Conversational Exchanges in Early Modern England (1549-1640)

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Edited by

Kristen Abbott Bennett

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel Bender, Associate Professor of English, Pace University, received his PhD. from the University of California, Berkeley. He has published articles on Shakespearean comedy, Thomas More, and the history of composition. He is currently working on a study of Tudor education; his article, "'A babe, a shrimp, a boy': Imitation, Schoolroom Trauma, and Ancient Rome in Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* and Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*," is forthcoming.

Kristen Abbott Bennett recently received her PhD. from Tufts University and teaches at Stonehill College and Wentworth Institute of Technology. Bennett has published scholarship in *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme, This Rough Magic, Renaissance Quarterly, The Shakespeare Standard, Interactions, The Anachronist,* and *Transverse*; her article, "At the Crossroads: Intersections of Classical and Vernacular Protest Literature in *Pierce Penilesse*" is forthcoming in *Upstart: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies.*

Audrey Birkett is an independent scholar who earned her PhD. at Royal Holloway, University of London. Birkett's recently completed manuscript, *The Power of Paratext: The Construction of Authorship in Caroline Extra-Dramatic Material,* is currently under review with Ashgate Publishers. Birkett has published essays on William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Henry Glapthorne, and Richard Brome.

Emily Fine is a doctoral candidate in English and American Literature at Brandeis University. She is completing her dissertation on mothers' legacy texts – works that women wrote and bequeathed to their children upon death or styled as legacies or final testaments – in seventeenth-century England.

Kavita Mudan Finn is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Southern New Hampshire University, and taught previously at Georgetown University, Simmons College, and the University of Maryland, College Park. She received her PhD. from the University of Oxford in 2010 and published her first book, *The Last Plantagenet Consorts: Gender, Genre, and*

Historiography 1440-1627, in June 2012. Her essay contains archival material consulted during the 2012 NEH seminar *Tudor Books and Readers 1485-1603*.

Robin Hizme is Director of the College Preparatory Programs at Queens College, CUNY and adjunct faculty in the QC English Department. She is currently completing her PhD. at the CUNY Graduate Center and writing a dissertation entitled "Violence, Affect, and Communal Identity: Massacres in Late Medieval & Early Modern English Drama."

M. Stephanie Murray is Instructor and Associate Director of the BXA Intercollege Degree Programs at Carnegie Mellon University. Murray earned her PhD. at University of Chicago and has given papers on *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, *Titus Andronicus, The Spanish Tragedy,* and on the topics of Aesthetic Literacy, and Collaboration and Simulation in Early Modern Literature.

Donald Hedrick is Professor of English and Director of the Graduate Program in Cultural Studies at Kansas State University. Hedrick has held research fellowships and visiting professorships at Colgate University, Cornell's Society for Humanities, Amherst College, University of California-Irvine, Charles University of Prague (Fulbright), and the Folger Shakespeare Library. Hedrick has published in *PMLA*, *ELH*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *New Literary History*, *Renaissance Drama*, and elsewhere. He has served on the Publications Committee of the MLA, and is currently on the Advisory Board of *PMLA*.

Don Rodrigues is a PhD. student and instructor of English and Cinema and Media Arts at Vanderbilt University. His work focuses on early modern intellectual history, media studies, and theories of identity, sovereignty, and technology. He is a HASTAC Scholar alumnus and co-founder of Vanderbilt's Digital Humanities Working Group. He has worked as lead TA and programming assistant for the Coursera MOOC, *Online Games: Literature, New Media, and Narrative.*

INTRODUCTION

KRISTEN ABBOTT BENNETT

> I begin with a desire to sleep with the dead.
> —Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse*

> Such is this golden age wherein we liue, and so replenisht with golden Asses of all sortes, that, if learning had lost itself in a groue of Genealogies, wee neede doe no more but sette an olde goose ouer halfe a dozen pottle pots, (which are as it were the egges of inuention,) and wee shall haue such a breede of bookes within a little while after, as will fill all the world with the wilde fowle of good wits.
> —Thomas Nashe, *Preface to Astrophel and Stella* (*sic.*)[1]

Etymologically, the word "conversation" carries within itself a sense of internal crisis, a turning back and forth, a form of sexual and textual intercourse that does not simply reproduce, but metamorphoses with each interaction. Jeffrey Masten's conceptualization of "textual intercourse" at the turn of the seventeenth-century aptly captures the processes of reproduction and exchange that characterize the following essays' treatments of "conversation."[2] Masten's frequent invitations to re-imagine

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[1] Masten (1). Nashe (III.333). Citations of Nashe's writings follow Ronald B. McKerrow's *The Works of Thomas Nashe* here and throughout. Given the fluidity of what presently constitutes the "early modern" period, the 1549-1640 time-frame in this collection's title has been provided to give readers a sense of what works and individuals are under discussion.

