Long Meg of Westminster: Women, Waives and Outlaws in Premodern England

Bethany Alice Jones
B.A, M.A

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English and Creative Writing
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Lancaster University
September 2019
Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree at this or any other university. It is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. Many of the ideas in this thesis were the product of discussion with my supervisors Dr Liz Oakley Brown and Professor Arthur Bradley.

Bethany Alice Jones, B.A. M.A.

Lancaster University, U.K.
Long Meg of Westminster: Women, Waives and Outlaws in Premodern England

Abstract

This thesis is the first sustained study of Long Meg of Westminster, a figure of Henrician England featured in premodern literature and folklore. Famous for her ‘excesse in height’, she features in a wide selection of popular narratives and, by the seventeenth century, provides a name for a gun, a cannon, and the Bronze Age Stone Circle ‘Long Meg and her Daughters’ in Little Salkeld, Cumbria. While earlier critics such as Patricia Gartenberg (1983) and Bernard Capp (1998) have noticed similarities between Long Meg and Robin Hood’s characterisation as an outlaw, I argue that Long Meg’s ‘merry prankes’ engage with the discourses of gender, law and popular culture. In its consideration of women beyond their marginal roles in outlaw narratives, this thesis interrogates the exclusion which uniquely underpins the lost legal term waive through the conceptual vocabulary of biopolitics. The distinctive contribution of my research thus lies in three key areas: it provides a detailed critical analysis of Long Meg of Westminster, a literary account of the premodern waive, and offers an intervention in Agamben studies.

Bringing legal materials such as Magna Carta (1215) and Henry de Bracton’s in De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae [On the Laws and Customs of England] (c.1235) into dialogue with literary texts concerned with Long Meg (1590-1640), I show how the waive – the woman’s terminological equivalent to the outlaw – is characterised by a suspension in law and language. The introduction traces the textual and critical history of Long Meg alongside the early English law from which the waive first emerges. This discussion concludes with an outline of the overarching biopolitical framework of the thesis. The first three Chapters provide a comparative account of Long Meg alongside the jesting communities of Robin Hood and John Skelton. Chapters One and Two encompass their overlapping traditions as
jestbook heroes in *The Gest of Robyn Hode* (c.1450), *The Merie Tales of Skelton* (c.1567) and *The Life of Long Meg* (1635). Using their shared stage presence as a cultural index to investigate the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play (c.1594), Chapter Three examines dramatic works such as Anthony Munday’s *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington* (c.1598) and Ben Jonson’s court masque *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (c.1624). Chapters Four and Five turn to Meg’s absorption into alternate communities of women in Thomas Deloney’s prose narrative *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1598) and the pseudonymous pamphlet ascribed to Mary Tattlewell and Joan Hit-him-home, *The Women's Sharpe Revenge* (1640). Distinct from the outlaw, the premodern waive illuminates the gendered difference which underpins Long Meg of Westminster’s tradition.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my primary supervisor and professional mentor, Dr Liz Oakley-Brown. I first became interested in the intersection between gender and outlawry in a special undergraduate module convened by Liz. This thesis is indebted to the material, discussions, and questions woven together in our ‘Early Modern Outlaws on Land and Sea’ seminars back in 2014. I am amazed by how these ideas have developed and expanded outwards over the course of the PhD. Without her encouragement, advice, and many hours of supervision, this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like thank my secondary supervisor, Professor Arthur Bradley, for his invaluable input on the theoretical framework of this thesis. His expertise in the field of biopolitics (particularly Giorgio Agamben) brought much-needed clarity to my analysis.

I also extend my thanks to the wonderful Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University, whose staff have supported me through all eight years of Higher Education. Many members of the department have given generous and constructive feedback at crucial points during the PhD, particularly Dr Clare Egan, Professor Lynne Pearce, Professor Alison Findlay, and Professor Mark Knight. I am grateful to the library staff of Lancaster University for their knowledge and efficiency when gathering books and resources. The libraries of the University of Leeds also provided essential workspaces in the writing up period of my PhD, an opportunity made possible by the SCONUL distance learning scheme. I would also like to thank the AHRC for funding my research.

At several points in the programme, I could not see myself completing the PhD. I would like to thank those who encouraged me to rest and continue. I thank the NHS Counselling Service who helped me manage through particularly difficult periods. I thank my friends, who have steadied me with their humour and company: Beth Durant, Becka Gibson, Hitesh Dhorajiwala, Angel Willowby, Felix McNulty, Fumina Hamasaki, Nour Dakkak,
Emma Franklin. Special thanks must go to my kindest and closest confidants, Dr Rachel White, Imogen Felstead and Christopher Moore, who have patiently read draft materials over the years. Finally, I thank my family; my Grandparents Liz and Trevor, my sister and brother-in-law Rebecca and Jo, and my parents Jacqui and Dean. Their unwavering support, both emotional and practical, has been crucial to the completion of this project.
Textual Note

To avoid obscuring the historical and material difference of texts, I have maintained the orthography in its original form as far as possible. I substitute / for the modern s and vv for the modern w, but maintain all other idiosyncrasies of early modern spelling. By preserving the language of the original texts, I establish a connection to the history of the primary materials of this thesis which would otherwise be rendered absent through modernisation. All primary materials are cited from Early English Books Online (EEBO) unless otherwise indicated. All references to Oxford English Dictionary (OED) are cited from Oxford English Dictionary Online.

