normative dictates of political and class identity. That the opening scene intends to critique idealism is emphasized by Gonzalo's utopian fantasies. On the ship, Gonzalo takes comfort in the fact that, despite the raging storm, the Boatswain "hath no drowning mark upon him – his complexion is perfect gallows" (1.129-30). In direct contrast to the Boatswain's practical concern with performing physical labor, Gonzalo measures the severity of the situation in terms of the abstraction of "good Fate" (1.1.30). Once on the island, this idealism manifests as a utopian vision of a society in which no one is required to perform labor of any sort:

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have, but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foison, all abundance
To feed my innocent people. (2.1.157-162)

The similarity between Gonzalo's utopia and Montaigne's account of the new world has been widely noted.²³ In particular, Gonzalo echoes Montaigne's description of the explorers'

²³ See Arthur Kirsch, "Virtue, vice, and compassion in Montaigne and *The Tempest*," *Studies in English Literature* 37 (1997): 337-52.

discovery “that societies of men could be maintained with so little artifice, so little in the way of human soldier.”²⁴ That Gonzalo’s vision of a society free of labor meets with immediate scorn – all the subjects will be so idle as the be “whores and knaves,” claims Antonio – suggests that Shakespeare is attempting to point up the absurdity of a society without labor (2.1.164).²⁵ To this extent, Shakespeare, as playwright, is also aligned with the Boatswain, critiquing idealist pretensions and affirming the social importance of labor.

Little critical attention has been paid to the mariners, an oversight that is due largely to their abrupt disappearance after the opening scene. Ariel informs Prospero that the mariners have been “all under hatches stowed... with a charm joined to their suffered labour,” while the other passengers have been brought ashore (1.2.230-231). It is, perhaps paradoxically, the mariners’ absence from the remainder of the play that makes them such a significant presence. Why, after all, are the mariners alone sheltered from Prospero’s scheme? What is unique about the mariners is that, unlike their aristocratic passengers, they are profoundly sensitive to the social and existential importance of labor. In an earlier romance, *Pericles*, the relationship between labor and social insight is articulated in a scene that closely resembles the opening scene of *The Tempest*. Pericles expresses appreciation for a group of mariners who are especially forthcoming in their critique of social conventions:

How from the finny subject of the seas
These fishers tell th’infirmities of men,
And from their wat’ry empire recollect

²⁴ Michel de Montaigne, “On the Cannibals,” in *The Complete Essays* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 232-233.

²⁵ Richard H. Grove argues that the play depicts a utopian mode “that had moved away from a stereotyped concept of the island as a place where a redemption of European political economy might be tried out and towards a more empirical perception and one more closely reflecting the hard reality of the early American and Caribbean colonies.” Richard H. Grove. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

All that many men approve or men detect! (5.85-88)²⁶

I would suggest that a similar appreciation of the mariners' laboring subjectivity is also the basis of Prospero's decision to exempt the mariners from the plot he has constructed on the island. Prospero will now take over for the mariners, extending and developing their formulation of labor's importance. In the aftermath of the storm, Prospero will draw on the mariners' practical attention to labor, in the process highlighting the laboring dimensions of theatrical performance.

Discussions of the play's consideration of labor often focus on the trope of colonial domination and subjugation. Mark Netzloff has recently offered a provocative take on this theme: "*The Tempest* refers to one of the most dominant ideas expressed in the colonial promotional literature of the early modern period: the use of colonialism as a means to rid England of its poor, masterless, unproductive, and potentially mutinous laboring classes."²⁷ Indeed, as Netzloff notes, early modern colonial discourse is unique in its attention to labor. Whereas the other dominant global economic discourse of the period, mercantilism, obscures the practical and economic value of labor, locating value instead in the circulation of commodities and bullion, colonial discourse is of necessity sensitive to the role of labor in the construction of social and economic order. Thus in *The generall historie of Virginia*, John Smith repeatedly returns to the question of labor. He explains that, on arriving in the new world, the colonists "found onely an idle, improvident, scattered people, ignorant of the knowledge of gold or silver, or any commodities, and carelesse of any thing but from hand to mouth, except bables of no worth; nothing to incourage vs, but what accidentally we found Nature afforded."²⁸ In a reversal of Montaigne's utopian vision of a labor-free new world, Smith depicts the lack of

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (London: Methuen, 2004).

²⁷ Mark Netzloff, *England's Internal Colonies: Class, Capital, and the Literature of Early Modern Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 92.

²⁸ John Smith, *The generall historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (London, 1624).

industriousness as a hindrance to social development. In response to an inquiry into improving the colonial process, Smith explains that the prosperous cultivation of the new world

cannot be done by promises, hopes, counsels and countenances, but with sufficient workmen and meanes to maintaine them, not such delinquents as here cannot be ruled by all the lawes in *England*, yet when the foundation is laid, as I haue said, and a common-wealth established, then such there may better be constrained to labour then here: but to rectifie a common-wealth with debaushed people is impossible, and no wise man would throw himselfe into such a society, that intends honestly, and knowes what he vndertakes, for there is no Country to pillage as the Romans found: all you expect from thence must be by labour.²⁹

In contrast to the mercantilist reification of value, colonists are forced to acknowledge the practical necessity of labor. The success of the colonial enterprise hinges on the proper training and administration of labor, since “debaushed” laborers can only yield an equally undesirable commonwealth. Empty promises of prosperity and industry are confronted by the practical need to perform labor in order to achieve these goals.

Just as Smith’s realistic emphasis on labor as the motive force of colonial expansion counters utopic and idealist fantasies of the new world, the play draws on colonial discourse in order to highlight the constitutive value of labor.³⁰ Thus when Prospero notes that “We cannot miss” Caliban because he “serves in offices / That profit us,” he reproduces a central element of colonial logic: the exercise of power cannot be taken for granted because it is dependent upon the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interestingly, Smith offers an account of the storm at sea that forced the aristocrats on board to labor. In a story that closely resembles the opening scene of *The Tempest* Smith explains how “had we a Mariner nor any had skill to trim the sayles but two saylers and my selfe, the rest being Gentlemen, or them were as ignorant in such toyle and labour. Yet necessitie in a short time by good words and examples made them doe that that caused them ever after to feare no colours.” John Smith, *The generall historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*.

labor of colonial subjects. Caliban represents precisely the kind of unruly labor that causes Smith such anxiety. Despite Miranda's "pains to make thee speak," Caliban responds by transforming her disciplinary undertaking into a source of subversion, since his "profit on't / Is I know how to curse" (1.2.353, 362-63). Caliban's response echoes Smith's concern to make colonial labor more profitable, though here Caliban has transvalued colonial profit to signify his resistance to subjugation.

There is also a critical tendency to see the play enacting a proto-capitalist fantasy in which unruly labor is disciplined. According to Cefalu, the play attempts symbolically to obscure the unpleasant reality of capitalist transition, by "allow[ing] masterlessness to emerge only momentarily, only insofar as masterlessness can effectively transmute into post-feudal labor-forms."³¹ To the extent that emerging capitalist elements are present in the play, they are presented in a way that denies the untidy process of primitive accumulation. Netzloff makes a similar argument regarding the moment in which Prospero says of Caliban, "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.274-75). Netzloff places this statement into dialogue with Tudor economic laws, in which context "Prospero's 'acknowledgment' of Caliban gains new meaning, no longer as the resumption of paternalistic authority mandated by the Statute of Artificers but as a claim of absolute ownership."³² And yet, in the context of Prospero's corresponding renunciation of magic, this "acknowledgement" of Caliban seems more ambiguous. After all, why would Prospero claim absolute ownership of Caliban while giving up his magic, the mechanism that has apparently facilitated this exercise of power? In abandoning his magical powers, Prospero is forced to acknowledge the material basis on which this power has depended all along, embodied here in the form of his most abused worker, Caliban. In a

³¹ Cefalu, 47.

³² Netzloff, 110.

revealing statement, Prospero contemplates his renunciation of magic by characterizing it as the time when “all my labours [shall] end” (4.1.265). As Prospero approaches the end of his magical reign, he becomes more aware of the laboring dimensions of his rule, seeing his power as materially supported by work and not engendered through magic.³³ He gives up magic, but not the labor that has supported it all along.

For Prospero, magic is itself intimately connected to processes of labor. His manipulation of Ariel, who, along with Caliban, facilitates life on the island, is depicted as a manipulation of labor. After the storm, Prospero informs Ariel that “thy charge / Exactly is performed; but there’s more work” (1.2.237-38). In compelling Ariel to perform this additional work, Prospero strategically contrasts Ariel’s current state of servitude with his life with “the foul witch Sycorax,” his former master (1.2.256). The contrast hinges not so much on the quality of the servitude – Prospero, like Sycorax before him, is the master of Ariel’s completely unfree labor – as the way this servitude is registered by the master in the relationship. Whereas Sycorax attempted to force Ariel “To act her earthly and abhorred commands,” there is a semblance of mutual respect that informs the relationship between Ariel and Prospero (1.2.273). When faced with the prospect of more work, Ariel reminds Prospero that “I have done thee worthy service” already (1.2.247). In response, Prospero threatens to punish Ariel, but not before reminding him of “What torment I did free thee” from (1.2.251). While it is tempting to interpret Prospero’s response as an exercise of tyrannical will, the dialogue between Prospero and Ariel articulates a certain intersubjectivity. As Derek Cohen explains, “Ariel, like Hegel’s bondsman, seems to discover in his labour a form of self-expression and, in this narrow sense, of freedom,” though

³³ Jane Kingsley-Smith makes a similar point, arguing that “by rejecting the magic that enabled him to transcend the everyday man, Prospero accepts his own vulnerability and mortality. He achieves this only at the price of drowning the knowledge that he was ever anything more.” Jane Kingsley-Smith, *Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 173.

ultimately “Prospero, the slavemaster, determines what Ariel will do.”³⁴ Both Prospero and Ariel, however, strive to explain their respective motivations and behaviors in terms of the other. As David Schalwyk puts it, because Ariel acts as a bondsman to Prospero and serves in a contract, his “service is therefore conditional and to a degree rational.”³⁵ Prospero’s and Ariel’s relationship is also rational in that it entails dialogue and disagreement. The current situation on the island is not assumed to be transparently objective, but is treated instead as something open to negotiation, even if this negotiation is fraught.

To this extent, I disagree with readings that see Prospero’s magic as an expression of his absolutist or authoritarian disposition. Richard Strier, along these lines, suggests that Prospero’s magic encodes his colonial agenda, arguing that “the Renaissance idea of magic and the idea of colonial administration have the same fantasy content: namely, the idea of omnipotence.”³⁶ As John Smith’s anxious account of undisciplined labor indicates, however, if colonization entailed a fantasy of omnipotence, it could easily be elided by concern for the practical limits to colonial power. In a similar way, early modern discourses on magic focus significant attention on the relational nature of magical power. Like Machiavelli’s prince, the magician exercises his art through a sensitive awareness of the relational constitution of power. More precisely, like colonial discourse, magical discourse represents power as contingent on the successful manipulation of other powers and agents. Giordano Bruno describes magic as a process of

³⁴ Derek Cohen, *Searching Shakespeare: Studies in Culture and Authority* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 59.

³⁵ David Schalwyk, *Shakespeare, Love, and Service* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 100.

³⁶ Richard Strier, “I am Power: Normal and Magical Politics in *The Tempest*,” *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Derek Hirst and Richard Strier (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.

“bonding” of and between spirits. Indeed, bonding is “where the whole teaching of magic is to be found.”³⁷ Bruno continues:

For actions actually to occur in the world, three conditions are required: 1) an active power in the agent; 2) a passive power or disposition in a subject or a patient, which is an aptitude in it not to resist or to render the action impossible (which reduces to one phrase, namely, the potency of matter); 3) an appropriate application, which is subject to the circumstances of time, place and other conditions.³⁸

Magic, as formulated by Bruno, is not only a thoroughly practical art, but this practicality hinges on a master-slave dialectic in which the active power to perform magic must account for an equally important passive power in the bonded subject. The concept of bonding stresses the relational nature of magic: it is a process of give and take, a strategy produced through the interaction of multiple agents.

This is not to suggest that Prospero does not harbor a desire for omnipotence. Instead, I am suggesting that this fantasy is consistently exposed as just that: an ideal as insupportable as Gonzalo’s labor-free utopia.³⁹ We are repeatedly reminded that Prospero’s magic is only possible with the aid of his laborers. As Goran Stanivukovic remarks, it is “as if Shakespeare is reminding us of the limitations of Prospero’s humanity and proficiency in magic.” Thus before he declares, following the banquet, that Alonso and his party “now are in my power,” Prospero first praises Ariel for following “My instruction” so carefully (3.3.85). Prospero’s “high charms” and power depend, he acknowledges, on the service of his “meaner ministers” (3.3.87). That

³⁷ Giordano Bruno, “On Magic,” in *Cause, Principle, and Unity*, eds. Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Lucca (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁹ Gareth Roberts puts this dynamic nicely: “Throughout the late plays magic operates as a metaphor for both the aspirations and limitations of the poet’s power.” As I have been suggesting, this dialectic between aspirations and limitations extends to the political power that is encoded by magic. Gareth Roberts, “‘An art lawful as eating?’: Magic in *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale*, in *Shakespeare’s Late Plays: New Readings*, eds. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 142.

Prospero's magical power is ultimately nothing more than the labor of his servants is revealed most clearly in the concluding moments of the play. In Prospero's final words before the epilogue, he orders Ariel to perform one final task:

I'll deliver all,
And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales,
And sail so expeditious that shall catch
Your royal fleet far off. My Ariel, chick,
That is thy charge. Then to the elements
Be free, and fare thou well. (5.1.313-18)

This final command occurs after Prospero announces that his "rough magic / I here abjure." (5.1.50-51). After abjuring magic, Prospero is left with only his ability to bind agents to his will, a circumstance suggesting the essential laboring dimensions of magic. Echoing Bruno's logic of magical bonding, the play's depiction of magical power articulates a dynamic of bondage. Though Prospero appears to give up magic, he cannot give up the relations of labor on which his authority depends.

In Bruno's philosophy of magic, the most important mechanism of bondage is love or Eros, which he labels the *vinculum vinculorum*, or chain of chains. As Ioan P. Culianu explains, Bruno uses this concept to denote the magician's "deft exploitation of individual propensities and attitudes in order to create lasting bonds with the purpose of subjugating the individual or the group to the will of the manipulator."⁴⁰ The magician's ability to manipulate others is ultimately a matter of manipulating the bonds of love that unite multiple subjects. It is thus significant that Prospero's most seemingly arbitrary exercise of power involves the establishment of a love match between Ferdinand and Miranda. In a near literalization of Bruno's somewhat vague and

⁴⁰ Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 95.

abstract concept of the bonding power of love, Prospero arranges a dynastic marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda by putting Ferdinand to work gathering logs. In this arrangement, love becomes inseparable from the performance of labor. Ferdinand explains that his “mean task” would be a burden, but his love for Miranda “makes my labours pleasures” (3.1.4, 7). Moreover, there is a very physical connection between Ferdinand’s love for Miranda and his labor. He explains that his “sweet thoughts” of Miranda “do even refresh my labours, / Most busil’est when I do it,” suggesting a mutually constitutive relationship between his performance of labor and his passion for Miranda (3.1.14-15).

The play makes an effort to establish a correlation between Ariel’s and Ferdinand’s servitude under Prospero. Ariel’s enslavement at the hands of Sycorax resulted in his confinement in a “cloven pine” for twelve years (1.2.277). Prospero threatens to repeat this punishment, warning Ariel that he will “rend and oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails” for disobedience (1.2.294-295). Ferdinand similarly understands his servitude as a kind of “wooden slavery,” and himself as a “patient log-man” who must perpetually carry logs for his master (3.1.62, 67). Moreover, Ferdinand, like Ariel, finds that he cannot resist Prospero’s magical power, and laments: “My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up” (1.2.487).

In the enslavement of Ferdinand, the logic of magically bonding spirits is extended and articulated through the drama of love. In orchestrating the love-match between Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero forces Ferdinand to think about love in terms of labor. Thus Ferdinand’s and Miranda’s attempt to express their mutual love is complicated by the practical concern of labor. Ferdinand complains: “The sun will set before I shall discharge / What I must strive to do” (3.1.23-24). This wooing scene is focused as much on the performance of labor as it is on the establishment of a dynastic marriage:

MIRANDA: If you'll sit down
 I'll bear your logs the while. Pray give me that;
 I'll carry it to the pile.

FERDINAND: No, precious creature,
 I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,
 Than you should such dishonor undergo
 While I sit lazy by. (3.1.26-32)

Ferdinand's and Miranda's ability to develop their romantic relationship is predicated on the performance of labor. The imperative to labor is inescapable, establishing the very parameters of the lovers' expression of affection.

What is interesting about Ferdinand's and Miranda's relationship is the fact that Prospero has arranged a dynastic marriage that is based on the recognition of practical limitations rather than unbounded aristocratic privilege. Indeed, even the marriage does not offer Ferdinand a complete escape from his slavery. Instead, it is framed as a new form of slavery, as Ferdinand makes his marriage vow to Miranda "with a heart as wiling / As bondage e'er of freedom" (3.1.88-89). By marrying Miranda, Ferdinand will be freed from his slavery at the hands of Prospero, but he will enter into a different kind of bondage. His experience as an enslaved laborer will inform his marriage, the constraint of labor transformed into sexual restraint when Prospero advises him not to "bestrew / The union of your bed with weeds" (4.1.20-21). Ferdinand evokes his recent slavery when he responds that he will resist sexual temptation by imagining that "Phoebus' steeds are foundered, / Or night kept chained below" (4.1.30-31). The result is that Ferdinand emerges as a different kind of political figure than Naples has hitherto known. Whereas Prospero abandoned practical concerns for the endless possibilities of magical

study, and whereas Sebastian reflects a caricatured Machiavellianism, Ferdinand, as a husband and a king, will be sensitive to the material limitations and determinants to his actions. If the marriage is one of political reconciliation, it also reconciles Ferdinand, the future King of Naples, to the practicalities of life. Forcing Ferdinand to perform labor seems to be part of Prospero's larger plan to rectify the political situation in Naples.