[2] Masten's conceptualization of conversation as sexual/textual intercourse is well supported by use during this period. See *OED* "conversation, n.2; 3." For example, William Shakespeare uses the word "conversation" to mean "sexual intercourse" when Catesby brings Richard Gloucester the head of "that ignoble traitor, the dangerous and unsuspected Hastings" (3.5.21-22). Richard reflects on Hastings's character:

> So smooth he daubed his vice with show of virtue
> That, his apparent open guilt omitted –
> I mean, his conversation with Shore's wife –
> He lived from all attainture of suspect (3.5.28-31)

textual production in provocative erotic contexts – both during the early modern period and today – have led this reader to imagine a scene of sundry slips of parchment seductively frolicking in writer's garrets and print shops. One conjures images of pages enfolding one another, rolling up together, ejaculating ink – becoming literature. Late sixteenth-century satirist Thomas Nashe imagined these kinds of textual copulations resulting in "a breede of bookes" that would fill the world with the "wilde fowle of good wits." Recently (and in part because of the nature of Nashe's writing), much ink has been well-spent exploring the intersections of print culture, textuality, and sexuality in the early modern period.[3] This collection of essays engages its predecessors by arguing that "conversation" is not only a site of reproductive intercourse, but also one of metamorphic between-ness. Conversation is both a compositional methodology and an interpretive hermeneutic.

Many analyses of early modern conversation focus primarily on prescriptions for social conduct. For example, both Peter Burke's 1993 *The Art of Conversation* and Anna Bryson's 1998 study, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England,* find analogues to eighteenth-century conduct manuals in works including George Pettie's 1581 translation of *The Ciuile Conuersation*, and Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier*. Picking up where Burke and Bryson leave off, Lorna Hutson examines conversation as an articulation of not social, but rhetorical decorum in her 2002 article "Civility and Virility in Ben Jonson." More recently, Zachary Lesser and Benedict S. Robinson's 2006 collection of essays, *Textual Conversations in the Renaissance: Ethics, Authors, Technologies* has departed from defining "conversation" in terms of interpersonal conduct and manners. Lesser and Robinson recognize that "Renaissance reading practices were active and engaged, and such conversations were two-way: the humanists did not merely read the ancients, they responded to them" (1). Similarly, our conceptualizations of conversation in this collection do not depend solely on synchronic exchanges of dialogue, or even epistles shared among contemporaries, but embrace the sense of what Diana E. Henderson has called "diachronic collaboration," or collaborations among readers and writers over time (*Collaborations with the Past* 8). The following essays recognize conversation as a form of diachronic polyvocality, as a dynamic medium for composition, exchange, and interpretation.

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[3] There are many fine works discussing the intersections of human sexual reproduction and the proliferation of print at the turn of the seventeenth century. See: Marotti and Bristol, Liebler, Prendergast, Guy-Bray (et.al.).

The quotations that follow from Cicero's *Orator* and Thomas Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe, or The Prayse of the Red Herring* were not only the inspiration for this collection and the seminar that preceded it,[4] but also epitomize the metamorphic nature of conversational exchange during the early modern period:

> In fact, the whole thing boils down to this (whether it is a matter of art of observation or experience): knowing the areas where you must hunt for, and track down, what you are trying to find. Once you have surrounded the entire place with the nets of your thought, at least if practical experience has sharpened your skill, nothing will escape you, and everything that is in the subject matter will run up to you and fall into your hands. (Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator* 2.Pr.147)

> Be of good cheere, my weary Readers, for I haue espied land, as *Diogenes* said to his weary Schollers when he had read to a waste leafe. Fishermen, I hope, wil not finde fault with me for fishing before the nette, or making all fish that comes to the net in this history. (Nashe, *Lenten Stuffe* III.223) [5]

In conversation with Cicero's hunting metaphors and nets of thought, Nashe appears to be rephrasing a classical commonplace.[6] When Cicero describes surrounding a "place" with nets of thought, he analogizes the rhetorical practice of building arguments by networking *loci communes,* or "commonplaces."[7] In classical pedagogy, students would memorize these Aristotelian-inspired "commonplaces," or parts of arguments, to have at

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[4] Some of the essays printed here were presented in short form in the seminar I co-chaired with Dianne Berg at the 2013 Northeast Modern Language Association Annual Meeting. See Bender, Birkett, Fine, Finn, and Rodrigues. Additional contributors were selected from the initial abstract submissions for that seminar.

[5] The metamorphic nature of these conversational exchanges is also directly analogized in Latour's discussions of actor-network-theory, now frequently combined with a broad conception of social network theory. Latour's definition of the "social" as "a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" resonates with our conceptualization of "conversation" (*Reassembling the Social* 7). Just as Latour argues that the social "is visible only by the *traces* it leaves when a *new* association is being produced between elements," so too can conversational networks be traced through verbal echoes in both texts and performances.

[6] See *Orator*.