List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early English Books Online</th>
<th>EEBO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
<td>OED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Introduction: Reading Long Meg................................................................. 7

Chapter One: The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635): A Suspension in Law and
Language ........................................................................................................ 51

Chapter Two: Networks of Jest Culture: Long Meg of Westminster, Robin Hood, and
John Skelton ........................................................................................................ 81

Chapter Three: Performing Waivery?: Long Meg and the Early Modern Stage........ 116

Chapter Four: Locating the Waive in Elizabethan England: from Legal definitions to
Long Meg of Westminster ..................................................................................... 150

Chapter Five: Textual Afterlives: the Spectre, Death, and Legacy of Long Meg of
Westminster ........................................................................................................ 187

Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 220

Appendix: A Textual Chronology of Long Meg of Westminster ....................... 224

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 226
Introduction

Reading Long Meg

Gentleman, to please your fantasies, many men haue made many pleasant jigges, as the Iests of Robin-Hood, Beuis of South-hampton, and such others, as Serue to procure mirth and driue away melancholy [...] [W]hen I was idle, I bethought me of Long-Meg of Westminster, and her merry pranks, as pleasant as the merriest Iest that euer past the Presse; a woman she was of late memory, and well beloued, spoken on of all and knowne of many; therefore there is hope of the better acceptance [...] and if she haue any grosse faults, beare with them the more patiently, for that she was a woman.

Anon, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635), Sig. A.3 - A.3r.¹

What happened to Long Meg of Westminster? The earliest extant jestbook about her, *The Life of Long Meg* (1635), is prefaced by the above address to the ‘gentleman’ reader which describes the titular figure as ‘spoken on of all and knowne of many’ (*LM*, A.3 ³). In search of ‘better acceptance’ from the audience, the author emphasises Meg’s popularity in the English imagination. As a ‘woman […] of late memory’, Long Meg’s narrative is situated in the then recent past ‘of Henry the eighth’ (*LM*, Sig. B.1). Despite her significance in the Henrician period, Long Meg’s singularity is undercut by her relational position to medieval folk heroes Robin Hood and Bevis of South-hampton. Long Meg’s legitimacy thus rests on her contact point with male figures who share in the nebulous objective to ‘procure mirth’ (*LM*, A.3 ³). The author capitalises on the thematic and aesthetic resonances of these existing figures: Robin Hood as a bow-wielding outlaw of the English greenwood, and Bevis of South-hampton as the chivalric knight battling giants and dragons with his magic horse Arondel. While Robin Hood and Bevis of South-hampton represent the communities of men found in the outlaw and romance traditions, Long Meg’s generic identity as a woman is far more

¹ Anon, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster: Containing the mad merry prankes shee played in her life time, not onely in performing sundry Quarrels with diuers Ruffians about London: But also how Valiantly she behaved her selfe in the Warres of Bolloingue* (London: 1635), Sig. A.3 - A.3r. Further references will be made parenthetically as *LM*. While this thesis refers to the date of the first edition in the Stationer’s Register (1590), I cite the 1635 text throughout as it is the earliest extant edition of the text.
ambiguous. The author notes the androcentric tensions which underpin Meg’s insertion alongside these figures. Addressing an imagined audience of ‘gentleman readers’, Meg is situated in a lineage of ‘pleasant jigges’ produced by ‘many men’ (LM, A.3'). While the author sees The Life of Long Meg as a continuation of this textual enterprise, Long Meg also emerges as a figure of disruption. Though ‘well beloved’, Meg sits uneasily alongside the existing traditions of outlawry and romance whilst belonging to neither, and is thus marked by the patriarchal anxieties of narrative prestige. Indeed, the author self-consciously warns of Long Meg’s ‘grosse faults’, imploring ‘gentleman readers’ to ‘beare with them the more patiently, for that she was a woman’ (LM, A.3'). As signifiers of antiquity and masculinity, Robin Hood and Bevis of South Hampton serve to rehabilitate her inherently defective image.

In the jestbook tradition, Long Meg is fundamentally represented as an adventurous if rough-mannered woman known for her ‘talnesse and strength’ (LM, A.3'). The sheer physical force and proportions of Meg form the basis of her enduring myth. As a ‘true Lancashire lasse’ (LM, Sig B.2'), Meg moves to London and becomes a local heroine in Westminster through her exploits in anti-establishment trickery and violence against obstinate men. Meg’s success in combat is geographically far-reaching, from the fields of the local metropolis to the Siege of Boulogne. The jestbook situates Meg in a Westminster populated by well-known Henrician jesting figures such as John Skelton and Will Sommers, thus blurring the lines between the real, the historic, and the imaginary. By the late sixteenth century, Long Meg loses her singularity and regional identity, and is absorbed into alternative London-centric groupings of women. Meg is gentrified, forming one of two love interests for a shoemaker in Thomas Deloney’s The Gentle Craft, the second part (c.1598). Surviving texts suggest that Meg endures long periods of near silence, only fleetingly invoked in stage plays alongside

