VERSE LIBEL
IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

STEVEN W. MAY & ALAN BRYSON

OXFORD

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Preface

We began this study with no more ambitious aim than to make available sound and fully annotated texts of a few dozen lively poems from the age of Elizabeth that were largely unknown to students of Renaissance literature. Many of these works came to light during the compilation of *Elizabethan Poetry: A Bibliography and First-Line Index of English Verse, 1559–1603* (2004). Generically, libels are a type of verse satire, satire being always an attack on something, whatever form it takes.[1] Whereas satire can denigrate anything, including institutions, doctrines, social types and classes, libel is a specialized *ad hominem* satire. For the purposes of this study, we define libels as attacks that single out one or more individuals who would have been identifiable to contemporary readers. The scurrilous, sometimes obscene nature of the poems edited here meant that they rarely if ever found their way into print; they were restricted to manuscript circulation, which has rendered them ever since largely invisible even to literary specialists. As a result, this book is necessarily concerned with the workings of scribal as well as solely literary culture as illustrated by the transmission of these libellous texts during and in some instances long after Elizabeth I's reign.[2]

We have limited our coverage to libels in English and Scottish verse. Prose libels would require at least another volume, as would verse libels of the same period in Latin, Gaelic and Welsh. And while we have not discovered English verse libels originating in Ireland or Wales, early verse libelling in Scotland survives in both Gaelic and Scots dating from the late fifteenth century, with the Gaelic tradition extending at least into the seventeenth century.[3] Renaissance Scotland was, furthermore, a hotbed of verse libelling in Scots in both manuscript and print; Scottish libels amount to roughly a quarter of the lines in our edited texts. As we investigated this entire body of poems, their contexts, and their counterparts in the age's print culture in both England and Scotland, it became increasingly clear that verse libel was no obscure byway in Renaissance poetry. It was a vigorous poetic genre, pervasive in manuscript circulation and, with regard to a number of these poems, persistently copied and recopied for decades. A broad spectrum of poets nurtured the genre, often with considerable creativity and skill, motivated by a range of feelings from bemused contempt to intense personal rancour.

[1] Edward Rosenheim, *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago, IL, 1963), 12. Rosenheim based his pioneering effort to define satire as a literary genre on our intuitive recognition of satire when we experience it, coupled with an inductive analysis of the characteristics of that phenomenon.

[2] We summarize what we have learned about this fascinating cultural phenomenon in section 6c of the Introduction, 'Verse Libel and Scribal Publication'. Details are recorded in the Textual Notes appended to each entry in the Commentary.

[3] Six early Gaelic libels with English translations are edited in *Duanaire na Sracaire, Songbook of the Pillagers, Anthology of Scotland's Gaelic Verse to 1600*, ed. Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman (Edinburgh, 2007): 'The chief devil of the Gael is dead', 251–7; 'Alasdair, have you given up the gloom?', 259; 'Of what was Domhnall Donn made?', 259–61; 'What reputation has Fearghal Og?', 275–7; 'The bladder of a pig, o ho', 279–81; 'Would that I would hear tomorrow, hu hi ho ro', 479–83.

The texts we offer here amount to a small fraction of the overall output of English and Scottish Renaissance verse libel; for all their diversity, they may represent too thin a cross section of the whole to be entirely representative of the genre's methods, styles and effects. Due to the high loss rates for the age's manuscripts, most of its verse libels (along with much of the rest of its poetry largely restricted to manuscript circulation) has irrevocably vanished. Moreover, the very real dangers of owning or transmitting these texts no doubt accelerated their rate of destruction. Our comprehensive overview of this neglected genre includes, nevertheless, a survey of printed libels from the second half of the sixteenth century, for some genuinely vitriolic attacks on individuals did find their way into print. This was especially true in Scotland during the late 1560s and early 1570s when civil war hampered the government's control of printing while making the press a valuable propaganda agent for the regime that controlled Edinburgh. In both Scotland and England, the government permitted or encouraged the libelling of its opponents, above all, Catholics. In England, a smattering of fugitive libels, motivated by merely personal resentments, also evaded the government's porous control of the press. A third category of printed libel was launched by the Catholic opposition to Elizabeth's government, although we have found only two examples couched in English verse.

Readers in both England and Scotland thus confronted the genre of verse libel in print as well as in manuscript. Nor were the handwritten copies necessarily passed secretively from one person to the next. As we shall see, they were cast into pulpits and public meeting places, posted on walls, even scattered openly about the streets. Some libels were sung to popular tunes, the better to humiliate their victims while extending the genre to the non-literate population, and one, at least, a highly defamatory dramatic jig, was publicly performed on multiple occasions. In consequence, some libel texts were also entered into evidence at trials for defamation, a fairly common cause of litigation in both church and secular courts. Libellous verse was one of the most frequently encountered poetic genres of everyday life in the Renaissance.

Our enjoyment of these libels seldom depends on their political dimensions which, for the libels edited here, are generally marginal or altogether absent. Politics concerns governing policies at one level or another, whereas the essence of libel is personal animosity. As Adam Smyth observed of the genre, 'Current trends in early modern literary scholarship overwhelmingly privilege poetry's political aspect, and such a focus can obscure a reading of verse libels as instances of wit... as—in other words—literary texts'.[4] Interesting, even informative as political issues may be when they occur (as in the libels surrounding the Earl of Essex's decline and fall, 1599–1601), the literary qualities of many libels provide an aesthetic pleasure that far outweighs issues of practical governance. Rosenheim observed of satire generally that it frequently produces no new evaluation of its target or a call to action; instead, 'the audience... is asked chiefly to rejoice in the

[4] '"Reade in one age and understood I'th'next": Recycling Satire in the Mid-Seventeenth Century', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69 (2006), 78.

heaping of opprobrium, ridicule, or fancied punishment upon an object of whose culpability they are *already* thoroughly convinced' (13–14). As applied specifically to libel, it is this delight in *ad hominem* attack that produces the distinctive aesthetic pleasure of a well-wrought libel. John Donne acknowledged this attraction in a letter he wrote from the Continent in July 1612. He began by deprecating the low quality of libels spawned by the death of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury: 'all which are brought into these parts, are so tastelesse and flat, that I protest to you, I think they were made by his friends'. Donne then contrasted these poorly written attacks with 'witty and sharp libels', for 'it is better for the honour of the person traduced, that some blunt downright railings be vented, of which everybody is soon weary, then other pieces, which entertain us long with a delight, and love to the things themselves'.[5] Such enticing literary appeal, as we shall see, is a critical distinction toward understanding the popularity and longevity of a number of Renaissance libels.

The legal relevance of these libels is, overall, even less significant than their political dimensions. Libellers, and those who copied and circulated their works, were certainly mindful of the laws of defamation and the punishments they entailed. Yet legal considerations had little substantive effect on the social and literary phenomenon of verse libelling. A number of the surviving texts, for example, would not have been actionable at law. Some of the charges against Bothwell and Mary Queen of Scots in Poem 36, for example, were essentially true, and defamation was expanded to include even fictitious charges only under King James I. Had a case based on this libel been tried in England, the attack might even have been exempt from a charge of *scandalum magnatum*, the medieval legal prohibition against defaming important people. The law has even less to do with the cultural value of these poems. Few if any of them circulated either in manuscript or print because of their utility as evidence in court or for any other such practical purpose.

Our study concentrates on the far more interesting aesthetic dimensions of these libels as produced by a wide variety of rhetorical techniques and often deployed in equally varied, reconstructed social contexts.[6] Many libels make entertaining reading today despite the fact that their targets are obscure, such as Robert Wroth the elder (d. 1606), oppressor of the even more obscure curate, Leonard Thickpenny. Some victims are unknown or can be only tentatively identified, as with many of those referred to in the libels of Oxford and Cambridge. Invective reveals (and sometimes generates) interpersonal conflict; it is always emotionally charged. Our response may be positive if we interpret the libel as a form of punishment directed at a guilty recreant, or negative if we feel that the target is being wrongfully vilified. Either way, libel creates moving literary effects, and emotional effect is the key ingredient in the success of all art.

[5] John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), ed. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY: (1974), sig. N1–1v.

[6] Citing the varied effects of early Stuart libels, Alastair Bellany notes that they might elicit rage, laughter, or even 'aesthetic pleasure' ('The embarrassment of libels: perceptions and representations of verse libelling in early Stuart England', in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester, 2007), 144–67 (159). We contend that the latter effect, roughly defined as their emotional impact, is their most important cultural contribution.

It will be apparent from this overview of verse libel that our work on the subject is introductory rather than definitive. We provide critical texts for all the as yet unedited texts that circulated widely in manuscript, plus all known libels that circulated locally. However, a great many more local libels were in circulation, many of which have no doubt survived and remain to be found in unstudied manuscripts. We have not been able to determine who wrote most of these libels, even those in wide circulation, and more remains to be discovered about the contexts and meanings of those poems. For example, we cannot say who wrote the very popular Bashe libel (Poem 2) or date its composition more exactly than to within about a decade. We know that Thomas Wright wrote libellous emblem verses (Poem 16a–h), but we have not identified all of his victims. Much more also remains to be said about the aesthetics and social impact of libelling, and the relationship of this genre to prose libels and contemporary non-libellous verse.

Our work on this book has been highly educational, which is another way of saying the subject's complexity plunged us into many fields of inquiry where we knew little or nothing. The finished product is thus, necessarily, a collaborative effort on many levels. We have reached out for help to specialists in many fields—friends, acquaintances and those we knew only by reputation—all have gone well beyond the bounds of professional courtesy in sharing their knowledge and advice with us. In addition to generous contributions by our colleagues at the University of Sheffield, we are especially grateful to Simon Adams, Kate Bennett, Mary Clayton, Jane Dawson, Fiona Godber, Jaime Goodrich, Helen Graham-Matheson, Michael Lynch, Martin Mayer, the Reverend Father Thomas McCoog, S. J., Alan H. Nelson, Juliette Pattinson, Emma Rhatigan, Fred Schurink, Edward Smith, Jeremy Smith, Tracey Sowerby, Laura Stewart, Theo Van Heijnsbergen, Sebastiaan Verweij, and J. Christopher Warner for all they have taught us in the course of this research. We are indebted as well to two anonymous readers for Oxford University Press who suggested many improvements to this book, nearly all of which we implemented, much to the benefit of its presentation and accuracy.

As with any project involving Renaissance manuscripts, we are also indebted to a number of librarians and archivists, and especially to Simon Bailey, Keeper of the Archives at Oxford University; Elizabeth E. Fuller, Librarian of the Rosenbach Library, Philadelphia; and to Robin Wiltshire, Archivist at Sheffield City Archives. Others to whom we are grateful include Norma Aubertin-Potter, Librarian at All Souls College, Oxford; Norman Reid, Keeper of Manuscripts and Muniments at St Andrews University; Jennifer Thorp and Naomi van Loo, Archivist and Librarian respectively at New College, Oxford; Anna Edwards, Assistant Archivist of the British Province of the Society of Jesus; Muriel McCarthy, Consultant at Marsh's Library; and Margaret Richards, Sara Rodger, and Heather Warne at Arundel Castle Archives.

For permission to publish critical texts of these libels, we are grateful to the Henry E. Huntington Library, the Masters of the Bench of the Inner Temple, the Trustees of Lambeth Palace Library, the Governors and Guardians of Marsh's Library, Dublin, and the Rosenbach Library.

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S. W. M., A. B.

Abbreviations and Frequently Cited Works

APC	*Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. J. R. Dasent, 46 vols. (London, 1890–1964)
Bindoff	*History of Parliament, The House of Commons 1509–1558*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, 3 vols. (London, 1982)
BL	The British Library, London
BR	Prefix to poem numbers in *The Index of Middle English Verse*, ed. Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins (New York, 1943); *Supplement*, ed. Robbins and John L. Cutler (Lexington, KY, 1965)
CSPD	Calendar of State Papers Domestic (various dates)
CCEd	Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540–1835 http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk
EEBO	Early English Books Online (http://eebo.chadwyck.com)
EETS	Early English Text Society
ESL	Early Stuart Libels (online: http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/index.html) A web-based edition of early seventeenth-century political poetry from manuscript sources
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
EV	Prefix to poem numbers in Steven W. May and William A. Ringler, Jr., *Elizabethan Poetry: A Bibliography and First-Line Index of English Verse,1559–1603*, 3 vols. (London, 2004)
Hasler	*History of Parliament, The House of Commons 1558–1602*, ed. P. W. Hasler, 3 vols. (London, 1981)
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
HN:	The Huntington Library, San Marino, California
Hughes and Larkin	*Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1964–69)
N&Q	*Notes and Queries*
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
O:	The Bodleian Library, Oxford
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004 and online: http://www.oxforddnb.com)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 2004 and online: http://www.oed.com). Definitions in the notes and commentary derive from this source unless otherwise stated.
OUA	Oxford University Archives
PRO	Public Record Office (the National Archives), Kew
RO	Record Office (various)
STC	*A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland 1475–1640,* first compiled by A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, 2nd edn. begun by W. A. Jackson and F. S. Ferguson, completed by K. F. Pantzer, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1976–86)

TM	Prefix to poem numbers in William A. Ringler, Jr., *Bibliography and Index of English Verse in Manuscript 1501–1558*. Prepared and completed by Michael Rudick and Susan J. Ringler (London, 1992).
TP	Prefix to poem numbers in William A. Ringler, Jr., *Bibliography and Index of English Verse Printed 1476–1558* (London, 1988)
TRHS	Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
VCH	The Victoria County Histories (various)

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Introduction

Verse Libel in Renaissance England and Scotland

1. LIBELS AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

Recorded English verse libel begins with the language's only native epic shortly after Beowulf arrives at Hrothgar's hall. The poet records that when Unferth accused the hero of having lost a swimming contest, Beowulf denied the charge and then humiliated Unferth by branding him with the unpardonable Teutonic crime of murdering his own kindred. In its fictional context, this verbal clash is properly termed an instance of mutual slanderous (verbal) rather than libellous (written) assault, but as written in Anglo-Saxon verse, it illustrates the foremost issues, legal and literary, associated with defamation in the centuries that followed. Over time, for example, English law would come to ask, first, at what point did mere words become actionable at law? If Beowulf had charged Unferth with fratricide in a private conversation rather than before an audience, could Unferth have sued for libel? Moreover, if the accusation is true—and Unferth indeed killed his brothers—has he been libelled? If so, must the plaintiff demonstrate some kind of tangible harm that resulted from the verbal assault in order to press charges? Unferth's denial of Beowulf's proficiency as strongman-hero, for example, has no apparent effect on the latter's reception by the Danes, who welcome him to Heorot and reward him abundantly for ridding the state of monsters. From an emotional standpoint (the quality that governs a libel's effectiveness as literature) Beowulf clearly delivers the most telling defamation. He trumps Unferth's charge by accusing him of a very serious moral infraction. Subsequent verse libel in Britain, especially during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, heightens emotional impact by concentrating on the victims' ethical rather than their occupational deficiencies.