In its political dimensions, then, the play is profoundly concerned with the practical limitations of power, placing labor center-stage as a way of articulating these limitations. As Douglas Bruster has reminded us, however, it is also important to consider the play's "local" elements, its dramatization of the immediate reality of the early modern theater. It is here, too, that labor plays a central role. Bruster goes so far as to suggest that the play is an allegory of Shakespeare's personal relationship with his actors/laborers: "The tension between Prospero and Caliban... embodies that between Shakespeare (and perhaps Burbage) and Will Kemp. It is perhaps not surprising to find Shakespeare suspicious of the uncontrolled, traditionalistic energy of Will Kemp and the anarchic aspects of the folk structures Kemp represented."⁴¹ From this view, Prospero's fraught relationship with Caliban encodes Shakespeare's equally troubled relationship with Will Kemp, who was known for his unruly behavior. But if Prospero is suspicious of the energy of labor, he is also dependent on it. As we have seen, Prospero not only openly acknowledges his dependence on Caliban's labor, but also organizes his scheme on the island in a way that draws out the laboring dimensions of political power. In doing so, the play also highlights the centrality of labor to the theatrical profession, depicting Prospero's theatricality itself as a laborious undertaking.

⁴¹ Douglas Bruster, "Local *Tempest*: Shakespeare and the Work of the Early Modern Playhouse," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1995): 53.

Labor was prominent in the theater to the extent that labor disputes informed the day-to-day business operations of the theater companies. One complaint to city officials from Henry Clifton accuses the Chapel Royal of impressing several children in order to exploit their labor as actors. These children were in “no way able or fit for singing, nor by any of the said confederates endeavoured to be taught to sing, but by them, the said confederates, abusively employed, as aforesaid, only in plays and interludes.”⁴² In this complaint, labor and exploitation are synonymous with acting. Actors themselves could be quite cognizant of this fact, as indicated by a lawsuit of 1597 brought by Francis Langley against several actors who had broken their contracts to perform plays at the Swan Theatre. According to the actors, the breach of contract was due to Langley’s failure to obtain a license to perform plays in London. As a result, the actors gained employment with the Rose Theatre instead, which did have a license to perform plays. In justifying this action, the actors explicitly represent themselves as laborers, contending that “it was to their undoing to continue in idleness” and that “they should help themselves to get their living.”⁴³ Here the complainants counter the common antitheatrical rhetoric that depicted actors as beggars, implicitly positioning themselves as skilled and industrious laborers as opposed to the stereotypical actor-as-beggar so prominent in the antitheatrical imagination.

It is significant, then, that Prospero is so attentive to the agency of his theatrical attendants. In realizing his theatrical undertakings, Prospero repeatedly draws attention to the labor that underpins it. Immediately following the successful staging of the banquet, Prospero praises Ariel’s diligent work: “Bravely the figure of this harpy hast thou / Performed, my Ariel; a

⁴² From “the complaint of Henry Clifton,” in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, eds. Glynne William Gladstone Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 265.

⁴³ From “Francis Langley sues players who have abandoned the Swan for the Rose,” in *English Professional Theatre, 1530-1660*, eds. Glynne William Gladstone Wickham, Herbert Berry, William Ingram (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 444.

grace it had, devouring” (3.3.83-84). In the next scene, Prospero announces the performance of the masque, emphasizing the stage mechanics that make it possible. Again he praises Ariel and “thy meaner fellows” for their work, asking him to “bring the rabble” to the masque, where Prospero will “Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity of mine art” (4.1.35, 40-41).

In having Prospero announce the masque, the play invites the audience to consider the varied meanings of Prospero’s “art.” Within the world of the play, his art indicates the practical application of magic in staging the masque; for the play’s audience, however, art also denotes the skilled artifice of theatrical performance. The result, as Melissa D. Aaron puts it, is that “the theatrical illusion is exposed, usually before it is executed.”⁴⁴ Indeed, Prospero’s continual acknowledgement of his spirits’ efforts not only demystifies magic, exposing it as a practical endeavor dependent on labor; it also represents the theater itself as something that is actively constructed. If Prospero is a stand-in for Shakespeare, as he is so often read, then Shakespeare is directing the audience’s attention to the labor of his theatrical endeavors.

The play’s effort to situate the theatrical performance as an act of labor culminates in Prospero’s epilogue. In a twist, magic becomes directly equated with consumer demand, as Prospero asks the audience to “release me from my bands, / With the help of your good hands” (5.1.327-328). The reference to bands places the erstwhile magician in the position of the spirit who has been bonded into service by magical power. Indeed, when Prospero asks the audience to “set me free,” he evokes his previous promise to Ariel: “I’ll set thee free for this” (1.2.443). In doing so, the epilogue suggests a correlation between the master-servant relationship as it has appeared throughout the play and the audience-actor/playwright relationship. In the play’s final

⁴⁴ Melissa D. Aaron. *Global Economics: A History of the Theater Business, the Chamberlain’s/King’s Men, and Their Plays, 1599-1642* (Cranberry, NJ: Associated Universities Press, 2005), 106.

moments, magic is identified with the power of market consumerism and the actor with the laborer endeavoring to be acknowledged. The epilogue thus serves to remind the audience of the work of the theater and drama, extending the mutual relation between Prospero and his laborers to the relationship between the actors/playwright and the commercial audience.

A good deal of work has been done on the relationship between dramatic authorship and the theatrical market place. Douglas A. Brooks charts the emergence of the modern concept of the author through an examination of the sometimes fraught intersection of dramatic production and early modern England's emerging book trade, suggesting a correlation between the solidification of the author function and the commodification of dramatic literature. Brooks observes that "both the printing trade, organized and embodied as the Stationers' Company, and the English vernacular dramatic tradition, written and performed at the Inns of Court, came into their own at precisely the same historical moment during the early years of Elizabeth's reign."⁴⁵ Nora Johnson makes a similar point, arguing that the early modern theater exemplifies the social constructedness of the author, since it is "where the economics, the collaboration, the physicality of theatrical production speak more forcefully than they do in the printed book – where an audience applauds or hisses – authorship takes its proper place: as a relational form, a contest, a negotiation."⁴⁶

According to Paul Yachnin, the intersection of the theater and market culture had the effect of making the theater a powerless social institution, depriving it of any serious claims to legitimacy and political significance. Yachnin offers a discussion of the strategies that playwrights employed in order to legitimize what was otherwise deemed to be a valueless

⁴⁵ Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23.

⁴⁶ Nora Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

activity driven by base material and commercial motives. Playwrights “had to reinscribe dramatic discourse in some interpretative field or in terms of some foundational value different from the interpretative field and the valuelessness or cultural weightlessness of the powerless theater.”⁴⁷ These strategies, according to Yachnin, were often contradictory: Shakespeare attempted to divest the theater of any public or political elements, stressing instead the theater’s ability to give representation and form to the private sphere; Jonson, on the other hand, attempted to transform the theater into a public sphere, fashioning it as a forum for the negotiation of political discourse.

As I have been suggesting, another source of legitimacy for the early modern theater was the history of labor that invested theatrical practice with an aura of dignity. The idea that labor is a noble and dignified undertaking that possesses value in itself could function as a counterpoint to concerns about the social and cultural debasement deriving from the theater’s commercial impetus. Indeed, acknowledgement and appreciation for the labor of dramatic production and performance was an important enough quality that Dekker focuses on it in his dedication to *If It Be Not Good, The Devil Is In It*. In a dedication to his new patron company, the Queen’s Men, Dekker expresses thanks for the support his new play has received: “Acknowledgment is part of payment sometimes, but it neither is, nor shall be (betweene you and me) a Cancelling. I haue cast mine eye vpon many, but find none more fit, none more worthy, to Patronize this, than you, who haue Protected it.”⁴⁸ He goes on to take a swipe at The Fortune, which had declined to produce his play, noting that “When Fortune (in her blinde pride) set her foote vpon This

⁴⁷ Paul Edward Yachnin, *Stage-wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and the Making of Theatrical Value* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 62.

⁴⁸ Thomas Dekker, *If It Be No Good, The Devil Is In It*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, volume 3, ed. Richard Herne Shepherd (London, 1873), 261.

imperfect Building, (as scorning the Foundation and Workmanship) you, gently raizd it vp.”⁴⁹

This emphasis on acknowledgement as a payment for one’s dramatic workmanship is especially revealing in the context of Dekker’s well-known characterization of the theater as the “poet’s Royal Exchange,” where the only acknowledgment that dramatic labor encounters is the blind forces of the market.⁵⁰ These two characterizations of the theatrical profession suggest a tension between market forces and a mode of artistic production based on models of skilled labor. The workmanship of drama is depicted here as a touchstone – a “foundation” – that transcends or resists the insecurity of the dramatic marketplace.

In drawing attention to the limit-points of performance, *The Tempest* pushes against the consumerist organization of the theater. The labor of performance – the fact that performance must be actively created and supported through material work – is represented as the touchstone of performativity, investing the theatrical with the kind of foundational value that was denied by commercial forces. In this context, Prospero’s farewell to the “insubstantial pageant” of his magical/theatrical endeavors takes on new import (4.1.155). This speech is often read as Shakespeare’s fond farewell to the theater, his acceptance that his own theatrical legacy is like an intangible and “baseless fabric,” or “such stuff / As dreams are made on” (4.1.151, 156-157). But in the same way that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* juxtaposes the immutable labor of the rude mechanicals to the insubstantiality of Puck’s magical performativity, Prospero’s farewell to the “insubstantial pageant” of magic/theater runs counter to the play’s continual emphasis on the material supports – in particular, labor – underpinning theatricality.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 262.

⁵⁰ Thomas Dekker, *The Belman of London* (London 1608).

4.0 THE LABORING BODY AND ARTISANAL CONSCIOUSNESS: *THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY* AND *A SHOEMAKER, A GENTLEMAN*

When at the beginning of Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* Sir Lincoln describes with disgust how his nephew "Became a shoemaker in Wittenberg -- / A goodly science for a gentleman / Of such descent," he expresses succinctly a central characteristic of early modern England's aristocracy: a disdain for labor (1.29-31).¹ As a class marker, the corporeality of labor was viewed negatively relative to the leisure of the aristocracy. As Paul Freedman has argued, while labor was not universally derided or devalued in the medieval and early modern world, the aristocracy treated labor as strictly the province of the lower social orders, its primary value being "that it produced what was necessary for consumption and display" by the aristocratic elite.² The aristocracy was thus inclined to take labor for granted, acknowledging productive activity only insofar as it furnished the material by which the aristocracy could display its own class privilege and distance from economic necessity. As this chapter argues, however, Lincoln's aristocratic disdain for labor, which in the play is heightened by a mercantilist subordination of production to exchange, is challenged by Simon Eyre and his shoemaker apprentices, who locate value in the laboring body and its position within a sustaining communal network. Through readings of Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, this chapter seeks to recover an artisanal perspective that understands value to be the product of the sensuous, bodily labor that connects the individual to the community at large. In making this

¹ All references are to Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, ed. Anthony Parr (New York: Norton, 1990).

² Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 30.

argument, it is not my intention to suggest that artisanal or craft labor was the expression of an untainted or pristine socioeconomic world that was falling victim to proto-capitalist exploitation. On the contrary, the skilled labor of the guild system experienced profound exploitation from at least the late medieval period. Indeed, only three fifths of apprentices even finished their training. But at the level of ideology, artisanal labor was the location of an oppositional way of seeing the world. In artisanal discourses of the period – from guild records and petitions to ballads and plays – the artisan is a symbol of communal cohesion, and in this way is imagined as offering an alternative to the dominant and emerging regimes of value that depreciate bodily labor.

4.1 ARTISANAL CONSCIOUSNESS, OR THINKING WITH THE BODY

Early modern aristocratic and mercantile ideologies relegate the body and its productive potential to the margins of the socioeconomic. Richard Brathwaite, for instance, in his popular account of proper aristocratic behavior, *The English Gentleman*, carefully distinguishes between aristocratic forms of labor and lower-class labor. The aristocrat should not be idle, but he must also avoid giving “too much care to the things of the body,” which pertain to manual labor.³ In his performance of labor, the gentleman represents the “golden meane.”⁴ Having been “from worldly affections weaned,” he will not “slave the noblest motions of the soule to the unworthy bondage of the body...”⁵ The gentleman, in short, engages in a thoroughly disembodied form of labor, serving the noble “affaires of State” rather than the base toils of the body.⁶ In its

³ Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman* (London, 1630), 135.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 135-136.

⁶ Ibid., 136.

understanding of the role of production in economic affairs, mercantile theory can be seen as more fully theorizing and systematizing this aristocratic marginalization of the laboring body. The merchants consistently formulate the relationship between productive labor and abstract value in such a way as to de-emphasize laboring bodies as a source of social and economic worth. Thomas Mun is forthcoming in his awareness of the importance of labor and production to a healthy economic system, contending that because those who “live by the Arts” greatly outnumber the wealthy, “we ought the more carefully to maintain those endeavours of the multitude, in whom doth consist the greatest strength and riches of King and Kingdom.”⁷ But Mun nevertheless views the laboring endeavors of the multitude primarily as a supplement to trade, since “where the people are many, and the arts good, there the traffique must be great, and the Countrey rich.”⁸ More people working means more trade which in turn means more wealth for the nation. The generation of economic wealth is here squarely identified with the circulation of goods and money, and not with laborers, who are important only insofar as they grease the wheels of commerce.

As Joyce Appleby has argued, the rise of mercantilism was part of a paradigm shift in the very conception of value, facilitating a process in which “the economy of sales and exchanges” became separated “from the moral economy of production and sustenance.”⁹ The result was that laborers, increasingly alienated from the social network of production that had sustained them, became “supernumeraries... without a place, without a prescribed life role.”¹⁰ Appleby’s account of the effect that early modern England’s socioeconomic changes had on labor, while highly suggestive, nevertheless makes the mistake of taking the mercantile view of labor at face value,

⁷ Mun, *England’s Treasury*, 31.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 129.

assuming that early modern labor was largely powerless and voiceless against emerging capitalist exploitation. The question that needs to be asked is: to what extent did labor speak on its own behalf? The early modern social world was not, after all, divided neatly between a declining aristocracy, an ascending merchant class, and the placeless poor. Artisanal labor, which in its historical development and socioeconomic role tended to overlap with all three of these categories, remained a significant factor in the shaping of early modern English society. The most notable difference between artisans and the aristocrats and merchants is the bodily orientation of the artisanal worldview. Whereas both aristocrats and merchants, despite their social and economic differences, construct their visions of self and society through the exclusion of the laboring body, artisanal consciousness hinges on an awareness of the central role of the body and labor in the production and reproduction of the social order.

If, for the dominant classes, the body serves to differentiate the common population from the elite, for the artisanal community, on the contrary, the laboring body is what links the individual to society at large, designating the laborer's fundamental value and place within society. This relationship between body and community could manifest in very direct ways, as for instance in the rules for the Weavers, which dictate that any new apprentice

shalbe presented by his master that so shall retayne him unto the sayd Master and Wardens of the sayd craftes and occupation for the tyme being, and there openly to be seen and examined of and upon his or their Birthes and clenes of their bodies and other certen points, for the worship of the sayd citie and honesty of the sayd craftes.¹¹

As the first step towards becoming a master, and thus a citizen, the initiating examination had profound implications not only for the individual apprentice but also for the guild and the city.

The apprentice's body, to this extent, serves as a point of intersection for the guild members and

¹¹ *TED*, 173.

civic authorities. The corporate body of the guild and the individual body of the aspiring guild member are in this moment united, as the social standing of the former is interpreted in terms of the physical well-being of the latter. In this account, the laborer's body is the location of a moral economy of production, with the determination of his physical suitability for artisanal labor serving to affirm the value of civic duty and a sense of social rootedness.

Attention to the body was also, for very practical reasons, a defining feature of early modern artisanal existence. The standard seven year training period for an apprentice was a measure of the length of time that was typically required "to master complicated techniques and competences, which varied greatly between trades and crafts, but which often required a great deal of physical and mental maturation."¹² That this mastery entailed intense physical discipline is suggested by the working conditions of the average apprentice, who commonly spent the early years of the apprenticeship performing unskilled labor in addition to learning the complex intricacies of his/her specific trade.¹³ This learning process could be so emotionally and physically demanding as to constitute, in Peter Searle's words, a "traumatic experience" for the young apprentices, many of whom ran away from their new masters when they could no longer deal with the physical hardship of the training process.¹⁴ Paula Smith similarly frames artisanal training and practices in terms of bodily experience, which she suggests constitutes a uniquely artisanal literacy: "Rather than producing a 'lettered man', such literacy had the goal of making knowledge productive. We might regard this as a nontextual, even a nonverbal literacy."¹⁵ Smith Speculates that "artisans might see reality as intimately related to material objects and the

¹² Llana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), 116.

¹³ See Ben-Amos, 109-132.

¹⁴ Peter Searle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 101.

¹⁵ Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 8.

manipulation of material.”¹⁶ If the artisan manipulates material as part of his or her experience of reality, this manipulation is first and foremost a manipulation of bodily skills and practices.

Smith’s argument suggests a practical basis to artisanal consciousness: if discourses by and about the artisanal community emphasize the body as a source of communal cohesion, this reflects or grows out of the “nonverbal literacy” that underpins artisanal labor and which was fostered by the guild system.

It is helpful to think about the artisanal intersection of bodily skill and perception in relation to recent developments in cognitive theories of mind and body.¹⁷ The basic insight of contemporary cognitive theory is that the mind, contra a dualistic Cartesian model of thought, cannot be understood in isolation from a physical brain and thus, by extension, a physical body. The mind, from this view, is the product of a body that continually interacts with its environment. Alva Noë’s enactive theory of perception has especially useful implications for thinking about artisanal consciousness. For Noë, perception depends not only on bodily interaction with the environment, but more precisely on the implementation of bodily skill. As Noë contends, “If perception is in part constituted by our possession and exercise of bodily skills... then it may also depend on our possession of the sort of bodies that can encompass those skills, for only a creature with such a body could have those skills. To perceive like us, it follows you must have a body like ours.”¹⁸ Having a body and corresponding bodily skills makes possible a sort of virtual perception of the world, so that we experience reality not as something represented to us as in a picture, but as available to us through the proper manipulation of the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ It is not my intention, however, to impose a contemporary understanding of the mind on the early modern period. I would echo Mary Thomas Crane who asks “that we apply to cognitive theory the same tests we apply to other kinds of theory, that is, simply to consider whether it convinces or intrigues or interests us, and whether it provides us with a useful model for interpreting texts and cultures.” Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare’s Brain: Reading With Cognitive Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 10.

¹⁸ Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 25.

bodily skills acquired through lived experience. “The world,” posits Noë, “is within reach and is present only insofar as we know (or feel) that it is.”¹⁹ The perception of reality is not given but enacted by us through the possession and manipulation of bodily skills – or to put it another way, reality as we perceive it is a thoroughly embodied phenomenon, a process of making sense of things through our bodily interaction with the world.