2 John Skelton is both Tudor poet laureate and a jestbook protagonist in The Merie Tales of Skelton (c.1567), further discussed in Chapters One and Two. Will Sommers was Henry VIII’s court jester, featuring in Thomas Nashe’s stage play Pleasant Comedie called Summers Last Will and Testament (c.1592).
others such as Moll Cutpurse and Mary Ambree. While the jestbook continues to be printed and circulated, Long Meg is otherwise rendered immaterial in the seventeenth century. She appears as a ghost in pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell and Hannah Hit-him-home’s *The Women’s Sharpe Revenge* (1640), and is further embodied in extraordinarily sized objects such as the megalithic stone circle ‘Long Meg and her Daughters’, and a large Westminster gun. Like Robin Hood, then, Meg develops a ‘mythic multiplicity’, accruing meaning in English popular culture as her literary tradition grows. Yet, despite sharing in the mirth and mutability of ‘the Iests of Robin-Hood, Bevis of South-hampton, and such others’ (*LM*, A.3), Long Meg cannot cohere nor belong to their existing traditions.

The challenge that Long Meg presents to the author in the prefatory address is echoed in premodern scholarship. Robin Hood continues to generate a wealth of scholarship and interest, maintaining a prolific status in mainstream media and culture. Though lesser known, Bevis of South-hampton has long been peripherally featured in discussions of Middle English Romances, and is the focus of a 2017 study. Of the three figures, Long Meg has received the least critical attention. While the relationship between Bevis of South-hampton and Long Meg has not been examined further, the proximity of Long Meg’s ‘merry prankes’ to the famous ‘Iests of Robin-Hood’ indicate far more than a generic parallel (*LM*, A.3). Patricia Gartenberg notes the difficulty in containing Meg in any single textual tradition. In ballads, drama, prose, jestbooks, and pamphlets of the sixteenth and seventeenth century,

---

5 Modern Robin Hood studies has been led by prominent scholars such as Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, and extends into a wider academic community through the *International Association of Robin Hood Studies*. While there are many examples of Robin Hood in mainstream media, two recent high-profile features have been the BBC Television Series *Robin Hood* (2006-2009) and the 2018 *Robin Hood* film, directed by Otto Bathurst.
Long Meg is discursively fashioned as a virago, tavern bouncer, ‘patriotic amazon, boon companion to celebrated men, Roaring girl, [and] brothel keeper’. However, in a brief yet crucial suggestion, Gartenberg observes that Long Meg also occupies the role of ‘a female Robin Hood’. Long Meg’s analogical position to Robin Hood thus extends beyond the address to the reader of _The Life of Long Meg_, suggesting a more significant relationship between the two figures. While _The Life of Long Meg_ draws a textual parallel between Long Meg and ‘the Iests of Robin Hood’ (LM, A.3), Gartenberg suggests that Long Meg fulfils the generic criteria of the outlaw whilst unable to be named as such. Gartenberg’s invocation of Robin Hood to articulate Long Meg’s character and behaviour captures an unresolved tension in language; that women cannot be outlaws in legal terms. The interface between women and outlawry, fleetingly captured by Robin Hood’s presence in _The Life of Long Meg_, is also found in early English law through the figure of the waive (the woman’s terminological equivalent to the outlaw). Suspended in law and language, Long Meg demands a vocabulary which addresses the relationship between women and outlawry more fully. The waive thus provides the closest term through which to examine Long Meg of Westminster.

As the title suggests – ‘Long Meg of Westminster: Women, Waives, And Outlaws in Premodern England’ – this thesis is the first sustained study of Long Meg of Westminster, contributing to a growing body of research concerned with the broader signifying capacities of outlawry. Addressing the lacuna from which the ‘female Robin Hood’ emerges, this thesis examines the forms of identity and agency available to women in the law and literature of premodern England. The spheres of premodern law and literature share growing concerns about the prestige of vernacular English. The concept of ‘vernacular eloquence’, in which English could be elevated through Greco-Roman concepts, is enshrined in both legal and

---

8 Gartenberg, p.49.
9 Gartenberg, p.49.
literary culture. Long Meg’s tradition thus becomes a site for vernacular eloquence, in which the tensions between the language of Anglophone oral traditions and the classical rhetoric of written culture are negotiated. Where language fails to name the waive, the body provides a site for interpretation.

Through the concept of biopolitics, I am able to discuss the intersection between law, agency, and embodiment which underpins the legal identities of women. In biopolitical terms, the living body is at the centre of the law: the body is ‘both the rule and criterion of its own application’, subject to and enactor of judicial processes. In order to unravel the legal position of the waive and see how it is applicable to representations of Long Meg, I turn to Giorgio Agamben’s study *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and its focus on the biopolitical codification of law and citizenship. In its biopolitical approach to the waive, my project looks back to the premodern period to ask critical questions about English law’s inclusion and exclusion, oppression and erasure of those who do not conform to cisheteropatriarchal standards. What lies beneath the systemic categorisation of the law, and the conditions producing terms such as the waive, are the material experiences and bodies which have evaded mechanisms of sovereign and state power. The distinctive contribution of my research thus lies in three key areas: it provides a detailed critical analysis of Long Meg of Westminster, a literary account of the premodern waive, and offers an intervention in biopolitics. In order to bring some linearity to Long Meg’s diffuseness, this introduction is divided into three distinct sections. I first give a more comprehensive view of her textual history, followed by a detailed account of the critical scholarship available on Long Meg thus far. Finally, I situate my analysis in a biopolitical and material framework. Through this

---


11 Social and political structures which marginalise individuals on the basis of gender and/or sexuality. See, for example, the current resistance to reforming *The Gender Recognition Act* (2004) in U.K government, [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/gender-recognition-act] [accessed 20/08/2019].
methodology, I read Long Meg of Westminster alongside the outlaw tradition, her suspension in law and language parallel to the waive.