Fictional verse libelling during the high middle ages resurfaces when, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, the Green Knight bursts into King Arthur's hall and insults his men at arms. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* includes some wonderfully animated mud-slinging between the Friar and the Summoner, plus Harry Bailey's attack on the Pardoner in their exchange at the end of the 'Pardoner's Tale'. The libels we present, however, attacked real people with sincere contempt, disgust, and anger. These attacks are thus unlike the general satires of social types or groups of people popularized in the late 1590s by such poets as Joseph Hall, Everard Guilpin, and John Marston. Genuine libels in verse or prose are personally malicious, designed to humiliate specific victims.

Several kindred genres of satiric, person-centred verse were also cultivated during the Renaissance, the distinctions between them becoming at times quite blurred in cases of individual poems. Flytings, for instance, express a range of invective from the libellous to something like a parody of libellous malice. About 1514, John Skelton engaged in what appears to be an exchange of personal insults with Sir Christopher Garnesche, who had called him a knave 'in the kynges noble hall'. Yet a degree of mere entertainment pervades the quarrel since Henry VIII had encouraged Skelton to seek this sort of revenge, and each of Skelton's responses is subscribed 'By the kynges most noble commaundment'.[1] Even less libellous, perhaps, is 'The Flyting of Dumbar and Kennedie', the likely Scottish model for Skelton's attack on Garnesche. As William Dunbar's editor, Priscilla Bawcutt observes, 'The tone of the work is difficult to assess. Despite the torrents of abuse, most critics have viewed it as a ritualized collaborative game.' She notes as well that Dunbar had elsewhere lamented in verse the illness of 'Gud maister Walter Kennedy'.[2] The flyting as high-brow courtly entertainment is fully embodied in the 'Flytting or Invective be Capitane Alexander Montgomerie aganis the Laird of Pollart' (*c.* 1583).[3] The teenage King James VI had appointed Montgomerie the 'master' poet of his 'Castalian Band', the royal initiative committed to promoting the arts, especially poetry, at the Scottish court. Sir Patrick Hume of Polwarth, who published *The Promine*, his verse eulogy of the King in 1580 (*STC* 13956), also belonged to the Band. James cited passages from the flyting in his *Essayes of a Prentise* (1584), and both men enjoyed on-going royal favour. A similar, fictitious flyting occurs in Prince Hal's amusing exchanges of insults with Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* (II.iv.241–8, 446–59). The language is libellous, but as with the Montgomery–Polwarth flyting, in context it is merely an entertaining display of hyperbolic rhetoric between friends. The immediate effect is laughter, not moral outrage or condemnation.

Another potentially libellous exchange from *c.* 1552 concerned reactions to Thomas Churchyard's broadside verse satire, *Davy Dycars Dreame* (*STC* 5225.5). At least three other poets joined in the fray; their works were published in a collected edition in 1560 (*STC* 5225). A certain amount of personal invective crops up from time to time in these works. The foremost respondent, Thomas Camel, protested to Churchyard, 'But tho I have hearde, a Lyon oft rore,/ I never hearde asse, so rore oute before' (sig. B2). Churchyard countered by supposing that Camel would benefit from confinement to Bedlam hospital where 'If you were scourged once a day, and fed with some warm meate./ You wolde come to your self again, after this rage of heate / You shew your selfe to be a foole, to answer me in spite' (sig. B4v).

[1] John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (New Haven, CT, 1983), 'Agenst Garnesche', l, 2. Only Skelton's contributions to the flyting are extant.

[2] *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. Priscilla Bawcutt, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1998), 2.427–8, 1.97. An edition of the flyting was published at Edinburgh c. 1508 (TP 1581, *STC* 7348), a further indication of its non-libellous nature, as both poets were still living.

[3] Alexander Montgomerie, *Poems*, ed. David J. Parkinson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 2000), 1.141–75. The exchange circulated in manuscript until 1621, when there appeared the first of four printed editions by 1632.

Overall, however, neither the work nor any one of its component poems, is libellous, nor do they work in aggregate as a flyting.[4] They illustrate instead how libellous elements can infiltrate polemic dedicated to a different over-arching purpose. Churchyard and his assailants scold and repudiate one another, but the result is better termed a debate or, as the 1560 reprint terms it, a 'Contention'. Personal libel is incidental to a number of other works. We exclude them from this study because their primary ends are not libellous and only fractions of their texts are devoted to vilification. Granted, the Enborne libel (Poem 28) might by this standard be considered more religious polemic than personal attack, yet its overall purpose was to insult the local parson to whom it is addressed. The remaining libels in manuscript and print considered in this study, including the fifty-two offered for the first time in critical texts are, we submit, libels first and foremost.

The epigram, as circulated in both manuscript and print, was a far more common vehicle of genuinely libellous sentiment than the flyting. Epigrams all but defy definition because they observed no particular form, ranged from couplets to a hundred or more lines, and set forth anecdotes, eulogies, and commendations as well as various types and degrees of satire. While many libellous epigrams were apparently aimed at real persons, epigrammatists (following classical precedent), ordinarily pilloried their victims under pseudonyms. Their targets can rarely be identified, and it is always possible that these writers had in mind no one in particular at all for the various Gnathos, Faustuses, and Curios named in their verses. Such epigrams were designed primarily to amuse readers as literary fictions, and only secondarily, if at all, as personal degradation. They were therefore safe to publish under their authors' names because those under attack, if they existed, could not be identified. Thus we usually know who wrote these libellous epigrams, but not the persons they attacked, whereas with genuine verse libels, the subject of this study, we can usually identify the victims but less often know who attacked them.

The epigrams of Sir John Harington include examples of both pseudonymous libels and outright verse libels of the kind that were nevertheless suitable for publication and eventually did appear in print. Harington's most scathing epigrams, of course, left his readers to guess whom he meant by Don Pedro, Lynus, Marcus and the rest (albeit his Paulus no doubt stands for Sir Walter Ralegh).[5] The Crown would have found nothing objectionable in his sarcastic libel 'Against Pius quintus that excommunicated the Queene'.[6] However, an obscure poet, Robert Joyner, turned the tables on Harington with a libellous printed epigram in his *Itis, or Three Severall Boxes of sporting Familiars* (1598). Joyner there attacked Harington as 'Ajax', the nickname by which he was everywhere known after publication of his

[4] In *English Reformation Literature, The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), John N. King treats the conflict involving Churchyard-Camel-Waterman *et al*. as a flyting, while acknowledging that its personal rancour is defused since 'The medieval genre of the flyting is in fact based upon the collaboration of the participants' (249).

[5] Carolyn J. Bishop, 'Raleigh Satirized by Harington and Davies', *RES*, n.s. 22 (1972), 52–6.

[6] Gerard Kilroy, *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington* (Farnham, 2009), 187.

Metamorphosis of Ajax in 1596.[7] Joyner termed Ajax a 'base bratte' for producing 'so foule a shame' (sig. A8v–B1). Harington replied in two epigrams, the longest addressed 'To Itis, aliasse [sic] Joyner', where he calls his assailant 'a noddy' and of 'uncouth tearms a senceles Coyner'.[8] Both of these epigrams, with Harington's attack on Pope Pius V, went unpublished until his posthumous *Epigrams* of 1618. Joyner's poem illustrates how even a transparent libel of a private subject might reach print with impunity from official censorship.

Poetic prophecy was another genre that carried at least the potential for libellous expression. These works were set forth under the pretence of being written many years earlier, a fictional ploy for commenting, often satirically, on current conditions. As a genre they were inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Prophetie Merlini*, a Latin prose offshoot of his *Historia Regnum Britanniae*. Shakespeare plays on his audience's awareness of poetic adaptations of the genre in *King Lear* where, after delivering a prophecy following the typical 'when/then' formula, the Fool explains 'This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time' (III.ii.80–95). Verse prophecies generally lack libellous impact for the same reason as epigrams: they do not name their victims outright. Instead of using fictitious names, however, where prophecies address individual targets, they employ the similar rhetorical device of referring to them under cover of armorial devices, especially animals. As Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin spoke of red and white dragons, so sixteenth-century prophecy-mongers invoke 'the cocke in the Northe', 'a drede-full dragon', 'The Egill and the antelope…'[9] Many of these works were satirical and subversive in intent. They had become so common by the 1540s that, by statute, 'The uttering of political prophecy was made a felony without benefit of clergy', and this law was re-enacted under Edward VI and Elizabeth I.[10] The problem, of course, is that many such heraldic beasts appear on the arms of more than one family. There is a riddling nature to these poems that invites explication, but in most instances the allegorical rhetoric guarantees ambiguous solutions. As J. P. D. Cooper notes, 'multiple meanings [are] inherent in popular prophecy…The danger is that we read meanings into symbols that would not necessarily have been perceived at the time.'[11]

We exclude these works from this study because the victims of intentionally libellous epigrams and prophecies could not ordinarily be identified even by contemporary readers. They might relish the often sarcastic malice expressed in these poems without knowing at whom, if anyone, it was directed. Granted, similar charges might be lodged against several of the libels we analyse below. We identify

[7] Elizabeth Story Donno, *Sir John Harington's A New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax* (London, 1962), 12, 26.

[8] Kilroy, 135, 157.

[9] 'The Cock in the North', Rossell Hope Robbins, *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York, 1959), 115. The poem circulated widely in manuscript from the mid-fifteenth century to the reign of James I. With regard to explicating the poem's allusions, Robbins notes that 'inasmuch as the prophecies are designedly obscure, it is doubtful if any such attempt can be fully successful' (309).

[10] Michael Powell Siddons, *Heraldic Badges in England and Wales*, 3 vols. (Woodbridge, 2009), 1.105.

[11] J. P. D. Cooper, *Propaganda and the Tudor State: Political Culture in the Westcountry* (Oxford, 2003), 108–112. Other studies of Tudor prophecy include Alistair Fox, 'Prophecies and Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII', in Fox and John Guy, eds. *Reassessing the Henrician Age* (Oxford, 1986), 77–91; Sharon Jansen, *Political Protest and Prophecy under Henry VIII* (Woodbridge, 1991).

the ‘Whiteliver’d Lyon’ (Poem 18, l. 53) as Lord Admiral Charles Howard because the Howard crest was a white lion. Sir Thomas Chaloner never names the woman he attacks in Poem 1, nor have we identified the anonymous ‘Kentishe Keyt’ who is the principal target of Poem 9. We include these poems as functioning libels on grounds that their victims would have been readily identified by the scribal communities for which the poems were written. That said, we submit that the boundaries of verse libel as a genre are often hazy, leaving the works we have included and excluded here subject to reappraisal as new evidence comes to light.

2. LIBELLING AND THE LAW

The laws against defamation included both slander (spoken attacks) and libel (written attacks). The 1275 Statute of Westminster (3 Edward I, c. 34), for example, made it an offence of defamation to ‘tell or publish any false news or tales, whereby discord, or occasion of discord or slander may grow between the King and his people, or the great men of the realm’. This law of *scandalum magnatum* covered writing as well as speech, its scope increased by further statutes passed in 1378 and 1388 (2 Richard II, c. 5; 12 Richard II, c. 11). By the 1550s the government was trying to refine *scandalum magnatum* in order to make it more useful as a protection specifically against libel (1 & 2 Philip & Mary, c. 3; 1 Elizabeth I, c. 6). However, *scandalum magnatum* proved inadequate in this respect because, in order to come within its terms, the defendant had to be found guilty of spreading not just any accusations, but ‘false news’: if what they wrote, said, or repeated abroad, when tested in open court, proved true, then they would be found innocent.[12]

The kinds of attacks that *scandalum magnatum* was meant to protect against were, in fact, dealt with more effectively through the law of libel or written defamation. Defamation was tried in church courts and, from the late fifteenth century, in the Court of Star Chamber (there, defined as likely to provoke a breach of the peace in response). By the early sixteenth century, it had become a tort in the Court of King’s Bench too. Such written or spoken defamation, however, had to be made known or published to a third party, otherwise no action could be brought against the accused.[13] The volume of defamation suits heard in these courts increased throughout the sixteenth century, many actions initiated by private persons not just by the Crown.

