

Mingling Kings and Clowns:

Carnavalesque Politics of the Fifteenth-Century

King and Commoner Tradition

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A thesis submitted in candidature for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Cardiff University

2015

Summary

This thesis analyses the political ideologies of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition. This critically neglected yet widespread tradition occupied a unique political and cultural space in the literature of the later Middle Ages, leaving an indelible mark on British culture. Its influence and study impacts on outlaw literature, romance, and Shakespearean drama. This thesis provides the first detailed critical history and close textual analysis of the King and Commoner tradition as a whole. Drawing on Bakhtinian and Foucauldian methodologies, it examines this material's amalgamation of carnival rituals with late-medieval complaint literature and insurgent demands.

The Introduction traces King and Commoner analogues across other cultures, insular romance and chronicles. Chapter One focuses on *King Edward and the Shepherd* (c. 1400), arguing that this 'bourde' utilises the commoner's carnivalesque poached feast and anti-noble complaints to invert social norms and deconstruct hierarchical boundaries. The King emerges here as a proto-panoptical spy, while the court is identified with corruption, oppression and alterity amid the commoner's containment. Chapter Two explores this carnival inversion in *John the Reeve* (c. 1450), arguing that this text repeatedly stages a carnivalesque violence directed at the social body, culminating in John's insurgent storming of the court. Chapter Three focuses on *Rauf Coilzear* (c. 1460) and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (c. 1500), contending that the tradition's carnivalesque elements allow it to interact with both the worlds of Carolingian romance and outlaw literature in these hybrid texts. Chapter Four examines the King and Commoner ballads and chapbooks of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, arguing that this conservative, pro-monarchic material self-consciously contains and remediates the tradition. The Appendix to Chapter Four also identifies King and Commoner influenced

drama from the sixteenth century onwards, highlighting the tradition's absorption into an array of cultural narratives, from Robin Hood plays to national histories.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Rob Gossedge for his patience, encouragement and provision of innumerable insightful suggestions and comments. I must also thank Stephen Knight for enthusiastically introducing me to *King Edward and the Shepherd* and providing cherished advice during the initial stages of my research. Additionally, I am tremendously grateful to Helen Phillips, who read a late draft of this thesis and made many astute and helpful suggestions.

I must also thank my parents, without whose inexhaustible support this thesis would not have been possible. Finally, my partner Helen Langdon has supported me throughout my PhD, acted as a sounding board for my ideas and provided many suggestions relating to clarity and matters of detail; I am eternally grateful to her.

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Introduction

‘A rolle he had reading, / A bourde written therein he ffound’

In his seminal *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, American scholar and ballad collector Francis James Child comments:

Next to adventures of Robin Hood and his men, the most favourite topic in English popular poetry is the chance-encounter of a king, unrecognised as such, with one of his humbler subjects.¹

The literature examined in this thesis emerged as a popular tradition in the fifteenth century to leave an indelible mark on English-language culture, influencing a vast array of literature ranging from outlaw ballads to Shakespearean national histories and nineteenth-century novels.² But despite its past popularity and long-lasting influence, this ‘most favourite topic in English popular poetry’ has long suffered from critical neglect, with currently only a handful of articles devoted to its study. This thesis will attempt to go some way to righting this, detailing the inverted, carnivalesque worlds imagined by this distinctly political and merrily subversive fifteenth-century material, as well as briefly tracing its later history in post-medieval ballads and drama.

This tradition of late- and post-medieval poetry has been variously referred to as ‘King in Disguise’, ‘King and Subject’ and ‘King and Commoner’, with each label possessing strengths and weaknesses. ‘King in Disguise’ focuses on the one constant in the

¹ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola & New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 69.

² The disguised King in the Robin Hood tradition is certainly influenced by this tradition, as is examined in Chapter Three’s discussion of *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. William Shakespeare made repeated use of the King and Commoner tropes in several of his plays, including *3 Henry VI*, *1 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Winter’s Tale*. The tradition is also used or referred in the work of a host of writers, poets and dramatists, including Gavin Douglas, William Dunbar, Philip Sidney, Robert Greene, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, Anthony Munday, Robert Dodsley, Walter Scott, Rudyard Kipling, and Mark Twain. The dramatic and literary afterlife of this King and Commoner tradition is briefly examined in this thesis’ conclusion.

tradition: the unrecognised, incognito ruler. This term has been criticised by Rochelle Smith, highlighting its inaccuracy due to the king's usual lack of a physical disguise.³ Yet this criticism is perhaps too focused on the materiality of disguise. A romance knight donning different armour becomes an 'incognito knight' but nonetheless remains identifiably a knight. By contrast, these 'incognito kings' use false names to conceal that social identity, that kingship, from those they encounter, regardless of whether or not they are disguised with a cloak. As Jane Bliss argues regarding romance, when 'the name rather than the face' is known, to choose to be incognito and to provide aliases is to prevent recognition, shed social identity, and gain a degree of social mobility.⁴ Nevertheless, I object to the King in Disguise term on different grounds, for this title excludes the commoners who are the joint (and in the fifteenth-century texts arguably *main*) protagonists of the tradition. Such exclusion would run awkwardly counter to the ideologies espoused by the medieval material.

'King and Subject' is a term that covers the rare instances when the subject is not a commoner (for example when they are a hermit or a bishop) but it could be criticised for being a little vague, theoretically serving as a description for any text portraying a king conversing with someone socially below him, regardless of whether that subject is the highest lord or lowest serf. The subjects in these narratives are almost always commoners, with the wide social gap between king and commoner generally the defining feature on which these texts are based.⁵ Given this, 'King and Commoner' appears the most appropriate and accurate description for these narratives and is gradually becoming the most critically accepted term,

³ Rochelle Smith, 'King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad, Elizabethan Drama, and Shakespeare', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 50.2 (2010), 301-335 (n. 9).

⁴ Jane Bliss, *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), p. 37.

⁵ By 'commoner' I am referring broadly to those who are not of the aristocracy/nobility. The commoners in these tales vary from lowly shepherds to relatively prosperous reeves but even the reeve repeatedly refers to his status as a commoner/churl, proudly declaring that he is 'of carles kinne' and insisting on his social distance from his aristocratic guests. *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. 550-94 (l. 90).

with a recent study by Rochelle Smith and compilation of comic tales by Melissa Furrow both opting for this label.⁶

In relation to medieval tradition, these tales present us with something of a break from commonly recognised and established categories. The earliest of these fifteenth-century King and Commoner tales are recorded in the form of ‘bourdes’. This bourde label was first critically applied to these texts by E. K. Chambers but has rarely been adhered to since, with the term ‘ballad’ usually applied to the medieval King and Commoner material.⁷ Yet several of the earliest King and Commoner texts clearly identify themselves as ‘bourdes’, including *King Edward and the Shepherd* (c. 1400-1450), *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468) and *John the Reeve* (c. 1450), the last of which opens with this self-description:

As I heard tell this other yeere,
A clarke came out of Lancashire:
A rolle he had reading,
A bourde written therein he ffound.⁸

This bourde label is certainly an apt description for the carnivalesque content of these texts. The word’s definitions accurately imply that these texts will be ‘bawdy’ tales, full of ‘jests’, ‘tricks’ and ‘pranks’.⁹

In an essay and recent collection, Melissa Furrow has applied this ‘bourde’ label to several Middle English comic tales, including the medieval King and Commoner texts.

Furrow argues that ‘bourdes’ were a distinct late-medieval comic genre, growing out of

⁶ Smith, ‘King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad’. *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013).

⁷ E. K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), pp. 128-9. For a couple of instances of the ballad label being applied to the King and Commoner tradition, see Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, pp. 67-75; Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 44. David Fowler raises some objections to this ballad label, arguing that it allows them to be confused with the later, vastly different broadside ballads and instead suggests that both the medieval Robin Hood and King and Commoner material should be referred to as ‘rymes’. See David C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 10.

⁸ *John the Reeve*, ll. 7-10.

⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran (University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service). Available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED5729> [accessed March 2015].

interest in both Chaucer's *fabliau*-inspired tales and Middle English romance's more 'realistic' deviations from their French sources, creating an English, less obscene variant of the French *fabliau*.¹⁰ In her *Ten Bourdes* collection, Furrow identifies *The Tale of the Basin*, *Jack and his Stepdame*, *The Lady Prioress*, *Dane Hew*, *Munk of Leicestre*, *The Freiris of Berwik*, *Sir Corneus*, and *The Boy and the Mantle*, along with the medieval King and Commoner texts, as potential 'bourdes'.¹¹ The King and Commoner texts sit somewhat uneasily alongside some of these other tales' more fantastical elements, such as the enchanted chamber pot in *The Tale of the Basin* or the magic flute in *Jack and His Stepdame*. Nonetheless, all of these 'bourdes', including the King and Commoner tales, do share a love of trickery and bawdy jokes, while often featuring a degree of carnivalesque inversion.

More generally, Furrow's sense that these *bourdes* emerged from a synthesis and adaptation of previously existing medieval genres (such as romance and *fabliau*) does seem to resonate with the King and Commoner material, for they otherwise resist simple classification. The fifteenth-century King and Commoner tales are too realistic, secular and unidealised to be typically pastoral, too focused on and sympathetic to the commoners' struggles to be traditional romance, too serious, rural and political to be traditional *fabliau*, and too focused on narrative and comic, bawdy celebration to be classed as complaint literature. Yet they arguably contain elements of all of the above genres. They are a wonderfully complex hybridisation, borrowing from a plethora of medieval genres to fashion something new.¹² As befits tales that invert norms and twist expectations, the King and

¹⁰ This argument is best detailed in Melissa Furrow, 'Middle English Fabliaux and Modern Myth', *ELH*, 56.1 (1989), 1-18.

¹¹ See 'General Introduction', in *Ten Bourdes*, pp. 1-3.

¹² A sense of this contradiction and uniqueness is also captured in Rachel Snell's description of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner texts as 'a challenging new type of romance', despite their complete break with and failure to include 'the familiar [romance] themes of love, chivalry, quest and the supernatural.' Rachel Snell, 'The Undercover King', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge & Rochester, N.Y.: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 133-154 (p. 136).

Commoner bourdes persistently refuse to meet pre-defined expectations, tricking the unsuspecting reader.

While each of the surviving fifteenth-century King and Commoner bourdes feature unique details and variations, they are linked by their utilisation and adaptation of a standard plot. This generally sees a king becoming lost in the forest and encountering a disgruntled, rustic commoner, from whom he conceals his royal identity. The commoner provides various political complaints regarding the aristocracy and the court, before inviting the incognito king back to his home and presenting him with a feast of poached deer. The end of these tales sees the commoner invited back to court under some pretence, where the king reveals his true identity amid a second feast. Despite fearing execution, the commoner is instead usually granted a lavish reward and a position in the court. The kings of these medieval tales are complex figures who restore social balance and expose aristocratic corruption but can also be portrayed as unsettling proto-panoptic spies, primarily concerned with fortifying their own power. Yet the most fleshed-out characters are almost invariably the commoners, with the main action taking place in their liminal, inverted worlds. Unlike the forests of romance or the beautiful, fantasy greenwood of the outlaw narratives, the distinctly chilly forest worlds of the King and Commoner material present the commoners' realistic hardships, tragedies and struggles, while offering a critique of the hierarchical social norms and boundaries that oppress them.

The political and narrative focus of these early tales falls on the presentation of the two opposing feasts, an unofficial feast in the forest and an official feast in the court. The commoner's feast depicts an inverted world that is closely akin to the principles of the unofficial medieval carnival feasts as envisaged by Mikhail Bakhtin in his celebrated study *Rabelais and His World*. These feasts glorify in excess, breaching boundaries, mingling high

and low, presenting the commoner as a mock king and the king as an ignorant fool, with hierarchical social norms interrogated and deconstructed. They repeatedly use a sense of inversion and doubleness to establish a collapse of difference, to rend and beat the body politic, while the commoners express a desire to ‘cracke thy crowne’ and ‘mak me lord of my awin’.¹³ This is further complemented by the commoner’s explicitly anti-noble sentiment, critiquing aristocratic oppression and hierarchical norms, while reaching for – in the words of Bakhtin – a ‘world of ideals [... a] utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance’ that transcends hierarchical norms.¹⁴

It has become something of a critical tradition to fall into one of two divided camps when discussing the politics of the medieval carnival. There are those who argue for the radical potential of the carnival, pointing to its break from social constraints and the rebellious actions that sometimes result from carnival festivities.¹⁵ Alternatively, there are others who view it as a conservative pressure valve, a controlled ‘release of steam’ allowed by those in authority with the aim of containing rebellious desires and so enforcing the status quo.¹⁶ However, such a stringent and generalising dichotomy is unhelpful. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White began a move away from this divide by arguing that:

¹³ John the Reeve, in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript*, l. 745. *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), pp. 161-204 (l. 129).

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 8-9.

¹⁵ Critics depicting the carnival as a rebellious act include: Bakhtin, *Rabelais*; Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 153-5; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975); Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People’s Uprising at Romans, 1579-80*, trans. M. Feeney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Thomas Pettitt, “‘Here Comes I, Jack Straw’”: English Folk Drama and Social Revolt’, *Folklore*, 95.1 (1984), 3-20; Christopher Dyer, ‘The Rising of 1381 in Suffolk: Its Origins and Participants’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, 36 (1988), 274-87 (p. 281); Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Critics espousing the ‘safety-valve’ theory of carnival as a conservative tool include: Phythian Adams, ‘Ceremony and the Citizen: the Communal Year at Coventry 1450-1550’, in *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1972), pp. 57-85; Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 148; Mervyn James, ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town’, *Past and Present*, 98 (1983), 3-29; Umberto Eco, ‘The Frames of Comic “Freedom”’, in *Carnival!*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin,

It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression. The most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as a *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*.¹⁷

This call for the politics of the carnival to be examined case-by-case, rather than as a generalised whole, is further pushed by Chris Humphrey:

All too often interpretation is simply a matter of slotting the evidence into the categories of a pre-existing model, rather than taking the time to study it further, and think constructively about the conclusions one reaches.¹⁸

This more balanced approach, based on a detailed, close-reading of the evidence, seems to me to be the most sensible methodology to emulate. The medieval carnival does not fit into a simplistic categorisation as conservative *or* radical but can be diverse in its meanings and ideology and utilised by any across the political spectrum for their own agenda. Put simply, the carnival can be radical but it can also be conservative.

This is particularly relevant for the King and Commoner burlesques, as they are not universally radical or conservative in their depiction of carnival feasting. They instead present and interrogate two very different types of carnival festivities, with each encompassing widely differing political agendas. The commoners' carnival feasts in these texts are explicitly illegal, unapproved and transgressive, and as such are removed from the conservative description of the carnival as an officially-permitted cultural 'safety valve'. In contrast to this, the carnival feasts at court are presented as official, state-sponsored banquets

New York & Amsterdam: Mouton, 1984), p. 6; Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), p. 143; Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 125-6; Peter Greenfield, 'Festive Drama at Christmas in Aristocratic Households', in *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13-19 July, 1989*, ed. Meg Twycross (Cambridge & Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 34-40.

¹⁷ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 14.

¹⁸ Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 38-9.

that instead seek to reinforce orthodoxy, aristocratic authority, and contain rebellion. In doing so, they distinctly resemble Bakhtin's descriptions of the carnival feasts of 'official culture':

Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward and eternal and indisputable [...] The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted.¹⁹

The court feast is an explicitly licit affair that persistently sees a reassertion of the king's authority and hierarchical norms, containing and ending rebellion by (re)absorbing the commoner into a fixed hierarchical structure. Yet, it is important to note that this containment does not simply cancel out the issues raised by the first feast but adds to the complex political voice of these tales. In Sandra Billington's words, 'misrule was [...] allied to rule as an interrelated opposite.'²⁰ Each requires the other in order to accentuate their own distinct character. These tales are acutely aware of this containment and arguably offer a subtle interrogation of it, setting the two feasts in opposition. In the court feasts, despite some elements of injustice being overturned and the commoner being lavishly rewarded, the corrupt court frequently becomes imbued with an uneasy sense of alterity and pessimism, permeated by images of death and execution, imbuing these conservative carnival scenes with a deep sense of dread. It is a notably morbid and problematic end for superficially comic tales, emphasising the triumph of restriction and oppression over the comparative merry freedom and abundance of the commoner's own feast. The result sees the forest presented as a place of life and the court as a place of death.

The King and Commoner Material in Criticism and Print

¹⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 9.

²⁰ Billington, *Mock Kings*, p. 1.

The King and Commoner material has received relatively little critical attention, with no comprehensive study of the tradition as a whole and only a handful of articles examining the individual texts. Generally speaking, the tradition exists on the margins of academia, usually only receiving a paragraph or passing reference, allowing these texts to be too readily dismissed offhand as simplistic and conservative.

A substantial reason for this critical neglect is probably due to the difficulty in locating the King and Commoner material, which has rarely been in print over the last century and has never been collated into a single edition. *King Edward and the Shepherd* (c. 1400-1450) is the oldest and longest of the medieval King and Commoner *bourdes*, yet it has only been reproduced on three occasions. It was first printed (with many inaccuracies) in Charles Henry Hartshorne's 1829 collection of *Ancient Metrical Tales* and would not be printed again until 1930, when it was included in Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale's *Middle English Metrical Romances*.²¹ Aside from its appearance in Janay Young Downing's unpublished 1969 PhD thesis (a critical edition of Cambridge University manuscript Ff.5.48), *King Edward and the Shepherd* subsequently remained out of print until as recently as 2013, when it was included in Melissa Furrow's collection *Ten Bourdes*.²² *John the Reeve* (c. 1450) was included in three nineteenth-century collections between 1867 and 1895 but was thereafter neglected until Furrow's 1985 publication of *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems*.²³ Similarly, *King Edward and the Hermit* (c. 1500) was printed three times

²¹ *King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *Ancient Metrical Tales*, ed. Charles Henry Hartshorne (London: W. Pickering, 1829), pp. 293-315. *King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (New York: Prentice Hall, 1930), pp. 949-85.

²² *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. 116-59. *King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 145-86.

²³ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript. John the Reeve*, in *Select Remains of the Ancient Popular and Romance Poetry of Scotland*, ed. David Laing and John Small (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1885), pp. 41-80. *John the Reeve*, in *Early Popular Poetry of Scotland and the Northern Border*, Vol. I, ed. David Laing and William Carew Hazlitt (London: Reeves & Turner, 1895), pp. 250-83. *John the Reeve*, in *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 177-234. *John the*

between 1814 and 1864 before being out of print until Furrow's 1985 collection.²⁴ The Scottish King and Commoner tale *Rauf Coilyear* (c. 1460) has been printed a little more frequently and uniquely for the King and Commoner material published as a stand-alone text, but it still possesses a significant gap in its twentieth-century publication history, with no editions of the text printed between 1903 and 1987.²⁵ The multiple post-medieval broadside ballads are for the most part harder to find still, with many remaining unpublished and often only available via online facsimile collections.²⁶ However, Francis James Child's famed and often reprinted ballad collection made *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* (c. 1600), its medieval counterpart *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468), and *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* (c. 1624) all readily available from the late-nineteenth century onwards.²⁷

The earliest criticism on the King and Commoner texts appears in Frederick James Furnivall and John Hales' 1867 edition of the Percy folio. In the foreword to the first volume, Furnivall picked out *John the Reeve* for special mention as one of several 'real gains to our

Reeve, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 187-221.

²⁴ *The Kyng and the Hermyt*, ed. J. J. Coneybeare, in *The British Bibliographer*, Vol. IV, ed. Sir Egerton Brydges and Joseph Haselwood (London: R. Triphook, 1814), pp. 81-95. *The Kyng and the Hermyt*, in *Ancient Metrical Tales*, ed. Charles Henry Hartshorne (London: W. Pickering, 1829), pp. 293-315. *The Kyng and the Hermyt*, in *Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of England*, ed. William Carew Hazlitt (London: John Russell Smith, 1864), pp. 11-34. *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Ten Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 237-69. *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), pp. 401-13. *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 222-41.

²⁵ *The Tale of Rauf Coilyear*, in *Select Remains of the Early Popular Poetry of Scotland*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1822), pp. 1-39. *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear*, in *Select Remains of the Ancient Popular and Romance Poetry of Scotland*, ed. David Laing and John Small (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1885), pp. 1-40. *The Tale of Rauf Coilyear*, in *Early Popular Poetry of Scotland and the Northern Border*, Vol. I, ed. David Laing and William Carew Hazlitt (London: Reeves & Turner, 1895), pp. 212-49. *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear: Mit literarhistorischer, grammatischer und metrischer Einleitung*, ed. M. Tonndorf (Berlin: C. Vogt's Verlag, 1894). *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear*, in *Scottish Alliterative Poems in Riming Stanzas*, ed. F. J. Amours (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1897), pp. 82-114. *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear: A Scottish Metrical Romance of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. William Hand Browne (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1903). *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear*, in *Longer Scottish Poems*, Vol. I, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt and Felicity Riddy (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), pp. 96-113. *Rauf Coilyear*, in *Medieval English Romances*, ed. Diane Speed (Sydney: Dept. of English, University of Sydney, 1989), pp. 196-235. *The Tale of Ralph the Collier: An Alliterative Romance*, ed. Elizabeth Walsh (New York: Peter Lang, 1989). *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*.

²⁶ See appendix one for a selected publication history.

²⁷ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, pp. 67-75.

literature’, while using an essay in the second volume to propose that *John the Reeve* was primarily written as a critique of bondage.²⁸ Hale’s introduction to *John the Reeve* added that the poet ‘understands best the life of the villain’ and the poem was reflective of the commons’ growing optimism and self-confidence amid the aftermath of the 1381 Peasant Revolt: ‘That mighty exodus which the fifteenth century witnessed is being accomplished. The house of bondage is being left. The land of freedom is coming into sight.’²⁹

Much of the subsequent work on the King and Commoner tradition as a whole is focused on the collation of descriptive synopses of the medieval and post-medieval material, while identifying textual provenances and suggesting literary analogues. In his ballad collection, published between 1882 and 1898, Francis Child devotes a section to this tradition, printing *The King and the Barker*, *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth*, and *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*, while providing detailed synopses of many others.³⁰ E. K. Chambers’ 1945 study of late medieval literature provides brief synopses of *King Henry II and the Cistercian Abbot* and *King Edward and the Shepherd* while highlighting *King Edward and the Hermit*, *John the Reeve*, *Rauf Coilzear*, and *The King and the Barker*.³¹ A 1975 article by Elizabeth Walsh provides comprehensive synopses of *Rauf Coilzear*, *King Henry II and the Cistercian Abbot*, *King Alfred and the Cakes*, *King Edward and the Shepherd*, *King Edward and the Hermit*, and *John the Reeve*, while tracing a number

²⁸ Frederick J. Furnivall, ‘Forewords’, in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. I, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. ix-xxvi (p. xi). Frederick J. Furnivall, ‘On Bondman, the Name and the Class, with Reference to the Ballad *John the Reeve*’, in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. xxxiii-lxii.

²⁹ John W. Hales, ‘*John the Reeve*: Introduction’, in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. 550-56 (pp. 550-1).

³⁰ Child’s synopses are of (in order provided) *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth*, *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*, *John the Reeve*, *Rauf Coilzear*, *King Edward and the Shepherd*, *King Edward and the Hermit*, *King Henry II and the Cistercian Abbot*, *King Alfred and the Shepherd*, *King James I and the Tinker*, *William III and the Forester*, *The Royal Frolick*, and *The King and the Cobler*. See Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, pp. 67-75.

³¹ Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages*, pp. 128-9.

of King and Commoner analogues from across Europe.³² Linda Hutjens' article largely repeats the above work while further emphasising the tradition's links to the chronicle tales of King Alfred and arguing for a Biblical precedent, highlighting Abraham's hospitality to three strangers and pushing Jesus as a prototype 'king in disguise' (who intermingles with sinners, grants them forgiveness, and rewards them in heaven).³³ Melissa Furrow's 2013 collection of bourdes prints *King Edward and the Shepherd*, *John the Reeve*, and *King Edward and the Hermit*, while providing a general introduction to the medieval King and Commoner material, including extensive notes and a revised set of potential composition dates for the texts she prints.³⁴

Of all the King and Commoner tales, *Rauf Coilyear* has attracted the most detailed academic attention – not only because it was printed more frequently than other examples of the tradition but also because its Carolingian romance setting distinguishes it from other King and Commoner bourdes. In the foreword to his edition of the poem, William Browne praises the author's 'literary gifts' while highlighting the poem's collapse of class separation, allowing the lowly Rauf to 'predominate over royalty and knighthood'.³⁵ An article from 1930 by H. M. Smyser sets out *Rauf Coilyear*'s structural and thematic links to 'folklore', such as *John the Reeve*, and the romances *Otinell* and *Fierabras*.³⁶ Elizabeth Walsh used a 1979 article to highlight the poet's use of alliteration and repetition to emphasise central concepts, such as Rauf's honour and word.³⁷ Stephen Shepherd (a Marxist, new historicist

³² These include Abraham's hospitality to three strangers, Homer's *Odyssey*, the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona, *Heimskringla*, and post-medieval European tales of *Der Köhler und Kaiser Maximilian II*, *Charles V and the Broommaker*, *Francis I and a Shoemaker*, and *Philip the Good and a Coal Burner*. See Elizabeth Walsh, 'The King in Disguise', *Folklore*, 86.1 (1975), 3-24.

³³ Linda Hutjens, 'The Disguised King in Early English Ballads', in *Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 75-89.

³⁴ *Ten Bourdes*, pp. 141-241.

³⁵ *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear*, ed. Browne, pp. 23-39.

³⁶ H. M. Smyser, 'The Taill of Rauf Coilyear and its Sources', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 14 (1932), 135-50.

³⁷ Elizabeth Walsh, 'The Tale of Rauf Coilyear: Oral Motif in Literary Guise', in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 6.2 (1979), 5-19.

critic) contends that *Rauf Coilzear* uses the concept of courtesy to establish a social critique, while providing an astute comparison to the ‘menacing tester’ in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.³⁸ In a compelling article that expands on Shepherd’s work, Glenn Wright further pushes this sense of courtesy acting as a ‘shared social code’ that interrogates ‘the value and meaning of nobility’, while similarly comparing Rauf to the ‘menacing tester’ of the Gawain romances.³⁹ Another engaging article sees Margaret Kissam Morris argue that the poem presents a synthesis of folktale and romance motifs that ‘simultaneously challenges and celebrates the nature of their disparate codes.’⁴⁰

The last few years has seen this critical interest in *Rauf Coilzear* grow further still, providing a broad pool of disparate interpretations. In an article from 2011, Nancy Bradbury fruitfully compares *Rauf Coilzear* with the fifteenth-century *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf*. Bradbury argues that both texts see their commoner protagonists frequently utilise proverbs in their speech, which, as a discursive form that permeates hierarchical divides, allows them to establish a pointed and meaningful discourse with the upper echelons of society.⁴¹ An article from a year later saw Ad Putter argue that Rauf’s ‘generous hospitality’ and ‘commitment to promises’ portrays him as inherently chivalric, allowing him ‘deserve’ his subsequent promotion.⁴² Elsewhere, Randy Schiff contends that the *Rauf Coilzear* poet aimed to ‘reflect upon imperial aggression and state formation’, claiming that Rauf’s violence

³⁸ S. H. A. Shepherd, “‘Of thy glitterand gyde haue I na gle’”: *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*, in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 228 (1991), 284-98.

³⁹ Glenn Wright, ‘Churl’s Courtesy: *Rauf Coilzear* and its English Analogues’, in *Neophilologus*, 85.4 (2001), 647-662.

⁴⁰ Margaret Kissam Morris, ‘Generic Oxymoron in *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*’, in *Voices in Translation: The Authority of ‘Olde Bookes’ in Medieval Literature*, ed. Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi and Gale Sigal (New York: AMS Press, 1992), pp. 137-55.

⁴¹ Nancy Mason Bradbury, ‘Representations of Peasant Speech: Some Literary and Social Contexts for *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*’, in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 19-34.

⁴² Ad Putter, ‘Ralph the Collier’, in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 145-58.

is recognised by Charlemagne as a ‘predisposition useful for expansionism’.⁴³ Anna Caughey uses *Rauf Coilzear* along with the *Buik of Alexander* and *Golagros and Gawane* as examples of romance ‘conciliatory chivalry’ that collectively stress ‘the importance of negotiation, humility and respecting, within certain limits, others’ rights to self-determination and autonomy.’⁴⁴ Jaqueline Stuhmiller compares Rauf to the carnival mock kings, which certainly resonates with this study, but she does not go into much detail and (unlike this thesis) ultimately dismisses Rauf’s poaching as being ‘more ridiculous than it is criminal’ and ‘a good joke rather than a serious threat’.⁴⁵ Finally, in his book *The Lilly and the Thistle*, William Calin self-consciously ignores the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition to instead assert that the Carolingian *Rauf Coilzear* was predominantly influenced and shaped by Old French *chanson de geste* (despite most of the *Rauf Coilzear* scenes examined by Calin being features of the other King and Commoner *bourdes*).⁴⁶

Moving into wider literary studies, the King and Commoner texts have been mentioned several times in relation to medieval Robin Hood studies, as may be expected given their close literary kinship and themes. But unfortunately in this field there exists little in-depth study on the King and Commoner texts or their ideological relationship to the Robin Hood material, with individual texts rarely quoted to substantiate any analysis. This is almost certainly a direct result of the lack of widespread availability of the King and Commoner material, restricting the range of critical discussion around them.

⁴³ Randy P. Schiff, ‘Sovereign Exception: Pre-National Consolidation in the *Taill of Rauf Coilyear*’, in *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300-1600*, ed. Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 33-50.

⁴⁴ Anna Caughey, ‘“Methink it Grete Skill”: Conciliatory Chivalry in Three Fifteenth-Century Scottish Romances’, in *Fresche Fontanis: Studies in the Culture of Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Janet Hadley Williams and J. Derrick McClure (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), pp. 97-111.

⁴⁵ Jaqueline Stuhmiller, ‘Poaching and Carnival’, in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David Hawes and Richard G. Newhauser (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 183-207 (p. 194).

⁴⁶ William Calin, *The Lilly and the Thistle: The French Tradition and the Older Literature of Scotland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 205-11.

In his study of what he categorises as ‘early ballads’, David Fowler emphasises that the Robin Hood and King and Commoner traditions are both part of a distinctive fifteenth-century ‘group of narrative poems frequently in couplet or septenar meters’.⁴⁷ He proceeds to provide an examination of the stylistic features of the late sixteenth-century King and Commoner ballad *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* along with its medieval counterpart *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468), arguing that these texts provide:

a unique opportunity to observe the evolution of the popular ballad from its beginnings in late medieval minstrelsy to its emergence in ballad form in the seventeenth century.⁴⁸

Fowler probably selected these two King and Commoner texts primarily due to their easy availability (with both being printed in Child’s ballad collection) but in doing so neglects the earlier King and Commoner texts which have far more in common with their Robin Hood counterparts, including poaching and feasting in the forest (both omitted in *Tanner* and *Barker*).

Remaining with Robin Hood studies, Maurice Keen briefly mentions some details relating to three unidentified King and Commoner texts in his study of medieval literary outlaws (these seem to be *King Edward and the Shepherd* and two post-medieval ballads, *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* and *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* (1624)). Keen tersely states that these are conservative texts in which the monarch is shown the utmost reverence by his commoner subjects, who unfailingly exhibit an ‘unshakable faith in the King’s own justice’.⁴⁹ This may be true of the post-medieval ballads but is a highly debateable description of *King Edward and the Shepherd*. A. J. Pollard briefly refers to *King Edward and the Shepherd* and *King Edward and the Hermit* as evidence of a literary tradition of Edward III meeting subjects in disguise, which could in turn be used to identify the

⁴⁷ Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*, pp. 84-93.

⁴⁹ Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London & New York: Routledge, 1961), pp. 155-7.

disguised but unnumbered King Edward in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*.⁵⁰ Thomas Ohlgren delves a little further into the influence of the same two texts on *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, pointing to some similarities in their depiction of poached feasts and acknowledging the King and Commoner's influence in shaping the *Gest*'s seventh and eighth fyttes.⁵¹ Ohlgren also provides a short analysis of *King Edward and the Shepherd* in his discussion of the contents of Cambridge manuscript Ff.5.48, stating that the King demonstrates 'his worthiness by listening to his subjects, by making restitution, and by overlooking their social transgressions and social blunders', while 'the shepherd in turn proves that he is worthy of respect, despite his clownish appearance and rustic manners'.⁵² Stephen Knight has also referred to the King and Commoner texts throughout his work on the Robin Hood tradition, acknowledging their influence, yet arguing that the medieval King and Commoner texts are 'ultimately hierarchical' when compared with the Robin Hood material:

[The king's] power is revalidated in the changing social circumstances symbolised by the encounter with this disruptive subject [... These texts] explore the politically-attuned but eventually quietist possibilities of this conflict.⁵³

However, Knight has also praised *King Edward and the Shepherd* for providing a rare glimpse of the true voice of the late fourteenth-century labourer.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ However, *King Edward and the Hermit* does not actually identify which King Edward is being used in its story, merely stating that the tale 'befelle be god Edwerd deys'. See A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late-Medieval Stories in Historical Context* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 200-1. *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61*, l. 13.

⁵¹ Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560, Texts, Contexts, Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 148-9. Thomas Ohlgren, 'Edwardus redivivus in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 99.1 (2000), 1-28 (pp. 10-11).

⁵² Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, pp. 44-5.

⁵³ Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 78. Knight also mentions the King and Commoner texts in relation to the *Gest* in his 'mythic biography' of Robin Hood, as well as in a more recent essay that applies Bourdieu's theory of Habitus to the medieval Robin Hood material, in which he claims *King Edward and the Shepherd* lacks 'the zest and naturalising power' of the *Gest*. Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 25. Stephen Knight, 'Alterity, Parody, Habitus: The Formation of the Early Literary Tradition of Robin Hood', in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood: Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, ed. Stephen Knight (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), pp. 1-30 (p. 14).

⁵⁴ Stephen Knight, 'The Voice of Labour in Fourteenth-Century English Literature', in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod (York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 101-122.

Elsewhere, Helen Cooper and Ordelle G. Hill have both mentioned *King Edward and the Shepherd* in passing as an example of the literature of the pastoral *bergerie*, ‘a word that itself embraces both the realistic and artistic aspects of the shepherd world’.⁵⁵ Cooper argues that Adam’s complaints ‘seem to reflect genuine social abuses’ and are part of a wider use of the shepherd figure as ‘a mouthpiece against social injustice’.⁵⁶ However, she also comments that these passages ‘are in contradiction to the main plot’, which is a comic focus on Adam’s ‘hilariously stocked larder’, creating two seemingly irreconcilable strands.⁵⁷ Hill pushes a more aggressively conservative reading, cursorily stating that *King Edward and the Shepherd* is ‘not a sober complaint but rather a lighthearted romance’.⁵⁸ Hill claims that the text is ‘sympathetic to the king’ and portrays Adam the shepherd as a ‘bumpkin’, while similarly describing the character of John from *John the Reeve* as ‘a comic buffoon’.⁵⁹

The medieval King and Commoner tradition has also begun to attract attention from Renaissance critics exploring the origins of a motif that is prevalent throughout early modern drama. In her otherwise excellent article on the disguised ruler in Renaissance drama, Anne Barton refers to the King and Commoner tradition but unfortunately fails to provide any references, is vague in her details, only mentions one medieval text (‘Edward I and the reeve’ – *John the Reeve*), and is content to repeat Maurice Keen’s own brief and unsubstantiated comments without further addition.⁶⁰ Building on Barton’s work on disguised monarchs in early modern drama are recent publications by Peter Hyland and Kevin Quarmby. Most of the plays examined in these two studies are clearly influenced, shaped, and even directly adapted from the King and Commoner material, making these studies invaluable to those

⁵⁵ Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: DS Brewer, 1977), pp. 48-49. Ordelle G. Hill, *The Manor, The Plowman and the Shepherd: Agrarian Themes in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance English Literature* (London & Cranbury: Susquehanna University Press, 1993), p. 103.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *Pastoral*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Cooper, *Pastoral*, pp. 59, 76.

⁵⁸ Hill, *The Manor, The Plowman and the Shepherd*, p. 103.

⁵⁹ Hill, *The Manor, The Plowman and the Shepherd*, pp. 103-105.

⁶⁰ Anne Barton, ‘The King Disguised: Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and the Comical History’, in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 207-233 (pp. 212-3).

examining the wider tradition. While the medieval *bourdes* do not receive any attention in Hyland's study, he does stress the 'anarchic' and 'topsy-turvy' nature of disguised ruler plays, in a way that often closely chimes with the conclusions of this thesis.⁶¹ Quarmby's study again does not look at the King and Commoner material directly but shows some awareness of the tradition, emphasising the 'king and subject' scenes across various plays, and offering a general paragraph on the King and Commoner tradition that succinctly balances both the conservative and more radical critical interpretations seen thus far.⁶² Meanwhile, the tradition's influence on Shakespeare has been demonstrated by Rochelle Smith. In her excellent article, Smith examines several of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century texts, highlighting their 'social realism' and ability to satirise 'the notion of class as an inherent and natural quality'.⁶³ This in turn leads into an insightful exploration of their influence on Shakespeare's own subversive use of this trope, especially in *Henry V*.

The articles that have most influenced this thesis are those by Elizabeth Walsh and Rachel Snell. Walsh's 1991 article on the King and Commoner tradition provides a Marxist interpretation of the earliest material. While she does not go into great detail, Walsh argues that these texts can be read 'as literary enactments of the political unconscious of the late Middle Ages', revelling in the commoners' social aspirations that 'challenge the exclusive nature of higher society'.⁶⁴ Rachel Snell's 2000 essay primarily focuses on *King Edward and the Shepherd*, arguing that these texts 'confront, albeit humorously, pressing contemporary issues relating to class, authority, rank and rule'.⁶⁵ Snell offers a comparison between *King*

⁶¹ Peter Hyland, *Disguise on the Early Modern English Stage* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 78-9.

⁶² 'This 'king and subject' theme perpetuates the myth of an unmediated line of communication between a monarch and his people. It thus confirms the hegemonic predominance of an accessible, all-seeing royal authority. Conversely, it also highlights underlying tensions among the nation's aggrieved though silent masses.' Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 27.

⁶³ Smith, 'King-Commoner Encounters', pp. 305-7.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Walsh, 'Upward Bound: The Sociopolitical Significance of the King-in-Disguise Motif', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26.1 (1991), 156-63 (pp. 161-3).

⁶⁵ Snell, 'Undercover King', p. 140.

Edward and the Shepherd and the demands of the 1381 peasant rebellion, while pointing to its general carnivalesque nature, moving from the commoner as a carnival mock king to the reassertion of the king's power in the court.⁶⁶ This study is much indebted to these articles and expands on Walsh and Snell's combination of revolt and carnival in a more detailed and wide-ranging study of the medieval and early modern King and Commoner burdes and ballads.

Methodology and Structure

This thesis adopts a strongly Bakhtinian methodology throughout. These texts are particularly receptive to Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, especially relating to the suspension and inversion of the social order and images of the grotesque body in the commoners' unofficial carnivalesque feasts. This is also true in respect to the containment that forms an inherent part of the official carnival festivities during the court banquets. In relation to both this containment and the early tradition's occasional presentation of the proto-panoptic spy king, this thesis will also briefly touch on elements of Foucauldian theory and the ways in which Foucault's ideas can shed light on some of the more pessimistic elements of these texts. These Bakhtinian and Foucauldian methodologies complement each other, as both present liminal spaces that invert social norms, set against a central space that contains disruption and enforces social norms. It will be argued that the medieval King and Commoner burdes persistently dramatise the relationship between these oppositional spaces to offer a sophisticated critique of the court and the official culture that it embodies.

Chapter One examines *King Edward and the Shepherd* (c. 1400-1450), arguing that it first presents and subsequently collapses hierarchical boundaries, utilising the commoner's

⁶⁶ Snell, 'Undercover King', pp. 147-51.

carnival feast to present an inverted world that deconstructs social norms. It emphasises this bourde's links to medieval complaint literature and insurgent demands of the period, arguing that the commoner's feast creates a space that can see the temporary enactment of these radical political aims. The second half of this chapter argues that, while the commoner is contained at court, this containment is itself made problematic through the repeated presentation of the court as dangerous *other* and the King's characterisation throughout the bourde as an unsettling proto-panoptic spy. Chapter Two further pushes this sense of carnivalesque inversion and collapse of social boundaries in *John the Reeve* (c. 1450), including a focus on the repeated images of physical violence in this bourde. It argues that this violence is committed against both the King's physical body and the body politic (the King's second body), culminating in John's bloody storming of the court with the pointed cry of 'I will cracke thy crowne!' to hold the King 'checkmate'.⁶⁷

Chapter Three explores King and Commoner texts from the second half of the fifteenth century, focusing on the satiric King and Commoner romance *Rauf Coilzear* (c. 1460) and the appearance of a King and Commoner narrative in the last fyttis of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (c. 1500). This chapter again examines the carnivalesque elements of these texts, arguing that they demonstrate the tradition's increasing hybridity and self-confidence, satirising or amalgamating with complementary literary genres. It is also contended that the carnivalesque King and Commoner elements of each text (such as the portrayal of violence in *Rauf Coilzear*) enable and even encourage such textual intermingling. This chapter ends with a brief discussion of the fragmentary *King Edward and the Hermit* (c. 1500) and *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468), arguing that both of these later fifteenth-century bourdes display the beginnings of a shift away from the previous carnivalesque elements.

⁶⁷ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, ll. 745, 793.

Chapter Four offers an overview of the post-medieval broadside ballads and prose chapbooks, arguing that they become increasingly conservative and hierarchical, with the carnival elements gradually stripped away or contained and remediated. When printed in cultural centres under the potential gaze of the censor, the King and Commoner tradition eventually became transformed into royalist propaganda to aid in the ascension of new monarchs. The Appendix to Chapter Four also includes a discussion of the tradition's influence on drama from the sixteenth century onwards and highlights several areas in need of further study in the light of this thesis' findings.

The remainder of this introduction offers a general background to the King and Commoner texts. It first highlights King and Commoner analogues across other cultures, before moving into an examination of King and Commoner tales in insular medieval chronicles. Finally, it offers a brief exploration of some disguised kings and knights in insular romance and their potential relationship with the fifteenth-century bourdes.

King and Commoner Analogues in Other Cultures

King and Commoner encounters are not unique to Anglophone culture but are something of a universal motif, with multiple threads of a wider, largely unconnected global tradition emerging separately to span European and Arabic cultures. Whether any of these various threads and analogues fed into or helped shape the English and Scottish fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition is debatable and largely unknowable. Indeed, in many cases any such influence can be almost certainly ruled out. But it is nevertheless worth tracing the most important of these analogues, if just to emphasise this motif's pervasive universality.

Multiple cultures contain tales of men and women interacting with disguised or incognito gods, whether in European mythology or Biblical tales; it is certainly possible that many King and Commoner traditions have their roots in such narratives. A few examples of these include Zeus disguising himself as a shepherd, a satyr, the Goddess Artemis, and a variety of animals in order to abduct, seduce and rape women (and Ganymede).⁶⁸ In Old Norse literature Odin frequently disguises himself in order to test and guide his mortal followers, infiltrate hostile lands (for example, the hall of the giant Vafthruthnir), or again seduce women (for example, the princess Rindr).⁶⁹ In the Judeo-Christian tradition there can be seen the tale of Abraham's hospitality towards three strangers (Genesis 18:2), for whom he puts on a feast, making them cakes and slaughtering a calf. The strangers are revealed to be angels and God promises Abraham and his wife Sarah that they will have a son in reward.⁷⁰ A similar Old Testament story is that of Lot's hospitality towards two angels (Genesis 19:1), for which God delivers him from Sodom's destruction. Linda Hutjens has also proposed Jesus as a prototype 'king in disguise', who interacts with mortal sinners, grants them forgiveness and rewards them in heaven.⁷¹

Beyond interactions with deities, a look at European antiquity provides us with a handful of King and Commoner motifs in classical literature. Perhaps the oldest of these can be found towards the end of Homer's *Odyssey*, where Odysseus returns to Ithaka disguised as a beggar and is given hospitality by the swineherd Eumaeus. Eumaeus even appears to foreshadow the fifteenth-century English and Scottish King and Commoner burdes in his

⁶⁸ For example, see tales of Aegina, Alcmene, Antiope, Callisto, Danae, Europa, Ganymede, Leda, Mnemosyne, and Semele. *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, ed. Pierre Grimal, trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford & New York: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 18, 32, 45, 86-7, 156-7, 169, 254-5, 293, 415. *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, ed. Simon Price and Emily Kearns (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 18, 34, 96, 144, 206-7, 226, 315, 504.

⁶⁹ For examples, see *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*, ed. Andy Orchard (London: Cassell, 2002), pp. 272-7, 373-4; *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, ed. Rudolf Simek, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 240-9, 265-6.

⁷⁰ Sarah initially scoffs at this promise, in a way that also anticipates the critical, 'unruly' women in both *King Alfred and the Cakes* and *Heimskringla* (see below).

⁷¹ Hutjens, 'The Disguised King in Early English Ballads', p. 88.

provision of a prohibited feast, defiantly killing and serving up a five-year-old boar that had been expressly set aside for the suitors attempting to woo Penelope.⁷² As Homer's works were unknown for much of the Middle Ages in Western Europe, such similarity is almost certainly coincidental. However, what it does reveal is a perception of food's importance to hospitality, a value that can cross social boundaries and bind people together (and in this case be used to pledge allegiance). It is certainly possible that the Anglophone King and Commoner narratives and their focus on feasting initially evolved from similar notions.

Another early example exists in the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona (c. 922-972). This tells of Emperor Leo's night-time excursions through the streets of Constantinople in order to test the effectiveness and fidelity of his night watch. On two occasions Leo runs from the guards and when caught successfully bribes them to obtain his release. However, at the third guard post the watch confiscate Leo's money, soundly thrash him and throw him into prison. Leo attempts to persuade the gaoler that he is the emperor but the gaoler does not believe him. Eventually the gaoler is convinced into escorting Leo to the palace, where Leo's identity as emperor is confirmed. The gaoler fears execution but is instead given a bag of gold coins as a reward. Leo proceeds to summon the guard, rewarding those who arrested him, while sentencing those who accepted his bribes to be severely beaten and subsequently banished.⁷³

Looking further afield, an Arabic version of the King and Commoner motif can be found in the ancient tales of Caliph Harun al-Rashid in the *Thousand and One Nights*, who repeatedly disguises himself in order to mix with commoners. In 'The Three Apples' this motif is utilised for explicitly political ends:

⁷² Homer, *The Iliad and the Odyssey*, trans. Samuel Butler (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), p. 605.

⁷³ Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, in *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona: Antapodosis, Liber de Rebus Gestis Ottonis, Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, trans. F. A. Wright (London: Routledge, 1930), pp. 27-212 (pp. 37-42).

The Caliph Harun al-Rashid summoned his Wazir Ja'afar one night and said to him: 'I desire to go down into the city and question the common folk concerning the conduct of those charged with its governance, and those of whom they complain we will depose from office and those whom they commend we will promote.'⁷⁴

This tale sees the Caliph uncover a world of poverty, government oppression, and the grisly murder of a young woman (which chimes with the early English and Scottish King and Commoner tradition), again speaking for the universality and political potential of this motif.⁷⁵

While this Arabic 'Sultan in Disguise' tradition appears distant, a path into Western culture is potentially provided by Boccaccio. Several of the *Decameron* tales appear to have their roots in the *Thousand and One Nights*, whether directly or through other sources, and the *Decameron*'s X.9 features a 'Sultan in Disguise' motif.⁷⁶ This tale portrays a disguised Saladin travelling to Europe on the eve of a Christian Crusade in order to gather intelligence. While in Italy he encounters and lodges with a Christian named Torello di Stra, with whom he develops a close friendship. Torello is later captured by Saladin's forces during the Crusade, but is recognised and freed by Saladin. When it is later discovered that Torello's wife is about to remarry, Saladin uses magic to help Torello return to Italy just in time to reclaim his wife from her suitor.⁷⁷

Heading further north, Joseph Harris points to two Scandinavian examples of this King and Commoner motif.⁷⁸ In Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (c. 1230), the Danish King Sveinn Úlfsson disguises himself following a rout and under the name of 'Vandrad' stays

⁷⁴ *The Arabian Nights*, Vol. I, trans. Richard Burton, ed. Leonard C. Smithers (London: H.S. Nichols, 1894), p. 177.

⁷⁵ Although the Arabic commoners' offer of self-sacrifice in order to save the life of the Sultan's corrupt advisor could not be much further from the anti-noble politics of the English and Scottish bourdes.

⁷⁶ For more on the *Decameron*'s potential *Thousand and One Nights* connections, see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London & New York: Tauris Parke, 2005), p. 97.

⁷⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman, ed. Jonathan Usher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 652-668.

⁷⁸ Joseph Harris, 'The King in Disguise: An International Popular Tale in Two Old Icelandic Adaptations', *Islandica*, 53 (2008), 137-169.

with Karl the farmer. During breakfast, Karl's wife bemoans that their King is 'both halt and craven' for fleeing the battle and then reprimands Sveinn for drying his hands in the middle of the towel: 'But little of good cannest thou; that is but uplandish to wet all the towel at once.'⁷⁹ King Sveinn later returns to the court and sends for Karl. The King then reveals that he was Vandrad, rewarding Karl with land in Zealand and a nobler wife. Snorri's tale itself draws heavily on the fragmentary *Hákonar saga Ívarsson* (c. 1200), a tale with 'the flavour of a fable', in which Karl is promoted by Sveinn to court steward, with a further reward being granted to Karl's son.⁸⁰ Harris also identifies a brief version of this tale in the contemporaneous *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, which refers to this legend as a moral story rather than historical truth. Harris argues that this is 'surely [...] a reference to an oral tale (*frásögn*)' lying behind this motif.⁸¹ This tale of a King's flight from battle, failure of courtesy and his admonishment by a commoner's wife is markedly similar to *King Alfred and the Cakes* (see below), although these Icelandic tales date from around a century later in their surviving form.

Þorsteins Þáttur Austfirðings ('The Tale of Thorstein from the East Fjords'), from around the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, offers a further Icelandic analogue. In this tale Thorstein saves the life of a man going by the name of 'Styrbjörn', who subsequently invites Thorstein to meet him at King Magnús' court. At the court Thorstein asks for Styrbjörn and is mocked by the other retainers. However, King Magnús defends Thorstein and eventually reveals that he was 'Styrbjörn'. The King offers Thorstein a wife and position as his retainer as a reward for saving his life but Thorstein declines the offer, knowing that the other

⁷⁹ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: The Stories of the Kings of Norway*, Vol. III, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1895), pp. 138-43.

⁸⁰ *Hákonar Saga Ívarsson*, ed. Jón Helgason and Jakob Benediktsson (Copenhagen: Jørgensen, 1952). Harris, 'The King in Disguise', p. 139.

⁸¹ *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leyden & Boston: Brill, 2004). Harris, 'The King in Disguise', p. 149.

retainers would remain hostile and envious of him. He instead returns to Iceland laden with gold. As Walsh has emphasised, this tale again has a host of intriguing similarities to the English and Scottish King and Commoner tales, including the hostility of the aristocrats towards the commoner, as well as Thorstein providing his free opinion of his monarch to the disguised Magnús (although in this tale he merely praises him as ‘an excellent leader’).⁸²

A final Norse analogue can be found in the *Karlamagnús Saga*, a late thirteenth-century Old Norse prose compilation of King Charlemagne tales. The first branch tells of the young Charlemagne’s adventure with a thief named Basin. Following the death of King Pippin of France, God sends an angel to ‘Karl’ (Charles) to warn him of an assassination plot. Having fled with his councillors to Arden, Karl is visited in a dream by a second angel who tells him ‘to rise up and go to steal’ with Basin the thief. This ‘seemed very strange’ to Karl but he nonetheless finds Basin and asks to be his companion. Karl subsequently travels with Basin under the pseudonym ‘Magnús’ and they lodge with a poor couple. One night, Karl and Basin ride to the house of Earl Renfrei intending to rob him. Basin tries to take Renfrei’s horse but it makes enough noise to rouse the household. Basin hides on a roof beam while Karl conceals himself behind the bed-hangings. From his hiding place, Karl overhears Renfrei telling his wife that he has plotted with eleven fellows to murder Karl during the forthcoming coronation. Karl proceeds to create a successful trap, capturing the conspirators during his coronation, and subsequently bestows Renfrei’s Earldom, wife and wealth on Basin as a reward for his aid.⁸³ This story also survives in a fifteenth-century Danish chronicle and fifteenth-century German and Dutch romance. However, it is believed to have

⁸² *The Tale of Thorstein from the East Fjords (Þorsteins Þáttur Austfirðings)*, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, Including 49 Tales*, Vol. I, ed. Vidar Hreinsson (Reykjavik: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), pp. 390-2. Walsh, ‘The King in Disguise’, p. 17.

⁸³ *Karlamagnús Saga: The Saga of Charlemagne and his Heroes*, Vol. I, trans. Constance B. Hieatt (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), pp. 54-101.

originated from an older, lost French source, and a song recounting this tale is briefly referred to by two thirteenth-century French chronicles.⁸⁴

There are also several post-medieval tales indicating the existence of a King and Commoner tradition across parts of mainland Europe. Child highlights a Belgian story of *Charles V and the Broommaker*, as well as *Der Köhler und Kaiser Maximilian II*, which details an encounter between Emperor Maximilian II and a charcoal burner.⁸⁵ Walsh mentions similar tales of *Philip the Good and a Coal Burner* and *Francis I and a Shoemaker*.⁸⁶ Hungarian folklore also contains several tales of King Mátyás (Mathias) Corvinus visiting the common people in order to impart justice and punish ‘the haughty aristocrats and rich men whose hands heavily weighed down the poor’.⁸⁷ In their surviving form, these examples all appear to post-date their earliest counterparts in the Anglophone tradition, so as such cannot be regarded as direct influences. However, they do again speak for the wide and pervasive reach of the King and Commoner as a general folktale motif across the continent.

Traces in the Chronicles: King Alfred, Walter Map and Gerald of Wales

Moving into Anglophone culture, traces of an older, insular King and Commoner tradition can be found recorded in medieval chronicles between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Two of these relate to tales of King Alfred and two more can be found in the chronicles of Walter Map and Gerald of Wales. Whether these chronicle tales provide us with another separate

⁸⁴ For more on this lost source and an examination of the relationship between these different versions of the Basin story, see Jacqueline de Ruiter, ‘*Karl Magnus Krønike, Karlagnús Saga and Karel ende Elegast: Genre – Form – Function*’, in *The Medieval Chronicle: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Driebergen/Utrecht 13-16 July 1996* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 96-102.

⁸⁵ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, pp. 75-5.

⁸⁶ Walsh, ‘The King in Disguise’, pp. 17-19.

⁸⁷ Joseph Szövérfy, ‘History and Folk Tradition in Eastern Europe: Matthias Corvinus in the Mirror of Hungarian and Slavic Folklore’, in *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 5 (1968), 68-77 (pp. 73-4).

thread of a wider tradition, or fed directly into the much later fifteenth-century *bourdes* can only be guessed at. However, when taken together, these chronicle tales do appear to possess several of the fundamental elements upon which the later fifteenth-century *bourdes* are based, perhaps offering a tantalising hint that the later *bourdes* evolved out of these older tales.

The famous chronicle tale of King Alfred burning a swineherd's cakes originally appears in the anonymous *Vita S. Neoti*, written towards the end of the tenth century. Travelling alone amid the salt marshes of Athelney, King Alfred seeks refuge with a swineherd and his wife, concealing his true identity from them. One day, after putting some bread in the oven, the swineherd's wife turns to 'other domestic occupations, until, when she sought the bread from Vulcan, she saw it burning from the other side of the room.' She angrily reproaches Alfred, declaring:

Look here, man. You hesitate to turn to loaves which you see to be burning, yet you're quite happy to eat them when they are warm from the oven!

The King, 'reproached by these disparaging insults, ascribed them to his divine lot' and henceforth gives the loaves his full attention.⁸⁸

Subsequent repetitions of this tale produce an array of subtle if pointed variants. Another version from a vernacular homily from the late eleventh or early twelfth century is preserved in the mid twelfth-century manuscript London BL MS Cotton Vespasian D.xiv. While most of the details remain, Alfred is here transformed into a cowardly deserter fleeing the Vikings 'in terror', abandoning 'all his soldiers and chieftains, and all his people' to look to 'his own safety'. At the same time a misogynistic element seeps into the tale, with the

⁸⁸ This story is primarily told to show the virtues of Saint Neot and connect him with King Alfred: following this episode Neot rescues Alfred from this low-point in his fight against the Danes and helps him to victory against them. From the *Vita S. Neoti*, a translated extract in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 198.

swineherd's wife persistently labelled as 'evil'.⁸⁹ In this way the tale criticises both Alfred for failing to live up to the ideal of a warrior king and the wife for daring to criticise Alfred. By contrast, the twelfth-century *Annals of St Neots* instead uses this tale to emphasise Alfred as a fierce warrior, while a mid-thirteenth-century *Chronicle* attributed to John of Wallingford emphasises Alfred as a holy, humble, 'patient' victim of 'prophecy', who refuses to 'risk certain slaughter of his own men' and shows his 'awesome [...] majesty' through his willingness to embrace 'that humble poverty'.⁹⁰ Each writer subtly but perceptively alters the tale to push their own politically motivated image of Alfred and an ideal king's role. While such variations are to be expected from chronicles (after all, history is always political), in terms of the later fifteenth-century King and Commoner *bourdes*, it is worth noting that this King and Commoner narrative is already being used to forward political agendas.