**A Textual History of Long Meg of Westminster**

Long Meg of Westminster’s first appearance in print is difficult to locate. The cheaply printed and widely circulated texts that make up much of folkloric traditions such as Meg’s are often lost, ill-preserved, even repurposed.\(^{12}\) It is ironic that the absence of these texts from archives today obscures their popularity during their period of production, as ‘many sixteenth and early seventeenth century cheap books licensed to printers were literally read to death’.\(^{13}\) The material obscurity in which Meg resides can be traced to the curious compilation of tales found in *The Old Book Collector’s Miscellany: or, A Collection of Readable Reprints of Literary Rarities* (1872), edited by Charles Hindley. In an introduction to later extant copies of Long Meg’s jestbook narrative, Hindley states that ‘the earliest edition of Long Meg that we have been able to find bears the following title: *The Life and Pranks of Long Meg of Westminster*. Imprinted at London for William How for Abraham Veale, dwelling in Paul’s Church yard, at the Sign of the Lambe, 1582’.\(^{14}\) Hindley’s reference predates the earliest entry of Long Meg found in the Stationers’ records, and raises questions regarding Meg’s trajectory in print. Hindley refers to a 1582 edition because of its given title, yet this is not evidenced in the Stationers Company Register or any other printing records. It is therefore


\(^{13}\) Gartenberg, p.49.

unclear whether Hindley’s dating is entirely accurate. Indeed, Robert Watt asserts that ‘the edition’s title page and colophon are forged from an unrelated book published in 1582’, and the rest of the edition dates to around 1650.\(^{15}\) However, Watt does note that in Hindley’s reprint of the 1635 edition, he includes another reprint which Hindley believes to be the abridged version of the 1582 text. Hindley states that the jestbook is written ‘in the Black Letter and contains fifteen chapters, the concluding one being “[t]he mad pranks she played the waterman at Lambeth!” which finishes with the couplet of— “[i]f any man ask who brought this to passe | Say it was done by a Lancashire Lasse”’.\(^{16}\) This reflects the fifteenth chapter of the extant *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635), which also details ‘the mad pranke [Meg] plaid with a waterman of Lambeth’ and concludes with the same rhyme (*LM*, A.4). A possible development to Long Meg’s jestbook tradition is shown through the inclusion of a further three chapters. While Hindley claims that the fifteenth chapter of *The Life and Pranks of Long Meg of Westminster* is ‘the concluding one’, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635) contains an additional sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth chapter. Watt concludes that this abridged version may still ‘be the earliest’ edition of the text.\(^{17}\) Its ‘casual reference to “Her Majesty”’ contrasts with the 1635 edition, which reads ‘she sat in her Majesty’.\(^{18}\) This change suggests this edition dates to Elizabeth I’s reign.

Entries in the Stationer’s records provide a more definitive timeline for Meg’s literary tradition. The jestbook *The Life of Long Megg of Westminster* was entered into the Stationer’s Company Register on the 18\(^{th}\) August 1590.\(^{19}\) Within the same week of the jestbook’s printing in 1590, between the 27\(^{th}\) and 31\(^{st}\) August, an anonymous ballad simply titled *A Ballad of Longe Meg of Westminster* was entered into the Stationer’s records. A second

\(^{16}\) Hindley (ed), *The Old Book Collector’s Miscellany*, p.iii.
\(^{17}\) Watt, p.40, n.51.
\(^{18}\) Watt, p.40, n.51.
ballad, *The mad merye pranckes of Long Megg of Westminster*, is also recorded on the 14th March 1595. Perhaps inspired by the 1595 ballad, the 1635 edition of the jestbook — with which I begin this chapter’s discussion — comes with the addition of an elaborate subtitle, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster containing the mad merry prankes shee played in her life time, not only in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffians about London but also how valiantly she behaued her self in the wars of Bolloingne* (henceforth *The Life of Long Meg*). Other reprintings of the jestbook were recorded in the Stationers Register beyond these three key printings in 1595, 1620, 1634, ‘and [there were] probably many others’. However, these have since been lost. The titles of these jestbooks varied somewhat; from *The Life of Long Meg* (1590 and 1635), to *The History of Long Meg* (1620 and 1634) and finally, in the eighteenth century, *The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster* (1750 and 1785). *The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster* offers an abridged version of the earlier episodic jestbook: whilst omitting chapters five, seven, fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen, it also includes the addition of a woodcut illustration of Meg. The demand for the same material to be repackaged with a change of title demonstrates the continued relevance and popularity of Meg’s character. Considering that the 1635 and 1750 editions of these jestbooks are extant, it is ‘reasonable […] that [they] reflect the early narrative well enough’, or closer still, are ‘possibly reprint[s]’. From these surviving copies and records, there is still sufficient material to get a sense of Long Meg’s inception. In light of its formative content, I offer a full summary of the jestbook’s plot. Before giving a detailed account of the narrative itself, I give a brief summary of the key characters it features. These figures form a

---


21 See Chapter Two for this woodcut.

22 Knutson ‘Long Meg of Westminster’ in *Lost Plays Database* <https://www.lostplays.org/> [accessed 01/03/17].

23 Gartenberg, p.49.
community which extends beyond the significance of the jestbook, and will be discussed throughout this thesis.