It was not until the Attorney-General Sir Edward Coke was forced to redefine the legal understanding of defamation in his 1605 report ‘De libellis famosis’, that the government had the means to deal with libels more effectively. Because a libel ‘robbed a man of his good name’, in a society that depended on reputation, the victim would be forced to defend himself by whatever means he could, even by breach of the peace. Coke argued that, unlike *scandalum magnatum*, whether the

[12] Robert B. Manning, ‘The Origins of the Doctrine of Seditious Libel’, *Albion* 12 (1980), 99–100, 112; Philip Hamburger, ‘The Development of the Law of Seditious Libel and the Control of the Press’, *Stanford Law Review* 37 (1985), 668–9.

[13] Manning, ‘Origins of the Doctrine’, 112; Hamburger, ‘Seditious Libel’, 669–70.

libel was truthful or not was irrelevant: the damage it did to the natural ties of obedience and to good order made it dangerous to the state, therefore the accused (whether its original author or another, later in possession of the text) must be punished if found guilty.[14]

The kinds of attack, spoken or written, that could be tried at law were thus steadily expanded from the late fifteenth century into the Stuart era. Deborah Shuger notes that during this time 'virtually all substantive law dealing with the regulation of language concerned defamation'.[15] Criminal defamation, accusing someone of committing a crime, was actionable in Star Chamber and at the assize courts, whereas from 1222 private defamation (usually, mere name calling) had been tried in local church and civil courts. Early in the reign of Henry VII, defamation was ruled admissible to the ecclesiastical courts 'only when the underlying matter was wholly spiritual'; yet the volume of defamation suits heard in these courts increased throughout the sixteenth century.[16] Secular courts also experienced large increases in defamation suits as the jurisdiction was expanded to include abusive language that stopped short of imputing a crime. Such cases were an ever-increasing staple of the royal courts' dockets by 1560, especially in King's Bench, less so in Common Pleas.[17] Precedent was established in 1591 'that professional disparagement was actionable by those who gain their living through practice of a trade, an art or a science';[18] accusations that might endanger livelihood thus became libellous. David Cressy has concluded that '. . . the spreading of libels grew to near-epidemic proportions in Elizabethan and Jacobean England',[19] a trend that no doubt motivated this and subsequent expansions of the law of defamation.

3. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF LIBELLING

The threat posed to central government by libels in verse or prose illustrates the genre's overall threat to civil society. Church and state—through official propaganda, the law, and religious instruction—worked together to inculcate the virtues of respect for authority and obedience to superiors as essential to promoting the common good as well as conforming to God's will. Libel attacked specific individuals,

[14] Sir Edward Coke, 'De Libellis Famosis', *Reports*, Bk. 5 in *The English Reports*, ed. Max A. Robertson and Geoffrey Ellis, King's Bench, Bk. 6 (Edinburgh, 1907), 250–2.

[15] Deborah Shuger, *Censorship and Cultural Sensibility: the Regulation of Language in Tudor-Stuart England* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006), 69.

[16] *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600*, ed. R. H. Helmholz (London: Selden Soc., 1985), xi, xliv–xlv. Ralph Houlbrooke has determined that 'Matrimonial, testamentary, tithe, and defamation cases accounted between them for over nine-tenths of the identifiable instance business of the [ecclesiastical] courts' in Norwich and Winchester (*Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation* ([Oxford, 1979]), 39).

[17] *Select Cases*, xlvi, lxxxvi.

[18] S. F. C. Milsom, *Historical Foundations of the Common Law* (London, 1969), 339.

[19] David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England* (Oxford, 2010), 35.

while the 'sociopolitical order rested—and rested precariously—on personal authority and allegiances'.[20] Richard III showed his awareness of how great a threat libel posed to successful rule by executing William Collingborne for composing the relatively innocuous lampoon of his regime, 'The Cat, the Rat, and Lovell our dog/ Rule all England under the hog'.[21] From the beginning, the Tudor monarchy faced civil disobedience and insurrection. Henry Tudor's lawless seizure of the throne in 1485 sparked local uprisings, none serious enough to overthrow the regime. Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I likewise dealt with civil unrest and armed rebellion. Elizabeth I survived two poorly managed armed uprisings, the Rebellion in the North (1569/70) and the Earl of Essex's attempted coup in 1601. The central government prevailed in each instance because it retained the loyalty of a critical mass of its subjects. To lose that support was to lose the psychological perception upon which rule depended nationwide, and libels—directly or by implication—attacked that perception. In doing so, they undermined the vital foundation of social order: acceptance of one's station in life, with its corollary, the respectful deference to one's social superiors. 'Untune that string', as Shakespeare's Ulysses explained, and the whole edifice of social order fell to ruin.[22] And that is exactly what libels threatened to accomplish at all levels of society.

The government's paranoia about libels knew few boundaries. Ambassadors and other English subjects abroad, for example, reported with alarm on the steady flow of printed attacks on Queen Elizabeth that rolled off the continental presses. In April 1588, for example, the English Ambassador to France, Sir Edward Stafford, reported that a 'villanous Libel against her Majestie' had been printed at Rheims. In 1591, Thomas Wilkes sent home from the Low Countries a book in German that 'was most vile and such as must greatly offend' the Queen. At about the same time, Dr Christopher Parkins reported from Denmark on what may be the same libel or a different one, a book in German published some years previously full of 'false railing abuse of the Queen of England'. From Florence, Lord Thomas Darcy informed Lord Treasurer Burghley, of a slanderous attack on the Queen, her father, and her brother, published by a Dominican friar just two days since.[23] Libels attacking the Queen, her family, her government, and its ministers were widely available in print and easily smuggled into England. The regular reports about them emphasize, again, the regime's hyper-sensitivity to such potentially dangerous

[20] Shuger, 68.

[21] EV 22011. Collingborne's couplet endured as one of the most widely disseminated verse libels in manuscript and print of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with fourteen separate printings during Elizabeth's reign alone. William Baldwin included an account of his fate, 'Howe Collingbourne was cruelly executed for making a foolishe rime', in the 1563 edition of his *Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge, 1938), 347–58.

[22] From Ulysses' speech on the importance of 'degree', *Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.75–137. Cressy establishes the perceived connection between libelling and sedition by quoting Elizabeth's Lord Chief Justice John Popham and Lord Keeper Thomas Egerton, concluding with Lord Treasurer Thomas Sackville's belief that 'These viperous and secret libellers . . . do much more in my opinion deserve death than those which commit open rebellion against the state' (34).

[23] BL Harl. MS 288, ff. 178–80; *List and Analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series*, ed. Richard Bruce Wernham, vol. 2, July 1590–May 1591 (London, 1969), 744, 819; *List and Analysis of State Papers, Foreign Series*, ed. Richard Bruce Wernham, vol. 3, June 1591–April 1592 (London, 1980), 802.

subversion of its authority. Nor was the prosecution of libelling restricted to the central courts at Westminster. It was actionable at law in local courts, both civic and ecclesiastical, where defamation was a common ground for litigation, granted that most of these cases, especially at the local level, dealt with slander rather than written libels.

How did the Elizabethan state treat a convicted libeller? The answer tells us how dangerous it was to compose and circulate libels in verse or prose. An interesting test case concerns Ulpian Fulwell, parson of Naunton in Gloucestershire, who, in 1576 published a book under the innocuous-sounding title, *The First Part of the Eight Liberal Sciences*. The Court of High Commission, the Elizabethan judicial body that investigated, tried, and punished ecclesiastical offences, found in Fulwell's book libellous treatment of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, 'and others'. Fulwell was deprived of his living, fined, and made to read in public a penitential confession of his crime. He confessed, however, without admitting to any libellous intent: 'I ame unfaynedlie sory that by my occacon anie such meaninge or collection owte of the said booke hath bin had towchinge your Lordship. for that I ment no Matter ageinst the same.' The most telling passage in this confession in terms of the state's fear of libelling is its conclusion: 'And I do also constantlie promys and by godes assistance will performe the same, that I ame and hereafter wilbe duringe my Lief, an enemye unto all Libells and libellers and setters furth of such infamous bookes, and will do my best endeavor for the suppressinge of all such attemptes.'[24] This was the attitude toward libels that the crown wished to inculcate in all its subjects. At stake was the ultimate survival of this (or any) regime.

Libels, moreover, could also cause their authors serious problems on the local rather than national level. Shakespeare is rumoured to have fled his hometown after posting a verse libel on the park gate of Sir Thomas Lucy, who had prosecuted him for poaching deer.[25] Prosecution of defamation at the municipal, quarter sessions, assize and above all the ecclesiastical courts, among other local jurisdictions, sometimes included verse libel, whether sung as a ballad or transmitted in writing as in Shakespeare's (supposed) case. Penalties ranged from public displays of penitence to time in the pillory, fines, imprisonment, or the threat of more serious prosecution.[26] The Vice-Chancellor's court expelled from the University both student authors of the 'Libel of Cambridge' (see the Commentary to Poem 50). The title to one text of the Bashe libel (Poem 2), affirms that its author was sued in Chancery.[27] Thomas Hale of Walthamstow, Essex, was charged with sedition at the assizes in 1594 even though the court acknowledged that he only copied out the text of a marginally libellous poem—he neither wrote nor published it. The poem

[24] David Kathman, 'Fulwell, Ulpian', *ODNB*; PRO E 135/9/5.

[25] In *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), Adam Fox summarizes the evidence for what might be Shakespeare's earliest attempt at poetry. He reprints the alleged first stanza of the libel as recalled by a nonagenarian of Worcestershire and first published in 1703 (299–300).

[26] See F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Disorder* (Chelmsford, Essex, 1970), chap. 4, 'Libel and Slander', for an account of the pervasive local impact of libelling. Emmison includes texts of four Elizabethan verse libels including two of the 'Chelmsford' ballads (68–73).

[27] BL Add. MS 34064, f. 36.

itself was libellous only to the extent that its reference to 'One foxe' who 'can cosen [deceive] fyve' could be taken as a pun on John Foxe, the Protestant martyrologist (and, incidentally, the manifest target of Poem 34). Overtly, the text Hale copied merely lamented the dismantling of the practices and aids to Catholic worship and their replacement by an ungodly Protestantism. (The jury found the poem to be 'slanderous and seditious', but hedged at convicting Hales of a felony merely for transcribing it).[28]

Manuscript anthologists were not unmindful of the dangers of owning, much less transmitting libels, however private the circumstances. The title to Poem 17 in Huntington MS EL 6162 (f. 121), reveals just how self-conscious was its scribe about the potentially incriminating nature of what he wrote. He at first distanced himself from the transcription by entitling it 'a not[e] which Iames Blonte [?] lent me to reade'. His defensive stance was thus that he neither composed the poem nor asked to read it, it was thrust upon him by Blonte. Yet he did copy it—but on second thought, the original scribe (or possibly a later owner of the manuscript) carefully inked out the text. Someone thought the poem too dangerous to save even among his personal papers.

4. VERSE LIBELS IN PRINT: THE EARLY TUDORS

Given the official paranoia about libelling, it is predictable that the most sophisticated Elizabethan verse libels (and no doubt the vast majority of all of them) were never printed. Yet more than 100 verse libels were licensed and openly printed during Elizabeth's reign in obedience to the principle that one man's libel is another man's manifesto. A precedent for this sort of official toleration of printed libels is apparent under the early Tudors. Its boundaries are aptly illustrated by the publishing history of those written by John Skelton and printed both during his lifetime and after his death and the deaths of his targets.

Although his flyting with Garnesche may not qualify as libel, Skelton wrote a number of genuinely malicious personal satires, some of which followed an erratic path to and through the press. The earliest of these shows that even a king could be safely attacked in print under certain circumstances. Skelton's *Ballade of the Scottysshe Kynge* ridiculed James IV, who invaded England in 1513 and was killed at the Battle of Flodden Field. Skelton faced little risk of being charged with *scandalum magnatum* by libelling a foreign ruler and enemy of the Crown, nor was James the only foreign king libelled in print in Tudor times.[29] Less easily explained

[28] Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Disorder*, 59–61. Emmison presents a full text of this eighty-line poem. Hale and his family had been known recusants since at least 1585. He paid an annual fine of £20 until his death in 1601 (Dom Hugh Bowler, *Recusants in the Exchequer Pipe Rolls 1581–1592*, ed. Timothy J. McCann, Catholic Record Society (Southampton, 1986), 74n).

[29] A satiric verse epitaph on the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250) appeared in five editions of Robert Fabyan's *Chronicles* (TP 438, EV 7040). Elizabethan printed verse libels attacked Philip II of Spain, several kings of France, and other continental rulers (e.g. Philip II, EV 3860, 16826; Charles IX of France, EV 13055; Archduke Ernest, EV 25784; Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy, EV 26075).

is the fact that a quatrain attacking Edward I (d. 1307) was published as early as 1480 and was then reprinted at least eleven times by 1559.[30] Skelton, meanwhile, had little to fear in 1528 when he published *A Replycacion Agaynst Certayne Yong Scolers*, a humiliating verse insult of Thomas Arthur and Thomas Bilney, both of whom were convicted of heresy in 1527. Skelton's attacks on Cardinal Thomas Wolsey from the early 1520s, however, were published only after Wolsey had died in disgrace for failing to achieve the annulment of Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon. By this time (*c.* 1531), Skelton was dead as well. It would no doubt have been dangerous for him to have set forth in print even the veiled allusions to Wolsey in *Speke Parott* and *Collyn Clout* while Wolsey enjoyed high favour with the king before 1529. Skelton's most blatant assault on the prelate in *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte* (which accuses Wolsey of a long list of crimes), reached print only toward the end of Henry's reign (*c.* 1545). Skelton could probably have sent his 'Against Dundas' to the press with impunity as well, for it apparently attacks Sir George Dundas (a Scot who affirmed that Englishmen had tails). In addition, Henry VIII became involved in this quarrel with the secretary of James V of Scotland.[31] Skelton's slight but acerbic attack on Dundas was finally printed in his collected *Workes* of 1568.