Although, of course, the early modern artisan has no access to cognitive theories of the mind/body connection, the essence of Noë’s treatment of perception as an extension of bodily experience underpins the artisanal worldview. For the artisanal community, skilled labor is the framework in which self and society is conceptualized. The possession of skilled bodily labor is at once what distinguishes the artisan from other classes, and also what unites him or her with the broader society. The early modern artisan, I want to suggest, sees the world in terms of the possession and implementation of skilled bodily labor, and is thus keenly aware of the value that such labor has for the production and reproduction of the social order in its entirety. In this way, a cognitive theory of the body can supplement Marxist understandings of class-consciousness. Marx’s analysis of labor under capitalism begins with that historical moment “when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians.”²⁰ The subsequent tradition of Marxist analysis tends to follow Marx’s lead in thinking about laboring class-consciousness in terms of the absolute dichotomy that pits the rightless proletarian against a system of production which confronts him or her as an outside, alien force. And yet, while this condition of proletarianization has important implications for the laboring body, the topic of the body rarely appears in Marx’s writings. Instead, Marx’s intervention into the history of capitalism takes as its

¹⁹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 876.

starting point a highly developed system of production in which the laboring body is at best an appendage to the mechanisms of profit, an object of capitalist exploitation rather than a subject in control of his or her productive ability.

When Marx, in his early manuscripts, does directly address the laboring body, it is in a distinctly abstract manner. Marx suggests that the natural human body, uncorrupted by alienating capitalist influences, is a holistic and non-alienated one that, through its labor, is capable of connecting individuals one-to-another and to the external world. Marx informs us that this prelapsarian man “lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continual intercourse if he is not to die.”²¹ The outside world, in this view, is an extension of the laboring body, the arena in which the laborer makes and remakes himself physically and mentally. The outside world is the laborer’s “inorganic body,” so that by performing labor he or she constructs a conscious awareness of the self in relation to the world. In this model of labor, body and mind are inseparable.²² Abstracted from historical and material grounding, however, this theory of the body/mind connection remains only an ideal, and it is perhaps for this reason that neither the later Marx nor the majority of his successors have much to say about the corporeal dimensions of consciousness.

Nevertheless, this early Marxian conceptualization of the body, however abstract, offers a potentially fruitful way of approaching early modern artisanal labor – or, rather, artisanal labor provides Marx’s idealistic and ahistorical theory of a bodily basis of laboring consciousness with concrete historical content. For the early modern artisan, the means of production and subsistence is not located in an external apparatus – a factory, for instance – but in his or her own body. The performance of labor is imagined not as an exploitative activity, but on the contrary as

²¹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988), 76.

²² Ibid.

that which allows the artisan to realize his or her skill through the transformation of material resources into finished goods. The artisan, whose bodily skill is the sole source of his or her subsistence, approaches the external world as a part of the self, as a resource to be embraced. Extending Noë's framework to the larger socioeconomic context with which Marx was working, then, we might say that, for the artisan, consciousness of self and of one's relationship to the broader social world is imagined and *enacted* through the medium of bodily labor. For the artisan, the possession of bodily skill as the sole means of subsistence situates the body as the central framework for thinking the world. The body is the source of personal value and meaning for the artisan, and it is also what connects him or her, materially and symbolically, to the world outside of his or her particular body.

The economic precariousness of the early modern artisan seems to have cultivated a profound awareness of the laboring body and its place within the social order. Poised, in this moment of transition, between a feudal apparatus and a more capitalist mode of production, the artisan walks a thin line between maintaining respectable status as skilled laborer and falling into the ranks of the unskilled and often vagrant laborers that constituted such a large portion of London's population. The early modern artisan, in other words, conforms to neither of Marx's versions of labor: he or she is not the laborer of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, nor is he or she the rightless proletarian of *Capital*, but is instead something in between these two poles. The anxiety engendered by this situation is reflected in a 1624 "petition from the Artizan Cloth-workers of the Citie of London," which begins by highlighting the traditional paternal bond uniting subject and sovereign, noting that "in the times of his Maiesties most noble Progenitors, Kings and Queenes of England, the State haue from time to time had an especiall care for the imployment and setting on worke of the said Artizans, and thereupon haue made

diuers good prouisions for their reliefe.”²³ The state has a responsibility to maintain the well-being of the artisanal community. But both this well-being and the paternal relationship between the Crown and the artisans are in peril, for economic conditions have made it so that some artisans

are enforced for want of worke to betake themselues to labour in the Citie as Porters, Waterbearers, and in other such like meane callings; others to returne home into their Countries, and there to be either chargeable to their friends, or to follow husbandry and dayly labour; others to depart the Realme to diuers remote parts in the world, where the secrets of their Art are disclosed, to the preiudice of those Artizans that remaine at home; and others for lacke of imployment are fallen to idlenesse and begging, and betake themselues to other euill courses, to the great scandall of the gouernment of this Commonwealth. And if the Petitioners should not in some measure get worke from the Drapers of London, they might for the most part of them perish for want of food.²⁴

The artisan is in a difficult position: he or she understands his or her labor as valuable and meaningful not because it is labor per se, but because it is inscribed within a network of social relations that extends all the way to the Crown. This network, however, is now threatened, and without it the artisan is reduced to his most basic potential to labor, deprived of the skills, values, and meanings that define the dignity of artisanal labor. But the commonwealth is equally deprived of meaning and dignity, thrown into “great scandal” by the diminishment of the artisanal class. The petition thus imagines the fate of the English state to be bound to that of the artisanal community.

²³ Anon., “The humble Petition of the Artizan Cloth-workers of the Citie of London (London, 1624), 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

Notable about this petition is the interconnection of artisanal and state interests, as if the two entities are ultimately one and the same. Just as the artisan is deprived of the material conditions that support his identity as a skilled laborer, the petition implies that the Crown is for its part deprived of the stability and feudal honor that defined James' "most noble Progenitors." The shattering of the artisan's identity entails a corresponding disintegration of the Crown's connection to the English past. The artisan imagines a direct correlation between his own skilled bodily labor and the means of subsistence, on the one hand, and the maintenance of the state on the other. This connection centers on the skilled production of goods, which is understood to benefit not only the artisanal community but England as a whole. Thus a 1571 petition of guild companies explains,

In olden times past, when the companies of artificers and handicraftsmen of this city reserved to themselves the only use, trade, and exercise of their several arts and handicrafts, the things then pertaining to the said arts were truly workmanly and substantially made and the Queen's Majesty's subjects well and truly served thereof.²⁵

The diminishment of the guilds' control of the production process due to the increase of industrial manufacture results in inferior goods, directly reflecting the quality of the labor producing them: "workmanly" goods can only be made by skilled artisans who control the production process, specifically as it relates to the implementation of bodily skill. Artisanal identity thus appears to be grounded not simply in production, but more precisely in the quality and usefulness of the goods produced, and it is this usefulness which links artisans to the larger community. The artisanal skill that has been actualized in superior goods is a symbolic and

²⁵ Quoted in Michael Berlin, "Broken all in pieces: Artisans and the Regulation of Workmanship in early modern London," in *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 81.

material point of junction between the artisan and English society. For this reason, the reduction in the quality of goods is taken as a direct assault on the artisanal sense of self and community.

Of all the early modern English trades, the Shoemakers were as one of the most intimately connected to processes of production. The Shoemakers (or Cordwainers) guild was unique amongst London's companies, as one of the largest and most widespread crafts to stress the production side of business rather than processes of exchange and financial enterprise. George Unwin, in his extensive study of London's guilds, observes that the Shoemakers "embraced from the first a mercantile element that tended to bring it on the a level with the wealthier crafts, but the industrial elements in them remained predominant, and they were displaced from their leading position by newer mercantile combinations like the Haberdashers and the Salters."²⁶ It was by not expanding the mercantile element of its trade that the Shoemakers' guild fell to the marginal position which would largely define the English shoemaking trade for centuries. Unwin suggests, however, that this marginal position and the company's focus on production yielded a favorable representation of the shoemaker in the popular imagination. As a result of its business practices, "the Cordwainers' company appears throughout the reign of Elizabeth as the champion of the small shoemaker and cobbler against the oppressive middlemen of the Curriers' Company."²⁷ The historical development of the Shoemakers' guild was thus determined in large part by its emphasis on production and manufacture rather than exchange.

The Shoemakers' attention to production was largely oriented toward quality rather than quantity, as indicated by the guild's long struggle to regulate the quality of leather being traded

²⁶ George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938), 83.

²⁷ Ibid. 252.

in England.²⁸ Indeed, many of the public records that pertain to the Shoemakers deal with their efforts to preserve the high quality of the leather being used in the making of shoes. A 1675 “Remonstrance of Shoemakers” complains about those who engross leather so that they can resell it “and neither can nor do convert the same Leather into made Wares.”²⁹ The author requests a “Seizure to take away from all unlawful buyers that cannot work and convert the same Leather in made Wares, and to set such a Fine on the heads of those shoe-makers that may buy Leather lawfully, and yet sell it again Red as it came from the Tanners.”³⁰ Leather is valuable to the extent that it can be transformed through skilled labor into a good that can be used by another person. Engrossers, on the contrary, who “scorns to work, and are become sole Merchants of Leather onely,” undermine the practical value of leather by focusing only on its exchange-value. Skill is elided by the pursuit of profit, so that “the best and ablest Shoe-Maker in all England must stand off until [engrossers] be served.”³¹ The artisanal community’s means of existence – its craft – is directly threatened by a mercantile logic that values buying and selling over useful production. And the fate of the Cordwainers is tied to that of the “Majesties subjects,” who suffer “great discouragement and utter ruin” when the state authorities fail to “stand up for the prosperity of the Land of their Nativity.”³² The Shoemakers have no illusions about the impact that the logic of exchange has on the production process: the unhindered pursuit of wealth neither benefits the laboring community nor enriches the nation, as the merchants would have it, but on the contrary functions to alienate the laborer from the production process and, in doing so, destabilize the nation. By opposing the use-value of labor and the goods it produces to

²⁸ See Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (New York: Blackwell, 1989), 53-65.

²⁹ Anon, “A Remonstrance of Shoemakers” (London, 1675), 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

exchange-value, then, the author attempts to stress the importance of labor to the English community.

The sentiments expressed by the artisanal community point toward an anxiety about the proletarianization of skilled labor within an emerging capitalist system. An abiding faith in the communal dimensions of physical labor appears in these writings as a kind of fallback position, a touchstone of value and meaning. Thus “The Cobler’s Corrant,” a late seventeenth century ballad by Richard Rigby, “a faithful brother of the Gentle-Craft,” situates physical labor as the most enduring feature of the shoemaker’s identity:

With contentment I now am crown’d,
a merry Cobler in my stall;
As he that hath ten thousand pound,
of Gold and Silver at his Call;
And thus my Life I mean to spend,
If I get but Old Shoes to mend.

Long time I lived in Iceland,
And wrought for many a Noble Peer;
Yet now at length, at your command,
I ready am to serve you here;
For nothing more I do contend,
For then to have Old Shoes to mend.³³

On the one hand, Rigby’s ballad is of course a highly romanticized depiction of the artisanal laborer’s life: all he needs to survive is his skilled labor and the means to implement it, not

³³ Richard Rigby, “The Cobler’s Corrant.” http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/ballad_project.

money or aristocratic patronage. But this logic also has practical import which resonates with the artisans' petitions and addresses to the state. Rigby manages to articulate, in especially succinct form, a consciousness which understands physical, skilled labor to possess value and meaning which transcends aristocratic and mercantile class-orientations. Whether or not this view of the laboring body as the fundamental reserve of value is merely fantasy is beside the point. For the fact is that the artisanal community imagines a world in which physical labor is personally and socially sustaining, the reality that underpins the more ephemeral values of nobility and monetary wealth.

Peter Stallybrass speculates that shoemakers in particular were likely to be associated with both the making of social value and exploited labor. The shoemaker, according to Stallybrass, is "materially and symbolically the maker of the social (she or he is the foundation of social *movement* in its most literal sense); at the same time, she or he is the person most trodden upon by a hierarchical society that imagines itself in terms of an elite who put their foot upon those whom they subordinate."³⁴ I would suggest that the shoemaker, due to his or her historical dependence on skilled labor rather than mercantile activity, serves as a privileged representative of an artisanal way of seeing, a worldview in which the sustaining capacity of skilled bodily labor is at the center of personal and social meaning. In petitions, addresses, and ballads, shoemakers formulate an embodied vision of the world. And yet, these artifacts of social consciousness are limited, offering a partial representation of how early modern social and economic dynamics were perceived by the artisanal community. It is with what might loosely be called the artisanal literature of the period that we encounter a more complete formulation of artisanal consciousness. In particular, this literature is revealing in the way that it places artisanal

³⁴ Peter Stallybrass, "Footnotes," *The Body In Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), 320.

consciousness into dialogue with other early modern worldviews. By staging artisanal labor, this literature offers insights into how artisanal consciousness emerges in relation to other social and economic forces and ideologies. Through readings of two plays about laborers, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) and William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (1618), this chapter explores the way laboring bodies are represented as resisting dominant class efforts to deny the value of productive activity. In both plays, aristocratic and bourgeois attitudes toward the value of the laboring body are challenged by an artisanal perspective. The materiality of labor is shown to be the basis of a uniquely artisanal way of seeing the world, and the plays stage a vision of a social world in which the labor of the body is embraced as the source of social and economic value.

4.2 THE LABOR OF COMMUNITY IN DEKKER'S *THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY*

It is tempting to interpret *The Shoemaker's Holiday* as a bourgeois fantasy, a depiction of a London in which self-determination and a bit of luck is all one needs to achieve personal wealth and climb the social ladder. In Paul S. Seaver's words, the play offers a demoralized London populace "a piece of commercial escapism," though, as Seaver speculates, the audience may well have "seen a much more problematic drama scarcely disguised beneath the surface innocence of the play," in particular the economic hardship experienced by so much of the late Elizabethan London community.³⁵ The temptation to see the play's light-hearted take on London's social and economic situation as an exercise in bourgeois ideological obfuscation is understandable: the drama unfolds as a veritable topography of London's nascent capitalist world, detailing the

³⁵ Paul S. Seaver, "The Artisanal World," in *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theater and Politics in London, 1576-1649*, eds. David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87.

obsolescence of the aristocratic elite while seeming to reward the city's ascending commercial class.³⁶ Peter Mortenson has even suggested that the play endorses a mercantilist doctrine, arguing that "Dekker's conceptual notions reflect those of the merchants: wealth is a fixed pie; an increase in one's position depends upon the diminution of another's."³⁷

The Shoemaker's Holiday, however, while undoubtedly reflecting a mercantilist worldview, does not valorize or reify this doctrine. Instead, what we find in the play is a tension between three models of economic and social value: an aristocratic sense of inherent value and social importance, a mercantilist or proto-capitalist vision in which all value is understood in commercial terms, and a counter-discourse, associated with the artisanal community, which locates the laboring body as the source of value and social meaning. The play takes advantage of the ideological tensions between the emerging bourgeoisie and the declining aristocracy to open up a space for the acknowledgment of the productive value of laboring bodies. I want to suggest, moreover, that the apparently fantastical nature of the play – its unrelenting emphasis on a frictionless process of social mobility – does not obscure the darker, more problematic dimensions of the play – the economic and social realities associated with England's nascent capitalism – but in fact works to draw them out and expose them to scrutiny. In doing so, the play presents the artisanal community as the sole social agent capable of resisting the disruptive effects of emerging commercial forces and maintaining communal integrity. The play, in short, suggests that social order is sustained by a consciousness of the social and economic importance of labor. The artisanal experience serves as the starting point for a consciousness which, moving beyond the ideological limits of aristocratic and commercial perspectives, sees the material body

³⁶ For an account of the historically accurate and realistic basis for the play's social types, see W.K. Chandler, "The Sources of the Characters in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *Modern Philology* 27.2 (November 1929): 175-182.

³⁷ Peter Mortenson, "The Economics of Joy in *The Shoemakers' (sic) Holiday*," *Studies in English Literature* 16.2 (Spring 1976): 247.

and its products as the lynchpin of social cohesion. The social world, the play suggests, must be actively produced, and the preservation of social order and community is best understood as an act of labor.

Like many comedies of the 1590s, the dramatic thrust of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* hinges on a romantic plot that stresses the tension between the aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie. The Earl of Lincoln's discussion of the romantic relationship between his nephew, Roland Lacy, and Rose, daughter to Sir Oatley, Mayor of London, articulates a perceived mutual opposition between the aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie. In forbidding Lacy to pursue his affection for "a gay, wanton, painted citizen," Lincoln voices a distinctly essentialist conception of class identity, noting that both he and Oatley "hate the existence of his blood with thine" (1.77, 79). Lincoln further attempts to convince Lacy of the seriousness of his class transgression by appealing to the sense of honor attached to his aristocratic blood, encouraging him to fight in France for the English cause and to remember "What honourable fortunes wait on thee" if he "Increase[s] the King's love which so brightly shines / And gilds thy hopes" (1.81-83). Lacy reassures his father by building on these romantic aristocratic values:

My Lord, I will for honour – not desire
Of land or livings, or to be your heir –
So guide my actions in pursuit of France
As shall add glory to the Lacy's name. (1.86-89)

Oatley, for his part, contends that Rose is "Too mean... for [Lacy's] high birth," positioning the aristocracy on an inaccessible rung of the social ladder (1.11). Oatley's concern, however, does not reflect a sense of class inferiority, but stems rather from his own class interests. A citizen who thrives on financial savvy cannot tolerate a courtier who will spend "More in one year than I

am worth by far” (1.14). The romance between Lacy and Rose thus evinces two competing class perspectives – one aristocratic and the other bourgeois – with both parties involved seeming to agree on their basic incompatibility. The conflict over Lacy’s romantic inclinations functions to oppose a rigidly essentialist vision of class identity to a more bourgeois model in which worth is measured in terms of hard-nosed financial calculation. The affection between their children, Lincoln and Oatley agree, is not enough to overcome the two families’ fundamentally different attitudes towards wealth.³⁸

That Lacy’s promise to his uncle proves false as he proceeds to adopt the disguise of Hans, a Dutch shoemaker, to escape his military duties suggests the irrelevance of Lincoln’s aristocratic pretensions.³⁹ Indeed, the aristocracy begins to appear not only purposeless but, as Seaver notes, “it seems a class that has lost its attractiveness even to its privileged members.”⁴⁰ This is all but acknowledged by Lincoln, who informs Oatley that Lacy abandoned his Grand Tour, a traditional staple of aristocratic coming-of-age, after he grew “Ashamed to show his bankrupt presence here [and] Became a shoemaker in Wittenberg” (1.28-29). Especially important about this acknowledgment is the way it not only highlights the decay of aristocratic superiority but also exposes the fundamental economic underpinnings of aristocratic privilege. The aristocratic lifestyle is unsustainable on its own merits. It is not inherently valuable but must be sustained, in the final analysis, by actual labor. The romantic plot that opens the play thus encodes both a demystification of the aristocratic ideology of inherent value and a tacit

³⁸ Even as they agree on the need to undermine the marriage, they cannot help but express their mutual dislike. Don E. Wayne explains: “While [Oatley and Lincoln] collaborate in obstructing a marriage that would join their families, there is no mistaking the element of hostility that governs their dialogue.” Don E. Wayne, “A Pox on Your Distinction”: Humanist Reformation and Deformations of the Everyday in *The Staple of News*,” in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, eds. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 75.