The community that surrounds Long Meg is comprised of archetypal members of society, often defined by a title and role. Meg encounters Father Willis, ‘a neighbour of hers’ employed as a carrier travelling from Lancashire to London (LM, B.1). In her employment at ‘the Eagle of Westminster’, Meg accrues new companions and connections (LM, B.2). The hostess and owner of the tavern, referred to by Meg as her ‘Mistress’, arranges fights and co-conspires pranks with Meg alongside bar keeping duties. Crucially, the hostess propels the action of the jestbook forwards without accompanying or engaging with Meg’s acts directly. Harry the Ostler, ‘a servant with Long Meg’ (LM, D.2) at the tavern, is more suited to a supporting role, featured primarily in chapters nine and ten.24 Harry’s fear and weakness emphasises Long Meg’s strength and valour, as Meg not only defends Harry from thieves but also takes up the military press which he was ‘very loth[ed] to’ (LM, D.2) accept.25 Meg’s opponents are chiefly men of mercantile and aristocratic classes, mostly defined by title rather than name. Sir James of Castille provides the only exception to this. As a Spanish Knight, the characterisation of Sir James echoes the European chivalric influence of Bevis of South-Hampton found in the epigraph of this introduction. Meg’s contempt and triumph over a ‘nobleman’ reiterates the class antagonism underpinning these interactions. As well as the nobleman, Meg encounters several nameless figures of the establishment tied to both the church and state. Bailiffs and Constables, Priests and Friars are met with violence and mockery. These figures are invested with a symbolic value, embodying a societal ‘type’ with which Meg is either aligned or in opposition to.

Yet the jestbook is also framed by a set of characters whose ‘real’ names and

24 An ostler or ‘oastler’ refers to ‘a person who receives and lodges guests’, as in the tavern (n., OED, 1).
25 ‘Press’ refers to the compulsory enlistment of citizens in the army or navy. See ‘Press’ (n., OED, 3).
identities are rooted in Henrician history: John Skelton, Will Sommers, and Sir Thomas More all appear in exchanges with Long Meg. Alongside Sir James of Castille, John Skelton and Will Sommers are introduced as part of the Hostess’s company, ‘sitting and drinking’ (LM, B.2) in the tavern space. Both Skelton and Sommers were adjacent to the Tudor court and posthumously became jesting figures in popular culture.26 Former poet laureate John Skelton (1463-1529) is reimagined as the Hostess’s love interest ‘Doctor Skelton’, and performs a rhyming verse about Meg when she arrives at the tavern. Skelton’s title and role is echoed in the jestbook’s initial address to the reader, which notes that ‘amongst the Doctors of health, Doctor Merry-Man is not the least’ (LM, A.3).27 Will Sommers, famous for his career as Henry VIII’s court jester, asks the Hostess for his opinion of Long Meg’s suitability for employment. The commentary provided by Skelton and Sommers thus serves to enshrine Meg’s ‘merry pranks’ in a faux-genealogy of Tudor England. Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) also fulfils a similar function as a visitor of the tavern. As a lawyer, author, and statesman, More advises Sir James of Castille in an erudite discussion of ‘the valour of Englishmen’ (LM, Sig.C.1). The Life of Long Meg thus combines named Tudor figures and generic characters defined by their societal role, forming a narrative which is at once historically specific and broadly allegorical.

In terms of narrative structure, each chapter is introduced with a titular summary of its content, and demonstrates Meg’s progression through the narrative. The content of the first and second chapters are summarised comprehensively, entitled ‘where she was borne, how one came vp to London, and how she beat the Carrier’ and ‘how she placed herselfe at

26 See Anon, The Merie Tales of Skelton (London: 1567), which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis. For more on Sommers and jesting, see Thomas Nashe’s play Pleasent Comedie called Summers last Will and Testament (1592) and the later jestbook Anon, A Pleasent history of the life and death of Will Summers (c.1637).

27 Will Sommers was posthumously associated with W.W’s A new and merie prognostication devised after the finest fashion (London: 1577). Printed seventeen years after his death, Sommers is described to ‘take [the] place’ of three preceding ‘witty doctors’, echoing the title of ‘Doctor Skelton’. As Sommers life and career ran later into the Tudor period than Skelton and More’s, his role inheriting the tradition of the ‘merie […] doctor’ is significant to the characterisation of The Life of Long Meg.
Westminster, and what she did at her placing’ ((LM, A.4*). As their titles suggest, these chapters follow Meg on her initial journey from Lancashire to London and her search and success in finding work. In chapter one, Meg journeys with a group of fellow countrywomen under the service of a Carrier named Father Willis. The Carrier attempts to overcharge Meg and her peers for their travel, to which Meg resists. Meg violently beats the Carrier into submission and successfully alieves herself and the other women in her company from all charges. She then forces the Carrier to use his connections to establish their employment. In chapter two, Father Willis introduces Meg to a tavern owner and Hostess. In the tavern, three recurring secondary characters are introduced, chiefly John Skelton, the aforementioned Hostess, and Sir James of Castille. Meg proves her worth as an employee by agreeing to a fist fight with the strong Spanish Knight, Sir James. She beats him and is thus ‘entertained into seruice’ as a tavern maid responsible for ensuring patrons ‘pay what they call for’ with extreme force ((LM, B.3*).