[7] Curtius prefers the Greek *topos* to "commonplace" (*European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* 70). Both commonplaces and *topoi* are arguments, "intellectual themes, suitable for development and modification at the orator's pleasure" (70). For excellent overviews of Aristotle's approach to rhetoric and examples from canonical works of American and British literature, see Hughes and Duhamel.

hand when confronted with a specific legal case. Cicero suggests abstracting Aristotle's commonplaces to make them more plentiful and flexible so that an orator may call upon them in multiple contexts. For Cicero, to surround "the entire place with the nets of your thought" means to think about every possible side of an issue. If one has dutifully studied his commonplaces, the subject matter should then be close at hand; the speaker can generate an eloquent invention, a persuasive argument. Much as Cicero abstracts and expands Aristotle's construction of "commonplaces," Nashe translates the "nets" of his thought into the "entire place" – the site of exchange between reading and writing – the site of conversation.

Nashe's net-work surrounds not only Cicero's "entire place" with his thought, but also presents readers with a site of hermeneutic negotiation.[8] Addressing his "weary Readers," Nashe gestures toward modesty by suggesting that his (faux) encomium of the red herring and revisionary English chronicle history have tired his audience. Nashe continues this pose as he represents reading as "fishing." Simultaneously, Nashe's mock-deference to "fishermen" implies that these readers might also be literary colleagues in a position to "find faulte." This juxtaposition of "weary Readers" and "Fishermen" also generates an analogous relationship that Nashe complicates by positing himself as a fisherman "fishing before the nette." These fishing metaphors thematically "work" with Nashe's story of the red herring's evolution, but they additionally analogize his and his colleagues' fluid conceptualizations of reading as writing, of writing as reading, as a "both/and" site of conversational exchange.[9]

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[8] Gadamer's theorization of "hermeneutic conversation" supports my use of "conversation" to designate a compositional practice. According to Gadamer, "Texts…are to be understood; and that means that one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, speaks only through the other partner, the interpreter…It is like a real conversation in that the common subject matter is what binds two partners, the text and the interpreter, to each other" (*Truth & Method* 388). Gadamer's explication clarifies the role of the active reader in any form of textual conversation. Without such a reader, of course, the text stands alone like the proverbial tree in the forest and falls unheard. As Gadamer argues, "the text brings a subject matter into language, but that it does so is ultimately the achievement of the interpreter. Both have a share in it" (388). Structurally, Gadamer's "hermeneutic conversation" provides a skeleton analogy to the conversational networks discussed in this book.

[9] This "both/and" site of conversation additionally recalls McLuhan's famous argument: "the medium is the message" (*Understanding Media* 7). McLuhan's axiom networks the influence of early modern literary production to modern media studies. The "both/and" interpretation of "medium" and "message" conveys the "social" production of language both as Latour defines "social," and in the broader

As Nashe casts his line "before the nette," he conflates his Ciceronian commonplace with readers. The "subject matter" of the commonplace is metamorphosed into the interpretive perspective readers bring to it. Ultimately, Nashe metaphorically metamorphoses both readers and writers into "all fish that comes to the net in this history." Thematically, Nashe's "fish" comprise "this history": he has captured them and translated them into his "nette," the text of *Lenten Stuffe*. At the same time, readers have come to Nashe's net and have been – wittingly or no – translated into his school of fish. Nashe's convoluted trajectory of metaphors casts his fish in and out of temporality – before and after history – to ultimately convey a passing through the interstices of his net. The "nette" is, in part, the text, but it is only through the interstices that writer and readers may meet. In the context of Nashe's metaphor, the site of conversational exchange is elemental: water. The interstices, or spaces in the net-working, articulate the traces of these active exchanges that each of the following essays explores.[10]

The first group of essays, subtitled "Transcending History, Transcending Genre," examines how interpreting these conversational traces can transform our expectations of genre and create wholly new literary forms. Daniel Bender's piece, "Native Pastoral in the English Renaissance: The 1549 Petition and Kett's Rebellion," coins the phrase "native pastoral" in its examination of how the plebian petitioners fashioned a collaborative rhetorical strategy from a foundation of pastoral polemics. In contrast to recent studies of courtly conversational exchanges, Bender's essay analyzes how conversational power articulates itself from the lower registers of the social hierarchy by appropriating Christian and poetic pastoral convention in order to instigate political reform. Robin Hizme's essay, "Conversing with Affect: Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*," establishes Christopher Marlowe's play as a palimpsest of conversational exchanges that manipulate

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contexts of media studies. Gordon explains that, to apprehend this dictum, we must "make the leap with McLuhan from media of communication to *any* technological extension of the human body" (*Escape into Understanding* 174). These "technological extension[s] of the human body" also anticipate Latour's agents of association that do the work of "reassembling," the work of conversation. See also McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium*.