³⁹ For a discussion that sees the Dutch presence not as a class question but in terms of the play’s religious agenda, see Julia Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove: The Plays of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16-35.

⁴⁰ Seaver, 100.

acknowledgement of the importance and value of labor. That Lacy resorts to shoemaking a second time to escape the pressures of aristocratic life – declaring, “The Gentle Craft is living for a man!” – further positions labor as a mode of activity which underpins the dominant classes’ competing narratives of social and economic value (3.24).

If early modern marriage was typically a means for solidifying class identity and interests, the animosity between Oatley and Lincoln regarding the cross-class relationship of their children evinces a lack of such a cohesive class structure, exposing instead the class tensions within and between dominant factions.⁴¹ But this tension does not produce an irreparable tear in the social fabric, a void in the place of a coherent system of social meaning and value. It is instead the artisanal class that fills the void left by the feuding aristocracy and bourgeoisie. At this moment, Lacy’s discussion of his plans to ignore his father’s advice and transgress class boundaries is interrupted by the arrival of Simon Eyre and his shoemaking apprentices on the scene, who seek the release of Ralph, one of Eyre’s apprentices, from military conscription. Recognizing Ralph’s predicament as an opportunity to escape his own military duties, Lacy refuses to heed their appeals, claiming that he “cannot change a man” (1.148). In contrast to Lacy’s disruptive behavior, which severs communities and undermines social cohesion, Eyre and company use this situation to demonstrate an overriding concern for communal accord. Firk, another apprentice, asks Lacy to take into account Ralph’s recent marriage to Jane, pointing out that “You shall do God good service to let Ralph and his wife stay together. She’s a young, new married woman. If you take her husband away from her a-night, you undo her. She may beg in the daytime; for he’s as good a workman at a prick and an awl as

⁴¹ Lawrence Stone notes that despite a trend towards companionate marriage in the late Elizabethan period, “The first and most traditional motive for marriage is the economic or social or political consolidation or aggrandizement of the family [which] tended to be the predominant motive at the top and also towards the bottom of the social scale.” Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 271.

any is in our trade” (1.138-142). When this appeal to family unity and the corresponding preservation of sexual propriety fails to persuade Lacy, Eyre is forced to acknowledge the harsh economic implications of Ralph’s leaving: Jane’s status as a wife will be sullied by a life of labor, as her “fine hand, this white hand, these pretty fingers must spin, must card, must work” (1.210-211).

By allowing Ralph to take his place in the war, then, Lacy not only betrays the filial, social, and national obligations that define him as an aristocrat, but threatens the fundamental patriarchal integrity of the domestic unit, which was so central to England’s basic socioeconomic functioning as to leave “virtually no place at all for the single man or woman taking up an occupation alone.”⁴² It is Eyre who resists the destabilizing impact of Lacy’s actions, using Ralph’s conscription and the domestic hardship it creates as an opportunity to espouse the honor of artisanal labor, encouraging Ralph to “Fight for the hounour of the Gentle Craft, for the Genlemen Shoemakers, the courageous cordwainers, the flowers of Saint Martin’s, the mad knaves of Bedlam, Fleet Street, Tower Street and Whitechapel” (1.214-218). This expression of honor differs markedly in two ways from the preceding conversation between Lincoln and Lacy. First, whereas Lincoln encourages Lacy to fight in the name of national and family honor, hoping to use the King’s cause in France as a means for securing the prestige of the Lacy family, Eyre defines honor in far more specific collective terms, his words encompassing not only London’s shoemakers but also its “mad knaves” and the diverse manufacturing and laboring community of the city. Eyre’s speech affirms the social worth of London society’s most marginalized members. And second, in contrast to Lacy’s deceptive and strategizing affirmation of national and family honor, Eyre’s rallying cry is precisely that – an effort to raise his

⁴² Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 228.

companions' spirits and assert the fellowship of the laboring community despite the destabilization threatened by Lacy's presence. Eyre, with his communal perspective and emphasis on the fellowship of labor, acts as a centripetal social force that opposes Lacy's unsettling influence.

A common reading of the play discovers a class fantasy guiding the drama. In Kasten's words, the play is "a fantasy of class fulfillment that would erase the tensions and contradictions created by the nascent capitalism of the late sixteenth-century."⁴³ But as suggested by the failure of Oatley and Lincoln to consolidate their respective class hegemonies through marriage arrangements, neither the urban, increasingly bourgeoisified aristocracy, nor Oatley's citizen bourgeoisie is capable of erasing class tensions. On the contrary, the play would seem to draw out those conflicts and contradictions. Even the most seemingly light-hearted and conciliatory interactions amongst characters express class tension, as when Oatley welcomes the newly wealthy Eyre "into our society," presumably referring to London's elite bourgeois community (11.8-9). Responding to Eyre's characteristic joviality, Oatley proclaims, "I had rather than a thousand pound I had an heart but half so light as yours" (11.18-19). Eyre's reply – "Why, what should I do, my Lord? A pound of care pays not a dram of debt" – evinces more than a naïve care-free disposition: whereas Oatley understands personal qualities like happiness to be determined by purchasing power, as something to be acquired in exchange for a thousand pounds, Eyre's attitude resists the reified perspective that subordinates happiness to the circulation of wealth.⁴⁴

⁴³ David Scott Kasten, "Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *Studies in Philology* 84.3 (Summer 1987): 325.

⁴⁴ Eyre's lack of a financial perspective accords with the historical development of the Cordwainers guild. George Unwin, in his extensive study of London's guilds, observes that the Cordwainers failed to develop as a commercial enterprise and remained focused primarily on manufacture. The Cordwainers "embraced from the first a mercantile element that tended to bring it on the a level with the wealthier crafts, but the industrial elements in them remained predominant, and they were displaced from their leading position by newer mercantile combinations like the

While it is easy to see Eyre as an idealized self-fashioning bourgeois subject, or “a figure who creates himself through his language and role playing as a significant subject of history,” the performance of his new bourgeois identity is not self-determined but supported, as he gratefully acknowledges, by the loyalty and hard work of his apprentices.⁴⁵ Indeed, in opposition to Oatley’s consumerist perspective, Eyre, as a shoemaker, a skilled producer of goods, is guided in his social perspective by his experience with productive labor.⁴⁶ Thus, after learning Hans’s true aristocratic identity, Eyre nevertheless vows to support him in his effort to win approval for marrying Rose. This support reflects not merely Eyre’s goodwill but, more crucially, his profound appreciation of the laboring community as the basis of his prosperity and increased social influence:

Lady Madgy, thou hadst never covered thy Saracen’s head with this French flap, nor loaden thy bum with this farthingale – ‘tis trash, trumpery, vanity! – Simon Eyre had never walked in a red petticoat, nor wore a chain of gold, but for my fine journeyman’s portagues [gold coins]; and shall I leave him? No. Prince am I none, yet bear a princely mind. (17.15-20)⁴⁷

It is not so much the portagues that have provided these riches, but Lacy’s loyalty as an apprentice to his master, a sense of loyalty that Eyre seeks to reciprocate by supporting his marriage to Rose. Eyre thus recognizes not merely the ability of labor to produce goods – his words suggest a deeper understanding of his laborers’ productive capacity, an awareness of labor

Haberdashers and the Salters.” George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938), 83.

⁴⁵ Brian Walsh, “Performing Historicity in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*,” *Studies in English Literature* 46.2 (Spring 2006): 324.

⁴⁶ For a contrasting reading that sees the differing perspectives of the characters as moral rather than class based, see Michael Manheim, “The Construction of *The Shoemakers’* (sic) *Holiday*,” *Studies in English Literature* 10.2 (Spring 1970): 315-323.

⁴⁷ For a sustained consideration of Eyre’s various moments of banter with Mistress Eyre, see Roy J. Booth, “Meddling With Awl: Reading Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (With a Note on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*),” *English* 41.171 (Autumn 1992): 193-211.

as the sustaining force for the material conditions on which happiness and communal well-being are grounded. Indeed, it is with this speech that the plot of the play is tied together and the denouement rendered possible. It may be the King who ultimately sanctions the marriage between Rose and Lacy, but it is Eyre's respect and sense of responsibility for his apprentice that facilitates the play's happy resolution.

It is therefore a mistake to interpret Eyre's sense of fellowship as offering a class fantasy in the place of class tensions. Those tensions still remain, but they open up a space for labor to emerge as the foundational bastion of social meaning and order. The play's concluding holiday, the massive banquet that caters to everyone from London's apprentices to the King, is presented as primarily serving the interests of the laboring class, as Eyre directs Hodge to "cover me those hundred tables again, and again, till all my jolly prentices be feasted" (20.15-16). Although the feast's most prominent guest represents a feudal, aristocratic social system, Eyre's concern for sharing his wealth with the entire community actually stands in stark contrast to early modern England's decaying feudal framework of social interdependency. Increasing its conspicuous consumption in order to compete with the growing commercial middle-classes, the aristocracy was compelled to exchange an ideology of communal responsibility for one of self-interest. Already by the late medieval period, the aristocracy's consumption patterns were growing more and more private, undermining feudal relations of dependency and paternalism.⁴⁸ In contrast to the increasingly commercial drive of aristocratic consumption patterns – exemplified in the play by the financially unrestrained Lacy – the massive banquet that Eyre organizes is not oriented towards conspicuous consumption or private enjoyment but rather the immediate satisfaction of the artisanal community's needs. Eyre certainly engages in market consumption, directing Hodge

⁴⁸ For a discussion of changing aristocratic consumption patterns, see Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, 1200-1520* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

and Ralph to “run, my tall men, beleaguer the shambles, beggar all Eastcheap, serve me whole oxen in chargers, and let sheep whine upon the table like pigs for want of good fellows to eat them” (20.25-28). Unlike the declining aristocracy, however, whose consumption practices were becoming increasingly private, a selfish indulgence in London’s consumerist excesses, Eyre’s consumption is, on the one hand, market oriented, tapping into the possibilities offered by “all Eastcheap,” but also profoundly practical, a matter of supplying meat for a laboring population that “would eat it an’ they had it” (20.21-22).

The utopian element of Eyre’s altruism, its fantasy vision of social wholeness, is not escapist but works to oppose a troubling, and very real economic dynamic. In an era in which consumerist market forces are rapidly dissolving a feudal subsistence economy geared towards the production of use-values, Eyre’s communal implementation of his newfound wealth presents the possibility of a social world where the spheres of production and consumption are inseparable, mutually reinforcing moments in the socioeconomic process. In this world, the class that produces goods, through the implementation of skilled bodily labor, is also the class that benefits from the fruits of that labor, the products of labor sustaining the bodies that made them. This unity of production and consumption is reflected in the ease with which Eyre takes on his new identity as a man of wealth and prestige. When he dons the velvet coat and alderman’s gown after receiving Lacy’s portagues, Hodge remarks that “now you look like yourself, master!” (7.114). Firk comments that Eyre is “like a threadbare cloak new turned and dressed,” and expresses amazement “to see what good raiment doth!” (7. 117-118). On the one hand, the teasing by Eyre’s companions indicates a certain skepticism of clothing’s real social value, an awareness of its function as a superficial token of imagined self-worth and social status. But Hodge’s remark, in particular, suggests also that Eyre has earned his new apparel and its

attendant prestige. Furthermore, Eyre does not use this wealth to break with his past as a member of the artisanal community. In the newly appareled Eyre, Hodge does not see a shoemaker transformed into a wealthy member of the upper class, but an artisan who directly experiences the wealth that labor produces. In the eyes of the artisanal community, then, Eyre is more than this wealthy apparel, which seems only an external sign of his (and by extension his class's) true worth.

The shoemakers seem largely defined by an awareness of the interrelation of labor and wealth. Eyre's new apparel does not so much signify his upward mobility as reflect instead the artisanal community's unique perspective with respect to issues of wealth and want, production and consumption. Thus Eyre treats Lacy's gift of portagues not as a ticket out of the laboring class but as an opportunity to celebrate and better the lives of his apprentices.⁴⁹ On one level, then, this artisanal consciousness appears as class solidarity, as when the wounded Ralph returns to the workshop after losing his legs in war. In response to his lament that he "want[s] limbs to get whereon to feed," Hodge replies: "Limbs? Hast thou not hands, man? Thou shalt never see a shoemaker want bread, though he have but three fingers on a hand" (10.79-83).⁵⁰ The scene's emphasis on the wounded body in articulating its vision of laboring comradeship suggests a conception of value at odds with competing models of wealth. Value and wealth – in Ralph's case, the basic means of sustenance – are made possible through physical labor, and do not derive from ineluctable essence or market forces. Hodge's encouragement of Ralph, like Eyre's

⁴⁹ Patricia Thomson has also noted Eyre's loyalty to his class despite his newfound wealth: "As Lord Mayor he remains what he was: a member of his gild and class." Patricia Thomson, "The Old Way and the New Way in Dekker and Massinger," *The Modern Language Review* 51.2 (April 1956): 169.

⁵⁰ Hodge's support is especially significant since, as A.L. Beier has shown, "Servants and apprentices were indeed most prone to vagrancy of all London's socio-economic groups, accounting for almost three-quarters of the Londoners whose occupations were listed in Bridewell records from 1597 to 1608, thus surpassing even their substantial share of the labour force." *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London; New York: Routledge, 1985), 44. Without the support of the guild, Ralph would be a prime candidate for this unfortunate fate.

determination to share his wealth with his apprentices, locates value – social, moral, and economic – in sensuous, lived communal experience. In this vision, wealth and want are not mutually opposed conditions or disparate class orientations, but moments in a single process: want is the motivation behind productive laboring activity, which in turn can alone satisfy want.

It is important that Hodge's valuation of labor occurs in response to the sight of Ralph's wounded body. The wounded body, as that which both hinders its possessor and engenders a sense of the need to overcome this existential obstacle, figures here the complex nexus of labor, sensuous bodily experience, and personal and communal wealth. Ralph's maimed body and the response it engenders in Hodge points up the reciprocal relationship between the body and the external world, subject and object. The ability to produce, to go to work on the world, is depicted not as an unfortunate burden but as an opportunity somehow to regenerate the lost body, not literally but to the extent that the wounded body, in order to satisfy its wants, must supplement itself with the social and material products of labor. "Since I want limbs and lands," concludes Ralph, "I'll to God, my good friends, and to these my hands" (10.110-111). Ralph's want of body and wealth does not marginalize him from others, does not render him unviable in the eyes of his community, but is on the contrary an invitation to view that community as an extension of his own body. In this way, Ralph's wounds position the laboring body as the locus for a uniquely artisanal conception of value and meaning, encompassing everything from personal survival and communal support, to material and spiritual satisfaction.

Thus Ralph's linking of the body to the world outside is not taken in abstraction. It is rather the practical result of his dependence for survival on the performance of skilled physical labor. When the ability to perform this labor is threatened, his thoughts turn to the way that the community of which he is a member might help him to conserve and cultivate the bodily

potential that remains. In her novel re-reading of Marx's labor theory of value, Elaine Scarry discusses precisely this reciprocal interaction between the body and the external world.

Extending her basic thesis that "physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content" and is therefore capable of making and unmaking the conceptual content of the world in which we live, Scarry identifies a similar dynamic in the process of labor: "In the attempt to understand making, attention cannot stop at the object (the coat, the poem), for *the object is only a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the makers.*"⁵¹ The shoemaker's body, exemplified in this scene by Ralph's wounded body, the body in pain, is precisely such a "fulcrum or lever": it is the lynchpin that connects self and other, allowing the laborer to fashion and extend himself by treating the world outside not as a hostile alien presence but as a surrogate self.

It is possible to interpret the play's emphasis on the laboring body as symptomatic of a tacit ideological agenda, an effort to obscure the harsh reality of the early modern laboring class beneath a romanticized version of laboring existence. Ronda Arab argues along these lines: "The increased status given to the productive body deflects attention from the transformation of working men into a laboring class. Thus, ironically, the adulation of the artisan body makes possible its pacification and submission to capitalist work regimes."⁵² But the very act of identifying the laboring body as productive of economic and social value disrupts any effort to subject the body to capitalist command. Instead, the laboring body is depicted as an autonomous, socially constitutive force which is capable of existing independently of commercial and market

⁵¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5, 307. Italics in the original.

⁵² Ronda Arab, "Work, Bodies, and Gender in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 13 (2001): 185.

regimes. This is made especially clear with the recurring theme of shoes as a sign of communal cohesion. Ralph presents Jane with a pair of shoes before he leaves for war:

Now, gentle wife, my loving, lovely Jane,
Rich men at parting give their wives rich gifts,
Jewels and rings to grace their lily hands.
Then know'st our trade makes rings for women's heels.
Here, take this pair of shoes cut out by Hodge,
Stitched by my fellow Firk, seamed by myself,
Made up and pinked with letters for thy name.
Wear them, my dear Jane, for thy husband's sake,
And every morning, when thou pull'st them on,
Remember me, and pray for my return. (1.228-237)

These shoes, in contrast to the rich gifts purchased by rich men on the market, are not commodities. Instead, they embody the autonomous, unalienated labor that immediately signifies the cohesion of the artisanal community.⁵³ The value that the shoes possess is not monetary and abstract but communal and tangible, signifying a lived community of labor rather than an external market system. This is a community in which the skilled realization of labor serves as the touchstone of personal and social reality. Hence Ralph does not focus on the shoes as finished products, but instead stresses the multiple skills that constitute the production process. The stitching, seaming, and pinking which, taken together, produced the shoes, represent so many members of the artisanal community. The shoes, which embody various forms of skilled

⁵³ Jonathan Gil Harris argues that the scene “invites the audience to view the shoes less as a love-token for Jane than as a homage to the artisans’ property of fellowship and association.” Jonathan Gil Harris, “Properties of Skill: Product Placement in Early English Artisanal Drama,” *Staged Properties in Early Modern Drama*, eds. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51.

labor, are synecdochal representations of real people who belong to a real community. Ralph will know Jane by these shoes, not because of their sentimental or monetary worth but because they connect, in a sensuous way, her body to the laboring bodies of the shoemakers.