Meg’s physical prowess is clearly demonstrated in the seven chapters that follow, all of which contain a number of violent altercations, varying from frivolous prankish behaviour to more severe, pseudo-juridical forms of punishment. Chapter three shows ‘how [Meg] vsed one of the Vicars of Westminster, that was a morrow Masse priest, and how she made him pay his score’ ((LM, A.4*). Chapter four presents another encounter ‘betweene her and Sir James of Castile a Spanish Knight’ ((LM, B.4*), the chivalric character introduced in chapter two. This features Meg and the Hostess as conspirators in which Meg is to ‘goe drest in Gentlemans apparel’ and challenge James to a duel ((LM, B.4*). After beating James to the ground, Meg spares his life on the condition that he ‘confesse [her] to bee thy better at weapon in any ground in England’ ((LM, C.1*) over the popular tavern supper that evening. The fifth chapter, entitled ‘the courtesie shee vsed towards soouldiers, and other men that carried good minds’ is the first explicit instance of Meg being juxtaposed to military themes
(LM, C.1). As in chapter four, Meg meets an ill, unemployed soldier in disguise, this time as a Servingman, and promises rewards if he bests her in a fight. The sixth chapter returns to the notion of a corrupt authority in the most violent chapter yet, as it recalls ‘how shee vsed the Bailiffe of Westminster that came into her Mistresse house, and arrested one of her friends’ (LM, A.4). Here, a patron who Meg ‘much favoured’ is accosted by a Bailiff for the debt of forty shillings he owes. In response, Meg almost beats the Bailiff to death but, as in many other instances, leaves him with a warning that ‘Catchpoles’ (LM, C.3) of the establishment were not welcome in her house. Chapter Seven ‘containeth, how shee vsed Woolsner the singing-man of Windsor, that was a great eater, and how she made him pay for his Break fast’ (LM, C.3). Woolsner conspires with ‘a company of pleasant gentleman’ to abuse the fixed price of six pence for breakfast by eating meat ‘fit for ten men’ (LM, C.3), but after a beating from Meg, the co-conspirators emerge to pay the debt. In the eighth chapter, Meg takes to the streets in search for ‘some means to be merry’ (LM, C.4) whilst dressed in men’s apparel and gets into yet another physical confrontation with an arrogant and abusive nobleman. Chapter nine sees the reappearance of Father Willis the Carrier, who Meg discovers being robbed of a hundred markes. Meg not only defends Father Willis from the thieves, but also forces them to take an oath for sparing their lives, bound by a kiss ‘on the skirt of [her] smocke’ (LM, Sig.D2).

The tenth chapter marks a shift in the narrative which situates Meg in the highly specific temporal political landscape of Henry VIII’s 1544 Siege of Boulogne.28 Initially, Meg finds herself defending a fellow servant, Harry the Ostler, from a Constable coming to press in Westminster. After giving the Constable a ‘box on the eare’ (LM, D.2), Meg takes the press money to go to Bulloigne herself. The eleventh and twelfth chapters follow Meg

---

through her relocation to France, firstly noting ‘how she beat the Frenchmen from the walles of Bulloigne, and behaued her selfe so valiantly, that the King gaue her eight pence a day for her life’ *(LM, D.3)*, and then ‘how her combat shee had with a Frenchman before the walls of Bulloigne’ *(LM, D.3)*. The twelfth chapter expands on Meg’s martial prowess, as she arranges ‘to fight it out to the death’ with a French soldier *(LM, D.3)*. Decapitating her opponent, Meg sends the severed head to the Frenchman’s fellow soldiers. Amazed to discover that ‘an English woman sent it him’, the chief soldier gives her a ‘hundred crownes for her valour’ *(LM, D.3)*. In the thirteenth chapter, after being declared a successful war heroine by ‘the report of [her] […] valiant deed[s] being come to the eares of the king’ *(LM, D.3)*, Meg returns to England to be married to a soldier. This chapter contains the first and only mention of Meg’s spouse, as chapters fourteen, fifteen and seventeen return to the now somewhat formulaic content whereby Meg violently engages with the unjust men of Westminster. In chapter fourteen, Meg almost hangs ‘the angry Miller of Eppingʾ to death for beating a little boy, in the fifteenth Meg ties a waterman to the sterne of the boat after he complains at her small payment for the journey, and in the seventeenth, Meg punishes James Dickins, an unruly and abusive customer of the tavern. Chapter sixteen situates Long Meg in a new household setting, focusing on ‘how shee kept a house at Islington, and what lawes she had there to be obseruedʾ *(LM, A.4)*. The eighteenth and final chapter is set late in Meg’s life in the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558), and partially fulfils the conventions of the jest biography genre in following Meg’s decline towards death. Visiting Meg at her sick bed, a corrupt Friar extorts money from her as financial and public penance for her sinful life. Meg’s health is restored for one final prank in which she disguises herself as the ghost of a man, haunting the Friar and regaining her funds. These chapters cumulatively demonstrate that Long Meg is a highly mobile subject, enacting extralegal violence as she moves from Lancashire, to Westminster, to France, to Islington. Meg also navigates the narrative shift in
England’s religiosity from Henrician to Marian England, her Protestant idealism cemented in her final encounter with the Catholic Friar.