From this evidence certain tendencies emerge regarding the publication of verse libel: it was understandably safe to libel opponents of the current regime, whether political or religious, native or foreign and regardless of their social status. Libelling in print a former state enemy was, presumably, even safer, as with Robert Fabyan's attack on the Lollard John Bodby who was burned for heresy in 1410.[32] It was even acceptable to malign in verse a deceased English sovereign (such as Edward I), at least one of an extinct dynasty, provided the libel was written by a foreigner and presented as an example of historical enmity between England and Scotland. From the standpoint of political and press freedom, however, the most surprising publications are Skelton's *Ballade of the Scottysshe Kynge* and *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte*, both of which issued from the press during the reign of Henry VIII. They provided models and precedent for disrespectful attacks on a king and a chief minister, and were therefore clear violations of the *scandalum magnatum* statute. Granted, both victims were dead; one was a Scottish king who had invaded England, the other a Lord Chancellor who had been highly unpopular with the populace at large during his years of ascendancy. Rule nevertheless depended upon mass respect for social rank and office. Henry's Privy Council was at least somewhat negligent to ignore the political implications of allowing these poems a mass circulation in print.

[30] BR 3918.5, TP 2143.5, TM 1841, EV 29081. Beginning 'What weens king Edward with his long shanks', it appeared in six editions of William Caxton's *Cronicles of Englond*, and in five more published by Fabyan. As royal abuse it was potentially a bad precedent, perhaps excusable as a poem in Scots devised by enemies of England.

[31] Scattergood, 134–6, 429–30.

[32] TP 1814; Fabyan's stanza in rhyme royal was also preserved in two manuscript copies of his *Chronicles of England* (TM 1579); see Julia Boffey, 'The English Verse of Robert Fabyan', in *The Prayse of Writing, Early Modern Manuscript Studies, Essays in Honour of Peter Beal*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Steven W. May (London, 2012), 1–24.

Skelton's influence on the printed libel reached its zenith early in the reign of Edward VI when Luke Shepherd employed many of Skelton's poetic techniques in more than a half-dozen anti-Catholic verse satires, some of which included significant personal libel.[33] These *ad hominem* attacks on prominent Catholics such as Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and Dr Richard Smith, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, entailed little risk under the Protestant regime instigated by Lord Protector Somerset. Gardiner is a significant target of abuse in *A Pore Helpe* and *The Upcheringe of the Messe*. In two works, *The Comparison betwene the Antipus and the Antigraphe* and *Phylogamus*, Shepherd attacks one Mason, who had published a line-for-line refutation of Shepherd's *Antipus*.[34] *Doctour Double Ale* characterizes as a notorious alcoholic Henry George, curate of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre without Newgate. Shepherd openly libels several other Catholic churchmen in his poetic works, along with the Catholic polemicist Miles Huggarde (Hogarde). The mid-Tudor press was obviously free to publish defamatory verse so long as its victims were *non grata* with the current regime.

5. PRINTED VERSE LIBEL

After 1558, the kinds of printed verse libel permitted by the earlier Tudors appeared in increasing numbers, facilitated in part by official press regulation that, Cyndia Clegg argues, was unsystematic. Her detailed analysis of the Elizabethan practice concludes that 'Press censorship was less a part of the routine machinery of an authoritarian state than an *ad hoc* response—albeit authoritarian—to particular texts that the state perceived to endanger the exercise of its legitimate and necessary authority.'[35] As a result, scores of regime-friendly verse libels were issued, along with others that appear to have been too remote from Crown functions of rule to have been contested.

An interesting example concerns two libels that attacked the would-be royal assassin William Parry. Both circulated in manuscript, but one of them was also printed in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). From the government's standpoint, both poems could no doubt have entered print with impunity. It sanctioned a steady stream of printed verse libels for the same reason it prosecuted, as opportunity permitted, libellers who attacked their betters. Libels could undermine the government's authority, but they could also bulwark its subjects' loyalty by discrediting opponents of the regime. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of these officially sanctioned libels attack Catholics. In doing so, again, the government allowed violations of what in another context would have qualified as *scandalum magnatum*.

[33] *STC* tentatively assigns all of Shepherd's satiric works to 1548. Shepherd's editor, Janice Devereux, submits that they 'were probably printed during the first two years of Edward VI's reign' (*An Edition of Luke Shepherd's Satires* (Tempe, AZ, 2001), xi). Devereux credits Shepherd with nine works, eight of them in verse.

[34] Although identified by some as Sir John Mason, King notes that the facts of Mason's biography make this quite unlikely (*English Reformation Literature*, 261).

[35] Cyndia Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1997), 222.

Elizabethan printed verse libel maligned royal and noble victims including Philip II of Spain, his Low Countries general, the Duke of Parma, members of the Guise family and several kings of France, along with such native *persona non grata* as Bishop Edmund Bonner, Cardinal Wolsey, and Elizabeth Barton, 'the Maid of Kent'.[36] But by far the greatest number of licensed verse libels printed between 1559 and 1603 attacked lords spiritual—a long list of popes.

Thirty-four of these sixty-five different verse attacks on specified popes occur in John Studley's *The Pageant of Popes* (1574, *STC* 1304), a translation of John Bale's *Acta Pontificum Romanorum*, published at Basel in 1558. Bale quoted numerous anti-papal excerpts in Latin verse, particularly by 'Mantuan' (Battista Spagnuoli), which Studley then rendered in English. We would expect that Pius V, who excommunicated the Queen in 1570, would be the prime target, but only three different poems take aim at him. Pope Sixtus IV, who held the see from 1471–84, is the most vilified pontiff (granted that eighteen of the twenty libels concerning him come from Bale via Studley). A close runner-up is Pope Alexander VI, the subject of nineteen libels, only six of them in Studley's translation. His daughter, Lucretia Borgia, becomes collateral damage in seven of these poems where the pair are accused of incest. Julius II, with a dozen libels (four by Studley), is the third most reviled pope, with a dozen more also libelled in print during Elizabeth's reign. However, of the nine popes who ruled the Church from 1558–1603, only two are the subjects of these sixty-five poems. These are Pope Pius V (d. 1572), who excommunicated Elizabeth, and his successor, Pope Gregory XIII (d. 1585). The Protestant Reformers emphasized not the immediate papal threat but the historical corruption of the papacy epitomized in particular by the careers of three worldly pontiffs who reigned between 1471 and 1513, and whose ethical shortcomings are beyond dispute.

These anti-papal verse libels are in the main far less ambitious, creative, and effective than libels written for manuscript circulation alone. Forty-one of the sixty-five papal libels, for example, are mere couplets, albeit a few of them achieve epigrammatic force:

> Here lyes Lucretia chast by name, but Thais lewd by lyfe,
> Who was to Alexander Pope both doughter and his wyfe.[37]
>
> And if thou ask why Leo could not take the sacred rite
> In his last hour, the reason was that he had sold them quite.[38]

Most, however, are translations from the Latin that stumble in their attempts to bridge the grammar gap between the two languages, as in this attempt by Richard

[36] See for example EV 400, Sir Francis Hastings' libel of Mary I and Philip of Spain, and EV 3860, an attack on Philip's pride and ambition. EV 13055 is a translation, perhaps by John Knox, of an attack in Latin verse on King Charles IX and King Henry III of France. EV 87 and EV 4189 libel the Duke of Parma, and EV 4326 is Bernard Garter's irreverent treatment in print of 'the merrie miracles of the holy Mayde of Kent'.

[37] John Studley, *Pageant of Popes* (1574), sig. Y4v, EV 8949. Timothy Kendall found this verse sufficiently pithy to reprint in his *Flowers of Epigrammes* (1577), sig. L2, without acknowledgment to Studley.

[38] Bernard Garter, *A Newyeares Gifte dedicated to the Popes Holinesse* (1579), sig. G4v, EV 2179.

Smith: 'Pope Alexander sets to sale heavens, altars, Christ, for fee/ He bought them first, therefore by right, sell them again may he.' Even less felicitous is Simon Patrick's approach to the same Latin couplet, where thirteen low words creep in the last line: 'Christ, sacraments, altars are sold by Alexander Pope/ He bought them very dear, he dear then may sell them I hope.'[39]

Richard Robinson's 380-line poem entitled, 'Pope Alexander the sixt rewarded for his wickednesse and odible lyfe', is perhaps the age's most ambitious attack on a named pope, and it is set forth with some degree of creative flair. Its fictional context is Alexander's post-mortem lament in the self-incriminating *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition.[40] The Pope's narrative focuses upon his confession that he secured the papacy through a pact with Satan. Still, the poem's conventional rhetoric and heavy-handed moralizing typify the least attractive characteristics of the mid-century style:

> Loe, what it is to worke by Conjuration,
> Or to deale with devils by wicked arte?
> Beholde the ende of all abomination,
> Am I not well rewarded for my part?
> A Guerdon meete is Hell, for suche as I,
> That sought so much to sitte in statelye seate:
> (Nowe who is Pope) unhappye wretche I trye,
> That am preparde for Sathan's hooke a baite. (sig. E1v)

There is no lack of venom in these printed attacks on the various popes, yet native English targets seem to have elicited even greater malice than did foreign-born Catholics. At least seven printed verse libels were devoted in whole or part to Bishop Edmund Bonner, an enthusiastic Marian persecutor of Protestants. These include perhaps the most imaginative and spirited verse libel to reach print during Elizabeth's reign. It is attributed to Lemeke Avale (a manifest but undeciphered pseudonym), who opened the attack on Bonner by having him lament from the grave his repudiation of Christ's teachings:

> The waie of thy commaundment I might not bide
> After that I was drunke with the cup of pride,
> But waxed lothly, foule, and fatte,
> Like to cardinall Wolsey, with his red hatte.[41]

This passage is followed by a sarcastic, macaronic parody of the vesper service for the dead akin to Poem 24. It, too, is modelled on Skelton's *Philip Sparrow*, but is even more strictly aligned with the Latin text:

> *Iam iacit ille cinis*, alas gone is our hope.
> *Circumdederunt eum dolores mortis*, now rotten in grave,
> Well, well, said the protestant, well rid of a k[nave]. (sig. A7)

[39] *The trial of truth* (1591), sig. D4 (EV 19001); *A Discourse Upon the Meanes of Wel Governing* (1602), sig. R3v (EV 4666).
[40] *The rewarde of Wickednesse* (1574), EV 17072.
[41] *A Commemoration or Dirige of Bastard Edmund Boner* (1569), sig. A7, EV 15524.

Interspersed with the responses are explicit and peppery attacks on the dead prelate:

> As liberall as the Beare, as swete as the Brocke°, — badger (a smelly animal)
> Of all kinde of linnen clothe, he loved well a smocke.
> As wholesome as a madde Dogge, as cleanly as a Bore,
> He loved well a fatte Pigge, so he did a h[ore].
> Paale as the Turkie Cocke, as gentle as a Snake.
> The like is not in all hell, if you seeke hym with a rake.
> (sig. B1v)

As with the poet of Poem 24, 'Avale' has read John Skelton's irreverent works with care; he mimics the playful, mock-learned Skeltonic style in such original adaptations of the Latin as,

> *Ne recorderis peccata*,
> He was full of *hata*
> Regardyng *non estata*,
> *Et quasi flos*,
> with his greate nose,
> *Fugit velut vmbra*,
> Thei morne for hym in *northumbria* (sig. B5v)

Occasional touches of amusing sarcasm also crop up in an anonymous broadside of 1564, where the poet imagines consigning the officers who burned Protestants during Mary's reign, especially the corpulent Bonner, to the same fate: 'To trye if suche tormentes be Pleasaunt and swete./ And specially Bonner the fier woulde fayne tast him,/ But burne him it coulde not his grece wolde so Bast him.'[42]

Otherwise, the printed anti-Catholic libels can boast few highlights. Of the remaining poems on Bonner's death in 1569, for example, Thomas Knell's contribution is simply a list of insults in 103 fourteener couplets: 'Nay sure, til time of present death he chaunged not his minde:/ But as he liv'd a foe to Christe, so dyed moste wilful blinde'—and so on.[43] Thomas Broke's broadside epitaph is at times more explicit but on the whole cut from the same poetic cloth: 'With coales and candle light also, of some the handes he brent:/ Of some the haire, from of their face, with cruell clawes he rent.'[44] Two poems on Bonner in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* accompany woodcuts, one of which, entitled 'Boner . . . scourgynge of Goddes Saynctes in his Orcharde', shows the Bishop with bundled switches in each hand flogging a man on all fours with his breeches pulled down, his back and haunches bleeding. The illustration, however, is far more moving and disturbing than the verses that accompany it.[45] Some years later, discovery of the Babington plot and the government's announcement of Mary, Queen of Scots' complicity in it evoked spirited and often libellous political-religious outcry throughout 1586–87. In verse,

[42] *A Complaynt agaynst the wicked enemies of Christ* (1564), EV 1431.

[43] Thomas Knell, *An Epitaph . . . vpon the life & death of D. Boner* (1569), (sig. A7), EV 9422.

[44] Thomas Broke, *An Epitaphe declaryng the lyfe and end of D. Edmund Boner* (1569?), EV 13929.

[45] *STC* 11222, 1563, sig. 2nd 4L5 (EV 14973); the second woodcut is on sig. 4A3v in this edition (EV 3593).