As a physical and emotional token that links Ralph, Jane, and the artisanal community that produced them, the shoes represent an alternative to Marx's account of labor in the capitalist system. Marx's classic insight into the commodity system is that it alienates producers from their products, labor from the market mechanisms of exchange, thereby "reflect[ing] the social relations of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers."⁵⁴ But unlike the alienated laborer, who is confronted by the products of his labor as by an alien violence, Ralph is able to reunite with Jane after their separation precisely by his personal connection to the products of his labor. Thus when Hammon's servingman solicits Ralph to make more shoes on the model of Jane's, Ralph immediately recognizes that in those shoes "trode my love./ These true-love knots I pricked. I hold my life, / By this old shoe I shall find out my wife" (14.47-49). Ralph thus identifies the shoe by the labor it embodies – and not as a commodity in the abstract. Indeed, if commodification works by exchanging the particularities of labor for an abstract general equivalent, Jane's shoes, in contrast, are defined by the use-value that makes them unique. The shoes retain their unalienated quality, representing social relations between people and not relations of exchange between material objects or commodities. As the fruit of Ralph's laboring body, and as goods designed to mold perfectly to Jane's body, the shoes affirm the bodily immediacy of the artisanal community over against an abstract and disembodied market system.

The contradiction between a productive laboring subjectivity and a commercial perspective is further drawn out by the romantic tensions between Jane, Ralph and Hammon.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. I*. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 165.

When Hammon discovers that Jane is already married to Ralph, he attempts to barter for her, offering Ralph “twenty pound” in “fair gold” (18.79-80). In refusing to commodify his wife, Ralph makes specific reference to his position as an artisan, asking Hammon if “thou think a shoemaker is so base to be a bawd to his own wife for commodity?” (18.84-85). It is not an inherent moral superiority, then, that enables Ralph to resist the logic of commodification, but his identity as an artisan, a notion seconded by Firk’s disgust at Hammon’s proposal: “A shoemaker sell flesh and blood – O indignity!” (18.88). In the same way that the shoes retain their connection to flesh and blood laborers, Jane, as a member of the artisanal community, remains in the eyes of her companions a flesh and blood person, and not an abstract commodity.

Hammon, as a wealthy gentleman, is not a laborer or a producer of goods, and this class orientation is reflected in his desire for Jane. When Hammon first approaches Jane, she is selling goods at a sempster’s shop. In response to her call, “What is’t you lack, sir? Calico, or lawn, / Fine cambric shirts, or bands? What will you buy?,” he answers: “That which thou wilt not sell” (12.22-23, 24). Indeed, Hammon’s account of his desire for Jane could just as well express his appetite for a new commodity: he confesses to having stood outside the shop window where she works “In frosty evenings, a light burning by her, / Enduring biting cold only to eye her” (12.16-17). Hammon’s unrequited affection for Jane highlights an economic system that thrives on desire, a system in which consumption does not satisfy want but only heightens it, playing on the lack at the heart of desire. That Jane will not sell her affection or her body does not prevent Hammon from trying to acquire her, and he wastes no time before offering to “pay you for the time which shall be lost” if she were to come with him (12.32). But just as Ralph’s refusal to commodify Jane is not a reflection of his superior moral status, Hammon’s attempt to purchase Jane as a prostitute speaks more to his class position than to any moral or ethical flaw. The

troubled romantic relation between Jane and Hammon draws out class contradictions: as a consumer in the London marketplace, Hammon cannot approach Jane as a fellow human being but only as a good to be purchased, as a commodity displayed within a shop window.

Romance in the play thus encodes the differential class perspectives pertaining to an emerging capitalist system, illustrating the tension at the center of a society which separates the spheres of production and consumption. Hammon's objectifying treatment of Jane reflects a consumerist attitude; in contrast, Ralph's treatment of Jane, from his gift of personally manufactured shoes to his refusal to reduce her flesh and blood existence to an exchange-value, reflects a laboring subjectivity that values social relations between people rather than things.⁵⁵ That the play valorizes the latter rather than the former is perhaps most profoundly indicated by Lacy's love for Rose. Indeed, Lacy's affection at times seems to conflate the ideal of love with the practical, more down-to-earth need to engage in labor to survive. He voices the common early modern theme of love as a transcendental force which can override social and economic barriers:

O love, how powerful art thou, that canst change

High birth to bareness, and a noble mind

To the mean semblance of a shoemaker! (3.10-12)

In praising love, Lacy finds himself in fact acknowledging labor as that which is capable of sustaining his romantic pursuits. Love may conquer all, but it is his labor as a shoemaker which "will further me / Once more to view her beauty, gain her sight" (3.17-18). Even the King recognizes the material labor that underpins Lacy's love: he contends that "love respects no blood" before noting that it was Lacy's willingness and ability to "stoop / To bare necessity

⁵⁵ For more on the relationship between gender relations and the play's class dynamics, with particular focus on Simon and his wife, see Ann C. Christensen, "Being Mistress Eyre in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*," *Comparative Drama* 42.4 (2008): 451-480.

and... To gain her love become a shoemaker” that made this love-match possible (21.105, 109-111). Thus whereas Hammon seeks to gain love through the exchange of money, Ralph, Lacy and, indeed, the King understand love as rooted in the social relations established by the labor process. By sanctioning the marriage between Rose and Lacy, then, the King not only legitimates cross-class relations but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, the artisanal community which has facilitated this romantic pursuit.

There are two standard readings of the play’s conclusion. One posits ideological closure and the containment of class tensions. For David Bevington, “Social discontent is purged in the play’s closure by the fact that Eyre and his shoemakers get what they want, yet without undue abrasiveness.”⁵⁶ The other reading argues the opposite, contending, in the words of Marta Straznicky, that the conclusion does not resolve class tensions but instead “invites the audience to share in the shoemakers’ triumphant appropriation of commercial and political, thus not only reinforcing but also reinventing the interests of the apprentices and industrial capitalists among them.”⁵⁷ Amy Smith similarly argues that the concluding marriage ceremony does not resolve the contradictions that have emerged in the play, but “instead that this marriage embodies them.”⁵⁸ The play’s conclusion does not seem as tidy as Bevington’s reading suggests, though a certain sense of social harmony does prevail in the final scene. At the same time, however, Straznicky’s reading may place too much emphasis on the commercial dimensions of the shoemaking community. Smith is correct to see the marriage as an embodiment of class

⁵⁶ David Bevington, “Theater as Holiday,” in *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theater and Politics in London, 1576-1649*, eds. David L. Smith, Richard Strier and David Bevington (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116.

⁵⁷ Marta Straznicky, “The End(s) of Discord in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*,” *SEL* 36.2 (Spring 1996): 368.

⁵⁸ Amy L. Smith, “Performing Cross-Class Clandestine Marriage in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*,” *Studies in English Literature* 45.2 (Spring 2005): 347.

contradictions and tensions, but the function of the play's refusal to purge these tensions is unclear.

It would seem, instead, that the King's presence at the concluding feast manages both to gesture towards ideological resolution while also preserving class tensions. While the King appears to embrace Eyre as an equal, there is nevertheless a sense that this gesture is at best merely formal, a way of disguising elitism as tolerance. The King is concerned to maintain a respectful distance from Eyre, sanctioning Eyre's social mobility while not assimilating Eyre's artisanal disposition into an aristocratic framework. The King wishes to "behold this huffcap," but is also worried that "when we come in presence, / His madness will be dashed clear out of countenance" (19.10-12). To avoid this situation, the King requests that Eyre be informed "'tis our pleasure / That he put on his wonted merriment" (19.14-15). When Eyre arrives, the King reiterates his request: Eyre should freely express his laboring subjectivity, behaving "As if thou wert among thy shoemakers" (21.14). The King's presence brings different classes together only to reaffirm their differences.

But if the King's formal gesture towards communal cohesion works to preserve social conflict and tension, it is not the King whose worldview ends up defining the play's conclusion. While the King's concluding request that "all shake hands" pretends to resolve, in a formal manner, the class tensions between Lincoln and Oatley, we are reminded by Eyre that this conciliatory gesture takes place in "my poor house" amongst his apprentices (21.119, 124). In a way, Eyre's remark serves to prioritize what is important, a reminder that underneath, and indeed propping up, the agonistic posturing of the dominant classes are laboring bodies. In the end, social agency is left with the artisanal community, the King's legitimation of the world of artisanal production opening up an alternative space for the emergence of an artisanal

consciousness. The artisanal community presents a worldview which, grounded in the material and communal labor of the body, is able to see past the ideological tensions and faultlines that inform the dominant classes. In contrast to the conflicting positions of aristocratic essentialism and commercialism, the shoemakers represent an embodied understanding of value and meaning. The social world, from the artisanal perspective, is made, not given. Where aristocratic and commercial conceptions of social order and cohesion fail, the shoemakers' worldview succeeds, grounding social order in the communal sensuousness of the laboring body. The play intervenes in a critical historical moment, pushing against the depreciation of labor that characterized the emergence of capitalism. Responding to a system that was objectifying workers, the play subjectivizes labor, giving it a prominent voice and determinant place within the social.

III. Remembering Labor in Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*

The class tensions at the center of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* are often intertwined with the articulation of a national identity. With particular reference to *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Andrew Fleck contends: "The comedies of the 1590s, with their romanticized plots of social mobility for the London tradesmen and their staging of foreigners as blocking agents to English advancement, instill nationalist feeling among London's workers."⁵⁹ But it is possible to see the nationalist elements in a play like Dekker's as serving a different purpose. Nationalism was an emergent, and as a result, highly fluid discourse in early modern England. Accordingly, nationalist texts, literary or otherwise, do not reflect a political reality but "are actively engaged in constructing – and deconstructing – [England's] origin-myths, in blurring, as well as

⁵⁹ Andrew Fleck, "Marking Difference and National Identity in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*," *Studies in English Literature* 46.2 (Spring 2006): 351.

bolstering its boundaries.”⁶⁰ As an emerging and unstable discourse, nationalism is not a finished category to be imposed by or on a particular social group, but an open field of contestation. Early modern nationalism’s open-endedness allows us to see it as a site of conflict between various class, cultural, and political interests: if national sentiment could function to indoctrinate or discipline the laboring class, it could also serve to empower workers.

This latter possibility is especially evident in William Rowley’s *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*, which also loosely adopts the genre of city comedy to fashion an ennobling vision of England’s artisans. But if Dekker’s play evokes an identifiable London, Rowley sets the action of his play in an ancient British past.⁶¹ In doing so, the play takes advantage of England’s uncertain historical and national origins. As Andrew Escobedo has shown, a profound sense of historical loss and fractured national identity led early modern historians and poets alike to construct “narrative representations of nationhood to mediate what they perceived as a troubling breach in history and in the process attempt to bring together the English past, present, and near future in a complete and continuous story.”⁶² These narratives, however, only exacerbate this uncertainty, “exposing in detail the imperfect grasp the English have on their past.”⁶³ I want to suggest that Rowley’s play takes advantage of this imperfect grasp on history, this failure of historical and national recall, to reconstruct the foundations of English national identity from the

⁶⁰ Willy Maley, *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 3.

⁶¹ Depictions of ancient Britons within early modern England’s national imaginary were not common, but they were also not unheard of. Colin Kidd notes that “Anglo-Saxonism predominated as the core identity of the English people, but, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ‘aboriginal’ ancient Britons enjoyed significantly more than a walk-on part in the national pageant.” Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.

⁶² Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

⁶³ Ibid.

perspective of the artisanal community.⁶⁴ Artisanal labor is presented, quite literally, as the foundation on which a national identity can be constructed. For the play, historical uncertainty is productive uncertainty, giving rise to a version of the nation's past with direct implications for early modern London's beleaguered artisans.

If *The Shoemaker's Holiday* identifies labor as the basis of social and economic value, *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* expands on this logic, remembering a national origin in which labor is central to the very foundation of English identity.⁶⁵ The play engages in what Martin Jay, building on the thought of Marcuse, has labeled anamnestic totalization, a critical methodology which taps into "the liberating power of remembrance" by seeking to revive alternative histories of the oppressed.⁶⁶ Whether or not a remembered past is objectivity true is largely irrelevant: in its ideological functioning, the power of nostalgia rests in its ability to negate a given symbolic order, to serve as a reminder that other realities are possible. In the play's alternative history, the laboring body is not only capable of producing commodities: it is presented as the very force that fashions England's historical and national identity. More precisely, by nostalgically representing a distant British past in which apprentice labor is a thriving and noble occupation, the play offers a symbolic resistance to the early modern proletarianization of the guild system. Rowley's play delves deeper than Dekker's into the relationship between skilled bodily labor and ways of seeing social reality, depicting the guild system, with its ability to cultivate and sustain artisanal labor, as the organizing principle of English history. Just as the play's plot hinges on two ancient

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the relationship between historical representation and historical truth, see D.R. Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology, and "The Light of Truth" From James I to the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 13.

⁶⁵ Alison A. Chapman explores the way shoemaking narratives upset class relations through their representation of the control of historical memory: "By depicting shoemakers who change the calendar and create new holidays, early modern texts raise pressing questions about who should be the custodians of England's historical and liturgical memory." Alison A. Chapman, "Whose Saint Crispin's Day Is It?: Shoemaking, Holiday Making, and the Politics of Memory in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.2 (Winter 2001): 1468.

⁶⁶ Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept From Lukacs to Habermas* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 224.

British princes' realization that "to exchange for the body's labour, / Were a far freer good" than surrendering to Roman conquerors, the play as a whole exchanges a history of exploitation and social and economic subordination for one that gives center stage to the laboring body (1.2.48-49).

The representation of the guild system as a central component of social organization can be found in early modern political thought. Thus, for instance, Jean Bodin seems to privilege the guild as the basic building-block of society:

Whereby it is plainely to be seene, the societies of men among themselues, to haue bene at the first sought out for the leading of their liues in more safetie and quiet: and them first of all to haue sprung from the loue which was betwixt man and wife: From them to haue flowed the mutuall loue betwixt parents and their children: then the loue of brethren and sisters one towards another: and after them the friendship betwixt cosens and other nie kinsmen: and last of all, the loue and good will which is betwixt men ioyned in alliance: which had all at length growne cold, and bene vtterly extinguished, had it not bene nourished, maintained, and kept, by societies, communities, corporations, and colledges: the vnion of whome hath for long time in safetie maintained many people, without any forme of a Commonweale, or soueraigne power... ouer them.⁶⁷

Colleges and corporations, or guilds, are the basis of community, the foundation on which all forms of community are constructed. Bodin, Antony Black has contended, was "the first to assign to friendship, in the traditional guild sense as a specific social quality peculiar to colleges and sodalities, an irreplaceable function in the social order."⁶⁸ If for Bodin this attention to the guild ultimately serves to support his philosophy of sovereignty, appropriating guild values and

⁶⁷ Jean Bodin, *Six bookes of a common-weale* (London: 1606).

⁶⁸ Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 131.

organization of the artisanal community to argue for the immutability of absolutism, the artisanal consciousness presented in *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* does precisely the opposite. Instead, the play interprets political power as factious and largely arbitrary, an ongoing power struggle between competing interests, in contrast to a guild system which is depicted as a constant source of communal meaning and cohesion.

The organization of the plot indicates a fundamental concern with blurring national and ethnic origins. The conflict between ancient native Britons, led by King Allured and his sons, Elred and Offa, and the Roman invaders, led by Maximinus and Dioclesian, does not favor a “true” ethnic identity.⁶⁹ Maximinus’ initial tyrannical threat to the British Queen to “prostitute thy body to some slave” gives way to a far more assimilatory intention with his later decision to “collect ten thousand ablest Britons” and “Let them be mix’t / With two Roman bands” in the fight against the Goths (2.2.108-110). Indeed, by the play’s conclusion the fighting between the British and the Romans seems all but forgotten, as Maximinus decides to “let [Offa and Elred], / Being English born, be Briton kings again,” despite having engaged in bloody conflict to remove their father from the throne (5.2.182-183). Religion, too, is able to overcome ethnic and national differences, as indicated by the Roman knight Alban’s eagerness to join the British knight Amphiabel in a “partnership in Christianity” (2.2.12). This “mixing” of ethnic identities in the formulation of England’s origins is also developed by the marriage plot between Maximinus’ daughter, Leodice, and Offa, who has taken the disguise of a shoemaker.

⁶⁹ This is interestingly not the case in the play’s source, Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*. In this text, the Queen makes a point of emphasizing the ethnic and national otherness of the Romans. She warns her sons to flee, since Maximinus’ intention is to gather British princes “to make them slaues in a forraigne Land, that are free borne in their owne Country... to the end he might plant strangers in their stead.” *The Gentle Craft* (London: 1637), 15. Rowley’s play, on the other hand, truncates this interaction between the Queen and her sons, removing any reference to questions of foreign versus native lands.

Thus, while the play stresses England's ethnic origins, this distant past is not depicted as a source of purity. If the question of ethnic purity is not central to the play, there is persistent attention given to the representation of labor that underpins this tale of blurred national and ethnic boundaries. When Leodice, realizing her affection for Offa, her shoemaker, attempts to rationalize her class transgression, she finds reassurance in her nurse's claim that "great Maximinus' father -- / Your father's father, madam -- was but even a smith, / That with his labour hammer'd out his living" (2.3.21-23). Leodice responds,

'Tis true,

I have heard my father boast it, yet had I forgot it.

Oh majesty! Thou mam'st the memory,

It loseth all records that are beneath us. (2.3.24-27)

If it was common for royalty and aristocracy to invent noble origins to legitimize family lines, that inclination is here resisted, the noble lineage leading back instead to the artisanal laborer. The allure of majesty inflicts a sort of violence on the laboring body, not only concealing labor from historical memory, but indeed maiming or mutilating it. Leodice's and Offa's romance is thus predicated on an act of remembering which recovers the laboring origins of national identity. In the same way that the romance plot mixes ancient British and Roman identities, it also erases boundaries between classes. In doing so, the play draws attention to the physical, sensuous labor that underpins class difference. This act of remembering leads to the recognition, as Leodice puts it, that "Beggars and kings are all one piece of earth, / Nor can the head be without the foot" (2.3.78-79).