Just as interesting for the King and Commoner tradition is another King Alfred tale found in the chronicle of William of Malmesbury (c. 1125). William relates that Alfred escaped 'a fierce enemy attack' by retreating to a wood, where he happened upon a swineherd named Denewulf. At this point of the narrative William tantalisingly hints at a wider and more complex story but opts to 'cut a long story short'. Whether this would have been a repeat of the cakes story, or a new variation, can only be speculated at. But William does inform us that having 'discovered that Denewulf's character was turned towards the good' Alfred taught him to read and made him bishop – an act William brands 'a miraculous achievement'.⁹¹ This is highly significant, as it provides us with the earliest example of a reward and social promotion being worked into the insular King and Commoner tradition.

⁸⁹ From the London BL MS Cotton Vespasian D.xiv, a translated extract in *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 198-9.

⁹⁰ From the *Annals of St Neots*, a translated extract in *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, p. 199. John of Wallingford, *Chronicle*, a translated extract in *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 200-201.

⁹¹ William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Bishops of England (Gesta Pontificum Anglorum)*, trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), p. 107.

If these two Alfred stories are taken together, they present a disguised king given hospitality by a commoner, combined with a critique of royal courtesy, the exploitation of the comic possibilities of the king being treated as an equal, and a commoner being granted social promotion. Furthermore, the central plot point revolves around food, which in turn enables a critique of courtesy and resultantly an inversion of the hierarchical norms of authority – displacing authority from the king to the commoner (or in this case to the commoner’s wife). This provides a comprehensive catalogue of the tropes that inform the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition, to the extent that it seems unlikely to be coincidental. While they are split across two Alfred tales, they nevertheless potentially hint at a folkloric King and Commoner tradition either being drawn on, or given birth to. These two tales were certainly regarded as being part of the King and Commoner tradition by the fifteenth century. John Hardyng’s mid-fifteenth-century chronicle combined the most traditionally King and Commoner elements of these two stories, resulting in a narrative that fitted more comfortably within the rest of the popular King and Commoner tradition.⁹² A late sixteenth-century ballad of *King Alfred and the Shepherd* would also revisit, adapt and expand on this tale, further establishing its place in the King and Commoner tradition.⁹³

The next two King and Commoner chronicle appearances, recorded by a pair of Welsh friends, can perhaps claim still more of a direct lineage to the fifteenth-century bourdes. A story of King Ethelred in Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium* (c. 1187) has escaped the notice of other critics exploring the origins of this tradition but it can be regarded as the earliest tale to combine all of the central elements of the later King and Commoner tradition into a single narrative. Map was a collector of popular folk tales as much as he was a writer of history, so it is certainly plausible that he was here drawing on an existing oral

⁹² John Hardyng, *The Chronicle of John Hardyng* (London: British Library, Historical Print Editions, 2011), pp. 201-3.

⁹³ *The Shepherd and the King*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. I, ed. W.G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), Nos. 76-7.

folktale (whether of Alfred or otherwise) and adapting it for his own use. Fleshing out a late tenth-century chronicle myth that Earl Godwin was of peasant origin, Map tells of one winter when ‘the ignoble Ethelred’ strays from his company while hunting (itself a central trope of the later tradition) and like Alfred before him stumbles across the house of a swineherd.⁹⁴ The swineherd’s son, Godwin, takes it on himself to look after the incognito King:

His father bade get ready one chicken; he at once set three to roast. The father served one piece of salt pork, and cabbage: he hastily added three and without consulting his father or mother served up a suckling pig.⁹⁵

While this is not the illegal, poached feast repeatedly seen in the fifteenth-century tradition, there is nevertheless a strange emphasis on excess, pushing the food beyond what Godwin’s father sees as normal hospitality, reaching towards the presentation of an excessive feast at odds with the poor and humble surroundings. The expanding food becomes a visualisation of Godwin’s own ambition and will allow Godwin to similarly breach the boundaries of the ordinary. In doing so, it undeniably hints at the carnival excess of the later *bourdes*, where restricted and forbidden items of food ‘rise, grow, swell’, with the commoners’ aspirations ‘like yeast added to the images [...] until they reach exaggerated dimensions’.⁹⁶ The story continues with Ethelred taking the ambitious Godwin back to court and making him the Earl of Gloucester.

Map here inserts a serious political backdrop to this King and Commoner tale, associating its narrative with fears of the disintegration of hierarchy and rebellion against the monarchy. This social disruption is seen in both the commoner Godwin’s rise to power and in Map’s portrayal of the ‘savage’ Ethelred subsequently marrying maidens to rustics and forcing ‘sons of the best blood to stoop to the daughters of serfs’, in an inversion of hierarchy

⁹⁴ Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, trans. M. R. James (London: Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1923), p. 228.

⁹⁵ Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 228-9.

⁹⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 278.

and traditional gender roles.⁹⁷ It is this which forms the primary motive for Cnut's own saviour-depicted invasion, against which Godwin raises a doomed rebellion. These details seem highly prescient, given the emphasis of hierarchical disruption and commoner resistance in the later fifteenth-century King and Commoner *bourdes*, even if Map is here approaching such ideas from an opposing, conservative direction. Map's use of the tale in this way indicates that King and Commoner narratives are inherently conducive to such political discourse, inversions and depictions of hierarchical disintegration.⁹⁸

The next chronicle use of this tradition was written only a few years later by Gerald of Wales. In *Speculum Ecclesiae (The Mirror of the Church)* (c. 1219) Gerald tells a story of King Henry II becoming lost in the woods while hunting and encountering a company of Cistercians. The monks take Henry to be a soldier or royal counsellor and having decided that he is in either case a figure of influence, they lay on a feast for him. During this feast they ask Henry to intercede on their behalf with the King, so that he may find favour with them regarding some piece of unspecified legal business. In order to make Henry more amenable, they ply him with alcohol and teach him a drinking game. When the challenger cries 'Pril' his opponent must cry 'Wril' and then both must drink. Henry is initially ignorant as to how he should respond, as the rules of this game he knows substitutes these two cries with 'Wassail' and 'Drinkheil'.⁹⁹ The next day the King rides to the nearby town to be reunited with his court and summons the Abbot to him. When the Abbot arrives, Henry settles the business

⁹⁷ Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, p. 232.

⁹⁸ In placing Godwin in opposition to King Cnut, Map's narrative is also potentially drawing on Godwin's portrayal as an outlaw in *Vita Edwardi Regis* (c. 1065-7), which can claim to be the earliest extended account of outlawry in English literature. If so, it would add a further (if admittedly loose and speculative) sense of connection to the commoners of the later fifteenth-century *bourdes*, who inhabit forest worlds and live off the king's deer in a way that is distinctly reminiscent of other literary outlaws, such as Robin Hood. 'The Outlawry of Earl Godwin from the *Vita Edwardi Regis*', trans. Timothy S. Jones, in *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, ed. Thomas Ohlgren (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. 1-11.

⁹⁹ This same drinking game is presented in more detail in Robert Mannyng (Robert de Brunne)'s *Chronicle* (c. 1338), when King Vortigern meets Princess Rouwen. Here, King Vortigern is similarly ignorant of the rules and words of this drinking game, despite them being the 'Wassail' and 'Drinkhail' that Henry is familiar with in Gerald's tale. See 'King Vortigern's Meeting with Princess Rouwen', in *Specimens with Memoirs of the Less-known British Poets*, Vol. I, ed. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1860), pp. xxv-xxvii.

entirely according to the Abbot's will. Henry then leads the Abbot to a feast, seating the Abbot at the head of the table before declaring, 'father Abbot, I say to you Pril'. The Abbot is embarrassed and frightened but Henry reassures him and the entire household challenge each other with cries of 'Pril' and 'Wril'.¹⁰⁰

Despite the lack of commoners or social promotion, this tale is evidently based on the same broad King and Commoner narrative, revolving around an incognito monarch and two feasts, one situated in the forest and the other in the court. Furthermore, this trope of teaching the incognito King an unfamiliar drinking game appears in two of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner *bourdes*. In *King Edward and the Shepherd* the King learns a near identical game that sees its participants exchange cries of 'passilodion' and 'berafrynde', while in *King Edward and the Hermit* these cries are substituted with 'fustybanyas' and 'stryke pantner'.¹⁰¹ In *King Edward and the Shepherd* we can also see this woodland drinking game being adopted by the court, where the Shepherd is (like Gerald's Cistercian Abbot) embarrassed and frightened that his secrets will be publically revealed.

Beyond these plot similarities, there is again a political edge to this tale. Gerald of Wales, like Walter Map, was a well-known critic of the Cistercians and this tale featuring Cistercian monks who put on sumptuous feasts, indulge in drinking games and manipulate the court can be read as part of Gerald's lengthy criticisms of the extravagance and influence of the order.¹⁰² It certainly resembles his claims elsewhere that the Cistercian order 'suffer from the bad effects of gluttony and intemperance' and 'pillage and divert to improper uses the largesses which have been collected by divine assistance, and by the bounties of the

¹⁰⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. IV, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, Roll Series 21 (London: Longman, 1873), pp. 3-431 (pp. 213-15).

¹⁰¹ *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ll. 317-20. *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61*, ll. 340-3.

¹⁰² Walter Map's kinship in such criticisms can be seen in Gerald devoting anti-Cistercian tales in *Speculum Ecclesiae* to Map ('nomine Walterus et cognomina Mapus') and even using Map as a protagonist for several of these tales. For details of Gerald and Map's friendship, see Henry Owen, *Gerald the Welshman* (London: David Nutt, 1904), pp. 188-90.

faithful'.¹⁰³ Gerald's tale also offers a fairly damning critique of Henry II, depicting him as a monarch who can be corrupted and bribed, with the legality and moral legitimacy of the Abbot's business left intentionally ambiguous. This King is not here depicted as a figure of justice and order but is hinted to be a willing participant in the corruption of both.¹⁰⁴

Gerald's use of the King and Commoner motif also contains allusions to early medieval carnival festivities. Wassailing was an integral part of the medieval Christmas carnival, in which a cup or bowl was passed around the gathering with each person in turn crying 'Wassail' and being met with a return cry of 'Drinkhail' as they drank.¹⁰⁵ The explicit reference to this ceremony in Gerald's tale means that this King and Commoner narrative is even at this early date situated within this carnival period and ritual. This sense of the medieval carnival could also be potentially extended to the Cistercian monks themselves. The medieval Christmas carnival regularly featured a mock Abbot of Misrule and Boy Bishop (a practice that dates back to the early tenth century), with clerics 'putting on lay clothes at New Year and interrupting services with rude songs and games' (the May games similarly featured a mock, carnal monk or friar).¹⁰⁶ In presenting an order of corrupt Cistercians evidently more interested in a carnal excess of food and carnival drinking games than they are with matters

¹⁰³ *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. T. Wright (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1913), pp. 362-3. One reason for this hostility can be inferred from Gerald's forced retirement from the court in the 1190s amid the accusations and rumour mongering of William Wibert, a Cistercian monk and later Abbot of Biddlesden, who 'obviously came to the decision that he could ease the path of his own advancement by denigrating Gerald'. See Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: 1146-1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 19.

¹⁰⁴ Gerald of Wales was initially one of Henry II's supporters but in later years became one of his most strident critics. This is especially evident in his *Liber de Principis Instructione*, completed around the same period as *Speculum Ecclesiae*. See Giraldus Cambrensis, *Liber De Principis Instructione*, ed. G. F. Warner, in *Giraldus Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. VIII, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, Roll Series 21 (London: Longman, 1891), pp. 3-330. For an English translation, see Gerald of Wales, *Concerning the Instruction of Princes*, trans. Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeleys, 1858), especially pp. 7-23. For a detailed history of Gerald's criticisms of the monarchy and willingness to risk the wrath of the authorities see Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, pp. 62-100.

¹⁰⁵ For details on this ceremony, see Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ See Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 99- 104. David Wiles, *The Early Plays of Robin Hood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 25-6.

of spirituality and abstinence, Gerald could be directly alluding to such carnival traditions, painting their entire order as a breach and inversion of the ordinary.

In Walter Map's and Gerald of Wales' tales can be seen early examples of the basic narrative structure of the later King and Commoner narratives. But just as fascinating are the underlying ideologies they both preserve. Their combination of the political with elements of the carnival will re-emerge in the later fifteenth-century *bourdes*, forming this literature's fundamental, ideological basis. Existing two hundred years before the *bourdes*, these chronicles reveal that the basic building blocks of the later fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition were already in place.

Disguised Knights and Kings in Insular Romance

Of all non-King and Commoner literary antecedents, it is perhaps the romance genre that most informs the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition. There is undeniably a strain of romance satire running throughout the *bourdes*. Their usual opening of a king becoming lost in the woods while hunting is highly reminiscent of romance, even as it comically subverts it by having him encounter not a dragon, maiden, or quest, but a disgruntled commoner, dragging the narrative from fantasy to realism. The commoners also possess thematic similarities with the romance figure of the 'menacing tester' (a character particularly prevalent in the Gawain romances) in their intrusion into court feasts, and their challenge to and critique of aristocratic courtesy.¹⁰⁷ *Rauf Coilzear* even utilises familiar characters from Carolingian romance, with Rauf beating Charlemagne and besting Sir Roland, while *King Edward and the Hermit* opens by invoking the stock romance phrase of

¹⁰⁷ For more on which see Wright, 'Churl's Courtesy', p. 658.

‘so this romans seys’.¹⁰⁸ But beyond this, establishing any kind of direct link to specific surviving romances is less than straightforward, tending towards broad thematic similarities rather than solid narrative links.

There are several instances of disguised kings or knights in twelfth-century romance, notably in the Oxford *Folie Tristan*, the *Romance of Horn* and *Ipomedon*. However, Tristan, Horn, and Ipomedon all primarily use their disguises in order to secretly speak with or test the fidelity of their courtly love interests.¹⁰⁹ This focus on courtly love is far removed from the commoner political complaint and carnival feasting in the King and Commoner *bourdes*, not least due to the complete absence of any interaction with commoners in such romance episodes. Nonetheless, Morgan Dickson’s comparative study of these romances highlights their use of disguise to ‘examine the nature and eventually the integrity of a character’s identity’ with a separation of ‘the character’s interior identity, what might be called the *self*, and the exterior or social identity’.¹¹⁰ This use of disguise to temporarily remove and interrogate social identity is somewhat comparable to the later King and Commoner tales. Dickson also argues that Horn and Tristan use disguise ‘to gain information which relates to the very social identity they have concealed’, which again provides similarities with the King and Commoner monarchs, who often make enquiries regarding law and order or their own public popularity.¹¹¹

The thirteenth-century *Gesta Herewardi* possess a couple of scenes that chime more closely with the narratives of the later *bourdes*. One episode sees the outlawed Hereward

¹⁰⁸ *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61*, l. 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Les Deux Poèmes de La Folie Tristan*, ed. Joseph Bédier (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907). *The Romance of Horn*, in *The Birth of Romance: An Anthology: Four Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Romances*, trans. Judith Weiss (London: Dent, 1992), pp. 1-120. Hue de Rotelande, *Ipomedon*, ed. A. J. Holden (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979). For a comparative examination of these romances see Morgan Dickson, ‘Verbal and Visual Disguise: Society and Identity in Some Twelfth-Century Texts’, in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge & Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 41-54.

¹¹⁰ Dickson, ‘Verbal and Visual Disguise’, p. 41.

¹¹¹ Dickson, ‘Verbal and Visual Disguise’, p. 52.

disguise himself as a potter in order to infiltrate the Norman King's court. The townspeople are struck by his resemblance to the famous Hereward 'insofar as a poor man could resemble a man of noble birth, or a peasant a knight', but declare that 'a man of such moderate height could scarce boast so much bravery and valour as popular rumour attributed to him'.

Hereward is subsequently led to the court kitchen and beaten by the drunk kitchen boys, leading to a comic battle in which Hereward defends himself against forks with a piece of wood from the fireplace, the result of which sees Hereward thrown into prison. Hereward then kills the guard and flees the castle, pursued by the King's servants and the 'foul language' of the pages.¹¹² There is an undeniably carnivalesque air to this episode, undercutting the chivalric for a focus on tricksters, Hereward's beating by commoners, curses, and the world of the kitchen, all of which cannot help but chime with the inverting, carnival feasts of the later King and Commoner bourdes – which also focuses on food, tricksters, outlaws, curses, and often on the physical beating of the king by commoners.

The early fourteenth-century Middle English *Havelok the Dane* can also be said to possess some potential links to the later King and Commoner narratives. Following the death of his royal parents and the murder of his sisters, the young prince Havelok is reared by Grim the fisherman. Havelok sends for Grim and orders him with explicit reference to his royal identity rather than with any attempt to conceal it ('Grim, thou wost thou art my thral'), but this set-up does enable several other scenes in which the incognito Havelok mingles with commoners.¹¹³ Havelok is employed by a Lincoln cook, wins a stone-throwing competition against the local townsmen and subsequently marries the King's daughter, before returning to

¹¹² *The Deeds of Hereward*, trans. Michael Swanton, in *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, ed. Thomas Ohlgren (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. 12-60 (pp. 47-9).

¹¹³ *Havelok the Dane*, in *Middle English Romances*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1995), pp. 3-74 (ll. 523-7).

Denmark to reclaim his Kingdom.¹¹⁴ This use of royal disguise, intermingling with commoners (again combined with a focus on the kitchen), and even a reward element in Havelok's marriage and return to the throne, again offer some loose, general links to the King and Commoner tradition. This romance does not quite provide enough thematic or narrative links to be labelled as a definitive source but it can certainly be said to be part of the wider King and Commoner motif that may have exerted some influence on the later *bourdes*.

Perhaps the most striking romance similarities can be seen in a pair of romances surviving from the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century, making them contemporary with the earliest King and Commoner *bourdes*. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* (c. 1400) is preserved in a miscellany dating from around 1460. In this romance, Gawain, Kay, and Bishop Baldwin go hunting, become lost in the wood and seek shelter with a 'Carle', who declares that 'her no corttesy thou schalt have, / But carllus corttesy' (a declaration that distinctly resembles those given by the commoners in the King and Commoner *bourdes*).¹¹⁵ The Carle presents the Knights with a feast and proceeds to test their chivalry in a series of bizarre episodes. After Gawain persistently does as he is instructed by the Carle, it is revealed that the Carle had once made a vow to kill any knights who lodged with him and failed to follow his orders. The Carle declares that he will now forsake his custom and agrees to visit Arthur's court, where he is presented with a feast in return and made a knight of the Round Table.

¹¹⁴ These scenes also exist in a reduced form (significantly lacking the level of detail relating to Havelok's interactions with the townsmen) in two older French versions of Havelok, Geffrei Gaimar's Anglo-Norman *L'Estoire des Engleis* (c. 1135-40) and an Anglo-French adaption of Gaimar, *Lai d'Haveloc* (c. 1190-1220). Both can be found in Geffrei Gaimar, *Lestorie des Engles Solum la Translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, Vol. I, ed. Thomas Duffus Hardy and Charles Trice Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-227, 290-327. For an English translation of Gaimar's version, see Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, in *Middle English Romances*, ed. and trans. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1995), pp. 319-29.

¹¹⁵ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romance and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 85-112 (ll. 277-8). The Carle's 'carllus corttesy' can be fruitfully compared to John's own mixed welcome of 'You are welcome, every one, / If you take itt thankefullye. / Curtesye I learned never none', or his repeated, proud assertions that 'I be come of carles kinne'. See *John the Reeve*, ll. 245-8 and 457.

There are still a multitude of hugely significant differences between the *Carle of Carlisle* and the King and Commoner bourdes, in both narrative details and thematic focus.¹¹⁶ But despite these differences, the simultaneous similarities between their broad narratives are irrefutable. Both feature members of the court becoming lost after a hunt, sheltering and receiving a feast from a rude, seemingly lower-class character, during which aristocratic courtesy is challenged and hierarchical norms are suspended, before ending with a feast at court and the reward of a knighthood for the ‘carle’. Furthermore, some of its smaller details also have curious parallels with the fifteenth-century King and Commoner bourdes. Gawain travelling with Sir Kay and a Bishop strikingly resembles *John the Reeve*, in which the King (albeit uniquely in the King and Commoner tradition) also has a Knight and Bishop for companions. Similarly, the Carle instructing his ‘Evyll-taught’ guests with violence, giving both Baldwin and Kay ‘a boffett’ to ‘teche the [...] sum of my corttessye’, distinctly resembles *Rauf Coilzear*, in which Rauf repeatedly strikes the incognito Charlemagne, again in order to teach him courtesy and obedience.¹¹⁷ It seems clear that this romance must have either directly utilised elements of the King and Commoner tradition or have fed into and helped shape the King and Commoner motif in its fifteenth-century form. At the same time, it raises the possibility of a literary connection between the King and Commoner tradition’s commoner figure and the ‘menacing tester’ of the Gawain romances.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ The most notable narrative differences being the lack of a disguised or incognito king, the absence of poaching, the Carle’s vow to test and kill knights, the nature of the Carle’s tests of courtesy (including throwing a spear, kissing his wife and daughter, and possibly ordering Gawain to behead him – this beheading is absent here but is the climactic event of an otherwise highly similar mid-seventeenth-century version in the Percy Folio Manuscript), and the potential of the castle-owning Carle in fact being a disguised knight rather than commoner. Indeed, in the seventeenth-century version of the *Carle of Carlisle* the Carle is explicitly said to have been transformed into his carle state by witchcraft and necromancy. Thematically, the *Carle of Carlisle* also tends towards creating a fantastical world rather than establishing the relative social realism of the King and Commoner bourdes – lacking the King and Commoner focus on oppressive statutes, commoner political complaint and court corruption. For the seventeenth-century version of the *Carle of Carlisle*, see *The Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romance and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 375-88.

¹¹⁷ *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, ll. 316-330. *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, ll. 144-54.

¹¹⁸ This is an area clearly in need of further study but this potential connection is briefly explored by Glenn Wright. See Wright, ‘Churl’s Courtesy’, pp. 658-9.

Further similarities to the King and Commoner tradition can perhaps be viewed in *Sir Cleges*. This tale is preserved in the National Library of Scotland Edinburgh MS 19.1.11 (Advocates), dated to c. 1400, and the Bodleian Library manuscript Ashmole 61, dated to c. 1500 (which also contains the King and Commoner bourde *King Edward and the Hermit*). *Sir Cleges*' narrative is based around two very different Christmas feasts. The first is in Sir Cleges' home, where he feeds 'ryche and pore [...] both gentyll men and comener', mingling all together for the Christmas carnival, with well-rewarded 'mynstrellus' to entertain his guests.¹¹⁹ Sir Cleges subsequently becomes impoverished, losing his estates. One Christmas he prays to God under a cherry tree, which promptly bursts forth into fruit. Under his wife's advice, he clads himself in poor clothing and takes the cherries to the King. The second feast takes place in the King's court in Cardiff, during which Cleges is repeatedly taken for a 'beger' and 'cherle' by the aristocrats and is intimidated by the court officials (a porter, officer and steward) who each initially refuse him entrance.¹²⁰ However, after examining the cherries, each courtier allows Cleges to pass on the condition that they will receive a third share of any reward granted to him by the King. The tale ends with a trick that sees those same courtiers beaten by Cleges, the seeming churl, with the King afterwards restoring Cleges' previous social position, granting him wealth and Cardiff Castle.

Parts of *Sir Cleges*' underlying narrative structure are remarkably close to the fifteenth-century King and Commoner bourdes. The plot revolves around two feasts with opposing ideologies (the first carnival feast mingling classes, and the second court feast initially attempting to enforce social separation) and ends with a royal reward and social promotion for a 'churl'. This sense of similarity is only increased when noting such additional details as the carnivalesque beating of courtiers, the use of disguise (albeit by Sir

¹¹⁹ *Sir Cleges*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 367-407 (ll. 32-65).

¹²⁰ *Sir Cleges*, ll. 267, 296, 331.

Cleges rather than by the King), the emphasis on the hardship endured by commoners, the use of food to gain entrance to the court, and the political critique focusing on the corruption and lack of charity of self-serving courtiers. It has been argued that *Sir Cleges* possesses an unusual level of hybridity, uniquely absorbing various motifs (including the ‘Spendthrift Knight’, the ‘Unseasonal Fruit’ and the ‘Strokes Shared’) from across romance, hagiography, folktale and even fabliau.¹²¹ I propose that one more, hitherto seemingly unnoticed motif should be added to this list. *Sir Cleges* seems to have broadly utilised the basic elements of the King and Commoner plot to set out the backbone of its narrative but then freely adapted it by setting it in an Arthurian world and selecting various other motifs from across literary genres that complemented each other. In doing so it attempted to create an apotheosis of medieval festive literature: a truly hybrid Christmas narrative that mingles high and low culture while being perfectly in sync with the ideology of the carnival festivities and religious celebration.

As with the *Carle of Carlisle*, it is impossible to tell whether or not *Sir Cleges* has utilised already established tropes of a King and Commoner tradition and/or whether it to some extent feeds into and helps shape the concerns and tropes of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition. But taken together, these romances reveal a degree of thematic crossover between romance and the King and Commoner tradition, especially in the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. Commoners (and social concerns as to their presence) were appearing on the fringes of romance, just as the King and Commoner tradition and late-medieval comic tales in general began to utilise and satirise romance motifs (for example, see

¹²¹ See Mary Elizabeth Housum, *A Critical Edition of Middle English Sir Cleges* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Catholic University of America, 1988).

The Tournament of Tottenham, The Feast of Tottenham, The Lady Prioress, The Cokwold's Dance, The Boy and the Mantle and A Gest of Robyn Hode).¹²²

This introduction has aimed to provide a sense of the breadth and scope of the King and Commoner tradition, tracing just some of the threads of a motif that reaches across an array of cultures and time periods. The bourdes and ballads that form the central focus of this thesis certainly do not exist in isolation but are just one incarnation of a tale that has long fired the cultural imagination. However, the troubled and politically turbulent late fourteenth-mid fifteenth century fuelled a more subversive political spin on this age-old motif. At the onset of the fifteenth century, England was shaken by political rumblings, of which the earlier 1381 rebellion was but a single, if often-recalled manifestation. It was amidst this political background that the King in Disguise bourdes began to be recorded, amalgamating elements of complaint literature with carnival celebration in bourdes that dramatised the collision between the centralised, authoritative social orders and the anarchic inhabitants of liminal, forest worlds.

¹²² For more on this possible relationship between late-medieval comic literature and romance, see Furrow, 'Middle English Fabliaux and Modern Myth'.

Chapter One

Feasts and Surveillance in *King Edward and the Shepherd*: ‘Wode has erys; fylde has sizt’

Introduction

By the fifteenth century there had emerged a distinctive King and Commoner tradition combining carnivalesque laughter with a pointedly political discourse. Multiple texts survive from around this time, including *John the Reeve* (c. 1440), *Rauf Coilzear* (c. 1460), *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468), *King Edward and the Hermit* (c. 1500), and the last two fyttes of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (c. 1500), but the earliest and longest is *King Edward and the Shepherd* (c. 1400-1450). *King Edward and the Shepherd* can in many ways be viewed as the archetypal text for the medieval King and Commoner tradition, containing many of the key elements repeated, expanded upon, or even merely alluded to in the rest of the surviving material. It combines the early tradition’s inversion of hierarchical boundaries with some of its most overt links to medieval complaint literature. It also reasserts the court’s authority via the presentation of the incognito monarch as a disturbing, treacherous and strangely proto-panoptical figure, while persistently portraying the court as a place of corruption and death.

King Edward and the Shepherd is preserved in the Cambridge University manuscript Ff.5.48. This is a small manuscript (8 1/2" x 5 7/8") dated to the middle of the fifteenth century, inconsistently and ‘carelessly executed’ in a ‘plain hand’, with its dialect pointing to a northern point of the West Midlands.¹ It is largely unadorned, aside from a handful of

¹ *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. xvii-xxvi. See also *The Northern Passion*, Vol. II, ed. Francis A. Foster, EETS 147 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1916), p. 31.

animal sketches that appear on the first few pages of the manuscript in red and brown ink.² The manuscript's contents are broad in subject matter, encompassing both religious and secular texts, including several that foreground their performativity with addresses to their listening audience. The manuscript's concern with oral performance has led to the suggestion that many of its texts (especially the comic tales) could have been originally 'copied from the repertory manuscript of a professional entertainer'.³ Aside from *King Edward and the Shepherd*, the manuscript contains – often unique – texts of *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *The Turnament of Tottenham*, *The Feest of Tottenham*, *The Tale of the Basin*, *A Tale of an Incestuous Daughter*, *The Mourning of the Hunted Hare*, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, *The Betrayed Maiden's Lament*, *The Dialogue Between a Nightingale and a Clerk*, and *The Northern Passion*.

There has been much critical speculation regarding the identity of the original owner and scribe of the manuscript. The end of *The Northern Passion* contains the inscription 'Explicit Passio Domini Nostri Ihesu Christi Quod Dominus Gilbertus Pylkyngton [...] Amen', which has led to repeated speculation that Gilbert Pilkington was the scribe of Ff.5.48.⁴ In her study, Janay Young Downing somewhat problematized this scribal assignation by highlighting the manuscript's other, often ignored colophons:

Scribe A was evidently in the habit of copying from his source completely and copiously, if not carefully, for at two points he has copied down non-textual information left by a previous scribe.⁵

² *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, pp. xx-xxi.

³ Oscar Cargill, *Drama and Liturgy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 121. Mendal G. Frampton, 'Gilbert Pilkington Once More', *PLMA*, 47 (1932), 622-635. Downing, *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, pp. xxxi-xxxiii.

⁴ For a full critical history of which, including now discredited claims that Gilbert Pilkington was the author of these texts, or even the famed 'Wakefield Master', see Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: the Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts, and Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 33-5; Downing, *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, pp. xxviii-xxxiii; and Frampton, 'Pilkington Once More', pp. 622-25.

⁵ *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, pp. xxx-xxxi.

The Betrayed Maiden's Lament includes the colophon 'Bryan hys my name iet', while *The Northern Passion* sees Jesus' crucifixion interrupted by 'a short list of actors and wages in space normally devoted to text, just as though this material was part of *The Northern Passion*'.⁶ As Downing argues, these instances of over-zealous copying certainly leave open the possibility that the scribe of Ff.5.48 may have simply copied down Gilbert Pilkington's name from their *Northern Passion* source. Nonetheless, Thomas Ohlgren has undertaken a detailed search for a Gilbert Pilkington and has identified a 'Gilbertus Pilkington' who was 'ordained as a subdeacon, deacon, and secular priest over a two-year period from 1463 to 1465' in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield.⁷ Such evidence is admittedly circumstantial but it does place Pilkington's name in roughly the right place at the right time, holding a position that does correlate with the various religious pieces in the manuscript. Drawing on Ohlgren's work, Stephen Knight has employed Bourdieu's concept of habitus to argue that the manuscript's comic tales can be viewed as similarly in keeping with Gilbert Pilkington's lowly position in the church:

Pilkington [...] can relate to [trickster figures] as the estranged, self-aware, mutely aspirant practitioner [...] of a new habitus which realises forms of self-projected liberation in the context of nature, freedom, and unthreatened masculinity.⁸

While Knight is here primarily drawing parallels between Pilkington and the trickster figure of Robin Hood, his argument and comparison is just as applicable to Adam in *King Edward and the Shepherd*.

The dating for *King Edward and the Shepherd* has attracted several differing estimates. In his nineteenth-century ballad collection, Francis James Child was content to tie

⁶ *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, p. xxxi.

⁷ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, pp. 36-9.

⁸ Stephen Knight, 'Alterity, Parody, Habitus: The Formation of the Early Literary Tradition of Robin Hood', in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Stood: Alterity and Context in the English Outlaw Tradition*, ed. Stephen Knight (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 1-30 (pp. 18-19).

the text to the creation of the manuscript, dating it to ‘about 1450’.⁹ Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale offer a slightly earlier dating, proposing that the vocabulary indicates that ‘it was composed about the end of the fourteenth century’, adding:

The chronology is sufficiently inexact to prove that it was written long after the events it relates; but it must have been written for an audience that knew something of the life of Edward III, and could appreciate the humour of passages such as 43 ff.¹⁰

French and Hale are here referring to a passage in which Edward gives subtle hints as to his true identity, mentioning details relating to his father (‘a Walsse knyzt’) and mother (‘Dame Isabell’).¹¹ A recent edition by Melissa Furrow takes such details further, proposing that these references, along with passing mentions of ‘Sir Raufe of Stafford’ (l. 629) and the ‘Erle of Waryn, Sir John’ (l. 678), suggest that the poet possessed detailed knowledge of Edward III’s court.¹² From this Furrow proposes that the *bourde* was written by a southern courtier during the period in which the tale was set. Furrow approximates this to be 1347, focusing on the Black Prince’s age in the text – he is young enough to be a ‘childe’ (l. 972), yet old enough to be a ‘prince’ (l. 917) (he was invested as Prince of Wales in 1343). She concludes that *King Edward and the Shepherd* was probably designed for performance in the festivities following Edward’s return from the French wars (concluding with the capture of Calais in the summer of 1347).¹³ Furrow could have also pointed here to Edward III’s introduction of ‘disguisings’, or ‘mumming’ into the court’s Christmas festivities in 1347, which included people masked as ‘wild men’.¹⁴ This incorporation of disguises and wild men into the royal court’s carnival

⁹ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 71.

¹⁰ Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, ‘*King Edward and the Shepherd*: Introduction’, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 949-950 (p. 949).

¹¹ *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. 116-59 (ll. 97-8). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

¹² Melissa M. Furrow, ‘*King Edward and the Shepherd*: Introduction’, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 145-8.

¹³ Furrow, ‘*King Edward and the Shepherd*: Introduction’, p. 145-7.

¹⁴ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 11.

festivities around Furrow's proposed dating could be loosely connected to *King Edward and the Shepherd*'s own basis on carnival festivities (albeit in May), use of disguises, and its intermingling of court culture with a wilderness figure.

However, there are many issues with this early dating, several of which Furrow acknowledges. Primary among them is establishing a path from Furrow's proposed aristocratic, southern origin to the version of *King Edward and the Shepherd* as it comes down to us, surviving in a northern dialect amongst other folkloric comic tales in an unprofessionally transcribed miscellany written over a hundred years after her proposed dating. Furrow intriguingly suggests that a handful of rhymes may contain traces of a more southern, East Anglian origin but this is not wholly convincing, especially given the clearly northern rhymes in most of the poem.¹⁵ Attempting to date the tale by means of its historical setting is also made problematic by the other early King and Commoner texts persistently setting themselves in the past, establishing a safe sense of historical distance while voicing commoner complaints. For example, *John the Reeve* was written c. 1440, yet sets itself during the time of Edward I, *Rauf Coilzear* was probably written c. 1460 and sets itself during the reign of Charlemagne, while *King Edward and the Hermit*'s opening of 'It befelle be god Edwerd deys' again clearly indicates that its setting is historical.¹⁶ This device is also common in the large number of King and Commoner ballads and chapbooks emerging from the sixteenth century, strengthening the sense that utilising a distant, historical setting was an established part of the King and Commoner tradition. Regarding the Black Prince's presentation as a 'childe' in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, it is worth noting that he is elsewhere portrayed in literature as a child prince, such as in the Elizabethan play *King*

¹⁵ Furrow, 'King Edward and the Shepherd: Introduction', p. 148.

¹⁶ *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), pp. 401-13 (l. 13).

Edward III (c. 1592-3), or Ben Jonson's masque *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610), indicating that this youthful presentation may itself have been something of a literary tradition.¹⁷

To stress the bourde's historical relevance to the early-mid fourteenth century, Furrow also points to a letter written to Edward III around 1333, probably by Archbishop Simon Meopham, which details the abuses of Edward's officials:

My lord King, behold what deceits are practised by your court in these days. Proclamation is made in the markets that none shall take oats or other things from any persons unless he pay for them as he is bound, under heavy penalty – And none the less, the harbingers of your court, and various grooms and servants, take many goods by violence from their owners, bread, beer, eggs, poultry, beans, peas, oats, and other things, for which scarcely any payment is made.¹⁸

This undeniably resembles Adam's complaints in *King Edward and the Shepherd*. However, such complaints were not confined to this specific period: evidence of them is found throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They are, for example, repeated in the commons' complaints to the Parliament of November 1381, as presented by Sir Richard de Waldegrave, in the aftermath of the Peasant Revolt:

[T]he poor commons are from time to time plundered and ruined – what with the purveyors for the household of the King and of others, who pay nothing to the commons for the victuals and carriage taken from them, and what with the subsidies and tallages often raised from them [...] and otherwise by grievous and outrageous oppressions done to them by divers servants of the King and of other lords of the realm, and especially by the aforesaid maintainers – so that they are brought to great wretchedness and discomfort, more than they ever were before.¹⁹

¹⁷ In *King Edward III* the Black Prince is portrayed as young throughout and is described as a 'tender youth', see *King Edward III*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.1.230. Ben Jonson's masque was written to celebrate the investiture of James I's son Prince Henry (d. 1612) as Prince of Wales, and features Merlin telling the fifteen year-old Prince Henry of past kings and princes, including 'The Black Prince Edward [...] who then / At Cressy field had no more years than you'. Ben Jonson, *Prince Henry's Barriers*, in *Masques and Entertainments by Ben Jonson*, ed. Henry Morley (London: Routledge, 1890), pp. 130-42 (ll. 248-9).

¹⁸ *Illustrations of Chaucer's England*, ed. Dorothy Hughes (London and New York: Longmans and Green, 1918), p. 173.

¹⁹ *Illustrations of Chaucer's England*, p. 240.

Such claims can be similarly seen during the build-up to Jack Cade's Revolt in 1450, with royal officials accused of organising 'raiding parties' to steal from the commons.²⁰ Therefore, Adam's complaints can be seen to be equally contemporary and pressing during the more usual late fourteenth to mid fifteenth-century dating given to this text and do not by themselves provide evidence for an earlier dating of the tale.

There must also be a question mark put over Furrow's claim that *King Edward and the Shepherd* was designed for court performance in the 1347 celebrations immediately following King Edward's return from the French wars. It would be a brave writer who would produce a piece for these patriotic, self-congratulatory court festivities that openly criticises the monarch's courtiers and focuses on the court's oppression of the commons. In any case, Edward's court was in far more self-congratulatory mode following its recent martial victories, as can be demonstrated by Edward's founding of the Order of the Garter in 1348 as a symbol of the English aristocracy's unity. The simultaneous royal patronisation of *bourdes* critical of the aristocracy would have run very much counter to this mood and occasion. The timing seems unlikely, whether *King Edward and the Shepherd* is (debatably) interpreted as otherwise 'complimentary to Edward' or not.²¹

Finally, speculation over a dubious 'lost' southern text seems somewhat irrelevant as regards the surviving text. As is demonstrated in chapter four of this thesis, these texts can be vastly altered in ideology over the period of a hundred years, even while maintaining the same basic plot and structure. There is no reason to presume that any potentially older version would contain the same content or ideological concerns. Taking this into consideration, it seems more prudent to date the existing text through its mid fifteenth-century manuscript and

²⁰ See I. M. W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 39-44.

²¹ Furrow, 'King Edward and the Shepherd: Introduction', p. 147.

its arguably late fourteenth-century language. A suitably cautious date balancing these could be given as c. 1400-1450.

Turning to the tale itself, *King Edward and the Shepherd* is an unfinished 1090 lines in length and written in twelve-line tail rhyme stanzas, with a rhyme scheme of *aabccbddbeeb*. While it does not directly describe itself as a *bourde* in the way *John the Reeve* and *The King and the Barker* do, it nonetheless repeatedly refers to the ‘bourdis’/‘bourdes’ either told or performed by its characters (ll. 214, 223, 323, 478, 487, 612, 633, 699), making the extension of this label to *King Edward and the Shepherd* seem a natural progression and fit.²² The basic plot is as follows:

One May morning, King Edward III leaves the court and walks into the countryside, where he happens upon a shepherd named Adam.²³ Adam tells Edward that the King’s men have killed his livestock and given him a tally stick but have not repaid the debt. Edward pretends to be a merchant named Jolly Robin who has influence in the court and is similarly owed money by the King’s men. He promises that he will obtain the money that Adam is owed, asking Adam not to blame the King for his troubles in return. Adam proceeds to tell Edward of a further gang who have stolen his livestock and raped his daughter. Adam then invites Edward back to his house in the forest. On the way, they pass rabbits and deer, which Edward unsuccessfully tries to tempt Adam into poaching. On reaching Adam’s house they sit down to eat. Adam at first gives Edward small brown bread and penny ale, then produces an array of poached birds and teaches Edward a drinking game called ‘Passilodion.’ Having done this, Adam produces wine, poached rabbits and poached deer, much to the King’s amazement. The next day, Edward returns to the court, having first made Adam promise to visit him.

The second half sees Adam visit the court, where he refuses to take off his hat to anyone or relinquish his staff. The King, still under the name of Jolly Robin, ensures that Adam is paid the money owed to him and insists Adam stays for a feast. During this feast Edward tells the Prince to play ‘Passilodion’ with Adam. Adam reacts angrily, fearing that he has been betrayed and will be executed. At the end of this feast

²² This argument is also convincingly put forward by Furrow. See Melissa M. Furrow, ‘General Introduction’, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013) pp. 1-5 (p. 2).

²³ The *bourde* initially indicates that Edward is attended by a groom, but this character seems to have disappeared by the time the King encounters Adam.

Edward finally reveals his true identity and Adam begs for his forgiveness. The text is abruptly cut off, ending with the colophon ‘*non finis sed punctus*’.²⁴

This chapter will perform a detailed analysis of this bourde. It will first highlight the ways in which social boundaries are set up in the bourde’s opening passages and combined with anti-noble complaint. This will then feed into the analysis of the unofficial commoner feast, which works to collapse those same boundaries in a blending of insurgent, political action with the ceremonies and Bakhtinian ideologies of the medieval carnival feast. The last section of this chapter will explore both the presentation of the King as disturbing proto-panoptical spy and Adam’s containment in the second official feast, emphasising the court’s unsettling presentation.

Establishing Boundaries and Commoner Complaint: ‘I am so pyllid with þe kyng’

King Edward and the Shepherd opens with the promise that those who hear it ‘shalle lawgh of gyle’ (l. 12), that is to say shall laugh at deception, deceit, or trickery (all of which are synonymous with this text as a ‘bourde’).²⁵ But, as Thomas Ohlgren points out, such ‘trickery is double-edged’, as it pointedly does not say who is to be the deceiver, or who is to be the deceived.²⁶ This is perhaps appropriate; on a superficial level this is a tale full of deception, whether Edward is deceiving Adam as to his identity, or Adam is deceiving Edward regarding his poaching, with both concealing their true selves.²⁷ But this sense of deception

²⁴ The other tales from this period end with the King presenting the commoner with a lavish reward and a position in the court, making it reasonable to suppose that this bourde would have finished in a similar fashion.

²⁵ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran (University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service). Available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED5729> [accessed March 2015].

²⁶ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, p. 44.

²⁷ This in itself runs against the use of disguise by Kings in romance. As Dickson argues, disguise allowed romance Kings to cast off their social identity in order to reveal their interior identity, or *self*, usually hidden beneath and constricted by those robes of state. Morgan Dickson, ‘Verbal and Visual Disguise: Society and Identity in Some Twelfth-Century Texts’, in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 41-54.

also runs deeper, as it is a text that persistently defies its reader's expectations. Usual perceptions are toyed with and turned upside down, as the woods situated on society's margins become transformed into the centre of justice and life, while the court becomes a strange liminal space imbued with injustice and death, thus redefining where the *other* lies. This is combined with the text's use of the ceremonies and inversion inherent to the folk carnival and a distinct political awareness that raises this seemingly comic tale to the edge of outright radicalism. As befits Bakhtin's vision of the carnival, the old world dies and a new world is born, redefining expectations and the limits of what is possible with the existing order overthrown, however temporarily. The following section will focus on the way the *bourde* establishes social boundaries and limits in preparation for their later collapse. In the process it will also demonstrate the simultaneous inversion of perceptions, redefining reader expectations as to which side of the tree-line danger may approach from.

The tale begins in a light, pastoral tone, as the 'kyng went hym in a tyde / To pley hym be a ryverside', where he meets a shepherd called Adam. But this air of playful contentment is quickly shattered by Adam's opening speech, dragging the tale into a darker and distinctly political arena. All is not as it seems in this Arcadian landscape:

I am so pyllid with þe kyng
 Þat I most fle fro my wony[n]g,
 And therefore woo is me.
 I hade catelle; now have I non;
 Thay take my bestis and don þaim slone,
 And payen but a stik of tre. (ll. 31-6)

This passage could have been directly lifted from medieval complaint literature, such as *Song of the Husbandmen* (see below). It presents an upside-down world where the 'kyngus men' (l. 148) are transformed into thieves, their social *other*, not upholding or embodying the law (as their title would imply) but committing the crimes themselves. Adam has been given a tally stick (the 'stik of tre') but it is clearly little more than a receipt of theft. Indeed, later in the

court the steward disdainfully tells Adam that, tally-stick or no, were it not for Edward's personal intervention, 'Today 3e gate no mone of me' (l. 786). It presents a portrait of aristocratic collusion designed to oppress the commons, yet this passage seems to indicate a more pointed oppression than simple theft. Through the violent slaughter of Adam's livestock the nobles deliberately strip Adam of the very means by which he makes his livelihood, aiming to both *maintain* and *increase* the commoner's poverty. It is the first instance of this bourde's persistent focus on materialism and particularly food as a battleground between noble and commoner, in which the commons will attempt to overreach materialistic boundaries, obtaining sustenance, while the court attempts to enforce dearth and the commons' class-appropriate poverty through restriction. That is to say, while the commons aspire for life, merriment and plenty, the court brings starvation and death.

The violence in this passage is further emphasised in Adam's next complaint, in which the consequences of a self-serving, corrupt court and subsequently disintegrated law are graphically played out:

3et ar þer of þeim nyne moo,
 Ffor at my hows þei were also
 Certis 3isturday.
 Þei toke my hennes and my geese
 And my schepe with alle þe fleese
 And ladde þeim forth away.
 Be my do3tur þei lay alny3t;
 To come agayne þei have me hy3t;
 Off helpe I wolde yow pray.

With me þei lefte alle þeire thyng,
 Þat I am sicur of þeire comyng,
 And þat me rewes soore. (ll. 160-171)

This passage's gradually increasing horror, leading to the rape of Adam's daughter and his desperate plea for aid, shapes the reader's sympathies and casts a long shadow over the text, later re-emerging to undercut the aristocratic laughter in the court scenes. Yet given its

importance, it is curiously ambiguous as to who the ‘nyne moo’ depicted in this second complaint are. Just before this second outburst Edward seemingly (if temporarily) convinces Adam that ‘Pei do but gode, þe kyngus men’, leading Adam to claim ‘Pei ar worse þen sich ten, / Ðat bene wiþ hym no delle’ (ll. 148-50). Adam then proceeds to his complaint without providing any other details regarding this second group’s identity.

It could be interpreted that those who ‘bene wiþ hym no delle’ (that is to say have never been with, or have no dealings with the King) are a band of common thieves, or outlaws. There would still be an element of anti-noble complain here, as Adam emphasises that the commons lack the ‘helpe of sum lordynges’ (l. 178) when it comes to maintaining law and order. Alternatively, it could be read that this second gang are a further group of nobles or gentry who do not attend the King at court, or commune/deal directly with him, and as such are even more unruly and out of control. A historical example to demonstrate this ambiguity could perhaps be seen in John Alpeigh, a gentleman and henchman of William Crowmer (the Sheriff of Kent and son-in-law of the influential courtier Lord Saye), who in the 1440s was encouraged by Crowmer to extort, oppress, and defraud the commons – activity which included the forming of ‘raiding parties taking livestock and household goods’.²⁸ Whether Alpeigh in his unofficial activities would be described as having had ‘no delle’ with Henry VI and so part of the second gang, or described as a one of the ‘kyngus men’ and part of the first, demonstrates the potentially fine line here.

The ambiguity and lack of specificity in this passage, even to the modern critic, can certainly be seen in the differing critical interpretations of it. Snell labels this second gang ‘robber outlaws’, with Furrow also describing them as an ‘outlaw gang’, and Glen Wright

²⁸ Commoner hatred for Crowmer and the bailiffs under him was such that Crowmer was decapitated along with Lord Saye during the 1381 peasant rebellion. Crowmer and Saye’s heads were then paraded through the streets and repeatedly made to kiss as a gesture of collusion between sheriff and courtier. Harvey, *Jack Cade’s Rebellion of 1450*, pp. 40-44.

opting for ‘freelance brigands’.²⁹ However, Walsh states that the ‘king’s men [...] have even molested [Adam’s] daughter’; Hill likewise reads both groups as ‘the king’s purveyors’; and Ohlgren provides an array of royal officials as potential perpetrators, claiming that Edward’s ‘knights, foresters, and game-keepers are guilty of theft, intimidation, and seduction of the peasantry’.³⁰ French and Hale leave either possibility open, stating that such gangs were made up ‘partly from men outlawed for trivial offenses, and partly from small landowners and nobles who improved their income by robbing travellers’.³¹ Child notably omits this central scene altogether from his otherwise highly comprehensive synopsis.³²

This degree of indeterminacy regarding the oppressors’ identity is in itself telling, as in some ways it is immaterial to the text. What can be said with certainty is that the nobles’ violent economic rape of Adam and the collapse of law and order related in Adam’s initial complaint, are repeated and embodied in the rape of Adam’s daughter, transforming his earlier complaints into a graphic and horrifying image. The King’s men either disturbingly mirror the act in their own similarly depicted violent oppression of Adam, or have been metamorphosed into savages themselves – furthering that sense of transformation into their social *other*. Either way, the tale emphasises the blurring and collapse of rigid certainties and boundaries, to create an unsettling resemblance, a lack of difference that further challenges the court’s moral authority.

This depiction of aristocratic oppression is carried over into the presentation of the royal forestry laws. These laws are portrayed as similarly oppressive and violent boundaries

²⁹ Rachel Snell, ‘The Undercover King’, in *Medieval Insular Romance*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows, Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 133-154 (p. 143). Furrow, ‘*King Edward and the Shepherd*: Introduction’, p. 147. Glenn Wright, ‘Churl’s Courtesy: *Rauf Coilgear* and its English Analogues’, *Neophilologus*, 85.4 (2001), 647-662 (p. 652).

³⁰ Elizabeth Walsh, ‘The King in Disguise’, *Folklore* 86 (1975), 3-24 (p. 11). Ordelle G. Hill, *The Manor, The Plowman and the Shepherd: Agrarian Themes in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance English Literature* (London and Cranbury: Susquehanna University Press, 1993), p. 104. Ohlgren, *Robin Hood*, p. 44.

³¹ *King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 949-85 (n. 160).

³² *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, p. 71.

that forcibly restrict materialism/food, impinging on the freedoms of the commons. When approaching Adam's house in the forest Adam and Edward come across 'conynges' (l. 218), which Edward encourages Adam to shoot for their dinner, provoking the fearful response:

Hit is alle þe kyngus waren;
 There is nouþer knyzt ne sqwayne
 Pat dar do sich a dede,
 Any conyng here to sla
 And with þe trespass away to ga,
 But his sidis shulde blede!
 The warner is hardy and felle;
 Sirtanly, as I þe telle,
 He wille take no mede.
 Whoso does here sich maistre,
 Be þou wel sicur he shalle aby
 And unto prison lede. (ll. 229-240)

This passage again presents materialistic, segregating boundaries backed by court-sanctioned violence, emphasising that violence, death, imprisonment and persecution are situated in and come from the aristocratic court, intruding into the commoners' forest world. When Adam and Edward subsequently come across 'hert and hynde' (l. 255), Adam goes into further details regarding the 'forster' (l. 269) and the structures policing the royal hunting reserve, in the process tying Edward more directly to this portrayal of aristocratic oppression:

He has with hym ʒong men thre;
 Þei be archers of þis contre,
 Þe kyng to serve at wille,
 To kepe þe dere boþe day and nyzt,
 And for þeire luf a loge is dizt
 Fulle hye upon an hille. (ll. 271-6)

Edward may, as he claims, 'wot hit nozt' (l. 39) when it comes to the oppressive and violent actions of 'þe kyngus men', but the same cannot be said here. The game they come across is not simply that of a local lord's but is explicitly 'þe kyngus waren', while the foresters serve 'þe kyng [...] at wille', and have been in turn granted a lodge by Edward 'for þeire luf'. If the commoners' 'sidis [...] blede' then it is presented as being at the King's behest and with his

full knowledge.³³ *King Edward and the Shepherd* also ensures that this particular social boundary separates the King from not just Adam but from the rest of the social body; it is not only the commons, but ‘nouþer knyzt ne sqwayne’ would ‘dar’ overstep this social limit. This game is solely for the King and the enforcement of this boundary emphasises that it is a representative marker of the King’s personal power and authority: that is to say, it is representative of his own separation, status and monarchic role as sole head of the social body. In this way the text presents us with the violence of power that enforces and publicly displays the (materialistic) hierarchical divisions between commoner, aristocrat, and king, while subtly representing hierarchical separation itself as a violent act.

An awareness of the cultural context surrounding these hierarchical, materialistic boundaries is vital to an understanding of these early King and Commoner texts, for these same boundaries were perceived as being under threat during the later Middle Ages. As is well known, the fall in population following the Black Death led to a growth in worker demand, an increase in the commons’ bargaining power with the landowners, and the rise of ‘up to twice or even three times their previous wages.’³⁴ One reaction by the aristocratic classes was the repeated issuing of sumptuary laws between 1336 and 1483, each attempting to restrict what the commons could earn or purchase. At the same time the Ordinance of Labourers (1349) and the Statute of Labourers (1351) attempted to fix labourers’ wages to pre-Black Death levels. The repeated issuing of these laws speaks of their ineffectualness, but it also reveals a focus on defining social position and hierarchy through wealth and materiality. As Christopher Dyer argues:

³³ This also makes Edward’s repeated attempts to make Adam poach seem all the more strange and sinister, as will be explored later on in this chapter.

³⁴ Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London and New York: Routledge, 1973), pp. 153-4.

[The] motive [behind the sumptuary laws], clearly expressed in contemporary literature, was that the visible symbols of social rank ceased to have their former meaning, the whole hierarchy of society was being threatened.³⁵

Such materialistically defined hierarchical boundaries had become deeply politicised in this period and it is no coincidence that they appear in the early King and Commoner texts in relation to commoner complaint regarding aristocratic abuses and oppression. In *John the Reeve* such laws are explicitly referred to, with John complaining that as a result of the King's oppressive 'statunge' he is forced to 'sell my wheate', 'dare not eate that I gett', and is forced to 'eate noe other meate' than 'salt Bacon of a yeere old'.³⁶ The theft Adam suffers at the hands of the 'kyngus men' in *King Edward and the Shepherd* could also be viewed as operating in a similar way to such materialistically and financially restrictive statutes. The statutes are the legal equivalent to this aristocratic theft, designed to keep the commoners oppressed, materialistically poor and fixed in their lowly hierarchical place.

But in general, the King and Commoner bourdes repeatedly situate materialistic divisions and differences between aristocrat and commoner around the allowance and revocation of food, which in turn leads to a focus on poaching and feasting. While the forestry laws are ostensibly different to the sumptuary laws, the principles behind them are presented in a similar way by these texts. The game of the forest always represents a forbidden, materialistic boundary infused with class politics in these tales, presenting it as a violently enforced hierarchical separation that is challenged by the commoner's distinctly carnivalesque poached feast.

³⁵ Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 283-4.

³⁶ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. 550-94 (ll. 139-155).

The Carnavalesque Collapse of Boundaries in Adam's Feast: 'De scheperde ete tulle pat he swatte'

As Snell argues, the commoner feasts in the early King and Commoner tradition clearly harness the ceremony of the popular carnival festivities for intrinsically political ends:

Adam and the other churlish protagonists are mock kings, asserting ancient congenital rights and a fundamental power.³⁷

The medieval carnival often saw the election of a mock king, or a 'lord of misrule', who oversaw the Christmas and May feasts and festivities as part of a tradition of carnival 'disguisings' and inversion that permeated every level of medieval society.³⁸ These early King and Commoner *bourdes* are infused with such disguises and inversions, with their main plot centred on the commoner's increasingly regal portrayal amid their extravagant feasting. Indeed, the two medieval texts that provide a seasonal setting place their tales in these periods of carnival celebrations, with *Rauf Coilzear* set in the 'Yule tyde' and *King Edward and the Shepherd* occurring 'In a morning of May' (l. 15).³⁹

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that medieval folk-culture carnival feasts 'marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions', reaching for a 'world of ideals' where all is collapsed and intermingled.⁴⁰ These were feasts of 'becoming, change, and renewal' based on life-death cycles and a celebration of the grotesque body.⁴¹ As such they were inherently hostile to 'static', official culture, which was 'founded on the principle of an immobile and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge'. The oppressive enforcement of materialistic, hierarchical divisions in the opening sections of *King Edward and the Shepherd* is a perfect

³⁷ Snell, 'Undercover King', pp. 147-149.