[10] My fascination with water and this nascent suggestion of conversation as a kind of metaphorical "swimming" has doubtlessly been inspired by Steve Mentz's intriguing conceptualization of swimmer poetics and recent work on the intersection of oceanic ecologies with early modern literature. See Mentz: <http://stevementz.com/swimmer-poetics-2/>, and *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*.

historical narrative and intersect dramatic, biblical, and martyrological traditions in order to iterate a communal sense of national identity. Hizme follows the trajectory of conversational exchanges sparked by Marlowe's play, notably the "Dutch Church Libel," in order to demonstrate *Massacre's* engagement with discourses surrounding national identity. The last essay in this section, Kavita Mudan Finn's, "'Of whom proud Rome hath boasted long': Intertextual "Conversations in Early Modern England," analyzes the intersections of ongoing conversational exchanges across genre, discourse, page, and stage to demonstrate how historical figures are rewritten into popular cultural icons. One such example is the racy historical figure of "Shore's wife" – who Finn persuasively argues becomes the Marilyn Monroe of her day – a persona created and perpetuated by conversational exchange.

The next section, "Embodied Conversation and its Discontents," invokes Douglas Bruster's concept of "embodied writing" in early modern England as that which blurs historical and fictional personas, notably in print culture ("Structural Transformation of Print" 50). Kristen Abbott Bennett's essay, "Negotiating Authority through Conversation: Thomas Nashe and Richard Jones" examines the fluid conceptions of literary "authority" among The Stationers' Company, printers, and writers across genres in Elizabethan London. This essay demonstrates how printer and writer negotiate literary authority through para- and intertextual conversational exchanges in order to argue that such authority is awarded to he who maintains public conversational control. Next, Emily Fine's "Polemical Conversation and Biblical Hermeneutics in the Gender Pamphlet War" combines current theoretical approaches to early modern conversation, gender, and print culture in her analysis of the interactions between Rachel Speght, Esther Sowernam, and Constantia Munda in their public responses to Joseph Swetnam's tract, *Araignment of Lewde, idle, forward, and unconstant women.* Fine argues that these "women" (or writers posing publicly as women, "embodying" women) take advantage of the conversational momentum engendered by the reproducibility of print and subvert Swetnam's misogyny by using his own, primarily Biblical, rhetoric against him. Finally, Audrey Birkett's essay, "The Conversation of Commendatory Verse" examines how both adversarial and laudatory exchanges among Carolignian dramatists evolve to define the "Dramaticke Lawes" of printed paratexts. Birkett's study additionally analyzes how (sometimes questionable) commendatory epistles emerge as metadramatic commentary on the business of playwriting.

The final section, "(Im)materializing Conversational Exchanges," takes three different methodological approaches toward first deconstructing, and

then reconstructing, conversations on both the stage and page. Donald Hedrick's paper, "Shakespeare and the Invention of Conversation," examines how Shakespeare translates the colloquial exchanges of Elizabethan Londoners onto the stage. In his discussions of conversational interplay in *Othello, Richard III,* and *Henry V,* Hedrick demonstrates how, regardless of dramatic genre, conversational "messes" engender and partially define the entertainment value of these plays. M. Stephanie Murray's following essay, "Talking to Ghosts: Imaginary Conversations in Early Modern Drama," is also situated on the stage. Here, Murray studies how "one-sided" dramatic conversations with ghosts, such as Vindice's in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* function to revisit injury, prophesy future events, and tacitly instruct the audience's response to the action onstage. Don Rodrigues's essay falls into this last category as much because of his method as his argument. His essay, "Can Conversation Be Quantified? A Cladistic Approach to Shakespeare's and Jonson's Influences in *Love's Martyr*" applies hierarchical cladistics analysis, a digital data-mining methodology that elicits textual similarities and differences in order to illuminate conversational and collaborative practices among Robert Chester, George Chapman, Ben Jonson, John Marston, and William Shakespeare. This data-based approach arguably immaterializes these conversational exchanges by converting them into data-sets before reconstructing them through analysis.

These analyses of discursive conversational networks permit readers to grasp how conversation functions as both a compositional methodology and an interpretive hermeneutic in early modern England. Conversation extends what we conventionally think of as "source study" by treating multiple sources as the writer's active interlocutors. Further, conversational exchanges such as those discussed throughout this collection demonstrate how writers of this period push the boundaries of conventional, diachronic imitation by conflating ancient and contemporary sources to lend a sense of immediacy to the subject at hand. Through these interactions, readers of both the early modern period and the twenty-first century may indeed converse with the dead.