The line that separates the aristocracy from the artisanal community is repeatedly blurred in the course of the play, even as the ancient British aristocracy is given a mythologizing positive

representation. The opening scene, which details the defeat of the ancient British at the hands of the invading Romans and the British princes' subsequent decision to seek refuge as shoemakers, makes a point of enumerating the noble qualities of the ancient aristocracy: the princes and the Queen are unwaveringly loyal to the dying King, the princes agreeing to flee the advancing Romans only after he urges them repeatedly to "Fly from Death"; the King himself is unambiguously brave in his upholding of military duty and honor, affirming with his last words that he "did not yield, / Nor fell by agues but, / Like a king, I'th' field"; and the Queen, preferring the fate that "heaven hath knit" to fleeing, refuses her companions' admonitions to escape (1.1.24, 49-50, 120). We are presented, in short, with a romanticized depiction of the aristocracy that highlights the class's faithfulness, piousness, self-sacrifice, bravery, and sense of extra-personal duty.

And yet, the emphasis on noble features does not seem ultimately to be directed towards the aristocracy, affirming instead the nobility and value of laborers. In escaping capture by the Romans, the princes, Offa and Elred, disguise themselves as shoemakers and gain employment with a British shoemaking outfit. Elred's assertion that "poor habiliments may find surer footing / Than the rich robes which royalty is clad in" establishes a practical equality between the aristocracy and artisanal labor. Nobility and labor are not opposed to one another but are indeed complementary, with the artisanal community providing a refuge and stabilizing reinforcement for a demoralized aristocracy. Artisanal labor, however, is not merely a temporary refuge for the princes, but is recognized as possessing an inherent value that is lacking in the aristocracy: "Who would venture to walk about the icy path of royalty," wonders Elred, "That here might find a footing so secure?" (1.2.39-41). The recurring theme of sure footing, an image made all the more palpable by the fact that the princes are specifically becoming shoemakers, suggests a privileging

of the artisanal community: when the contradictions within the aristocracy become overwhelming, as in the case of war, labor offers a secure and reliable escape. Where the normal social and infrastructural means by which Offa and Elred defined themselves and their place in society has been destabilized, shoemaking continues to offer an “honest trade to get our living by” (1.2.67).

The princes’ noble features do not alienate them from their fellow artisans, but on the contrary facilitate their assimilation into their new community. In their new roles as shoemakers, Offa and Elred bow and weep as their mother, the Queen, passes by as a prisoner of the Romans. Their distinctly noble behavior earns them respect from Cicely, the shoemaker’s wife, who declares that they are “Kind boys... indeed, they shall fare ne’er the worse. / I would e’en weep myself, to see my boys so kind-hearted” (1.2.132-133). The Queen urges Cicely to “use them well, / So much the more ‘cause they were kind to me” (1.1.140-141). The princes’ kindness, their gentleness, accords nicely with their new laboring existence. As Cicely notes, “their compassion of women shall lose ‘em nothing if they be but dutiful to their master and just to their dame” (1.2.172-174). The princes’ aristocratic disposition thus renders them more desirable as laborers. As with its mixing of ethnic boundaries, then, the play recovers an ancient Britain in which manual labor is not only a noble way of life but in fact harmonizes with an aristocratic value system to such a degree that the two class orientations become virtually indistinguishable. Indeed, if anything labor is presented as the fundamental basis, the origin, of social order, a sentiment expressed by Cicely as she surveys the destruction of the war: “The world treads not upright; methinks it had need of a good workman to mend it” (1.2.149-150). In the face of war and destruction, skilled labor, labor which is capable of mending that which is damaged, remains the sole social force capable of rebuilding a war-torn nation.

As Cicely's remark suggests, labor is not a mere component element of an imagined British past: it is the constitutive force, the motor behind British national development. When that nation is wracked by war and aristocratic power struggles, labor remains as a touchstone of stability. It is here, with this romantic depiction of the laboring community, that the play engages in its most significant act of anamnestic totalization, recalling a British past before the capitalist restructuring of the guild system. If the fundamental purpose of the medieval guild was to serve as "a fighting organization for the defense of the trade interests of those who belonged to it," by the early modern period guilds and small craftsmen were being reorganized by an expanding market into a profit-based triad of merchants, manufacturers and nascent industrial capitalists, and waged laborers.⁷⁰ This was a system that most certainly did not have trade interests in mind. As Braudel has argued, the expansion of the putting-out system, in which merchants took direct control of the productive capacity of guilds, was becoming so influential that "all sectors of craft life were touched, and the guild system was gradually being destroyed," even if the guild, as a formal organization, lingered for some time.⁷¹ The supersession of local economies and social networks by a national economy geared toward large-scale production and commercial trade between nations had a devastating effect on the traditional guild structure, which valued stability, community, and the practical satisfaction of needs over the imperatives of impersonal market dynamics. By the early modern period, the days in which the guild functioned to conserve social and economic order were coming to an end, as merchants came increasingly to view the guild, with its communal outlook and stress on preserving traditional labor practices, as a hindrance to economic improvement and innovation. Keith Wrightson sums up the dire consequences for the laboring community in no uncertain terms: "A growing proportion of urban craftsmen belonged

⁷⁰ Georges Renard, *Guilds in the Middle Ages* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publications, 1968), 32.

⁷¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 317.

to a skilled or semiskilled journeyman proletariat struggling to cope with declining wages and with the uncertainties of demand for their labour in what was frequently an overstocked labour market.”⁷²

Whether or not a harmonious and vigorous guild system that was opposed to capitalist change ever actually existed is open to debate.⁷³ But the play’s depiction of the ideal guild of the distant past is “true” to the extent that it articulates a real desire for an alternative history in which labor is not oppressed and exploited by external social and economic forces.⁷⁴ Thus Rowley’s play contains not a hint of a proletarianized labor force. Moreover, as a play that can be broadly classified as a city comedy, *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* is unique in its lack of merchants or other commercial figures. The play imagines a past in which guild labor not only coexists in harmony with an ancient aristocracy but serves as the very foundation on which that aristocracy can flourish. After all, both Offa and Elred, as well as Sir Hugh, another British aristocrat who has been unsettled by the fighting, take shelter in a welcoming guild structure when they are forced to flee their positions of aristocratic privilege. Without this guild support, the play would seem to suggest, the very possibility of British history would have been compromised.

The guild structure at the center of the play is not the exploitative one of early modern England’s nascent capitalist economy but a supportive organization, one concerned with preserving the integrity of its members. Elred’s and Offa’s new master (referred to only as

⁷² Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 194.

⁷³ See, for instance, the articles in *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, eds. Stephen R. Epstein and Maarten Roy Prak (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), many of which explore how medieval guilds could be in practice, if not necessarily in ideology, forces of technological and economic innovation.

⁷⁴ Roger Ladd sees a similar motive at work in the writings of Thomas Deloney, whose *The Gentle Craft* served as Rowley’s source material. Roger A. Ladd, “Thomas Deloney and the London Weavers’ Company,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 32.4 (Winter 2001): 981-1001.

Shoemaker) views his new apprentices as future masters, not merely as waged laborers with a precarious economic standing. He informs them that they will be “bound for seven years, and then you are your own men, and a good trade to get your livings by” (1.2.88-90).⁷⁵ When Elred leaves to fight against the Goths, his master assures him that he will “sell all the shoes in my shop before my lame soldier shall be kept in an hospital” (3.2.70-71). Elred gratefully acknowledges the familial nature of his master’s support, which is “not as to a servant, / But a child” (3.2.72-73). The shoemaker values Elred as a particular, unique individual, not as a source of economic profit, to such an extent that he is willing to direct all of his wealth into securing Elred’s well-being. Wealth, for the shoemaker, is not the product of exploited labor, but on the contrary that which can preserve the dignity of labor. Sir Hugh also views the shoemaker’s guild as possessing practical value. He explains to the shoemaker that he is willing to accept

any pains

That might afford me pension for my life.

I would do double labour for my hire

If I might have employment. (3.2.180-183)

Hugh’s emphasis on the value of his life, and his recognition of the guild as offering refuge from the wars that “hath ruin’d me,” suggest that labor is not adequately represented by pay or the wage relation (3.2.178). Labor possesses a value that transcends the bounds of financial or economic interests, in this case enabling Hugh to escape the “dangerous quick-sands” of war (3.2.179). The guild that Hugh and Elred embrace is one in which the wage relation is a supplement to life and not a commanding force which dictates one’s existence. Where the early

⁷⁵ The shoemaker’s promise would have rung hollow for a seventeenth century London audience, as the drop-out rate of London apprentices during this time was about fifty percent. Those who did not become freemen through apprenticeship typically descended into the ranks of the London poor. See Llana Krausman Ben-Amos, “Failure to Become Freemen: Urban Apprentices in Early Modern England,” *Social History* 16-2 (May 1991): 155-172.

modern guild was frequently a locus of poverty and proletarianization, here the guild serves precisely the opposite function, offering Hugh and Elred a way of avoiding hardship and ruin.

To a certain extent, the association of artisanal labor with an ancient, indigenous British aristocracy works to legitimize or naturalize the laboring community, using an interpretation of the past, in Raymond Williams' words, as "a deliberately selective and connecting process which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order."⁷⁶ In representing artisanal labor as a refuge for the aristocracy, an escape from the contradictions of the ruling class, the play does more than just ratify a laboring class perspective. More profoundly, the guild structure is positioned as the fundamental organizing principle of English national identity. If the play, on one level, is an account of England's national origins, depicting the successful assimilation of Roman and ancient British ethnic identities, it also makes clear that this origination was made possible by the values and organizational coherence of the guild. Thus the symbolic mechanism of this ethnic assimilation, the marriage of Offa and Leodice, does not take priority over Offa's obligation to the guild. Out of respect for the standard prohibition of apprentice marriage, Offa explains to Leodice that "I am a 'prentice and must not wed," since doing so would "bind me to a perpetual 'prenticeship" (2.3.147, 150). What is presented as a founding event in England's national development – the marriage of the British and Roman ruling classes -- must accommodate itself to guild rules. If we follow Laslett's classic characterization of the early modern world as a family which was "not one society only but three societies fused together; the society of man and wife, of parents and children and of master and servant," then it would seem that the play places the latter familial union in a determinant position relative to the others.⁷⁷ An aristocratic marriage negotiation is subordinated to the sense of duty and honor that defines this

⁷⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 116.

⁷⁷ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Scribner, 1973), 2.

imagined laboring community. The guild, and not the aristocratic institution of marriage, is the foundation of ancient British history.

The play reformulates important plot elements and themes, from military honor to marriage and, ultimately, the unification of native British and Roman ethnic identities, in terms of the values of an idealized guild structure. Thus, for instance, when Elred, who has been pressed into fighting with the Romans against the Goths and Vandals, rescues Dioclesian from Huldric, the King of the Goths, Dioclesian promises that “Never had Briton soldier such a pay / As thou shalt have” (3.4.55-56). When the dust of battle settles, Dioclesian marvels that Elred’s “sword the greater half hath won,” and vows to “pay thy merits” accordingly (3.5.26-27). Dioclesian asks Elred’s social status, to which, interestingly, Elred affirms his artisanal identity, replying that he is

A Shoemaker, my lord, where merrily,
With folic mates, I spent my days till when,
Being press’d to wars amongst my countrymen,
Hither I came, and here my prize is play’d,
For Britain’s honour and my master’s trade (3.5.37-41).

Rather than use Dioclesian’s goodwill as an opportunity to reveal his aristocratic identity, Elred instead chooses to reinforce his status as a laborer. In doing so, he positions the guild system as an honorable social institution. Elred’s labor, and not his aristocratic essence, is directly implicated in this mythical making of England’s national identity, as his military prowess and honor is attributed as much to his artisanal consciousness as to his sense of national pride and

duty. His honest laboring disposition and his loyalty to the guild translate flawlessly into his ability to defend national interests.⁷⁸

Both of the princes, indeed, find the guild accommodating of their royal/aristocratic dispositions. Even when the shoemaker is apprized of Offa's and Elred's true princely identities, he promises Elred – his “princely ‘prentice” – that, like “leather that will hold all water,” he will keep their secret (5.1.160). The shoemaker's willingness to protect the princes' identities captures the sense of communal cohesion and responsibility that defines guild life in the play: it is, quite simply, because they belong to a guild that the princes are able to survive in secret. But it also indicates an understanding of classed identity that is not in line with the standard aristocratic worldview. The shoemaker continues to view the princes as laborers, apprentices of the guild, despite the revelation of their royal status. Where official aristocratic ideology situates class identity within a thoroughly essentialist framework, the shoemaker's characterization of the princes as “princely ‘prentices” suggests, if not a denial of aristocratic ideology, then at the least a willingness to think class identity in a significantly different way. Offa and Elred can be both princes and apprentices – the latter identity is not subordinated to or elided by the former. Identity, for the shoemaker, is not determined by one's place within an immutable hierarchy of status, but is instead the product of one's participation within a community in which one's life – indeed the very question of survival – is understood as a matter of mutual concern amongst members. The mutually sustaining act of physical labor here overrides the aristocratic metaphysic of identity. Offa and Elred do not resist the shoemaker's conceptualization of class

⁷⁸ Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis suggest that a national consciousness may have been a component of changing guild structure in this period. A variety of London guilds, following the lead of market forces, spread their enterprise and influence of control from a local to a national level: “London in the early seventeenth century was at the peak of [economic] influence, with a larger share of the urban population and trade of the nation than it had had before or would indeed have until relatively recently. The national perspective of some of its guilds reflects this.” Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis, “Reaching Beyond the City Wall: London Guilds and National Regulation, 1500-1700,” in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, eds. S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 314.

identity, with Offa proudly affirming that Elred's newborn son will never "scorn, till that race [of kings] be run, / To call himself a prince, yet a shoemaker's son" (5.1.199-200). The son, from this view, is the material embodiment of the shoemaker's conflation of aristocratic and laboring identities.

There is thus a certain "moral economy" of labor informing the shoemaker's eagerness to protect and support his apprentices. To a certain extent, this moral economy helps to articulate the play's guiding fantasy of an ideal past in which labor was not exploited or maligned; but it is also historically accurate to the extent that it reflects what Margaret Pelling argues is a central feature of the early modern guild, namely its fostering of the social interdependency "which bridged the gap between the family and 'the State', and connected families one with another."⁷⁹ The play draws out the guild's function as an agent of communal connectivity, concluding with the Queen's acknowledgment of the shoemaker's and Cicely's familial care of the princes, as she commends them for being "loving parents" to her sons during her absence (5.2.163). The shoemaker's response further emphasizes the importance of the guild as a preserver of communal networks: "I did, madam, the best I could for 'em. I have seen one married to the Emperor's daughter" (5.2.164-165). The play's prominent royal figures (Maximinus, Dioclesian, the Queen) play no significant role in resolving the conflict within the aristocracy. The bloodshed is ended by the marriage for which the shoemaker takes credit, a marriage which leads Maximinus to marvel to the Queen that "Wonders hath fallen since you have a prisoner been; / You, and your sons, and we are grown a-kin" (5.2.156-157). But this wonder has been brought about by the guild's success in upholding values of social interdependency, a point stressed by Maximinus' subsequent acquiescence to Barnaby's request that the "fellow servants"

⁷⁹ Margaret Pelling, "Apprenticeship, Health and Social Cohesion in Early Modern London," *History Workshop Journal* 37 (1994): 33.

to the princes, “being of the Gentle Craft, may have one holiday to ourselves” (5.2.172-173). By consecrating the newly established allegiance between the British and the Romans with the declaration of St. Crispin’s Day, or the Shoemaker’s Holiday, the play implicitly positions artisans as the makers of English national history. In reaching back to an ancient past, then, the play remembers a history that serves as a foil to the early modern degradation of labor, placing the skilled laboring body, quite literally, at center stage as the producer of the nation.

Although an increasingly marginalized group, the early modern artisanal community nevertheless stands for the universal in these plays. Just as artisanal labor emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the laboring body and the material world in which labor is realized, artisanal consciousness articulates a link between the part and the whole. In both plays, attention to bodily skill engenders a way of seeing the world that is more socially holistic or comprehensive than dominant class perspectives. Where the aristocracy and commercial classes are shown to subordinate the larger community to their particular class interests, the artisanal community offers a worldview that stresses social cohesion rather than factional difference. This communal vision is inextricably tied to bodily labor: the social world, from the artisanal perspective, is actively produced and reproduced, not given. The laboring body, in these plays, is presented as the material foundation of the social, as that which actively makes the social, and what I have called the artisanal consciousness is the subjective orientation that corresponds to this experience.

It is perhaps today, in the twenty-first century, that such an artisanal perspective is most valuable. What remains of artisanal labor is on the verge of total appropriation by the global

market system. As Michael Herzfeld argues, artisanal labor, with its non-rationalized and non-mechanized bodily labor and knowledge, is struggling against instrumentalization by capitalism. Artisanal labor no longer constitutes an alternative value system and mode of production, since “it is precisely in the apparent dead ends of cultural production, where ‘tradition’ becomes a self-confirming mark of static resistance to change, that we can see how insidiously the effects of expanding capitalism, that aftershocks of colonialism, and the bureaucratic universalization of a single morality fuse with the everyday experiences of working people.”⁸⁰ The artisan’s seemingly backwards or traditional way of seeing the world now functions as a sort of constitutive outside of global capitalism, an embarrassing deviation from the increasingly homogeneous global value system that serves to strengthen capitalist hegemony. Like its early modern predecessor, the contemporary artisanal community is a marginal group that stands for the whole, though now in a way that risks undermining the power and value of the artisan.

It is nevertheless here, in the world of globalization, that artisanal consciousness offers a possible alternative to global capitalism. Artisanal cooperatives are at the forefront of fair trade movements and other efforts to restore ethical practices to the economy, struggling to overcome the social and economic alienation engendered by the global economy: “By connecting the consumer with the producer and thus creating a fabric of community, fair trade stores fill a void people experience in the mind-numbing superstores and commercial malls.”⁸¹ Artisanal consciousness, with its attention to physical production and community, continues to offer an alternative way of seeing the world.

⁸⁰ Michael Herzfeld, *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 24.

⁸¹ Kimberly M. Grimes, “Democratizing International Production and Trade: North American Alternative Trading Organizations,” in *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade for the Global Economy*, eds. Kimberly M. Grimes, Barbara Lynne Milgram (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 22.