William Kempe reviled the conspirators in 200 lines of fourteener couplets. He terms the Pope 'that most lewd Italien Frier' (sig. *2), scolds each of the would-be royal assassins by name, and blames Mary for luring these young men to destruction with her 'Siren songes' (sig. 3v). Kempe praises Elizabeth's reluctance to condone Mary's death sentence and ends with the standard anti-Catholic, patriotic platitudes.[46]

Meanwhile, Catholics launched a considerable counter-offensive, but very little of what has survived in print takes the form of verse libel. Several woodcuts in John Fowler's *Oration Against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes of our time* (1566), are accompanied by libellous couplets such as that beneath a picture of three men in cloaks filling a huge bag with church plate stolen from an altar. The caption reads: 'Calvin beyng younge, the Crosse and Chalice stale,/ Beinge olde he did put greater things in his male' (sig. K4). Another woodcut attacks the French Calvinist, Theodore Beza, with the caption, 'Upon poore priestes Beza in judgement doth sitte,/ Him selfe to be judged and hanged up more fitte' (sig. K4v). Again, the pictures outweigh the poetry in libellous impact.

More effective is Poem 14, a mock-epitaph on Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, included in a prose attack on Elizabeth's government printed in 1592. Fourteen copies of this poem survive in manuscript, and while eight of them are embedded in the full prose text, the detached copies show the verse libel taking on a circulatory life of its own. Other, and better, pro-Catholic verse libels also circulated in manuscript, especially Poems 23, 33, and 34. The best printed verse libel from the Catholic side, however, may (or may not) be anti-Protestant in its orientation. A black-letter ballad entitled *A shorte Answer to the boke called: Beware the Cat* attacks William Baldwin, but primarily on grounds that he falsely attributed the book's narrative to Gregory Streamer: 'The pith of this paper, (if any man in it loke)/ Is to deni utterli, that Stremer made that boke.'[47] The anonymous balladeer denies that there is any truth in *Beware the Cat*, an ingenious work of prose fiction that satirizes Catholic tradition and ritual. The ballad never mentions its anti-Catholic satire, although its *ad hominem* attack on Baldwin emerges clearly enough:

> Every thing almost: in that boke is as tru,
> As that his nose to my dock°: is joyned fast with glu, tail
> Put up your pipes Baldewine: if you can make no better,
> Many talk more wittili: that knoe not one letter.

The poet is ironically insulting as well as directly abusive; the resulting doggerel is truly scurrilous if not very imaginative.

The remaining non-religious printed verse libels of Elizabeth's reign can generally lay claim to even less literary value, although a few of them are the work of well-known writers. They are concentrated in works composed during two literary movements of the 1590s. First, the Harvey–Nashe quarrel of *c.*1592–97 involved

[46] *STC* 14925, *A Dutiful Invective, Against the moste haynous Treasons of Ballard and Babington* (1586), EV 28776.

[47] *STC* 664.5, c. 1570, edited by William P. Holden, *Beware the Cat And The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth* (New London, CT, 1963), 94–5.

a half-dozen or more contributors and generated a number of outright verse libels. Gabriel Harvey had tried his hand at libelling years before with his Latin verse 'Speculum Tuscanismi', described by Harvey himself as a 'bolde Satyriall Libell'. It was interpreted, and was probably meant as, an attack on Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, but its oblique style and lack of any specific reference to Oxford deflate its libellous force.[48] Harvey's satiric talents were effectively limited to prose. His attacks in verse on Robert Greene, and consequently on Thomas Nashe, are similarly too obscure and limp-wristed to convey much libellous impact. However, several poets allied with Harvey in his quarrelling pamphlets displayed a greater talent for defamation. In his *Foure Letters, and Certaine Sonnets: Especially touching Robert Greene* (1592), the most libellous poems are the work of Harvey's brother, John, and his neighbour in Saffron Walden, Christopher Bird. Bird's sonnet in couplets is couched in the rough four-stress, semi-anapestic rhythms that typified libelling long after Elizabethan poets had established regular accentual-syllabic prosody:

> Greene the Connycatcher, of this Dreame the Autor,
> For his dainty devise, deserveth the hauter.° — halter
> A rakehell: A makeshift: A scribling foole:
> A famous bayard° in Citty, and Schoole. (A3v) — ignoramus

John Harvey's technically proficient sonnet is likewise a list of insults. It treats Greene in a flippant, dismissive fashion, terming him among other epithets a fool, 'madbrain'd knave', and (as Greene was now dead), 'a buried Elfe' (sig. I4). These are the most telling verses embedded in the libellous prose that initiated Harvey's quarrel with Nashe.

Nashe sought revenge for Greene, his literary mentor, by attacking Harvey in *Strange Newes, of the Intercepting Certaine Letters* (1592), yet its poetic component is negligible. Nashe's most effective verse assault on Harvey is a couplet (reprinted in Nashe's *Have with you to Saffron-Walden*, 1596), that both insults his opponent directly while its form mocks Harvey's cultivation of English quantitative verse:

> But ah what newes doe you heare of that good Gabriel huffe snuffe,
> Knowne to the world for a foole, and clapt in the Fleete for a Rimer? (sig. G3v)

Otherwise, Nashe's verse libelling in the tract centres on a second couplet aimed at Harvey (sig. F1), and two awkward, mocking quatrains in reply to Bird, the first being:

> Put up thy smiter O gentle Peter,
> Author and halter make but ill meeter.
> I scorne to answer thy mishapen rime,
> Blocks have cald schollers bayards ere this time. (sig. D1v)

[48] *Three Proper, and wittie, familiar Letters* (1580, *STC* 23095), sig. E2–2v. The evidence is thoroughly examined by Virginia F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey, His Life, Marginalia and Library* (Oxford, 1979), 64–66, and Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary, the Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool, 2003), 225–9.

Nashe concludes *Strange Newes* with an English sonnet that threatens eternal conflict with his opponents, more a manifesto than a focused vituperative attack.[49] In contrast, William Withie surpassed Nashe with a robust attack on Harvey that also mocked his attempts to write English quantitative metres (Poem 51c).

In 1593, Harvey replied to Nashe's *Strange Newes* with two works. First, his *New Letter of Notable Contents* ends with a 'Sonet' subtitled, 'Gorgon, or the wonderfull yeare' (sig. D3–3v). Virginia Stern terms this a 'curious and difficult poem';[50] it is far too obscure to qualify as effective libel. Second, in *Pierce's Supererogation* Harvey manages a direct but rather uninspired attack on Nashe with,

> The noddy Nash, whom every serving Swash
> With pot-jestes dash, and every whip-dog lash (sig. 2E2)

Following this, Harvey perhaps libelled Nashe in a flaccid sonnet in which an unidentified woman accuses him of being 'Witlesse still'.[51] Again, the most effective verse libel in this work was composed by friends, this time by Barnabe Barnes, John Thorius, and Anthony Chute. All three were aspiring writers closely allied, as was Harvey, with their printer, John Wolfe. Barnes, who published in 1593 his significant collection of lyric verse, *Pathenophil and Parthenophe*, contributed a rather disappointing Petrarchan sonnet to Harvey's diatribe (sig. 3*3–3v). Its paired insults in each of the first nine lines congeal into a monotonous chant:

> The Muses scorne, the Courtiers laughing-stock;
> The Countryes Coxecombe; Printers proper new;
> The Citties Leprosie; the Pandars stew;
> Vertues disdayne; honesties adverse rock;
> Envies vile champion; slaunders stumbling block.

The form, however, was picked up a few years later, first to libel and then, in an answering poem, defend Sir Walter Ralegh.[52] Thorius contributed two poems that denigrate Nashe but are primarily concerned with commending Harvey (sig. 2F2v–3, G1v–2; EV 1936, 5238). It was Chute who produced by far the most stinging verse libels for *Pierce's Supererogation*. In his initial sonnet for Harvey's tract, Chute mixed praise of Harvey with abuse of Nashe, 'Whose rascall stile deserved hath to gaine/ The hatefull title of a railing Muse.' He goes on to describe Nashe as 'The foole, whom Shame hath stained with fowle blott' (sig. 2F4v). Chute's

[49] Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast analyses the rhetoric of abuse in the Nashe–Harvey exchange with emphasis on its illicit sexual overtones. Of the poems on both sides, Prendergast cites only the final poem in *Strange Newes* (188) without noting that it is, in fact, a fully developed English sonnet ('Promiscuous Textualities: The Nashe-Harvey Controversy and the Unnatural Productions of Print', in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2005), 173–95).

[50] Stern, 116–20.

[51] The poem beginning 'A Dame, more sweetly braue, then nicely fine' (sig. 2F4, EV 155) is entitled 'His Sonet, that will justifie his word, and dedicateth Nashes S. Fame to Immortalitie'; this may refer to the 'Sieur de Fregeville', to whom are attributed the preceding French verses that praise Harvey.

[52] These texts are poems 21 and 22 in Michael Rudick's *Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh, A Historical Edition* (Tempe, AZ, 1999). Both circulated only in manuscript.

second effort, however, is a forty-line attack focused solely on Nashe that attributes his inspiration as a writer to inebriated malice:

> So long the Rhennish furie of thy braine,
> Incenst with hot fume of a Stilliard[53] Clime,
> Lowd-lying Nash, in liquid termes did raine,
> Full of asburdities, and of slaundrous ryme.
> So much thy Pot-jests in a Tapster humor,
> (For that's the Quintessence of thy Newgate[54] fashion)
> Thy tossepot majesty, and thy Fame did rumour
> In wondrous Agonyes of an Alehouse passion.

Chute's poem qualifies as the high water mark of verse libel in the Harvey–Nashe pamphlet war. In *Have with you to Saffron-Walden* (1596), Nashe's most ambitious rejoinder in the exchange, he rebuked Harvey and his allies at length but added only this quatrain to the poetic attack:

> Gabriel Harvey, fames duckling,
> hey noddie, noddie, noddie:
> Is made a gosling and a suckling,
> hey noddie, noddie, noddie.

Nashe had opened the book with a lengthy, insulting mock-dedication to Richard Lichfield, barber-surgeon of Trinity College, Cambridge, and it is Lichfield's *Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597) that delivers the last substantial word in the controversy.[55] The verse component of Lichfield's attack is limited to four insulting mis-translations of a Latin distich, the most stinging of which are:

> Some sayes Nashe is lascivious, but I say he is chast,
> For he by chacing after whores, his beard away hath chast,

and,

> Who saies Nash riots day and night, about the streets doth lye
> For he in prison day and night in fetters fast doth lye. (sig. D3)

To conclude, the most telling verse libels generated by the Harvey–Nashe quarrel were aimed at Nashe by Harvey's allies; the principals in this dispute unquestionably delivered their most devastating attacks in prose.

[53] The Steelyard, London headquarters of the Hanse merchants, was famous for its Rhenish wine (imported from the Rhineland).

[54] For the likelihood that the London authorities had sent Nashe to Newgate prison in autumn 1593, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, '*Christs Teares*, Nashe's "Forsaken Extremities"', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 49 (1998), 167–80.

[55] The *Trimming* has been attributed to Harvey, but there is no reason to suppose Lichfield incapable of writing this pamphlet in his own defence. In contrast with Nashe's disrespectful jibes at the barber-surgeon, Sir John Popham, Lord Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench, addressed a letter to the Vice-chancellor and other officers of Cambridge University, ordering them to arrest 'one Robert Scott' who 'hath lately offred violence unto Rich. Liechfielde barbor of Trinitie Coll': Popham added that Scott was to be kept in prison until 'his personall appearance before me at the next Assizes' (30 January 1601, Cambridge University Archives, Collect. Admin. 5, f. 223). Barber-surgeons were respected professionals, and Lichfield was clearly a man with at least one friend in high places.

Meanwhile, the 1590s produced a substantial corpus of verse satire that occasionally dabbled in outright libel. Indeed, Sandford M. Salyer has linked this satiric movement with the Harvey–Nashe quarrel, arguing that in 1597 Joseph Hall attacked Thomas Nashe under the pseudonym Labeo in a number of passages in *Virgidemiarum*.[56] The allusions he detected are convincing enough in their cumulative weight, but raise questions as to the degree of explicit, targeted vituperation required for a work to qualify as libel. Hall nowhere names Nashe or alludes outright to any of his works. Only contemporaries with a quite detailed knowledge of Nashe's writings, including his obscene 'Choice of Valentines', (necessarily restricted to manuscript), could have ferreted out the identity of Hall's victim. That might not be too much to ask of a libel submitted to a scribal coterie but, released into the broader print culture, Hall's veiled insults are unlikely to have struck home with many of his readers.

The self-conscious attempt to transfuse Classical verse satire into English begins with the satires in Thomas Lodge's *A Fig for Momus* (1595). Joseph Hall's satires, first published in 1597, closely resemble Lodge's, and were imitated and answered by John Marston, Everard Guilpin, Samuel Rowlands, Cyril Tourneur and Nicholas Breton among the most prominent contributors to the genre.[57] Some of these writers departed from the broad generalizations and impenetrable pseudonyms that typify these satires to engage in straightforward libelling. The movement's most lively and interesting verse occurs in these passages. John Marston's lampoon of Hall under the pseudonym Grillus in his *Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image* (1598), for example, is fairly transparent. He cites a number of specific topics in Hall's *Virgidemiarum* and identifies his target as a university man by lamenting that '. . . it greeveth me/ An Academick should so senceles be.'[58] In revenge, Hall took the extraordinary step of causing an epigram that insulted Marston to be pasted into every copy of the *Metamorphosis* sold in Cambridge. Marston responded with a spirited attack on Hall in *The Scourge of Villanie* also published in 1598. After introducing his opponent as '. . . that stinking Scavenger/ Which from his dunghill hee bedaubed on/ The latter page of old Pigmalion', (sig. H1), Marston ridiculed Hall's libellous attack on him by audaciously reprinting it:

> I Ask'd Phisitions what theyr counsell was
> For a mad dogge, or for a mankind Asse?
> They told mee though there were confections store,
> Of Poppy-seede, and soveraine Hellebore,
> The dog was best cured by cutting and kinsing,
> The Asse must be kindly whipped for winsing.