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PART 1:

CONVERSATION: TRANSCENDING HISTORY, TRANSCENDING GENRE

NATIVE PASTORAL IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE: KETT'S REBELLION AND THE 1549 PETITION

DANIEL BENDER

In July 1549, a large cross-section of agrarian English society gathered in the meadows outside of Norfolk to protest illegal enclosures and entrepreneurial engrossment of small land holdings.[1] Despite the efforts of Lord Protector Somerset and parliamentarian ally John Hales to remove illegal enclosures, residents of Norfolk and Suffolk despaired of relief (Pollard 231-2; Wood 39). The "good Duke of Somerset….took all his pains and employed many honest men," explains a Tudor chronicler, but could not prevent the "greedy avarice of the gentry" who defied the proclamations against enclosures (Strype, *Memorials* 2.156). The only remaining authority would have to be constituted by commoners prepared to speak publicly for the aggrieved populace. Taking up pen and paper, they would make a case for economic regulation not to distrusted local magistrates but to King Edward and his councilors.[2]

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[1] Cranmer's English Bible marks an instantiating moment for "native pastoral" as I will discuss throughout. The title page of the second edition (1540) features a heterogeneous gathering of people holding newly issued "Englished" bibles (*n.p.*). With Latin and English inscriptions arranged in interchangeable sequence, the illustration depicts first-time access of literate commoners to the New Testament. For a detailed chronology of the "Commotion time" with special attention to the massing of commoners prior to the rebellion, see Russell. My reference to a "cross-section of agrarian society" is based on Whittle (23-25). Known participants in the rebellion range from "two minor manorial lords" to farmers owning less than 5 acres. In contrast to my reading, Wood suggests that Robert Kett was less than fully committed to the liturgical multitude, becoming a leader to control "angrier" and "poorer" rebels (*1549 Rebellions* 157).

[2] Thirsk discusses legislation that increased commoners' resentment of Parliament, including a proposed sheep tax that would have lightened the tax burden for wealthy landowners. See Thirsk 202-223.

This essay argues that in seeking the moral and political support of the Edwardian Protectorate, the petition writers fashioned a rhetorical strategy from a distinctively English tradition of pastoral polemics whose best known practitioners were the Protestant divines Hugh Latimer and Robert Crowley. In writing a rural plea addressed to an urban audience, the petitioners approximate themes and conflicts associated with Renaissance pastoral conventions. The shire representatives of East Anglia were rustic and relatively unsophisticated, a group much like the artificial rustic types who populate elite pastoral verse. And, although some of these representatives had significant land holdings, courtly politics in London were as remote and unfamiliar to them as they would have been to the literary shepherds in Theocritus and Virgil and later, in England, those of Spenser and Sidney. Nevertheless, lyric strains of lament and nostalgia for a happier time – staples of classical pastoral – are reiterated in the Petition's pleas for renewed access to land ownership and the economic autonomy it affords.[3] Even the familiar thematic of an Arcadian "golden age" finds a parallel in the Petition's remembrance of King Henry VII, protector and benefactor of English common folk.

The Petition has not been recognized, however, as a plebeian version of Renaissance pastoral, nor has early modern scholarship credited it as an example of that most Renaissance of composition practices, *imitatio*, which reconfigures previous texts in light of contemporary needs. The circumstance of the Petition's composition – thousands of discontented commoners milling in place without communicating their grievances – called for cross-class communication if the messenger was a culturally authoritative or at least politically orthodox person. How would the rural petitioners fashion a written identity that served this occasion? A strategically fashioned persona of rural subjects serving as unofficial pastors would give the petition-writers greater moral authority to negotiate with the royal council, an authority that mere shire representatives lacked. Specifically, the petitioners wrote as protective paternal figures – as clerical pastors – who could defend their flock in the name of Christ, the divinely anointed shepherd who protected the poor and aggrieved. This metamorphosis of rural petition-writers into *de facto* pastors produced a new version of pastoral which I will call native pastoral.[4]

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[3] Virgil's First and Ninth *Eclogue* concerns land dispossession, a crucial issue in the 1549 Petition. For a discussion of Virgilian pastoral and issues of land confiscation, see Patterson 73.

[4] A precedent for the petition's pastoral genesis comes from a previous uprising of 1536, where commoners justified their protest as a defense of religion. The commons should "Awake" for "the Churches sake" (qtd. in MacCullough 74-78).