³⁸ Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 95-111, 244-261.

³⁹ *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), pp. 161-204 (l. 4).

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 10.

embodiment of this ‘static culture’ principle – emphasising social separation.⁴² By contrast, the carnival’s merger, or collapse of class boundaries is played out in Adam’s feast, which draws on this folk carnival feasting in both ceremony and ideology for pointedly political ends.

Adam’s commoner feast is presented in a very specific order that first presents the social limits and constraints earlier emphasised by his complaints in the forest and then overcomes and breaches those same limits. Adam first brings out ‘Brede’ and ‘Twa peny ale’ (l. 292-3), representing food that is fairly appropriate to his class.⁴³ But ‘Therof wolde he not lett’ (l. 293), breaching boundaries between commoner and noble with the pointed declaration of ‘3et have I mete that were worthy / A grete lord for to fech’ (l. 302). Adam then produces ‘fesaunde’, ‘crane’, ‘heron with a poplere’, ‘Curlews, boturs’, ‘maudlart’, ‘a hur mech’, and ‘a wylde swan’, all to the clear amazement of the King (ll. 295-307). Comparison with Woolgar’s study on the great households in the later Middle Ages reveals that Adam’s feast is indeed worthy for a ‘grete lord’, closely resembling the banquets (and wild stock) of the most extravagant aristocratic estates.⁴⁴ Such wild birds would have been kept ‘for the lord’s mess alone’, and even then solely ‘reserved for Christmas and other major feasts’.⁴⁵ Indeed, swans were (and still remain) royal birds that can only be consumed with royal permission. In possessing such birds, Adam both defies those earlier hierarchical boundaries and begins to resemble ‘a grete lord’ by seizing these materialistic, social markers.

After his initial surprise, Edward’s response is telling, emphasising the remaining *difference* between Adam’s table and the markers of a royal feast by pointing to the lack of

⁴² Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 166.

⁴³ Although that this bread is ‘whete’ rather than lower-class barley and is presented on a ‘fayre cloth’ already presents the reader with subtle clues that all is not as it seems (ll. 289-92).

⁴⁴ C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 114.

⁴⁵ Woolgar, *The Great Household*, p. 133.

‘buk or doo’ (l. 380) – that which ‘nouþer knyzt ne sqwayne’ would ‘dar’ to possess for fear of overstepping his social bounds and intruding into the restricted sphere of the king (ll. 230-

1). On cue Adam brings in:

fett conynges thre
 Alle baken welle in a pasty
 With wel gode spicerye;
 And oþur baken mete alsoo,
 Boþ of hert and of roo. (ll. 395-400)

It is clear that this feast now resembles and rivals the King’s own, effectively crowning Adam as the (mock) king of this carnivalesque feast. This is only further emphasised by Adam’s addition of spices to his poached rabbit pies, showcasing ‘one of the defining characteristics of upper-class diet’, and presentation of ‘Lanycolle [...] wyne’, which Adam has ‘every mele’ (ll. 446-50) at a time when the daily consumption of wine was again ‘a mark of the highest aristocracy.’⁴⁶

In the forest *King Edward and the Shepherd* presented hierarchical and materialistic divisions between commoner, aristocrat, and king. In Adam’s feast the dishes are quite purposefully presented in ascending hierarchical order to emphasise the subsequent breaching and collapse of those same hierarchical boundaries and Adam’s own rise through them. He turns such restricted, hierarchical markers against their intended purpose, in what Snell described as a ‘covert appropriation of aristocratic culture’.⁴⁷ In the process he elevates himself from the feet to the head of the social body, transferring authority from the disguised monarch to himself, in an exaggerated enactment of the conservative fears of hierarchical collapse behind the sumptuary laws. To use the words of Bakhtin, Adam’s commoner ‘aspiration is like yeast added to the [banquet] images. They rise, grow, swell with this leaven

⁴⁶ Woolgar, *The Great Household*, pp. 126-9.

⁴⁷ Snell, ‘Undercover King’, p. 147.

until they reach exaggerated dimensions'.⁴⁸ Or, in Adam's own words, 'Sich fowle con my slyng take; / þeroff am I no wrech!' (ll. 308-9). Adam's grasping of these monarchic social markers lifts him from his status as a 'wrech' and instead crowns himself as this banquet's carnival king at the expense of the disguised Edward's authority, turning the world upside down in a distinctly carnivalesque breaching and inversion/collapse of hierarchical separation.

Adam's poaching can be regarded as an act of political violence that also borrows from a sense of carnivalesque inversion. This poaching resembles and reproduces the aristocrats' slaughter (and probable consumption) of his own livestock. However Adam's act of violence does not simply mirror the aristocrats' example but turns such violence against its original conservative purpose of enforcing social difference by instead using it to subversively overcome that same social difference. The resemblance and inversion in this (displaced) violence is aimed at collapsing and stripping away social, hierarchical difference, replacing it with a carnivalesque intermingling.

At the same time, this poaching reveals a distinctly carnival collapse and 'downward motion', turning abstract laws into a focus on the body.⁴⁹ Aristocratic oppression becomes metamorphosed into the commoner's food and so consumed, transforming abstract laws and concepts to the corporeal, shifting the high to the low, swapping dearth for feast, official laws for an unofficial carnival. That which would serve to divide aristocrats and commoners has become inseparably mingled in the commoner's expanding belly, as 'Þe scheperde ete tille þat he swatte' (l. 359), the grotesque body growing and breaching its limits in unison with the expanding food and Adam's defiance of the boundaries of dearth and poverty enforced by the court/official, hierarchical culture. In Bakhtinian terms, Adam 'tastes' the aristocratic 'world,

⁴⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 279.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 116-7.

introduces it to his body, makes it part of himself [...] he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself', consuming social boundaries and differences.⁵⁰

The carnival reversal between king and commoner is further emphasised during Adam's drinking game. Drinking games are inherently carnival in spirit, representing a chaotic carnival ritual that overthrows the sober rituals of ordered society: as drunkenness and excess are enforced by rule, sobriety and pious restraint become outcast. As with so much in this tale, Adam's drinking game takes this sense of carnival and politicises it. The drinking game sees its participants exchange the nonsensical cries of 'passilodion' and 'berafrynde' in order to drink (in a variant of the traditional carnival 'Wesseye' (l. 327)).⁵¹

But there is direction behind these apparent nonsense words. As Julia Kristeva argues:

Carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law.⁵²

This carnival language could be similarly regarded as operating in a very Deleuzian sense, pre-empting his call to 'hijack speech': 'The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control'.⁵³ These nonsensical cries become the language of the unofficial carnival, incomprehensible to official culture. As Prince Edward later comments in the court, 'It is a new language' (l. 925). They are carnival, upside-down 'order-words,' situating the feast and the world it creates outside of the court

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 281.

⁵¹ The *Middle English Dictionary* shows that these two cries are exclusive to *King Edward and the Shepherd*, proposing that 'passilodion' may be a unique combination of *passum* ('raisin wine') and *lūdium* (a 'game' or 'contest'), while labelling 'berafrynde' a 'nonsense word'. See *Middle English Dictionary*, available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED32567> and <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED4127> [accessed March 2015].

⁵² Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 65.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 175.

and King's knowledge, control and power.⁵⁴ It establishes a new order in this liminal space and in the process reverses the usual social order, inverting the location of power, recasting Adam as teacher and the King as his pupil: 'Þe kyng seid þat he wold lere: / [...] "Teche me, I þe pray!"' (ll. 322-4). This reversal of positions emphasises their essential reversibility during this carnival feast, again establishing Adam as a carnival king and Edward as his subject, for underneath the comedy is an assertion of Adam's sovereignty and rule being established that allows him to declare 'I wil þat it so be' (l. 460):

Thus shal þe game go aboute,
And whoso falys of þis route –
I swere be Seynt Mighell –
Get hym drynk wher he wille,
He getes non here – þis is my skille –
Nozt to anoþer sele. (ll. 331-6)

If the first part of the bourde focused on the aristocrats' restriction of the commoner's access to food and drink in order to maintain their own power and superiority, then Adam here reverses it. To gain access to the previously exclusively aristocratic wine, Edward must now engage with this carnival discourse and obey Adam. This carnival world again inverts the ordinary and in so doing overcomes the social barriers earlier foregrounded by the bourde's complaints.

As the feast and drinking game progresses, Adam even begins to be described in increasingly aristocratic terms, appropriate to his new position as carnival king:

He wynkid and strokyd up his hode
And seid, 'Berafrynde.'
He was qwyte as any swan;
He was a wel-begeton man
And comyn of holy kynde.
He wold not ete his cromys drye;

⁵⁴ On 'order-words', Deleuze comments that: 'Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience [...] Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a social obligation.' Adam's carnival order-words force the King to engage with his carnival feast and so obey its inverted world order, placing Adam in control. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 76-9.

He lovyd nothyng but it were trie
 Neþer fer ne hende. (ll. 363-70)

This description of Adam's white skin and good birth are more usually found in descriptions of the aristocracy, again presenting Adam in socially elevated terms during his illegal appropriation of aristocratic food ('He wold not ete his cromys drye; / He lovyd nothyng but it were trie') and assertion of his drinking game rule (significantly repeating 'Berafrynde' before this seeming class transformation). That this appearance is attributed to a lowly shepherd again helps to rupture the distinctions between high and low.⁵⁵ It further implies a potential for reversibility and kinship between the king and commoner, a breakdown of rigid social divides. Adam has become 'hende' in all senses of the word: 'courtly' in appearance, 'courteous', and increasingly too 'close' to the aristocratic classes for the comfort of social conservatives.⁵⁶

The question posed amid this collapse of hierarchical boundaries is whether there is any perceivable difference left between a shepherd and a king. In her examination of disguised kings and knights in twelfth-century insular romance, Morgan Dickson argues that such figures hide their aristocratic social identity in order to examine their interiority (their inner 'self'). The result is invariably that their inner worth shines through their social disguise, thus proving their social worth and so cementing their own power/social position within that society:

⁵⁵ Adam is always presented as a shepherd in this tale, as opposed to *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, which instead reveals that the seeming churl was a disguised aristocrat all along. See *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romance and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 85-112.

⁵⁶ A passage that offers a useful contrast with these carnival scenes can be found in John Gower's description of the 1381 rebels: 'Born of a poor man's stock and a poor man himself, he demands things for his belly like a lord [...] This is a race without power of reason, like beasts.' Gower depicts the commons as being so animalistic that they are closer to the food on the aristocratic table than they are to resembling the aristocrats, emphasising the inherent separation between the classes rather than the potential for one to metamorphose into the other. *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1962), p. 210. For definitions of 'hende', see *Middle English Dictionary*, available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED20378> [accessed March 2015].

The adoption of a disguise allows the hero to exist in a society without the expectation that he should behave as a knight, which paradoxically allows him to prove conclusively that he belongs essentially and exclusively to the morally rigorous class of knighthood which he claims for his own. By proving, while in disguise, that the interior identity of the self adheres to the social identity that the knight would like to claim, once he has shed his disguise the knight is able to claim that identity unequivocally.⁵⁷

By contrast, it is noticeable that in *King Edward and the Shepherd* Edward does not possess any innate qualities that shine through to mark his rank when visiting Adam in the wilderness. It is this which is emphasised by Adam's wife, as she pauses with a pitcher of wine and addresses Adam, just before their drinking game begins:

Pe wife askid, 'Who shuld begynne,
Pe godeman, sir, or 3e?' (ll. 456-7)

A king and a shepherd may sit at the table but she cannot see anything to separate them.

When social identity is blurred and hierarchical divisions collapse, the king and shepherd are portrayed as equals.⁵⁸ This again furthers the sense of complete hierarchical collapse and intermingling amid Adam's carnival feast, with social rank and separation interrogated and ultimately found wanting in terms of meaning.

Complaint and Insurgent Literature

The implicit political content of this superficially comic tale is such that it is surprising that so few critics have explored it from this angle. The link between *King Edward and the Shepherd* with late medieval political literature is palpable. Adam's complaints could have been directly lifted from complaint literature, perhaps most closely (if not exclusively) resembling those found in the *Song of the Husbandman* (c. 1300):

⁵⁷ Dickson, 'Verbal and Visual Disguise', p. 53.

⁵⁸ This is simultaneously a line that betrays the wife's own marginality – indeed, it is her sole line in this bourde. This is an equality between men, whom she is left to serve. At this moment when hierarchies fall, she alone is excluded.

Mai ich no lengore lyve with my lesinge;
 Ȝet ther is a bitterore bid to the bon,
 For ever the furthe peni mot to the kynge.

Thus we carpeth for the kyng, and carieth ful colde,
 And weneth for te kevere, and ever buth a-cast;
 Whose hath eny god, hopeth he nout to holde,
 Bote ever the levest we leoseth a-last.⁵⁹

The Husbandman also complains of the ‘wodeward’ who ‘waiteth us wo that loketh under rys’ and the ‘ryche’ who ‘pileth the pore’ and ‘raymeth withouten eny ryht’, all of which resonate with Adam’s complaints to Edward.⁶⁰ But *King Edward and the Shepherd* also moves beyond complaint literature in a way that reflects the changes in the political literature of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. As Cannon argues, complaint literature is always ‘the articulation of a pessimistic world view’, focusing on ‘elucidating the depths or extremity of a problem rather than attacking its cause’, with the complainant often insisting that ‘his lot will never improve’.⁶¹ Rossell Hope Robbins points to a distinct shift in political literature from the end of the fourteenth century, moving from complaint to insurgent action:

When does criticism become subversion? In [John Ball’s letters], the distinction consists of a single line at the end of No. 17: ‘God doe bote for nowe is time.’ Previously, many had regretted evils; Ball wanted to remove them. In Ball’s words a typical complaint which could be found in the books of any law-abiding layman or cleric was turned into a call for action.⁶²

Indeed, to emphasise the extent to which Adam’s materialistic/hierarchical collapse would have been regarded as transgressive action, one need only turn to Froissart’s record of the alleged calls of John Ball during the 1381 rebellion:

A ye good people, the matters goeth nat well to passe in Englande, nor shall nat do tyll every thyng be common; and that there be no villayns nor gentylnen, but that we be all unyed toguyder, and that the lordes be no greater maisters than we be [...] They

⁵⁹ *Song of the Husbandman*, in *Political Songs of England*, ed. and trans. Thomas Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 149-52 (ll. 9-12).

⁶⁰ *Song of the Husbandman*, ll. 17-26.

⁶¹ Christopher Cannon, *Middle English Literature: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), pp. 43-46.

⁶² *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. xlii.

ar clothed in velvet and chamlet furred with grise, and we be vested with pore clothe; they have their wines, and spyces, and good breed and we have the drawyng out of the chaffe, and drinke water.⁶³

King Edward and the Shepherd puts John Ball's rebellious ideals into action. Adam grasps the aristocratic 'wines, and spyces, and good breed', collapsing the materialistic differences between 'villayns' and 'gentylnen', ensuring that 'every thyng be common' and all are 'unyed togyuder' in an interrogation and deconstruction of hierarchical separation. In this critique of hierarchical boundaries Adam can be seen to be close in ideology to the proverbial commoner insurgent cry of 'When Adam dalf, and Eve span, who was thanne a gentilman?'⁶⁴

This call for and realisation of action is embodied in Adam's carnivalesque, poached feast. It is a reimagining of the way things are and a statement of protest that encourages others to take up and continue such reimagining. It can even appear as a direct incitement to breach norms, to 'schewe no curtasye' (l. 406). Adam seems to look outside of the text amidst his feast to state as much to the bourde's audience:

To alle þat wil my gamme play,
Fille it be þe ee, I þe pray,
My bourdis þat will lere. (ll. 476-8)

In some ways, this is perhaps the most radical statement in this text. The bourde's audience, perhaps themselves listening 'At festis and mangery' (l. 7), as is imagined in the narrator's opening lines, are directly invited to join in Adam's 'gamme', to compare their 'borde' (banquet table) with Adam's own, and if it is found wanting to 'lere' from his 'bourdis'

⁶³ Jean Froissart, *The Chronicle of Froissart 1523-25*, Vol. III, trans. Sir John Bouchier and Lord Berners (Long Acre: David Nutt, 1901), p. 224.

⁶⁴ Thomas Walsingham alleged that John Ball began a sermon with this proverb to 200,000 commoners amid the build up to the 1381 revolt: 'And continuing his sermon, he tried to prove by the words of the proverb that he had taken for his text, that from the beginning all men were created equal by nature, and that servitude had been introduced by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God, who, if it had pleased Him to create serfs, surely in the beginning of the world would have appointed who should be a serf and who a lord.' Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, in *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 2nd edn., ed. R. B. Dobson (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 374-5.

(banquet/tale/game) and similarly overreach ('Fille it be þe ee').⁶⁵ In this moment the text flirts with breaching its own fictional boundaries to reach into the world of its audience and incite civil disobedience.

This sense of rebellious action is further encapsulated by Adam's formation of a commoner band to fight those who would oppress them:

For oþer felowes and I,
 We durst wel take party
 These nyne for to mete.
 I have slyngus smert and gode
 To mete with þeim 3if þei were wode
 And reve hem her lyves swete.
 Þe best archer of ilkon,
 I durst mete hym with a stone
 And gif hym leve to schete. (ll. 181-189)

This passage again seems to echo Ball's sentiment that 'nowe is time', as (unlike in the *Song of the Husbandman*) oppression, injustices and hardships are no longer to be endured but to be actively fought. This passage becomes even more striking when it is remembered how ambiguous the text is as to whether 'These nyne' are outlaws or nobles. It certainly leaves open the possibility that the 'kyngus men' may themselves encounter future peasant resistance if they continue in their raids and violent oppression.

It has been seen that the first half of this bourde is focused on first setting up and then dismantling materialistic, hierarchical boundaries. This is combined with a deep-seated sense of unlawful and immoral aristocratic oppression and injustice. The result is that when the carnival feast turns the world upside down by inverting and challenging social norms, it simultaneously rights this injustice. Justice is shown to be on the upside-down carnival's side and placed in the sphere of the liminal forest, rather than in the central court. In the words of

⁶⁵ While 'borde' (table) and 'bourde' (tale/trick) have different origins (the first being of Germanic origin and the second a loanword from French), they do become curiously conflated in these King and Commoner tales, with both the story and the characters' tricks always centred on the dining table, wrestling for control and ownership of the feast.

Debord, ‘In a world that is really upside down, the true is a moment of the false.’⁶⁶ This is a phrase that one could easily imagine being uttered by the madmen on Brant/Foucault’s *Ship Of Fools*, sailing merrily on society’s margins as an embodiment of all social distortions.⁶⁷

But this world upside down concept can also be found in John Gower’s comments in the 1390s, regarding the peasantry’s ongoing attempts to challenge medieval hierarchy:

The world is changed and overthrow
That it is well-nigh upside down.⁶⁸

That same image can also be found in complaint literature from this period, such as ‘The World Upside Down’, which presents an idealised version of society before declaring that this image is false, and to discover the truth ‘All these lightli shold tornyn vp so dovne’.⁶⁹ *King Edward and the Shepherd* uses this idea of an upside-down world to invert literary expectations: the forest becomes infused with images of life, feasting and freedom that are contrasted with the encroaching death, injustice and oppression from the royal court. The King and Commoner forest acts as a social space that can be described in Foucauldian terms as ‘the *threshold* itself [...] in the interior of the exterior’, on the very boundary between society and the limits of its control, both within and without. It is ‘the space of the Great Secret’, inhabited by ‘madmen’ who can both know and invert the norms of official culture to reveal its hidden truths.⁷⁰ In this forest, this social boundary, society’s limits can be revealed, interrogated, embodied, breached and overcome, and in so doing creatively re-imagine and redefine where those social limits should lie. This is a carnival feast designed to transform and reconfigure the limits of the ordinary.

⁶⁶ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1967), p. 9.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-34.

⁶⁸ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, trans. Terence Tiller (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), ll. 29-30.

⁶⁹ ‘The World Upside Down’ in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rosell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), no. 63, l. 43.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, pp. 9-18.

The Proto-Panoptical King, and Court Containment: ‘Off thyngus þat fallis amyse’

The court scenes and the commoner’s reward have attracted vastly different critical interpretations. For Elizabeth Walsh, the commoner’s reward is the pinnacle of their rebellion:

[The commoner] has revolted against the restrictions which govern his existence [...] He imagined himself to be more than society accounted him, and at the end his reality far exceeds his former fantasy.⁷¹

Walsh argues that the reward enables the commoner to gain freedoms directly from the king and so permanently overleap the oppression of the aristocracy. A historical parallel to demonstrate this could perhaps be seen in the Forest of Dean’s ‘freeminers,’ who by the thirteenth century claimed royal privileges to mine freely wherever they wished in the Forest, ‘whether on the royal demesne or on the lands of private persons’.⁷² The freeminers’ heraldic crest (believed to be from the fifteenth century but possibly later) details a miner surrounded by leaves climbing on top of a knight’s helm, symbolising their authority in the forest above both the aristocracy and crown in an image that feels inadvertently fitting for the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition.⁷³ However, others have viewed the commoner’s reward in a more pessimistic light. The majority of criticism states that these texts appear ultimately to bow to the King and so, in the words of Stephen Knight, ‘explore the politically-attuned but eventually quietist possibilities of [... class] conflict.’⁷⁴ Or, as Maurice Keen describes it, just as the 1381 and 1450 rebels asserted their faith in the king, so these texts appear to ultimately bow to the highest power.⁷⁵ Even Walsh admits that the ‘authority of the rulers is not questioned’, while Snell emphasises the ‘conservative trajectory’ of the court

⁷¹ Elizabeth Walsh, ‘Upward Bound: The Sociopolitical Significance of the King-in-Disguise Motif’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26.1 (1991), 156-63 (pp. 160-1).

⁷² Legend has it that these rights were granted by a King between 1221 and 1365 in recompense for the miners’ military service as engineers. See Cyril E. Hart, *The Free Miners of the Royal Forest of Dean and Hundred of St. Briavels* (Gloucester: The British Publishing Company Limited, 1953), pp. 1-33.

⁷³ For a reproduction of the freeminers’ crest, see appendix two.

⁷⁴ Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 78.

⁷⁵ Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London and New York: Routledge, 1961), pp. 155-7.

scenes, again referring to the 1381 rebels' 'tragically misguided belief in this ideal of a benign and stable ruler'.⁷⁶

However, I would propose a slightly different interpretation, reading these court scenes as neither a depiction of commoner *or* aristocratic celebratory triumph. With regards to *King Edward and the Shepherd*, the above interpretations fail to acknowledge the complex ambiguities in the bourde's representations of both the troubling King and the oppressive court. There is a deep sense of unease, pessimism and paranoid mistrust surrounding this strangely Foucauldian king. During his time with Adam in the forest Edward persistently attempts to engage in propagandist self-promotion and draw out Adam's secrets, probing him for rebellious thoughts: 'What wil men of your king seyne? / Wel litulle gode, I trowe!' (ll. 50-51). While there is a comedic aspect to this, the bourde is undeniably presenting the king as a spy in these passages. The potential danger to Adam is glimpsed in his repeated wariness of these questions and initial refusal to answer them:

The herd onsweryd hym riȝt noȝt;
And seid agayn, 'Char, how!'
Pen luogh oure kyng and smyled stille;
'Pou onsweris me not at my wille;
I wold þai were on a lowe!' (ll. 52-6)

While there is a merry focus on Edward's fixed smile, his threat to throw Adam into a lake feels only partially in jest. There is a distinctly forbidding undercurrent to these scenes.

This is only emphasised during Edward's repeated attempts to make Adam either poach or admit that he does poach. The danger Adam is in is again made clear in his responses to these probing questions. Adam first declares that anyone daring to poach would not get far before 'his sidis shulde blede' (l. 234) and confronted by Edward's continued cajoling finally exclaims:

⁷⁶ Walsh, 'Upward Bound', p. 161. Snell, 'Undercover King', pp. 151-3.

Let sech wordis be!
 Sum man myzt here the;
 Þe were bettur be stille.
 Wode has erys; fylde has sizt:
 Were þo forstur here now right,
 Thy wordis shuld like þe ille.
 He has with hym ʒong men thre;
 Þei be archers of þis contre,
 Þe kyng to serve at wille. (ll. 265-73)

As was highlighted earlier, this passage voices the expressed knowledge that it is the King's own 'wille' that such oppressive controls exist at all. As such, it contains an unsettling awareness that the King is here potentially trying to lure Adam to his death, *via* the laws he himself has imposed. Edward's troubling nature is perfectly captured by the phrase, 'Wode has erys; fylde has sizt'. In this darkly comic moment, the text makes explicit the King's role as spy, watching without being seen in a way that anticipates the Foucauldian panoptical state:

[T]he major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary.⁷⁷

It is clear that 'visibility is a trap'.⁷⁸ This tale presents the incognito Edward as the embodiment of this hidden, oppressive, authoritarian gaze, as well as the source of the corporal punishment that accompanies that gaze. The text is again communicating a deep sense of anxiety over the King's role beneath the uneasy laughter.

Just as troubling is the way the King creates his disguise, not with a physical cloak, but with a cloak of *words*, with a false story of being a 'marchant' (l. 61) called 'Joly Robyn'

⁷⁷ 'Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary'. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 201.

⁷⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 200.

(l. 124) who is similarly owed money by the court ('Þe kynges men oen to me / A thowsande pounde and mare' (ll. 55-6)) – itself a cunning attempt to make Adam identify with Edward, establishing a sense of shared grievances and a mutual exchange of secrets ('I tell it þe in privete' (l. 64)) that will provoke Adam into revealing his own secrets/'privete'. This is a text of stories within stories. There is a real fear of orality going amiss in this tale, of oral tales tricking or misleading those who do not listen carefully: as Edward laughingly and cryptically hints after feeding Adam the false story of his merchant identity, 'Pou redis alle amysse' (l. 96). Indeed, in the following section we can see Adam begging Edward to 'Undurstande my tale' (l. 201), while the King instead attempts to persuade Adam to poach under his watching gaze because it would be 'gret bourde' (l. 223), with both characters attempting to wrestle for control of this tale/bourde. This metafictional element is particularly intriguing when we remember that *King Edward and the Shepherd* is itself presented as an oral story, beginning as it does with a call by the narrator to his audience to 'lystyns me a whyle' (l. 3). There are multiple narrators, multiple oral stories, and multiple audiences, with the validity of oral tales exposed as being fragile and deceptive. It asks the audience to wonder whether they are also reading 'alle amysse' and to ponder over the truthfulness and hidden intent of oral tales, including the tale that they are currently listening to.

This fear of stories going astray comes at a time when men such as John Holton were hung, drawn and quartered for writing bills perceived to be against the King.⁷⁹ In a disturbing echo of this tale, during this period government spies were paid to travel to villages in the guise of merchants to eavesdrop on villagers and inform on potential subversives and agitators (a category that very much included poachers).⁸⁰ The populace were obviously very

⁷⁹ V. J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971), p. 21.

⁸⁰ 'Spies were paid to travel the roads and to eavesdrop in villages and alehouses in order to keep those in authority informed of what the common people were saying and doing.' 'Governments viewed the preserving of game not merely as the protection of an aristocratic recreation but also as a matter of social control. Poachers were not just deer stealers but potential agitants meeting up in the woods to plot sedition. The preamble to the

aware and paranoid of this practice. I. M. W. Harvey tells of an incident in 1450 when John Wodehouse, ‘a valet and messenger of the king’, was murdered by townspeople in Lincolnshire ‘on the suspicion of being a royal spy.’⁸¹ This is a period where false stories abounded, to persuade or deceive. Stories were dangerous and could cost you your life. This again reflects the disturbing role of the King in this tale and the danger Adam is in, but it could also be seen as a reflection of the tale itself. *King Edward and the Shepherd*, with its commoner complaints and celebration of poaching, also appears to look outside of itself in this moment, agitating over who may be listening and watching, observing its own audience with a potentially wary eye.

King Edward and the Shepherd ends with a court feast, during which the King and his courtiers psychologically torture and ultimately contain Adam. However, that is not to say that this is a celebratory conservative ending. If Adam’s feast was presented as a utopian ideal, then there is a very real sense that Edward’s own ‘bourdis’ instead details ‘thyngus þat fallis amyse’ (ll. 633-4). This is instead a Bakhtinian official culture feast that reasserts the hierarchical separation and official culture boundaries that Adam’s own feast challenged:

The official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it [...] Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward and eternal and indisputable [...] The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted.⁸²

1485 act recited how ‘persons in great number had often times hunted by night as by day in divers forests, parks and warrens by colour whereof rebellions, insurrections, riots, robberies and murders had ensued.’ I. M. W. Harvey, ‘Was there Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?’, in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies In Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R. H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), pp. 155-74 (pp. 161-3).

⁸¹ Harvey, ‘Was there Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?’, p. 162.

⁸² Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 9.

King Edward and the Shepherd makes immediately clear that the court feast is different to Adam's own. While Adam's feast was presented as his 'gamme'/'game' (ll. 248, 331, 356, 385, 420, 459, 469, 476) and 'My bourdis' (l. 478) – in the double sense of 'story' and 'trick', as well as being conflated with his 'dining table'/'feast' – the court feast is very much portrayed as the King's rival game and bourde:

And þan [began] *þaire gammen*, iwis,

[...] The kyng seid to erles tweyne,

'*Ȝe shalle have gode bourd*, in certayne'. (emphasis mine, ll. 609-12)

This feast and game is explicitly presented as belonging to the official court world and designed for the aristocrats. Edward tells the courtiers of Adam's forthcoming visit, asking them join in a game/bourde designed to deceive Adam:

I pray yow alle and warne betyme

Pat ȝe me calle joly Robyne,

And ȝe shalle lawȝ your fille. (ll. 617-19)

The court becomes wrapped up in a fictional world, a 'bourde' tale of their own construction designed to trick and mock Adam for the laughter of the courtiers. It is clear that this official court 'bourde' (tale/game/feast) will be set against Adam's own unofficial 'bourde' and differ vastly in its ideology.⁸³

In a gesture towards Adam's feast and carnival crowning, 'þaire' bourde also sees Adam placed at the head of the table ('þou begynne þe borde' (l. 904)). However, it quickly becomes clear that Adam has only been placed in this position to present him as a target for their laughter, transforming him into an allowed, contained, official-culture carnival fool: 'And alle þe lordynges in þe halle / On þe herd þei lowgen alle' (ll. 998-9). In Adam's feast, laughter was generated by the collapse of hierarchical social norms and by class intermingling, creating a comedy aimed at the inversion of the ordinary and the breaching of

⁸³ On this conflation of 'borde' (table/feast) and 'bourde' (tale/trick), see footnote 65 of this chapter.

the divisions enforced by official culture. Indeed, Bakhtin argues that medieval laughter is *always* related to ‘the people’s unofficial truth’ and its defeat of ‘authoritarian commandments and death’, asserting that ‘its idiom is never used by violence and authority’.⁸⁴ However, this court laughter is quite different, demonstrating that the official culture can appropriate the carnival and its laughter for conservative ends. The class-based nature of this court laughter is emphasised with the ‘lordynges’ laughing at the lower-class ‘herd’, with ‘alle’ laughing at a solitary, scapegoated figure. This is a conservative laughter focused on Adam’s difference from the courtiers and his isolation and separation in their aristocratic world, reinforcing conventional ideas of class division and hierarchy. As such, this feast is clearly marked as an official culture feast, asserting ‘all that was stable, unchanging, perennial’.

This court feast also enacts the separation (as opposed to carnival intermingling) between Adam and Edward. Significantly, it also does this with an articulation of Edward’s personal betrayal, harking back to the King’s disturbing presentation as spy in the forest. In the court, Adam speaks in the language of secrets, of ‘privete’ – a word he also uses to describe his own secret feast (ll. 384, 488, 515) – attempting to place his bond and words/shared knowledge with Edward outside of the knowledge of the official culture: ‘Speke with me a worde in privete’ (ll. 671-2) / ‘A worde of tweyn in privete / Togedur between us bath’ (ll. 794-6). According to Adam’s perception, he and Edward are ‘togedur’ (‘We ar neightburs, I and he’ (l. 690)), bonded by their ‘privete’ and set against the court, ‘my foo’ (l. 643). When Edward reciprocates this language of being ‘togedur’ (ll. 703, 707) Adam declares that ‘Robyn [...] þou art trew’ (l. 710).⁸⁵ However, over the course of the court feast Edward works to shatter Adam’s perception of their unity. Edward’s trick/‘bourde’ is to send

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 90-91.

⁸⁵ Adam’s use of Edward’s false name simultaneously emphasises to the audience the inherent falseness and contradiction in Adam’s statement.

his son to play ‘passilodion’ with Adam. Adam’s worst fears are confirmed when the entire court begins to play the game, revealing that Edward has broken his trust and revealed

Adam’s ‘privete’ to the court, provoking a telling reaction:

Den looȝ þe herd and liked ille
 And seid, ‘Lefe childe, be stille,
 For Goddis swete tre!
 Go sei þi fadur he is to blame
 Pat he for gode dose me schame!
 Why has he wryed me?
 Have I maugre for my god dede? (ll. 971-77)

Adam’s speech noticeably emphasises the King’s personal treachery and betrayal (‘*he* is to blame’, ‘Why has he wryed *me*’), implying the King’s own ‘schame’ in his failure to stay ‘trew’. Following his own poached feast, Adam specifically states that if Edward were to reveal his ‘privete’ to the court ‘þan art þou unkynd’ (l. 514). Edward has indeed proven ‘unkynd’ here: that is to say has broken Adam’s idea that they are of one ‘kind’, establishing that they are not ‘togydur’ but separate. While Adam’s feast established resemblance, Edward’s feast is specifically designed to enforce his and Adam’s separation, to sever their bond and kill off their sense of resemblance. That he does this by co-opting Adam’s drinking game, transforming it ideologically in the process, only further emphasises this sense of calculated betrayal. As Edward tells his squire, ‘He has me schewid his privete; / He wil wene ded to be’ (ll. 1061-2).

This sense of Adam’s symbolic death and potential execution is emphasised throughout. If Adam’s unofficial carnival feast crowned him, then this official culture feast is his violent uncrowning. Indeed, as soon as Adam is placed at the head of the table to ‘begynne þe bourde’ he begins to imagine that he may ‘hangyt be / With a hempyn corde!’ (ll. 904-10), symbolically transforming the King’s banquet table into the public scaffold.

Following Edward's betrayal, the images of execution only escalate further until Adam is left half mad with dread:

He clawed his hed; his hare he rent;
 He wende wel to have be schent;
 He ne wyst what was to done!

[...] A, Lord God! Þat I was unslye!
 Alasse, þat ever he come so nye,
 Þe sothe þat I shulde seye!
 Wolde God, for His Modurs luf,
 Bryng me onys at myn abofe, –
 I were out of þeire eye, –
 [...] Soo aferde I am to dye!' (ll. 1010-1030)

The text presents this court feast as Adam's execution and in a sense it is. Adam's carnival feasting has been ended: 'Shalle I nevermore marchand fede / Ne telle my pryvete?' (ll. 978-9). Adam's unofficial carnival feast relied on being placed on the liminal edges of society, outside of the gaze of official culture. But here he has been contained by court, with his carnival placed in the absolute centre of that official culture and under direct surveillance. As Adam says, 'I were out of þeire eye'. The bourde again seems keen to emphasise its Foucauldian message that 'visibility is a trap'.⁸⁶

It is important to emphasise that this bourde does not necessarily join in with this conservative laughter. As has been shown, the court's laughter ('*paire gammen*') is persistently undercut by the darker execution imagery and a sense of the King's treacherous nature, infusing this laughter with a distinctly forbidding and unsettling edge. It is also noticeable that the aristocratic court feast does not ideologically counter that which was seen in Adam's feast. Adam's feast offers a pointed critique of hierarchical difference and exposes the violence that enforces class separation. In the court feast, the aristocrats re-enforce their superiority with another display of oppressive terror and violence against the commons. In

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 200.

doing so, the court feast does not so much undo Adam's earlier critique but enforces its message, again allowing Adam's forest feast to be equated with freedom and life, while the court is equated with oppressive violence and death. As such it is very much a *return* to Adam's original complaints and the dichotomies they presented.

This sense of return is only furthered by the repeated reminder that Adam's daughter has once again been placed in danger of being raped as a result of Edward luring Adam into the court. Just before Adam departs for the court we are presented with the daughter's sole appearance in the text:

Toward þe court he can goo;
His doȝtur lemman met he thoo,
And alle his cumpanye.

He thoȝt more þen he seyde. (ll. 596-9)

This is a surprisingly touching and subtle moment, offering a brief moment of stillness in between the frantic action of the two opposing feasts. These lines are designed to linger in the mind. They offer a very rare occasion in which we are not explicitly told what was said or thought, leaving a sense of curiosity and even an aura of melancholy, with the focus on and explicit reminder of his daughter. The daughter and the danger she is in is then returned to in the court scenes, with Adam insisting that he needs to leave before the court feast begins:

Today þen mett I myne enmye,
Forsothe as I the telle--
He þat by my doȝtur lay;
I tolde þe of hym ȝisturday--
I wolde he were in Helle!
At my howse is alle þe rowte;
They wil do harme whil I am owte;
Ful yvel þen dar I dwelle. (ll. 828-35)

Edward assures Adam that he will send men to protect the daughter if Adam stays: 'In þis courte þai ar twenty / At my bidding to bidde redy / To do a gode jornay' (ll. 845-7).

However, Edward never does seem to send these promised knights – or at least, it is an

instruction noticeably omitted by a text that otherwise repeatedly details Edward's instructions to his courtiers, no matter how small. Instead we are left with the ambiguous and mildly alarming phrase 'Thus þe kyng held hym with tale' (l. 851). Given that the court is at this point wrapped up in a false fiction designed to deceive Adam, this further layering of tales does not seem to bode well for the daughter's safety. Neither the daughter nor her seemingly imminent, desperate plight are mentioned again, but are left here hanging, subtly haunting the court's laughter, transforming her into something of a ghost at this court feast.

In a further return to Adam's initial complaints, the bourde presents a continuing sense of class antagonism between Adam and the courtiers in these court scenes. Throughout his time in the court, Adam appears ready for battle, referring to the courtiers as 'my foo' (l. 643) and refusing to relinquish his staff when commanded: 'Nay, fellow [...] so mot I the, / My staffe ne shal not goo fro me; / I wil hit kepe in my hande' (ll. 647-9). This sense of class warfare is combined with Adam's repeated refusal to lower his hood when speaking to the aristocrats:

He onsweryd as he thouȝt gode,
But he did not of his hode
To hym never þe moo. (ll. 638-40)

As gret lordis as þei ware,
He toke of his hode never þe mare. (ll. 692-3)

This gesture is symbolic of Adam's refusal to acknowledge aristocratic superiority, or hierarchical boundaries, in an extension of the politics of his own feast.⁸⁷ For Adam, 'This court is noȝt but pride' (l. 727). It is worth focusing on that articulation of emptiness, that nothingness/'noȝt'. Following Adam's previous deconstruction of hierarchical boundaries,

⁸⁷ At the same time, this lack of deference is also contained by Edward. Even before Adam's arrival, Edward uses his knowledge of Adam to transform Adam's challenge into an aristocratic game: 'But a wager I dar lay, / And ȝe wille as I yow say, / A tune of wyne, iwysse: / Þer is no lorde þat is so gode, / Þouȝ he avayle to hym his hode, / Þat he wil do of his' (ll. 623-8). As such, Adam's social challenge, while still genuine on his part, becomes deflected and co-opted by the court, transforming his rebellious actions into nothing more than fuel for their conservative laughter.

the court can be regarded as symbolically meaningless, primarily standing for a hollow, aristocratic pride, generating an illusion of power. Adam does not need the court and does not acknowledge its worth because he has breached that sense of hierarchical difference/aristocratic superiority: ‘To the kyngis meyte have I no need’ (l. 816). As in Adam’s initial complaints, all that can maintain the court’s hollow pride is violent commoner oppression. This makes Adam’s refusal to relinquish his staff perhaps unsurprising.

Neither do Edward’s actions over the course of the court feast placate Adam’s rebelliousness. Indeed, if anything, Adam is made more radical as a result of Edward’s treacherous actions:

‘Joly Robyn’ he þoʒt, ‘wo þou be
 Þat tyme þat I ever met with þe,
 Er ever þat I þe seye!
 Be God,’ he þoʒt, ‘had I þe nowe
 Þer were ʒisturday I and þow,
 Paynes þen shulde þou drye!
 I shulde chastis þe so with my slyng,
 Þou shulde no moo thyhyngis bryng,
 On horse þowʒ þou were hye!’ (ll. 1046-54)

This is the first occasion in which Adam explicitly states a desire to commit direct, murderous violence against the aristocracy (an image both *John the Reeve* and *Rauf Coilzear* later toy with in their physical beatings of the King). Adam does not yet realise Edward is the King, yet he has nonetheless begun to realise that Edward is a courtier of considerable importance, while the last line of this passage subtly provides a sense that Adam would carry out this threat regardless of how ‘hye’ Edward was seated up the hierarchical scale.

The text abruptly cuts off with the King’s identity revealed and Adam pleading for his life – albeit through fear rather than due to any articulated sense of genuine contrition. It is presumed this sudden end is due to a lost leaf of text, wherein Adam would be granted the reward and court position generally featured in these texts, but it is nevertheless a fitting

ending to this troubled tale. While a reward would make the text appear more positive, it would barely mask the images of execution, violence and class warfare that repeatedly undercut these court scenes. Social promotion would still ultimately be Adam's symbolic death and social containment, negating the carnival feasting by making it official, absorbing it in the way many romance texts absorb the *other*.

While this containment and execution offers a strangely pessimistic edge to the bourde's conclusion, it does nonetheless correlate with the first half of the text. The earlier inversion of literary expectations regarding the depictions of court and forest are continued in these court scenes. It is again not the forest but the court that is depicted as the strange, fearful *other*. If compared with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, then Edward's court, full of disguises, deceptions, and the threat of execution, resembles not King Arthur's Camelot, but Morgan Le Fay's court in the wilderness.⁸⁸ The court and King do not embody and protect that which is 'trew' but than which is false and 'unkynd', bringing not a sense of freedom, but a sense of oppressive control and death. By contrast, the commoner's forest remains the centre of the text's more optimistic worldview, a sphere of celebratory carnival feasting, life, freedoms, and law-breaking. Situated on the edges of society, the forest (that which is outside, off limits and beyond ordinary society) is able to present a manifestation and embodiment of those political issues that lie beyond the limits of acceptable social norms. The forest world is subsequently able to deconstruct and overcome these social limits, by pushing onwards into a socially distorting carnival world where these accepted norms are turned upside down. This carnivalesque 'shadow of society' thus holds up an inverting mirror to official culture, revealing the hidden truths that govern it and the fragile principles on

⁸⁸ This is only further emphasised by the lengthy description of Adam dressing in preparation for his visit to the court (ll. 587-96). As Helen Cooper argues, this passage is 'described in as much detail as the arming of a knight', parodying elaborate passages found in romance where the knight is dressed and armed in the court before proceeding on his quest into the unknown. Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (Ipswich: D. S. Brewer, 1977), p. 52.

which its power structures are based.⁸⁹ In this process of deconstruction, amid the rending of the old order, new social limits are created in the minds of its audience, redefining where the edges of the acceptable lie, giving birth to a new world view – even as this new order is in turn contained and symbolically executed by the old. In this way, the bourde's 'Gay matter is [...] the grave and the generating womb, the receding past and the advancing future, the becoming.'⁹⁰

⁸⁹ To borrow a phrase from Robert Harrison's excellent study of the forest. See Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 69-72.

⁹⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 195.

Chapter Two

The Carnavalesque and Insurrection in *John the Reeve*: ‘I will cracke thy crowne!’

Introduction

The last chapter offered Bakhtinian and Foucauldian readings of *King Edward and the Shepherd* and placed it in context with the populist revolts of the late-medieval period. This chapter will turn to *John the Reeve*, a further early King and Commoner bourde that blends carnivalesque ceremony and ideology with the political complaints of its commoner protagonist. *John the Reeve* is particularly amenable to this form of Bakhtinian interpretation, as it emphasises banqueting imagery throughout and repeatedly stages the carnivalesque beating of the political body.

The sole copy of *John the Reeve* is preserved in Thomas Percy’s folio manuscript (British Library Add MS 27879), a manuscript famously rescued from obliteration by Percy during a visit to his friend Sir Humphrey Pitt of Shifnal. Having noticed a bundle of old papers by the fireside, Percy learned that Sir Humphrey had instructed his maids to use the manuscript as kindling. Luckily for posterity, Percy was allowed to take the remaining sheaves of the manuscript with him and subsequently published some of these in his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765). Here, Percy describes *John the Reeve* as ‘infinitely superior’ to all other King and Commoner texts but did not print it in this collection because of the tale’s length.¹ It remained unpublished until the nineteenth century, when it was printed in Frederick Furnivall and John Hales’ 1867 edition of the Percy folio (an edition which

¹ Thomas Percy, ‘Introduction to *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*’, in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Vol. III, ed. Thomas Percy (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), pp. 179-80 (p. 179).

published the full Percy manuscript, while removing Percy's own creative additions and 'amendments' to the tales). Furnivall picked *John the Reeve* out for special mention in his foreword to the Percy folio as a 'curious poem' that was among several 'real gains to our literature'.² Hales' poetic introduction to *John the Reeve* added:

All the powers of the poet are devoted to the description and portraiture of the villain. He understands best the life of the villain; his sympathies go with it; his great delight is to depict it [...] It was evidently written in the decadence of feudalism, when the darkest ages of villenage were fast passing away [...] The great rising of Richard II's reign, however abortive, however completely foiled it might have seemed at the time, had produced a lasting effect [...] This is a poem of mirth and of hope, not a wild angry satire, not a deep bitter moan. That mighty exodus which the fifteenth century witnessed is being accomplished. The house of bondage is being left. The land of freedom is coming into sight.³

However, it has remained largely unstudied since. Elizabeth Walsh, Rachel Snell, and Rochelle Smith all briefly refer to *John the Reeve*'s radicalism but without elaboration or detail.⁴ It has also received some attention from critics studying the Scottish King and Commoner tale *Rauf Coilzear* but only to be dismissed as an inferior, conservative story. Stephen Shepherd mentions *John the Reeve* in passing as a 'sentimentally patronizing portrayal of a churl blundering his way amongst royalty' that demonstrates *Rauf Coilzear*'s comparative sophistication.⁵ Glenn Wright devotes slightly more space to *John the Reeve* but

² Frederick J. Furnivall, 'Forewords', in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. I, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. ix-xxvi (p. xi).

³ John W. Hales, 'John the Reeve: Introduction', in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. 550-56 (pp. 550-1).

⁴ Walsh claims that John's 'obstreperous nature' represents a 'challenge to the rigid class society of the Middle Ages', Smith argues that John's feast 'blurs class lines as it mocks the idea of simple taste for simple folks', and Snell compares John's storming of the court and holding the King 'checkmate' to the 1381 revolt. Elizabeth Walsh, 'Upward Bound: The Sociopolitical Significance of the King-in-Disguise Motif', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26.1 (1991), 156-63 (p. 160). Rochelle Smith, 'King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad, Elizabethan Drama, and Shakespeare', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 50.2 (2010), 301-335 (p. 309). Rachel Snell, 'The Undercover King', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge and Rochester, N.Y.: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 133-154 (pp. 152-4).

⁵ S. H. A. Shepherd, "'Of thy glitterand gyde have I na gle": *The Tail of Rauf Coilzear*', *Archiv für das Studium der neuern Sprachen und Literaturen*, 228 (1991), 284-98 (p. 297).

ultimately repeats Shepherd's view, adding that 'the poem is at bottom a jovial romp that casts no shadows [...] of its own potential seriousness'.⁶

If *John the Reeve* is largely ignored by literary critics today, it was certainly well known in the sixteenth century (in Scotland, at least), as is attested by many literary references to it. Several of these references also seem to either hint at John's aggression, or identify him within a distinctly political framework. The earliest reference to the *bourde* can be found in Gavin Douglas' dream poem *The Palis of Honoure* (c. 1500-1501). Towards the end of the poem, the narrator is shown a mirror in which he views figures from history and mythology, among whom are a collection of literary figures popular in Douglas' time:

I saw Raf Coilyear with his thrawin brow,
 Craibit Johne the reif and auld Cowekewyis sow
 And how the wran come out of Ailssay,
 And Peirs Plewman that maid his workmen fow,
 Gret Gowmakmorne and Fyn Makcoull, and how
 Thay shuld be goddis in Ireland, as thay say.
 Thair saw I Maitland upon auld beird gray,
 Robene Hude and Gilbert with the quhite hand,
 How Hay of Nauchtoun flew in Madin land.⁷

That the first two literary figures recorded in this esteemed company are from the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition speaks volumes regarding the popularity of these texts. It is also worth noting that amongst this company John is identified as being especially 'craibit', which is to say 'ill-natured' or 'bad humoured'.⁸

Both texts are also mentioned by William Dunbar in his complaint *To the King* ('*Exces of thocht dois me mischeif*'), probably written shortly after Douglas' *Palis of Honoure*:

⁶ Glenn Wright, 'Churl's Courtesy: *Rauf Coilgear* and its English Analogues', *Neophilologus*, 85.4 (2001), 647-62 (pp. 654-6).

⁷ Gavin Douglas, *Palis of Honoure*, ed. David Parkinson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), ll. 1711-19.

⁸ *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (up to 1700)*. Available at <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/craibit> [accessed March 2015].

Quhone servit is all uther man,
 Gentil and sempill of everie clan –
 Kyne of Rauf Colzard and Johnne the reif –
 Nothing I gett nor conqueis can.⁹

Rauf Coilzear and *John the Reeve* are here being associated by Dunbar with both the supposed disempowerment of the nobility and increasing political influence of those of low birth. While an undoubted exaggeration on Dunbar's part, this nonetheless reveals an explicitly political perception of these King and Commoner texts, directly associating them with the usurping of hierarchical norms.

A further sense of this sixteenth-century political perception of *John the Reeve* is found in David Lyndsay's *The Testament and Complaynt of Oure Soverane Lordis Papyngo* (1530). This is a bleakly comic Scottish poem detailing the political complaints of King James V's dying parrot, in a pessimistic portrayal of James' court.¹⁰ It includes a description of 'Archebisshop of Sanctandros, James Betoun', who is forced to flee into the wilderness 'dissagysit, lyke Jhone the Reif' as 'the courte bair hym sich mortall feid'.¹¹ This dichotomy again hints at a political association, placing John in a position of hidden, 'disguised' opposition to the corrupt court.

A final reference to *John the Reeve* can be found in Harley MS. 207 (c. 1532). This lengthy pro-Catholic religious debate begins with 'Johan the Reve' putting on a feast for his friends 'Hobbe of the Hille' (who also appears in *John the Reeve*), 'Laurence Laboror', 'Thomlyn Tailyor', and Langland's 'Peirs Ploughman'.¹² However, their festivities are interrupted (in a seeming parody of Arthurian romance) by the arrival of the Lutheran 'Jacke

⁹ William Dunbar, *To the King* ('*Exces of thocht dois me mischeif*'), in *William Dunbar: The Complete Works*, ed. John Conlee (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), No. 48, ll. 31-4.

¹⁰ For more on which, see Joanna Martin, *Kingship and Love in Scottish Poetry, 1424-1540* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 169-70.

¹¹ David Lyndsay, *The Testament and Complaynt of Oure Soverane Lordis Papyngo, Kyng James the Fyft*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir David Lyndsay*, Vol. I, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: W. Patterson, 1879), pp. 61-104 (ll. 549-60).

¹² King Edward adopts the name 'Peeres' in *John the Reeve*, although this may simply be coincidental.

Jolie', who declares that 'it is plane ydolatrie to beleue that the bodie and bloude of criste ar in firme of breade and wyne ministrede in the alter'. This in turn causes a strongly Catholic 'Peirs Ploughman' to wax 'woundrous Angrie' and call 'Jacke Jolie fals heritike'. John then steps in and 'defied them bothe to be content in his house', ordering them to sit down so that they can continue with their feasting: 'And thei warre bothe contente So to doo.' As in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, John's commoner banquet table seems able to assert a space in which usual divisions are temporarily suspended, allowing for these ideological opposites to meet and 'reason' their differences 'gentlie'.¹³

John the Reeve is 910 lines in length and divided into three parts. The manuscript was produced in the mid-seventeenth century, probably somewhere in Lancashire, but is clearly copied from a collection of pre-existing materials.¹⁴ A date for the composition of this bourde can be deduced from the tale's statement that there had been 'kings three' named Edward, thereby placing the tale's composition between the death of Edward III in 1377 and the accession of Edward IV in 1461.¹⁵ Furrow has narrowed this further by pointing to the bourde's use of the term 'handful,' a term which was identified in 1439 (in *Rotuli Parliamentorum* 5. 30b) as a relatively new concept: 'They were wonte to mete clothe by yerde and ynche, now they woll mete by yerde and handful'.¹⁶ She also points to the bourde's distinction between ale and beer, highlighting that continental beer was only made from 1391 in London, spreading to a few English towns by 1400, with beer-brewers only

¹³ *The Banckett of John the Reve, unto Piers Ploughman, Laurens Laborer, Thomlyn Tailyor, and Hobb of the Hille* (c. 1532), British Library Harley MS. 207, f2v. A summary can also be found in Frederick J. Furnivall, 'On Bondman, the Name and the Class, with Reference to the Ballad *John the Reeve*', in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1867), pp. lxi-lxii.

¹⁴ Furnivall, 'Forewords', in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, Vol. I, p. xiii.

¹⁵ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1868), pp. 550-94 (l. 16). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ Quoted in Melissa M. Furrow, 'John the Reeve: Introduction', in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 187-189 (p. 188).

established enough to warrant regulation by 1441.¹⁷ As a result, *John the Reeve* was probably composed towards the middle of the fifteenth century.

The basic plot of *John the Reeve* is as follows:

Part One: King Edward I is hunting in the South West of England when three of his falcons fly off. Edward pursues them with an Earl and a Bishop but they soon find themselves lost, with night falling and the weather turning wet, cold and rough. They spy John and ask him to lead them to some shelter. John answers them rudely at first and takes them for thieves. The aristocrats protest that they are acquainted with lords and gentlemen but this merely provokes John to speak angrily of both lords and the law. However, John eventually agrees to take them to his own home for the night. Upon reaching John's home, the Earl tells John that Edward is the King's falconer, the Bishop is a poor chaplain and he himself is a pack-horse driver. They are then joined for dinner by John's neighbours, Hob and Hodgkin.

Part Two: John serves up bean bread, pottage, sour ale, year-old salted bacon and salted beef. The King protests and insists on being given better food. Having first sworn the courtiers to secrecy, John produces a vast feast of aristocratic food and drink. During this feast John, Hob and Hodgkin perform a chaotic dance for the aristocrats.

Part Three: The next day the aristocrats ride home and summon John to them. John declares that his guests have betrayed him, arms himself and rides to the court. There he knocks the court's porter unconscious, kills four of the King's dogs and rides into the royal banquet hall, where he is only stopped by the King's promise to make John a gentleman. Edward then presents John with a feast and pardons him. John's daughters are subsequently married to squires, his two sons are made a parson and a knight and Hob and Hodgkin are made freemen.

John the Reeve makes for an intriguing comparison with *King Edward and the Shepherd*. It contains many of the same political ideas and themes, including strong anti-noble sentiment, a clear awareness of the materialistic definition of hierarchy and its subsequent upheaval in the commoner's carnivalesque feast, while also providing a subtle, repeated focus on the body and the body politic (especially from the feast onwards). In many ways it also appears to be a more radical text, with John's statements and rebellion against the King and the lords far less ambiguous or subtle than Adam's in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, while John's

¹⁷ Furrow, 'John the Reeve: Introduction', p. 188. Also see: Richard W. Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 99.

bloody insurrection at the end of the tale enacts the violence that remained locked in Adam's thoughts and words.

I will first examine the opening passages of *John the Reeve*, arguing that it foregrounds many of the carnivalesque elements found in the later feast, including the collapse of boundaries and depictions of the body politic. The chapter will then look at the politics of the carnivalesque feast itself in detail, before ending with an examination of John's violent storming of the court and the strange pessimism that seems to haunt its closing passages.

Tempestuous beginnings: 'Of Lords,' sayes hee, 'speake no more!'