[56] 'Hall's Satires and the Harvey-Nashe Controversy', *Studies in Philology* 25 (1928), 149–70. Salyer specifies these passages as Book 1, Satire 9, Book 2, Satire 1, and all of Book 6.

[57] Rowlands, *The Letting of Humours Blood in the Head-Vaine* (1600); Tourneur, *The Transformed Metamorphosis* (1600); Breton, *No Whippinge, nor trippinge* (1601).

[58] *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool, 1961), 'Reactio' [Satire 4], ll. 71–2. In 'Some Notes on References to Joseph Hall in Marston's Satires', *Review of English Studies* 9 (1933), 192–6, Davenport analyses the extent to which Marston distorted Hall's views amidst significant name calling while borrowing words and phrases from his victim's writings.

Now the S. K. I little passe
Whether thou be a mad dog, or a mankind Asse.[59]

Hall had punned on Marston's name by suggesting that he could be 'best cured by cutting', that is, by 'marring his stones'. Marston ridiculed this clumsy rhetorical ploy by noting opposite line 5, 'Mark the witty alusion to my name.' He then added, 'Smart jerke of wit, did ever such a straine/ rise from an Apish schoole-boyes childish braine?' (sig. H2).

Brief passages that insult other writers can be detected in *The Scourge*: Richard Barnfield and Sir John Davies, for instance, and no doubt Nashe as author of the 'nastie lothsome brothell rime', alluding to his 'Choice of Valentines'. Other passages of verse libel are found scattered among the works of these satirists. Yet where they ventured into recognizably personal libel, the impact of their verse was usually blunted by two factors. First, as we have seen, vague allusions to their targets, especially through ill-defined pseudonyms, left their victims' identities as uncertain as most of those referred to in the age's libellous epigrams. Second, even well-defined attacks on recognizable individuals were diluted by their immersion in far lengthier passages on other subjects, especially general complaint and solemn moralizing. Overall, these works cannot be classified as libels.

In summary, a few Elizabethan printed libels motivated by religious zeal attacked their victims with spirit and intensity. The majority of these anti-Catholic libels, however, were translated from a foreign language, usually with little imagination or poetic sophistication. Similarly, a few of the libels incorporated into the Harvey–Nashe exchange or imbedded in the general satires of the 1590s were executed with some flair and conviction. The remaining verse libels published in England deliver, at best, a competent level of insult. The most talented practitioners of this genre opted, perforce, for scribal publication.

Scotland, however, provides a sharp contrast regarding the relationship between libels and print in two respects. First, printed verse libels were routinely used to attack major public figures in the realm's affairs, and second, these poems were on the whole more ambitious and effective than their English counterparts. Robert Sempill is the best-known author of these works, but his printer, Robert Lekpreuik, undoubtedly published equally explicit verse libels by other poets. Such open dissemination of libels was made possible by political circumstances throughout this turbulent period, not a formal or substantially greater freedom of the press. The Protestant lords and the Kirk never lost control of Edinburgh and, accordingly, tolerated, perhaps encouraged the libelling of their Catholic opponents and political rivals. Thus the official mechanism that allowed publication of these libels was identical to that responsible for English printed libels: the strengthening of the regime by attacking its enemies. (For analysis of the Scottish phenomenon in both print and manuscript see below, section 7d, 'Libelling in Scotland'.)

The types of printed verse libel tolerated in both Scotland and under Elizabeth thus follow the general contours of their early sixteenth-century precedent, but with a considerable increase in volume. In England, enemies of the regime, whether

[59] *The Scovrge of Villanie* (1599), sig. H1v.

kings, popes, or would-be assassins were vulnerable targets, apparently with the state's full approval. Second, low-profile subjects of printed libelling ordinarily posed no threat to state sovereignty and were tolerated, or at least not prosecuted. The deceased writer Robert Greene, the participants in the Harvey–Nashe quarrel, and the social satirists, albeit most of them were university-educated, libelled each other for years without running afoul of the censors. Their mud-slinging joy ride ended, momentarily, with the 'bishops' ban' of June 1599. John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, directed the Stationers' Company 'That all nasshes bookes and Doctor Harveys bookes be taken wheresoever they maye be found and that none of theire bookes bee ever printed hereafter.' Hall's satires were called in, while those by Marston and Guilpin, among others, were publicly burned. But as Cyndia Clegg points out, 'of the seven named satires censored, all but two had previously received ecclesiastical approval'. In fact, the ban was merely a fluke in the Crown's regulation of the press caused, Clegg argues, by heightened factional and political tensions stemming from the Earl of Essex's military expedition to Ireland. Satires, epigrams, plays, and other banned genres resumed publication within the year.[60]

Yet the ban did serve as a reminder that the state was watching; it had the authority to suppress printed works that crossed the line, and to prosecute everyone involved in their publication. This threat, though seldom enacted, surely inhibited authors, publishers, printers, and booksellers from taking a chance on marginally acceptable writings, especially those that might be construed as libellous. Did official intimidation also contribute to the bland character of so many of the verse libels that did reach print? Even those that attacked the nation's enemies often seem watered-down compared with their manuscript counterparts. The fact remains that these printed libels do not amount to a significant poetic genre. They are a deservedly neglected sub-genre of the age's verse satire. In the history of Renaissance discourse they are of interest for showing that libels certainly did reach print, with and without official sanction. Otherwise, they serve collectively as a minor addendum to the vigorous, ambitious, often artful cultivation of verse libel that flourished in scribal culture.

6. VERSE LIBELS IN MANUSCRIPT

The growing interest in scribal culture over the past few decades has attracted increasing attention to, primarily, the abundant seventeenth-century verse libel.[61] The libels at the heart of this study represent only a fraction of all those written in verse and passed from hand to hand during Elizabeth's reign, but they probably

[60] Edward Arber, *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640, A.D.*, 5 vols. (London, 1875–1894), 3.677; Clegg, 200–01, 203–16.

[61] ESL, ed. Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae (http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/index.html) offers online texts of more than 350 poems composed c. 1603–1640. The editors note that: 'The edition is borne out of an awareness of widespread interdisciplinary interest in this field, which is being stifled for lack of easy access to sources.'

offer enough evidence to trace the genre's sixteenth-century contours, its development and characteristic literary achievements. What follows is a summary overview of Elizabethan verse libel in manuscript and print beginning with a brief account of its historical precedents. This narrative draws upon and is followed by texts of fifty-two transcribed verse libels now available for comprehensive critical study and appreciation. The Stuart genre developed organically upon this Elizabethan foundation.

6a. Medieval Libels

Scribally published verse libel was not, of course, an Elizabethan invention. Individuals were attacked in writing during the Middle Ages, yet neither a widespread nor vigorous tradition of English verse libel seems to have developed before the fifteenth century for several reasons. Foremost was the tendency of libels to be generated from below and aimed at targets higher up the social scale. Before the fourteenth century, however, the upper class, whether clerical or lay, effectively monopolized scribal culture, which was based on expensive parchment and vellum. Moreover, the preferred languages of this literate class were French and Latin, French being the language of even informal letters throughout most of the fourteenth century. Interclass libelling was unlikely to have been conducted in English.[62] While the earlier medieval underclass could and probably did set forth libels as graffiti scratched or painted on stone and plaster, such texts would have been largely restricted to jingles rather than more ambitious libellous poems. Nor would such graffiti be likely to endure; we have not found any examples of libellous medieval graffiti, although one early Scottish libel would lend itself to that kind of distribution. This is the five-line attack on Edward I in 1296 that circulated in English manuscripts of the prose *Brut* chronicle (BR 3918.5). It was widely dispersed in print, beginning with William Caxton's *Chronicles* (1480) and then reprinted in at least seven editions of Fabyan's *Cronycles* (1516+, TP 2143.5).

As even the aristocracy gradually embraced English, and as paper just as gradually became available after 1300, a vernacular tradition of verse libel evolved. Its forms and conventions may have adapted an earlier, largely aristocratic tradition of verse libel in Latin or French, but evidence is lacking.[63] The earliest surviving English verse libel may be the attack on Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who was among those defeated at the battle of Lewes in 1264.[64] Formal English political ballads of the fourteenth century include libellous attacks on the Scots, especially William

[62] In his *Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to that of Edward II* (London, 1839), 6, Thomas Wright notes that satiric and libellous verse emerges in the thirteenth century, but only in Latin and Anglo-Norman. Similar English songs probably existed, 'but the Latin songs belonged to that particular party who were most in the habit of committing their productions to writing' (viii–x).

[63] R. M. Wilson notes references to satires, some of which were probably libellous, from the earlier middle ages but of indeterminate language (*The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (1952; rpt. London, 1970), 188—90).

[64] Wilson, 187. The text is edited from BL Harl. MS 2253, f. 58v, in Wright's *The Political Songs of England*, 69–71.

Wallace, Robert the Bruce and his allies, and on the King of France and his allies, including the pope, with regard to their invasion of Flanders in 1302.[65] Among the earliest illicit verse libels to have survived is an insulting thirty-line attack, combined with threats of physical violence, on the mayor and officers of the peace of Cambridge in 1418. The poet was no doubt a university student who 'affixed on the mayor's gate a certain schedule [the libel], to his great scandal.'[66] This conflict foreshadows the town/gown animosity that also found expression in the major university libels produced during Elizabeth's reign (Poems 49, 50, 52).

6b. Early Tudor Libels in Manuscript

Pre-Elizabethan verse libel was not prominent enough to be recognized in William A. Ringler's indexes of earlier Tudor verse under their classifications of literary kinds. Several manuscript poems of the type qualify within the category 'satire (invective)', including three poems about the extortionist John Baptist de Grimaldis (TM 383, 1015, 1619), transcribed excerpts from John Skelton's attack on Thomas Wolsey in 'Why come Ye not to Court' (TM 417), plus several other attacks on Wolsey, one to a length of 282 lines, in John Colyns' anthology.[67] However, a genuinely libellous prophecy survives from the reign of Henry VIII. In a letter of 2 February 1537, Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, enclosed the text of 'a profecy fayned of late', a libellous poem that names Thomas Cromwell, the King's principal secretary, and 'Care' (perhaps Sir Nicholas Carew), and refers to other targets by their initials and arms. Norfolk probably saw himself caricatured in the prediction that 'The white Lyon shalbe Layde to slepe', alluding to the Howard crest.[68] 'An Exhortacyon to the Nobylles and Commons of the Northe' (1536) primarily attacks Cromwell in twenty-five sixain stanzas.[69] Sir Thomas Wyatt's 'Ye old mule that thinck your self so fare' (TM 2027) would certainly qualify as verse libel if the poet meant to disgrace a particular woman. Lesser attacks on identifiable persons include that on one Bentley (TM 970), on Henry VII's ruthless administrator, Richard Empson (TM 1204), and on Daniel, a Fleming (TM 1549).

As measured by length alone, the most ambitious extant verse libel of the entire Tudor era was composed in 1547 by the gentleman pensioner William Palmer. It is a 5400–line attack on Bishop of Winchester Stephen Gardiner, with sideline assaults on a number of other Catholics including Edmund Bonner and Henry

[65] See the song on the execution of Sir Simon Fraser, Laurence Minot's 'Battle of Neville's Cross', and verses on 'The Flemish Insurrection' in Robbins, *Historical Poems*, 14–21, 31–34, 9–13.

[66] Wilson (p. 194) prints the poem from the unique text in a sixteenth-century manuscript compiled by John Stow, BL Harl. MS 247, ff. 129–9v (EV 14029).

[67] BL Harl. MS 2252 (TM 1682, 484). The poems are printed in *Ballads from Manuscripts*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (1868–72; rpt. New York, 1968), 1.352–61, 333–5. Furnivall also edits from the same anthology two verse complaints by Edward North, imprisoned for libelling Wolsey (1.337–9, TM 1094, 606). TM 2006 is a third complaint by North from BL Lansdowne MS 858.

[68] PRO SP 1/115, f. 177 with the poem (TM 19), as an enclosure. The white lion likewise identifies Charles Howard, Lord Admiral, in Poem 22 below.

[69] *Ballads from Manuscripts*, ed. Furnivall, 1.304–9 (not a TM poem).

Cole (both mentioned in Poem 24).[70] The poem resembles later libels in its form, rough tetrameter quatrains rhyming *abab*. Palmer attempts a degree of sophistication in the rhetoric of his poetic fiction. The speaker purports to be Gardiner himself, who confesses in detail to his crimes (and those of other Catholics) as the poet overhears him pray to 'his godd*es* . . . / as Popis Cardinall*es* bisshop*es* most holi saint*es*' (Janelle 19). The work offers detailed and valuable historical testimony, but as Pierre Janelle notes, its irregular metre and often strained rhymes leave it void of 'literary value'. In addition, Gardiner's persona is routinely violated as he speaks 'as Palmer's mouthpiece, [and] contradicts himself in the most absurd fashion' (15).

A great deal more verse libel undoubtedly circulated in manuscript before Elizabeth's reign but it has disappeared for several reasons. As libel, it was restricted to ephemeral scribal culture, while its destruction was hastened by the fact that such libels were risky possessions, not the kinds of poems anyone would want the authorities to discover in a random search of their papers. Yet one early Tudor poet, John Skelton, came close to founding a distinctive tradition of English verse libel. As we have seen, some of his attacks on Wolsey that circulated in manuscript during the reign of Henry VIII reached print between *c.* 1531 and 1568.[71] Skelton exerted a lingering influence on the genre's later development. In print his most prolific disciple was Luke Shepherd. 'The Image of Ypocresye' (1533, TM 1791) is mostly a general Reformist satire of the failings of the Church, written in Skeltonics, although part 3 libels Sir Thomas More with a trenchant reminder of his enthusiastic persecution of Protestant 'heretics.' During Elizabeth's reign, however, verse libel developed rapidly along different lines and almost exclusively in scribal culture, establishing the genre as a significant literary kind for the first time.