5.0 “THE HUMOUR OF NECESSITY”: DISPOSSESSED LABOR AND SUBJECTIVITY IN JONSON’S *EVERY MAN IN HIS HUMOUR*

City comedy is a humoral genre. Characters have a proclivity for excreting, spitting, leaking, and spewing. The genre revels in the subversion of bodily self-control and the carnivalesque transgression of boundaries, and its complicated plots mirror its characters’ humoral instability. The genre’s humoral volatility also makes it a perfect vehicle with which to explore London’s equally unstable economic environment. The genre, Leinwand posits, can in fact be seen as “the staging area” in which London’s “urban roles are brought into sharp relief.”¹ The humoral and the economic dimensions of city comedy tend to come together and overlap around the question of household management. Thus Kitely, the anxious merchant and patriarch in Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour*, announces in the opening moments of the play his intention to act as an “iron bar / Twixt the corrupting motions of desire” and his household order. He is nervous that his household is being infiltrated by the forces of the marketplace, and that his home will soon fall victim to London’s “giddy humour and diseased riot” (2.1.59).

In the play, this diseased riot is particularly associated with dispossessed labor, embodied in the figure of Brainworm, a servant who disguises himself as a vagrant soldier to perpetrate his schemes. Through a reading of Jonson’s *Everyman in his Humour*, this chapter looks at how city comedy combines discourses on household management, social (dis)order, and the humours in order to negotiate the place of dispossessed labor within England’s new economy. What Jonson’s Brainworm will come to call the “humour of necessity,” which he uses to justify his subversive

¹Theodore Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison; Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 10.

actions, expresses the translation of poverty into a humoral discourse. By exploring the tense relationship between members of London's dominant classes and the humoral vagrants of the play, this chapter seeks to understand how the dramatic representation of the humours – in their domestic, sexual, and economic forms – articulates a distinctly vagrant subjectivity. In articulating this subjectivity the play also gives dramatic form to the antitheatrical anxiety over the actor's proteanism as a vagrant laborer.

5.1 THE HUMOURS AND NECESSITY

Following Michael Schoenfeldt's characterization of humoral discourse as offering "a near-poetic vocabulary of felt corporeal experience," we might think about humoral theory not only as a physiological model of the body but as an important epistemological category, a discourse in which both personal experience and broader social questions are negotiated and understood.² On the one hand, humoral theory offers the individual a way to understand the contours and operation of his or her physical and mental self. At the same time, however, humoral theory links the individual body to larger social, political, and economic dynamics. Thus in *Microcosmographia*, Helkiah Crooke's discussion of the methods for maintaining humoral health is often inflected by a distinct class antagonism. He explains, for instance, that "as the pined or greedy Liuer draweth from the veines crude and vnconcocted iuyces, so is it with the stomacke, yea with the mouth: for we see what rifferaffe and what odious viands hunger maketh toothsome to such as are pinched therewith."³ The ambiguous use of "rifferaffe," which can be read here as indicating both a mode of behavior and a socioeconomic group, highlights the

² Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

³ Helkiah Crooke. *Microcosmographia*, (London: 1615).

humoral overlap between self and society: as a physical condition of the individual body, hunger also encodes the class most associated with that condition.⁴ The stomach is the location of an uncontrollable disposition, an appetitive drive which, motivated by the desperation of hunger, defies the rationality and ordered operation of the humoral system. The metaphor implies that the social riff-raff is equally unstable.

Crooke's anatomization of the humoral body establishes a hierarchy, placing the stomach in a position of subordination relative to other faculties. In his scheme, there exist three humoral regions within the body, each of which serves a particular function in maintaining the health of the body as a whole:

The lower Belly which was framed for the nourishment of the *Indiuidium* & propagation of mankind. The middle Region of the Chest, wherein the Heart of man the sunne of this *Mycrocosme* perpetually moueth and poureth out of his bosome as out of a springing fountain the diuine Nectar of life into the whole body, and the vpper Region or the Head wherein the soule hath her Residence of estate, guarded by the Sences and assisted by the intellectuall faculties at whose disposition all the inferior parts are employed.⁵

Although Crooke presents the humoral body as an immutable hierarchy, his previous reference to the "riff-raffe" associated with hunger complicates this imagined order and stability. The stomach, at the bottom of the hierarchy and lacking the "diuine Nectar of life" and the "Intellectual faculties," is also the most unstable, subject to the dictates of vital necessity. The stomach "is the seat of the appetite; & to this onely part hath nature giuen the sense of want or Animal hunger."⁶ This "Animal hunger" works as a kind of pre-discursive force within the body,

⁴ The OED defines "riff-raff, *n.*" as "Persons of a disreputable character or belonging to the lowest class of a community; persons of no importance or social position." 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford UP.

⁵ Crooke, *Microcosmographia*.

⁶ Ibid.

necessary because without it “wee should by degrees be extinguished & affamished before wee were aware.”⁷

Crooke’s overlapping of the humoral and the social is often tacit. But Edward Forset, in *A comparative discourse of the bodies natural and politique*, directly implicates the regulation of the humoral body in the preservation of social order. Just as humoral imbalance can lead to behavioral disturbances in the individual, “So if the Soueraigne in the precincts of his regiment, shall suffer an ouergrowing inequalitie of greatnesse to get an head, it will quickly gather to it selfe a syding faction of like disposed disturbers, which will make a shrewd aduventure, both of ouertopping him, and ouerturning of his state.”⁸ Forset’s analogy articulates a desire social stability capable of overriding or obscuring social antagonism. He presents class distinctions as constituting a harmonious spectrum, explaining that there are “foure Elements” in the body politic, comparable to the four humours in the physical body: “First, the generous, to aduance and mainteine the state with their well deseruing actions: Then the learned, to instruct and direct with skill in cases of consultation: Thirdly, yeomen with their labour to produce and worke the commodities of the land: And lastly Trafiquers which may both vent out by exportation what may be spared, & bring in the necessaries that shall be wanting.”⁹ Forset concludes that all subjects “may well be raunged and reckoned” within this spectrum of labor.¹⁰

And yet, Forset is later forced to acknowledge the precariousness of his harmonious vision, anxiously asking: “So in the ciuill bodie, if prudent policie by aduised tempering of the disparitie of the people, should not conioyne them to a well agreeing consent, how could any hope be conceiued, but that the difference of poore and rich, vulgar & noble, ignorant and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Edward Forset, *A comparative discourse of the bodies natural and politique*, (London: 1606), 32.

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ Ibid.

learned, fearfull and valiant, industrious and such as take their ease, must needs by their opposite quallities, not onely deface the dignitie, but also subuert the stabilitie of the state?.”¹¹ If at first the body politic is depicted as a closed system, with every class and division of labor playing a separate and unequal role in maintaining the harmony of the whole, we find here an awareness of the limits of this fantasy. Economic inequality, the fundamental contradiction between rich and poor, which does not seem to fit into Forset’s scheme of the “four Elements,” has the capacity to disrupt the balance of the body politic. Forset’s thinking on the question of social order is a good example of Paster’s argument that humoral theory functions as a disciplinary mechanism that “encode[s] a complexly articulated hierarchy of physiological difference paralleling and reproducing structures of social difference.”¹² But at the same time, we see in Forset the limitations of this disciplinary strategy. If Forset seeks to formulate the humoral analogy as disciplinary mechanism, the antagonism between rich and poor indicates an oppositional subjectivity at work within this dominant discourse. Poverty, as a humoral disposition, represents the limit point of containment and orderly regulation.

This recognition that poverty is capable of subverting humoral, and thus by extension social, order is nowhere more explicit than in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The careful regulation of the humours, Burton explains, can be subverted by “necessitie, pouerty, want, hunger, which driues men many times to doe that which otherwise they are loath, and cannot endure, and thankfully to accept of it.”¹³ The systematic predictability and manipulability of the humours gives way to the existential uncertainty that comes with poverty. If humoral theory seeks to understand human behavior in a systematic manner, poverty is that force which

¹¹Ibid., 40.

¹² Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 16.

¹³ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, (London: 1621), 40.

undermines such pretensions to tidy organization. As in the writings of Crooke and Forset, here too the disorder of the individual body has profound social implications, since poverty has a history of encouraging “outlawes & rebels in most places, to take vp seditious armes, and in all ages hath caused vproares, murmuring, seditions, rebellions, thefts, murders, mutinies, jarres and contentions in every common-wealth, grudging, repining, complaining, discontent in every private family, because they want means, to liue according to their callings, to bring vp their children, it breaks their hearts, they cannot doe as they would doe.”¹⁴ By framing the individual condition of necessity or poverty as possessing a corresponding social dimension, Burton makes it difficult to think about personal bodily experience as something separate from the social. There is no distinction between public and private: personal somatic consciousness is at once a social or economic consciousness.

It is with Burton that we see clearly the economic underpinnings of the humoral subject. Harsh necessity requires that the poor perform a variety of roles, though this performativity is in no way empowering:

poverty alone makes men theeues, roagues, rebels, murderers, traitors, assasinats... sweare & forswear, beare false witnes, lye, dissemble, any thing, as I say, to advantage our selues, and to relieue our necessity... when a man is driuen to his shifts, what will he not doe?.. A great temptation to all mischiefe, it compels some miserable wretches to counterfeit seuerall diseases, to dismember, make themselues blind, lame, to haue a more plausible cause to beg, and loose their limmes to recover their present wants... and that which is worst, it makes them through anguish and wearisomnesse of their liues, to make away themselues. They had rather be hanged, drowned &c. then to liue without means.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., 207-208.

¹⁵Ibid., 208-209.

The touchstone of these various identities is necessity, which constitutes the limit point of the regulation and discipline of the social body. It is here, where humoral control falters, that the dispossessed laboring subject begins to speak for itself, its agency determined not by the norms of humoral order but by brute necessity. The experience of need is fundamentally determinant of subjectivity, and the myriad roles and identities that the impoverished person plays are so many expressions of economic necessity. The instability that comes from the desperate struggle to survive is something humoral theory can identify but not regulate.

Thus if humoral theory provides the framework in which a corporeal subjectivity can be formulated, it also provides a framework in which to articulate the antagonistic logic that underpins subjectivity in a class society. The emergence of capitalism in early modern England was not only about the generation of capital and productive capacity. It also entailed the accumulation of subjectivities, dividing society between a lucky few who could afford to possess a stable sense of self and a vast majority of poor and oppressed who lived in precarity at the edge of survival.¹⁶ Whereas, following Paster, a standard reading argues that humoral theory helped to subordinate these marginal subjectivities to the interests of dominant power, I argue that it also offers the marginal subject an interstitial space in which to speak and act for itself. Where Paster and Schoenfeldt see humoral theory as a system for enforcing and regulating power, my reading suggests that the discourse on the humors could be quite unstable, opening up a space for resistance. If humoral theory was often a discourse that served dominant power, it could also be appropriated and transvalued by marginalized social groups. Although these marginal voices are

¹⁶For discussions of the subjective implications of emerging capitalism, see Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); William C. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Urbana-Champaign; Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2001); and Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

undoubtedly faint, and are often twisted and manipulated by outside powers and class interests, it is through this antagonism that they come into being and speak.

5.2 “GIDDY HUMOUR AND DISEASED RIOT”: ORDER AND ECONOMIES OF LABOR

To return to Kitley, who we left standing as an “iron bar / Twixt the corrupting motions of desire”: the desire that he hopes to stifle and to bar from infiltrating his household seems specifically to be the combined forces of female sexual desire and what he perceives to be the morally dissolute culture of the London market-place, which nevertheless is his place of business and the source of his livelihood. As the play proceeds, Kitley, a successful London merchant, grows increasingly paranoid that his household order is on the verge of collapse, and that it will soon become as “common as a mart, / A theater, a public receptacle / For giddy humour and diseased riot” (2.1.57-59). Humoral instability is here inseparable from social instability. Kitley goes on to locate the primary source of household disorder not in the “public weal” but in the household itself, namely in the figure of his wife, who he worries may inflame the desire of the London marketplace’s “wild associates” (2.1.179, 62). “Why’t cannot be,” he speculates, “where there is such resort of wanton gallants and young revelers, / That any woman should be honest long” (2.1.175-177). Kitley’s growing jealousy not only derives from a fear that the outside world will infiltrate the boundaries of his household, but hints also at a suspicion that the chaotic outside has always been inside his home, operating right under his nose. This concern that the chaste and obedient wife is actually a prostitute is most explicitly articulated later by Cob, a water-bearer who questions his wife’s fidelity. Cob, suspecting that he has been cuckolded, asks

his wife, “Did I charge you to keep your doors shut, Is’bel?” (4.8.74). His paranoia about sexual infidelity indicates an anxiety about the blurred boundary between public and private. The opening up of doors is evidence, to Cob’s jealous mind, that he has been cuckolded. Kately is quick to concur with this suspicion, concluding that Cob’s wife, Tib, is a “bitter quean” who must be “tamed” (4.8.83). The fragile distinction between chaste wife and prostitute encodes an unsettling overlap of the domestic and public spheres.

The thin line between chaste wives and prostitutes in early modern culture has been noted. For Coppelia Kahn this uneasy tension is the product of the contradictory forms of sexual advice advocated by religious marriage treatises, which tend to imply “that even though a wife’s body may be properly enclosed within the locked house, whenever desire is aroused, she threatens to escape ideological confines, and undermines the male authority in which marriage is grounded.”¹⁷ Richard Horwich similarly contends that city comedies in particular transform the common distinction between “innocent maiden and wily courtesan, into a model of economic pressures at work in Jacobean society as a whole.”¹⁸ If prostitutes/unchaste women represent the social turmoil wrought by changing economic conditions, then we can see the preservation of the wife’s chastity or the successful wooing of the chaste maid as figuring the preservation of the traditional social order. Indeed patriarchal power, and by extension masculine identity, is closely connected to the separation of the public and private spheres. Prior to the capitalist implementation of a division between men’s labor and women’s labor in the spatial terms of inside and outside, patriarchal ideology gave husbands “the authority of the head of a household

¹⁷ Coppelia Kahn, “Prostitutes and Wives in Jacobean Drama,” in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, eds. Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 249-250.

¹⁸ Richard Horwich, “Wives, Courtesans, and the Economics of Love in Jacobean City Comedy,” in *Drama in the Renaissance*, ds. Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 257.

that was organized as an integrated working partnership.”¹⁹ With the gendered division of labor characteristic of capitalist society, however, men began to lose their ability to regulate female labor, to encompass it within their own labor.

Kitely’s paranoid jealousy is thus the result of the epistemological limits determined by his position within the socioeconomic system. As a merchant, his gaze is oriented towards the public sphere, the realm of the market and commerce, and not the household. Hence the comical scene in which Kitley struggles to make up his mind about whether or not to leave the house to conduct his business at the Exchange. He decides to be at the market for only two hours, but quickly realizes “That things never dreamt of yet / May be contrived, ay, and effected too / In two hours’ absence: well, I will not go” (3.2.10-12). Does not, he asks, he who “sets his doors wide open to a thief / And shows the felon where his treasure lies” deserve to be robbed, or in this case cuckolded (3.2.16-17)? His reluctance to leave the household indicates the profound masculine anxiety deriving from the emergence of a public/private division of labor. Kitley’s public labor, as a merchant, leaves his wife unguarded and himself open to cuckoldry. The separation of the public and the private renders the private household more vulnerable to infiltration by the agents and influences of a disorderly and morally corrupt society. That Kitley describes his imagined cuckolding as consisting of “things never dreamt of yet” highlights the epistemological crisis underpinning his anxiety, a crisis perhaps best articulated later when Tib responds to her husband’s “and so I leave you” with a taunting and suggestive, “It’s more than you know, whether you leave me so” (4.2.30, 31). With the gendered division of labor, the household, as the location of female labor, becomes a blind spot in the male imaginary, a place in the social order which defies the male’s regulatory surveillance and thus his patriarchal authority.

¹⁹Michael McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy: Gender Difference in England," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 28.3 (1995): 298.

By representing the household as an unstable – or potentially unstable – humoral economy, the play highlights the delicate boundary between household order and perceived public disorder. Thus Kately must be careful in his attempt to remove his brother-in-law, Wellbred, from his home. Kately frets that if he upsets the humorally unstable Wellbred,

He would be ready from his heat of humour
And over-flowing of the vapors in him
To blow the ears of his familiars
With the false breath of telling what disgraces
And low disparagement I had put upon him. (2.1.95-99)

Humoral instability links the household to the public sphere. Kately's ability to manage the humoral order of his household is intimately tied up with his public reputation. As a public operative, a merchant, Kately's identity is determined by his public image, which itself is contingent upon whether he succeeds or fails in managing his household.²⁰ By controlling what happens in his home, Kately hopes to control his public presence. The regulation of household order, then, expressed here by the need to manage Wellbred's sensitive humoral disposition, is inseparable from a desire to regulate social order.

Knowell, Kately's aristocratic foil, expresses similar concerns about the state of social order, and like Kately his conceptualization of this situation is mediated by the discourse on household management. His son's gallantry and association with the London underworld lead him to lament "the change / Of manners and the breeding of our youth / Within the kingdom, since myself was one" (2.3.2-4). But whereas Kately interprets the contaminating public sphere, London's "diseased riot," as the cause of household disorder, Knowell interprets this set of

²⁰ Craig Muldrew looks at the role of reputation in the transition to capitalism, arguing that "wealth was gained through reputation, not accumulation, individualism or inward piety." Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 2.

circumstances from a more aristocratic and patriarchalist perspective, blaming poor parenting as the source of his son's disreputable behavior:

Ere all their teeth be born, or they can speak,
We make their palates cunning! The first words
We form their tongues with are licentious jests!
Can it call, 'prostitute'? Cry, 'bastard'? O, then, kiss it;
A witty child. Can 't swear? The father's darling!
Give it two plums. Nay, rather than't shall learn
No bawdy song, the mother herself will teach it!
But this is in the infancy; the days
Of the long coat; when it puts on the breeches
It will put off all this. Ay, it is like,
When it is gone into the bone already. (2.3.14-28)

If Knowell begins his complaint by blaming both parents, it becomes clear that the perceived culprit is actually the mother, whose effeminizing and contaminating influence prevents the boy-child from being properly transformed into a man.²¹ Even when Knowell acknowledges the father's share of the blame in social decay, it is within the context of how they allow their sons to witness their "lascivious courtships" of women and even to "Taste of the same provoking meats with us" (2.3.35, 36). Moreover, fathers are guilty of encouraging their sons to "'Get money'; still, 'Get money, boy; / No matter by what means; money will do / More, boy, than my lord's letter'" (2.3.49-51). Women and money have humoral implications, since their influence "stains

²¹ See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), for a discussion of fear of female contamination. For a discussion of masculine anxiety about gender roles, see Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

unto the liver / And heart, in some” (2.3.30-31). Like Kately, Knowell equates women with the appetitive desire of market society, though whereas Kately imagines a boundary existing between his household and the chaotic public sphere of the market, Knowell, as an aristocrat who views the public sphere in macrocosmic analogy to the household unit, accordingly understands social dissolution as an effect of improper household management. Thus while Kately seeks to emphasize the boundary between outside and inside, public weal and household, Knowell believes the solution to the problem of social decay to be the restoration of order within his household, and particularly in his son’s behavior. Social order will follow accordingly.