John the Reeve opens with an unusual feature that initially seems to separate it from the other surviving King and Commoner texts. While out hunting King Edward I chases 'wonderous ffast' three 'ffawcons' who 'fflew away' until:

ffrom morning untill eueninge late,
 many menn abroad they gate
 wandring all alone;
 the night came att the last;
 there was no man that wist
 what way the King was gone,

sauē a Bishopp & an Erle ffree. (ll. 20-31)

This provision of two companions to accompany the King is unique in the King and Commoner tradition.¹⁸ The appearance of the Earl and Bishop is at the start of a new stanza and as part of a new rhyme, suggestively indicating that this detail was intended to be unexpected and surprising. The effect is to draw attention to these royal companions and the

¹⁸ Although, as is noted in the introduction, this feature does make it somewhat resemble the Gawain romance *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* (c. 1400), in which Gawain is accompanied by Sir Kay and Bishop Baldwin when encountering and lodging with the seeming Carle. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romance and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 85-112.

way in which they influence the tale. What emerges as a result of their insertion is a focus on the wider body politic and its carnivalesque dissection.

The first hint of this can be seen in *John the Reeve*'s presentation of what happens to the court once the king becomes separated from it: 'many menn abroad they gate / wandring all alone' (ll. 21-2). Without a figurehead the court fragments. The aristocrats are no longer united as a cohesive social body but each are separated, severed from that body. The body politic is decapitated, its head removed, its social body 'wandring' without order. As the Bishop and Earl say, in their opening words to the King:

itt is a ffolly, by St. Iohn,
ffor us thus to ryde alone
soe many a wilsome way;

a King and an Erle to ryde in hast,
a bishopp from his coste to be cast,
ffor hunting sikerlye.
the whether happned wonderous ill,
all night wee may ryde vnskill,
nott wotting where wee bee. (ll. 34-42)

At this point, these characters present themselves not as individuals but symbolically, as members of the wider society ('a King', 'an Erle' 'a bishopp'). They become embodiments of kingship, the nobility and the Church and their subsequent disorder – each has been symbolically 'cast' from the 'coste' under his care. These courtiers are both literally and symbolically isolated from society, lost and made 'thus to ryde *alone*' / soe many a wilsome way [...] nott wotting where wee bee' (emphasis mine). What is emphasised is the disordering of the medieval orders that rule society, before meeting a 'churl' who will further disturb the dividing lines between the social orders.

The presence of three members of the court also ties into an important focus on an interweaving of triumvirates throughout *John the Reeve*, which is used to portray a similarly

destabilising effect on the boundaries that govern the social body. The three courtiers chase the three ‘ffawcons’, in a ‘wonderous ffast’ flight into the natural world where they ‘may ryde vnskill’ (l. 41), and so meet with the three anarchic commoners. Its effect is to blur boundaries, staging a descent from high to low, from civilised and courtly to natural and wild. At the same time these commoners resemble the aristocrats, with the bourde directly connecting each of the three commoners to their corresponding courtier. Hob and Hodgkin are described by John as being ‘of the same ffreeledge that I am’ but he adds that one is the vassal of ‘the Bishopp of Durham’ and the other the vassal of ‘the Erle of Gloster’ (ll. 176-180). While the Bishop and Earl accompanying the King are never named, it seems highly probable that they are intended to be the aristocrats who are here named as Hob and Hodgkin’s lords. John, meanwhile, describes himself as nothing less than ‘the Kings bondman’ (ll. 125). Therefore, each courtier is bound to a corresponding commoner. Each is presented as the shadow of the other, while John’s carnival feast (like Adam’s in *King Edward and the Shepherd*) specifically works to rupture social boundaries amid a mingling of bodies and collapse of difference. This binding of commoners and aristocrats also reappears at the end of the bourde, where John’s ‘royal’ (l. 471) feasts are legalised and his two sons are made a ‘Knight’ and ‘parson’ (ll. 888-90), thus ending with John and his sons bearing a disconcerting resemblance to his original three courtly guests. Each group resembles the other, regardless of their superficial social position and hierarchical separation. There is an intermingling present, a carnivalesque threat that human may easily become the animal, that the nobles may easily become the commoners and that the commoners may easily become the nobles.

This carnivalesque ‘world turned upside-down’ seems to be directly referred to when the Earl and Bishop criticise the ‘ffolly’ (l. 32) of Edward’s pursuit. This direct criticism of the King for abandoning his court is unique to *John the Reeve* and is only possible because of

these additional royal companions, who know both the King's identity and the wider political significance of his 'hast' (l. 37). But this is also a highly Bakhtinian moment. As the courtiers enter this upside-down world, where social norms become inverted, the King is identified as the source of folly. The carnivalesque concept of the fool 'king for a day' that runs throughout the King and Commoner burlesque is already present in these opening lines, but it is intriguing to note that it is the King, rather than John, who is here labelled as that fool. This will be returned to when we enter John's carnival feast and it becomes increasingly difficult to tell who is presented as the fool and who is presented as the king. Hierarchical, materialistic and physical boundaries are all in constant flux in John's carnivalesque world.

Positioned just as the text moves us towards the uncivilised and wild, John's first appearance is markedly menacing and strange, as the night draws in and the weather defies pastoral/romance conventions by turning wet, 'cold and euen roughe' (l. 70):

As they stoode talking all about,
 They were ware of a carle stout:
 'Good deene, ffellow!' can they say.

Then the Erle was well apayd;
 'You be welcome, good ffellow!' hee sayd,
 'Of ffellowshipp wee pray thee!'
 The carle ffull hie on horsse sate,
 His leggs were short and broad,
 His stirropps were of tree;
 A payre of shooes were stiffe and store,
 On his heele a rustye spurre,
 Thus fforwards rydeth hee. (ll. 47-57)

This initial portrait of John contains a Chaucerian eye for subtle social satire. That he is 'ffull hie on horsse sate' seems to hint at a high social standing, or social pretensions (as it does in the Merchant's portrait in *The Canterbury Tales*) and this knightly image is only furthered by

a focus on John's spurs.¹⁹ However, no matter how high he sits, the same line insists that he is nonetheless a 'carle', ensuring that these details appear jarring. His knightly appearance is further destabilised by the portrait's focus on the rust on John's spur, as well as on his wooden stirrups, stiff, rough shoes and John's distinctly un-heroic short, broad legs.²⁰ This realism and blending of hierarchical markers is comic but it also emphasises the social upheaval of the late-medieval period – where aristocratic fears over the dissolution of class boundaries found their voice in the sumptuary laws – as well as foregrounding John's own ability to avoid conventional medieval classification. The knightly details in the description offer a glimpse of familiarity to his aristocratic guests but this only serves to throw his difference into sharper focus. What is therefore emphasised in this depiction is John's otherness and a hard, natural realism at odds with the tale's traditional romance-esque hunting opening. In this way, the portrait of John disrupts the typical romance opening of the *bourde* just as much as the unexpected, realistic turning of the weather.

Indeed, John's bond with the disruptive nature of the un-pastoral cold weather is worth emphasising. This silent, imposing and inelegant figure gives a picture of forbidding discourtesy and *otherness* that is at odds with the aristocrats' repeated calls for fellowship. The aristocrats repeat 'ffellow', 'ffellowshipp', or 'ffreind' eight times during this initial meeting (ll. 48, 50, 51, 59, 77, 89, 110, 133), all of which are met with aggressive responses that deny any form of fellowship. When the Earl accuses John of knowing 'litle of gentrise' John agrees, aggressively and proudly asserting 'with gentlenesse I have nothing to doe' (ll. 65-8). Unlike, for example, the characters in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, John refuses to adopt

¹⁹ 'A Marchant was ther with a forked berd, / In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat'. Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 23-36 (ll. 270-1).

²⁰ Although the detail of rusty armour is also reminiscent of the portrait of Chaucer's Knight in the *General Prologue*. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *General Prologue*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, l. 76.

or mimic the *gentillesse* of the aristocrats.²¹ John is resolutely *other* and just as ‘cold and euen roughe’ as the natural world which he inhabits, with as little care for courtly ‘gentlenesse’. He seems to emerge from and be a part of this landscape that is forbidding to the aristocrats, appearing so abruptly with the worsening, inhospitable weather that he seems to have sprouted from the ground (an image only furthered by his stirrups ‘of tree’). He embodies the weather’s disruption of social and literary (romance) norms.

In terms of a carnivalesque reading, it is also interesting to note that this ‘cold and euen roughe’ treatment results in the aristocrats becoming increasingly discourteous themselves:

the king sayd, ‘by mary bright,
I troe wee shall ryde all this night
in wast vnskillffullye;

‘I ffeare wee shall come to no towne;
Ryde to the carle and pull him downe
Hastilye without delay.’ (ll. 82-7)

There is a sense of increasing urgency and danger as the aristocrats start to realise that their ‘gentlenesse’ and birth will not save them from this uncaring natural world, leading them to abandon their genteel conventions and become more ‘vnskillffullye’ aggressive in their approach. John’s response at this point is revealing:

the carle sayd, ‘by Marye bright,
I am afrayd of you this night!
I see you rowne and reason,
I know you not & itt were day,
I troe you thinke more then you say,
I am affrayd of treason.

‘the night is merke, I may not see
what kind of men that you bee.’ (ll. 97-104)

²¹ See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Franklin’s Tale*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 178-89.

The ‘cold and euen roughe’ weather and ‘merke’ night both hides and renders meaningless the courtiers’ social positions. The night can make churls appear to be knights and knights appear to be thieves, each transforming into their social other: their ‘merke’ social shadow. Once social position is hidden, these characters can only be judged through their actions and in this the courtiers appear not as the upholders of law and order but as those who subvert and disrupt that social order.²²

John’s refusal to be *gentil* or ‘ffellow’ becomes combined with his increasingly vocal anti-noble sentiment:

then sayd the Erle with words ffree,
 ‘I pray you, ffellow, come hither to mee,
 & to some towne vs bringe;
 & after, if wee may thee kenn,
 amonge Lords and gentlemen
 wee shall requite thy dealinge.’

‘of lords,’ sayes hee, ‘speake no more!
 with them I haue nothing to doe,
 nor neuer thinke to haue;
 ffor I had rather be brought in bale,
 my hood or that I wold vayle,
 on them to crouch or craue.’ (ll. 109-20)

John’s claim that he would rather risk death than lower his hood in deference to a lord is an extreme political statement during this intensely sensitive period; it cannot help but recall the anti-noble sentiments voiced in commons rebellions of the period from 1381 to 1450. This act also has its parallel in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, where Adam persistently refuses to lower his hood in the court until he is finally under threat of execution (‘But þen he putte doun his hode’).²³ However, unlike Adam, John remains true to his earlier statement. When John is later in the court standing before the revealed King, the text specifically informs us

²² This is also a pointed remark, coming just before John (like Adam the shepherd in the last chapter) accuses the aristocracy of financially and materialistically oppressing and robbing the commons.

²³ *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. 116-59 (l. 1083).

that John defiantly ‘vayled neither hatt nor hood’ (l. 792), refusing to show deference to the revealed King, even under threat of death.

John also voices complaints against legally enforced, materialistic, class boundaries, explicitly foregrounding the rebellious nature of his later feast, while situating the tale’s class battleground in these materialistic terms:

‘ffor if you come into my inne,
with beeffe & bread you shall beginn
soone att your supper;

salt Bacon of a yeere old,
ale that is both sower & cold, -
I vse neither braggatt nor beere, -
I lett you witt withouten lett,
I dare eate noe other meate,
I sell my wheate ech yeere.’

‘why doe you, Iohn, sell your wheate?’
‘ffor [I] dare not eate that I gett.
therof I am ffull wrothe;
ffor I loue a draught of good drinke as well
as any man that doth itt sell,
& alsoe a good wheat loffe.

ffor he that ffirst starueth Iohn de reeue,
I pray to god hee may neuer well cheeue,
neither on water nor land. (ll. 139-153)

This passage glances forwards to John’s feast by highlighting the same aristocratic materialistic oppression that we saw in *King Edward and the Shepherd*. The commons are presented as those who produce food: whether fresh meat or wheat to make ‘beere’ or ‘a good wheat loffe’. However, they are forced by law to sell these raw materials to the aristocrats and are instead made to buy inferior goods (‘salt Bacon of a yeere old,/ ale that is both sower & cold’). The forestry laws are also directly referenced in relation to these restrictions when John states that ‘the kings statutes’ mean that ‘ffeull heere is wonderous scant’ (ll. 194-7) and

the lost aristocrats will (like the commons themselves) be forced by law to remain ‘wett and cold’ (l. 189) during their dinner.

It is noticeable that the control of materialism is here specifically set around the banquet table – it is no coincidence that John lists items of food and drink in his anti-noble complaints, along with the accompanying ‘bright’ and ‘bold’ fireside (l. 192). It is an indication that the class antagonism in this *bourde* will take place around the site of the carnivalesque feasts, both in the commons’ unofficial, liminal feast in the wilderness and in the official feast in the King’s court, at the heart of the social body. Additionally, this same warfare will be based around the image of the body (both individual and political) and whether it is nourished, starved, or decapitated. The language John uses also hints at the aggression that enforces this aristocratic oppression, further emphasising a sense of social warfare set around the banqueting table. As a result of the ‘statuinge’ he ‘*dare eate noe other meate*’, ‘*dare not eate that I gett*’ and as a result ‘*starueth*’ (emphasis mine). This striking depiction of eating and starvation emphasises the forceful financial oppression of the commons by the nobles, where defiance threatens death and compliance brings starvation, while persistently locating this battle around banquet images. Against this background John’s carnivalesque feast of forbidden meat and drink reaches for both a new political life (amid life-giving feasting and an illegally roaring fire) and the death of the current political world. That this new life and feasting is set against this backdrop of potential execution and death only completes the carnival cycle. It takes the Bakhtinian principles of the carnival, where ‘the kitchen and the battle meet and cross each other’ in a cycle of life and death, and imbues them with a social awareness.²⁴

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 197.

in a microcosm. When the commoner's penny is placed next to the King's penny, there is no perceivable difference between them. Their identical pennies render meaningless the social difference between king and commoner, severing them from the social body and transferring their identities into materialistic equality. The radical nature of this materialism is presented in this politicised drinking, where the commoner 'durst as well as' the king 'drinke the wine' that serves as a marker of the highest aristocracy. These King and Commoner tales repeatedly tell of and celebrate those commoners who 'durst' grasp 'as well as hee' that which is forbidden, disregarding the materialistic boundaries that forcibly separate the three medieval orders. That this rebellious defiance of the King's laws ends with a focus on feasting imagery once again looks forward to the carnival politics of the later common's feast, where the 'laws, prohibitions and restrictions that determine the structure and the order of ordinary [...] are suspended.'²⁵

John's actions in these opening exchanges also fit interestingly into Bakhtin's theory regarding the role of oaths in carnivalesque texts:

What is the thematic content of oaths? It is mainly the rending of the human body. Swearing was mostly done in the name of the members and the organs of the divine body [...] The dismembered body and its anatomisation plays a considerable part in Rabelais' novel [...] the fighting temperament and the kitchen cross each other at a certain point, and this point is dismembered, minced flesh.²⁶

It is interesting to note that John's prayer of ill will towards the King and Sheriff and his oath to drink wine before the King work in very much the same way. The King, the Sheriff and the materialism that divides the body politic into the head (the King) and the feet (the workers) can all be viewed as the 'members and the organs' of the social body. John's oath and prayer works to first separate out these organs and then to dismember this body by challenging and severing the bonds that hold the body together. Furthermore, to medieval thought the social

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 122.

²⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 122-3.

body and the king's body were inseparable.²⁷ Therefore, this violence towards the social body can also be seen to be aimed at the King's body. It is the King's own carnival dismemberment. The carnival food and drink in the commoner's feast that sever the divides of medieval hierarchy are in this way also symbolically the King's own flesh (venison) and blood (wine).²⁸ The bindings of the social body, of which the King is the embodiment, are being rendered and consumed. The battleground and the feast become merged amid a carnival eruption of grotesque inversion and displacement of social norms.

As soon as the characters reach John's house, medieval social boundaries (defined by this materialism) begin to collapse. Despite John's reminder to the courtiers that they will be without a fire ('ffor the kings statutes, whilest I liue, / I thinke to vse and hold' (ll. 197-8)), his first action on returning home is to call 'his men all' and instruct them to 'build me a ffire in the hall' (ll. 232-3). They soon enter 'a chamber' where 'a charcole ffire was burning bright' with further 'candles on chandlours light' (ll. 246-8). While this is a display of aristocratic wealth, this is not an attempt to make John appear a more conservative or aristocratic figure. The reader is constantly reminded that this wealth is in fact a display of John's rebellion, his lack of deference, his refusal to follow 'the kings statutes', and of strict medieval social boundaries being warped. This is important to bear in mind in relation to the other descriptive details surrounding John's hall.

John's hall is uniquely aristocratic among the other commoner dwellings in the surviving fifteenth-century King and Commoner texts:

thus thé rode to the towne:
Iohn de Reeue lighted downe

²⁷ While primarily a legal doctrine, the theory of the 'King's Two Bodies' was recognised and utilised by the wider populace. This is wonderfully illustrated by a group of tenants who argued that they did not need to pay 'customary relief' on the death of their landowner, the King, as his 'body politic' could technically never die. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 3-4.

²⁸ 'Thus blood is transformed into wine; ruthless slaughter and the martyr's death are transformed into a merry banquet; the stake becomes a hearth.' Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 211.

beside a comlye hall.
 4 men belive came wight;
 they hasted them ffull swyft
 when they heard Iohn call;
 thé served him honestly and able,
 And [led] his horsse to the stable,
 & lett noe terme misfall.

some went to warne their dame
 that Iohn had brought guests home.
 shee came to welcome them tyte
 in a side kirtle of greene,
 her head was dight all by-deene,
 the wiffe was of noe pryde;

her kerchers were all of silke. (ll. 211-26)

Nowhere else in the early tradition is the commoner's home situated in a town, or given such a socially elevated appearance. This description, if isolated, could be from a courtly romance, with a knight returning home with royal guests, where he is greeted by his loyal men and hostess wife dressed in her aristocratic finery.

But to read this passage merely in terms of John's 'gentrification' misses the bourde's central point. These boundaries between the aristocratic and commoner are continually blurred. Even as John is presented as superficially, financially and materialistically aristocratic, he continuously works to undermine this by insisting that he is a commoner, taking pride in being 'of carles kinne' (l. 90). The emphasis lies on the inability to place him one way or the other within the recognised medieval concept of society:

'I goe girt in a russett gowne,
 my hood is of homemade browne,
 I weare neither burnett nor greene,
 & yett I troe I haue in store
 a 1000^{ll} and some deale more,
 ffor all yee are prouder and ffine;

'therefore I say, as mote I thee,
 a bondman itt is good [to] bee,

& come of carles kinne;
 ffor and I bee in tauerne sett,
 to drinke as good wine I will not Lett,
 as London Edward or his Queene.' (ll. 282-93)

This passage takes us from the feet to the head of the body politic, while emphasising that John does not properly fit anywhere in it, or rather fits in every position at once: he is simultaneously a churlish fool and the equal of a king. He is presented as a commoner, wearing 'homemade browne', rather than higher quality 'greene', or even more aristocratic 'burnett'.²⁹ However, he is wealthy enough to have an aristocratic 'hall', his own men and aristocratic wine. John comes 'of carles kinne' and is the King's 'bondman' in terms of his social position but he will show no restraint ('will not Lett') in drinking 'as good wine' as royalty in defiance of materialistic class expectations. John blurs the boundaries between the commons and aristocrats, and significantly for a carnivaleque reading of the *bourde*, the boundaries between himself and the King.

The courtiers act in response to this collapse, working to contain, explain and categorise these blurring and morphing social boundaries. Once arriving at John's home the courtiers repeatedly attempt to identify John in terms of their own knightly world. The Earl responds to John's claim that it is 'good to be of carles kinne' with the declaration:

By gods might,
 Iohn, thou art a comly knight,
 and sturdy in euery ffray. (ll. 294-6)

²⁹ The rebellious nature of John's actions are also made apparent in the discrepancy between his purchasing power and his coarse, woollen 'russett gowne'. He is very much a commoner in disguise, disguised perhaps more truly than the King himself. He can afford fine clothes in 'burnett' or 'greene', but must hide his wealth in public. In the private sphere of John's home, aristocratic appearance is contrasted by an insistence on a churlish base. However, in the public sphere, and under public gaze, John appears conventionally churlish and impoverished, in contrast to his private defiance of conventions and his insistence on obtaining the goods set aside for the aristocratic. It emphasises the danger that John is in when placed under the probing public gaze. It is already possible to see here the tension between public confinement and surveillance with private, carnivalesque liberty. The public, official world dominated by the aristocratic court becomes a place threatening death and requiring deception, while the unofficial, liminal, private world becomes presented as a sphere of freedom in which hidden truths can be revealed. For details of 'lower-class' russet and 'affluent' burnet, see Ellen Wedemeyer Moore, 'Medieval English Fairs: Evidence from Winchester and St. Ives', in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. A. Raftis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), pp. 283-300 (p. 291).

The aristocratic appearance of John's 'hall' results in the Earl rejecting John's claim to be a 'carle'. He instead insists that John must be a 'knight', in an attempt to place John back within the traditional medieval hierarchy that John so defiantly resists. There is possibly a degree of mocking laughter present here in the Earl's use of 'knight' for John, and it is noticeable that the Earl uses the familiar pronoun 'thou', but there is also a gesture towards romance conventions. It is as though the Earl expects John to reveal that he is indeed a disguised knight, transforming the text into a romance along the lines of *The Carle of Carlisle* – in which the 'carle' of Carlisle reveals himself to be in fact a disguised knight, thus explaining away his wealth and castle and defusing any social anxiety.³⁰

However, John instead responds by exclaiming 'a knight [...] doe away ffor shame!' (l. 297) and follows this with the declaration 'I know you not in your estate' (l. 300). That polite pronoun 'your' asserts a dichotomy, in opposition to the Earl's attempt in 'knight' to see similarity. It is a return to the opening where John repeatedly ignored the courtier's calls for 'ffellowshipp'. John aggressively rejects the notion that he belongs, or wants to belong to 'your estate' but is instead insistent and proud that he is 'come of carles kinne' (l. 290) throughout the bourde. He revels in his alterity and the inability of the courtiers to define or fix his social place. In John's own words he is 'misnurtured' (l. 301): he does not belong. Like a knight he will fight for his honour 'if any such doe me wrong' but he will 'fight with him hand to hand' like a churl, 'cladd in mine array' (ll. 303-5).

When the King similarly asks John if he has any 'armouringe' or 'any weapon to weare' (ll. 316-7), John responds:

I vow, Sir, to god,' sayd Iohn thoe,
 'but a pikefforke with graines 2 -
 my ffather vsed neuer other speare: -
 a rusty sword that well will byte,

³⁰ See *The Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 375-88.

& a handffull, a thyttille syde
that sharplye will stare,

‘an acton & a habargyon a ffoote side;
& yett peradventure I durst abyde
as well as thou, Peeres, ffor all thy painted geere.’ (ll. 318-26)

Again we see the courtiers attempting to place John within traditional medieval structures, trying to view him through a distinctly aristocratic romance worldview, but John persistently resists being placed in this world. The extended detail in the listing of his weapons is reminiscent of a romance depiction of a knight’s arming. However, the ‘rusty’ (if still explicitly sharp) weapons are insistently those of the commons (and perhaps subtly recall the period’s peasant revolts). This combination harks back to John’s initial portrait, where the knightly and un-knightly were similarly crushed together. It is his jarring otherness that is again emphasised in these exchanges.

The Bishop adds to this by asking John ‘trauelled you neuer beyond the sea?’ (l. 307), invoking wars, pilgrimages, or crusades – the first repeating the other courtiers’ attempts to see John as a knight, the latter two seeing John through a religious lens appropriate for the Bishop’s role. John says ‘sharplye “nay!”’ but insists that he ‘dare hold the hye way’, where he has got into trouble ‘ffor I haue made such as you wrath / with choppes and chances yare’ (ll. 308-14). John takes the Bishop’s question and twists it, with his tale of (Robin Hood-esque) outlaw violence localised in ‘the hye way’ rather than in foreign lands and set against the state/church, rather than in service of it.

These exchanges are comic but there is a very real class anxiety here. The social difference between John and the courtiers is repeatedly depicted in rebellious, warlike terms. In the above passages John threatens the Bishop with violence and is presented as though armed and ready to fight the disguised King (‘in all thy painted geere’) with his own churlish armour and weapons – an image that emphasises this sense of class warfare. This latter

moment calls back to the depiction of the King and commoner sat at a table, where John ‘durst’ drink the wine, despite the potential for execution. They appear to be set against each other, inextricably bonded in a deadly game: ‘I durst abyde / as well as thou’. John ‘durst’ to challenge in the same way that he ‘durst’ to break social difference and aristocratic superiority, refusing to ‘crouch or crave’ to the social norms being forced onto him by the aristocrats.

John’s Feast: ‘Trace nor true mesure [...] but hopp as ye were woode’

As the underlying violence threatens to erupt into the tale, John’s neighbours Hob and Hodgkin arrive and John’s feast begins. Violence is redirected into carnivalesque laughter as ‘mirth [is] commanded’ (l. 335) by John. The carnivalesque nature of the feast is immediately apparent as John takes ‘the wand’ ‘for want of a marshall’ (l. 342). The bourde deliberately uses courtly language and aristocratic banquet conventions in order to create a comparison between John’s banqueting hall and the King’s own. John has ordained himself as the carnivalesque ‘Lord of Misrule’ and so begins to arrange his guests.

John first orders ‘Peeres ffauconer’ (King Edward) to ‘gange [...] before’ to the head of the table and informs the company that Peeres will ‘begin the dish’ (ll. 343-4). This is a moment that is remarkably similar to the court feast of *King Edward and the Shepherd*, where the King orders Adam to sit at the head of the table and ‘begynne þe borde’ (much to Adam’s distress, aware that he has been made into the fool king-for-a-day).³¹ This parallel scene in *John the Reeve* makes it very difficult to ascertain whether John or Edward is being made the true carnival mock king. John is the churl who is very much presented as a king as he ‘marshalled his meanye’ (l. 350), without realising that his illegal carnival feast is falling

³¹ *King Edward and the Shepherd*, l. 904.

under the gaze of the embodiment of the law (thus transforming him back into the fool); however, it is Edward, the hidden king ordered by a churl, who is being sat at the head of the table like the carnival mock king, tasked with beginning a feast that will defy his own laws.

The boundaries between John and Edward are thin.

John continues his own role as carnival king by introducing the potential for sexual disruption:

goe to the bench, thou proud chaplaine,
my wiffe shall sitt thee againe;
thy meate-fellow shall shee bee. (ll. 345-7)

On a basic level this is proper, as the married wife is sat next to the chaste Bishop. However, the focus on the flesh and bodily innuendo implied by ‘meate-fellow’ subtly recasts the Bishop in the traditional carnival role of the comic, lusty friar. In doing so, this passage sets up the Bishop’s conventional spiritual social role and then subverts it, transforming it into the carnal and carnival, turning the world upside-down and towards grotesque laughter. Alice’s initial portrait even prefigures such a metamorphosis, shifting focus from her handkerchiefs ‘all of silke’ to ‘her hayre as white as any milke’ and her desirable ‘belly, backe, and side’ (ll. 226-231): the description moves from the aristocratic, to the common, to the sexual, and even to the edible in the focus on milk and presentation of her body as something to be dissected and consumed. If combining this portrait with her presentation at the feast, then she is simultaneously presented as an appropriate and worthy companion for a Bishop, as a sexualised presence, and described in similar terms to the ‘meate’ that will soon arrive at the table. The effect again blurs and collapses expected boundaries in a distinctly carnivalesque way.³²

³² A comparable moment conflating images of feasting with the adulterous, sexual congress between a religious figure and wife can be seen in the late fifteenth-century Scottish comic tale *The Freiris of Berwik*. The wife of a hosteller is preparing for a visit from her lover, Friar Johine, setting capons and rabbits to roast and then retreating to her chamber. There ‘Scho pullit hir cunt and gaif hit buffetis tway / Upoun the cheikis, syne till it

This intrusion of the sexual and its ability to break down boundaries is also emphasised in the presentation of John's daughters. John sits 'the ffairer' by the King, as 'he is the best ffarrand man', and declares that 'the other shall the Sompter man haue'. The language here, with its focus on aesthetic attraction and male possession, again presents the women as sexual offerings, which is only emphasised by John's knowing aside to Edward, informing him that in accepting his daughter Edward 'might bear the prize' (ll. 352-366). The fertility and swelling of the sexualised and pregnant female body appear to foreshadow and be tied to the banquet food that will itself morph from the rustic to the aristocratic, that will 'rise, grow, swell [...] until they reach exaggerated dimensions'.³³ It is again indicative of the carnivalesque cycle of life, with the death of an old world and birth of a new world. This carnivalesque sexualisation and birth can be viewed in political terms that *breach* hierarchical (if not patriarchal) boundaries. By ordering that his aristocratic guests and his own daughters 'of carles kinne' are 'wedded' (l. 360), John aims to penetrate and disrupt the medieval hierarchical boundaries that are defined through birth and 'kinne'. This sexual intermingling attacks the same conservative sentiment that defines the sumptuary laws, aiming not at fixing social boundaries, but at mixing and blending boundaries in a carnivalesque mingling of bodies. It is very much the political death of the court's world of separation and the birth of John's new carnival world.

Furthermore, by offering his daughters to the aristocrats, John continues the presentation of himself as a carnival mock king. He is parodying court conventions, marrying off his daughters to forge new allegiances:

Peeres, & thou had wedded Iohn daughter reeue,
there were no man that durst thee greeue
neither ffor gold nor ffee.

cowd scho say, / "Ye sowld be blyth and glaid ay my requeist: / Thir mullis of youris ar callit to ane feist." *The Freiris of Berwik*, in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 89-101 (ll. 139-42).

³³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 279.

Sompter man, & thou the other had,
 in good ffaith then thou were made
 ffor euer in this cuntrye. (ll. 360-365)

The language here is again purposefully courtly, with John presented as a king and protector of ‘this cuntrye’, offering both ‘gold’ and ‘ffee’. John also includes the Bishop in these royal promises, declaring that he would give him ‘a kirke’ in ‘this towne’ ‘& I were king’ (ll. 369-70). The Earl only further emphasises John’s increasingly aristocratic appearance with the declaration of ‘soe god me saue! / of curtesye, Iohn, thou can’ (ll. 355-6), while John’s promises end with all three courtiers mock-swearing allegiance to him: ‘the King, the Erle, the Bishopp, can say, / Iohn, & wee liue wee shall quitte thee’ (ll. 373-4).³⁴

The purpose of this passage is to induce laughter that is in part aimed at John. But beyond this it ties into the carnivalesque collapse of boundaries that we have seen throughout this bourde. John’s illegal, carnival churls’ court and Edward’s own official court are becoming blended. It is the death of dichotomy and the birth of resemblance. John is not presented as a churlish reeve but as a royal king, who increasingly resembles the incognito Edward, collapsing the difference between the King of the carnival and the King of the state. This parallels the sexual intermingling present in these same stanzas. Furthermore, John’s royal appearance itself then becomes blended with the sexual panderer, as the aristocratic becomes churlish and the sacred becomes carnal. It is again this collapse of boundaries, of difference, and the ability itself of these boundaries to shift and undergo a metamorphosis that is all-important in these passages.

John’s unofficial feast is central in making his rebellion tangible. The order in which the food is presented follows the same pattern seen in *King Edward and the Shepherd*,

³⁴ Although, as in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, that ‘quitting’ or ‘repaying’ contains a hint of menace, as it can be as indicative of their promise to ‘revenge’ as it is to ‘reward’.

highlighting the deconstruction of class boundaries. First John brings out food permitted to the commoners:

by then came in beane bread,
 salt Bacon rusted and redd,
 & brewice in a blacke dish,
 leane salt beefe of a yeere old,
 ale that was both sower & cold:
 this was the ffirst service. (ll. 387-92)

The King responds with horror: ‘soe haue I blisse, / such service nerest I see’ (ll. 394-5).

Once in the position of the commoner, on the receiving side of his own laws (again emphasising this carnival interchangeability between himself and John), he begs John to ‘take this service here away, / & better bread vs bringe; / & gett vs some better drinke’ (ll. 399-401). The transformation is complete, as the King suddenly resembles the commons in the peasant revolts of the period, calling for the transgression of his own ‘statutes’.

In a passage reminiscent of *King Edward and the Shepherd*, John makes the disguised King and his companions ‘swear to me by booke and bell / that thou shalt neuer Iohn Reeue bettell / vnto Edward oure kinge’ (ll. 407-9), emphasising the illegal turn that this feast is about to take. John and his fellows then bring in ‘the payment bread’ and ‘wine that was both white and redd’ (ll. 428-29), already presenting that which was forbidden to them by the ‘king’s statutes’. This food and drink is distinctly aristocratic, making it difficult to distinguish materialistically between churls and aristocrats: an impression only aided by the wine being brought ‘in siluer cupp[e]s cleare’ (l. 430). However, this is in turn dwarfed by the feast that follows:

by then came in red wine & ale,
 the bores head into the hall,
 then sheild with sauces seere;
 Capons both baked & roasted,
 woodcockes, venison, without bost,
 & dish meeate dight ffull deere.

swannes they had piping hott,
 Coneys, curleys, well I wott,
 the crane, the hearne in ffere,
 pigeons, partrid[g]les, with spicerye,
 Elkes, fflomes, with ffroterye.
 Iohn bade them make good cheere. (ll. 458-469)

As discussed in the last chapter in relation to *King Edward and the Shepherd*, this feast allows for the ultimate carnival collapse of difference and hierarchy, especially in the world of medieval sumptuary laws, where class divides are defined, enforced and perceived through materialistic possession. It presents the materialistic definition of medieval social hierarchy through its feast and deconstructs it. Starting with that which is allowed to the commons it reaches to the food restricted to the most lavish aristocratic banquets, and as such reaches right up to the food restricted for the King's own banquet table (including the poached venison, whose arrival is subtly emphasised by the addition of 'without bost'). This class rupture is captured when John declares (in a return to his earlier imagined scene of the King and himself drinking) that 'yee shall see 3 *Churles* heere' dare to 'drinke the wine with a merry cheere', while the Earl affirms knowingly that 'the King [...] drinketh no better' (ll. 440-48). As John himself indicates in the wilds, the mere existence of this feast means that 'Iohn Reeue his bond hath broken' (l. 202) – severing the bond that ties 'the Kings bondman' John to King Edward (l. 123). Yet, at the same time this destruction of difference emphasises the new bond of equality between John and Edward at this carnival moment. This is brought out when the Earl states:

Iohn, you serue vs royallye!
 if yee had dwelled att London,
 if king Edward where here,
 he might be a-payd with this supper. (ll. 471-4)

While comic, this again aims to underline this lack of difference between John's table and the King's table. In terms of the medieval materialism that defined hierarchy, they are presented

as equals. John and Edward are no longer lord and bondman but have these bonds re-imagined and re-forged in this socially unbound carnival world.

As with *King Edward and the Shepherd*, this illegal feast perfectly captures the rebellious sentiment of John Ball, imagining it as realised, insurgent action:

A ye good people, the matters goeth nat well to passe in Englande, nor shall nat do tyll every thyng be common; and that there be no villayns nor gentylnen, but that we be all unyed togyuder, and that the lordes be no greater maisters than we be [...] they have their wines, and spyces, and good breed and we have the drawyng out of the chaffe, and drinke water.³⁵

As such, this feast moves beyond folk ceremony into radical politics. Furthermore, the repeated comparisons between John and Edward make this rebellion appear more than ever aimed not merely at the King as an individual but at the political body and the oppressive power structure that he as King represents. The bonds of the political body itself are being served up, rent and devoured. The old world dies and the new world is born in the image of the 1381 rebels.

This is the point where political aims and Bakhtinian folk-carnival banquet images themselves meld together. John's illegal 'struggle and labour' allows him 'to absorb' that aristocratic, materialistic 'part of the world that has been conquered and mastered.'³⁶ John 'tastes' the aristocratic 'world, introduces it to his body, makes it part of himself [...] he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself.'³⁷ His new body, made up of both the natural churlish and the absorbed aristocratic, is the symbol of this new life; John's body is reborn as the distillation of the 1381 rebel's demands. This is the commoners' second body, the body *communitatus*, to rival and wrestle with the body politic, the King's second body, from which they have severed themselves. The King is beaten and uncrowned

³⁵ Jean Froissart, *The Chronicle of Froissart 1523-25*, Vol. III, trans. Sir John Bourchier and Lord Berners (Long Acre: David Nutt, 1901), p. 224.

³⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelias*, p. 282.

³⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 281.

when the enforcement of hierarchy (of which he is the head), defined by the 'kings statutes', is rendered and absorbed by John in this feast that collapses social boundaries. The King's second body is swallowed by the churls.³⁸ That which would starve or execute the commons instead brings them nourishment and new life, as the world is turned upside-down and the body politic is instead decapitated and quartered in the commons' carnival feast.

This direct, rebellious and violent opposition between John and Edward is emphasised by John's oath as his carnival feast is brought out:

'Nay,' sayd Iohn, 'by gods grace,
& Edward wher in this place,
 hee shold not touch this tonne.
hee wold be wrath with Iohn, I hope;
thereffore I beshrew the soupe
 that shall come in his mouth!' (ll. 476-81)

At this point the bourde emphasises the direct rivalry between the King and the Commoner, despite their superficial social difference. John notably 'hopes' that the King would be 'wrath' if his feast was discovered. He aims to transgress against the King, as both an individual (he notably refers to Edward by name here) *and* as head of the body politic. The latter can be drawn from the fact that this intentional rebellion, and their individualised battle, is again set around the allowance or revocation of food. Within the bounds of this carnival feast John is the King. As mock king he would deny food to King Edward, if he knew Edward was present ('hee shold not touch this tonne'), and curses the 'soupe / that shall come in' the King's mouth. This denial and restriction of food is a direct parody of the King's own sumptuary laws, turning the body politic upside-down. The feet (workers) become the head (King) and the head becomes the oppressed feet, feeling the bite of their own laws. The body politic is wrapped into a madman's contortion in this upside-down carnival world.

³⁸ 'What dost thou mean by this?' / 'Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.' William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1683-1784 (IV.III.29-31).

Edward should indeed be ‘wrath with John’, for this rebellion undermines his own ‘statutes’, which symbolise the rigidity of the social hierarchy of which he is the head. A rigid hierarchy that separates man from man nourishes the very concept of monarchy, while John’s undermining of this rigidity, collapsing all together with all boundaries made fluid, threatens Edward’s political starvation (as representative of that rigid hierarchical system). This is wonderfully captured in the comic image of John cursing Edward’s soup. Both John and Edward are mirrored, inverted kings here, heads of their own opposing social structures, each attempting to restrict and devour the other, with the banquet table at the centre of the battleground. At the same time this symbolic violence also more seriously hints at the potential threat towards King Edward. If Edward’s hidden identity were uncovered by John, as is imagined in the above passage, then there is the potential for John’s oaths to turn to action. He may ‘durst’ decapitate Edward literally, rather than simply symbolically, with his ‘rusty sword that well will byte’ ‘ffor all thy painted geere’.

This combination of the social body politic with the corporeal body – that is to say conflating the corporeal and political body’s nourishment, starvation, movement and violent breaching – can also be found in two other central moments in John’s feast. The first begins with a small passage that initially appears to be unusually conservative. As his guests take their seats, John tells Hob and Hodgkin:

att side end bord wee will bee,
out of the gentles companye:
 thinke yee not best soe?
ffor itt was neuer the Law of England
to sett gentles blood with bound. (ll. 381-5)

This separation of physical bodies works to highlight class boundaries and enforce social separation. The churls are identified as churls and the aristocrats as aristocrats, each separated from the other. It initially seems aristocratic banqueting conventions (and ‘the Law of England’) are to be maintained to at least some degree. However, following the King’s

rejection of the rustic feast and his insistence on the transgression of his own laws, John tells Hob and Hodgkin:

let vs sitt out of the throng
 att a side bords end;
 these strange ffellowes thinke vncouthlye. (ll. 423-5)

This passage is almost identical to the first but it inverts the reasons for the two groups sitting apart. It is now the courtiers who are presented as being ‘uncouth’ and undesirable.

Furthermore, the commoners’ physical separation from this ‘uncouthness’ means that John and his fellows are also symbolically separated from appearing ‘uncouth’. It allows for a social transformation, perverting the social function of ‘uncouthness’ in social recognition and separation: for by ‘uncouthness’ we mean a lack of cultivation or awareness of culturally defined manners, which are themselves always indicative of class, formed as they are by the elite to recognise their social equals and separate themselves from their social inferiors.

Indeed, as the commoners begin to ‘drinke the wine’ and produce their aristocratic feast at this precise moment, they instead appear to have swapped social positions with the courtiers and become aristocratic. Social boundaries are again turned upside-down, revealing their meaningless fluidity but it is here achieved and indicated by this physical separation of bodies amid the swapping of culturally ascribed perceptions.

These passages are also closely related to the dance at the end of John’s feast that collapses this physical separation. Addressing Hob and Hodgkin, John declares that:

ffor wee will ffor our guests sake
 hop and dance, & Reuell make. (ll. 518-9)

This again superficially appears to be another highly conservative moment that clashes with the rest of John’s feast, as the commoners’ rebellion is transformed into entertainment for the aristocrats. Yet what follows is carnivalesque chaos, during which there is an emphasis on the body and political readings of it. The commoners dance their ‘mesures wrong’ (ll. 528):

‘yee dance neither Gallyard nor hawe,
Trace nor true mesure, as I trowe,
but hopp as yee were woode.’ (ll. 530-2)

Dancing is a social expression, bodies moving in unison and order, reflecting the harmony of the social body. However, this madman’s dance sees the three commoners breaking with all order, tracing no ‘true mesure’, no recognised pattern (‘yee dance neither Gallyard nor hawe’). This is not a dance of order but of disorder, as they sever themselves from the unity of the wider social body. The repressed violence, implicit in this severance, then erupts as Hob’s ‘brow brast out of blood’ (ll. 534-8). The underlying violence and class warfare in the banquet is written on the commoners’ bodies and their grotesque movements. This violence is then directed towards the courtiers, as John’s declaration again emphasises the wider social implication:

‘methinkes wee dance our measures wronge,
by him that sitteth in throne.’
then they began to kicke & wince,
Iohn hitt the king ouer the shinnes
with a payre of new clowted shoone. (ll. 543-7)

John’s oath that ‘wee dance our measures wronge / by him that *sitteth in throne*’ is purposefully ambiguous in terms of whether it is religious or secular, especially as he proceeds to beat ‘the king’. Edward is presented as the ritualistic carnival mock king who is ‘abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over’.³⁹ It captures both his uncrowning and the complete inversion of this world turned upside-down. The boundaries between John and Edward, fool and king, are blurred, each tumbling ‘top ouer tayle / & Master and Master they yode’ (ll. 534-5). This dance of disorder again binds John and Edward together in a moment of violence but here, post-feast, this violence is actualised and physical. Despite their social

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 197. This dance also distinctly resembles the fools’ dance depicted in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. Book III sees the entrance of fools wearing a traditional ‘pale’ on their ‘hose’ and on their ‘tipet [...] a belle’, who perform a chaotic dance and beat everyone present ‘on the crowne’: ‘Tho come ther lepyng in a route, / And gunne choppen al aboute / Every man upon the crowne’. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 347-73 (ll. 1823-41).

difference, John's kicking of Edward's shins is a moment that breaches that social gap via the physical body. It is a moment at odds with their physical separation at the start of the feast, where each social group is sat aside from the other. This is a true carnivalesque 'mingling of bodies', a collapse of hierarchical separation, a moment of violence that defies and overcomes that separation.

When John first met the courtiers, he claimed that if he was 'thratt' (threatened) then his 'neighbors' Hob and Hodgkin would 'wold not lett' but join him to 'ffight' the courtiers (ll. 181-5). Even at this early stage a 'battell' (l. 188) threatened to erupt between the three commoners and three aristocrats. Violence is always beneath the surface of this carnivalesque feast: whether the King's laws are being ripped apart, class oppression (itself enforced through violence) is being defied, the political body is being rendered, or physical blows are received, as blood finally erupts and the King is physically beaten. This violence continues to escalate as we move into the third part of *John the Reeve*, as John storms the court, brains the porter and slaughters the King's dogs, to hold Edward 'checkmate' (l. 793).

Insurrection: 'I will cracke thy crowne'

Before looking at John's storming of the court, it is first worth briefly examining the violent threat posed to the commoners' by the aristocrats' presence. This undercurrent of violence and decapitation cuts both ways. Just as in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, the aristocrats' role as court spies is emphasised throughout the first parts of *John the Reeve*:

'If thou find in my house payment ffine,
or in my kitchin poultry slaine,
peradventure thou wold say
that Iohn Reeue his bond hath broken:
I wold not that such words weere spoken
in the kings house another day,

‘ffor itt might turne me to great greefe;
 such proud laddis that beare office
 wold danger a pore man aye;
 & or I wold pray thee of mercy longe,
 yett weere I better to lett thee gange
 in twentye twiine devills way.’ (ll. 199-210)

While this element of the bourde is not given the weight or sophisticated, near-Foucauldian detail seen in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, the ‘danger’ posed by court surveillance is still a recurring element. It is referred to again when John makes the courtiers promise ‘that thou shalt neuer Iohn Reeue bettell / vnto Edward our kinge’ (ll. 408-9), is implied every time John curses the King and the law, and can be seen in John’s fear of the courtiers’ use of ‘lattine’ to whisper (‘rowning’) to each other during his feast: creating a secret space within his secret space and prompting John to declare ‘hee was ffalse that rowning began’ (ll. 485-97). There remains a fear of being secretly observed, of being placed under the court’s gaze and of subsequent execution. This forbidding representation of surveillance and the secret, undermining ‘ffalse’ whispers of the courtiers are again highly reminiscent of the populace’s fear of government spies during this tumultuous and politically dangerous period.⁴⁰

When a royal messenger summons John to court, it is the seeming revelation of this surveillance that sees ‘Iohn waxed vnfaine in bone & blood’ (l. 581). Furnivall and Hale give this line the delightfully understated annotation, ‘He is put out at first’.⁴¹ However, this is a rather more macabre image than Furnivall and Hale allow for, as John’s body appears to be torn apart, bones and blood erupting, capturing the fear that his death, *via* a traitor’s execution (in which John’s body would have been hung, drawn and quartered) is fast approaching.

⁴⁰ I.M.W. Harvey, ‘Was there Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?’, in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies In Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R. H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), pp. 155-74 (p. 162).

⁴¹ *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript*, Vol. II, p. 581.

Despite the messenger's assurances that John is to be 'made a Knight', John scoffs at this news, sensing a darker, concealed purpose:

‘a knight,’ sayd Iohn, ‘by Marry myld,
I know right well I am beguiled
with the guests I harbord late.’ (ll. 586-9)

John is convinced that he has been betrayed, spied on by the courtiers to whom he gave hospitality, and his defiance of the King has been revealed.

The next fifty lines are dedicated to John arming himself, bidding his friends and family farewell and making preparations for a battle in the court. His wife fetches his ‘side Acton’, his ‘round pallet [...] made of Millayne plate’, his ‘pitch-fforke’, ‘a sword’, a ‘buckler’ and his ‘gloves’. They then mend his ‘Scaberd’ and finally prepare his horse with a ‘saddle’ and the ‘stirrops [...] of a tree’ referred to in his initial portrait (ll. 593-637). The length and detail in this description of the commoner's arming before he journeys to the court is reminiscent of romance knights preparing for a quest and John's helmet (‘pallett’) of Milan plate certainly adds an aristocratic air to this scene. However, the weapons themselves are mostly those of the commons, undercutting this romance detailing with a distinct flavour of the peasant revolts.

Despite the serious undertones, this arming is also drenched in the same comic, chaotic, carnivalesque atmosphere as John's feast. It transpires that John's sword is stuck fast in his scabbard from lack of use. Amid much laughter and cursing (‘I wold hee had kist my arse that itt made!’), Alice holds the scabbard and John pulls at the sword ‘soe hard’ that ‘again a post he ran backward / & gaue his head a rowte’ (ll. 611-19). This slapstick violence leads to John, Alice and ‘his meanye all’ to further ‘laughe’ (ll. 620-1). It is very reminiscent of the commoners' dance, when Hob's ‘brow brast out of blood’ causing John's

own laughter.⁴² In each scene a head injury and fall occurs, symbolic of the commoners' potential decapitation, and each time it is met by an uncaring, madman's laughter. Laughter and an underlying threat of death are very much fused together in this carnivalesque world. In the words of Foucault, it seems that:

Madness is the *déjà-là* of death [...] when the madman laughs, he already laughs with the laugh of death; the lunatic, anticipating the macabre has disarmed it.⁴³

This mixture of carnivalesque laughter and death continues in the rest of this scene. The feast is further recalled by the vast quantities of illegally acquired aristocratic wine drunk by the commoners during John's arming. Hob and Hodgkin are sent for and join John in drinking '3 pottles of wine in a dishe' to mark their 'partinge' (ll. 626-8). John then bids farewell to Alice and his two neighbours with the words:

‘dame,’ he sayd, ‘ffeitch me wine;
I will drinke to thee once againe,
I troe I shall neuer thee see.
Hodgkin long, & hob of the lathe,
tarry & drinke with me bothe,
ffor my care are ffast commannde.
they dranke 5 gallons verament:
‘ffarwell ffellowes all present,
ffor I am readye to gange!’ (ll. 638-46)

The wine drinking and John's imminent execution are blended together, as his blood threatens to flow as freely as the wine. The scene has a melancholic undertone to it but the comedy and drunkenness defuse much of this seriousness. John appears ridiculous and we are meant to laugh at him, even as his insurgent intentions and seemingly imminent death add a weighty seriousness to the passage. It is jarring and unsettling. This is a merry death and a comic revolution, but it works not to defuse John's chaotic disruption but to add to it. John rides to court dressed in armour that embodies the collapse and absorption of social

⁴² ‘Hob of the lathe lay on the fflore, / his brow blast out of blood. / ‘a, ha!’ Quoth Iohn, ‘thou makes good game! / had thou not ffalled, wee had not laught;’ (ll. 537-40). Compare to: ‘againa a post he ran backward / & gawe his head a rowte. / his wiffe did laughe when he did ffall, / & soe did his meanye all’ (ll. 618-21).

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 13.

boundaries: a jarring, comic clash of both the aristocratic (a Milan plate helmet) and the churlish (a pitchfork). He appears both as a comic parody of knighthood and a peasant insurgent, all while fuelled by the illegal wine from his own carnivalesque banquet (that itself symbolises the collapse of these social boundaries). He is the embodiment of carnivalesque chaos, a blending of laughter with (and at) death.

Once this carnivalesque chaos reaches the court John's disruption is amplified as his insurgent language and actions gather pace, while the comedy quickly falls away (despite the efforts of the courtiers). John 'wold not vayne' his 'hatt' to 'neither Knight nor Barron', displaying an incendiary lack of deference (ll. 651-2). When John is mocked by a Knight over his 'rusticall arraye' (l. 658) John replies in strong, insurgent terms:

Iohn bade them kisse the devills arse:
ffor you my geare is much the worsse!
 you will itt not amend,
by my ffaith, that I lead!
vpon the head I shall you shread
 but if you hence wende! (ll. 668-75)

There is an emphasis on the aristocratic financial oppression of the commons here ('ffor you my geare is much the worsse!') but John then moves beyond complaint towards insurgent intent, threatening aristocratic decapitation: 'you will itt not amend [...] vpon the head I shall you shread'. This further escalates, as John's curse moves this threat of decapitation onto the head of the body politic:

'the devill him speede vpon his crowne
that causeth me to come to this towne,
 whether he weare Iacke or Iill! (ll. 676-8)

John's curse against the man 'that causeth me to come to this towne' is unwittingly aimed against the King on John's part, with the identity of this curse's recipient known only to the reader. However, whether intentional or not, John's radicalism is maintained through the bourde's knowing focus on the 'crowne', combined with John's disdain towards both nobility

and his disregard as to the identity, or social position, of the person he curses; he curses them regardless of ‘whether he weare Iacke or Iill’. The violent decapitation of the corporeal body and the decapitation of the head of the body politic become intertwined in the image of the ‘crowne’. Indeed, this is just the first of several references to the ‘crowne’ and the violence John would commit against it. Rebellious politics are again very much written on the physical body.

This sense of insurgency continues when John meets the Earl. John again ‘vayled neither hatt nor hood’ (l. 684) in deference but instead accuses his former guest of betrayal: ‘thou hast disdainde mee right’ / ffor wrat[h] I waxe neer wood!’ (ll. 687-8). Once the Earl hurries into the hall to inform the King of John’s arrival, John demands that the porter admit him. What follows is perhaps the most overtly radical moment of any of the King and Commoner bourdes:

the Porter sayd, ‘stand abacke!
& thou come neere I shall thee rappe,
thou carle, by my ffay!’

Iohn tooke his fforke in his hand,
he bare his fforke on an End,
he thought to make a ffray;
his Capull was wight, & corne ffedd;
vpon the Porter hee him spedd,
and him had welnye slaine.

he hitt the Porter vpon the crowne,
with that stroke hee ffell downe,
fforsooth as I you tell. (ll. 722-33)

The tale’s underlying violence finally erupts in this scene. The porter’s words situate this moment in terms of class warfare (‘& thou come neere I shall thee rappe, / *thou carle*, by my ffay!’) and in terms of the separation between carles and courtiers. His royally appointed role is to embody and enforce this divide, to prevent mingling, to maintain distance between the people and the ‘crowne’. It is this literal and symbolic divide that John breaches and falls

when he hits the porter on the ‘crowne’. It is also highly appropriate that John charges like a jousting knight while armed with a churlish pitchfork, thus himself embodying a collapse of boundaries as he breaches the King’s gate.

This violence continues as John ‘rode into the hall’:

& all the doggs both great & small
on Iohn ffast can thé yell.

Iohn layd about as hee were wood,
& 4 hee killed as hee stood;
the rest will now be ware. (ll. 734-9)

This redirected violence is typical of these tales. In *King Edward and the Shepherd* we saw the violence Adam threatens against the aristocrats redirected into the slaughter of the King’s rabbits and deer. In *John the Reeve* we do not see the poaching itself, but we instead have this moment where the King’s dogs are slaughtered, themselves replacing the King’s men. Yet it remains a symbolic act of violence against the King’s authority. This displaced symbolism is clearly signalled by the text, as John’s slaughter results in ‘a squier hend’ begging John to alight from his horse and ‘giue me thy fforke’ in fear that John’s violence will soon be directed against the courtiers, while others call on John to ‘lay downe thy sword / sett vp thy horrse [...] thy bow, good Iohn, lay downe’ (ll. 740-8). John’s answer only works to increase the insurgent perception of his violent disruption:

nay, by St William of Yorke,
ffirst I will cracke thy crowne! (ll. 744-5)

This again draws on the image of the doubled crown, referring to both the squire’s own head and the head of the social body to which he belongs, its use of language (especially following John’s slaughter) inevitably raising the prospect of regicide. Another squire’s urgent plea of ‘yee see not who sitteth att the meate’ draws attention to the King’s presence, only further emphasising John’s dangerously insurgent choice of words (l. 752).

The chaos causes the Queen to notice John but she laughingly dismisses him:

such a ffellow saw I neuer yore!
 shee saith, 'hee hath the quaintest geere,
 he is but simple of pryde.' (ll. 761-3)

The Queen laughs at John's comical appearance and thus dismisses and defuses the seriousness of his intent. As with *King Edward and the Shepherd*, the court's laughter can transform the commoner's rebellion into aristocratic entertainment and therefore the commoner into an ephemeral king-for-a-day, to be laughed at and then beaten/decapitated. However, John's reaction is not to cower in terror like Adam but to actively turn this court laughter to 'ffeare':

right soe came Iohn as hee were wood;
 he vayed neither hatt nor hood,
 he was a ffaley ffreake;
 he tooke his fforke as he wold Iust;
 vp to the dease ffast he itt thrust.
 the Queene ffor ffeare did speake,

& sayd, 'lords, beware, ffor gods grace!' (ll. 764-71)

John charges the King's dais, the place of honour at the royal feast, and thrusts his pitchfork into it. In many ways this image is symbolic of John's carnivalesque world. It is the violent intrusion of the churl into the aristocratic feast, capturing the amalgamation of the peasant revolts with the carnival banquet. The class battleground is situated in the banquet table and it is here that the blow is struck, as King and Commoner face each other across the table, with the aristocratic laughter silenced.

Having recognised the King, John superficially speaks to him as a bondman:

my good, its thine;
 my body alsoe, ffor to pine,
 ffor thou art king with crowne. (ll. 782-4)

However, despite John's polite and servile tone, his statement that 'thou art king with crowne' still carries an element of threat, considering John's stated aim to 'cracke thy

crowne' only a few lines before. Indeed, as John's complimentary address continues it becomes clear that his words have a double and more threatening meaning, using language not to praise Edward so much as trap him. There is a complexity to this speech that is reminiscent of Mark Antony's speech in the marketplace in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:⁴⁴

'but lord, thy word is honorable,
both stedffast, sure and stable,
& alsoe great of renowne!'