6c. Elizabethan Verse Libel and Scribal Publication

The predictable restriction of the bulk of Renaissance verse libels to scribal publication largely explains why the genre has been neglected for so long. Its surviving texts, in scattered manuscript collections, complicated their discovery, editing, and systematic study. The same restriction applies to the numerous early Stuart libels (many of them now posted on the website of that name), as well as to the early Tudor genre. The steadily growing volume of extant libel texts over this period of nearly two centuries no doubt reflects a steadily expanding population and higher literacy rates, but also the increasing survival rate of documents of all sorts as we move forward in time. Locating and analysing the transcribed texts of Elizabethan verse libels in manuscript has, as something of a by-product, brought to light copious

[70] The poem was announced, and excerpts published by Pierre Janelle, 'An Unpublished Poem on Bishop Stephen Gardiner by William Palmer', *The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 5, 6 (1928–9), 12–25, 89–96, 167–74. The unique text (TM 756) occurs in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 613 (R3.33), a carefully written small quarto of 148ff.

[71] E.g. the libellous excerpt from *Why Come Ye Not to Court* in Humphrey Welles's miscellany, O: MS Rawl. C.813 (TM 417), ed. Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan, *The Welles Anthology, MS. Rawlinson C.813* (Binghamton, NY, 1991), 167–81; *STC* tentatively dates the first edition of *Collyn Clout* to 1531, and *Why Come Ye Not to Court* to 1545 (?).

new evidence about scribal culture, much of which is set forth in the textual notes to these poems in the Commentary. A consolidated review of those findings stresses the often surprising dimensions of that culture in place, social contexts, and time. These results are not limited only to libels circulated in manuscript, but would also apply to many other genres in prose or verse that were primarily nurtured in the scribal networks.

Although the mainstream of Elizabethan libel in verse or prose was never sent to the press, these works were nevertheless published for the delectation of what often became a mass readership simply by being released into the broad but unpredictable currents of manuscript circulation. Despite vigilant prosecution of all sorts of libels at all levels of government, their composition and distribution were pervasive in manuscript culture.[72] Reports of libels rarely distinguish their form in prose or verse, but certainly some of the many references to them concern verse libels. The frequency of libelling is illustrated in records concerning William and Katherine Noble, two of the scores of victims defamed in Thomas Buckley's 'Libel of Oxford' (Poem 49). In 1565, William sued Francis Mylles of All Souls College for slandering him. Among the numerous depositions in this case is a reference to 'the lybell that was sett up against Mr mylles at carfaxe'.[73] While Noble was clearly pursuing a case of oral defamation, it is clear that Mylles, too, had been libelled by a manuscript text, one 'sett up', that is, publicly posted at Carfax, the intersection of several main streets in Oxford's city centre. Once written down, the shorter libels were easily distributed in this fashion. They were constantly cited as being thrown into pulpits or pinned up on gates, posts, doors, alehouse walls, and other public places.[74]

Insulting poems amounted to a small fraction of all libellous attacks, yet verse libel was a persistent weekly if not daily part of ordinary life. The Appendix, the 'Bibliography of English and Scottish Verse Libels Edited from Manuscripts', bears further witness to the age's chronic preoccupation with libelling. The multiple surviving copies of many of these works, banned by the authorities and dangerous to possess, also testify to their plenitude. References to lost verse libels round out the picture. For example, in a letter to Lord Burghley, 22 December 1583, William Herle describes 'certayn verses unadvowed, which conserned your sellf, and were in nature of an ynfamous libell . . . for suche verses have byn shewed furth of late, and

[72] Considerable manuscript evidence calls into question Pauline Croft's assertion that libels were 'Mostly metropolitan' and 'orginated [sic] in the tavern world of pamphlets, epigrams and satire rather than among factious courtiers' ('The reputation of Robert Cecil: libels, political opinion and popular awareness in the early seventeenth century', *TRHS* 6th ser., 1 [1991], 63). See below, section 7b, 'Libels at Court'.

[73] Register of the Chancellor's Court 18 April 1561-16 December 1566, and the testimony of Mr. Flower, 14 October 1565, Oxford University Archives, Hyp. A 7, f. 270.

[74] Our Commentary cites a number of references to the distribution of libels. Among other reports typical of libel circulation: Thomas Randolph complained in a letter of 16 March 1581 of a libel 'set on his lodging door and in divers other places of the town'. Ambassador to Scotland Robert Bowes wrote Sir Robert Cecil on 17 December 1596, mentioning a libel 'thrown into the Church' in Edinburgh. A few years later, a libel was thrown into Cecil's own chamber at Whitehall Palace. In a letter to the Privy Council of 20 February 1601, the Bishop of Salisbury (and others), enclosed the copy of a libel 'found in the market place at Sarum'. On 3 April 1601 the Mayor of London sent Cecil a libel found 'this morning upon the Stairs of the Royal Exchange' (BL Harl. MS 6999, f. 91; PRO SP 52/59, f. 87; PRO SP 63/203, f. 114; HMC Salisbury 11.75, 11.321).

it may haplye bryng furthe these new libelles withall.'[75] No copy of these verse attacks on Burghley has survived. In his 'Testament', written a few days before his death, Sir John Perrot denied receiving a 'rhyme . . . written against her Majesty', verses that the Lord Deputy of Ireland assured Burghley had been delivered to Secretary Walsingham.[76] In a letter to Sir Robert Cecil of 26 January 1600, Archbishop Whitgift enclosed 'a very lewd and seditious rhyme, or libel, spread in Wales', which, again, is known only from this reference.[77] Only two copies have survived of Poem 6, a libel that was 'dispersed abroade in the streetes, being twentie of them' addressed to their victim, John Markham. Neither copy is one of the original twenty.

Some two dozen of the libels edited in this book range from a quatrain to no more than sixteen lines of verse, and could have been easily transmitted in multiple copies, sung to a known or made-up tune, or committed to memory. In oral culture, of course, such verse libelling in the form of slanderous songs or jingles, though naturally less common than spontaneous name calling, was a highly popular means of personal insult. Adam Fox observes that 'rhymes passed around quickly by word of mouth, tripping easily off the tongue and lodging firmly in the memory'. These pre-meditated attacks made the transition to libel when the slanderer realized that 'if a composition could also be set down on paper its impact might be much greater and its audience much wider'.[78] But the transition might take place as well simply because those who heard the insulting ballad thought it worthy of preservation. On occasion there was urgent practical incentive to commit a libel to paper, as shown by the cluster of Jacobean rhyming libels analysed by Fox from the records of the Court of Star Chamber. Defamation was regularly prosecuted in this court, although it accounted for only 577 of a total of 8,228 cases from 1603 to 1625. Yet the extant records comprise a treasure trove of verse libel because plaintiffs were required to produce either copies or verbal recitations of the alleged attacks.[79] To date, the only such Elizabethan verse libel to come to light from this source is the quite accomplished 'Jig of Michael and Frances' (see below, section 8, 'The Aesthetics of Libelling'); a systematic trawl of the reign's Star Chamber documents would no doubt yield many more examples.

While rhyming insults recited or sung as ballads were undoubtedly very common, few of the libels edited here show signs of being set to music. Poem 22 is said to be sung 'To the tune of heye downe a downe', but its irregular metrics make this injunction problematic. Of the remaining three libels with refrains, only Poem 15 (beginning 'Chamberlain, chamberlain') seems likely to have been written for a contemporary tune. The eighteen eight-line stanzas of 'Domine factotem' (Poem 38, with its variable refrain based on '*ipso facto*') would commit the performer to

[75] BL Lansdowne MS 39, ff. 194–4v.
[76] HMC Salisbury 4.193, dated 3 May 1592; Sir William Fitzwilliam to Burghley, 14 September 1590 (PRO SP 63/154, f. 102).
[77] HMC Salisbury 11.20.
[78] *Oral and Literate Culture in England*, 304.
[79] Fox, 309–10. The location of these texts was greatly facilitated by the *List and Index to the Proceedings in Star Chamber for the Reign of James I, 1603–25, in the Public Record Office, London, Class STAC8*, ed. T. G. Barnes, et al., 3 vols. (Chicago, IL, 1975).

something of a musical marathon if sung from start to finish. Poem 24, a parody of the evensong service for the dead, could certainly be chanted or sung, yet its 453 lines present the vocalist with an even greater challenge.

As these examples suggest, the received paradigm of verse libel as an insulting song or terse and temporary posting on a slip of paper—as an essentially ephemeral, lyric composition—is dangerously incomplete. Fox musters persuasive evidence to confirm that 'England at this time was a society thoroughly permeated by the use of the written word'.[80] Equally misleading is the concept that with the advent of the printing press, both readers and writers migrated 'from script to print', largely abandoning the manuscript culture that had necessarily dominated medieval literacy. The textual histories of the poems edited here reveal an ambitious and voluminous scribal culture that transcended the boundaries of geography, class, and time. Verse libel throughout Elizabeth's reign was an enthusiastically cultivated, common literary genre. Many of its authors invested considerable time and effort in their malicious compositions, with results more suitable for the study than the alehouse. To enjoy these works required that the audience read or listen to substantial poems, and since these libels could not be set forth in print, recipients who wished to obtain copies of their own had no choice but to invest in their transcription.

Thus while shorter libels were indeed scribbled down, passed from hand to hand, and nailed up in public for all to see, more than a dozen of the texts we have edited were clearly not intended for this sort of quick and easy public dissemination. Nor was this investment in abuse limited to any one libellous type or subject. The 'Jig of Michael and Frances' runs to 170 lines, while another previously edited libel on Nicholas Turberville, who was murdered by John Morgan in 1580, survives in ninety-eight lines of fourteener couplets.[81] Eleven of the poems edited in this book exceed 100 lines in length, with another eight ranging from sixty to ninety-eight lines. All three university libels (Poems 49, 50 and 52) exceed 250 lines of verse. Two Scottish libels, Poem 39 ('Tom Trowth') and Poem 36, the attack on Mary, Queen of Scots, and James Hepburn, fourth Earl of Bothwell, exceed 300 lines. The Catholic attack on John Foxe (Poem 34), and the exposé of Yorkshire recusants (Poem 27), comprise 246 and 200 lines respectively, while at 453 lines, the gloating abuse of Mary I's Catholic officers of church and state (Poem 24) is the longest of the texts we have edited by number of lines; its form in Skeltonics, however, renders it shorter in word count than, for example, the three university libels. And while Thomas Wright's emblems are individually concise, they were clearly meant as contributions to a unified emblem book that both praised the Earl of Essex and his followers and libelled his opponents. The literary qualities imparted to a number of these longer works—prosopopoeia, allegory, and

[80] P. 316, and see 313–24 for the dissemination of libels in writing, as songs and ballads, through degrading illustrations, and even in printed broadsides later in the seventeenth century.

[81] The jig has been edited by C. J. Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge, 1936), The Turberville libel (EV 29028), was edited by Norma H. Hodgson, 'The Murder of Nicholas Turberville. Two Elizabethan Ballads', *Modern Language Review* 33 (1938), 520–7. This libel refutes the preceding poem that eulogizes Turberville (EV 6770).

dream vision for instance—required a narrative rather than lyric structure. The survival of so many of these lengthier poems, often in multiple manuscript copies, demonstrates the genre's appeal to readers who were willing to copy substantial, complicated texts in order that they might be read and enjoyed on future occasions. The continued circulation of a few of these poems into the reign of Charles I and beyond testifies to their on-going literary appeal.

A variety of motives accounts for the geographic distribution of many libels. The most easily explained instance involves Poems 37, 39, and 44, verse libels that traduce a number of Scots, from Bothwell and the Regent James Stewart, first Earl of Moray, to named ministers of the Kirk in Edinburgh. Copies of these poems were dispatched from Scotland to London apparently because of their value as diplomatic intelligence. The only substantive copies are housed at the Public Record Office among the State Papers Scotland. Sir Robert Cotton arranged to have Poems 39 and 44 copied into his historical collections of papers relating to Scotland. Thus the international transfer of these texts and their subsequent recopying was largely if not entirely motivated by utilitarian rather than literary interests. The same is true for copies of thirty satiric ballads, many of them libellous in whole or part, ascribed to Robert Sempill and printed in Scotland between 1570 and 1572. Copies were dispatched to London while Sir William Drury and Thomas Randolph served as special ambassadors to the Scottish court.[82] Only one copy of any of these imprints has been located in Scotland (*STC* 22209). Their survival depended overwhelmingly on their being archived in England. No more than two copies of any of the rest are extant, all in London archives, with eleven of them among the State Papers Scotland.

Other libels circulated around the countryside. Poem 32, Henry Goodere's apologetic verses, appear in the Marsh's Library anthology compiled by Cambridge undergraduates, Sir John Harington's Arundel Harington manuscript, and in O: MS Gough Norfolk 43, the household book of Thomas Brampton, yeoman of Eye, Suffolk. 'The Scottishe Libell' (Poem 42) is preserved in the Marsh's Library manuscript, in Robert Commander's anthology compiled at Ludlow on the border of Wales, and in BL Add. MS 38823, transcribed in Kent and London by the courtier Sir Edward Hoby. Once released into circulation, manuscript texts travelled as far and through as many hands, as their inherent interest warranted.