My effort to define the Petition as plebeian reprise of a major Renaissance genre is the first step in my argument. My main thesis is that the Petition's status as a plebeian pastoral created the conditions for rare event: a cross-class exchange in a culture where controversial dialogue was reserved for cultural elites: manorial lords, members of Parliament, royal councilors. With the exception of James Holstun's sympathetic analysis of the "commoning time" that produced the Petition, early modern scholarship has not treated the Petition as a complex representation of a communitarian identity, the commoners of East Anglia.[5] F. R. Russell's *Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk* (1859) reproduces the manuscript of the Petition, and offers helpful annotations on obscure phrasing and terminology, but he does not consider the literary implications of rural Englishmen speaking in defense of a multitude that was expected to be quiet and obedient.[6] In the twenty-first century, the Petition is treated as an archival record rather than a vision of economic and spiritual order composed by a social class usually associated with illiteracy. Andy Wood's *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern*, Diarmaid MacCullough's essay "Kett's Rebellion in Context" and Jane Whittle's "Lords and Tenants in Kett's Rebellion" read the Petition for its documentary value in Tudor social history, and not as a nascent mimesis of plebeian aspirations, historical relationships, and identity themes. A similar bias appears in Zachary Lesser's and Benedict S. Robinson's recent collection of essays, *Textual Conversations in the Renaissance: Ethics, Authors, Technologies*. The collection explores Renaissance dialogue between highly literate groups who negotiate their differences based on similar class affiliations. But when the essays in this collection discuss social groups, authors, and dialogic traditions, these references operate as if in gravitational orbit around cultural elites of the period. For example, the historical subjects of *Textual Conversations* are most often Latin-trained humanists such as Baldassare Castiglione and Stephano Guazzo, not English commoners with sudden access to pen and paper. By contrast, this essay analyzes conversational power coming from the lower end of the social hierarchy. The plebian subjects collaborating on The Petition harnessed the sacred

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[5] See Holstun for a compelling case that the requested reforms would protect small landholders against a wave of land dispossession. On pages 50-53, however, he argues that these requests were ultimately utopian, given the rapid capitalist expansionism at the time.

[6] The relevant primary document illustrating the expectation that commoners will be quiet and obedient (letting their superiors rule) is Richard Morrison's *A Remedy for Sedition.* The tract is reprinted in MacCullough 112-113.

doctrine of Christ's ministry as a blueprint for domestic policies of the Tudor Commonwealth.

This essay will also argue that religious instruction was not always the sole office of professional clergy. Early modern scholarship recognizes the deep learning of Protestant divines in sixteenth century England. Deborah Keller Shuger's *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture,* for example, recounts the intense interest of English theologians in analogizing monarchic power with the Christian body politic. But her study represents a common trajectory of power relations: the highly trained pastor preaches to the Tudor multitude so that they can become followers of Christ. Religious doctrine and the arts of the sermon are believed to operate by what might be termed trickle-down theology. But the flow of instruction and reform can be reversed. The multitude, schooled in Christ's message of cross-class salvation and alert to Christ's ministry to the oppressed, could, if occasion required, edify their political and social superiors in the practical application of Christ's ministry. In taking the stance of pained mediators speaking for a silent social class, the petition-writers sought legitimacy in the eyes of King Edward's Privy Council. The Petition of 1549 is not merely a list of complaints; it represents a strategy of conversational engagement that could bridge the class division between London elites and East Anglian plebeians.

1. Cross-Class Dialogue

A grasp of recent work in conversation theory is crucial to understanding the Petition's efforts to make its demands acceptable to a Tudor government. We are better able to understand why the phrase "We pray" and its variant, "We pray your grace," is repeated in twenty-eight of the twenty-nine entries in light of Lynne Magnusson's study of early modern social dialogue.[7] Through the "elaboration of repetitive social practices," a discourse can contribute to "the construction….of subject positions, personal identities, relationships and systems of knowledge" (*Social Dialogue* 10). Because the petition-writers were commoners, and their leader, Kett, was a tanner and local landholder, these anxious defenders of the multitude had to present the rhetorical equivalent of a

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[7] Quotations of the *Petition* are from Russell 48-56. For the sake of easier comprehension, I silently modernize spelling. Subsequent quotations of the Petition will be abbreviated as Russell followed by the page number where the entry appears.

bended knee; "we pray" linguistically presents the social practice of physical submission. Magnusson's analysis shows that a discourse is socially acceptable when it duplicates orthodox, and therefore expected, social behavior. The role of deference in dialogue between politically unequal groups receives further confirmation in psychoanalytic theory, where, as Jessica Benjamin has shown in *The Bonds of Love,* the submissive interlocutor must maintain a continuous stance of submission. Assertion and the desire to be recognized, Benjamin writes, "constitute the poles of a delicate balance" (10). When the shire representatives call for an end to clerical absenteeism or ask that corrupt tax assessors be replaced, these proposals are presumably made palatable by a continuous tone of deference. The work of Magnusson and Benjamin allows us to appreciate the Petition's starkly submissive tone as a sensible approach in addressing a royal council.

Similarly, Arthur Kinney's and Jennifer Richards's recent studies have built on the problem of conversational balance. If deference toward a superior is one way to maintain the good will of the superior party, a more calculating strategy involves projection of a self that the listening party would like to hear. As Kinney explains in his essay, *"Art of Conversazioni,"* a successful dialogue may depend on an illusion projected by the addresser. The addressee may prefer the attractive projected persona (compassionate shire representatives) and overlook the less attractive and all-too-familiar person or persons (restive commoners) known from historical experience. Any conversation, Kinney writes, "needs some kind of give-and-take, some kind of willed blindness or ignorance, some tacit compromise of subject and position" (17). Kinney's positive valuation of "willed blindness" is realized in the Petition's extremely pious and deferential language; reverential respect for "Your Majesty" manages to cover up competing emotions of resentment. Another study of courtly rhetoric reiterates how bracketing negative emotion and superimposing a forced, yet more positive one can move a conversation forward. Building on dissimulation as a bridge between unequal conversational partners, Richards's *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* asserts that feigned vocalizations of goodwill can serve honest conversation; the projection of benevolence facilitates "negotiation between different and conflicting interests" (2).