'therefore haue in mind what thou me hight
when thou with me [harbord] a night,
a warryson that I shold haue.'
John spoke to him with sturdye mood,
hee vayed neither hatt nor hood,
but stood with him checkmate. (ll. 782-93)

John is polite but defiant. His 'sturdye mood' undercuts his compliments. Unlike Adam, John does not plead for his life, not even lowering his hat or hood as a sign of respect or deference. He instead demands that the King not only pardon but reward him, despite the insurgent slaughter, violence and chaos John has wreaked in the court, let alone his earlier defiance of the King's laws and cursing of the King in the carnivalesque feast. If Edward refuses to do so, then John's specific invocation of the King's promises, honour and wider reputation mean that Edward's (and by extension the court's) honour will be called into question. Either the King's laws will be defied, or the King's honour will be publicly despoiled; either way the fabric of courtly society will be rent apart. The King is trapped into performing John's will; he is caught 'checkmate'. The choice of words emphasises that there is still an underlying threat of regicide underpinning this passage, with John holding the King 'checkmate' at the end of a pitchfork.

⁴⁴ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1549-1614 (III.II).

Edward acquiesces to John's demands. John is made 'a gentleman' and then given a 'coller bright' and made 'a knight' (ll. 801-10). He is granted ownership over his 'manner place', given '100l' and 'euery yeere a tunn of red wine / soe long as thou dost liue' (ll. 802-5). Furthermore, his daughters are married 'vnto 2 squires gay', one of his sons is 'made a Knight' and 'the other a parson of a kirke', while Hob and Hodgkin are made 'ffreemen bothe' (ll. 886-97). To an extent this shows the achievement of much of the political aims in John's carnivalesque feast. John as a churl is now allowed to own aristocratically restricted material goods and has usurped the rigidity of medieval hierarchy and birth right. His sons now resemble the Earl and Bishop, and his daughters' marriages to courtiers allow for the carnivalesque 'mingling of bodies' John himself called for, again collapsing the separation between churl and noble. As Walsh argues, 'the new identity conferred upon him at the end of the tale symbolizes the reach of the imagination toward a new order of society'.⁴⁵ The churl has infiltrated and seemingly reshaped the court.

However, despite Walsh's positive reading of this ending, just as in *King Edward and the Shepherd* there is a strange sense of pessimism on the part of the commoner at this moment of seeming triumph. Upon receiving his 'coller bright' and being knighted, John's reaction is not one of elation but of fear:

then was Iohn euill apayd,
& amongst them all thus hee sayd,
 'ffull oft I haue heard tell
that after a coller comes a rope;
I shall be hanged by the throate;
 methinkes itt doth not well.' (ll. 812-7)

The collar that knights him is simultaneously presented as the hangman's noose. John seems to realise that he has been symbolically executed, that his new life is mingled with the death of his unofficial carnival. John is no longer a carnival king, head of an inverted world, but has

⁴⁵ Walsh, 'Upward Bound', p. 160.

been subsumed back into the social body and placed in a subservient position within the official, allowed royal feast:

‘sith thou hast taken this estate
that euery man may itt wott,
 thou must begin the bord.’
then Iohn therof was nothing ffaine –
I tell you truth with-ouen laine, -
 he spake neuer a word,

but att the bords end he sate him downe;
ffor he had leeur beene att home. (ll. 818-25)

The battleground is, as ever, the banqueting table. John’s rebellion has been absorbed, devoured and swallowed by the social body. In terms of Bakhtinian banquet imagery, it is John’s ‘part of the world that has been conquered and mastered’ once he is introduced into the body of the court.⁴⁶ His carnivalesque rebellion has been silenced (‘he spake neuer a word’). He has become nothing more than an aristocratic singularity, a spectacle to be laughed at by the courtiers, a former king-for-a-day. There is after all ‘no slander in an allowed fool, though / he do nothing but rail.’⁴⁷

As with *King Edward and the Shepherd*, *John the Reeve* seems to dramatise a form of Foucauldian containment. In *Madness and Civilisation* Foucault describes the perceived threat in medieval thought regarding the liminal world inhabited by ‘madmen,’ which is encapsulated in the fifteenth-century literary creation of the ‘ship of fools’ sailing around the fringes of society. Foucault portrays this world of madmen as a place of ‘secret knowledge’ revealing society’s ‘hidden truths’⁴⁸:

This false happiness [of the fool] is the diabolical triumph of the Antichrist; it is the end, already at hand. The delicately fantastic iconography of the fourteenth century

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 282.

⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1785-1846 (I.V.80-1).

⁴⁸ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, pp. 11-19.

[...] where the order of God and its imminent victory are always at apparent, gives way to a vision of the world where all wisdom is annihilated.⁴⁹

It is the same ‘secret invasion’ by a ‘tide of madmen’ from the liminal edges of society, set on annihilating all conventional social ‘wisdom’ – while revealing the ‘hidden truths’ of aristocratic oppression and the fluidity of hierarchical boundaries – that is seen in these bourdes.⁵⁰ But rather than fearing this annihilating ‘invasion’, these bourdes openly celebrate and embrace this ‘madness’. However, for Foucault’s madmen, their journey ended in containment, with the state reabsorbing that which was challenging by placing it under observation, in the centre of society:

Scarcely a century after the career of the mad ships [...] Oblivion falls upon the world navigated by the free slaves of the Ship of Fools. Madness will no longer proceed from a point within the world to a point beyond, on its strange voyage; it will never again be that fugitive and absolute limit. Behold it moored now, made fast among things and men. Restrained and maintained. No longer a ship but a hospital.⁵¹

Madness in society is contained, observed and made safe. While Foucault sees this state containment occurring at least a century after these early King and Commoner bourdes, this pattern seems to exactly correspond to the commoners’ absorption into the court. Foucault’s ideas therefore provide a useful illustration as to why the King’s reward is portrayed with such fear and pessimism by the commoners in this tale. In containing and absorbing John, the court also contains and absorbs John’s feast. It becomes safe, observed, predicted and so transformed into a Bakhtinian official feast.⁵² Once the carnivalesque banquet becomes allowed, its cultural meaning and significance becomes lost; it merely becomes an extension of the King’s own official banquet. John’s feast no longer represents a challenge to order as he is now part of that order. He no longer challenges the sumptuary or forestry laws due to

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p. 19-20.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p. 14.

⁵¹ Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p. 31.

⁵² Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward and eternal and indisputable [...] The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 9.

his social elevation, but those laws still remain. He has failed to truly change the body politic. He has merely been absorbed and contained by it. The knighthood effectively executes his rebellion.

This chapter has used close textual analysis of *John the Reeve* to expand on the ways in which the fifteenth-century King and Commoner texts can be rewardingly analysed through Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, while bearing in mind the turbulent popular politics of the later Middle Ages. The carnival imagery can be used to explain the relation between the radical political statements in both *John the Reeve* and *King Edward and the Shepherd* and the banquets that form the spine of these bourdes and around which most the action revolves. These are texts that use the concept of the popular carnival and 'Lord of Misrule' in order to radically collapse social boundaries and deconstruct the medieval concept of the body politic, reshaping this imagined society in the image of the demands found in the peasant revolts of this period. Furthermore, the commoners in these bourdes achieve this rebellion through achievable insurgent action, in the form of their illegal poached feasts.

However, these are also texts that fear court surveillance and communicate concerns regarding official recognition and absorption into official culture. This is perhaps apt when regarding the bourdes' own transition from oral culture to written culture, a transition which is emphasised in the opening lines of *John the Reeve*:

as I heard tell this other yeere,
a clarke came out of Lancashire:
 a rolle he had reading,
a bourde written therein he found. (ll. 7-10)

When it is remembered that this bourde could have been orally performed, the layers of reading, hearing and writing pile up; this is an *oral* performance of a *written* bourde, which was *heard* from a clerk, who found it *written* in a bourde (which may itself have been based

on an oral tale). While this is very unlikely to be an actual history of *John the Reeve*, it is nonetheless richly symbolic. This is a folk-culture that is in the process of being displaced, distributed from an uncertain liminal source and absorbed into a volatile, politicised fifteenth-century culture where you can never be certain who might be listening.

Chapter Three

Hybridity and Transformation: *Rauf Coilzear*, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, *King Edward and the Hermit*, and *The King and the Barker*

Introduction

In the latter half of the fifteenth century there is a distinct shift in the King and Commoner tradition towards a form of textual hybridity and a seeming desire to further play with and disrupt medieval literary boundaries.¹ In *Rauf Coilzear* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, the King and Commoner's carnival narrative becomes blended, respectively, with the world of late Middle English Carolingian romance and the outlaw spaces of the Robin Hood tradition. That these texts feel able to toy with their conventions and co-opt elements of other genres/traditions suggests that the King and Commoner tradition is recognisable and well established. But two other texts from this same period offer a more troubled angle to this increase of hybridity; the fragmentary *King Edward and the Hermit* and *The King and the Barker* both reveal a sense of restlessness and tiredness with the tradition's increasingly predictable narrative. They collectively show that this is a tradition ready to evolve and change.

This chapter will highlight the ways in which *Rauf Coilzear* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* continue and utilise the tradition's distinctly carnivalesque tropes. It will also explore the ways in which these carnival elements actively lend themselves to the hybridity and

¹ This has been seen to a small extent before in *Sir Cleges* and *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in their free borrowing and adaptation of some King and Commoner elements for their romance narratives. While the tales examined in this chapter are more definitively setting themselves within the wider King and Commoner narrative and tradition, it is certainly possible that those previous romances may have influenced this move towards hybridity, especially as *Rauf Coilzear* is set on the boundaries of a romance world. *Sir Cleges*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 367-407. *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 85-112.

textual intermingling observable in these texts. The end of the chapter will briefly examine *King Edward and the Hermit* and *The King and the Barker*'s move away from the early tradition's radicalism in a prelude to the pro-monarchic and conservative King and Commoner broadside ballads that emerge from the late sixteenth century.

Rauf Coilzear: Introduction

Rauf Coilzear is the sole surviving Middle Scots King and Commoner text (although the repeated sixteenth-century Scottish references to *John the Reeve* make it probable that some form of this tale was also known in Scotland). As detailed in the last chapter, 'Raf Coilyear with his thrawin brow' is mentioned alongside 'Craibit Johne the reif' in both Gavin Douglas' Scottish dream poem *The Palis of Honoure* and William Dunbar's complaint *To the King (Exces of thocht dois me mischeif)* (both c. 1500).² 'Rauf Collzear' is also listed among the various examples of 'gude tayl or fabyll' (including a tale of 'robene hude and lital iohne') told by the shepherds in *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c. 1549-50), a political allegory attributed to Robert Wedderburn.³ But despite its clear popularity, no manuscript copy of *Rauf Coilzear* has survived. The c. 1515 Asloan manuscript lists 'the buke of Rauf Colzear' in its index but the tale itself is missing.⁴ It only comes down to us through the sole surviving copy of an edition printed by Robert Lekpreuik at St. Andrews in 1572, now owned by the National Library of Scotland.

² Gavin Douglas, *Palis of Honoure*, ed. David Parkinson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), ll. 1711-2. William Dunbar, *To the King (Exces of thocht dois me mischeif)*, in *William Dunbar: The Complete Works*, ed. John Conlee (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), No. 48 (l. 33).

³ Robert Wedderburn(?), *The Complaynt of Scotland*, Vol. II, ed. John Leyden (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1801), pp. 98-9.

⁴ H. M. Smyser, 'The Taill of Rauf Coilyear and its Sources', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 14 (1932), 135-50 (p. 135).

While it is impossible to date the poem exactly, it is generally agreed that its orthography ‘belongs to the sixteenth century’ and ‘its language to the second half of the fifteenth century.’⁵ There is some critical debate over whether a more exact date can be ascertained from the poem’s contents, generally through an attempt to link the marginal character Dame Jane of Anjou with a historical figure. In his 1894 German edition of *Rauf Coilyear*, M. Tonndorf attempted to identify her with Jeanne de Laval, the second wife of René II of Anjou, arguing that Jeanne may have put in a claim to Anjou on the death of Charles VIII of Maine, thus dating the poem to around 1481.⁶ However, William Browne has shown this argument to be highly flawed, pointing to the lack of evidence for any such claim and stating that, in any case, Jeanne ‘had not the shadow of a claim to the duchy’.⁷ H. M. Smyser uses the same character to make a case for a slightly earlier dating of the poem, arguing that Dame Jane of Anjou’s inclusion could have been influenced by public interest surrounding Margaret of Anjou’s refuge in Scotland in the 1460s.⁸ Smyser’s argument is more persuasive but these attempts to more precisely date the poem via a small detail pertaining to a very minor character remain ultimately speculative and circumstantial.

972 lines in length and written in thirteen-line stanzas, the poem itself is a late product of the Middle Scots ‘alliterative revival’, which also includes such poems as *The Buke of the Howlat* and *Golagros and Gawane*.⁹ However, it fits uneasily into simple categories. In his study on the alliterative revival, J. P. Oakden notes that *Rauf Coilyear*’s setting makes it ‘the only example among alliterative works of a romance in the Charlemagne cycle’, while

⁵ Diane Speed, ‘*Rauf Coilyear*: Introduction’, in *Medieval English Romances*, ed. Diane Speed (Sydney: Dept. of English, University of Sydney, 1989), pp. 196-203 (p. 197).

⁶ See *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear: Mit literarhistorischer, grammatischer und metrischer Einleitung*, ed. M. Tonndorf (Berlin: C. Vogt’s Verlag, 1894).

⁷ *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear: A Scottish Metrical Romance of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. William Hand Browne (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1903), pp. 30-31.

⁸ Smyser, ‘*The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* and Its Sources’, p. 136.

⁹ For a full list of these poems and detailed analysis of *Rauf Coilyear*’s poetic and structural relationship to them, see Margaret Mackay, *The Alliterative Tradition in Middle Scots Verse* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1975).

emphasising that the content simultaneously undercuts its high theme, representing ‘a reaction (whether conscious or unconscious) against conventional romance’.¹⁰ Thorlac Turville-Petre similarly emphasises *Rauf Coilzear*’s role as a ‘bridge between the sober moral reflections of *The Awntyrs of Arthure* and, in the same stanza form, the scatological humour of Henryson’s *Sum Practysis of Medecyne*’.¹¹ To understand this poem’s seemingly contradictory nature, it is worth emphasising Turville-Petre’s claim that towards ‘the end of the fifteenth century the thirteen-line alliterative stanza was only used for ribaldry and satire’, becoming ‘the language of insult’.¹² In this way, *Rauf Coilzear*’s very form subtly undermines its romance theme. It is simultaneously part of the fifteenth-century English and Scottish interest in Carolingian romances and a satire of those same tales. It is therefore appropriate that the narrative should be set in both the ‘high’ world of Charlemagne and in the ‘low’ carnival world of the King and Commoner bourdes. High and low are persistently blended together, each collapsing into the other in a way that is apt for the King and Commoner tradition’s inherently carnivalesque nature. To borrow Bodel’s famous phrase, the *voir* Matter of France is intentionally undercut by the *vain et plaisant* Matter of Britain.¹³ In this way, *Rauf Coilzear* has a sense of its own hybridity, intentional contradictions and contrasts ingrained in its very fabric.

The basic plot of *Rauf Coilzear* is as follows:

Charlemagne is riding with his knights and barons towards Paris to celebrate the coming yuletide when they enter a mountainous, wild moor. A fierce storm suddenly blows in from the east and scatters the nobles, leaving Charlemagne lost and alone. Charlemagne comes across Rauf the coalman and begs Rauf to guide him to some shelter. Rauf agrees to take this unknown courtier to his house but predicts that they will quarrel.

¹⁰ J. P. Oakden, *The Poetry of the Alliterative Revival* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1937), pp. 50-1.

¹¹ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977), p. 117.

¹² Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, p. 117.

¹³ Quoted in Rosalind Field, ‘The Curious History of the Matter of England’, in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), p. 29-42 (p. 29).

Upon arrival at his house, Rauf instructs his wife Gyliane to prepare food. Rauf then leads Charlemagne to dinner but Charlemagne stops at the door to let Rauf through first. Rauf angrily seizes the King's neck and berates him for being discourteous. Rauf then instructs Charlemagne to sit with Gyliane and serve the meal. Charlemagne instead insists on Rauf doing this and Rauf responds by punching Charlemagne so hard that he flies half the length of the hall. Having again berated Charlemagne for his discourtesy, their feast begins. Rauf boasts to the King that he poaches and brings out capons, rabbits, venison and wild birds. After dinner Charlemagne persuades Rauf to come to the Parisian court to sell his charcoal.

The next day, Charlemagne rides back to Paris and orders Sir Roland to watch the moor, bringing back anyone he meets. Upon seeing Rauf on the road Roland insists that Rauf comes with him to Paris. However, Rauf refuses and threatens to fight Roland. Eventually Roland gives up, riding back to the displeased King. When Rauf reaches Paris he barges into the court and comes upon Charlemagne dressed in his robes of state and surrounded by his nobles. Charlemagne's nobles call for Rauf's execution but Charlemagne instead makes Rauf a knight, giving him armour and promising three hundred pounds a year and the next available estate.

Early the next morning, Rauf rides off to find Sir Roland and fight him. He instead comes across Magog, a Saracen on a camel. Having mistaken Magog for Roland, Rauf fights with him. Roland then arrives and persuades Magog to convert. All three become sworn friends and ride back to the court, where Magog is made Sir Gawteir by Charlemagne and married to Jane of Anjou. Rauf is then made Marshall of France and builds a hostelry on the spot where he first met Charlemagne, so that all may have such hospitality.

Rauf Coilzear repeatedly utilises and interacts with romance tropes and characters. While this aspect has been partially explored by other critics, the vital role played in this by the medieval King and Commoner tradition's distinctly carnivalesque nature has not yet been examined.¹⁴ The following sections will first focus on the ways in which the poem initially presents these carnivalesque elements in the wilderness and then show how the poem proceeds to utilise these same elements as it actively works to collapse the boundaries between the King and Commoner and Carolingian romance worlds. At the same time, there

¹⁴ The most comprehensive of these essays on *Rauf Coilzear*'s use of romance tropes are currently Glenn Wright's 'Churl's Courtesy: *Rauf Coilzear* and its English Analogues', in *Neophilologus*, 85.4 (2001), 647-662; and Margaret Kissam Morris, 'Generic Oxymoron in *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*', in *Voices in Translation: The Authority of 'Olde Bookes' in Medieval Literature*, ed. Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi and Gale Sigal (New York: AMS Press, 1992), pp. 137-55.

will be an emphasis placed on the key role played by carnivalesque violence amid this breaching of medieval genre.

Anti-Noble Violence in *Rauf Coilzean*: ‘To mak me lord of my awin’

The poem opens with Charlemagne riding ‘unto Paris’ for ‘the yule tide’, flanked by ‘prelatis and princis’, ‘dukis and duchepeiris’ (the Twelve Peers) and ‘Barrounis and bacheleiris’, all ‘proudest in pane’ and of ‘mekle pryde’.¹⁵ The scene is set for a Carolingian romance, until ‘that ryall raid ovir the rude mure’ (l. 14). Suddenly, the courtiers become engulfed by ‘ane tempest’ that ‘blew out of the eist stiflie and sture’ (fiercely and strong) and strikes the knights ‘sa feirsleie’ that ‘micht na folk hald na fute on the heich fell’ (ll. 15-19). This passage is permeated with details that would not feel out of place in depicting a military skirmish, its emphasis on the fierceness of the attack and the loss of ground giving the sense that there has been a great battle between the French knights and the distinctly Scottish (or at least distinctly un-Parisian) landscape.¹⁶

In the tempest’s aftermath the court is ‘sperpellit full fer’ until ‘Thair wist na knight of the court quhat way the King raid’ (ll. 26-30). The court has been scattered by this onslaught and the nobles face a catastrophic defeat, with the spectre of death swooping down on the wind: ‘In point thay war to parische, thay proudest men and pure’ (l. 20). By scattering the knights and separating the King from the court, the ‘rude mure’ has symbolically torn the aristocratic social body limb from limb, leaving its decapitated head in the wastes; when the

¹⁵ *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), pp. 161-204 (ll. 4-11). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ It is certainly not an accurate depiction of the flat countryside surrounding Paris. Instead, the mountainous terrain and fierce wind as the ‘deip durandlie draif in mony deip dell’ (l. 17) lends a realistic northern chill to this landscape, which the poem’s contemporary Scottish (and potentially northern English) audience would have certainly recognised as belonging to their own world.

King is ‘cachit fra the court [...] / na body was him about’ (ll. 33-4). Following this separation from their monarch, the remainder of the decapitated social body is left to wander aimlessly and appropriately ‘madlie’ (confused and without thought) amidst this untameable nature:

‘Amang thay myrk mountanis sa madlie thay mer [...] / That ilk ane tuik ane seir way’ (l. 22).

The knights temporarily resemble the wandering figure of the mad ‘wild man’ in the wilderness, abandoning the wider community and each taking their ‘separate way’ to become isolated individuals, ‘completely untutored in the trappings of civilization [...] as he rushes from tree to tree’.¹⁷ To borrow a line from Chrétien’s *Yvain*, in each Knight the external storm seems to move internally, causing ‘such a storm’ to break ‘loose in his brain that he loses his senses’.¹⁸

Rauf Coilzear depicts the potential of the court to metamorphose into their social other when faced with a wild violence that cannot be controlled or contained by the court. The civilised becomes uncivilised, ordered procession becomes chaos, community becomes the individual and the world of the high has been transformed into the world of the low. In this way the nobles’ transformation into wild fools acts as a prelude to the poem’s later King and Commoner carnivalesque themes; it utilises violence to disrupt binary distinctions and blur social differentiation. This violence from the low against the high is based on a fundamentally carnivalesque action that sees the enactment of a ‘downward motion’, a ‘grotesque swing’ and ‘rough debasing gesture’ that takes the sacred and ‘lowers it to earth’, tearing everything down to a base equality and intermingling.¹⁹ The moor has absorbed the court; the courtiers about ‘to parische’ are subsumed, as if into a grave, to re-emerge as

¹⁷ Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 70-71. Also see Penelope B. R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 134-207.

¹⁸ *Yvain*, in *Arthurian Romances*, trans. W. W. Comfort (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1914), pp. 180-269 (p. 216).

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 166-7.

wandering ‘madlie’ wild men, children of nature temporarily severed from civilised social principles, constraints and hierarchical structure.

A sense of social rebellion is also embedded into the language of these opening scenes, even before Rauf’s first appearance, as the highest in society are set against the ‘rude’ moor. This use of ‘rude’ primarily describes the moor’s rough and violent nature but it cannot help but simultaneously invoke the ‘rude’ (that is to say churlish or common) Rauf, who will soon emerge from this moor to re-enact the moor’s carnivalesque disruption and disregard for rank, with his own violence threatening a royal decapitation, both symbolically and physically.²⁰ Indeed, this natural violence allows for Rauf’s own later carnivalesque violence to occur, as Rauf meets Charlemagne with all hierarchy and boundaries of class separation swept away in the wilderness’ tempestuous blast. This death of the old order allows for the rebirth of a new, inverted order, born from this ‘rude mure’.

When Rauf emerges from the storm, the poem emphasises that he is fundamentally bound to this landscape, or more precisely a product of it, in a way that the court are not:

I leid my life in this land with mekle unrufe,
Baith tyde and tyme, in all my travale. (ll. 47-8)

Rauf does not live here with ease but he has been shaped over ‘tyde and tyme’ by ‘this land’ and it is therefore no surprise that he mimics this land’s rough and violent treatment of nobility, who will in turn find ‘mekle unrufe’ (much trouble/disquiet) at Rauf’s own hands. Indeed, Rauf warns Charlemagne during their initial meeting to ‘thank me not ovir airlie, for dreid that we threip’ (l. 79): ‘rude’ violence seems to threaten Charlemagne at every side, whether from unruly nature or unruly ‘carll’, disrupting any sense of aristocratic authority (l. 42). This wild land is impossible for the courtiers to control, navigate or comprehend: ‘In thay wickit wedderis thair wist nane to dwell’ (l. 21). This is, of course, part of the poem’s

²⁰ For both uses of ‘rude’, see *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (up to 1700)*. Available at http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/rude_adj_1 [accessed March 2015]

comedy. These seasoned knights are helpless when torn from the world of romance and pitched into this realistic Scottish landscape. But it also moves beyond this comedic, satiric aspect into serious political deconstruction. The knights are evocatively depicted as ‘proudest in pane’, that is to say in their attire. It is telling that the poem emphasises aristocratic materialistic social signifiers just before the tempest breaks, as such signifiers of hierarchy prove worthless in both the navigation of this landscape and in the knights’ own survival. For a short time, social rank becomes meaningless. As the poem emphasises, these courtiers, dependent on these superficial signifiers, cannot ‘dwell’ here: they ‘hald na fute on the heich fell’ (ll. 19-21). They do not recognise the land and the land does not recognise them. But it also encourages the reader to compare them with Rauf, who can in contrast declare ‘I dwell’ in this landscape and is able to navigate ‘ovir sevin mylis’ of this ‘rude mure’ when the best of Charlemagne’s knights cannot: ‘The carll had cunning weill quhair the gait lay’ (ll. 49-93). Rauf belongs to this ‘rude moor’ and within this world that is situated beyond the court’s authority he has power above those ‘proudest in pane’.

As with the previous King and Commoner bourdes, this imbues Rauf with a sense of carnivalesque inversion, allowing him to appear as a commoner king in this upside-down world in which Charlemagne and his knights are correspondingly bereft of power. During their first meeting Charlemagne remarks that Rauf ‘semis ane nobill fallow’ (l. 54) and on arrival at Rauf’s house this ‘nobill’ appearance is further emphasised as Rauf orders ‘Ane ryall’ fire to be made, ‘capounis of the best’ to be prepared and tells ‘Twa cant knaifis of his awin’ to stable the horses (ll. 109-113). The effect is to bestow upon Rauf the materialistic, superficial markers of nobility that are at odds with his lowly social position and the otherwise specifically ‘hamelie fair’ (l. 112). What is emphasised (as in *John the Reeve*) is both Rauf’s commoner status *and* his noble appearance, a sense of jarring disparity feeding

into the usual carnivalesque King and Commoner sense of social boundaries and hierarchical signifiers collapsing, exposing hierarchical difference as superficial and lacking in meaning.

This social collapse is once again most clearly symbolised in the commoner's feast. The food is presented in what is by now a familiar pattern, with the food ascending through the social orders. Rauf first 'brocht breid to the buird', soon followed by 'braun of ane bair / And the worthyest wyne' (ll. 185-6). This is already better food than would be expected to be found in the home of a 'carll': as the narrator comments in a knowing aside, 'as I wene, thay had aneuch thair' (l. 187). But following Rauf's boasting over his poaching, 'Syne enteris thair daynteis, on deis dicht dayntelie' as carnivalesque excess abounds and limits are breached (l. 189):

Of capounis and cunningis they had plentie,
With wyne at thair will, and eik vennysoun:
Byrdis bakin in breid, the best that may be;
Thus full freschlie thay fure into fusoun. (ll. 207-10)

As before, Rauf's illegal feast delves 'into fusoun' (abundance) to collapse the signifiers of difference between Commoner and King. As Charlemagne declares, 'The King himself hes bene fane / Sum tyme, of sic fair' (ll. 205-6).

This materialistic deconstruction is then furthered by a reversal of their social positions. Rauf crowns himself as the carnival King in this feast; he has 'marschellit' Charlemagne, placing himself at the head of the table and sending 'the cop raik for *my* bennysoun' ('blessing'), ordering 'our gaist' to 'drink thow to *me*' (ll. 184-213, emphasis mine). Rauf casts himself as King and Charlemagne as his subject.²¹ For Bakhtin, the communication of such social reversibility forms the essential radicalism of the unofficial, popular carnival:

²¹ It is also interesting to note that Charlemagne is repeatedly ordered by Rauf to 'Tak my wyfe be the hand in feir' and having been beaten into submission, Charlemagne is eventually sat with 'and matchit that nicht' with Gilyane (ll. 144-184). They are indeed 'matchit', as they are both subservient to Rauf and commanded by him.

The dual image combining praise and abuse seeks to grasp the very moment of this change, the transfer from the old to the new, from death to life. Such an image crowns and uncrowns at the same moment. In the development of class society such a conception of the world can only be expressed in unofficial culture. There is no place for it in the culture of the ruling classes; here praise and abuse are clearly divided and static, for official culture is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which the higher and the lower never merge.²²

It is a carnivalesque inversion of social order with a very specific aim: to usurp medieval hierarchical norms by dismantling the principles upon which that 'static' official culture is based, allowing for the possibility of merger, change and the transference of power. In Rauf's words, it is designed 'To mak me lord of my awin' (l. 129). Rauf orders praise of himself at the expense of the abuse of Charlemagne's authority and the aristocratic conception of the boundaries that form, order and separate the medieval social body.

These radical principles underpin the speech in which Rauf foregrounds the unofficial illegality of his carnival feast:

The carll carpit to the King cumlie and cleir:
 'Schir, the forestaris, forsuith, of this forest,
 Thay have me all at inuy, for dreid of the deir;
 Thay threip that I thring doun of the fattest.
 Thay say, I sall to Paris, thair to compeir
 Befoir our cumlie king, in dule to be drest;
 Sic manassing thay me mak, forsuith, ilk yeir,
 And yit aneuch sall I have for me and ane gest.
 Thairfoir sic as thow seis, spend on, and not spair.' (ll. 194-202)

There is a sense of class warfare here between the 'carll' and 'the King' (here specifically referred to in terms of their social positions), with an emphasis on the violence underpinning their opposition throughout this speech. The foresters are very much presented as the agents of the King, sent to 'menace' his subjects, leaving them in 'dreid' that they will be brought before him 'in dule to be drest'. As in the previous *bourdes* examined, food and the access to

²² Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 166.

it becomes portrayed as a social battleground, while aristocratic power (so reliant on this materialistically defined division) is backed by an explicitly royal violence.

‘And yit’ Rauf still emphasises his own breaching of such hierarchical boundaries and thus his defiance of the King’s laws. Rauf specifically aims to poach ‘the fattest’ ‘deir’ and therefore the fittest for royalty. The royal, restricted ‘vennysoun’ is transformed into a symbol of the hierarchical divides that maintain the existing social body, the King’s second body, and it is this which will be butchered and consumed. It allows this social body to be reborn and reconstituted into a ‘rude’ society that is unfettered by aristocratically enforced materialistic division. Once again, ‘the kitchen and the battle meet and cross each other’ and what is set at the centre of this ‘culinary treatment’ is ‘the grotesque image of the dissected body’.²³ In this context, Rauf’s declaration of ‘Thairfoir sic as thow seis, spend on, and not spair’ sounds like a call to violent revolt as much as to cutlery.

In *Rauf Coilzear*, this violence against the King’s body is not simply symbolic. On two occasions it is also physical, actualising these abstract concepts, and is again designed to enforce a sense of social reversibility. It is worth quoting these two moments of physical violence in full. The first instance occurs when Rauf angrily (‘twa part in tene’) shoves Charlemagne through the door to his hall:

The Coilyear gudlie in feir tuke him be the hand
 And put him befoir him, as ressoun had bene;
 Quhen thay come to the dure, the King begouth to stand,
 To put the Coilyear in befoir maid him to mene.
 He said, ‘Thow art uncourtes; that sall I warrand!’
 He tyt the King by the nek, twa part in tene,
 ‘Gif thow at bidding shuld be boun or obeysand,
 And gif thow of courtasie couth, thow hes forget it clene!
 Now is anis,’ said the Coilyear, ‘kynd aucht to creip,
 Sen ellis thow art unknawin,
 To mak me lord of my awin

²³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 194-7.

Sa mot I thrive, I am thrawin;
Begin we to threip.' (ll. 118-30)

The second instance occurs at the start of the feast and sees Rauf punching the King 'Half the breid of the hall':

'Tak my wyfe be the hand in feir, withowtin let,
And gang begin the buird,' said the Coilyear.
'That war unsemant, forsuih, and thysel unset.'
The King profferit him to gang, and maid ane strange fair.
'Now is twyse,' said the carll, 'me think thow hes forget!'
He leit gyrd to the King, withoutin ony mair,
And hit him under the eir with his richt hand,
 Quhill he stakkerit thair with all
 Half the breid of the hall;
 He faind never of ane fall
 Qhuill he the eird fand. (ll. 144-154)

In both cases this violence is offered as a response to Charlemagne's refusal to obey Rauf, with his beating of the King used to enforce Rauf's rule. Indeed, this moment of commoner violence against the King is imbued with the language of power, focusing on Rauf's 'bidding' and Charlemagne's need to be 'boun' and 'obeysand'. This 'threip' and anger ('I am thrawin') is specifically focused at making Rauf 'lord', while Charlemagne is subject to Rauf's rule and must subserviently 'creip'. This violence continues and enforces the reversal of their positions in this inverted world. In carnivalesque terms, it is simultaneously the King's uncrowning and Rauf's own crowning, the death of the old world and the birth of the new.²⁴ It is also significant that this physical violence is specifically directed against the King's 'nek', or 'under the eir'. In both cases this violence (that crowns Rauf) is specifically aimed at the join between Charlemagne's head and neck, threatening a royal decapitation amid Charlemagne's violent uncrowning. It is a moment that recalls the earlier symbolic

²⁴ As Bakhtin argues, 'destruction and uncrowning are related to birth and renewal. The death of the old is linked with regeneration; all the images are connected with the contradictory oneness of the dying and reborn world'. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 217.

decapitation of the social body during the storm, while also capturing the symbolic actions of the feast, as regards the culinary rending, breaching and devouring of the social body.

In many ways, these actions are all part of the same action: the carnival beating of the social body and the (mock) King's body, which formed an essential part of the medieval carnival.²⁵ But it also looks beyond ritual to expose and politically deconstruct the fabric of power and the violence that maintains it. It is a reflection of the King's own rule; his royal authority is maintained by the foresters' violence, with the potential threat of execution looming in the shadows for those commoners who dare to disobey. Rauf engages with this principle and turns it on its head, setting it against the courtiers who rely on it and using their own violent principles to subdue and rule them. It is no coincidence that following Rauf's second blow, Charlemagne is so 'stonischit at this straik' that he resolves that there 'Is nane so gude as leif of and mak na mair stryfe' and thereafter does Rauf's 'bidding' without further dissent (ll. 172-6). The King's attempts to impose his own authority are killed in this blow, crowning Rauf undisputed ruler of his 'awin'.

Along with this focus on Rauf beating his guest during the feast, there is also an initially incongruous-seeming focus on 'courtesy' (ll. 122, 125, 159, 163, 171). It would have been easy for the poet to write Rauf's courtesy as comic, based upon his blundering misunderstanding of romance conventions of courtesy. However, as Ad Putter has argued, Rauf repeatedly displays an understanding of medieval etiquette and courtesy books, whether providing for his guest or refraining from asking his guest's name until after supper.²⁶ Even during his beating of Charlemagne, Rauf responds to the King's failure of proper courtesy. As Stephen Shepherd has observed, the poet's emphasis on Charlemagne's 'strange fair' and on Rauf being reasonable ('as ressoun had bene') tellingly implies that 'the narrator sides

²⁵ See Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 197-9.

²⁶ Ad Putter, 'Ralph the Collier', in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 145-58 (pp. 151-55).

with Rauf in his various protests against discourteous conduct.²⁷ Through Rauf's emphasis on his own reasonable behaviour, the courtier's reactions appear unreasonable by contrast. Wright builds on Shepherd's study to note the frequency with which the poet repeats 'ressoun' throughout *Rauf Coilzear* (ll. 84, 119, 214, 378, 884, 252, 758). Wright argues that this repetition of 'ressoun' is used by the poem to articulate a 'global ideal of fair play', an idea of courtesy which 'is imagined as a set of social norms relevant to all social strata' that ultimately 'enables an understanding of class relations in terms of reciprocity rather than hierarchy':

Rauf [...] really does believe himself to be in possession of the very courtesy his highborn guest astonishingly lacks. This is funny, of course, but points to something serious: the proposition that courtesy is not simply whatever Charlemagne says it is, that the ruling class has no automatic prerogative to dictate the terms of its relationship to those below.²⁸

Wright offers a comparison between Rauf's courtesy and the courtesy displayed by the menacing tester of the Gawain romances (especially *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), concluding that the poet of *Rauf Coilzear* engages with the depictions of courtesy expressed in these romances but then pushes, or subverts them by delivering a 'more radical and far reaching critique' that challenges 'the customary complicity of courtesy with hierarchy and privilege'.²⁹ This dismantling and inversion of any class associations with courtesy can be seen in the poem's description of the 'simpill' Rauf who has dominance over the 'unknawin' (uncouth) and 'uncourtes' 'courteir' (ll. 163-4). These contradictory descriptions purposefully contort expected portrayals, turning conventional class perceptions on their head. As such, Rauf's engagement with aristocratic concepts of courtesy joins his engagement with aristocratic food and violence; each concept

²⁷ S. H. A. Shepherd, "'Of thy glitterand gyde haue I na gle": *The Taill of Rauf Coilzear*', in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 228 (1991), 284-98 (p. 288).

²⁸ Wright, 'Churl's Courtesy', pp. 658-9.

²⁹ Wright, 'Churl's Courtesy', p. 658.

is wrestled from the sole domain of the aristocracy, enabling a deconstruction, blending and intermingling of hierarchy that combines to offer a wide-ranging social critique.

Throughout this first part of *Rauf Coilzear* the poem repeatedly uses aristocratic principles in order to subvert that same aristocracy, using that which would support social separation to instead enforce a sense of inversion set around the carnivalesque feast. This concept is also all-important in understanding the second half of the poem, as Rauf proceeds to move into and interact with a distinctly romance world, allowing the poem to use its own generic hybridity to extend the reach of its own playful, carnivalesque radicalism.

Roland and Rauf: 'I sall raise thy ryall array'

The confrontation between Rauf and Roland takes up a remarkably large proportion of *Rauf Coilzear*, with almost a quarter of the poem devoted to it. Yet it has received surprisingly little attention from the few essays examining the text. Superficially, it appears to be a comic scene, in which Rauf insists on travelling to Paris to see 'Wymond of the Wardrop' (the name adopted by the disguised Charlemagne), while Roland instead insists that Rauf will be escorted by him to the King, as Charlemagne has ordered. The two resultantly argue at cross purposes, despite having the same goal in mind. However, there is a serious point being made beneath the comedy.

Roland clearly expects a social inferior to obey, his words steeped in the same language of power that Rauf earlier utilised against Charlemagne. Roland informs Rauf that he is 'boun [...] to ga' (l. 423) and upon Rauf's refusal declares:

'Do way,' said Schir Rolland, 'me think thow art not wise,
I red thow at bidding be, be all that we have sworne;
And call thow it na scorning, but do as I the ken,

Sen thow has hard mine intent:
It is the Kingis commandement. (ll. 434-8)

Roland's focus on 'all that we have sworne' to support his authority stresses social obligation, as does his invocation of 'the Kingis commandement' and his use of 'bound' and 'bidding'. Rauf is presented as being literally tied up by such obligation, without any option other than to 'at bidding be' when ordered by his social superiors to 'do as I the ken'. This impression is maintained through a focus on social disparity in their opening exchanges. As Shepherd has observed, they are presented as 'Coilyear' and 'Knicht' (ll. 428-9), despite the alliterative potentials in Rauf and Roland.³⁰ But this emphasis on social difference can also be found in the contrast between Roland's 'ryall array' (l. 480) and Rauf's own 'foull clais' (l. 432) and the detailed description of Roland's armour (ll. 454-79) set against Rauf's 'auld buklair' and 'roustie brand' (ll. 517-8). Even Rauf appears to be caught up in this display of class superiority, spending thirty lines examining Roland's armour in admiration ('Rauf rusit in his hart of that ryall thing / "He is the gayest in geir that ever on ground glaid"' (ll. 481-2)), while their meeting sees him 'kneillit' in seeming subservience to Roland (l. 421). It briefly appears as though this King and Commoner tale has been halted and dazzled by this display of romance power and authority.

Yet this focus on their social difference only works to emphasise the extent of Roland's eventual failure. Things could not go much worse for Roland, as he leaves frustrated with his will broken, only for dishonour to fall on him upon his return to Charlemagne's court. The way Rauf achieves this is to put much of what we have already seen into practice. Rauf rebels against the expected social order and the bind of hierarchical obligation that Roland invokes, refusing to obey simply on the grounds of superficial class difference. Rauf instead engages Roland on aristocratic and romance ideals of 'courtasie':

³⁰ Shepherd, "'Of thy glitterand gyde haue I na gle'", p. 286.

Schir Knicht, it is na courtasie commounis to scorne:
 [...] For to towsill me or tit me, thocht foull be my clais,
 Or I be dantit on sic wyse, my lyfe salbe lorne.’ (ll. 429-433)³¹

Rauf ‘kneillit’ ‘Courtesly’ (l. 421) to Roland and expects the same ‘courtasie’ to be returned to him. As Shepherd notes, ‘beneath the immediate comic patina lies a shrewd observation of the demise of courtesy attending social prejudice.’³² Rauf demands to be treated as an equal on these grounds, again wrestling these concepts from the sole domain of the aristocracy, interacting with them in a way that is independent of superficial hierarchical difference. Rauf is self-consciously becoming a hybrid figure, at once bourde commoner and romance knight. When Roland subsequently fails to be courteous, Rauf is then able to criticise him on these grounds, again creating an inversion of social expectation, presenting a ‘Coilyear’ as courteous, while the ‘Knicht’ possesses ‘na courtasie’.

This same process can be seen at the foundation of their disagreement, as they invoke the medieval concept of ‘truth’:

‘Thair is mony carll in the countrie thow may nocht ken;
 I sall hald that I have hecht, bot I be hard set,
 To Wymond of the Wardrop, I wait full weill quhen.’
 ‘Sa thrive I,’ said Rolland, ‘it is mine intent
 That nouthur to Wymond nor Will
 Thow sald hald nor hecht till,
 Quhill I have brocht the to fulfill
 The Kingis commandment.’ (ll. 446-53)

Both Rauf and Roland are here drawing on the legalistic sense of truth ‘as promise, a pledge of loyalty, a covenant’, as well as on the ethical sense of truth as ‘honour’.³³ Rauf focuses on what he has ‘hecht’ (‘promised’) to ‘Wymond of the Wardrop’ and the importance of keeping his own pledge ‘as I am trew’ (l. 547). Indeed, the above is itself a repetition and emphasis of

³¹ ‘Sir Knight, it is not courteous to scorn the commons, to handle me roughly or drag me off, though my clothes be foul, before I could be daunted in such a way, my life would be lost.’

³² Shepherd, “‘Of thy glitterand gyde haue I na gle’”, p. 286.

³³ Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 9.

his earlier vow to the incognito Charlemagne of ‘That I have said, I sall hald, and that I tell the plane’ (l. 315). By engaging with these chivalric concepts, Rauf creates a resemblance to Roland’s own pledge, insisting on the equality of his own word.

It is this engagement as an equal that proves troubling to Roland and infuses their exchange with class conflict. Roland repeatedly constructs this system of promises and pledges in terms of hierarchy and a tool of aristocratic command, using the ‘Kingis commandment’ or ‘all that we have sworne’ to emphasise a sense of community and order. In this way Roland seems to insist that there is a social hierarchy present in this abstract world of pledges. Roland even seems to refute and mock Rauf’s ability as a commoner to engage with such lofty concepts at all:

it is mine intent
That nouthur to Wymond nor Will
Thow sald hald nor hecht. (ll. 449-51)

By contrast, Rauf repeatedly rejects Roland’s insistence on hierarchical bonds and difference holding dominance: ‘Thair is mony carll in the countrie thow may nocht ken’ (l. 446).

Whether it forces Roland to break his word, or defies the ‘Kingis commandment’, Rauf insists above all that he must maintain his own individual word and honour, removing it from any sense of communal obligation. As such, it is a radical, class-infused insistence of Averagus’ principle in *The Franklin’s Tale* that ‘Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe’.³⁴ Their impasse ultimately hinges on Rauf’s continuing refusal to acknowledge social order, intermingling high and low in a rejection of social differentiation and an enforcement of carnivalesque principles.

A hint of this rebellious, political context can be seen in Rauf’s violent escalation of their debate, amid Roland’s continuing refusal to recognise him on equal grounds:

³⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Franklin’s Tale*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 178-89 (l. 1479).

And thow mat me ony mair, cum efter quhat sa may,
 Thow and I sall dyntis deill, quhill ane of us be deid,
 For the deidis thow hes me done upon this day.'
 [...] 'Bot gif thow raik out of my renk, full raith sall thow rew,
 Or, be the Rude, I sall rais thy ryall array,
 Thought thy body be braissit in that bricht hew,
 Thow salbe fundin als febil of thy bone fay.' (ll. 511-52)

Rauf's challenge seems fully aware of the rebellious sense of class warfare that lies beneath it, as his churlish 'roustie brand' threatens to 'rais thy ryall array'. Indeed, Rauf's emphasis that beneath his 'ryall array' Roland 'salbe fudin als febil if thy bone fay' voices his continuing refusal to recognise rank as being anything more than superficial covering: beneath their 'bricht hew' the 'proudest in pane' have a body as 'febil' as any other. But Rauf takes this rebellious action still further, calling after Roland and challenging him to a duel:

'Be Christ!' said the Coilyear, 'that war ane foull scorn,
 That thow suld chaip, bot I the knew, that is sa schynand;
 For thow seis my weidis ar auld and all toworne,
 Thow trowis nathing thir tallis that I am telland.
 Bring na beirnis us by, bot as we war borne,
 And thir blonkis that us beiris; thairto I mak ane band,
 That I sall meit the heir upon this mure tomorne,
 Gif I be haldin in heill – and thairto my hand –
 Sen that we have no laiser at this tyme to ta. (ll. 558-66)

Rauf formally challenges Roland to single combat, as if Rauf was a fellow knight. Again violence is used to allow a commoner to interact with an aristocratic, romance world, creating a sense of equality, resemblance and forcing a carnivalesque collapse of hierarchical difference.

Roland rides off without response, seemingly still rejecting Rauf's ability to engage with chivalric codes. However, Roland's failure to recognise Rauf as a rival knight sees him shamed by Charlemagne on his return to the court. Charlemagne is 'engrevit' on two counts (l. 600): Roland's failure as a vassal to do as 'I the bad' neglects and undermines the authority of the 'Kingis commandment' (l. 596), but the poem communicates that what is

equally or even more important is Roland's failure to recognise the validity of Rauf's violent challenge. Charlemagne takes Rauf's challenge seriously, emphasising that Roland 'durst not' meet Rauf in battle and was so 'dantit' that he fled the field (l. 597). In failing to recognise Rauf as a knight engaging in chivalric concepts, Roland failed to act like a knight himself in terms of his own chivalry and honour. As a result of Rauf's violence and Roland's class prejudices, Roland's reputation and position is undermined. It is certainly a long way from *The Song of Roland's* depiction of a hero who would rather see himself and Charlemagne's rear guard slaughtered than risk his 'good name' or see 'the fair land of France [...] fall into disrepute':

I prefer to die than to suffer such shame;
For the fine blows we strike the emperor loves us all the more.³⁵

As Roland claims when hurrying 'gat furth glaid' from the King's sight, 'I suld have maid [Rauf] in the stour to be full hard stad' (ll. 601-3). He should have met violence with violence to protect both his name and the court's honour. If violence proves values, then this text can invert and mangle *The Song of Roland* to declare that 'The [courtiers] are wrong and the [commons] are right.'³⁶

In his challenge Rauf completes the steady inversion that has been underpinning their entire quarrel. Even before being knighted, Rauf begins to resemble a romance knight at the expense of Roland. As Margaret Kissam Morris argues:

Leaving their respective positions on the socioeconomic scale aside for a moment, this narrative [...] puts Rauf in the position of many romance heroes who persist in upholding their word in the face of a hostile challenger.³⁷

As a result of his violent threats and refusal to obey his social superiors (very much generic markers of the King and Commoner bourdes), Rauf is able to hold his 'trouthe' and appears

³⁵ *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glyn Burgess (London: Penguin, 1990), ll. 1054-92.

³⁶ *The Song of Roland*, l. 1015.

³⁷ Morris, 'Generic Oxymoron', p. 144.

‘wicht’ (‘valiant’), allowing him to be made a romance, Carolingian ‘knight’ who can ‘Tak keip to this [chivalric] ordour’ (ll. 754-5). By contrast, Roland displays a lack of courtesy, appears cowardly and breaks his pledge to the King, and so is resultantly presented as a failed knight who showed a lack of valour. The expected positions of the churlish ‘Coilyear’ and noble romance ‘Knight’ have been turned upside down by Rauf’s carnivalesque-infused violence. Social boundaries again collapse as low turns to high and high turns to low, with this carnivalesque reversibility and the disruption of static official culture being all important. This encounter is a wonderfully satiric and distinctly rebellious moment, utilising the topsy-turvy King and Commoner motifs in a new romance context, whereby they can interact with and subvert romance literary norms to break down both social and literary distinctions.

The ‘Carll Knight’ and the Saracen: ‘to threip is my thocht’

Despite his triumph over Roland, Rauf’s knighthood is far from celebratory or comfortable. His knighthood comes while ‘Thir Lordis leuch upon loft’ then ‘bad have him to hing’ for having the King ‘set at sa licht’ (ll. 739-41). A new life as a knight may come from this threatened death but Rauf’s position remains uncertain. Charlemagne’s command to ‘Tak keip to this ordour’ hints towards Rauf’s containment within a social order that he has persistently resisted and Rauf’s own potential joy over his promotion is instead countered by his claim ‘of thy glitterand gyde have I na gle’ (l. 717). At the same time, the King’s promise that Rauf will receive ‘the nixt vacant, be ressonabill richt’ (l. 758) also offers an unusual sense of deferral and uncertainty to his reward. Elizabeth Walsh claims that Rauf’s reward and title resultantly mean that ‘Now he belongs’.³⁸ However, this is not quite true, or at least raises the question, ‘to what does he belong?’ Rauf is presented as not quite a knight, nor

³⁸ Elizabeth Walsh, ‘Upward Bound: The Sociopolitical Significance of the King-in-Disguise Motif’, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 26.1 (1991), 156-63 (p. 161).

quite a commoner; he is suspended within a social void. In his own words, he has been made a ‘carll knicht’ (l. 788). He now embodies a class rupture but also does not belong anywhere. Rauf’s concern over his social acceptance is clear in his anxiety over the court laughter, which is used (as with *King Edward and the Shepherd*) to create a sense of aristocratic superiority, by making the commoner a comedic figure who emphasises rather than collapses social boundaries:

Sall never lord lauch on loft, quhill my lyfe may lest,
That I for liddernes suld leif, and levand besyde. (ll. 784-5)

His primary concern remains to be accepted as an equal, silencing the court’s laughter and proving his own worth as a knight. In this way *Rauf Coilzear* presents the concerns over containment that were seen in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, but then moves beyond the usual King and Commoner plot to provide a potential escape from this uneasy dilemma. Rauf’s solution, as ever, is to use physical violence to prove his worth and force his inclusion in defiance of class, and so he sets off to find and challenge Roland, ‘yone busteous beirne that boistit me to byde’ (l. 781). However, what emerges in the final episode is a surreal carnivalesque blending and intermingling that does not aim to fortify Rauf’s position so much as to further confuse the already uncertain social boundaries.

This increasing sense of collapse occurs as the poem stretches its sense of hybridity by taking this final episode directly from the world of romance. This end section distinctly resembles the romance *Otuel* (c. 1330), in which a Saracen rides to Charlemagne’s Parisian court with a challenge, fights Roland, converts to Christianity and marries Charlemagne’s daughter.³⁹ In *Rauf Coilzear*, ‘the Sarasine’ Magog brings Charlemagne a ‘bodword’ that the Saracens will ‘at the nixt springis [...] / Chace Charlis [...] fer out of France’ (ll. 847-903). He then fights Rauf and Roland, converts to Christianity and marries Dame Jane of Anjou. This

³⁹ *The Romance of Otuel*, in *The Romances of Rouland and Vernagu, and Otuel: From the Auchinleck Manuscript*, ed. William B. D. D. Turnbull (Edinburgh: Alex Lawrie, 1836), pp. 33-84.

can again be read in terms of Rauf's commoner violence enabling him to further penetrate and engage with a romance world. But it is further complicated by the *Rauf Coilzear* poet intentionally using an episode from romance that both complements and confuses Rauf's earlier role of a romance-esque menacing tester to further push the usual King and Commoner sense of carnival collapse of difference.

Having arrived at the same place and hour that he had previously met Roland, Rauf sees 'Ane knicht on ane cameill come cantly at hand', who he takes to be Roland and so challenges to a duel: 'And in the rowme of ane renk in fewtir kest he' (ll. 804-809). This inability to see difference is comic but it also speaks of the issues that lie beneath this lack of recognition. Magog is presented as a challenge to the court from the wilderness and so he cannot help but resemble Rauf. This resemblance is only further emphasised by Magog's declaration of 'to threip is my thocht' (l. 912), thereby repeating Rauf's original claim to Charlemagne in the wilderness (l. 130). This resemblance only seems further emphasised when Magog claims kinship with those who cause trouble for Charlemagne's court: 'my cusingis ar thay' (l. 913).

This similarity is made more complex by Rauf coming from the court in 'ryall array', the exact description given to Roland during Rauf and Roland's previous encounter (l. 779). Indeed, it is an intentional repetition of that previous encounter, with Rauf arriving 'neir time of day that he had thair bene', to again 'hald that he had hecht' (ll. 798-9). But, significantly, Rauf now resembles Roland in his outward signifiers and is fighting for the court against wilderness rebellion. In this way the poem dramatises Rauf's containment by the court. Rauf is here fighting an aspect of himself. Indeed, Rauf and Magog each mirror the other as they fight, with their individual actions persistently written as one single action. 'Thay' or 'thair' is repeated twenty-three times in less than thirty lines during their initial skirmish (ll. 813-42): they charge at the same time, their spears splinter at the same time, their horses die at the

same time, and they draw their ‘twa swordis [...] togidder’ and ‘hewit thay togiddir’ (ll. 820-4). They even speak with the same voice (‘Yarne efter yeilding!’ on ilk syde thay call’ (l. 837)) and are presented as deadlocked until one or the other dies: ‘Thair was na girth on the ground, quhill ane gaif the gaist’ (l. 836). One aspect of Rauf must seemingly die in this encounter.

This is complicated further still by Rauf mistaking Magog for Roland. This is in part comic, as Magog’s ‘cameill’ makes difference appear comically obvious to the reader. But all Rauf recognises is that Magog is another knight from a romance world and thus resembles, or is equivalent to, Roland. Magog is then both Rauf and Roland, the court and the *other*, crushed together in this world of collapsing differences. Magog’s collapse of difference between the ‘rude’ Rauf and Roland’s ‘ryall array’ is perfectly captured in the description of ‘the rude Sarasine in ryall array’ (l. 935); he possesses the essence of both, embodying the core descriptions previously assigned to emphasising Rauf and Roland’s central differences. What is presented in this fight is the collapse of difference and essential reversibility of roles, as each of these three characters becomes the other in a surreal carnivalesque intermingling. Magog is the *other* onto which Rauf and Roland’s class differences are displaced and collapsed.

Magog’s subsequent absorption into the court resembles Rauf’s own absorption and signals the end of Rauf and Roland’s hostility, with all three becoming ‘freindis to thair lyfis end’ (l. 950). It is the death of difference, with the romance knight and the *other*, in the forms of the Saracen tester and King and Commoner Collier, united on one equal plane. Rauf is well rewarded, despite his previous disdain for the court’s wealth, and is eventually made ‘the Marschell of France’ (l. 962). Yet, there is still room for a hint of anxiety around Rauf’s containment. Rauf is noticeably silent at the end of the poem. His last and distinctly ominous words are ‘ane of us sall never hine / Undeid in this place’, spoken to Magog as he is locked

in battle with his menacing tester double, just before ‘the blude of his browis brest out abufe’ (ll. 854-859). If his values and equality were proved through violence, then it is conspicuous that once violence is ended and peace is declared that Rauf is silenced and his disruption of boundaries is ended. He loses his voice at precisely the point at which he becomes a fully established romance knight and so ceases to be a more troubling hybrid, carnival figure.

Rauf Coilzear utilises generic hybridity to further the earlier carnivalesque elements of the King and Commoner bourdes. The poem sees Rauf repeatedly engage with the narrative’s romance setting and concepts and blend them with a carnivalesque violence that always forces an inversion or intermingling. Concepts of honour and courtesy are removed from the sole domain of the aristocratic, romance characters, as Rauf utilises commoner violence in order to forcibly engage with appropriate these concepts. In doing so he repeatedly collapses the difference between Commoner and King, Commoner and Knight, Knight and Saracen, bourde and romance.