The presence of libel texts in miscellanies compiled by university students, by courtiers, and by collectors all over England likewise contradicts an appeal based solely on the occasional, intensely personal nature of the works themselves. Copies of Poem 49, Buckley's libel of Oxford (*c*. 1568) appear, for example, in two miscellanies compiled by students at St John's College, Cambridge, *c*. 1585–90.[83] These students could have known, or even known of, few of the targets named in this poem but, again, its racy adolescent appeal is undeniable. Edward Bashe surely inspired little resentment among Cambridge students, yet one of these anthologies also preserves a text of the libel attacking him (Poem 2). Another Cambridge

[82] Gary M. Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives 1509–1688* (London, 1990), 242–3.

[83] These are O: MS Rawl. poet. 85 and Marsh's Library, Dublin, MS Z.3.5.21.

student turned courtier, Sir John Harington, included both poems in his private anthology. It seems unlikely that Henry Stanford, household tutor and chaplain to George Carey, Lord Hunsdon, copied the Bashe libel into Cambridge University Library MS Dd.5.75 out of any personal resentment of its protagonist. The poem's appeal was largely or entirely aesthetic.

Perhaps the most striking insight to be gleaned from this evidence overall concerns the diversity of scribal contexts in which they circulated. As prohibited works, potentially dangerous to write, own, or transmit, we would expect libels to adhere to the 'coterie' paradigm long accepted as the norm of Renaissance manuscript circulation.[84] It seems only reasonable that scribes would share incriminating texts only with trusted friends. Presumably, then, copies of the anti-Protestant Enborne libel (Poem 23), trophy of a successful Catholic raid on the parish church, would circulate only in a restricted Catholic coterie. Three of its four transcribed texts may represent just such coterie circulation, but evidence is lacking. What we know beyond doubt is that this pro-Catholic poem circulated widely in Protestant circles. Not only does it appear in an anthology compiled by the Puritan Gilbert Freville, it reached two Church of England ministers, both of whom printed texts of the poem independently (and with licence) under James I.

Libel transcription obviously bridged social as well as geographic boundaries. The Scottish Libel (Poem 42) was copied by a Cambridge student into the Marsh's Library anthology, but Sir Henry Sidney's chaplain and the courtier Sir Edward Hoby copied it as well. Poem 32, Henry Goodere's apologetic verses, appear in both the Marsh's Library anthology and Sir John Harington's Arundel Harington manuscript, as well as in Thomas Brampton's household book. Stephen Batman, clergyman, copied the libel of the Duttons' acting company (Poem 45), apparently composed by a member (or members) of the Inns of Court. Lord Hunsdon's servant Henry Stanford copied both the Bashe libel and the mock epitaph for the Earl of Leicester. However dangerous the transmission or possession of libels may have been, they clearly passed across class lines from masters to servants (or servants to masters) in promiscuous fashion.

A number of the poems edited here also transcended temporal boundaries, persisting in circulation far longer than might be expected of such necessarily topical works. What motivated the copying and recopying of these libels long after the deaths of their victims? Poem 17, for example, an attack on the Earl of Essex's opponents at the time of his disgrace in 1599, joined a considerable body of related works in verse and prose ('Essexiana') that circulated in manuscript for decades after his execution in 1601. Poem 17 survives in fourteen transcribed copies, only five of which are likely to be of Elizabethan vintage. The text in MS Rawl. poet. 26 occurs in an anthology begun no earlier than 1618 and continued well into the 1640s. The text in Nottingham University MS Portland Pw V 2 was copied from Sir John Holles' papers *c*. 1616 or later. Bodleian MS Eng. hist. c.272, BL Harl.

[84] As defined by Harold Love, a text shared within 'a closed circle of readers on the understanding it is not to be allowed to go beyond the circle', *The Culture and Commerce of Texts, Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst, MA, 1998), 43.

MS 2127, and All Souls College MS 155 were transcribed during the 1620s at earliest. Intense public fascination with Essex's dramatic rise and fall played out in manuscript as well as in print throughout the seventeenth century.

The afterlife of Henry Goodere's verse apology for his assistance to Mary, Queen of Scots (the non-libellous Poem 32), is more mysterious. Goodere, who died in 1595, wrote his complaint while imprisoned in the Tower in 1571 or 1572. It no doubt began circulating at once, for Thomas Norton countered with Poem 32a, his attack on Goodere's behaviour that is calibrated stanza for stanza with Goodere's defence. Thus both sides in this skirmish within the larger Catholic versus Protestant struggle were represented by poems circulating in the scribal networks. But whereas Norton's libel survives in just two Elizabethan anthologies, Goodere's poem is found in five manuscripts. One of these is an early seventeenth-century anthology (BL Harl. MS 677), and another a miscellany compiled *c.* 1640 or even later (BL Harl. MS 2127). Were these two scribes attracted to the work by its historical connections with the Queen of Scots, some personal knowledge of Goodere himself, or its extended plea of innocence in the face of official, anti-Catholic persecution?

Other long-lived texts may have appealed to different scribes for contrary reasons. A variety of motives no doubt accounts for at least some of the fourteen transcribed texts of the second verse epitaph for the Earl of Leicester (Poem 14). This libel was one of five poems in an anti-Protestant tract published by Richard Verstegan (alias Rowlands) in 1592. The scribe of Huntington MS EL 1162 was perhaps a devout Catholic who copied the entire work under the title, 'Burleygh's Commonwealth', in full sympathy with its message. A later hand, however, has inserted the subtitle, 'A Slaunderous & defamatory Libell sett out & published by the Traytorous Papists beyond Seas' (f. 1). The text of the epitaph alone in O: MS Wood D 19, vol. 2, forms part of a composite collection of works, both literary and historical in nature, dated for the most part between 1648 and 1689. The first mock-epitaph for the Earl of Leicester (Poem 13), was perhaps the longest-lived of Elizabethan verse libels in scribal culture, with this significant twist: it was reassigned from Robert Dudley to Robert Cecil on the latter's death in 1612. Only one Elizabethan text of the poem has come to light, nor do any of its later copies apply its mockery to Leicester. With its venom aimed at Cecil, however, the poem became a favourite with Stuart anthologists into the early eighteenth century. The poem is thus not only a textbook example of recycling in scribal culture,[85] but another example as well of a libel's popularity outliving any likely residual resentment of its victim (in this case, victims).

The appeal of these libels as poetry was no doubt another, perhaps the primary, factor in their longevity. Entertainment value was a significant motive in the

[85] In Chapter 3 of *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, 1995), Arthur F. Marotti analyses the 'instability and malleability' of texts circulating in manuscript, noting their tendency 'to elicit revisions, corrections, supplements and answers' (135). A poem's wholesale reapplication to a different purpose, as with Poem 13, is less common but not unique. Joshua Eckhardt notes that Thomas Bastard's epigram 'In Getam' (published in 1598) was adapted (after 1611) to libel Robert Carr, Viscount Rochester and Earl of Somerset (*Manuscript Verse Collectors and the Politics of Anti-Courtly Love Poetry* (Oxford, 2009), 72–73 and n. 11).

transmission of the two Oxford libels and the Bashe libel well into the seventeenth century. Thomas Buckley's 'Libel of Oxford' (Poem 49), treats persons and escapades (real and imagined) from *c.* 1568. Yet four of its nine substantial copies (with forty or more stanzas) date from the 1620s or later (granted that Anthony à Wood copied one of them in the second half of the seventeenth century for its relevance to University history).[86] The second Oxford libel targets victims from town and the university in the early 1590s, yet at least four of its six most complete texts date from *c.* 1610 to the 1620s or thereafter.[87] The occurrence of thirty-eight stanzas from this poem in John Gell's anthology suggests that it may have circulated for several decades in the University community since Gell was a student there in 1610. In addition, excerpted stanzas from both the libels of Oxford occur in a number of manuscript miscellanies compiled *c.* 1620–40. The Commentary for Poems 49 and 52 offers further examples of the continuing influence of these two libels long after their topical relevance had faded. Their relentless focus on sexual misconduct couched in an irreverent, riddling style largely accounts for their on-going popularity. Similarly, of the seven substantial manuscript copies of the Bashe libel, two and possibly three date from the 1620s, some forty years after the libel's composition, and thirty years after its protagonist's death.[88] Its first four lines were conscripted *c.* 1620 to begin an otherwise unrelated lampoon of a Catholic priest (see the Commentary to Poem 2). Edward Bashe, Victualler of the Navy, was far too minor an official to command much antiquarian interest, nor are religious or political motives at issue here. The poem was copied and recopied because of its imaginative, lively vilification of a Crown officer. His identity was by James's reign irrelevant. Collectors valued the poem for its literary qualities. They no more needed to know or remember Bashe than a modern reader must read Thomas Shadwell's biography to enjoy Dryden's 'MacFlecknoe'.

Libels in verse and prose were being constantly launched into the networks of scribal publication. Those that found an audience sometimes generated replies in kind that added to the volume of texts circulating in manuscript. Robert Gregory, customs officer of Poole, Dorset, copied into Harvard fMS 757 the 114-line attack on John Morgan, who in 1580 murdered Nicholas, brother of the poet George Turberville. Although Gregory's is a unique copy of this libel, it presumably circulated in a number of copies in the Dorset–Somerset neighbourhood where both the Morgan and Turberville families were prominent. The attack on Morgan was popular enough, at any rate, to generate a line-by-line defence of Morgan and counter-attack on Turberville that Gregory also saw fit to transcribe. Libelling of the Scottish Regent John Erskine, first Earl of Mar, and those who betrayed the

[86] Kate Bennett, 'Anthony Wood's Verse Miscellany "Libels and Songs": The Lost MS. Wood E 31', *Bodleian Library Record* 16 (1999), 391. William Percy transcribed two copies of Poem 49 c. 1644 (Mark Nicholls, 'The authorship of "Thomas Bastard's Oxford libel" ', *Notes and Queries* 250 (n.s. 52, 2005), 186). The text in All Souls College, Oxford, MS 155 is a fourth copy from the 1620s or later.

[87] Granted, this includes both copies in the Alnwick Castle MSS transcribed by William Percy, who attended the University at this time. Gell's miscellany dates from c. 1610 and later; the Corpus Christi College, Oxford MS is an anthology compiled primarily during the 1620s.

[88] These are the first Dalhousie Manuscript and two British Library manuscripts, Add. MS 34064 and Lansdowne MS 740 (see the Commentary to Poem 2).

rebel, Thomas Percy, seventh Earl of Northumberland, to the English in 1572 spawned several extant replies, one of which refers to other writings on the subject now unknown (see the Commentary to Poems 40a–b). Poems 32 and 32a and 48 and 48a are examples of non-libellous poems that were answered by verse libels.

As opposed to the open, often mass circulation of some libels, others were perhaps written for personal satisfaction but never released into the scribal networks. William Withie's attacks on his fellow college members at Christ Church, Oxford (Poems 51a–b) and Robert Commander's libel on Hugh Shadwell (Poem 3), are unique, holograph copies that may reflect wholly private ventings of frustration. Withie had little to gain from insulting his colleagues outright, while Commander's attack on Shadwell is unbecoming to a household chaplain. We cannot conclude, however, that libels extant in unique copies did not circulate, for the high loss rates for Renaissance manuscripts leave open the possibility that they were widely disseminated. The 'Libel of Cambridge' (1573), for instance, survives in only two copies, yet was still well enough known to be humorously referred to about 1600 in the second 'Parnassus' play as a 'Chronicle of *Cambrige* cuckolds'. We believe that with regard to transcribed English verse libels, very little has survived, perhaps one in 600 copies even for the most popular works transmitted by hand over several decades.[89] From the extant copies of these poems we can nevertheless block out the rough contours of their popularity and transmission, and draw tentative conclusions as to why some libels apparently saw very little circulation while others circulated widely for decades.

Libellers used scribal publication for motives ordinarily the opposite of poets who sent their works to the press. While the age's 'self-crowned laureates' sought patronage and immortality by publishing their creative writing, verse libellers wanted nothing less than recognition for their achievements. Authorial anonymity is a distinctive hallmark of the libel in scribal culture. We can name with some confidence only thirteen authors for the fifty-two libels edited here.[90] The scribal publication of a libel in verse or prose had everything to do with enhancing the libel's impact, but nothing to do, ordinarily, with poetic fame.

Thus, while authors of libels were ordinarily confined to publishing their works anonymously in the private medium of manuscript circulation, there is something of a disconnect between the authorities' fear of libels and the actual motives of most of the writers who produced verse libels. Granted, many Elizabethan prose libels, and some of those in verse, advanced a political agenda. The most notable Elizabethan example is the prose dialogue 'Leicester's Commonwealth' (1584), with its flagrant disrespect for the Earl of Leicester and other officers of the regime.

[89] In 'What Proportion of Lute Music has Come Down to us?', *Lute News* 53 (2000), 9–10, Chris Goodwin calculates the survival rate of printed copies of lute music to estimate that only one Renaissance manuscript lute book in 600 has survived. Verse libels circulating on single sheets or bifolia would no doubt have experienced a much lower survival rate.

[90] These are Gabriel Argall and Owen Rowland (50), Thomas Buckley (49), William Byrche (21), Sir Thomas Chaloner (1), Robert Commander (3), John Markham (7), Thomas Norton (32a), Sir Anthony Standen (12), Sir Thomas Stanhope (6), Leonard Thickpenny (8), William Withie (51a–d), and Thomas Wright (16a–h). Richard Verstegan (or Vestegan, alias Rowlands) is the likely author of Poem 14, but this libel entered manuscript circulation from a surreptitious printed pamphlet.