In the generic shift from jestbooks to the early modern stage, Long Meg is equally absent. Much like the 1590 and 1595 ballads, the stage play *Longe Mege of Westmester* seems to emerge as an analogue to the *The Life of Long Meg* jestbook. The entries from Henslowe’s Diary date the opening performance of ‘Longe Mege of Westmenster’ as the 14th of February 1594, with a total of nine performances in the same year. Taking into account that the jestbook and ballad productions cluster around 1590-5, one might speculate that *Longe Mege of Westminster* was at least relatively if not brand new. Indeed, the immense success of the 1594 staging of Meg is also bound up in the practical consideration that ‘plays that reached commercial exhaustion […] needed a recovery period if they were to be restaged at all’. Long Meg’s presence on the early modern stage does not end with the last recorded performance of *Long Meg of Westminster* in 1597. While no longer framed as a protagonist figure, Long Meg continues to make numerous appearances on the peripheries of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Long Meg is absorbed into different communities of ‘pseudo-historical personages inhabiting the courtly and city milieus’. Residing amongst folkloric figures of Tudor nostalgia, as well as new London-centric groupings of subversive women, Long Meg emerges at the threshold between repetition and innovation. For the theatre repertories who looked to capitalise on existing tropes whilst generating new material for commercial viability, Long Meg provided a useful and flexible subject.

The mutability of Long Meg’s tradition sees her accrue other associations on the stage. In Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West Part I* (c.1597-1603), Thomas

---

Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1601), Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s *Westward Ho* (1605), and Nathan Field, *Amends for Ladies* (1611), Long Meg is paired with Mary Ambree. Long Meg and Mary Ambree share a success in print as distinctly English heroines with valiant military histories; Long Meg as a laundress-turned-soldier in the war of Boulogne (1544-46), while Mary Ambree is ‘said to have fought in the siege of Ghent of 1584 to avenge her lover’s death’. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* (1617) credits Long Meg as ‘the first roarer’, forging a link between Long Meg and the protagonist of *The Roaring Girl*, Moll Cutpurse, whose character emerges between 1607-10. Long Meg is thus repackaged to substantiate other historico-legendary identities for women. These categories are not neatly separate in the cultural imagination, but form a larger and far more nebulous network of popular figures. The conflations between women on the early modern stage are captured in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611), as the drunken butler Stephano sings of ‘Mall, Meg and Marian, and Margery’. Capitalising on their homophonic similarities, Shakespeare demonstrates the cultural and commercial productivity in citing these women as a congenial group.

The growth in Long Meg’s tradition on the early modern stage corresponds with developments in pamphlets and other forms of narration beyond the jestbook. Two brief references to Long Meg are found in the Marprelate tracts: one in the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate’s *Theses Martinianae* (1589) and the other in John Lyly’s response *Pap with an Hatchet* (1589). Taken together, these recordings confirm an earlier date for Long Meg of

---

35 The Marprelate controversy first emerged in 1586, when Archbishop Whitgift procured a decree from the Star Chamber Court which enabled him to censor puritanical writers and seize control of the Stationers’ Company. Under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate, puritans responded in an unauthorised series of satirical pamphlets.
Westminster in print than the first entry in the Stationer’s Register in 1590, supporting Charles Hindley’s reference to an earlier edition of the jestbook. *Theses Martinianae* was part of a series of publications from the famous pamphlet war between the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate and Mar-Martin. While Marprelates advocated for puritanical, Presbyterian ecclesiastical reform, those against them defended the sanctity and authority of the established church. In order to engage their readership in theological subject matter, the pamphlets are characterised by mocking forms of address and a humorous colloquial style. In this religious dispute, Long Meg of Westminster is invoked to undermine Mar-Martin’s legitimacy as a writer. Marprelate suggests that before his career ‘in publishing bawdery, and filthiness’, Mar-Martin’s only trade was in ‘carreying Long Meg of Westminsters hand-basket’.

Further speculating, Marprelate writes that Mar-martin may have been ‘promoted vnto service of some laundresse in a bishoppes house’ after Long Meg’s death. The reference to Meg’s handbasket alludes to her role as a laundress in the jestbook, as seen in the earliest edition of 1635. While the laundry role is part of Meg’s military service, the connection made between laundering and ‘brothel-house[s]’ establishes a double entendre, in which Mar-Martin is imagined to be ‘attending upon some other of his aunts’, making Long Meg ‘the madam of a bawdy house’. Late in 1589, John Lyly joins the Martinist debate in his pamphlet *Pap with an Hatchet*. In this direct response to *Thesis Martinianae*, Lyly claims that Marprelate’s knowledge of Long Meg’s ‘brothel’ exposes his own involvement, and he is

---

The bishops employed writers such as John Lyly and Thomas Nashe to defend the Church of England and attack Marprelate.

36 Martin Marprelate, *Thesis Martinianae: That is, Certain Demonstrative Conclusions, sette downe and collected (as it should seeme) by that famous and renowned Clarke, the reuerend Martin Marprelate the great: serving as a manifest and sufficient confutation of al that euer the Colledge of Catercaps with their whole hand of Clergie-priests, haue, or can bring for the defence of their ambitous and Antichristian Prelacie* (1589), D.2v.