Thus at the heart of the play is a drama of good husbandry.²² The category of the humours mediates between particular individual experience and the social, with the humoral economy of the household encoding a broader socioeconomic dynamic. The anxiety about good husbandry and the “giddy humour and diseased riot” that upsets domestic order is ultimately an expression of the perceived social and economic disorder of an emerging market system. But why is female sexuality the focus of this anxiety? I want to suggest that if this drama of good husbandry is figured in terms of household management, with its humoral overtones and emphasis on the precarious difference between wife and prostitute, it is because of the tendency, in the England of nascent capitalism, to link vagrant labor with women’s labor. The emergence of capitalism created a situation in which prostitutes were often understood as an embodiment of dispossessed and proletarianized labor.²³ The prostitute signified “the immediacy and alienation

²² Husbandry could denote both household labor and labor performed outside of the household. According to the OED, from the 13th through the 17th centuries, husbandry can be defined as the “Management, economical administration, ordering (as of a household).” By the beginning of the 17th century, it also comes to mean “Industrial occupation in general.” 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press.

²³ Wallace Shugg reminds us of the inextricable relationship between early modern London’s conception of prostitutes and conceptions of economic change, noting that “the spread of prostitution was greatly aided by the rapid, unrestrained growth of London during this period, a growth that produced slum areas, especially in the suburbs east and west of the city where the profession could easily take root.” Wallace Shugg, “Prostitution in Shakespeare’s London,” *Shakespeare Studies*. 10 (1977): 306.

of labor as a commodity, of the body as a product.”²⁴ This was due not only to a process of cultural displacement by which “the effects of social crisis are refigured as its causes” but also to the real structural links that forced the private realm to confront the unpleasantness of economic life.²⁵ For one thing, the capitalist division of labor, by rendering the household more dependent on the husband’s wage-earning capacity, created a precarious economic situation for many women and made prostitution a viable source of income. When the husband, for whatever reason, became unable to earn wages, the wife (or in many cases the widow) could turn to one of the few available forms of financially remunerative female labor, prostitution.²⁶ Furthermore, while under normal circumstances the wife and the prostitute are, in the male imaginary, typological opposites, they nevertheless occupy similar socioeconomic positions in patriarchal society: both trade sexual labor for financial security; the difference between the two is that whereas the wife’s commodity-value derives from her symbolic value on the marriage market, the prostitute’s commodity-value is stripped of all symbolic pretensions – she sells raw labor power.²⁷

Douglas Bruster has noted the important etymological link that relates the early modern concept of husbandry to both the management of one’s personal labor and the husband’s management of his wife and household. Bruster finds this link being twisted in accordance with the logic of emerging capitalism in the figure of the wittol, who allows himself to be cuckolded in exchange for financial benefits. City comedy often demonstrates how “the cuckold’s patience translated readily into images of commercial investment,” so that cuckoldry was seen “as not

²⁴ John Twyning, *London Dispossessed: Literature and Social Space in the Early Modern City* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 57.

²⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 138.

²⁶ See Anne Haselkorn, *Prostitution in Elizabethan and Jacobean England* (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), 1-33.

²⁷ See Theodore Levinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison; Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 137-149, for further discussion of this similarity.

only *a* natural but perhaps *the* natural collective metaphor to gloss a thematic of nascent capitalism.”²⁸ If cuckoldry serves to figure the utilization of labor under capitalism, it follows that the prostitute, operating outside of both socially legitimate financial and sexual economies, would figure thoroughly chaotic and uncontrolled labor – that is, the limits of capital’s nascent command of labor power.²⁹ The woman who sells her sexual labor for money is a source of masculine insecurity on two fronts: not only does she defy the boundaries and protocols of patriarchal order, but she also represents an abomination of the very concept of good husbandry, of the management of labor.

The representation of the prostitute as an embodiment of commodified labor meant that she often encompassed vagrant labor in general. This was possible in large part because the juridical category of “masterless men,” or idle, wandering vagrants, did not denote a specific, readily identifiable group of people, but referred more generally to changing configurations of the application of labor. Patricia Fumerton explains “that in the minds of contemporary authorities, the vagrant experience did not need to involve physical mobility or even homelessness. It was marked by being out of place, which included engagement in irregular, unsettled labor.”³⁰ In short, the concept of vagrancy transcended individual behavior and spoke to the social and economic change that was displacing much of the population from its traditional

²⁸ Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 62.

²⁹ David Underdown makes a similar argument: “The growth of a market economy may... have given more women a greater sense of independence, making men liable to retaliate when they encountered instances of flagrant defiance of accustomed patriarchal order.” The patriarchal “taming of the scold” was thus at once a taming of the emerging capitalist economy. David Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 136

³⁰ Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

occupations and way of life.³¹ It included everyone who depended upon his/her labor to survive, and who had to adapt his/her labor power to a fluid and mobile economic system which was rapidly chipping away at feudal social formations. In a 1531 vagrancy act, for instance, a vagrant is characterized as “any man or woman being whole and mighty in body and able to labour, having no land, nor using any lawful merchandise, craft or mystery whereby he might get his living.”³² Key to this description is the free-floating status of labor power, its existence as potential: the specificity of labor is unimportant, so long as it is channeled into a socially legitimate occupation. We see this attitude expressed again in a 1578 proclamation by the Queen calling on vagrants to “Depart and auoide themselves from the said Cities of London and Westminster... and from there to repare to the coutreys and places where they were borne, there to tarrie and abide in some lawfull worke and exercise, as they ought to doe...”³³ There is no consideration here of the underlying causes of vagrancy, the guiding assumption being that there is a natural occupation or use-value of labor awaiting every vagrant in his/her hometown, from which, for whatever reason, he/she has simply wandered away. The vagueness of these labors (“some lawfull worke and exercise”) bespeaks the failure or incapacity of the ruling class adequately to conceptualize the true nature of the problem. Before this mass of unemployed labor came to be seen as a valuable economic resource for capital, feudal society could only register the epidemic of “masterless men” as a radical violation of the traditional social order. The condemnation of the growing ranks of the vagrant class amounts to an effort by the state to

³¹ Christopher Hill delineates five categories of “masterless men”: the first were “rogues, vagabonds and beggars, roaming the countryside, sometimes in search of employment, too often mere unemployable rejects of a society in economic transition, whose population was expanding rapidly”; the second, closely related to the first, was the London underworld, “an anonymous refuge” for vagrants and a source of casual labor; third were protestant sectaries; fourth were cottagers and squatters on rural land; and fifth was the itinerant trading population. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1991): 40.

³² qtd. in A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (New York; London: Routledge, 1985), 9.

³³ Anon., “By the Queene.” (London: 1578).

obscure contradictions in the economic infrastructure through recourse to a tidy moral explanation of social disorder: vagrants are simply degenerate.

It is precisely because of this conceptual impasse that vagrant or displaced labor becomes inscribed within the figure of the prostitute. Indeed, as Beier has shown, vagrants' (perceived) transgression of patriarchal household order was the primary cause of their vilification, with one contemporary commentator going so far as to call them "a promiscuous generation."³⁴ This equation of vagrancy with uncontrollable and insurgent sexual energy is given further material manifestation by the fact that "women itinerants were charged with prostitution rather than vagrancy."³⁵ Masterless sexual labor, like the other forms of labor that became displaced during the emergence of capitalism, haunt the margins of legitimate labor and social order, and indeed one consequently reads city comedy with the sense, as one critic has put it, that "this mob of masterless women threatens at any moment to surface in the action."³⁶ Representations of uncontrollable female sexuality are thus closely connected, if not inextricable from, the early modern conceptualization of masterless and vagrant labor: the whorish woman's transgression of patriarchal and economic order aligns her at both a socio-symbolic and social structural level with the epidemic of masterlessness that undercut early modern pretensions to social stability.³⁷ Furthermore, it is worth keeping in mind that, with the transition to capitalism, women's work became increasingly limited to the reproduction of labor power within the household. Under

³⁴qtd. in Beier, 51.

³⁵Ibid., 52.

³⁶Fiona McNeill, "Gynocentric London Spaces: (Relocating) Masterless Women in Early Stuart Drama," *Renaissance Drama* 28 (1999): 197.

³⁷Gail Kern Paster also discusses the relationship between female sexuality and the chaos of London in general, though she sees representations of female sexuality as simply a backdrop to city comedy's exposition of London's corrupted and predatory organization of social relations. The result is that, for Paster, "Female sensuality is most often expressed as cliché in city comedy, the inevitable compliment to the endless cuckoldry jokes." Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 153.

capitalism, the private household sphere primarily exists to reproduce labor power, the very rabble that Kitley and Knowell locate within the public sphere.

Thus despite the anxious emphasis placed on prostitutes, stewards, and “lascivious jests” throughout *Every Man in his Humour*, I want to suggest that the menacing threat to household order actually finds its source, its primary manifestation, in the figure of Brainworm, Knowell’s wily servant who disguises himself as a vagrant soldier in order to undermine his master’s plans (2.1.62). Brainworm serves as the structural hinge that connects the household to the public sphere, and his vagrant scheming is in many instances precisely what enables the “diseased riot” to transform the household into a “public receptacle.” What seems to be a divergent plot thread surrounding Brainworm’s scheming is actually the presupposed but not directly named socioeconomic referent of the play’s family drama. Household husbandry – with its anxious negotiation of humoral disorder and sexual labor – operates synecdochally as a strategy for working through the more general problem of vagrant labor that is embodied in Brainworm.

Brainworm’s decision to adopt the “borrowed shape” of a vagrant soldier has no particular motivation other than his loyalty to Knowell’s son Edward and his consequent desire to foil Knowell’s efforts to reform his son’s behavior (2.2.6-7). According to Judith Weil, “As a highly variable part of a network of dependencies, a part which interacts with the functioning of maturation, marriage, and friendship, service reflects and modifies other norms” (9).³⁸ If the servant’s obedient labor is a sign of a stable social hierarchy, Brainworm’s vagrant labor indicates a radical disintegration of the status system: not only is Brainworm’s proteanism in defiance of the feudal emphasis on essential identity, but the object of his scheming is precisely the undermining of Knowell’s plan to transform his son into a proper gentleman. As a servant,

³⁸Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9.

the lynchpin of traditional household order, Brainworm's willful submission to vagrancy and the channeling of his labor into the subversion of his master's will is the ultimate proof of Knowell's and Kitley's suspicion that the family unit's hegemonic function as the source of social order is in a state of profound crisis. But more than attesting to social crisis, Brainworm's presence and his instigation of much of the play's action demonstrates that central to this crisis is an ideological struggle to make sense of unplaced, vagrant labor. What Brainworm's seemingly unmotivated behavior represents is the disturbing way that economic change can radically, and without warning, alter the application of labor, transforming what had been a form of labor grounded in relations of mutual dependency into what must have appeared to be a monstrously uncontrollable and unstable form of free-floating labor power.

There are two versions, Marx informs us, of the history of primitive accumulation, or the earliest moments of capitalist emergence: the first, that of the bourgeois political economists, naively and deceptively speaks of laborers' "emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds," and their subsequent emergence as free agents in control of their own labor.³⁹ The laborers themselves, however, experienced this freedom as the viscous process of being "robbed of all their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements."⁴⁰ It is from this latter historical perspective that Brainworm, disguised as Fitzsword, speaks when he describes his impoverished condition as "the humour of necessity," apologizing for his shameful beggary by explaining that "it is my want speaks, not myself" (2.2.46-47, 49). Far from an expression of freedom, Brainworm characterizes his position of economic dispossession as guided by an ethic of brute necessity which overwhelms his moral volition and his sense of dignity. The humour of necessity refers to labor that is precisely not the

³⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*. (New York: Penguin, 1992), 875.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

object of its possessor's free agency, its implementation determined instead by a basic impulse to survive which overrides concern for social decorum. But this humour of necessity is also the basis of a vagrant subjectivity – it “speaks” through Brainworm, forming the kernel of his subjectivity. Confronted by the direness of his/her situation, the vagrant laborer is forced to recognize the objective determination of subjectivity, and is therefore unburdened by any pretensions of an inner or private subjectivity distinct from the objective conditions of existence, a circumstance suggested by Brainworm's confession that “This condition agrees not with my spirit” (2.2.50). His spirit takes second place to the immediacy of necessity. The fact that Brainworm is aware of the discrepancy between his actual lived condition and his ideal self or spirit indicates the potential for subjective agency engendered by economic hardship. Brainworm's subjectivity is potentially radical because it forces him to reflect upon the way harsh economic conditions determine his ability to self-fashion.

Objective necessity thus invests existence with a radically uncontrollable quality: simply put, someone who is starving, a victim of socioeconomic hardship, is unlikely to be concerned with the social norms and codes of conduct that exist to keep social antagonisms in check. Brainworm's humour of necessity, as an existential status, indicates the unpredictability that was often associated with vagrants. Silvia Federici notes that the early modern “proletariat personified the ‘ill humours’ that hid in the social body, beginning with the disgusting monsters of idleness and drunkenness. In the eyes of his masters, its life was pure inertia, but at the same time uncontrolled passion and unbridled fantasy, ever ready to explode in riotous commotions.”⁴¹ In the play, this unbridled fantasy manifests in Brainworm's protean shape-shifting, as he channels his humour of necessity into schemes designed to undermine social

⁴¹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 154.

order. This proteanism also legitimates Knowell's and Kitley's anxiety about the chaotic and contaminating influence of the public sphere. Brainworm's ironic "O, how I long to be employed!" following his initial encounter with Knowell suggests that the vagrant poor could indeed work if they wanted to, but that they are only willing to employ their labor power in socially damaging ways (2.3.143). As Brainworm proceeds to take advantage of his vagrant status rather than to suffer from it, the humour of necessity is increasingly represented as a devious subjective desire for Machiavellian scheming. Socioeconomic necessity is recoded as a question of individual moral choice.

In response to Brainworm's begging, Knowell employs what Halpern has labeled the discourse on capacities, or the patently bourgeois tendency to reduce socio-economic phenomena to individual agency and will. The discourse on capacities accomplished much of the ideological work of primitive accumulation by obscuring the inherent unfairness of capital's constitutive unsettling of labor power: "The great innovation of the sixteenth century was to employ [the discourse of capacities] in a major way to explain *downward* mobility and to cope ideologically with the swelling tides of the new poor."⁴² Thus Knowell informs Brainworm that

men of thy condition feed on sloth,
As doth the beetle on the dung she breeds in,
Not caring how the metal of your minds
Is eaten with the rust of idleness. (2.3.103-106)

Knowell's accusations enable him to conceive of behavior performed in accordance with existential necessity as a lifestyle choice, allowing him to divest himself of any sense of personal responsibility for Brainworm's suffering. Personal failure, and not social injustice, is to blame for Brainworm's poverty.

⁴²Halpern, 90.

And yet, despite the various abuses directed at Brainworm, the play seems unwilling to do without him, and certainly the characters who deride him the most vigorously nevertheless seem to be strangely fascinated by him. Knowell, for instance, takes Brainworm into his service on a provisional basis even after proclaiming that, if one were to do such a thing, “I would esteem the sin not thine, but his” (2.3.110). The preservation of Knowell’s fantasy of restoring social stability requires the presence of its perpetual foil. And this is the ideological dimension of the play as well: only by having someone to blame for social instability can the frightening consequences of that instability, of the violent unsettling of labor power, remain misrecognized. We can say, then, that the play tries not so much to recontain this labor power which has been pushed to the level of necessity, but seeks rather to ignore the problem, or block it from consciousness.

Accordingly, the play concludes in an act of willful ignorance rather than with an effort to work through the implications raised by Brainworm’s presence. The play’s elision of these implications is summed up by Justice Clement’s dismissive evaluation of the preceding events: “Why, this is a mere trick, a device; you are gulled in this most grossly, all!” (5.1.35-36). Leinwand describes Clement as a “*deus ex machina*,” who “resolves the intrigues and metes out fit rewards and punishments, though it is hard to imagine that he can do much to improve the next day’s goings-on in London.”⁴³ The law, as it is represented in the figure of Clement, seems inclined simply to overlook the turmoil of London society, as demonstrated by his transvaluation of Brainworm’s subversive laboring subjectivity, interpreting it as an instance of an important noble characteristic: he informs Brainworm that “thou hast done, or assisted to nothing, in my judgment, but deserves to be pardoned for the wit o’ the offence” (5.1.180-181). Economic necessity and the subjective orientation it engenders is re-interpreted as aristocratic wit. By

⁴³Leinwand, 116.

representing desperation as wit, the play seeks to erase the class antagonism expressed by Brainworm's actions. Moreover, Clement's commendation of the marriage between Edward and Bridget as a "Good complement" to Brainworm's behavior continues this upbeat interpretation of events (5.1.268). The final moments of the play thus attempt to reinscribe the threatening public sphere within the household order, indeed exposing Knowell's and Kitley's anxieties as being little more than a figment of their imaginations, a failure properly to regulate their humours.

The play's attention to domestic order speaks to a larger anxiety about social and economic change. The humours mediate between the household and the social, and the negotiation of household regulation, with its unstable humoral dimensions, allows the play to explore the implications of this changing socioeconomic environment. Brainworm, in his role as a vagrant laborer displaced by these changes, is the play's most potent expression of the anxieties arising from the emergence of capitalism. And yet, the more the play attempts to control Brainworm, to represent the desperation he voices as harmlessly mischievous and comical, the more he seems to exceed the bounds of this control. Indeed, the action of the play is driven not by the narrative domination of the merchants or aristocrats, but on the contrary by the actions of a vagrant laborer. Brainworm's subjectivization of his economic condition is the motive force of the play. The very fact that he is able to adopt the guise of a vagrant laborer suggests that the "humour of necessity" has become a viable subject position, a location of potential oppositional agency. By consciously reflecting on the economic situation of the vagrant laborer, Brainworm gives voice to this potential agency.

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