These theorizations of early modern social dialogue typically focus on scholars and diplomats, and thus do not quite fit the compositional demographics in the summer of 1549. On the eve of what came to be known as Kett's Rebellion, the petitioners were not reading Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano.* Still, Magnusson's theorization of linguistic practices which

reinforce appropriate social practices, Benjamin's theorization of submissiveness as a condition for assertion, Kinney's thesis that dissimulation can generate dialogic good will, and Richards's similar approval of "feigning" rhetoric inform my analysis of the Petition and offer analogues to the East Anglians' conversational compositional strategies. As I shall demonstrate, the petitioners approximated the voice and ethos of Protestant commonwealth pastors in order to restore a tarnished ideal: a bond of reciprocity between benevolent King and grateful Commons.

2. Pastoral Language of the 1540s: Precedents

The shire representatives, church-goers all, had a number of orally-produced discursive precedents to follow. These parishioners-turned-writers must have heard licensed pastors in the Church of England offer exegesis of Christ's ministry to the poor and downtrodden; the idea of speaking for the "weakest" was a doctrinal commonplace. Throughout the 1540s, the erosion of the commons as independent land holders with adequate resources of food, housing, clothing, and even firewood had gained the attention of protestant clergy in the Tudor clerical establishment. The commoners, especially the literate landholders, would have known of written sermons on behalf of agrarian England. In his *Instructions to the Parsons and Curates,* Bishop Richard Sampson urges English clergy to take Edwardian legislation as their lead in ministering to ordinary souls. Curates are bound to "obey and execute the kings high commandments" (Strype 1. 374). Advancing the cause of an activist clergy concerned with the "the quietness of Christ's flocke," the Bishop of Chichester insists on a political obligation behind of the pastoral calling; the "care of souls" is not a matter of soothing individual suffering, but of actively supporting the application of the law. Presumably, the Proclamations against illegal enclosure were included in the pastor's duty to see the king's "high commandments" executed.

Another precursor to the absent or embattled pastor image is closer still to the conversational strategies of the Petition. The Petition's concern with royal honor ("We pray your Grace") and indignation at gentry aggression ("commoning on the commons") is a clear reprise of the early protestant pastor Hugh Latimer who spoke with eloquent indignation against offenses committed against the commons. Delivered on 8 March 1549 in the presence of King Edward, Latimer's sermon diagnoses the sickness of the English social body as a breach of pastoral responsibility. The king's honor is damaged because "graziers, inclosers, and rent-

rearers" block the monarch's intention to shelter and sustain the lowliest subjects:

> It is the king's honour that the commonwealth be advanced; that the dearth of these foresaid things be provided for, and the commodities of this realm so employed, as it may be to the setting of his subjects on work, and keeping them from idleness. And herein resteth the king's honour and his office. So doing, his account before God shall be allowed and rewarded. Furthermore, if the king's honour, as some men say, standeth in the great multitude of people; then these graziers, inclosers, and rent-rearers, are hinderers of the king's honour. For whereas have been a great many householders and inhabitants, there is now but a shepherd and his dog: so they hinder the king's honour most of all. (99-100)

Latimer singles out "oppressors, ingrossers of tenements of land" whose greed has allowed "the king's liege people" to be famished and decayed (*Sermons* 94). These grievances will resurface in July 1549, when the shire representatives of East Anglia will accuse "lords" of "commoning on the commons." Defense of the commons could be a popular subject of protestant activism, for paralleling Latimer's complaint against "hinderers of the king's honor" is Robert Crowley's pamphlet denouncing economic and spiritual exploitation of the commons. *An information and peticion against the oppressours of the pore commons of this realme (1548)* reaches the high notes of Protestant interventionist rhetoric. Specifically, as a Protestant minister, Crowley professes his belief in the Christian doctrine of "distribution" famously figured in Christ's distribution of fish and loaves. Crowley's *Petition* sides with causes dear to the Lord Protector Somerset, citing illegal enclosures as the devices of wealthy men who care only about the "heapes" of treasure to amass. Addressing these wealthy opponents of Christian distribution as if they were present, Crowley writes: "Knowe that your office is to distribute and not to scrape together on heapes" (*Selected Works* 163). A recent study of Crowley's pastoral polemics helpfully explains that "godly exhortation and admonition" were a regular feature of "church discipline" (Graham 147).[8] Although a Protestant reformer who confronted the rich and powerful was assumed to