A Gest of Robyn Hode: Introduction

The second half of the fifteenth century saw the King and Commoner tradition not only encroaching into the court of romance but also into the woods of its literary neighbour, the folktale world of Robin Hood. The King and Commoner and Robin Hood traditions flourished alongside each other in the fifteenth century and share a clear association. Indeed, both of the fifteenth-century Robin Hood ballads/bourdes that survive in manuscript form are recorded with King and Commoner bourdes: *Robin Hood and the Monk* appears with *King Edward and the Shepherd* in Cambridge University manuscript Ff.5.48, while *Robin Hood and the Potter* is recorded with *The King and the Barker* in Cambridge Ee.4.35. Similarly, *John the Reeve* and *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* appear alongside six Robin

Hood ballads (including the potentially fifteenth-century *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*) in Thomas Percy's folio, while Samuel Pepys placed *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* (and the King and Commoner related ballads *The King and Northern Man* and *The Old Abbot and King Olfrey/King John and the Abbot of Canterbury*) alongside Robin Hood ballads in his own ballad collection.⁴⁰

This persistent association is perhaps not surprising, given that both traditions were evidentially popular in the fifteenth century, are written in much the same form, and tell of forest-dwelling, trickster commoners who poach the monarch's deer. Moreover, both sets of bourdes are linked to the folk carnival. As has been argued, the 'lord of misrule' feast forms the central focus of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner bourdes, while Robin Hood often fulfilled the role of the 'lord of misrule' during fifteenth-century summer carnivals.⁴¹ Furthermore, both traditions were linked to a degree with fifteenth-century popular politics. While the fifteenth-century Robin Hood bourdes do not contain the overt political complaints of their King and Commoner counterparts, they still possess a love of inversion and display an intrinsic resistance to authority figures, portraying the agents of law and church as embodiments of falsehood and the outlaws as custodians of truth (as with the King and Commoner bourdes, this contains the medieval concept of the 'world turned upside-down').

This link between the Robin Hood material and commoner rebellion was displayed in several

⁴⁰ *The King and Northern Man* is a comic tale printed several times throughout the seventeenth century. While different versions contain variations of the plot, it generally details a farmer whose land is claimed by a corrupt lawyer. The farmer walks to Windsor Castle, where he demands that the nonplussed porter let him see the King. The farmer is eventually granted an injunction by the King, forcing the lawyer to return the land and pay the farmer one hundred pounds in compensation. The farmer is then treated to a royal feast before returning home. *The Old Abbot and King Olfrey* and *King John and the Abbot of Canterbury* are variants on a ballad (also known as *King John and the Bishop*) in which the King hears of an Abbot's excessive goods and gives the Abbot three weeks to answer three questions, threatening to behead the Abbot if he fails. The Abbot fails to discover the answers in the allotted time but amid his despair he meets a shepherd who agrees to go to the court disguised as the Abbot. The shepherd proceeds to answer all three of the King's questions, gains the Abbot's pardon, and after revealing his true identity is made abbot himself by the King. *The King and Northern Man*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 124. *The Old Abbot and King Olfrey*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 127. *King John and the Abbot of Canterbury*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 128.

⁴¹ See David Wiles, *The Early Plays of Robin Hood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 7-19.

fifteenth and sixteenth-century commoner riots: one of which saw a group of Norfolk labourers block the highway in 1441 with the intention of murdering Sir Geoffrey Harsyk, while singing ‘We arn Robynhodesmen, war, war, war.’⁴² Given these similarities and literary kinship, it is perhaps not surprising that these two traditions would eventually combine, as they do in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*.

As with *Rauf Coilzear*, no manuscript copy of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* survives, with the earliest versions appearing in printed editions from 1495.⁴³ The *Gest* is the longest of the surviving Middle English Robin Hood texts, standing at 1824 lines in length and spanning eight ‘fyttes.’ Stephen Knight has convincingly argued that the *Gest* is probably a compilation, or ‘reworking’ of pre-existing Robin Hood tales, with the last of these episodes featuring a recognisably King and Commoner plot.⁴⁴ In fyfte seven, King Edward enters the forest disguised as an abbot, where he meets the yeoman Robin Hood and his band of outlaws. He is subsequently treated by Robin to a feast of poached deer, before revealing his identity, pardoning Robin and his men, and giving Robin a position in the court. There are some important alterations, yet the King and Commoner plot is nonetheless undeniably present with its basic structure intact.

The focus of this section will be to examine the ways in which the seventh and eighth fyttes of the *Gest* persistently invert the King’s commands while fashioning Robin Hood as a monarch, thus placing it ideologically very much in step with the rest of the carnivalesque fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition. A central part of this will focus on an examination of the importance of physical violence in presenting and then collapsing conventional hierarchy, culminating in the physical beating of the King. This study will also

⁴² For details on this and other Robin Hood rioters, see Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 8.

⁴³ See Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Contexts and Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 97-9.

⁴⁴ Knight, *Mythic Biography*, p. 24-5.

aim to challenge a prevailing critical perception pertaining to this section of the *Gest*, namely that despite his resistance of ‘the corrupt church and the power of the sheriff’, and the *Gest*’s own resistance of gentrification, Robin is nonetheless portrayed as being ‘ultimately loyal to the king’.⁴⁵

Carnival Beatings in Robin’s Forest: ‘Smyte on boldely’

Fyttes seven and eight of the *Gest* are repeatedly infused with a carnivalesque sense of inversion and social reversibility. On their initial meeting in the forest, the disguised Edward presents Robin with a royal summons:

But well the greteth Edwarde, our kyng,
And sent to the his seale,
And byddeth the com to Notyngham,
Both to mete and mele.⁴⁶

Despite Robin’s enthusiastic claim to ‘love no man in the worlde / So well as I do my kyng’, he instead insists that the disguised Edward ‘shalt dyne with me’ (ll. 1541-6). The tale abruptly shifts from an official feast in the court to an unofficial feast of the King’s illegally poached deer, from an allowed feast that enforces hierarchy to a carnivalesque feast that resists and defies social, legal boundaries:

Anone before our kyng was set
The fatte venyson,
The good whyte brede, the good rede wyne.
And therto the fyne ale and browne. (ll. 1569-72)

As is usual in the King and Commoner tradition, this unofficial feast is noticeably aristocratic, reaching to the King’s own table with the ‘fatte venyson’.⁴⁷ The King’s authority

⁴⁵ Knight, *Mythic Biography*, pp. 13, 30.

⁴⁶ *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 80-148 (ll. 1533-6). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

and hierarchical difference is publicly defied through celebratory consumption of the markers of aristocracy and class separation. The *Gest* emphasises that this is done to invite the King's gaze into this world, so that Edward can 'se what lyfe we lede / Or thou hens wende; / Than thou may enfourme our kynge' (ll. 1577-9). In doing so, it explicitly sends a personal challenge to the King: despite the awareness of a proto-panoptical gaze, Robin refuses to curb his illegal poaching of the King's own deer.

This passage also serves to remind the reader that the King is already informed of Robin's activities. Fytte seven opens with the King wandering 'All the compasse of Lancasshyre' in a search for his deer:

He went both ferre and nere,
 Tyll he came to Plomton Parke;
 He faylyd many of his dere.
 That bare ony goo horne.

The kynge was wonder wroth withall,
 And swore by the Trynyté,
 I wolde I had Robyn Hode,
 With eyen I myght hym se. (ll. 1425-36)

Exactly how 'wonder wroth' Edward is can be deduced from his desire to 'smyte of the [...] hede' of 'Syr Rycharde at the Le' who had merely aided Robin's most recent escape from the Sheriff (ll. 1437-40), suggesting that decapitation would be the minimal punishment awaiting Robin himself. There is a clear sense here of the class antagonism surrounding poaching, which is an intriguing focus given the wider narrative. No mention is made, for instance, of Robin's recent murder of the Sheriff in relation to the King's wrath. Poaching is seen as the more important issue. Whereas the Sheriff's murder is an attack on the agents of the King's authority, poaching is viewed here as a direct attack on Edward's social, aristocratic right and

⁴⁷ An earlier forest feast in the *Gest* is also noticeably lifted from the standard King and Commoner unofficial feast, with its focus on Robin Hood possessing distinctly aristocratic 'wyne', 'dere', 'Swannes and fessautes' and 'foules' (ll. 125-32).

on his personal authority.⁴⁸ Edward's desire for violent revenge emphasises (as in the previous King and Commoner *bourdes*) access to food as a class-infused battleground, rendering Robin's declaration that his poached feast is put on 'For the love of my kynge' both problematic and deeply ironic (l. 1547).

This sense of class warfare is again emphasised during the poached feast when Robin and his men grab their bows:

Up they sterte all in hast,
 Theyr bowes were smartly bent;
 Our kynge was never so sore agast,
 He wende to have be shente. (ll. 1581-4)

The *Gest*, albeit briefly, presents a very real anxiety of royal assassination. This passage is not needed for the narrative, its sole purpose being to create a sudden shock and voice the underlying anxieties in the narrative. The violent rending of the principles that bind the social body briefly threaten to overspill into physical violence aimed at the King's body, again emphasising the illegal banquet as a site of class-infused uprising. This sudden fear of execution also harks back to the King's initial desire to execute Robin. It highlights the potential reversibility of social positions and authority that forms the basis of the carnival, disrupting the fixed and static norms of official culture.

This reversibility is, as ever, presented through the distinctly aristocratic nature of the feast itself, but it can also be observed in the wider presentation of Robin as royal 'lord of misrule' during the King's visit. Having been invited to dine in the forest, Edward is struck by the outlaw's obedience and deference to Robin:

All they kneled on theyr kne,

⁴⁸ As regards Robin's execution of the Sherriff, it is worth noting that Robin first addresses the Sheriff with the words 'Of some tidings of oure kinge / I wolde fayne here of the', then shoots him before any answer can be made (ll. 1379-80). Robin's request for tidings remains unanswered because they are unimportant. The narrative is instead working to implant into the tale issues of opposing authorities, looking beyond the Sheriff as a corrupt agent of authority to emphasise Robin and Edward as direct rivals, with a distinct sense of violent class warfare bubbling beneath the surface of this text.

Full fayre before Robyn;
 The kynge sayd hym selfe untyll,
 And swore by Saynt Austyn,

‘Here is a wonder semely syght;
 Me thynketh, by Goddes pyne,
 His men are more at his byddyng
 Then my men be at myn.’ (ll. 1557-64)

That Edward can make the comparison between himself and the outlaw Robin speaks volumes as to Robin’s royal presentation, transforming the forest into a second, inverted court, beyond the margins of the law and reach of royal authority. The servile behaviour of Robin’s men is out of context for the other fifteenth-century Robin Hood *bourdes*, in which Robin is specifically a leader by consent and will offer up his position following any dissent.⁴⁹ However, the *Gest*’s more regal presentation of Robin is perfectly in keeping with the carnival king, ‘lord of misrule’ of King and Commoner *bourdes*. Even if a clear hierarchy is still present in Robin’s carnival ‘lord of misrule’ court, it is still specifically presented as a more willing, consensual one than Edward is used to in his own court. As Edward declares, ‘His men are more at his byddyng / Then my men be at myn’. Perhaps this is because Robin’s carnival court still removes class restriction: all yeomen are here equal to Edward’s lords and will breach medieval sumptuary laws to obtain the food otherwise reserved for the aristocrats. There is a different basis to the system, with the carnival rule being based on intermingling and collapse, rather than restriction.

But, as with *Rauf Coilzear*, reversibility and authority are most clearly articulated in the *Gest* through the use of violence. King Edward’s true identity is revealed to the outlaws as a result of a buffeting game, in which they shoot at targets and whoever ‘fayleth’ must ‘yelde [...] to his mayster’ and ‘bere a buffet on his hede’ (ll. 1591-7). There can already be seen here a focus on the language of power and hierarchy beneath this game’s violence in the

⁴⁹ See *Robin Hood and the Monk*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 31-56 (ll. 311-14).

use of ‘yelde’ and ‘mayster’. The order in which they are buffeted then proceeds to establish a clear hierarchical order. ‘Lytell Johan and good Scathelocke’ are ‘smote [...] full sore’ by Robin after missing the mark, emphasising their hierarchical place beneath Robin, but when Robin misses there is initially some uncertainty as to who he should ‘yelde’ to and be buffeted by (ll. 1605-8). Robin insists on the disguised Edward buffeting him, despite Edward’s reluctance on the grounds that ‘It falleth not for myn ordre’ – referring to the religious order appropriate for his abbot disguise, yet simultaneously appropriate in terms of ‘social order’ given the hierarchical order being established by the game (l. 1621). Ignoring this objection, Robin tells Edward to ‘Smyte on boldely’ and as a direct result of the ‘pith in [Edward’s] arme’, ‘Robyn behelde our comly kynge [...] / And kneled downe in that place’ (ll. 1625-40):

My lorde the kynge of Englonde,
Now I knowe you well. (ll. 1643-4)

Social recognition and the King’s authority are directly established through violence. This game utilises violence to set out a clear hierarchical ‘ordre’, where the outlaws ‘yelde’ to their ‘mayster’ Robin Hood, and Robin in turn yields to his ‘lorde the kynge of Englonde’. Resultantly, the King is shown deference and is able to set out his commands with a conservative order established.

However, once physical violence has been used to establish this social order, the *Gest* works to invert and collapse this order through this same violence. Having revealed his identity, the King commands that Robin:

leve the grene wode,
And all thy company,

And come home, syr, to my courte,
And there dwell with me. (ll. 1655-8)

The condition for their pardon is that Robin will become one of Edward's men, contained and fixed beneath him in a static hierarchy. Yet, as soon as this is established, Robin dresses the King up in 'Lyncolne grene', as though the King were instead joining his own band and becoming a member of his forest court (l. 1685). Edward's absorption of Robin has suddenly been turned upside down. As David Wiles observes, this adoption of Robin's livery would have probably been recognised as a direct link to the carnival May games, emphasising the King's absorption into the carnival:

Games of Robin Hood acted as an instrument of temporary levelling. Through distributing liveries to all and sundry, Robin Hood provided a symbolic uniform for the diverse members of his parish, and within his band no hierarchy was allowed to prevail.⁵⁰

This inversion and levelling is then actualised through the physical violence of the previous buffeting game. While leaving the forest, Robin repeatedly beats the King, inverting the former hierarchy of buffeting that was so essential to originally recognising Edward as monarch and establishing his authority:

And many a buffet our kyng wan
Of Robyn Hode that day,
And nothyng spared good Robyn
Our kyng in his pay. (ll. 1697-1700)

In this passage it is not the King but Robin who appears as 'mayster'. The beating of Edward signifies the King's uncrowning, unmasking the principles behind the repeated substitution and inversion of the King's commandments throughout these fyttes. In each instance, the King's physical body, authority and body politic undergo a persistent buffeting. It reveals Edward as the true fool, emphasising his complete metamorphosis into the figure of the beaten mock king in this carnival world.

⁵⁰ Wiles, *The Early Plays*, p. 51.

Tellingly, when Robin's carnival band reaches Nottingham, the inhabitants do not see Robin's containment but instead see 'nothyng but mantels of grene' and believing 'our kyng be slone' they flee, fearing a revolutionary uprising (l. 1707-10). As David Wiles argues: 'King Edward's action cannot be explained merely as a joke played on the people of Nottingham.'⁵¹ As the carnival leaves the forest and enters the real world, it recalls a memory of peasant revolts in the eyes of the urban viewers. We have persistently seen in the earlier King and Commoner bourdes that the boundaries between carnival inversion and the revolutionary principles of fifteenth-century peasant revolt are thin. While there are no explicit political complaints in the *Gest*, it appears to be this potential for a revolutionary breaching of the boundaries between the real and the game, the comic and the dangerous, that is again depicted in this startling moment as the King's murder is 'playfully' imagined amid the fleeing townsfolk.

The *Gest* also resembles *Rauf Coilzear* in moving beyond the standard King and Commoner plot to imagine what becomes of the promoted commoner at court. Interestingly, it presents a tragic tale, with Robin unable to live in accordance with his former ideals, losing all his money in an attempt to maintain his previous excess of generosity. Such is his position that Robin eventually declares: 'Yf I dwele lenger with the kyng, / Sorowe wyll me sloo' (ll. 1751-2). This imagery of sorrow and death in the face of promotion resembles the pessimistic view held by *King Edward and the Shepherd* and *John the Reeve*. There is a sense of the simultaneous death of the carnival and death of rebellion, resulting in the threatened physical death for Robin Hood as the 'lord of misrule', the embodiment of the carnival and symbol of the outlaw. Unofficial carnival excess and generosity are curbed by the financial and legal realities of the official world, while Robin's social position is similarly contained, with his absorption by the hierarchical structure placing him definitively under the King in a static

⁵¹ Wiles, *The Early Plays*, p. 48.

culture. In terms of his containment, it is also worth noting that Robin directly relates this sorrow not to the court or the lords but directly with ‘the kynge’.

If the official culture and the King are tied to images of death and dearth (tellingly, in the court Robin declares that he might ‘Nother ete ne drynke’ (l. 1766)), then the unofficial culture of the forest and outlaw poaching is linked to feasting, life, and in this last section rebirth.⁵² In order to cure his sorrow, Robin retreats to the forest. Having gained Edward’s permission to have seven nights leave to visit his old home of ‘Barnysdale’ forest, Robin returns to the forest permanently, refusing to return to court in defiance of the King’s order. Significantly, Robin’s first act on his return is to shoot ‘a full grete harte’, before blowing his horn to summon ‘all the outlawes of that forest’ (ll. 1785-7). As ever, rebellion against the King and the split between official and unofficial culture is situated around the commoner banquet table and poaching. Tellingly, the last mention of the King is not one of loyalty or deference but one of fear, emphasising both opposition and separation: ‘For all drede of Edwarde our kynge, / Agayne wolde he not goo’ (ll. 1799-1800).

Along with *Rauf Coilyear*, the *Gest* continues the carnivalesque inversion seen in the King and Commoner burdes, while stretching the boundaries of the tradition, blending with other literary genres to create a hybrid text. This partially speaks of the self-assurance of the King and Commoner tradition as it entered the second half of the fifteenth century. However, this repeated hybridity was not the only change taking place in the tradition at this time. Two other King and Commoner fragments that survive from the second half of the fifteenth century similarly present a tradition attempting to expand, shift and change, struggling to escape what had possibly become a predictable structure and formula. The first utilises the

⁵² This is itself fitting for the permanent cycle of life, death and rebirth that Bakhtin argues is the essence of the medieval carnival, presenting a world of change and transmutability in defiance of the official culture of fixed ideals and hierarchy. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 165-6.

carnival but drastically alters its political focus, while the second begins the tradition's escape from the realm of the carnival altogether.

The End of an Era: *King Edward and the Hermit* and *The King and the Barker*

The end of this chapter will briefly examine *King Edward and the Hermit* and *The King and the Barker*, two fragmentary tales that signal a transformation in the tradition's politics and focus, displaying the first signs of a subtle shift towards the later conservatism of the King and Commoner ballads.

King Edward and the Hermit survives in the Bodleian Library manuscript Ashmole 61, which has been dated to c. 1500.⁵³ Once belonging to an amateur scribe who signed their name as 'Rate', the manuscript is a collection of romance, didactic tales, prayers, exempla, and comic tales, interspersed by Rate's sketches of flowers, shields, and idiosyncratic fish bearing toothy grins. *King Edward and the Hermit* harks back to Gerald of Wales' tale of *King Henry II and the Cistercian Abbot* in making the lost King's host a religious recluse, albeit in this instance a lone hermit rather than an entire abbey of monks. Its content also resembles several key elements of *King Edward and the Shepherd*, most notably in the Hermit's reference to poaching communities and in the King's attempts to persuade the Hermit to poach, despite the presence of foresters and the punishments that await if the Hermit is caught ('To the courte thei wold me lede / And to prison me bryng [...] / And in perell to hyng').⁵⁴ However, this potential for violence and execution is rarely emphasised and this bourde is considerably lighter in tone than *King Edward and the Shepherd*. The tale

⁵³ George Shuffelton, 'Introduction', in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), p. 2.

⁵⁴ *King Edward and the Hermit*, in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), pp. 401-13 (ll. 256-60). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

instead focuses on the contrast between spiritual restraint and the excess of the King and Commoner feast.

The Hermit in this bourde presents us with another figure lifted from the medieval carnival, that of the mock cleric of the May games (from which the later Robin Hood character of Friar Tuck is probably descended) or the Abbot of Misrule of the Christmas carnival.⁵⁵ As with these figures, the bourde's Hermit creates a sense of merry, slightly blasphemous discrepancy between his spiritual role and a more secular reality. Instead of the 'rotys and ryndys' (l. 127) he initially claims to eat as a religious recluse, he presents the usual King and Commoner poached feast:

A cloth he brought and bred full whyte,
And venyson ibake tyte.
 Agen he yede full ryght:
Venyson salt and fressch he brought,
And bade hym chese wherof hym thought
 Colopys for to dyght. (l. 291-6)

He then proceeds to teach Edward a drinking game (similar to those in *King Henry II and the Cistercians* and *King Edward and the Shepherd*), in which they exchange cries of 'fustybandyas' and 'stryke pantener' (ll. 340-52). The bourde repeatedly plays with the incongruity between the Hermit's religious position and his excessive eating and drinking. This can especially be seen in the use of religious imagery at inappropriate junctures, whether in Edward's declaration of 'Now Crystys blyssing have sych a frere / That thus canne ordeyn our soper' (ll. 303-4) as they tuck into the poached feast, the Hermit swearing 'Be Sent Savyour' that he has 'a pote of galons foure' of barley wine (ll. 309-10), or the Hermit instructing Edward to 'Fyll this eft and late us layke / And betwen rost us a stayke / Thus holy lyve to lede' (ll. 366-8). Edward's statement of 'Thy wyll it schall be wrought' during

⁵⁵ For the mock cleric and Friar Tuck, see Wiles, *The Early Plays*, pp. 25-6. For details relating to the Abbot of Misrule, see Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 9-12.

the drinking game could even be read as a slightly blasphemous play on the Lord's Prayer (l. 338). There is a clear pattern of carnivalesque inversion of norms, as the religious and spiritual become intermingled with or transformed into carnal, corporeal, worldly pleasure, and a world of restraint becomes metamorphosed into a world of excess.

However, this shift to a religious subject results in a focus on anti-clerical satire. There is no real political reason given for the Hermit to poach, with no strong sense of political oppression, or any sense of aristocratic corruption being fought. This lack of political context coupled with the Hermit's religious position completely changes how this feast is presented and how we view the (relatively) lower-class subject. It instead feeds into the history of clerical satire, making the Hermit somewhat akin to Chaucer's portrait of the pleasure-seeking Monk.⁵⁶ When the Hermit initially denies that he poaches, the bourde makes explicit the Hermit's betrayal of his spiritual order:

The ermyte seyde, 'Men of grete state
 Oure ordyr thei wold make full of bate
 Aboute sych mastery. (ll. 273-5)

His private excess is presented as having very public and religious consequences, which may have been further emphasised in the missing second half of the tale, when the Hermit's feasting would have probably been exposed to the public gaze in the court. While he denies that other hermits in his order poach or live excessively ('Bot thei be in prayer and in penans, / And arne ther mete by chans' (ll. 276-7)), this passage still voices an awareness that his individualistic feasting could raise public doubts as to the purity of the rest of his order. This clerical critique results in the reader being encouraged to side against the Hermit, or at least direct their laughter at him, rather than with him: to criticise his poaching rather than

⁵⁶ 'He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen, / That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men'. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The General Prologue*, in *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 23-36 (ll. 176-7).

celebrate it. This is a subtle but important change in the tradition and a focus that will become increasingly adopted in the later, post-fifteenth-century King and Commoner ballads.

As to why this change is present at this point in the tradition, there is a small but perhaps telling line towards the end of the Hermit's feast. When the King suggests that the Hermit should accompany him to court the following day, the Hermit gives a unique response:

Th'ermyte seyde, 'Be hym that me bought,
 Syre,' he seyde, 'ne thynke it nought.
 I suere thee, by my ley,
 I have be ther and takyn dole,
 And have hade many merry mele,
 I dare full savely sey.
 Hopys thou I wold for a mase
 Stond in the myre ther and dase,
 Ne hand halve a dey?
 The charyté comys thorow sych menys hend,
 He havys full lytell that stond at hend
 Or that he go away.

'Hopys thou that I ame so preste
 For to stond at the kyng yate and reste
 Ther pleyes for to lere?' (ll. 405-19)

This mocking summarisation of the usual second half of the King and Commoner plot displays a deep sense of self-awareness and weariness. The subject standing in a 'dase' in the King's court has become generic. The Hermit, like the tradition as a whole, has 'hade many merry mele' in the court and is not 'so preste' to do so again. This is perhaps accidentally fitting for a text in which the court scene is missing and *presumed* lost but it also speaks of a tradition becoming stale and ready for change as it enters the second half of the fifteenth century. This sense of staleness in the tradition could elucidate both the tradition's movement towards hybridity at this time, as seen in *Rauf Coilzear* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, as well as prefiguring the sixteenth-century tradition's metamorphosis into royalist conservatism.

In terms of rewriting the narrative focus of the King and Commoner tradition in the second half of the fifteenth century, the most radically different bourde is the brief and fragmentary *The King and the Barker*. It is also the tale that most strongly foreshadows the conservative direction of the later tradition. This bourde is 228 lines in length and survives in Cambridge University Library MS Ee.4.35, a household miscellany owned by ‘Ricardo Calle’ that has been dated by Thomas Ohlgren to c. 1468.⁵⁷ In the words of Child, the text ‘has come down to us in a sadly mutilated condition’.⁵⁸ Indeed, David Fowler has convincingly argued that the narrative only makes sense if stanzas 30-33 (which detail the arrival of Lord Basset and the reveal of the King’s identity) are inserted towards the end of the tale between stanzas 54 and 55.⁵⁹

While a fundamentally different King and Commoner text, *The King and the Barker* is not wholly divorced from the rest of the tradition and it is worth briefly detailing its similarities with the previous texts before moving on to an examination of its divergences. For instance, it gestures towards the earlier fears of aristocratic theft when the Barker takes the King to be an aristocratic ‘theffe’ during their initial exchanges and later believes this fear to be confirmed when the King rides off on the Barker’s horse: ‘Alas, þeyn the tanner thowt, / with mey hors he well reyde away’.⁶⁰ There is a hint of the king-as-spy motif when the King probes the Barker for information, first enquiring ‘What now tydyng / herest [þou] as þou [dost] ryd?’ before the Barker’s evasive response prompts him to ask the more pointed ‘What herest sey be the lord Baset / yn thes contrey?’ (ll. 93-104). The Barker is also initially rude and unhelpful, which is perhaps best captured in the ominous directions to Dayton Basset he

⁵⁷ Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems*, pp. 74-5.

⁵⁸ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 68.

⁵⁹ David C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 85.

⁶⁰ *The King and the Barker*, in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, 2003), pp. 78-81 (ll. 81, 149-50). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

provides for the King: ‘When þow comest to the galow-tre, / torne vpon þe lyft honde’ (ll. 31-2). While cryptic, this simultaneously calls attention to the law’s judgement and violence against those who disobey (thus harking back to the execution fears previously seen in other King and Commoner bourdes) and also perhaps references the Last Judgement, in which the dead turning to the left (the *sinistra*) are those headed to hell. Therefore, in more colloquial terms, it is a subtle way for the Barker to tell the aristocrat pestering him to ‘be damned’ and ‘go to hell’, without risking the gallows himself. It turns a symbol of aristocratically controlled violence into a disguised space for verbal commoner violence against that aristocracy.

However, despite these links to the previous tradition, the bourde fundamentally breaks with what has gone before in multiple aspects. The most central of these differences sees the removal of the carnival feast. While both the commoner and royal feasts are referred to, with the Barker eager to go ‘hom to may deynere’ and the King promising that ‘þou schalt haffe mete ynow to neyzt’, these promised feasts never arrive (ll. 63-7). The bourde, like the Barker, remains ‘ffastyng yet’ (l. 64). This is symptomatic of a wider absence of carnivalesque inversion, intermingling, or reversibility throughout this tale. This can be especially observed in the bourde’s central scene, in which the still-incognito King invites the Barker to ‘an hontyng reyde’ and insists that they swap horses (l. 136). When the King rides off on the Barker’s horse, the Barker throws his cowhides onto the King’s but is quickly thrown off when the cow horns terrify the horse, who ‘went he had bore / þe deuell on hes bake’ (ll. 165-6). The Barker is unable to participate in the aristocratic hunt due to the markers and social realities of his class, symbolised by the cowhides. Therefore, unlike the other commoners in the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition, he cannot shoot the King’s deer. Class separation is emphasised, rather than carnival intermingling and collapse.

Significantly, at the end of the bourde, the commoner and aristocrats do not dine together but instead ‘owre kyng and the barker / partyd ffeyre atwyn’ (ll. 225-6).

This newfound conservatism can also be found in other small details throughout the tale. The King rewards the Barker with money ‘to mend hes kow-heydys’ but there is uniquely no social promotion (l. 224). While there is some gesture towards materialistic equality, with the Barker declaring ‘Y trow Y hafe more money yn mey pors / nar thow hast yn theyne’ (ll. 71-2), the effect is to emphasise the Barker’s comic ignorance, as (unlike the earlier commoners) he never displays any form of true materialistic equality. The King and Barker’s social distance is instead emphasised throughout to undermine the Barker’s claims of equality. But perhaps most telling of all, when the Barker is probed for information regarding the local lord’s behaviour, the Barker does not provide the anti-noble complaints found in the earlier texts but instead praises Lord Basset, claiming that his servants ‘sey thay leke hem well, / ffor he ys a god man’ (ll. 115-6).

Fowler notes that ‘the most striking stylistic feature in the text is the use of incremental repetition in the comic climax of the hunting episode’, with the repeated line of ‘The kynge lowhe and had god game’ suggesting ‘waves of laughter emitted by the king’ (ll. 173, 183, 185, 189).⁶¹ The direction of these waves is highly significant for the future of the tradition. As with *King Edward and the Hermit*, the audience’s laughter is being directed towards the commoner, and in *The King and the Barker* is emanating from the King and his perspective. The King and Commoner tales examined in this chapter are all undergoing a form of metamorphosis, blending with other genres/traditions, voicing their own self-awareness, or even transforming the tradition’s core narrative. But it is this image of the laughing King that best captures the tradition’s post-medieval future in the broadside ballads of the sixteenth- to eighteenth-centuries, as the King and Commoner tales move into the

⁶¹ Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*, p. 86.

printing presses in the heart of the city and fall under the direct gaze and perhaps even control of the aristocratic powers they had previously mocked.

Chapter Four

Containment in the Later Ballads: The King at the Keyhole

Introduction

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the King and Commoner tradition move into the urban centres to be printed as street ballads and prose chapbooks. But its new home placed the tradition under several interrelated, cultural pressures. This period saw an aristocratic interest in and anxiety over King and Commoner tales (and the mingling of Kings and Clowns more generally), the rise of state censorship in early print culture, and greater surveillance over carnival festivities. The result saw the King and Commoner tradition become remediated, gradually metamorphosing into a stringently conservative tradition cut off from its carnival roots and eventually becoming little more than monarchic propaganda.

In his *Defence of Poetry* (c. 1580), Sir Philip Sidney launched a stinging criticism against literature that staged the ‘mingling [of] Kinges and Clownes’: ‘[They] thrust in the Clowne by head and shoulders to play a part in majesticall matters, with neither decencie nor discretion.’¹ While this criticism was primarily aimed at drama, it nevertheless reveals an aristocratic, cultural concern over such literary intermingling of high and low that cannot have boded well for a King and Commoner tradition that was entirely based on this concept. Even more telling is a passage in Sidney’s *Arcadia* (c. 1580) that acts as a direct satirical and political attack of the King and Commoner tradition. In Book One, the incensed Kalander tells a by-now familiar King and Commoner narrative, detailing King Basilius’ encounter

¹ Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, in *The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, Vol. III, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 1-46 (p. 39).

with Dametas, ‘the most arrant, doltish clown that I think ever was’. One day Bailius strayed out his way while hunting and happened upon Dametas:

[Basilius] found some of his answers (as a dog, sure if he could speak, had wit enough to describe his kennel) not unsensible, and all uttered with such rudeness, which he interpreted plainness – though there be great difference between them – that Basilius, conceiving a sudden delight, took him to his court with apparent show of his good opinion: where the flattering courtier had no sooner taken the prince’s mind but that there were straight reasons to confirm the prince’s doing, and shadows of virtues found for Dametas. His silence grew wit, his bluntness integrity, his beastly ignorance virtuous simplicity [...] and thus having first given him the office of principle herdsman, lastly, since he took this strange determination, [... Basilius] hath in a manner put the life of himself and his children into his hands.²

As far as I can ascertain, this reference to the King and Commoner tradition has escaped critical attention – Dametas is generally regarded here as a comment on flattery and thus ‘the norm of courtly service’.³ However, this clear use of the King and Commoner narrative is a damning critique by Sidney on what was, by then, one of Britain’s best known literary traditions. Sidney takes the narrative, deconstructs its clichés with snide satirical asides, and then places it at the source of *Arcadia*’s Utopian disruption. This is not to say that critiquing the King and Commoner narrative is the primary focus of *Arcadia*, yet Dametas’ disruption is tied to the King’s abandonment of his court for a life in the wilderness, which in turn leads to an ‘unruly’ commons uprising, as ‘clowns and other rebels [...] like a violent flood [...] all knit together only in madness’ attack Basilius and members of the aristocracy, ‘without respect of their estates’.⁴ The King and Commoner scene plays a small, yet key role in the wider social rot. In the words of Franco Marengo:

The interruptions succeed each other with uniform consistency: they open a series of unhealthy parentheses in a state of normality which looks more and more precarious,

² Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 77-8.

³ Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Sidney’s Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 146.

⁴ Sidney, *Arcadia*, pp. 379.

until they lead to a final breakdown in the private life of the characters as well as in the state.⁵

Sidney is identifying the King and Commoner narrative as one of these ‘unhealthy parentheses in a state of normality’, linking the wilderness hierarchical disruption it celebrates to the potential for commoner rebellion and the anarchic collapse of social norms. While this is without doubt an exaggeration of the tradition’s social influence, it is nonetheless an indication that the tradition had fallen under the surveillance and aristocratic gaze that the Bourdes seemed to fear.⁶ This, in turn, poses a threat to the tradition’s ability to subtly communicate rebellious ideology or interrogate social norms.

Perhaps just as damaging to the King and Commoner tradition’s rebellious potential was the rise of early print culture. From the sixteenth-century, new King and Commoner material would be primarily printed as short ballads or chapbooks in society’s cultural centres under the growing scrutiny of the censor. Under Elizabeth I literary censorship became increasingly imposed. One of her first acts as monarch was to issue an injunction in 1559, which provided for a strict censorship of the press, regulating:

the printers of bokes, which for covetousnes cheifly regard not what they print [...] whereby arriseth great disorder by publicatyon of vnfrutefull, vayne and infamous bokes and papers.⁷

This was followed by a further ordinance in 1556, allowing for searchers to raid ‘certayne evill desposyd persons’ who ‘secretly [...] prynte’ from their own ‘pryvye presses’, and was strengthened further by the 1586 Star Chamber decree:

The decree announced that the most Reverend in God the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London were appointed licensers, that nothing was to be printed that had not been perused by both or one of them, and that all printing was to be confined to London and the two Universities. The Stationers’ Company were to

⁵ Franco Marengo, ‘Double Plot in Sidney’s Old Arcadia’, *The Modern Language Review*, 64. 2 (1969), 248-263 (p. 251).

⁶ See Chapter One.

⁷ Quoted in William M. Clyde, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press from Caxton to Cromwell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 13.

search for printing presses hidden in obscure corners and to seize unlawful books and bring them to Stationers' Hall.⁸

While primarily designed to stamp out pro-Catholic propaganda, these laws were extended to cover any books, pamphlets, or ballads that could be interpreted as being potentially seditious in content.

The spreading of such seditious words was seen as a direct, treasonous attack on the body of the sovereign, whether the monarch was explicitly portrayed or not. As Edward Nisbet wrote in his *Caesars Dialogue* (1601):

[S]editious words like a contagious disease do infect others [...] The speare of the Souldier pierced the side of my Sauour, vntill hee was dead, the tongue of the seditious, (I tremble to thinke of it) pierceth the head and heart of my Soueraigne in her life.⁹

The punishment for appearing seditious could be severe for printers and authors. For example, in 1632 William Prynne was fined five thousand pounds, stripped of his university degrees, sentenced to life imprisonment and condemned to have both ears removed in the pillory, after passages in his book critiquing female actors in pastoral plays were 'interpreted as a veiled insult to the Queen, who had but lately herself taken part in the performance of a pastoral play.' In the words of William Clyde:

After this remarkable trial and judgement he was a bold man who dared to publish his thoughts and opinions unless he knew they would be acceptable to Star Chamber.¹⁰

Given this pressure on the early printers, it is perhaps unsurprising that the King and Commoner tradition (and to a lesser extent the analogous Robin Hood tradition) emerged from this period having undergone a complete transformation. The mingling of kings and clowns had become a potentially dangerous topic and the printers of King and Commoner

⁸ Clyde, *Freedom of the Press*, pp. 14-21.

⁹ Edward Nisbet, *CAESARS DIALOGVE, or, a familiar communication, containing the first institution of a Subject, in allegiance to his Soueraigne* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1601), pp. 31-6. Available at <http://name.umd.umich.edu/A72932.0001.001> [accessed January 2015].

¹⁰ Clyde, *Freedom of the Press*, pp. 37-38.

texts had to ensure that they could not be charged for distributing anything containing ‘seditious words’ or ‘veiled insults’ that questioned or challenged the monarch’s authority.

The sixteenth century also saw the mock king rituals that formed such a central ideological focus of the fifteenth-century *bourdes* undergo a significant alteration. Evidence from the Middle Ages shows a degree of interrelation between the celebration of inversion in carnival festivities and popular revolt, with several rebellions emerging from carnival festivities and rebel leaders adopting mock king titles lifted from such festivities.¹¹ But Sandra Billington has argued that this connection dissipated during the sixteenth century:

[D]espite the fact that the Tudor and early Stuart periods were full of rebellions, there was a surprising lack of resort to king game images by the common people, and a total lack of planned mirror images of the king’s court by rebels and outlaws.¹²

At the same time, Billington argues that there was an increasing sense of control over carnival games in which mock kings were elected. Late Tudor ‘lords of misrule’ displayed an increasing tendency ‘to limit their unruliness’.¹³ These lords were elected not to incite disorder but to keep those under their charge ‘usefully occupied during a period when disorder might otherwise have tempted them’ and were able to revoke festive privileges if they got out of hand: ‘The festive order was prolific but controlled, and unsanctioned eruptions could curtail the licensed season’.¹⁴ This greater control over increasingly safe carnival festivities and disconnect from any true sense of inversion cannot have failed to impact on the King and Commoner tradition, which was previously so reliant upon public familiarity with the inversion and disorder formerly evoked by such rituals. Combined with the increasing awareness of the tradition by those in power and the censorship of printers, it is

¹¹ Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 9-23.

¹² Billington, *Mock Kings*, p. 23.

¹³ Billington, *Mock Kings*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Billington, *Mock Kings*, pp. 27, 37.

no surprise that this tradition became drastically altered and increasingly cut-off from the ideological focus of the medieval *bourdes*.

This chapter examines the transformation of the post-medieval King and Commoner tradition across the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. It first offers a detailed study of three broadside ballads: *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* (1624), *King Alfred and the Shepherd* (1578) and *King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading* (c. 1680). I argue that these three ballads uniquely capture the King and Commoner tradition in a state of transition. All three feature many of the radical tropes of the medieval *bourdes*, yet they each attempt to redirect, contain and neutralise any sense of radicalism presented by the introduction of these tropes. They instead repeatedly promote a conservative ideology that emphasises social difference, transforming the tradition, while still retaining some broad links to its past. The result sees the creation of contradictory texts, caught between the tradition's past and future, producing unsettling moments and featuring an often strained laughter.

The chapter then briefly examines several shorter ballads and chapbooks that are fully settled in their conservatism, including: *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* (c. 1600), *The King and the Cobler* (c. 1680), *King William III and the Loyal Forrister* (c. 1689-1702), and *The Royal Frolick* (c. 1690). I argue that some of these texts were primarily written to critique radical elements of the earlier tradition, while others were conservative propaganda designed to promote and celebrate their contemporary monarchs. The final section of this chapter moves into the eighteenth century to look at the ballad *King James I and the Tinker* (c. 1745) and several Scottish King and Commoner tales of James V, proposing that these tales show the tradition being used to support differing political agendas in England and Scotland post-Union.

King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield: Introduction

King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield captures the sense of political transition in the tradition. A ballad of the ‘Miller and King’ first appears in the Stationer’s Register on December 4th 1624 and multiple copies have survived from around this period.¹⁵ Three broadside ballad versions appear in the Roxburghe collection, two in the later Crawford collection, one in the anonymous *A Collection of Old Ballads* from 1723, a ballad and a chapbook version are contained in Samuel Pepys’ late seventeenth-century collection, and a further folio edition survives in Thomas Percy’s manuscript.¹⁶ Internal evidence for the seventeenth-century dating of these versions can be found in the use of ‘scabbado’, a seventeenth-century term for syphilis that appears in all of the above texts. The surviving copies are largely identical, only deviating minutely from each other with occasional variations in their choice of wording or phrasing. The version contained in Percy’s manuscript features slightly more archaic spelling but it is otherwise near identical to the broadside copies, making it probable that it was itself copied from a printed ballad. The only significantly different version can be found in Percy’s *Reliques* (1765) but this is a result of

¹⁵ *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554-1640*, Vol. IV, ed. Edward Arber (London: Privately Printed, 1875), p. 131.

¹⁶ *A Pleasant Ballad of King Henry the second, and the Miller of Mansfield*, in Roxburghe, Coll. I, Nos. 178-9. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30116/image> [accessed September 2014]. *A Pleasant new Ballad of the Miller of Mansfield, in Sherwood and of King Henry the second*, in Roxburghe, Coll. I, Nos. 228-9. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30162/image> [accessed September 2014]. *A Pleasant BALLAD of King HENRY the second, and the Miller of Mansfield*, in Roxburghe, Coll. III, No. 853. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/31378/image> [accessed September 2014]. *A Pleasant Ballad of King HENRY the Second, and the Miller of Mansfield*, in *National Library of Scotland Crawford*, No. 491. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/33052/album> [accessed September 2014]. *A Pleasant Ballad of King Henry II, and the MILLER of Mansfield*, in *National Library of Scotland Crawford*, No. 492. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/33170/album> [accessed September 2014]. *A Pleasant new Ballad of King Henry the second and the Miller of Mansfield*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. I, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), Nos. 528-9. *The Miller and the King*, in *Samuel Pepys’ Penny Merriments*, ed. Roger Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 44-9. *A Pleasant Ballad of King Henry the IInd, and the Miller of Mansfield*, in *A Collection of Old Ballads: Corrected from the best and most Ancient Copies Extant*, Vol. I, ed. Ambrose Philips (London: J. Roberts, 1723). *Kinge and Miller*, in *Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1868), pp. 147-57.

Percy collating his own manuscript copy with the Pepys' ballad before adding his own creative additions and 'corrections'.¹⁷

While the number of surviving copies is testament to the ballad's seventeenth-century popularity, its influence extends into the eighteenth century, inspiring Robert Dodsley's play *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737) and sequel *Sir John Cockle at Court* (1738). Dodsley's play went on to be one of the most popular of the eighteenth century and was repeatedly performed before the Prince and Princess of Wales, despite inspiring a small riot and being labelled as 'subversive [propaganda] dangerous to the order of the state'.¹⁸ The success of this play in turn led to the founding of the 'King and Miller' pub in Mansfield (c. 1793 – c. 1959), as well as inspiring several musical adaptations, including a score by the prestigious composer Thomas Arne (1737), Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny's French opera *Le Roi et le Fermier* (1762), and Sir Henry Rowley Bishop's burletta, *Harry le Roy* (c. 1800-50).¹⁹

Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield is a ballad of 240 lines, divided into two parts, each 20 stanzas in length. The second part was probably written shortly after the first, possibly by a different author, as it features a more inconsistent rhyme scheme and metre. The second part also repeatedly refers to the Miller as 'John Cockle,' whereas he is unnamed in the first part. However, taken together the basic plot is as follows:

¹⁷ *The King and Miller of Mansfield*, in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Vol. III, ed. Thomas Percy (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996), pp. 179-89.

¹⁸ For more on this play and its context see this thesis' conclusion. Harry M. Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 55-6. Robert Dodsley, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield: A Dramatick Tale* (London: Privately Printed, 1737). Available at <https://archive.org/details/kingandmillerma01dodsgoog> [accessed September 2014]. Robert Dodsley, *Sir John Cockle at Court: Being the Sequel of the King and the Miller of Mansfield* (London: Privately Printed, 1738). Available at <https://archive.org/details/sirjohncockleat00dodsgoog> [accessed September 2014].

¹⁹ Barbara Gallon and David J. Bradbury, *Nag's Head, King's Arms: Mansfield's Hostelry History* (Nottingham: Old Mansfield Society, 1997), p. 28. Thomas Arne, *The King and the Miller*, in *The Musical Entertainer*, Vol. I, ed. George Bickham (London: Charles Corbett, 1737), no. 40. Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny, *Le Roi et le Fermier: Comedie en Trois Actes* (Paris: Claude Herissant, 1762). Henry R. Bishop, *Harry Le Roy: Heroic Pastoral Burletta founded on Dodsley's King and the Miller of Mansfield, as performed with great applause at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden* (London: Goulding, D'Almaine and Potter, 18--).

King Henry II is hunting in Sherwood Forest with his lords, yet when night falls, he finds himself lost and alone. Chancing on John the Miller, Henry asks the way to Nottingham. John initially takes Henry to be a thief and threatens to fight him. After Henry protests that he is a gentleman, John instead offers to lodge him for the night.

When they arrive at John's house they are greeted by his wife. Despite the King's lack of papers, John and his wife decide to let Henry stay because of his attire, manners and honest face. They tell him that he will have the privilege of sleeping with their son, Richard. Richard seems irritated by this and asks Henry whether he is infected with syphilis, provoking Henry to laughter. They sit down to dinner, during which John produces roasted venison. Richard boasts that they always poach from the forest and swears the King to secrecy. The next day, the nobles search for the King and come upon John's house. Realising the truth of his guest's identity, John falls before Henry, expecting to be decapitated. Henry draws his sword, but instead makes John a knight.

In the second part, the King returns to the court and sends for John and his family. Henry personally greets them on arrival but Richard's rude response causes John embarrassment. Henry then presents them with a feast but Richard remains unsatisfied, complaining that the dishes are too small and that he would rather eat a black pudding. Richard proceeds to produce a sweating black pudding from his breeches. John and Richard then dance with the court ladies, to general amusement. The ballad ends with Henry making John the overseer of Sherwood, on the condition that he ceases poaching.

King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield contains more of the political tropes of the medieval bourdes than any of the other post-medieval ballads. Indeed, it could almost be mistaken as being an earlier bourde, or at least sympathetic with the aims of the earlier tradition. Yet when it is closely examined, what emerges is a very different and at times contradictory text, capturing the tradition's transition. The potential radicalism introduced through the use of the earlier tropes is persistently contained and redirected, resulting in an ultimately conservative text that emphasises (rather than closes) the social gap between King and commoner. As such it offers an intriguing window into the conservative appropriation and remediation of this popular literature.

Rebellious Echoes and Conservative Ideology

Despite the ballad's overarching conservative thrust, its opening exchanges contain several brief references to the earlier, more radical aspects of the fifteenth-century *bourdes*. In a seeming gesture towards the likes of *King Edward and the Shepherd* and *John the Reeve*, John at first takes Henry to be 'some Gentleman theefe'.²⁰ In its amalgamation of gentlemen and thieves, this phrasing gestures towards the anti-noble sentiment and the violent, materialistic oppression of the commons by the court depicted in the medieval *bourdes*. John then responds to this threat from a 'Gentleman' by declaring that he will 'cracke thy knaves crowne' (I. l. 24), a phrase which may have been directly lifted from *John the Reeve*. The text's language displays an awareness that the King's crown/head would receive the blow both physically and symbolically, as it would also be an attack on the head of the social body, the King's second body. As with *John the Reeve*, this violent 'cracking' of the crown (and its ability to transform Henry from 'Gentleman' to 'knave') hints at social, hierarchical upheaval, which Bakhtin argues forms an intrinsic part of all carnivalesque beatings.²¹ Henry's response that 'Thou dost abuse me much' (I. l. 25) itself seems to emphasise an awareness of the more radical subtext contained in this threat.

In the fifteenth-century *bourdes*, the apex of this social disruption and beating, or rending of the political body, was found in the poached, carnivalesque feasts that defied the materialistic definition of medieval hierarchical boundaries. As has been seen, the banquet table was repeatedly depicted as a site of class warfare, where the restrictive sumptuary and forestry laws met with complaint literature and the insurgent demands of the peasant revolts. Uniquely among the broadside ballads, this poached feast is still present in *Henry II and the*

²⁰ *A Pleasant new Ballad of the Miller of Mansfield, in Sherwood and of King Henry the second, Roxburghe*, Coll. I, Nos. 228-9, l. 22. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 198-9.

Miller of Mansfield and is presented in a way that would be very familiar to readers of the earlier *bourdes*. First the Miller brings out an allowed, commoners' feast of 'bag pudding' (blood sausages), 'apple-pies', and 'nappy ale' (strong ale) (I. ll. 76-7). As in the *bourdes*, once the first course has established expected social boundaries, the feast proceeds to transgress those same social and legal constraints:

Wife (quoth the Miller) fetch me forth light-foot
 That we of his sweetness a little may taste,
 A faire Venison pasty then brought she forth presently,
 Eate (quoth the Miller) but sir make no waste:
 heres dainty Light-foot in faith then said our King,
 I never before eate so dainty a thing.
 I wis (said Richard) no dainty at all it is,
 For wee doe eat of it every day,
 In what place (said our King) may be bought like this,
 We never pay penny for it by my fay:
 from merry Sherwood we set it home here,
 now and then we make bold with our Kings Deere. (I. ll. 85-96)

This initially appears in keeping with the carnivalesque politics of the medieval *bourdes*. As a result of rebellious action the 'Venison' is no longer a restricted, aristocratic 'dainty' but the 'every day' food of the commoners. That which acts as a dividing class boundary has been devoured, allowing those same class boundaries to be transgressed and the commoners to resemble and temporarily overthrow (in the confines of this banquet) 'our King' and the hierarchical boundaries and laws he embodies. In this act of rebellion against official culture the Miller creates a materialistic resemblance between himself and the King and so becomes transformed into a Lord of Misrule, the carnivalesque king of an upside-down world. This disruptive role is then conflated with the political role of the outlaw, as this ballad deliberately draws parallels with the Robin Hood tradition, setting the tale in 'merry Sherwood' (I. l. 4), referring to the nearby 'Nottingham' (I. l. 16), and comparing John's wife to 'Maid Marrian' (II. l. 60).

However, despite these rebellious, carnivalesque medieval tropes remaining in the minutiae of this ballad, the text is otherwise strongly conservative. These features are still present but are left feeling oddly hollow, cut-off from their previous political significance and in contradiction with the main thrust of the text. This can be seen in John's feast and the details, or rather the lack of details, in and around it. Other than the suggestive use of 'Gentleman theefe', there is no explicitly anti-noble sentiment in this ballad, no sense of aristocratic oppression, injustice, nor any hardships for the commoners. Symptomatic of this is the description of the Miller's first course. In the medieval *bourdes*, the commoner's permitted food was described negatively, often eliciting the King's horror. Yet in this ballad they eat 'hot bag-pudding', 'good apple-pies' and 'nappy ale, good and stale', all depicted positively and in terms of pastoral luxury. When combined with the lack of political oppression, or specific political aim, the poached feast appears to be reduced to meaningless gluttony. In Bakhtinian terms, it becomes the private eating of early bourgeois literature, far removed from the original spirit of the carnival:

[Early bourgeois literature expresses] the contentment and satiety of the selfish individual, his personal enjoyment, and not the triumph of the people as a whole. Such imagery is torn away from the process of labour and struggle [...] it is no longer the 'banquet for all the world' [...] If this picture of eating and drinking is hyperbolic, it is a picture of gluttony, not an expression of social justice.²²

Once the elements of political 'labour and struggle' have been removed, so too has any wider social, political outlook, or comment. The feast instead turns inwards, containing the radical potential in the banquet imagery, transforming it into simply the satisfaction of an individual's appetite.

This containment, or redirection, of the earlier radical material can also be seen in the deference that John and his wife show to the gentry. Despite the anti-noble sentiment implied in his initial 'Gentleman theefe' accusation and threat of violence, John performs a comic

²² Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 301-2.

volte-face upon Henry's declaratory response of 'I am a Gentleman' (I. 1. 26). Having heard this confirmation of Henry's social position, John enthusiastically declares 'Ile lodge thee all night' and soon adds 'I like well thy countenance, thou has an honest face' (I. 11. 26-43). John appears eager to serve his social superior as soon as Henry states his social rank, immediately defusing any potential class antagonism. It is also notable that the King's innate goodness shines through in his appearance, implying that there is something inherently superior in his breeding. Indeed, John's wife later reinforces this idea:

it seemeth this youths of good kin,
Both by his apparell, and eke by his manners,
To turne him out certainly it were a great sinne. (I. 11. 56-8)

In this ballad there is value in being of 'good kin'. The commoners must serve the aristocrats as duty and morality dictates; it would be 'a great sinne' for those of low kin to refuse to serve their social superiors. The social groups and the gap between them are drawn out, while traditional hierarchical roles are reinforced. In complete contrast to the medieval *bourdes*' attempts to negate social difference, this ballad instead works to emphasise that social distance.

This emphasis on social distance can be further seen in John's unusually early knighthood, awarded before he visits the court. The Miller is superficially promoted into the aristocracy at this moment and those of 'good kin' are made technically his kind. Yet the passages following his promotion instead facilitate the ballad's emphasis on the remaining, *innate* social distance between the aristocrats and the commoners. When the Miller and his family receive their royal summons, the court messenger pointedly laughs 'at their simplicity' (II. 1. 37), implying that 'Sir' John and his family remain culturally below a mere court messenger, despite their new titles. This is followed by John's emphasis on the materialistically defined social gap that remains despite his knighthood:

Here comes expenses and charges indeed,

Now we must needs be brave, though we spend all we have,
 For of new garments we have great need,
 of horses and servingmen we must have store,
 with bridles and saddles and twenty things more. (II. ll. 44-8)

This feels thematically similar to the first course of the commoners' illegal feast: using materialistic, hierarchical markers to emphasise social boundaries, usually before the subsequent collapse of social difference. However, here, once this social gap is made explicit by the Miller, the commoners do not proceed to close it. The distance between the commoners and the aristocrats is instead maintained:

Tush sir John (qd. his wife) neither do fret nor frowne
 You shall be at no more charges for me:
 For I will turne and trim up my old Russet gowne,
 With every thing as fine as may be:
 and on our Mil horses full swift we will ride,
 with pillowes and pannels as we shall provide,
 In this most stately sort, rode they unto the Court. (II. ll. 49-55)

While the early bourdes defied materialistically defined hierarchical boundaries, this passage enforces them, making it clear that (beyond the poached venison) there will be no social challenge through materialistic resemblance in this ballad.²³ It emphasises their difference, the impossibility of commoners realistically bridging that hierarchical/materialistic gap, and their own lack of desire to disrupt the political body by doing so. They will remain visibly and identifiably commoners.