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[8] My discussion of land access as an allegory of reciprocity is indebted to Kenneth Graham's essay, "Distributive Measures." Crowley's thought "corresponds to a God whose justice mirrors the local market in its insistence that all transactions – socioeconomic, judicial, or spiritual – must maintain the principle of reciprocity" (137).

be a Protestant minister, we discover the same tones of exhortation and admonition in the East Anglian Petition.[9]

Yet another liturgy-inspired defense of the English commons and thus another textual precursor of the Petition comes from the golden reign of a previous Tudor King. Sixty years earlier a Tudor King had defended the lowest social order. Henry VII's legislation in the late fifteenth century, the *Acts Against Enclosers and Engrossers (1489)* will resurface in the *Petition* as a commemoration of land prices in the reign of Henry VII. Sampson and Latimer's sermons on the Christian duty to nurture the commons, Crowley's ministerial tract against the oppressors of the commons, as well as Henry VII's legislation, comprise a set of precursor texts that the petitioners of 1549 would fashion into their pleas for gentry-containment and relief for the laboring class.

I have organized my reading of the twenty-nine entries by subject matters around which multiple entries tend to cluster. Accordingly, my first section assesses the petition's call for renewed access to land in light of an historic relation between Tudor King and the commoners. I then evaluate the petitioners' strategic representation of a rural collective, a strategy that aligns petitioners with Christ's inclusive ministry. Lastly, I demonstrate that the petitioners came to engage their pastoral function more openly as the writing process unfolded. In those entries where Christ is invoked as the sacred protector, the shepherd of shepherds, the petitioners creatively reproduce Protestant polemics. In each of the three sections, we will discover pastor-centered discourse infusing the collaborative labors of the petitioners.

3. Agrarian Producers: The Allegory of Landownership

For early modern literary scholars, a work of pastoral literature which presents human labor is likely to be seen as violating, not embodying, the genre. As Roze Hentschell has observed, "The erasure of rural work has long been regarded as a necessary component of pastoral literature" (*Culture of Cloth* 2). In *History and Class Consciousness*, George Lukács describes the conditions under which readers would recognize writing about land as literary; only "as an observer set apart in space" can the artist "relate to nature" (224). Whereas landscape is allegorically rich (spring as

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[9] Wood's *1549 Rebellions* identifies Latimer and Crowley as protestant interventionist pastors. Both preachers hope to "prevent future disorders" by urging the gentry to "embrace godly religion" (189). The fact that the Privy Council and the Parliament did not take seriously the discontent in the rural areas of England is proven by the subsequent disorder of Kett's Rebellion.

hope, winter as despair), land is generally considered a material reality, and thus separate from aesthetic or literary purposes. The petition-writers, however, faced the challenge of showing how land ownership was the material condition for psychological identity. While land use could be restricted to purely economic discourse, the petitioners present their royal readers with an equation. Land cultivation represents the habitual actions and values of the "commons" as a class of English subjects, an independent people whose labor provided a steady food supply for their social superiors.[10] When petitioners call for "copyhold land" that is "reasonable rented," as "it was in the first year of King Henry VII" (14), they remind their readers that land cultivation and psychological well-being of commoners work in tandem.[11]

If the Privy Council is to take the request for renewed access to land seriously, they would be likely to do so if the "commons" writing in July 1549 had its economic autonomy and service to the national economy protected by royal intervention. As I mentioned earlier, the petitioners drew self-consciously on a text held in popular memory, namely Henry VII's celebrated legislation. The "pulling down and wylfull wast" of houses and towns, the legislation contended, had infringed on the commons' right to "lawful labor." Championing low-status commoners, Henry threatened to punish those who create "pasture londes" from fields that had long been "used in tylthe" (qtd. in Pollard, *England* 235). Given his *Act against Enclosures and Engrossers,* Henry VII inhabits the petition writer's imagination as the archetype of the English pastor-King. If Edward VI, grandson of that Tudor monarch, could safeguard the traditional autonomy of small land-holders, then he could protect the psychological underpinnings of his rural subjects.

The entries about land access include references to outright violations of boundaries, most dramatically when gentry landowners fenced in tracts of common land to contain their burgeoning sheep populations. Petition writers reacted angrily to the lawless estate holders and repeat the title

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[10] Anger about exorbitant rents was voiced by Crowley, the Tudor prototype of the pastor speaking for the multitude. Strype took Crowley seriously enough to reprint Crowley's *Peticion,* including the passage concerning "lease mongers" who had "multiplied their rents to the highest" and turned tenants into "slaves" (*Ecclesiastical Memorials* II. I.221).

[11] Aware that commoners were being displaced from their land, the government (or at least Somerset) may have favored rent reductions. Holstun argues that the gentry who mustered troops against the commoners feared "that class war would *fail* to break out "and favored military conquest instead of easing rent or wool prices" ("Utopia" 33).