It is the reinforcement of this clear class difference that lies behind the nobles' mocking laughter in the court, as the aristocrats are allowed to feel comfortable in their visibly unchallenged superiority. During the court scenes it becomes clear that the commoners' superficial titles are nothing more significant than the King's 'sport' (II. l. 6), designed primarily for the nobles' (and reader's) amusement, encouraging laughter that is

²³ Indeed, Elizabeth I's reign saw an increased emphasis on the enforcement of a raft of sumptuary laws that were even more extensive than those in the later Middle Ages (although actual prosecution of offenders remained rare). For more on this, see Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 298-331.

focused on the discrepancy between the commoners' aristocratic titles and their cultural reality. This can be clearly seen in the description of the Miller's wife lining up with the court ladies: 'With Ladies and their maids, like to the Queen of spades, / The Millers wife did so orderly stand' (II. ll. 75-6). Her difference is further emphasised by the wife offering 'a milke-maids courtesie at every word' (II. l. 77), drawing attention to her cultural ignorance, inappropriately rustic manners and low ('milke-maid') birth. It is a portrait concentrated on the amusing (rather than challenging) incongruity of her presence. The ballad aims for a conservative laughter that mocks her attempts to fit in, stressing her cultural inferiority. This is similarly emphasised when John and Richard dance with the court ladies:

And then the Ladies prepared to dance,
 Old sir John Cockle and Richard incontinent,
 Unto this practice the King did advance:
 here with the Ladies, such sport they did make,
 the Nobles with laughing did make their hearts shake. (II. ll. 104-8)

This passage offers a contrast to the commoners' chaotic dance in *John the Reeve*. Rather than portraying the commoners' violent, carnivalesque breach of social boundaries, it is again focused on the court's entertainment, the commoners' ignorance and their comic and vulgar difference. It is encouraged by the King and provokes the nobles' laughter because it again emphasises the courtiers' innate superiority and the commoners' innate inferiority. In this ballad, nothing, not even aristocratic titles, can overhaul being 'of good kin'.²⁴

²⁴ Richard does later claim to have wooed one of the ladies in this dance but we are told that she goes by the markedly un-courtly name of 'Jugg Grumball with the red head' (II. l. 112). While we are left to speculate as to her origins, presence and potential profession in the court, her name firmly hints that each social group will very much keep to their own kind. A close and telling parallel can be found in William Winstanley's seventeenth-century satirical chapbook *The Essex Champion: or, The Famous History of Sir Billy of Billerecay and His Squire Ricardo* (1690). Billy, the son of an Essex farmer, is inspired by various popular romances and ballads (inc. 'King Edward IV and the Tanner' and 'King and the Cobler') to become a knight errant. To accomplish this he falls in love with a neighbouring farmer's daughter, a 'lusty, strapping wench' named 'Joan Grumball', who Billy renames 'Dulcina' and claims as his Lady. In relation to Joan Grumball's name, Dale Randall and Jackson Boswell note that 'the name *Joan* in England often referred to a common woman [...] 'Grumball' speaks for itself': a comment that seems just as applicable to Richard's own 'Lady'. See William Winstanley, *The Essex Champion: or, The Famous History of Sir Billy of Billerecay and His Squire Ricardo* (London: J Blare, 1690). Available at http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=19525754 [accessed

This court scene draws heavily on its counterparts in the early tradition, especially in its utilisation of aristocratic laughter to contain and defuse commoner rebellion, but its effect is heightened by the ballad's many deviations from the earlier tradition. In this ballad the court's laughter does not convey a sense of menace. The commoners have not been the previous victims of aristocratic oppression and violence in this ballad, voicing no anti-noble complaints. Neither is this court imbued with troubling images of death or execution. It does not provide us with details of the commoner's innermost thoughts and anguish or depict them violently plunging a pitchfork into the high table. There is instead an emphasis on merriment at all times. If the commoners are laughed at in this ballad, it is because they *are* comically blundering, ignorant and presented as inferior in their incongruous difference. We are given no reason to sympathise with the commoners' treatment but are instead encouraged to look down on them and join in with the aristocratic laughter.

Richard and the Containment of the Grotesque

Richard acts as a curious symbol for this containment and in many ways embodies this tale's seeming contradictions. Throughout the ballad, he displays a lack of deference towards the King that is surprising, given the generally conservative nature of the text. As such, he seems to possess the radical commons anger of the bourdes, redirected and contained in a side-character. Yet his anger is curiously directionless, without cause or aim and he is eventually suppressed by his father, the indignant John. This section will briefly examine the three main instances of Richard's outbursts, occurring during the King's arrival at the Miller's house, the court feast and during the commoners' arrival at court. The first two demonstrate how this ballad's utilisation of the carnivalesque grotesque is adapted in order to promote a

conservative ideology, while the third is used as evidence regarding the extent of editorial concern over any aspect of this ballad being interpreted as potentially seditious.

The first of Richard's outbursts is in the Miller's house. When John proudly informs Henry that he 'shall lye with no worse than our owne sonne' (I. 1. 66), Richard's rude response punctures the jovial good mood:

Nay first (quoth Richard) good fellow tell me true.
 Hast thou any creepers within thy gay hose?
 Or art thou not troubled with the Scabado?
 I pray you (quoth the King) what things are those?
 art thou not lowsie, nor scabby (quoth he)
 if thou beest surely thou liest not with me. (I. II. 67-72)

This interjection is jarring and disrupting, not least in its grotesque vulgarity. It breaches etiquette, while its implicit homoeroticism threatens breaching of a different sort. Unlike his parents, it is clear that Richard is unwilling to bend over backwards to satisfy the nobility – as seems to be the implied pun. The scene is abruptly transformed from reverence of the head of the social body to fear of infection from his sexual organs, in a grotesque, carnivalesque inversion. In the words of Bakhtin, we see 'the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum.'²⁵

However, this gesture towards a carnivalesque uncrowning again feels somewhat blunted. Like his father, Richard fails to offer any explicitly anti-noble sentiment, ensuring that this lack of deference cannot be clearly read as political. Instead, Henry's response of baffled ignorance ('what things are those?') implies that 'creepers' and 'scabado' are only known to and come from Richard's world, distancing the King from Richard's remarks and turning the insult back on its source. Richard's grotesque accusations do not so much uncrown the King as to cause Henry 'to laugh most heartily / Till the teares trickled downe from his eyes' (I. II. 73-4), because it is again indicative of Henry's own cultural superiority.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 309.

As before, it does not collapse the gap between classes but emphasises the distance between their worlds.

This can be similarly seen in Richard's disruption at the court feast. In the *bourdes*, the social gap between the king and commoner was negated during the inverting carnivalesque banquet. While Richard's following interruption utilises banquet imagery and possesses an element of carnivalesque disruption, it does so with very different aims and to very different results:

you feed us with twatling dishes so small,
 Zounds a blacke pudding is better than all.
 I marry, quoth our King, that were a daintie thing,
 If a man could get one here for to eate.
 With that Dicke straight arose, & plukt one out of his hose
 Which with heat of his breech began to sweat. (II. II. 95-100)

The reveal of a pudding in Richard's hose is probably a rather literal, derogatory reference to him as a 'pudding prick', that is to say 'something worthless', while perhaps further indicating that he is a 'Jack pudding'/a fool – both terms being common description of fools in this period (as indeed was the name 'Dick' itself).²⁶ But in the context of this passage, Richard's comparative 'worthlessness' and his social separation from the aristocrats is also being played out. Richard rejects the King's food for a black pudding, which is presented here as the food of the commoners and notably absent from the King's royal table (although present in the initial commoner's feast, before the venison was brought out). In doing so he emphasises both his social distance from the nobility and his contentment with that which is deemed appropriate for his 'lowly' social position. The grotesque image of Richard producing this sweating black pudding from his crotch again utilises the carnivalesque to contain rather than disrupt. It depicts the commoners as vulgar, content to live in their own vulgarity and eat within their confined, grotesque position in the social body. While the

²⁶ For these definitions, see Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), pp. 51-67.

Miller is later instructed by the King to steal ‘no more of my Deere’ (II. l. 118), Richard has here pre-empted this demand. Even the most challenging, disruptive character of this ballad chooses to maintain the social order and class boundaries of his own free will, negating any remaining sense of political challenge from the Miller’s earlier poached feast.

The reasons for this containment can be glimpsed in Richard’s outburst on his arrival at court. This scene further adds to the above examples, but also provides an insight into the editorial anxieties of the ballad’s publishers. In this passage the King greets John and Richard cordially, only to be rudely interrupted:

Good sir John Cockle, once welcome againe:
 and so is this Squire of courage so free,
 quoth Dicke abots on you, doe you know me?
 Quoth our King gently, how should I forget thee,
 Thou wast mine owne bedfellow well that I wot,
 But I doe thinke on a tricke tell me that prethe Dicke
 How we with farting did make the bed hot,
 thou whorson happy knave, then quoth the Knight [John],
 speake cleanley to our King, or else go shite. (II. ll. 64-72)

While this appears to be relatively harmless on the surface, the surviving ballads are remarkably conflicted as to what line 70 should be, especially given their otherwise lack of significant variation. The version in the Percy manuscript is close to this Roxburghe version (‘how with farting we made the bed hott’), making it a shared, mutually grotesque act. However, the other two Roxburghe versions (I. 178-9 and III. 853), the two Crawford versions (491 and 492), and the Pepys ballad all have the King accusing Richard alone of farting, placing any instances of the vulgar and grotesque purely in the domain of the commoners: ‘how *thou* with farting didst make the bed hot’. To further complicate matters, in his *Reliques* Thomas Percy amends lines 69-70 in order to have Richard accuse the King: ‘Yea, sir, quoth Richard, and by the same token, / Thou with thy farting didst make the bed

hot'.²⁷ The reason for Percy making this change is clear. John's angry response of 'speake cleanley to our King' makes no sense unless these lines are given to Richard, indicating that the surviving versions have been doctored. William Chappell follows this same logic in his edition of the Roxburghe ballads, giving these lines to Richard and arguing that the context shows that there must be an error in the surviving Roxburghe versions: 'But I think of a trick, tell me that prethee, Sir, / how thou with farting didst make the bed hot'.²⁸

The lack of clarity over this one line displays a clear editorial anxiety dating back to its original printing, making it difficult to interpret. Any analysis of these lines must rely on making assumptions as to which version is correct, or on guesswork if constructing a potentially lost original ballad, which may never have been published. But if this line was purposefully altered to make it safer (as seems probable from the internal evidence) then that need for alteration is itself indicative of the conditions in which this ballad was printed. This amendment to ensure that Richard does not make such a grotesque accusation of the King speaks volumes of the care that was taken to avoid the appearance of offence and the fear of being seen to have made a political *faux pas*. It seems that even such a small detail caused huge editorial anxiety, with the accusation only printable after it had been transferred to the King's laughing mouth and (in most versions) made into a depiction of Richard's vulgarity alone. Great care was taken to ensure that any sense of vulgarity was contained within the figure of the commoner, while the cultural superiority of the aristocrats was upheld at all times.

John's angry retort to Richard of 'speake cleanley to our King, or else go shite', seems to curiously reflect this sense of self-containment and censorship. For Bakhtin, 'the

²⁷ *The King and Miller of Mansfield*, in *Reliques*, ll. 69-70.

²⁸ *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*, in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, Vol. I, ed. William Chappell (Hertford: The Ballad Society, 1871), pp. 539-46 (ll. 189-90).

grotesque was the basis of all the abuses [and] uncrownings'.²⁹ But while John's language is certainly grotesque and focused on the lower bodily stratum, this is again the grotesque turned inward, not abusing those socially above, but abusing his own class and kin. It is an attack on Richard's lack of deference. In doing so, it also specifically remediates a fundamental trope of the medieval *bourdes*, of which Richard is the embodiment in this ballad. It is the anti-authoritarian figure of Richard and all of the early carnivalesque *bourde* commoners he represents who are uncrowned through this use of carnivalesque language. Furthermore, John's use of 'shite' following on from the accusation of 'farting', ensures that the grotesque scatological imagery again remains contained within the commoners and their world. It emphasises the commoners' vulgarity and their social distance from the nobles. Their very words seem to transform to excrement. Therefore, it is no surprise that this grotesque imagery once again provokes court laughter – 'The King and his Counsellors heartily laught at this' (II. l. 73). As we have seen throughout this ballad, if this tale retains any ideological elements from the carnival, then it is a conservative carnivalesque that does not mingle bodies but separates them, enforcing hierarchy rather than collapsing it and encouraging a mocking, conservative laughter directed at the commons' difference.

This ballad captures the tradition during its process of transformation. Many of the radical tropes of the earlier tradition are still present in this ballad: from poached feasting to the grotesque, lack of royal deference, and the occasional fragment of speech that seems to hint at the echoes of the *bourde* rebellion. But these traces remain confused, contradictory echoes in a very different type of King and Commoner text. They are indicative of the difficulty of this ballad's balancing act: attempting to instil a new-found conservatism, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of the *bourde* commoners' lack of deference. Taken as a whole, what persistently emerges is a ballad that both utilises and contains the tradition's

²⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 341.

radical tropes, redirecting them in order to emphasise the social gap between nobles and commoners, while stripping the tale of any explicit anti-noble sentiment, inversion, intermingling, or commons political desire. It is a ballad morphing from a suggestively rebellious tradition into a strictly conservative one.

King Alfred and the Shepherd

King Alfred and the Shepherd is active in self-consciously promoting this conservative shift within the King and Commoner tradition. The Stationer's Register records that a broadside ballad titled 'A merry Songe of a Kinge and a Shepherd' was licensed to Ric Jones on the 25th September 1578.³⁰ While no copies have survived from this period, multiple copies of a similarly titled ballad, *The Shepherd and the King*, survive from the first half of the seventeenth century and are preserved in the collections of Samuel Pepys, John Ker, Crawford, William Euing and *A Collection of Old Ballads*.³¹ The copies amongst these collections are near identical, allowing us to make the reasonable assumption that they were replicas of the ballad originally licensed to Ric Jones.

The ballad is 256 lines, divided into 32 stanzas. The basic plot is taken – at some distance – from the late tenth-century chronicle tale of King Alfred burning a swineherd's wife's cakes (examined in the introduction to this thesis). This ballad expands upon the tale, imbuing it with an awareness of fifteenth-century King and Commoner tropes:

³⁰ *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554-1640*, Vol. II, ed. Edward Arber (London: Privately Printed, 1875), p. 338.

³¹ *The Shepherd and the King*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. I, ed. W.G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), Nos. 76-7. *The Shepheard and the King*, in *The Roxburghe Ballads*, Coll. I, Nos. 504-5. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30340/album> [accessed September 2014]. *The Shepherd and the King*, in *National Library of Scotland Crawford*, No. 648. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/33250/album> [accessed September 2014]. *The Shepherd and the King*, in *University of Glasgow Euing*, No. 332. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/32009/album> [accessed September 2014]. *The Shepherd and the King*, in *A Collection of Old Ballads: Corrected from the best and most Ancient Copies Extant*, Vol. I, ed. Ambrose Philips (London: J. Roberts, 1723), pp. 43-52.

King Alfred disguises himself as a beggar and travels through Somerset. He happens upon a shepherd and requests some food and drink from the Shepherd's satchel. Taking Alfred for a thief, the Shepherd challenges him. After fighting for four hours Alfred calls a truce. The Shepherd is still wary of Alfred but agrees to take him to his cottage. The Shepherd proceeds to boast of the luxurious food he receives from the lord of Newton Court. He promises Alfred both a share of this food and ten groats a year in wages if Alfred will become the Shepherd's man. The King willingly agrees and they go to the Shepherd's home to meet the Shepherd's wife, Gillian.

The next day Gillian is baking some cakes on the hearth when they start to burn. She angrily berates Alfred for failing to turn them, threatening to hit him if he does not pay more attention in future. That night, while watching the spiders weave webs above his woollen bed, Alfred decides that he cannot live a rustic life and will return to the court the next day. When the dawn breaks, Alfred repeatedly blows his horn until a hundred lords and knights surround the Shepherd's house. Realising Alfred's true identity, the Shepherd and Gillian beg for their lives. Alfred pardons them before granting them a thousand sheep and as much pasture as it takes to feed them. He also promises to turn their cottage into a stately hall. In return, the Shepherd vows that he will bring Alfred a newborn lamb and woollen coats once a year. He also promises to tell his tale to others, accompanied by his bagpipe.

As with *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*, this ballad possesses multiple elements that seem to gesture back towards the political content of the older medieval burdes. Yet this ballad also persistently works to strip these elements of any sense of radicalism, remoulding them in order to further a conservative agenda that emphasises the impermeable gulf between social classes.

The ballad opens with a self-conscious reference to the earlier tradition. As soon as the disguised Alfred encounters the Shepherd he announces:

I come to be thy Guest,
To taste of thy good victuall here,
and drinke that's of the best.

Thy Scrip I know hath cheese good store.³²

³² *The Shepheard and the King*, in *The Pepys Ballads*, ll. 30-33. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

The King's expectations of the commoner possessing 'good victual' betrays a winking, familiarity with the earlier King and Commoner narrative. This in turn leads to a sense of class antagonism, as the Shepherd greets Alfred's demand for food with a martial challenge:

Yet if thou wilt thy dinner winne,
 thy Sword and buckler take:
 And if thou canst, into my Scrip
 therewith an entrance make.

I tell thee Roister it hath store
 of Beefe and Bacon fat,
 With shives of Barley bread to make
 thy chops to water at.
 Here stands my Bottle, here my Bag,
 if thou canst win them, Roister.
 Against thy Sword and Buckler here
 my sheep hooke is my waster.

Benedicite now (quoth our King)
 it never shall be said,
 That Alfred of thy Shepherds hooke,
 will stand a whit afraid.
 So roundly thus they both fell too't,
 where giving bang for bang:
 At every blow the Shepherd gave,
 King Alfreds Sword cride twang. (ll. 37-56)

This battle seems to have been lifted from the Robin Hood tradition, resembling the 'Robin meets his match' motif, but it also captures a small sense of the class antagonism of the early King and Commoner bourdes.³³ Superficially, the Shepherd and King are set against each other in a violent depiction of class warfare, with the Shepherd's 'sheep hooke' threatening to 'waste' the King as each gives 'bang for bang'. It is also no coincidence that this battleground is set around 'Beef and Bacon fat [...] to make / thy chops water at.' This is a knowing gesture back to the early tradition, where banquet imagery repeatedly sits at the heart of the class warfare.

³³ See Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 82-5.

This conflation of carnivalesque, class violence with food is also repeated in the ballad's central scene, where the Shepherd's wife, Gillian, threatens to beat the King for letting her cakes burn:

What canst thou not, thou Lowt, quoth she,
 take paines the same to turne?
 Thou art more quick to rake it out,
 and eate it up halfe Dowe:
 Then thus to stay till't be enough,
 and so thy manners show.

But serve me such another tricke,
 Ile thwack thee on the snout:
 Which made the patient King good man,
 of her to stand in doubt. (ll. 163-72)

The threat of Gillian beating Alfred for his bad manners is reminiscent of the carnivalesque beatings in *Rauf Coilzear*, or the violent dance in *John the Reeve*. It threatens a breach of both physical boundaries and social boundaries, turning social norms upside down, as the Shepherd's wife commands the King. Rather than Gillian fearing execution, it is Alfred who is left standing 'in doubt', fearing a 'thwack [...] on the snout' as violence enforces disorder.

However, this is as radical as the ballad becomes and even this sense of class warfare is distinctly blunted. Rather than pretending to be a lowly courtier (like the Kings in the *bourdes*), Alfred is pointedly disguised as a beggar in these scenes, with clothes 'All rag'd and torne, as from his backe, / the Begger his clothes had rent' (ll. 15-16). As such, no anti-noble sentiment can be attached to the Shepherd and King's fight, for the Shepherd and Gillian each believe that they are directing their violence against their own commoner class. Furthermore, despite the implied threat of the Shepherd's 'sheep hooke' being a 'waster', the ballad's author could barely conceive of a weapon less likely to threaten regicide, especially seeing as Alfred is well equipped with a sword and buckler. Nowhere else in the tradition is the King so well prepared for battle and so well defended from violence. Similarly (and

unlike *John the Reeve* or *Rauf Coilzear*), the violence threatened by Gillian in the commoner's home never materialises and Alfred's body remains unharmed and the social and physical boundaries un-breached. In this way the violence and antagonism of the earlier tradition is presented symbolically, yet simultaneously defused of any real rebellious threat.

The banquet imagery that threatened to rend the social body in the earlier *bourdes* is also stripped of any sense of radicalism in this ballad. The Shepherd boasts to Alfred that his commons community all possess:

Curds and clouted Creame
of red Cowes morning milke:
And now and then fine Buttered Cakes
as soft as any silke.

Of Beefe, and rosted Bacon store,
that is most fat and greazie. (ll. 99-106)

This food and drink may be luxurious but it is noticeably modest by King and Commoner standards and distinctly pastoral in nature, certainly differing from the illegally acquired aristocratic food and drink found in the earlier *bourdes*. Indeed, it is revealed that this food is granted to the shepherds by their 'Master, which is chiefe, / and Lord of Newton Court', who 'keepes' his 'Shepherd Swaines / in farre more braver sort [...] to make them glib and easie' (ll. 97-108). This is certainly far removed from the anti-noble sentiment of the early tradition. Food is here made into a symbol of the commoners' bonds with the nobles and used to control and contain potential rebellion, keeping the commoners from challenging the social order or the power of their masters. In Bakhtinian terms, it represents the abandonment of the 'unofficial feast' of the people for the sanctioned 'official feast' of the authorities and therefore works to maintain traditional, hierarchical authority.³⁴

³⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 9-10.

A further sense of this containment can be seen in the ballad's opening, when Alfred arms himself with 'A Sword and Buckler good and strong / to give Jacke sawce a rap' (ll. 17-20). 'Saucy Jack' is the name commonly given to the Renaissance trickster figure, an often lower-class character that disrupts or triumphs over those socially above him through use of his wits:

Furthest of all from Castiglione's courtier, but closest perhaps to the hearts of Shakespeare's audience, is the saucy jack [...] His code of ethics comes not from books, but from ballads; he shows his mettle not in a tournament but in a jig [...] The chivalrous knight could hardly find a sharper rival than the saucy jack: while one vies for honour with his valour, the other wins the day with his wit.³⁵

This is another detail that displays a knowing awareness of the medieval King and Commoner tropes, as the reference to this antagonistic trickster figure cannot help but conjure up the disruptive commoners of the *bourdes*. Yet the description of Alfred setting out to give such a figure 'a rap' is a clear conservative statement of intent to subdue such boisterous commoner figures, and the early King and Commoner tradition that they represent more generally. Additionally, this reference to trickster figures cannot help but simultaneously emphasise the lack of any true trickster figures in the tale that follows and the success with which this ballad has suppressed such figures.

As with *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*, this ballad also utilises aristocratic laughter in order to emphasise social distance. The audience is encouraged to follow Alfred in growing 'blythe' at the Shepherd's 'clownish' jests and to laugh at the 'silly Sots' (ll. 129-31). The noticeably unnamed Shepherd and the grotesquely ugly Gillian ('a toothless Dame' who 'mumbleth on browne Bread' (ll. 89-90)) are persistently presented as foolish two-dimensional caricatures, whose primary role is to be mocked. Like the Miller and his family, they are not politicised, suffer no hardships, do not generate reader sympathy, and lack any real sense of identity, which in turn allows Alfred's inherent superiority and perspective to

³⁵ Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 54-5.

dominate the tale. There is certainly no danger of resemblance between the commoners and the disguised King in this ballad. The social gap between these characters is subtly captured in the quaint night-time scene, as Alfred lies in his rustic shepherd's bed:

But never such a lodging had
King Alfred in his life.

For he was layd on white Sheepes wooll,
new pull'd from tanned Fells:
And ore his head hung spiders webs,
as if they had beene Bells:
Is this the Country guise, thought he?
then here I will not stay:
But hence be gone so soone as breakes
the peeping of next day.

The cackling Geese and Hens kept roost,
and pearcht by his bed side. (ll. 175-186)

It is important to understand that this passage is not designed to reveal the hardship of the Shepherd's life. The Shepherd previously boasted to Alfred that 'thou shalt lye in harden sheetes, / upon a fresh Straw bed' (ll. 91-2), demonstrating his contentment with his position and material possessions (in a way that strongly contrasts with the commoners in the medieval bourdes). As such, Alfred's dissatisfied reaction to these naturalistic, pastoral surroundings is designed to communicate the social distance between these characters and the impossibility of true interaction between their worlds; the King cannot live in this pastoral world and cannot learn anything from it, while the Shepherd at no points reaches for anything beyond his own class.

This focus on social separation also informs the Shepherd's reward. There is no need to contain him as he commits no form of rebellion. As a result, he is not socially elevated but is simply given a bigger flock of sheep:

A thousand Weathers Ile bestow
upon thee for thine owne:

With pasture grounds, as much as will
 suffice to feed them all. (ll. 235-8)

Social positions remain fixed in this ballad. The Shepherd never threatened or desired to be anything other than a shepherd and so remains one. Moreover the commoner uniquely rewards the King, 'as dutie binds':

the Shepheard said, good King:
 A milke white Lambe once every Yeere,
 Ile to your Highnesse bring:
 And Gillian my old Wife likewise,
 of wooll to make your Coates:
 Will give so much at New-yeeres tide,
 as shall be worth ten Groates.

And in your praise, my Bag-pipe shall
 sound sweetly every yeere:
 How Alfred our renowned King,
 most kindly hath beene here. (ll. 241-252)

This display of deference and fealty offers confirmation of the Shepherd's position as loyal subject, bound to the King in his duty. The annual gifts of a lamb and wool even seem to show the Shepherd voluntarily bringing the pastoral into the taxation system in an act of self-containment.³⁶ It is certainly far removed from John storming the court to hold the king 'checkmate'.³⁷ The Shepherd's promise to spread this tale with use of his bagpipe as a ballad in 'praise' of the King is also a telling metatextual moment. It encapsulates the sense of cultural appropriation within this ballad, taking a literature that formerly conveyed the commons' political unrest and insurgent demands and transforming it into conservative, monarchical praise literature designed to instil a sense of nationalist loyalty and reinforce a

³⁶ The importance of the failing wool trade to the economy during this period also indicates that these gifts may have been a more pointed economic gesture and greater self-sacrifice. For details of the wool trade's crisis in the 1550s see Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 201-3.

³⁷ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1868), pp. 550-94 (l. 793).

traditionalist class ideology. It no longer communicates the voice of the disenfranchised commons but offers a distinctly more conservative, perhaps even aristocratic perspective.

This sense of the ballad's aristocratic voice is in fact curiously captured in a throwaway line near the beginning of the ballad, where we are told that Alfred 'on his head in stead of a Crowne [...] / wore a Monmouth Cap' (ll. 19-20). Superficially, this detail of a Monmouth Cap appears to portray specific knowledge of an aspect of the commoner's world. Yet these caps were in fact fashionable amongst the aristocracy at the time of this ballad's printing. For instance, just two years before this ballad was first printed, Gilbert Talbot describes in a letter the 'Monmouth cap' he has sent to his father George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury and Lord High Steward, as a pastoral 'new year's gift'.³⁸ It means that when Alfred is 'crowned' with this Monmouth cap on his way 'to give Jacke sawce a rap', he is crowned with an unintentionally pertinent symbol of this aristocratic cultural appropriation of the commoner's world. This cannot help but appear somewhat emblematic given the wider conservative appropriation of the King and Commoner material in the sixteenth century.

This ballad again provides a snapshot of the tradition's transformation. Elements of class warfare and violence around the commoner's banquet imagery survive in part, retaining a link to the fifteenth-century material. But *King Alfred and the Shepherd* is insistently conservative, containing and defusing any sense of the tradition's radicalism. Even more noticeable than the remaining tropes are those that are absent. There is no anti-noble sentiment or lack of deference, no social mobility, and no poached feasting. It is clear that 'Jacke sawce' has been given a 'rap' and his bagpipes have been engaged to play a new tune.

³⁸ Quoted in *Illustrations of British History, Biography, and Manners, in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth & James I*, Vol. II, 2nd edn., ed. Edmund Lodge (London: John Chidley, 1838), p. 79.

King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading

The tangible tensions in the tradition at this time are further captured amid the unsettlingly dark laughter of *King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading*. This tale survives in the first volume of a collection of seventeenth-century chapbooks gathered by Samuel Pepys, titled *Penny Merriments*. Fragments of this chapbook have been published in Roger Thompson's edition of the *Penny Merriments*, although the complete text is currently only available to read in the Samuel Pepys Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge.³⁹ The chapbook is written in prose and separated into six chapters, spread over seventeen pages. While this chapbook is undated, the dated chapbooks in this Pepys collection are almost exclusively from the 1680s. It seems that Pepys was an avid collector during this decade, allowing us to safely assume that *King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading* was also printed around this time.

The basic plot is as follows:

Henry VIII is hunting in Windsor Forest when he becomes separated from his company. Henry decides to take this opportunity to anonymously visit the Abbot of Reading, who is known for keeping a large and plentiful table. Having gained admittance, Henry eats heartily of a sirloin of beef. The astonished Abbot declares that he would gladly pay a hundred pounds in order to have such a good appetite. Henry thanks the Abbot and leaves, promising to tell the King of the Abbot's hospitality.

On arriving back at court, Henry has the Abbot imprisoned in the Tower of London, instructing the Lieutenant of the Tower that the Abbot should only be fed bread and water. The Abbot sends his friends to petition the King, but to no avail. The Abbot then turns to the Lieutenant for help, declaring that he is so near starvation he is ready to eat his own flesh. The Lieutenant reports this to Henry, who laughs and instructs the Lieutenant to give the Abbot a feast the next day, but under no account say that it is on the King's orders.

³⁹ *The Pleasant History of King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading*, in *Penny Merriments*, Vol. I, ed. Samuel Pepys, No. 37. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text. *Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading*, in *Samuel Pepys' Penny Merriments*, ed. Roger Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 29-32. A condensed synopsis of this tale can also be found in Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*, Vol. III, ed. J. S. Brewer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845), pp. 340-1.

The next day the Abbot is brought food by the Lieutenant, while Henry watches from an adjoining room through a peephole. Once the Abbot has finished eating, the King enters the cell, almost causing the Abbot to swoon. Henry tells him not to be dismayed and demands a hundred pounds for giving the Abbot a good appetite. The Abbot thanks the King for proving a good physician to him, paying the sum and rewarding the Lieutenant for his kindness. The Abbot then returns to his friends and they all laugh merrily at the King's joke. The tale ends with the Abbot arranging a feast and eating a sirloin of beef.

As with the above ballads, this chapbook contains multiple tropes from the early *bourdes*. The main plot rotates around two feasts, the King is presented as a somewhat disturbing proto-Panoptical spy, and the early *bourdes*' pessimistic sense of the court as a place of containment is reflected very literally, as the court becomes a site of incarceration. Yet everything is out of joint. The structure is significantly altered while all the tropes are reformed in order to contain their potential radicalism. But despite its own considerable efforts to appear apolitical, it is also a tale full of an unnervingly strained laughter that always seems to hint at something more disturbing beneath its surface. Perhaps more than any of the other post-medieval King and Commoner ballads and chapbooks, this tale's tensions and contradictions are palpable as it attempts to contain and quash any potential for rebellion (with mixed success), while retaining thematic links to the tradition's past.

The opening seems to be that of a traditional King and Commoner text, as the King becomes lost while hunting and subsequently eats a large feast at a subject's house. However, unlike the *bourdes*, the subject is not a commoner, yeoman, or even a lowly hermit, but an Abbot. While his feast is plentiful, it is an allowed, permitted feast, appropriate to the Abbot's social position. Therefore, the subject's feast, so central to the *bourdes*' sense of rebellion, is here stripped of all political power or significance.

This use of an Abbot does open the possibility for a religious, anti-Catholic critique set around his feasting (also see Gerald of Wales' critique of the Cistercians in *King Henry II*

and the Cistercian Abbot) but even this potential is contained.⁴⁰ Indeed, this absence itself becomes noteworthy given the tale's setting and the chapbook's historical context. Given the text's choice of King and subject, the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries cannot help but cast a shadow over this text. This potential for religious comment is only further emphasised when considering the political and religious turmoil during the decade in which this chapbook was published. The 1680s saw the death of the superficially protestant Charles II (although he converted to Catholicism on his deathbed), the accession of his Catholic brother James II, and James' subsequent deposition by the Protestant William of Orange in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, all of which took place against a backdrop of intensely anti-Catholic populist sentiment. As such, it might be expected that this chapbook would be an anti-Catholic text, using this feast to criticise the abbot as a powerful, corrupt, gluttonous figure, or as a hoarder who takes from the commons. Yet surprisingly, the abbot is instead depicted as being 'very large and liberal to all persons' (p. 2) and temperate, with no desire for banqueting: 'you see of all this variety of Meats here is, I can hardly eat any thing, a pestle of Lark is as much as I have eaten' (p. 3). This chapbook seeks at every turn to be ambiguous, careful not to take sides and to defuse (or outright gloss over) topics that could be potentially viewed as politically dangerous.

Despite this notable lack of political direction or threat, the Abbot still receives the punishment that always seems to hang over the commoners in the early bourdes. His incarceration in the Tower of London seems to dramatize the bourde commoners' sense of containment and impending death once they enter the world of the court. Rather than returning his subject's hospitality with a royal feast at court, the King instead offers starvation, which is again a strangely fitting image as regards the early bourdes, where the

⁴⁰ For Gerald of Wales' King and Commoner tale, see the introduction to this thesis. Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. IV, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, Roll Series 21 (London: Longman, 1873), pp. 3-431 (pp. 213-15).

court feast symbolised the end of the commoner's own banqueting. The tropes of the earlier tradition are here but are transformed beyond recognition and can only be made sense of through an awareness of the earlier tradition.

This also applies to the feast in the Tower. After meeting with the King, the Lieutenant informs the Abbot:

that the King was much enraged against him, insomuch that he could not prevail with him in the least to have any other Diet but Bread and Water; but that he so much pittied him, and was troubled at his Condition, that he would venture his Place and Life to serve him: and that to morrow he should have a Dinner, and he would come and Dine with him himself. (p. 11)

This presents us with the medieval bourde's illegal commoner feast in an unexpected context. The Lieutenant acts as the (relative) commoner, first presenting the allowed food of 'Bread and Water', before daring to defy the King's law with a feast of illegal meat and drink: 'a lusty Loyn of Beef, and another two or three Bottles of Clarret' (p. 12). Yet in this chapbook the feast has not only been allowed but instructed by the secretly watching King:

Well, said the King, to morrow let him have a Loyn of Beef to Dinner, and let him have a Bottle or two of Clarret, but be you not known that you have Orders from me, but that you do it upon your own account, and let there be a Hole made out of the Abbots Room that I may come privately and see him eat; The Lieutenant told that King that all things should be done to his Order. (pp. 10-11)

In this way, the seemingly illegal commoner's feast has been incarcerated in the Tower and placed under surveillance, permitted by the King and designed to serve his interests, transforming it from an unofficial feast to an official one. Again this chapbook utilises the early tradition's tropes but presents them in a form that negates and contains their original politics.

In spite of these efforts to defuse political potential, this chapbook is undeniably undercut by a disconcertingly menacing edge. The King cannot help but be portrayed as a

distinctly unsettling spy in this tale. This sense of court surveillance is captured by the image of the King's peephole:

the King came privately to the *Tower*, where he was conveyed secretly into a room adjoining to the Lord Abbots, and a hole made so cunningly that he might see the Lord Abbot and he not see him again [...] the King had much to do to forebear Laughing. (pp. 11-12)

This sense of surveillance can also be extended to the chapbook's opening:

[Henry] thought a fit occasion offered itself, to go Dine with the Lord abbot of Reading, it being unknown to any of his Company; and in the Garb and Disguise he was in, neither the Abbot nor any of his servants could know him. (p. 2)

Henry displays a specific intention to visit the Abbot in order to secretly observe him. It conveys to the reader both the power of the royal gaze and a sense that the sovereign might always be watching, waiting to severely punish his subjects for the most trivial of offences. As such, it is a distinctly Foucauldian, proto-panoptical vision of the monarchy, encouraging obedience both through fear and the sense of perpetual visibility.⁴¹ It is also highly reminiscent of *King Edward and the Shepherd* and Adam's fear that 'Wode has erys; fylde has sijt'.⁴²

This disturbing undercurrent is compounded by the sense that the Abbot has been unjustly imprisoned and victimised. This is emphasised by the 'earnest' petitions of the Abbot's friends to Henry, which are:

to little or no purpose, for the King was extreamly Averse to all their Intercessions; neither could they learn from the King wherein the Abbot had offended him.' (p. 6)

They are left to conclude that 'it was some Great and Hanious offence that the Abbot had committed' (p. 6). The reader's knowledge as to the lack of offence only accentuates the unwarranted, gratuitous nature of the Abbot's punishment. This makes the Abbot's

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 195-228.

⁴² *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. 116-59 (l. 268).

starvation, leaving him ‘ready to eat my own flesh’ (p. 9), feel all the more unnerving and the King’s joke distinctly menacing.

Given this unsettling depiction of Henry, there could be some temptation to view this chapbook as anti-monarchic. But, despite the tale’s dark undercurrent, there is always the sense that the text is encouraging us to laugh *with* the King. This is nowhere more true than the chapbook’s final scenes in which the ‘Joyful’ (p. 15) Abbot recounts the entire tale to his friends, ‘which when they heard, they all laughed heartily, to think what a Cure the King had wrought on the Abbot’ (p. 16). The chapbook here conjures up its own metatextual audience, promoting its expected reception of merry laughter. The Abbot and his companions then sit down to a feast during which the Abbot eats ‘very heartily every day, especially from his Beloved Dish of Sirloyn of Beef’ (p. 17). To modern eyes this may give the Abbot the appearance of a trauma victim, but the text repeatedly seeks to assert that the Abbot was ‘very merry and cheerful’ and ‘very cheerful and well at Reading, where he lived some time after with great plenty’ (p. 17). This maniacal cheerfulness may seem forced but its emphasis and the universal celebration of the King’s ‘joke’ leave little room for an anti-monarchic moral. This chapbook’s emphasis on conservative laughter unconvincingly attempts to mask its more disturbing undercurrents.

This merry concealment also applies to the historical reality upon which this tale is based. While the historical Abbot of Reading may have lived ‘some time after’ the setting of this story, he did not live ‘very cheerful and well’ for long. Hugh Cook, the last Abbot of Reading, was one of four abbots executed for treason by Henry VIII, following the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace rebellion. Hugh Cook had previously been on good personal terms with Henry, ‘entertaining him when his hunting in

Windsor forest brought him near the abbey.’⁴³ He had also aided the King’s petitions to the Pope for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon and had subsequently complied with all demands put upon him by Henry and Thomas Cromwell. Despite this, he was arrested, sent to the Tower of London for ‘examination and practical condemnation’ and subsequently sent to his ‘country to be tried and executed’.⁴⁴ In the words of the historian H. Maynard Smith:

His sudden arrest and execution comes as a surprise and no one knew the reason. Rumour said it had to do with the Royal Supremacy, another said that he had sent money to the Yorkshire rebels three years before, but we only know that he had then made a voluntary contribution to the King’s expenses.⁴⁵

This cannot help but colour our reflections on *King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading*, as several of the chapbook’s details parallel the historical events too closely for coincidence or comfort. The monastery at Reading was one of the most powerful monasteries to fall in the Dissolution, making it unlikely that the author of this chapbook would have been unaware of the fate of its last abbot, especially given the period in which they chose to set it. This reimagining of the historical facts to end in laughter seems as jarring as the attempts to use and defuse radical tropes of the early King and Commoner tradition. In both cases it papers over too many cracks, as the unsettlingly dark elements beneath the laughter threaten to seep through the pages, subtly undermining its attempts to impose a merry conservatism.

King Henry VIII and the Abbot of Reading may be a contradictory text but it does again catch the transition of the King and Commoner tradition. As with the above ballads, it contains several tropes from the medieval bourdes but it twists and morphs them in an attempt to defuse their political radicalism: whether transforming the commoner’s unofficial feast into an official feast, presenting the King’s spying as a merry jest, or making it primarily a tale of two aristocrats, negating the need to comment on class altogether. The potential for

⁴³ H. Maynard Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 106.

⁴⁴ Francis Aiden Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1920), p. 384.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation*, pp. 106-7.

radicalism is consciously identified, suppressed and contained. In each of the post-medieval King and Commoner texts examined thus far, this effort to contain, defuse and remediate these tropes of the fifteenth-century tradition is in itself revealing as regards the atmosphere in which they were printed. It suggests that there was something about the older material that required alteration to make it permissible for this new age of printed street-literature. These three texts all consistently fight against their own contradictions in order to promote a merry, conservative laughter for a new age of print and censorship, in which the King may always be watching at the keyhole.

Conservative Propaganda: ‘I will betray you to [...] our King’

The remainder of the surviving seventeenth-century King and Commoner texts break almost entirely with the early tradition, often abandoning core elements of its structure and either ignoring or actively critiquing the tropes of the medieval bourdes. The following section briefly examines these texts, first exploring the pointed conservatism of *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* (c. 1600) and *The King and the Cobler* (1680), before detailing two propagandist ballads from the reign of William III.

King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth (c. 1600) is perhaps the most reproduced of all King and Commoner texts, appearing in numerous ballad collections from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was certainly aided by it being identified as the quintessential King and Commoner ballad by Francis James Child in his highly influential nineteenth-century collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. The tale first appears in the Stationers’ Register in 1564 as a chapbook entitled ‘The story of Kynge Henry the IIIth and the Tanner of Tamowthe’. This version has not survived but multiple identical

ballad copies have, which appear in the Stationer's Register in 1586, 1600, 1615 and 1624.⁴⁶

King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth is itself adapted from the earlier King and Commoner tale *The King and the Barker* (c. 1468). While *The King and the Barker* was significantly less radical than the other medieval texts and represented a shift away from the carnivalesque politics of the medieval bourdes, *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth* further pushes the tale into a purely conservative realm:

One spring morning, King Edward IV meets a Tanner while out hunting. Edward asks directions for Drayton Basset and offers a dinner if the Tanner comes with him. The Tanner answers rudely, uncertain as to whether Edward is a lord or a thief. The King offers to swap horses but the Tanner demands a fee to do so, which the King happily pays. The Tanner insists that Edward shall not obtain his precious cowhide and throws it onto the King's horse. He then orders Edward to help him mount the horse, farting in Edward's face as he does so. Once the Tanner is successfully mounted, Edward's horse sees the cowhide's horns, mistakes it for a devil and runs away, throwing the tanner from his back in the process. The Tanner insists that they swap horses again but the King demands sixty times the amount he originally paid. The Tanner hands over twice the fee he was originally paid and offers to use the last of his money to buy Edward a drink. The Tanner then wishes to leave but Edward blows his horn and seven score knights appear, kneeling before him. The Tanner fears he will be hanged but Edward instead gives him Plumpton Park, to help maintain the Tanner's cowhide. The Tanner in turn offers to repair the King's shoes if he ever visits Tamworth.

The main difference to *The King and the Barker* relates to the Tanner's character, portraying him as far more arrogant, idiotic and vulgar than the Barker. It also expands the horse-swapping scene, including an emphasis on the Tanner's pride and financial loss in order to further critique the upstart commoner.

In order to understand this ballad, the prominence given to the Tanner's cowhide must first be briefly examined, as it is bound-up with the Tanner's social and economic identity.

There is a persistent financial focus to this text. The tanner boasts of his wealth, engages in

⁴⁶ For details on these versions see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, 1965), pp. 67-8. The tale also served as the primary (if not sole) source for scenes within Thomas Heywood's *I Edward IV* (1599), for more on which see this thesis' conclusion. Thomas Heywood, *King Edward IV, Part One*, in *The First and Second Part of King Edward IV Histories*, ed. Barron Field (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1842), pp. 1-92.

economic transaction, and fears the theft of his wealth and goods. On each occasion this financial element is also linked to the Tanner's cowhide. In the opening exchanges the Tanner declares that 'I heare no tidings [...] but that cow-hides are deare'.⁴⁷ When Edward tries to buy the Tanner's horse, the Tanner insists that 'thou gets not my cow-hide' (l. 96). Finally, when the King's men appear, the Tanner fears that they will steal away both his 'cow-hide' and life together (l. 196). At every turn the cowhide represents the Tanner's economic identity and his social aspirations. The Tanner clearly sees the cowhides as symbolic of an economic superiority that can even challenge that of the aristocracy, first boasting to Edward as to how 'dear' his cowhides are valued and following it by the claim that 'I haue as many nobles in my purse / as thou hast pence in thine' (ll. 51-2).

Once this is understood, then it becomes clear that the central horse-swapping scene acts as a conservative critique of this commons socioeconomic aspiration. Firstly, the Tanner's economic overconfidence appears foolish when the King purchases the Tanner's horse, meeting the Tanner's valuation and causing him to declare in astonishment that 'I would haue sworn on a book [...] / thou hadst not one penny' (ll. 123-4) – despite his awareness that Edward is a courtier. The Tanner's social aspirations and the naivety of them are then emphasised when he climbs onto Edward's horse to transform himself into 'a gentleman':

'Help me [vp], good fellow,' quoth the tanner,
 'lightly that I were gone;
 My wife and my neighbours more and lesse
 will say I am a gentleman.'

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

⁴⁷ *King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth*, in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V, ed. Francis James Child (Mineola and New York: Dover Publications, 1965), pp. 75-7 (l. 68). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

‘You make great waste,’ said our king,
 ‘your curtesie is but small.’ (ll. 141-150)

This farting works to undermine the Tanner’s aspirations, even as he attempts to materialistically and symbolically climb the social ranks. What is emphasised is his insurmountable cultural vulgarity, his innate lack of ‘curtesie’ and the impossibility of him ever being seen as ‘a gentleman’. It is this which is also communicated in the King’s own rejection of the Tanner’s cowhide:

‘I will not haue it,’ said our king,
 ‘I tell thee, so mote I thee;
 I will not carrie it away
 though you would giue it me.’ (ll. 97-100)

To the Tanner, the cowhide represents his liberation from his lowly social position and his ability to economically challenge aristocrats, but it is also shown in this passage to clearly mark out his commoner status, enforcing his social separation and inherent cultural/class difference from the aristocrats. While the early Bourgeois commoners grasped that which was desirable to and marked out the aristocracy, the Tanner is limited in his vision, unable to imagine that which is materialistically outside of his own commoner world. It is a conservative statement on the clear social division between aristocrat and commoner, and on the commons’ foolish arrogance to believe otherwise. In this way, it acts as a pointed, satirical critique of the early King and Commoner material.

This conservative ideology of class separation also underpins the Tanner’s fall from the King’s horse, as his pride in his cowhide and all that it symbolises proves to be his very literal downfall:

The tanner tooke vp the good cowhide,
 off the ground where he stood,
 He threw it vpon the king’s steede,
 in the saddle that was so good.

The steed stared vpon the hornes,
 vnder the greene wood spraie;
 He had weende the diuell of hell had bin come,
 to carrie him thence away.

[...] when the tanner was in the saddle
 the steede began to blow and blast,
 And against the roote of an old tree
 the tanner downe he cast. (ll. 129)

The Tanner's ignorant pride in his cowhide is his undoing. The horse acts as a class barrier that instinctively rejects the Tanner and his cowhide's attempts to vault social boundaries. The cowhide ultimately does not grant the tanner liberation but emphasises his social place, leaving him bruised and battered at the 'roote' of the 'old' social 'tree'. Rather than presenting the King's carnivalesque uncrowning, this ballad instead uncrowns and symbolically decapitates the commoner's aspirations, leaving the Tanner's 'necke [...] well nigh brast' (l. 160).

This ballad actively aims to mock and undermine the commons' economic self-confidence. It represents a specific attack on the commoner's belief that their rise in spending power and materialistic gains will make them the equivalent, or even superior of a courtier. As such, it is also an attack on the foundations of the medieval King and Commoner bourdes, whose radicalism hinged on the commoner's ability to disrupt the social body through material gains and social aspiration. The *Tanner of Tamworth* does not attempt to subtly defuse familiar tropes of the medieval tradition, but instead directly confronts and attacks the older tradition's core values and the foundations upon which its carnivalesque radicalism was built. This is a conservative ballad designed with hostile specificity.

The King and the Cobler (1680) is a light-hearted chapbook that presents a more subtle propagandist agenda. This chapbook details the relationship between the disguised Henry VIII and a Cobbler, who partake in two drinking binges, first at the Cobbler's house

and later at the court, before Henry's identity is revealed and the Cobbler is made a courtier.⁴⁸ The tale emphasises the King and Cobbler's close friendship throughout in a tale that is devoid of any overt political content. However, it is this harmony and lack of politics that perhaps reveals this chapbook's true purpose. Cobblers have long had a reputation for urban militant activism, stretching from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century. So great was their propensity for radical activity that cobblers' political radicalism became proverbial.⁴⁹ Shakespeare famously presents a cobbler leading the riotous mob in *Julius Caesar* (1599). Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) contains Simon Eyre, a subversive cobbler who aids an aristocrat to break the law and himself flouts traditional hierarchy by rising through the social ranks to become Mayor of London.⁵⁰ From around the mid to late eighteenth-century can also be found the King and Commoner-esque ballad *King Edward's Ghost, or the King and the Cobler*, which uses its Cobbler as a mouthpiece to deliver stinging criticisms of the court to Edward III's ghost:

These [Nobles], I presume, quoth the King in a Trance,
Have help'd to pull down the Tyranny of France.
Tush, Tush, quoth the Cobler, who had taken a Cup,
No, these are the Folks who have just set him up.

Thou ly'st, quoth the King, they're too innocent,
Then cast he his Eyes on Be—t and K—t:
As for t'other four, their Names you may spare,
They're Rogues, but they look not such Rogues as they are.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *The Cobler Turned Courtier being a Pleasant Humour Between King Henry the Eighth and a Cobler* (London: F. Haley, 1680). Available at http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=12150236 [accessed September 2014]. A broad summary of this tale, interspersed with direct quotations and several woodcut reproductions, can also be found in John Ashton's collection of chapbooks: *The King and the Cobler*, in *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Ashton (London: Skoob, 1990), pp. 233-6.

⁴⁹ See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Political Shoemakers', in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (London: Abacus, 1999), pp. 23-58.

⁵⁰ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1549-1614. Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemakers Holiday*, ed. Karl Warnke and Ludwig Proescholdt (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1886).

⁵¹ *Edward's Ghost, or The King and Cobler*, in *Rawl. D 383* (f. 145), ll. 41-8. Available at <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/edition/510> [accessed September 2014].

If delving back to notable cobblers during Henry VIII's reign (and *The King and the Cobler's* setting), then it is also impossible to ignore 'Captain Cobbler', a leader of the Lincolnshire Uprising that was precursor to the Pilgrimage of Grace rebellion.

With this cultural perception of cobblers in mind, the lack of politics in *The King and the Cobler* is in itself intriguing. This chapbook seems designed to forge the impression of a close historical bond between monarch and cobblers in order to encourage loyalty and a general sense of goodwill towards the monarchy amongst these traditionally rebellious city craftsmen. Indeed, this impression is only strengthened by a search through Pepys' collection of broadside ballads from around this same late seventeenth-century period, which contains several ballads similarly aimed at promoting this sense of a historical connection and goodwill between the monarchy and England's 'loyal' cobblers, including *The Glory of the Gentle-Craft*, *The Shooe-makers Delight*, and *The Shooe-maker's Triumph*.⁵² It seems that the King and Commoner tradition was being co-opted into a campaign designed to strengthen conservative social bonds and pre-emptively defuse rebellious potential amongst this profession.

King William III and the Loyal Forrister (c. 1689-1702) is far more explicit in terms of its conservative, political aim. In this short ballad, King William III rises early, puts on 'a gown of grey russet [...] / As tho' he had been some silly poor man' and heads to the forest to hunt.⁵³ However, once arriving at the forest, he is stopped by a Forester:

Who cry'd you bold fellow how dare you come here,
Without the King's leave to chase his fair Deer.

⁵² See *The Glory of the Gentle-Craft, or A brief account of the Valiant Shoomakers*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. IV, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 318; *The Shooe-makers Delight: Or, a brief Account of their Manly Acts and Warlike Performances*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. IV, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 392; *The Shooe-maker's Triumph*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. V, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 427.

⁵³ *The Loyal Forrister, or Royal Pastime*, in *University of Glasgow Euing*, No. 156. ll. 7-8. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text. Available at <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/31870/image> [accessed September 2014].

I am one of his subjects I am one of his force,
 And I am come hither for to run a course,
 Get you gone bold fellow you run no course here
 Without the leave of King William forbear. (ll. 19-24)

William attempts to bribe the Forester into letting him poach with ‘hounds’, ‘hawks’, ‘forty shilling’ and a ‘Ring’, but the Forester will not be tempted and instead responds that ‘I will betray you to William our King [...] I’ll bring you before him as sure as a Gun’ (ll. 29-43).

William then reveals his identity, rewards the Forester with twenty guineas for his loyalty and makes him a porter of his new royal residence at ‘Kingsington Court’ (l. 71). This ballad clearly acts as a riposte to the medieval King and Commoner *bourdes*, launching a very specific attack on the tradition’s previous celebration of poaching. The ballad attacks those subjects who do poach and promises rewards for those who prevent others from doing so, while the idealised subject is presented as a loyal enforcer of the King’s laws (‘I am one of his force’).⁵⁴

This ballad can also be seen to possess a new, deeply conservative development in the King and Commoner tradition. The ballad tellingly uses a contemporary king and features a contemporary political issue, promoting William III to the ballad’s readers, while voicing support for William III’s ‘harsh enforcement of the forestry laws’.⁵⁵ It was clearly written and issued as monarchic propaganda. Indeed, this sense is only heightened by the ballad’s closing stanzas:

And when you come thither pray ask for long *Jack*,
 Who wears a Pumgranet of gole at his back,
 Likewise a green Pheasant upon his right sleeve,
 I’ll warrant he’s a true man you may him believe.

He’s one of my porters that stands at my Gate

⁵⁴ Indeed, notice how far the tradition has shifted between Adam’s cry of ‘I am so pyllid with þe kyng’ in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, and this Forester’s declaration that ‘I will betray you to [...] our King’. *King Edward and the Shepherd*, l. 31.

⁵⁵ E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), pp. 40, 288.

To let in my nobles both ear[l]y and late;
 And therefore good fellow come up without fear,
 Ile make thee my Ranger of Parks far and near. (ll. 73-80)

The King is here presented as a narrator in disguise, surprising the reader and making them feel under direct, royal observation. It expands the increasing panoptical feel of the later tradition, further pushing that sense of the unseen omnipresent King, waiting for his subjects to make a wrong move. With this in mind, it is also appropriately symbolic that the tale ends in Kensington Palace, with the King and Commoner tradition brought into the epicentre of William's newly purchased and renovated royal residence.

This use of the tradition as monarchic propaganda is again explicit in *The Royal Frolick* (c. 1690). This ballad exists in three parts, seemingly released as a series, each of which adds a little more to the tale. They can be found in Pepys' ballad collection as *The Royal Frolick*, *An Answer to the Royal Frolick* and *The Royal Recreation*.⁵⁶ Taken together the tale details the entertainment of an incognito William III and his men by a farmer's daughter and the daughter's subsequent fame and marriage to a Squire, having first refused to marry any suitors from her own class. It is noteworthy for being the first King and Commoner ballad to provide a female commoner protagonist and is certainly worthy of study for this aspect alone – although this feature is probably drawn from the plot of an earlier, lost King and Commoner ballad *The Miller's Daughter of Manchester* (1581), and several Renaissance plays that work similar love plots into King and Commoner adaptations.⁵⁷ But

⁵⁶ *The Royal Frolick*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 313. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text. *An Answer to the Royal Frolick*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 326. *The Royal Recreation*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 312.

⁵⁷ *The Miller's Daughter of Manchester* was registered in the Stationer's register on March 2nd 1581. This ballad was in turn probably the main source for the anonymous play *Fair Em, The Miller's Daughter of Manchester* (1590). *Fair Em's* plot details the wooing of the Miller's beautiful daughter by three disguised courtiers, which has some clear similarities with *The Royal Frolick*. For more on *Fair Em* and other examples of Renaissance drama utilising love plots, see this thesis' conclusion. *Fair Em, The Miller's Daughter of Manchester*, ed. John S. Farmer (Amersham: John S. Farmer, 1911); *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. V, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 281.

regarding *The Royal Frolick* as royal propaganda, it features multiple passages that were clearly designed as promotional material for the newly crowned William III. The first part of the ballad opens with the declaration:

Old stories inform us of Jocular things,
The which has been acted by Sovereign Kings,
To make their hearts merry and Nobles also,
As they on their Progress, a hunting would go:
 These were happy days, when Great Caesars would be
 Familiar with Subjects of e'ry degree.

Yet those that have Govern'd these Kingdoms of late,
Has not been so pleasant, till William the Great,
Returning to London from Limerick Fight,
Whose Courage was mingl'd with Joy and Delight. (ll. 1-10)

This emphatic disparagement of the recent 'not [...] so pleasant' monarchs is hugely significant. It throws its wholehearted support behind the Dutch-born William while simultaneously offering a subtle critique of King James II, who William had only just usurped following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. This disparagement of the 'not [...] so pleasant' James is designed to remind the reader of the public hysteria and distrust surrounding James – from the fictitious 'Popish plot' (a supposed Jesuit plot to murder the Protestant Charles II in order to install the Catholic James on the throne) to the public tensions caused by James' eventual ascension, due to his Catholic faith.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that this passage swiftly moves to William's campaign against the Catholics in Ireland, pushing these religious tensions to the fore, while casting William as defender of both country and faith. The 'Limerick Fight' directly refers to William's victory over James's Catholic forces in 1690, which was decisive in crushing the usurped James' resistance. Nor are these religious politics confined to these opening lines. All three parts of this ballad abound with references to William's Protestant faith and the

English people's celebration of his war against Catholicism. The most detailed of these is voiced by the farmer's daughter in *The Royal Frolick*:

Then one of the Nobles straight call'd to the Maid.
O where is thy Father and Mother? he said:
Said she, they are rid to the next Market-town,
To see Great King William of Royal Renown.
Whole Conquering Sword has the Victory won,
And made the proud Rebels in Ireland Run.

[...] Great King William that sits on the Throne,
Has venter'd his Life to pull Popery down,
Therefore he's belov'd by the best of the Town:
My Father and Mother will honour him then. (ll. 37-53)

The Royal Frolick at all times emphasises William's public popularity and his defence of Protestantism and the English people from the foreign powers of Catholicism. William is presented to the reader as one of *us*, fighting the foreign *other* (with William's Dutch birth conveniently omitted). By contrast, James is (without being directly named) shifted into the realm of the *other*, linked with foreign, malevolent powers in the figure of the Pope, and recast in the role of a 'rebel'.⁵⁸

These King and Commoner ballads were plainly written with the express purpose of providing William with street propaganda. Indeed, a perusal through Pepys' ballad collection reveals that they were part of a much wider promotional campaign for William.⁵⁹ They

⁵⁸ A contemporary ballad more overtly expressing this features James II bewailing his defeat to his ally, the overtly anti-Protestant King Louis XIV of France, opening with the damning lines: 'Dear Brother, and Confederate / Your Slave is come again once more'. *King James: His Lamentation for the Loss of His Kingdom of Ireland, Being a Dialogue between Him and the French King*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 297, ll. 1-2.

⁵⁹ The following titles provide just a small, if reflective sample of these William ballads: *The Loyal Subjects Happy Choice: Or Englands Happiness in a Protestant King and a Free Parliament*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 263; *The Protestant Court of England: Or the Joyful Coronation of K. William III and Q. Mary II*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 275; *The Protestant Soldiers Resolution to Fight for King William (who is now gone for Ireland) against the Irish Rebels, and French-papists, both by Sea and Land, being encouragement for all*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 299; *King Williams Triumph: Or His Signal Victory over His Enemies; together, with the Surrender of Drogheda, and His Joyful Entrance into the City of Dublin*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 300; *The Loyal*

embedded the King into a familiar literary tradition, aiming to bolster William's public popularity amongst his new subjects and thus ensure his unproblematic ascension. Taken alongside *King William III and the Forrister*, it is clear that the political propagandist potential of the King and Commoner tradition had been seized upon by social conservatives by the late seventeenth century, in the process transforming the tradition beyond recognition.

The Eighteenth Century: The Problem of James I and the 'Goodman of Ballengeich'

A final, more problematic and elusive ballad promoting royalist celebration can be found in *King James I and the Tinker*. The earliest version of this ballad is preserved in a 1745 garland in the British Library (*The King and Tinker's Garland*), another appears in the ballad collection of antiquarian Francis Douce (1757-1834), a third from 1796 is in the Bodleian Library's John Johnson Collection, and a fourth is recorded in James Dixon's 1845 book of ballads, transcribed from the repertoire of a crippled Yorkshire minstrel.⁶⁰ The ballad is only

Subjects Prayers for King Williams Good Success Over His Enemies in Flanders, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 318.

⁶⁰ *King James the First and the fortunate Tinker*, in *The King and Tinker's Garland, Containing Three Excellent Songs* (Sheffield: John Garnet, 1745). Available at <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=GfteAAAaCAAJ> [accessed March 2015]. *King James and the Tinker*, in *Douce Ballads*, Vol. III, No. 126b. Available at <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/edition/16204> [accessed March 2015]. *King James and the Tinker*, in *Johnson Ballads*, No. 1153B. Available at <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/sheet/23899> [accessed March 2015]. *King James I and the Tinkler*, in *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry of England: Taken Down from Oral Recitation, and Transcribed from Private Manuscripts, Rare Broad-sides, and Scarce Publications*, ed. James Henry Dixon (London: The Percy Society, 1845), p. 109. Details of how Dixon's version was obtained and collated, as well as details relating to this Yorkshire minstrel's life and premature death by drowning following a drunken night out, can all be found in the later edition edited by Robert Bell, *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry of England: Taken Down from Oral Recitation, and Transcribed from Private Manuscripts, Rare Broad-sides, and Scarce Publications*, ed. James Henry Dixon and Robert Bell (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1857), pp. 72-4. A further, slightly later version of this tale can also be found in a ballad collection from 1864. This curious ballad, titled *King Hal and the Cobbler*, repeats nearly verbatim the above versions of *King James I and the Tinker* but swaps James I for an unnumbered 'King Hal' and the tinker for a cobbler. While the collection claims that its tale is taken 'from a chap-book', I have been unable to find a chapbook source. This collection also includes an accompanying illustration of Henry VIII conversing with a cobbler, a pairing that cannot help but be reminiscent of the chapbook *The King and the Cobbler*. It is, therefore, possible that this illustration was originally designed for a telling of *The King and the Cobbler* before a last minute change necessitated the far shorter *King James I and the Tinker* to be inserted into this collection in its place, with the characters then altered to match the already completed illustration. While this is speculation on my part, it would explain this otherwise rather inexplicable and unique amalgamation.

sixty lines in length and fairly nondescript, describing an incognito James I drinking with a tinker at a pub. After chatting convivially, James promises to fulfil the tinker's wish to see the King and takes him outside. They ride to the greenwood and are met by the King's nobles who all remove their hats at the sight of the pair, thus revealing James' royal identity. James then rewards the tinker with a knighthood. As with *The King and the Cobler*, the ballad is largely notable for its removal of the previous political and carnivalesque tropes of the tradition (other than drinking). It was also written with the clear intent of celebrating James I:

And now to be brief, let's pass over the rest,
 Who seldom or never were given to jest,
 And come to King James, the first on the throne,
 A pleasanter Monarch sure ever was known.⁶¹

This unusual opening is reminiscent of *The Royal Frolick*, firmly demoting the 'jests' of previous monarchs featured in the King and Commoner tradition to the realm of fiction, while presenting this ballad as true and James as a monarch who has a genuine bond with his people. This critique of previous monarchs appears strangely incongruous with the rest of this distinctly apolitical ballad. It could suggest that this ballad was primarily designed as propaganda to promote the newly crowned Scottish James to his potentially wary English subjects. However, the late dating of the ballad in its surviving form makes such a theory highly problematic and in any case fails to explain why this ballad appeared so relevant to and popular with eighteenth-century audiences.

To answer this problem, it is worth turning to a series of King and Commoner tales based on King James V that were being told around the same period. These James V tales were evidentially hugely popular in Scotland but they have only survived as short descriptive synopses, which has resultantly led to them being overlooked by ballad collections and other

King Hal and the Cobler, in *Old English Ballads: A Collection of Favourite Ballads of the Olden Time*, ed. Anon (London: Ward and Lock, 1864), pp. 217-9.

⁶¹ *King James and the Tinker*, in *Douce*, ll. 1-4.

academics looking at the tradition. Walter Scott recorded some details of two folkloric Scottish James V tales in *Tales of a Grandfather* (1827), both of which see James adopt the name ‘the Goodman of Ballengiech.’ The first tale sees typical King and Commoner elements (including the presence of a mock-king) become rearranged, with the usual commoner role taken by an aristocrat. James V plans to hold a feast and sends for a delivery of venison. However, the venison becomes waylaid by the chief of the Buchanans at Arnprior, who seizes it for his own feast and declares ‘that if James was King in Scotland, he, Buchanan, was King of Kippen.’⁶² After hearing news of this, James rides to the Buchanans’ castle and enters under the name of ‘the Goodman of Ballengiech’. Buchanan recognises James, grovels before him and begs for James’ forgiveness, which James readily grants before joining him for the feast. Scott’s second tale sees James, again under his pseudonym, attacked by a band of gypsies on Cramond Bridge. He is rescued by John Howieson, a local thresher, who fights off the gypsies and escorts James towards Edinburgh. James pretends to be a poor man of the court and invites John to call on him there. When John visits the court, James provides him with a tour and then promises to show him the king. The pair enter a hall filled with nobles who all remove their hats to them, revealing James’ true identity in a scene that is nearly identical to the end of *King James I and the Tinker*. James subsequently rewards John with the farm of Braehead.⁶³

Details of several more Scottish James V tales can be found in a work by the Reverend Andrew Small, dating from 1823. Small’s book predominantly focuses on documenting his antiquarian expedition around Fife but the last chapter includes cursory plot details relating to an array of otherwise lost, oral King and Commoner tales that were being

⁶² Walter Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1836), pp. 21-3.

⁶³ Such tales had an undoubted influence on Scott, with his narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) also featuring a disguised James V, here calling himself ‘James Fitz-James, the Knight of Snowdoun’. This poem also contains a climactic scene in which the incognito James promises to take Ellen Douglas to the King, only for James’ true identity to be similarly revealed when all of the lords remove their hats to him. See, Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake* (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne, 1810). Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather*, pp. 23-6.

told by the local Scottish populace. *King James V and the Tinker* (recorded in full by Small, although he indicates that this tale has been obtained from a different source) is near identical to the 1745 version of *King James I and the Tinker*, merely replacing James I with James V. Otherwise, *King James V and the Miller* follows the usual King and Commoner feast and reward structure, with the Miller killing and serving-up his prize chicken and ordering the King to ‘sit up’ at the table; *King James V and the Shepherd* tells of the incognito James stealing an insolent shepherd’s awl and forcing him to wade into a loch before dubbing him ‘a dirty knight’; *King James V and the Three Tinkers* sees the incognito James kidnapped by three tinkers and forced to do manual labour, before orchestrating his own rescue and having the tinkers executed; *King James V and the Pedlar* portrays James placing his pack in a tree hollow, hiding, observing a passing pedlar steal the pack, and then hanging the pedlar for theft; and *King James V and the Robber* details the incognito James cutting the hand off a would-be robber, which allows him to later identify the thief as a local lord’s son.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most overtly political James V tale is described in John Gordon Barbour’s *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Character and Scenery* (1824). This tale begins with a Scottish widow’s visit Stirling to complain to James V that her son has been kidnapped by the English during a recent excursion. The widow says that she called on Sir John Charteris of Amisfield for help in capturing the raiders but the lord refused the petition and treated her with contempt. In response, James disguises himself as the ‘Gudeman of Ballengeich’ and visits Sir John, repeatedly sending word via John’s porters that the English are invading. On each occasion John refuses to act or admit James. James eventually throws off his disguise and blows his horn to summon his attendants. He then reprimands Sir John for refusing to

⁶⁴ Andrew Small, *Interesting Roman Antiquities Recently Discovered In Fife* (Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1823), pp. 277-89.

help the widow, ordering him to pay her tenfold for her loss and ransom her son under pain of execution.⁶⁵

A rather different James V tale can be found by way of an eighteenth-century Scottish gentlemen's club known as 'The Most Ancient and Most Puissant Order of the Beggar's Benison and Merryland, Anstruther.' Formed in Fife in 1732, this decadent club was 'devoted to the convivial and obscene celebration of the idea of free sex', while supporting smuggling and any who voiced 'distinctly subversive political sentiments'.⁶⁶ The 'Beggar's Benison' claimed to have taken their name from a story of James V and a beggar girl. This tale portrays James travelling in disguise through East Neuk, Fife. Finding his way blocked by a stream, he pays a nearby beggar girl to carry him across and then gives her a gold coin for her services. In return she gives him the following 'benison' (blessing): 'May your purse naer be toom / And your horn aye in bloom'.⁶⁷ In his book on the 'Beggar's Benison,' David Stevenson nicely encapsulates why the tale so appealed to this libertine club:

At first sight this may be a blessing on the king's wealth (the gold in his purse) and hunting horn, but behind this lies the blessing of his testicles (in the purse of the scrotum), and his erect ('in bloom') penis. The implication is clearly that the beggar lass had granted the king more than aquatic transport: she was rewarded with gold for sexual favours.⁶⁸

This sexual or 'romantic' James tale did not exist in isolation. Walter Scott perhaps alludes to such tales when he states that James used his disguise to 'enjoy amusements which he could not have partaken of in his avowed royal character.'⁶⁹ Thomas Percy is rather more explicit in his *Reliques* (1765), claiming that James V 'was noted for strolling about his dominion in disguise, and for his frequent gallantries with country girls', alluding to a lost tale in which

⁶⁵ John Gordon Barbour, *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Character and Scenery*, by Cincinnatus Caledonius (Edinburgh: Archibald Allardice, 1824), pp. 46-9.

⁶⁶ David Stevenson, *The Beggar's Benison: Sex Clubs of Enlightenment Scotland and their Rituals* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), p. 1.

⁶⁷ Stevenson, *The Beggar's Benison*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Stevenson, *The Beggar's Benison*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather*, pp. 21-2.

James visits ‘a smith’s daughter at Niddrey.’⁷⁰ An article in 1841 for *Tait’s Edinburgh*

Magazine similarly states that:

The reader will hardly require to be informed that it was the practice with James V to traverse the country in disguise – sometimes for the purpose of seeing that justice was regularly administered, and frequently in the less patriotic errand of gallantry and adventure. On these occasions he engaged in many romantic frolics... James was not only an excellent connoisseur of female beauty, but had a sort of intuitive art in finding it out, even though passing just a single night in the neighbourhood.⁷¹

The article proceeds to tell a version of the Cramond Bridge story but instead of James being rescued from a band of gypsies by John Howieson, James rescues from abduction a ‘pretty girl of the lower rank’ called ‘Marion Howison’.⁷² This version of the tale is then worked into the article’s own story of a Robin Hood-esque Scottish outlaw named ‘Richard the Reiver’ or ‘Double-Ribbed Dick’ and his lover Marion. In this tale, James’ incognito visit to view the ‘pretty maid’ Marion results in James similarly saving Marion from abduction, while also uncovering the plot of a corrupt official to falsely accuse Richard of murder. James subsequently appears at Richard’s trial, condemns the official and pardons Richard, promoting him to ‘keeper of the peace.’⁷³ John Gordon Barbour also records a rather smuttier version of the Cramond Bridge story that euphemistically describes James ‘toying’ with a beautiful dairy maid by the bridge when they are seen by the girl’s lover who assaults James, requiring James to again be rescued by the nearby thresher.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Thomas Percy, ‘Introduction to *The Gaberlunzie Man*’, in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Vol. II (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), p. 60.

⁷¹ Anon, ‘The Feats and Fortunes of Richard the Reiver; Commonly Called Double-Ribbed Dick: Part II’, in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine for 1841*, Vol. VIII (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1841), pp. 85-92 (pp. 89-90).

⁷² This version of the tale also appears in (and may have even been created by) a slightly earlier play performed in Edinburgh by William H. Murray, *Cramond Brig; or the Gudeman O’ Ballangeich* (1826). This play merges details of the James V Cramond Bridge tale with Robert Dodsley’s play *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737), occasionally directly lifting Dodsley’s dialogue. Both Dodsley’s and Murray’s plays feature a lower-class maiden receiving the unwanted attentions of a corrupt aristocrat and Murray’s version contains a scene in which ‘Marion Howieson’ is rescued from abduction by the disguised James V. See the Appendix to Chapter Four for more details. William H. Murray, *Cramond Brig; or the Gudeman O’ Ballangeich: A Comic Drama in Two Acts* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 182-). ‘Richard the Reiver: Part II’, p. 89.

⁷³ Anon, ‘The Feats and Fortunes of Richard the Reiver; Commonly Called Double-Ribbed Dick’, in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine for 1840*, Vol. VII (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1840), pp. 777-86. ‘Richard the Reiver: Part II’, pp. 85-92.

⁷⁴ Barbour, *Lights and Shadows*, p. 49-50.

It is difficult to draw too much from these James V tales individually as so few details survive beyond a basic outline, with the original tales lost. But on the whole, these tales appear to predominately present James as an idealised hero who maintains the law, rewards loyalty and brings impertinent subjects to heel, regardless of whether they are aristocrats or commoners. While it is difficult to definitively date them (either individually or collectively), it can be deduced from the above that James V tales were being told in Scotland by at least the 1730s and remained popular until the mid-nineteenth century. The number of these tales seem to indicate a strong desire in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland to celebrate this Scottish monarch – offering further examples of the King and Commoner tradition being used as monarchic praise literature. But in this instance, there is perhaps a kernel of protest viewable in that patriotic celebration. Following a century that saw the Acts of Union (1707) unite England and Scotland under a single Kingdom and the subsequent Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, the popularity of these tales could suggest a patriotic nostalgia for the now lost Scottish monarchy, idealising an independent Scottish past and a benevolent, local Scottish ruler.⁷⁵ This context provides an intriguing background for the Scottish James V tales, especially given that the majority of them see this emblem of the Scottish crown being attacked, kidnapped, robbed, betrayed, or otherwise abused, in one instance against the backdrop of an English incursion. In these James V tales, there is perhaps a glimpse of the tradition being once again subtly adapted and turned back towards resistance.

With this context in mind, it is perhaps no coincidence to find that the earliest known copy of *King James I and the Tinker* was printed in the year of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. However, it seems probable that this James I ballad was written for very different ends. This ballad's survival from and seeming popularity in England (the 1745 garland was printed in Sheffield while the Johnson and Dixon versions originate from London and Yorkshire

⁷⁵ For more on the Jacobite rebellions and tensions in this period, see John L. Roberts, *The Jacobite Wars: Scotland and the Military Campaigns of 1715 and 1745* (Edinburgh: Polygon at Edinburgh, 2002).

respectively), coupled with the historical James I's emphatic advocacy of an English and Scottish union, indicates that this ballad may well have been used in England by pro-Union campaigners as propaganda to counter the Jacobite rebellions – by celebrating a figure who created a precedence for the merging of the English and Scottish crowns. If we return to its opening lines, *King James I and the Tinker* could even be read as a direct English response to the Scottish James V tales:

And now to be brief, let's pass over the rest,
Who seldom or never were given to jest,
And come to King James, the first on the throne,
A pleasanter Monarch sure ever was known. (ll. 1-4)

This opening promotes James I and explicitly focusses on the English perspective and throne (he is notably not described as 'King James, the sixth on the [Scottish] throne'), while dismissing the reported exploits of any monarchs that came before him as fictional – which very much includes those Scottish tales of his grandfather James V.⁷⁶ This English ballad seems designed to subtly trump, defuse, reclaim and undermine the Scottish James V tales. As such, it appears probable that this English James I ballad and its Scottish James V counterparts were used to promote and give voice to opposing political agendas during this tense post-Union period.

This chapter has detailed the gradual metamorphosis of the King and Commoner ballad and chapbook tradition from the sixteenth century onwards. Taken as a whole, these tales saw the tradition undergo a political realignment, as the carnival tropes of the medieval tradition became gradually redirected, turned against themselves, and finally expunged altogether, leaving a conservative laughter directed from the top down that revelled in social separation and aristocratic cultural superiority. While the Scottish James V tales perhaps offer

⁷⁶ *James I and the Tinker* may have even used a Scottish James V version of this tale as its basis, given that Small records a similar version of *James V and the Tinker*, while Walter Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and Cramond Bridge tale possess a near identical ending to this ballad. Although, given the difficulty in dating any of these James V tales, it is equally possible that Small's and Scott's versions were simply part of a later Scottish adaption/reclaiming of this English James I version.

us a small deviation from this narrative, the tradition in England had clearly become little more than a conservative, social propagandist tool by the seventeenth-century, with texts designed to encourage the good behaviour of the lower classes and defuse unrest, often while promoting current, omnipresent monarchs, who may always be watching at the keyhole.

Appendix to Chapter Four

The King and Commoner Tradition on the Stage: ‘Mingling Kings and Clownes’

Introduction

The last chapter showed the increasingly conservative nature of the King and Commoner ballad tradition. However, this is not quite the full story. The King and Commoner tradition was also repeatedly adapted for the early modern stage, giving rise to a vast array of permutations and interpretations of the tradition. While many of these plays draw on the tradition in order to promote the same conservative values found in the post-medieval ballads, there are also a few plays that use the tradition to undercut their monarchs, or pose disquieting questions that recall the early tradition’s original sense of subversion and cultural interrogation.¹ While it would require another thesis to cover these plays adequately, it would feel amiss if I did not at least here identify and provide a brief sense of a few of the central texts, if only as an area that requires further research in light of this study’s findings. With this in mind, I will first highlight the multiple King and Commoner references in Shakespeare’s canon, before identifying and providing brief synopses of some further plays that seem to directly draw on or adapt the King and Commoner material, including some relevant scenes in early modern Robin Hood drama. Finally, I pose some wider questions regarding the tradition’s cultural influence, especially regarding the figure of the early modern fool.

¹ As Sandra Billington similarly argues in relation to the portrayal of mock kings: ‘In the sixteenth century, the subtleties and complexities inherent in outlaws and kings, in mirror image opposition, were absorbed into literature and the dramatic possibilities emerged in history plays’. Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 28.

King and Commoner Drama: The Kings of Dark Corners

Shakespeare stands out as the most prominent and repeated exploiter of the King and Commoner tradition. As these plays are both well-known and easily accessible, they do not require much in the way of comment here. *3 Henry VI* (c. 1592) contains a scene in which the deposed King Henry VI enters a forest in disguise and encounters two poaching gamekeepers, who identify and capture Henry in the hopes of obtaining a reward from King Edward IV – thus blending a variety of recognisably King and Commoner tropes in an intriguing new way.² In *1 Henry IV* (c. 1597), Prince Henry cavorts in the local London taverns and later disguises himself in order to rob and terrify his friend Sir John Falstaff.³ *Henry V* (c. 1599) contains a scene in which Henry disguises himself on the eve of battle in order to venture into his camp and talk incognito with his soldiers. He resultantly gets into an argument with a soldier, Williams, and finds himself questioning the nature of kingship. Later on in the play, Henry reveals that he was the mysterious man Williams had challenged. In a clearly King and Commoner inspired conclusion, Williams fears execution, but is instead rewarded by Henry with a glove full of coins.⁴ *Measure for Measure* (c. 1604) combines the early King and Commoner focus on corrupt nobles and the unsettling proto-panoptical

² William Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 317-98 (III.i).

³ These scenes were loosely adapted from the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, believed to have been staged in the late 1580s. The first half of this earlier play depicts the young Prince Henry disguising himself and mixing with thieves and Sir John Oldcastle (on whom Falstaff was based) in order to rob his father's officials. Later scenes see Prince Henry arrested following a tavern brawl and release a thief (Cuthbert Cutter) who had aided Henry in his robberies. In a potential gesture towards the King and Commoner narrative, Henry also promises his criminal gang that they will be granted positions of state once he is King – although he does not honour this promise later on. William Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1177-1254. *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, ed. John S. Farmer (Amersham: John S. Farmer, 1913).

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1471-1548 (IV.i., IV.viii). Anthony Munday and Michael Drayton's play *Sir John Oldcastle* (1600) also contains a scene in which Henry V disguises himself with the aim of infiltrating a rebel camp, when he is waylaid and robbed by Sir John of Wrotham, the parson. Henry later confronts John, causing John to initially draw his weapon on the King before begging forgiveness. Henry spares John's life and even lets him keep the money he stole. Anthony Munday and Michael Drayton, *The Life of Sir John Oldcastle* (Chiswick: The Malone Society, 1908), IV.i.

disguised ruler as spy.⁵ The ‘old fantastical Duke of dark corners’, Duke Vincentio, announces that he intends to leave Vienna and places the puritanical Angelo in charge. Vincentio subsequently adopts a disguise and remains in the city, mingling with his subjects and watching Angelo’s gradual descent into corruption. The disguise allows for Duke Vincentio’s omniscient appearance in the play’s climax to condemn Angelo, in which Vincentio arranges the other characters’ exits and entrances (including his own re-entrance in disguise) for theatrical effect, as the citizens of Vienna watch on. The result very much resembles the actions of the still-disguised king during the court scenes of the early King and Commoner tales, as well as being a metatheatrical spectacle designed to publically cement Vincentio’s own power.⁶ *The Winter’s Tale* (c. 1609-11) sees King Polixines disguise himself to attend a commons’ carnival feast (itself very much in tune with the early King and Commoner tradition). There he discovers his son Florizel (disguised as a shepherd) has wooed the shepherdess Perdita, who it is later discovered is of royal blood (in a similar twist to that seen in the earlier King and Commoner influenced play *Fair Em* – see below).⁷ In another gesture towards the King and Commoner tradition, the shepherds who raised Perdita are subsequently rewarded and made gentlemen by the King. Rochelle Smith also includes *As You Like It* (c. 1598-1600) in this list, while Peter Hyland claims that the disguises and ‘topsy-turvy’ world of *King Lear* (c. 1604-5) allow it to be viewed in light of such disguised ruler plays. Both suggestions open up interesting avenues (especially in terms of the oppressed shepherds in *As You Like It*, and the relationship between the King and Fool in the

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 2039-2108 (IV.iii.146-7).

⁶ For an exploration of Duke Vincentio’s attempts to (re)establish his authority and *Measure for Measure*’s warning ‘to be wary of art’s incriminating compact with power’, see Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 133-47.

⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 2881-2962 (IV.iv).

wilderness in *King Lear*) but their direct relationship with the King and Commoner tradition is perhaps somewhat more debatable.⁸

While relevant material on Shakespeare's relationship with other 'disguised ruler' plays can be found in studies by Barton, Hyland and Quarmby, Rochelle Smith's article is currently the sole exploration of the ideological and thematic influences of the King and Commoner tradition on Shakespeare's canon.⁹ It remains an area clearly in need of further study and one that reaches beyond Shakespeare to early modern culture more generally. Ross Duffin's invaluable collection of the 160 broadside ballads referenced in Shakespeare's plays reveals the extent to which Shakespeare was very much immersed in, deeply influenced by, and part of the 'low culture' that the street-ballads inhabited.¹⁰ It is clear that Shakespeare would have identified with Mopsa, the shepherdess in *The Winter's Tale*, when she enthusiastically declares, 'I love a ballad in print': a message that is only emphasised by the entrance of the disguised King Polixines, in his own King and Commoner-inspired scene, just after these words are spoken.¹¹ Shakespeare's repeated staging of this King and Commoner folkloric motif poses a challenging critique to any literary critics, historians, or anthropologists who claim that literary influence only trickles from the top down (making popular culture a merely degenerated form of aristocratic culture). The influence of this tradition makes it clear that high and low culture were engaged in a far more complex and

⁸ Rochelle Smith, 'King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad, Elizabethan Drama, and Shakespeare', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 50.2 (2010), 301-335 (pp. 325-7). Peter Hyland, *Disguise on the Early Modern English Stage* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 78-9. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 1615-1682. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), pp. 2336-2491.

⁹ Anne Barton, 'The King Disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the Comical History', in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 207-233. Hyland, *Disguise on the Early Modern English Stage*. Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012). Smith, 'King-Commoner Encounters in the Popular Ballad'.

¹⁰ Ross W. Duffin, *Shakespeare's Songbook* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

¹¹ Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, IV.iv.251.

open two-way dialogue. It also poses a simultaneous challenge to the notion that early modern literature was in any way a sudden cutting-off from its medieval past. Renaissance literature clearly displays a deep interrogation of its medieval past and the way in which medieval culture and narratives could be reimagined in order to shape the present.

Shakespeare was certainly not alone in his theatrical adaptations of the King and Commoner motif. There can be found a multitude of plays from the late sixteenth-century onwards featuring either scenes inspired by the King and Commoner tradition or direct adaptations of King and Commoner ballads, which further interact with each other to create a unique set of disguised ruler plays. Many of these also include simultaneous love plots that involve disguised aristocrats, usually either a king or corrupt lord, wooing lower-class women. It is possible that these love plots are influenced by the disguised kings and knights of romance (who often use disguise to woo or test their lady's love) and have become blended with other features borrowed from the King and Commoner tradition – generally the King interacting with commoners and/or commoner complaints over aristocratic exploitation.¹²

Perhaps the earliest of these plays is Robert Greene's *Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (c. 1589). In a clear gesture towards the King and Commoner tradition, this play sees Prince Edward dress in green and go hunting, during which he lodges incognito with a gamekeeper and fills the keeper's lodge with 'poached' venison. During his stay, the disguised Edward falls in love with the keeper's daughter and, on returning to the court, makes plans as to how to woo her. This in turn leads to Edward's fool, Raphe, suggesting that they switch their clothes and positions:

¹² For more on romantic uses of disguise in romance, see this thesis' Introduction and Morgan Dickson, 'Verbal and Visual Disguise: Society and Identity in Some Twelfth-Century Texts', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 41-54.

Marrie, Sirah Ned, thou shalt put on my cap and
my coat, and my dagger, and I will put on thy clothes,
and thy sword, and so thou shalt be my foole.¹³

Edward agrees to this and they proceed to visit the necromancer Friar Bacon to ask for advice on winning his love, with the Fool disguised as a prince and the Prince disguised as a fool. This switch of identities is partially a comment on the folly of the Prince's illicit and dishonourable love.¹⁴ But considering the carnivalesque hierarchical inversion and class intermingling inherent to the early King and Commoner burdes, this exchange of identities between prince and clown can be read as a knowing extension of the more obviously King and Commoner inspired narrative details.

The anonymous *Fair Em, The Miller's Daughter of Manchester* (1590) features a plot that somewhat resembles both the love plot of *Frier Bacon* and the much later King and Commoner ballad *The Royal Frolic* (c. 1690), albeit with its tropes displaced and rearranged.¹⁵ However, it seems to be based on a lost ballad titled *The Miller's Daughter of Manchester*, which was registered in the Stationer's register on 2nd March 1581.¹⁶ In this play, the Miller's beautiful daughter is wooed by three disguised, incognito courtiers, one of whom she eventually marries. The conclusion sees William the Conqueror meet Em and recognise her father, who is revealed to be the previously banished Sir Thomas Goddard. William forgives Sir Thomas and grants him his old title and lands. In this way, the play features the interaction between a king and seeming commoners, disguised identities, and

¹³ Robert Greene, *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay*, in *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, Vol. II, ed. J. Churton Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp. 1-78 (I.i.31-3).

¹⁴ This reading is also proposed by Sandra Billington. See Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984), p. 48.

¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter Four, *The Royal Frolic* details the incognito King William's hospitality from a farmer's daughter, which subsequently results in her being wooed by members of the aristocracy. *The Royal Frolick*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 313. *An Answer to the Royal Frolick*, in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 326. *The Royal Recreation* in *The Pepys Ballads: Facsimile Volume*, Vol. II, ed. W. G. Day (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), No. 312.

¹⁶ *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. V, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 281.

court promotion (here turned into restoration) of the King and Commoner tradition, but with any sense of hierarchal upheaval removed.¹⁷

Thomas Heywood's *King Edward IV, Part One* (1599) contains a lengthy and highly humorous adaptation of *The King and the Barker/King Edward IV and the Tanner of Tamworth*, while adding further tropes taken from across the King and Commoner tradition. During the play, John Hob the tanner comes across a royal hunt, encountering various members of the court before a disguised Edward accosts him. Unlike the ballad versions, Hob refuses Edward's offer to swap horses (in a pointed reference to the ballads, he claims Edward's horse is too skittish) and instead voices commoner complaints relating to the abuse of royal patents. As in *King Edward and the Shepherd*, Edward probes Hob for information regarding the King's public popularity. But the play's dramatisation of Falconbridge's rebellion to reinstate the deposed King Henry VI adds greater import than usual Edward's question. Hob's answer is to repeatedly emphasise Edward's and Henry's interchangeability, declaring with comic irreverence that 'There's such halting betwixt two kings, that a / man cannot go upright, but he shall offend t'one of them' and 'Death's an honest man; for he spares not the King. / For as one comes, another's ta'en away; / And seldom comes the better'.¹⁸ Edward subsequently visits Hob's home, where they feast and sing. Hob later reappears in London to petition for the release of his imprisoned son and once again meets the disguised Edward. On the reveal of Edward's identity, Hob is given a reward of forty pounds and his son is pardoned. A side plot sees Edward wearing the same disguise in order to meet with and woo the commoner Jane Shore, initially doing so incognito.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Fair Em, The Miller's Daughter of Manchester*, ed. John S. Farmer (Amersham: John S. Farmer, 1911).

¹⁸ Thomas Heywood, *King Edward IV, Part One*, in *The First and Second Part of King Edward IV Histories*, ed. Barron Field (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1842), pp. 1-92 (pp. 41, 51-2).

¹⁹ An eighteenth-century two act play by Francis Godolphin Waldron titled *The King in the Country* (1788) later isolates, edits and modernises the King and Tanner scenes of Heywood's play, although the end result possesses considerably less charm than the original. Francis Godolphin Waldron, *The King in the Country: A Dramatic Piece in Two Acts* (London: Privately Printed, 1789).

In Thomas Middleton's *The Phoenix* (c. 1603-4) the Duke's son, Phoenix, disguises himself and explores 'Ferrera' with his servant Fidelio, seeking to learn about the subjects he will soon rule. Over the course of the play they encounter an immoral lawyer, a captain trying to sell his wife, an incestuous knight, a corrupt Justice of the Peace with designs on Fidelio's sweetheart, and the Lord Proditor, who is plotting to murder Phoenix and seize power. The ending sees the still-disguised Phoenix gather and indict most of the above in the court, then reveal his true identity and punish (rather than reward) his guilty subjects in a display of royal power.²⁰

Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1605) clearly possesses some relationship to the later chapbook *The King and the Cobler* (1680) and also distinctly resembles an episode in the *Antapodosis* of Liudprand of Cremona (c. 922-972).²¹ It features an extended sequence in which Henry VIII disguises himself and heads into London at night in order to test his incompetent and corrupt watchmen, discovering that they are on personal terms with the city's criminals. Henry comes across Black Will, a murderer, thief, and pimp, who engages Henry in a duel. This fight sees them both arrested by the watch and taken to prison. When two courtiers come to release the King, in the process revealing Henry's true identity, Henry enlists Black Will in the army and requests that any prisoners who have been

²⁰ Thomas Middleton, *The Phoenix*, in *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, Vol. I. ed. A. H. Bullen (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), pp. 99-210. Two other Jacobean disguised-ruler plays often discussed in relation to *The Phoenix* are John Marston's plays *The Malcontent* (c. 1603) and *Parasitaster, or The Fawn* (1604). I have not included either here as I feel that neither draw sufficiently on the King and Commoner material, although they both contain several parallel themes and are certainly of great value in the study of these disguised ruler plays more generally. See John Marston, *The Malcontent*, in *The Works of John Marston*, Vol. I, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1887), pp. 193-320; and John Marston, *Parasitaster, or The Fawn*, in *The Works of John Marston*, Vol. II, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: J. C. Nimmo, 1887), pp. 105-230.

²¹ For more on this *Antapodosis* tale, see this thesis' introduction. Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, in *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona: Antapodosis, Liber de Rebus Gestis Ottonis, Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*, trans. F. A. Wright (London: Routledge, 1930), pp. 27-212 (pp. 37-42). *The Cobler Turned Courtier being a Pleasant Humour Between King Henry the Eighth and a Cobler* (London: F. Haley, 1680). Available at http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=12150236 [accessed September 2014]

wronged by either his servants or Cardinal Wolsey send him petitions (although nothing comes of this).²²

A trio of Renaissance Robin Hood plays also feature distinctly King and Commoner elements, continuing the intermingling of these two traditions following *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (c. 1500). In *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield* (printed in 1599 but performed as early as 1588-9), often attributed to Robert Greene, George is a defiantly monarchist commoner, fighting the rebellious Earl Kendall and his men. The plot includes two King and Commoner influenced scenes. The earliest of these sees Earl Kendall, Lord Bonfild and Sir Gilbert come into Wakefield in disguise and allow their horses to help themselves to George's wheat field, much to George's chagrin. On discovering that they are part of Kendall's army, George strikes the Earl, declaring 'A poore man that is true, / Is better than an Earle if he be false'.²³ Kendall summons his army but decides to reward George for his bravery, promising to make George a knight if he joins his rebellion – thus creating an unusual twist on the King and Commoner reward trope. George accepts this offer, but only in order to play a trick that results in him killing Sir Gilbert and taking Kendall and Bonfild prisoner. A further King and Commoner scene sees King Edward and King James disguise themselves and head into Bradford, where they meet and drink with George and Robin Hood. King Edward then reveals his identity and offers to make George a knight. George refuses the offer, asking only that King James 'Giue a small pension to the fatherlesse, / Whose father he caus'd murdered in those warres'.²⁴ As such, this play takes the physical and violent 'trickster' commoner of the early tradition and redirects these elements into the figure of a

²² Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me, You Know Me*, ed. Karl Elze (Dessau: Emil Barth, 1874).

²³ Robert Greene(?), *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*, ed. John S. Farmer (Amersham: John S. Farmer, 1913), C.3.

²⁴ Greene(?), *George a Greene*, G.1.

staunch monarchist, who is more than happy to remain fixed in his social position as a humble subject.

The central scenes of George Peele's *King Edward I* (1593) see the Welsh Prince Lluellen and his followers dress themselves as Robin Hood and his men on the eve of battle with King Edward I.²⁵ In the forest, Lluellen encounters and fights with an initially incognito King Edward, thus blending King and Commoner elements with the 'Robin meets his match' motif of the outlaw tradition. This use of a disguised king set against a figure who challenges his authority chimes with the more radical aspects of both the medieval King and Commoner and Robin Hood material. However, as Stephen Knight argues, 'there is little political bite in the idea of this exile', with these scenes focusing on a tensionless 'neo-pastoralism' that works to dispel Lluellen's potentially threatening position as an independent Welsh Prince by instead emphasising his keenness for 'simple amusements'.²⁶

Anthony Munday's gentrified and conservative Robin Hood play, *The Downfall of Roberte Earl of Huntington* (1598), contains a scene near the play's conclusion in which Prince John flees the court on the news of King Richard I's return. John dresses himself in Robin Hood's traditional 'Kendall greene' and adopts the name 'Wodnet' before heading into the forest.²⁷ The disguised John encounters and fights Scathlock and Friar Tuck, before being identified upon Robin and Marian's arrival. King Richard appears shortly afterwards to return Earl Robin's confiscated lands and title, again safely transforming the King and Commoner reward and social promotion trope into social restoration and resultantly keeping social order intact.

²⁵ George Peele, *Edward I*, in *The Works of George Peele*, Vol. I, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: John. C. Nimmo, 1888), pp. 75-218.

²⁶ Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 116-19.

²⁷ Anthony Munday, *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 303-401.

Post-Renaissance, a dramatic adaptation of *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield* (1624) can be found in an eighteenth-century play by the (Mansfield-born) satirist Robert Dodsley, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* (1737).²⁸ Dodsley was acquainted with several members of the anti-Walpole political group ‘Cobham’s Cubs’, not least his own patron and ‘co-conspirator’ Alexander Pope.²⁹ *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* certainly tapped into a public vein of anti-Walpole sentiment, becoming one of the most popular plays of the decade and a firm favourite of the Prince of Wales – himself strongly associated with the Cobhamites as head of the Leicester House Opposition (around which much of the government opposition gathered).³⁰ The play itself inspired a small riot and was repeatedly lambasted by supporters of Walpole’s government as ‘subversive [propaganda] dangerous to the order of the state’.³¹

The play contains a blend of royalist patriotism and anti-government radicalism. It features repeated criticisms of London’s corrupt courtiers, including a lengthy anti-noble song, while the main villain of the piece is the unsubtly named Lord Lurewell, who tries to steal away Peggy, the betrothed of Dick the Miller’s son. At the same time, John Cockle the Miller is no longer the poacher of the ballads but portrayed as the King’s most ardent forester and law-keeper. The play concludes in a *Measure for Measure*-esque trial scene at court, which ends with the King knighting John, denouncing Lord Lurewell and forcing him to pay Peggy and Dick three hundred pounds a year in recompense for his actions.³² A sequel, *Sir*

²⁸ Perhaps coincidentally, it was Robert’s brother, James Dodsley, who would later publish the first edition of Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765, a collection which included and made more widely available the ballad version of *King Henry II and the Miller of Mansfield*. *The King and Miller of Mansfield*, in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Vol. III, ed. Thomas Percy (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), pp. 179-89.

²⁹ Harry M. Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley: Creating the New Age of Print* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 44-50.

³⁰ Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley*, p. 55. For more on the Leicester House Opposition, see Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 55-7.

³¹ Solomon, *The Rise of Robert Dodsley*, p. 56.

³² Robert Dodsley, *The King and the Miller of Mansfield: A Dramatick Tale* (London: Privately Printed, 1737). Available at <https://archive.org/details/kingandmillerma01dodsgoog> [accessed September 2014].

John Cockle at Court (1738), is a lengthy critique of the aristocratic fashions and extravagance of the court, with John calling for power and wealth to be confiscated from those that abuse it. It also possesses a very similar love plot to the first play, in which John's daughter is wooed by an ill-intentioned Knight, requiring the King to once again throw on his disguise and aid John in proving the Knight's dishonest intentions.³³ The success of Dodsley's plays inspired several musical adaptations, including a score by the prestigious composer Thomas Arne (1737), Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny's French opera *Le Roi et le Fermier* (1762), and Sir Henry Rowley Bishop's burletta, *Harry le Roy* (c. 1800-50).³⁴

The nineteenth century also saw Dodsley's *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* form the basis of William Henry Murray's comedy *Cramond Brig; or the Gudeman of Ballangeich* (1826). Murray was a dramatist and actor who managed two Edinburgh theatres. He was also a friend of Walter Scott, bringing several of Scott's works to the stage. Indeed, it was perhaps the success of Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), a poem that follows the adventures of a disguised James V, which encouraged Murray to create his own James V play.³⁵ In *Cramond Brig*, Murray loosely adapted the Scottish King and Commoner tale of James V at Cramond Bridge and amalgamated it with Dodsley's *Miller of Mansfield*.³⁶ Murray occasionally lifts entire sections of Dodsley's dialogue (such as the disguised monarch's 'What is a king?' speech, some of the commoner's satiric swipes at courtiers, and the monarch's judgements in the court scenes), while its plot similarly features a corrupt courtier trying to seduce and

³³ Robert Dodsley, *Sir John Cockle at Court: Being the Sequel of the King and the Miller of Mansfield* (London: Privately Printed, 1738). Available at <https://archive.org/details/sirjohncockleat00dodsgoog> [accessed September 2014].

³⁴ Barbara Gallon and David J. Bradbury, *Nag's Head, King's Arms: Mansfield's Hostelry History* (Nottingham: Old Mansfield Society, 1997), p. 28. Thomas Arne, *The King and the Miller*, in *The Musical Entertainer*, Vol. I, ed. George Bickham (London: Charles Corbett, 1737), no. 40. Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny, *Le Roi et le Fermier: Comedie en Trois Actes* (Paris: Claude Herissant, 1762). Henry R. Bishop, *Harry Le Roy: Heroic Pastoral Burletta founded on Dodsley's King and the Miller of Mansfield, as performed with great applause at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden* (London: Goulding, D'Almaine and Potter, 18--).

³⁵ See, Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake* (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne, 1810)

³⁶ For more on this tale, see Chapter Four.

abduct a commoner's daughter (here, Marion Howieson). However, its plot possesses some unique features (such as James' fight with Marion's abductors) and further originality is created by the rambunctious Scottish farmer and wife, Jock and Tibbie Howieson, with Murray creating a clear verbal contrast between the rural, Scots-speaking commoners and the urban courtiers' well-spoken English – a divide which the disguised James V frequently attempts to bridge through his use of Scots proverbs.³⁷

Finally, a nineteenth-century history play by John Alfred Langford, *The King and Commoner* (1870), can perhaps be regarded as the most overtly radical piece of King and Commoner-related drama, as well as the most pessimistic. Langford was a self-educated journalist, activist and writer, who was public in his support for European revolutionaries Lajos Kossuth and Giuseppe Mazzini.³⁸ His book *English Democracy: Its History and Principles* found circulation 'among the radicals of the north' and details lower-class political struggles throughout English history while espousing Langford's own hopes for greater future equality:

Wherever oppression and tyranny bow men down to the earth – wherever the despot sets his foot upon the laws and liberties of a land – there the democrat sees in the oppressed and downtrodden one to sympathise with, to encourage, and to help. Nor does he accept this as a beautiful theory only, but as a duty laid upon him, and which he resists or neglects at his peril.³⁹

The King and Commoner is a history play set around 1194, portraying the life of Fitz-Osbert (one of the earliest 'radicals' celebrated by Langford in *English Democracy*).⁴⁰ Following King Richard I's return from the Crusades, Fitz-Osbert intends to meet with King Richard

³⁷ William H. Murray, *Cramond Brig; or the Gudeman O' Ballangeich: A Comic Drama in Two Acts* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 182-)

³⁸ Anon, 'Toiling Upward: John Alfred Langford', *The British Controversialist and Literary Magazine*, 3rd September 1871, pp. 54-62, pp. 221-30, pp. 303-12 (pp. 304-5). *The British Controversialist* was a monthly magazine made up of contributions by anonymous readers 'that aimed to provide a spot on which men of every creed may meet as upon neutral ground, and there engage in calm and deliberate controversy.' See *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), p. 77.

³⁹ 'Toiling Upward', p. 305. John Alfred Langford, *English Democracy: Its History and Principles* (London: Chapman, 1859), pp. 77-8.

⁴⁰ Langford, *English Democracy*, pp. 23-4.

and pass on the complaints of the commons, as part of his endeavour to liberate the serfs from the oppressive tyranny of the aristocratic classes. However, Fitz-Osbert privately admits to his wife that ‘I sometimes fear / This hoping in the king will be in vain’.⁴¹ He then relays a King and Commoner story of Richard wandering incognito in the countryside and encountering a peasant who owns a falcon. Richard declares that a falcon is ‘fit only for the noble, not the serf’ and, ‘Indignant at this wrong to chivalry’, attempts to confiscate the bird, resulting in a small peasant uprising that forces the King to flee, be overtaken, and bested by the peasant in combat: ‘This peasant-scoffing, serf-insulting king / Had fallen by a peasant’s hand’.⁴² While Fitz-Osbert is still willing to petition the King, he also declares: ‘And if we fail, the sword at last must prove / Who strongest is, the commoners or the king.’⁴³ While he does briefly convince Richard to aid the commons in their struggle against aristocratic oppression, Fitz-Osbert is ultimately betrayed and assassinated by corrupt members of the court.

Early Modern Clowns: ‘the aduise of fooles’

Returning to the sixteenth-century, a far broader and more complex question regarding the influence of the King and Commoner tradition on early drama can be posed with reference to George Whetstone’s and Philip Sidney’s critiques of Renaissance theatre. In the preface to his play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), George Whetstone bemoaned the comedies of his time, remarking that:

Manye tymes (to make mirthe) they make a Clowne companion with a Kinge: in theyr graue Counsels, they allow the aduise of fooles: yea they vse one order of speach for

⁴¹ John Alfred Langford, *The King and the Commoner: A Historical Play in Five Acts* (Birmingham: E. C. Osborne, 1870), p. 15.

⁴² Langford, *The King and the Commoner*, pp. 15-16.

⁴³ Langford, *The King and the Commoner*, p. 32.

all persons: a grose *Indecorum*, for a Crowe, wyll yll counterfet the Nightingales
sweete voice: euen so, affected speeche doth misbecome a Clowne.⁴⁴

A similar complaint written shortly afterwards can be found in Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* (c. 1580):

all their Playes bee neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies, mingling Kinges and
Clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the Clowne by head and
shoulders to play a part in majesticall matters, with neither decencie nor discretion.⁴⁵

Both complaints relate to the use of the fool in Renaissance drama and predate all of the surviving King and Commoner-influenced plays. However, both Whetstone's and Sidney's comments undeniably resonate with, and could even act as a description for, the King and Commoner material. Indeed, Sidney's criticism is particularly pertinent given his satiric attack of the King and Commoner narrative in the opening of *Arcadia* (c. 1580), believed to have been written around the same time as his *Defence of Poetry*.⁴⁶ With this in mind, the intriguing question posed by Whetstone and Sidney's comments regards the extent to which the King and Commoner tradition may have influenced the development of the fool on the early modern stage – especially when such fools or clowns are made 'companion with a Kinge'. It is possible to identify some historical examples of monarchs employing jesters, fools, or minstrels and there also exist a handful of 'King and Fool disputes' found in medieval marginalia or the *Solomon and Marcolf* tales.⁴⁷ But in terms of insular literary culture, the King and Commoner tradition (with its roots extending back to the tenth century) can certainly lay a valid claim for being one of the cornerstones of any such 'mingling' of

⁴⁴ George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra*, ed. John S. Farmer (Amersham: John S. Farmer, 1910), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, in *The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, Vol. III, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 1-46 (p. 39).

⁴⁶ For more on which, see Chapter Four. Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (the New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkovicz (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 17.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of both historical fools employed by monarchs and the medieval King and Fool disputes, see Billington, *A Social History of the Fool*, pp. 1-15, 32-50. A further insightful history on monarchs employing fools can be found in John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 1-9. An excellent comparison between *Rauf Coilyear* and the fifteenth-century *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf* can be found in Nancy Mason Bradbury, 'Representations of Peasant Speech: Some Literary and Social Contexts for *The Tail of Rauf Coilyear*', in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 19-34.

‘Kinges and Clownes’ in the popular imagination. Indeed, even the historical court fools during the Renaissance are presented in a way that resonates with the King and Commoner tales. These fools were frequently presented or constructed as country rustics, allegedly plucked from their former rustic life (whether by persuasion or coercion) to come to court and entertain the monarch. For example, Elizabeth I’s fool, Richard Tarlton, was famously said to have been a swineherd when he encountered a servant of the Earl of Leicester, who being pleased with Tarlton’s ‘*happy unhappy answers*’ brought him back to the court.⁴⁸

Such intriguing details reveal the extent of research that is still required regarding the extent of this folkloric King and Commoner tradition’s widespread and pervasive influence. Nor does the history of this tradition end with its use as a recurring motif on the stage. Its direct use and influence can be further extended to an array of novels and poems from the nineteenth century to the present day, including Walter Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1899), Rudyard Kipling’s ‘The King’s Job (The Tudor Monarchy)’ (1911), and some books in Terry Pratchett’s comedic ‘Discworld’ series, especially *Men at Arms* (1993) and *Feet of Clay* (1996).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Billington, *A Social History of the Fool*, pp. 32-6.

⁴⁹ Walter Scott’s narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) follows the adventures of a disguised James V, going by the name of ‘James Fitz-James, the Knight of Snowdown’. See Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake* (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne, 1810). In *Ivanhoe*, Scott freely adapts *King Edward and the Hermit* in chapters sixteen and seventeen, during an encounter between a disguised King Richard and Friar Tuck. See Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. Francis Hovey Stoddard (New York: American Book Company, 1904), pp. 164-182. Scott also discusses the King and Commoner tradition and its influence on *Ivanhoe* in Walter Scott, *The Prose Works of Walter Scott: Supplementary Volume* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1834), pp. 67-8. Mark Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee* features a lengthy section in which Hank disguises himself and King Arthur as peasants in order to visit the poor, part of which includes an extravagant feast in a commoner’s home. However, Arthur’s incompetent attempts to act like a convincing peasant result in their pursuit by an angry mob. They are subsequently sold into slavery, threatened with execution, and saved by Lancelot on a bicycle. See Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, ed. Bernard L. Stein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 264-380. Rudyard Kipling’s King and Commoner inspired poem sees an unnamed King disguise himself as a leper and leave the court to find knowledge, only to come across school children reciting ‘Our King is an ass’. See Rudyard Kipling, ‘The King’s Job (The Tudor Monarchy)’, in *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. R. T. Jones (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 747. Several of Terry Pratchett’s ‘Discworld’ books feature Captain Carrot, a cheerful if simple member of Ankh-Morpork’s city watch, who possesses an encyclopaedic knowledge of the city’s inhabitants and history, is obsessive over the letter of the law, commands attention and forces obedience through the unnatural strength of his charisma alone, and makes repeated efforts

While this thesis is primarily focussed on a close analysis of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tales, it is vital to understand their place in the tradition as a whole and the extent of their cultural influence. These texts can only be partially understood if read in isolation. For a medievalist, an understanding of these equally intriguing later permutations helps to throw the unique details in the medieval material into sharper focus. But these sections on the post-medieval material have also sought to provide a sense of the sheer scale, variety, and pervasive cultural influence of this critically neglected tradition. I have highlighted key texts across several centuries, introduced readings, and emphasised some of the shifts in the post-medieval tradition, while tracing its adaption across broadside ballads, prose chapbooks, and drama. It is clear that the post-medieval tradition filtered equally into cheap and transient street entertainment and the staging of national histories, bridging ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary cultures, while demonstrating itself amenable to a variety of ideological uses. This discussion must unfortunately be curtailed by the limits of a single thesis but I hope that it will provide some encouragement for further research into this fascinating area, prompting further discoveries and helping others shine a brighter light into this tradition’s remaining dark corners.

to hide that he is the direct heir to the Republic’s long-vacated throne. In *Feet of Clay*, Commander Vimes muses: ‘young Carrot turns up with charisma writ all over him, and he’s got a sword and a birthmark and everybody gets a funny feeling and dozens of buggers start going through the records and say, “Hey, looks like the king’s come back.” And *then* they watch him for a while and say, “Shit, he really *is* decent and honest and fair and just, just like in all the stories. Whoops! If this lad gets on the throne we could be in serious trouble! He might turn out to be one of them inconvenient kings from long ago who wanders around talking to the common people.’” See Terry Pratchett, *Feet of Clay* (London: Corgi Books, 1997), p. 386; Terry Pratchett, *Men at Arms* (London: Corgi Books, 1994).

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to provide the first detailed, close textual analysis of the fifteenth-century King and Commoner tradition. It has demonstrated the ways in which these fascinating and much undervalued late-medieval texts uniquely melded together politically aware and astute anti-noble commoner complaints with the mock kings and upside-down worlds imagined by the medieval carnival festivities. The result is the creation of a distinctly Bakhtinian space, in which commoners show disdain for the aristocracy ('of lords,' says hee, 'speake no more!'), command and physically beat the king, crown themselves as carnival kings, and defiantly feast on an excess of food explicitly restricted for the aristocracy.¹ It is a celebration of inversion that allows the commoners to transcend their everyday realities. The commoners consistently redefine social limits, dismantling and discarding traditional hierarchical structures in a challenging reordering of the medieval social worldview. These texts voice a realisation that the old feudal world is collapsing, that its social divides are artificial and arbitrary and can be breached. As Adam says in *King Edward and the Shepherd*: 'Whatso thai have, it may be myne, / Corne and brede, ale and wyne, / And alle that may like me.'² It is no coincidence that these words distinctly resemble the alleged insurgent calls of the peasant revolts of this period.³ The 'kitchen and the battle meet' as these carnival feasts declare war on the social norms of medieval society, throwing

¹ *John the Reeve*, in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances*, Vol. II, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales (London: N. Trübner, 1868), pp. 550-94 (l. 115).

² *A Tale of King Edward and the Shepherd*, in *A Critical Edition of Cambridge University MS Ff.5.48*, ed. Janay Young Downing (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1969), pp. 116-59 (ll. 440-3).

³ Jean Froissart, *The Chronicle of Froissart 1523-25*, Vol. III, trans. Sir John Bouchier and Lord Berners (Long Acre: David Nutt, 1901), p. 224.

the world into a state of transience and impermanence, celebrating the death of the old, static culture and the birth of a new potential future.⁴

It has also been shown that these fifteenth-century texts end with an uneasy containment in the court's own conservative carnival feast, during which the commoner is made a target for aristocratic laughter and transformed into an allowed fool. Despite the commoner's hierarchical promotion, he becomes absorbed back into the hierarchical structure, fixed in a static society with his rebellion ended. Yet this ending is far from straightforward. These texts repeatedly make such containment problematic and unsettling, filling the court with images of execution, portraying it as a site of dread and unrepentant corruption, often presided over by a potentially untrustworthy king. While the commoner's forest is portrayed as a site of feasting, freedom, and life, the court is persistently transformed into a place of dearth, restriction and death, redefining literary and social expectations as to where the *other* resides.

These fifteenth-century tales are challenging, sophisticated and complex, interrogating late medieval political thought and literary norms. They offer insights into perceptions of class during the social unrest of this turbulent period and the ways in which populist literature could be used to absorb, disseminate and interrogate political thought. More generally, the tradition also symbolises a meeting point of late medieval literature, absorbing elements from the likes of romance, comic tales, complaint and pastoral literature to create new, hybrid texts that defy expectations of genre – an amalgamation that is perhaps best captured when the rough commoner Rauf bursts into the realm of Carolingian romance and proceeds to best the bewildered Sir Roland.⁵

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 197.

⁵ *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), pp. 161-204.

The King and Commoner tradition's cultural influence is far-reaching, extending from this medieval material to the present day through ballads, chapbooks, drama, poems, and novels. As such, the tradition as a whole far outstrips the bounds of a single thesis. But this study has aimed to lay the foundations for future research in both its Bakhtinian exploration of the fifteenth-century tradition and provision of details relating to the tradition's potential sources and cultural afterlife. This fascinating literary tradition deserves greater critical attention and it is my hope that this study will encourage further debate around these much undervalued texts. To borrow the words of Adam the shepherd, I wholeheartedly put out the call 'To alle þat wil my gamme play' and those clerks 'My bourdis þat will lere.'⁶ Steal into the forest, drink deep of the commoner's wine, and 'schewe no curtasye'.⁷

⁶ *King Edward and the Shepherd*, ll. 476-8.

⁷ *King Edward and the Shepherd*, l. 406.

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Appendix One

Select King and Commoner Publication History

1723: *King Henry the IInd and the Miller of Mansfield*, in *A Collection of Old Ballads:*

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Appendix Two

Freeminers' Brass



The Forest of Dean 'Freeminer brass' (c. C15th-C17th), in All Saints Church, Newland. Photographed by Mark Truesdale (9/2014).