37 Marprelate, D.2v - D.2v.

38 See *Aunt*, (n., *OED*, 3).

39 Marprelate, D.2v.

40 See *Aunt*, (n., *OED*, 3).
Thus a ‘crafty Jack’ to be ‘threshed with [his] own flail’.  

Taking up the Martinist style of pamphlet wars, Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey deploy Long Meg in their libellous correspondence. The output of their contemporary Robert Greene reflects the continuities in merry materials across print and performance: the series of citations of Long Meg by Nashe and Harvey emerges in the same year as Greene’s production of the Robin Hood play *George a Greene, Pinder of Wakefield* (c.1593). In his ‘long Kentish-tayld declaration’ against his literary rival Gabriel Harvey in *Strange News* (1592), Thomas Nashe toasts his ‘blessed cup of sacke’ to his ‘Muses foot of the twelues; old Long Meg of Westminster’. By invoking Long Meg, Nashe suggests that Harvey ‘wilt stride ouer Greenes graue and not stumble’. In *Pierce’s Supererogation* (1593), Harvey responds to Nashe’s criticism, forging another link between Long Meg and the Robin Hood tradition in his reply that:

[Long Megg of Westminster would have been ashamed to disgrace her Sonday bonet with her Satterday witt. She knew some rules of decorum: and although she were a lustie bouncing rampe, somewhat like Gallemella, or maid Marian, yet was she not such a roinish rannell, or such a dissolute gillian-flurtes, as this wainscot-faced Tomboy.

As the epigraph to this introduction has already shown, in *The Life of Long Meg*, Robin Hood and Bevis of South-hampton provide proximate reference points through which to understand Long Meg. Gabriel Harvey’s description produces a different series of invocations, clustering in tension around Meg’s femininity and virtue. For Harvey, Long Meg sits at the threshold of

---

42 Thomas Nashe, *The apologie of Pierce Pennillesse. Or, Strange Newes, of the intercepting certaine letters and a conuoy of verses, as they were going priuillie to victuall the Lowe Countries*, (London: 1592), F.1v.
43 Nashe, *Strange Newes*, F.1v.
44 Some of the figures listed here remain unidentified thus far. In an email correspondence with Andrew Hadfield of *The Thomas Nashe Project*, I asked about the figure of Gallemella. He was also unable to identify her but tentatively suggested that Gallemella may be a European (Italian) connection to Long Meg. The mention of ‘gillian-flurtes’ may also allude to Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft* (discussed below), as a woman named Gillian is created as a romantic rival to Long Meg. Thomas Nashe and Thomas Deloney also operated within the same literary networks, as demonstrated in a search of their relationship using the resource *Six Degrees of Francis Bacon* <http://www.sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com/> [accessed 10/03/17].
immodesty: she possesses the ‘Satterday witt’ of a ‘lustie bouncing rampe’, yet still dons her ‘Sonday bonet’ to maintain ‘some rules’ of chastity and religiosity. Long Meg is also defined through negation in Harvey’s terms. She is ‘somewhat like Gallemella, or maid Marian’, yet not exactly parallel. The juxtaposition of Long Meg and Maid Marian anticipates Shakespeare’s song in *The Tempest*, suggesting that there is some longevity to their similar place in the national and literary imagination. Harvey’s assessment of Long Meg is marked by a further layer of differentiation, in which she is ‘not such a roinish rannell […] as this wainscot-faced Tomboy’. This conclusion captures the competing discourses about societal standards for women clustering around Long Meg. Long Meg is not exclusively associated with sex work as a ‘rannell’, but only knows ‘some rules of decorum’. Her behaviour and appearancecomplexly locates her as a ‘rampe’, referring to ‘a bold, wanton, or lively woman; a tomboy’, yet she is not as deviant as the ‘wainscot-faced Tomboy’ in question. Harvey’s analysis situates Long Meg as a device through which to measure conformity. Meg is similarly used as a relational model to other women in Nathan Field’s stage play *Amends for Ladies* (c.1611). Meg is invoked in relation to the ‘merry pranks’ of Moll Cutpurse, who is inserted by Fields as a secondary character closely following the success of Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* (1610). In *Amends for Ladies*, shop owner Grace Seldome calls Moll ‘Mistris Hic & Haec’. Resolving to ‘speak in [her] key’, describes her as a ‘sword and target […] Mary Vmbree, Long Meg […] [you] looks’t like a rogue and a whore vnder a hedge’. The collapse between Moll Cutpurse, Mary Ambree, and

---

45 ‘Roinish’ meaning coarse or rough, (adj., OED, 1). ‘Rannell’ referring to a sex worker, see (n., OED, 1).
46 See ‘Ramp’, (n., OED, 1). The description of the Tomboy as ‘wainscot-faced’ carries connotations of race, class, and youth, as it referred to one who resembled oak wood in hardness or colour (n., OED, 3). In *Lenten Stuffe* (1599), Nashe describes a woman of ‘the tanned wainscot hue’ as a ‘withered wrinklefaced beldam [Grandmother]’, indicating both age and class in terms of outdoor labouring.
47 As seen on the title page of the second edition of the playtext. Nathan Fields, *Amends for ladies with the merry pranks of Moll Cutpurse: or, the humour of roaring* (London: 1639). This echoes the title of Meg’s earlier jestbook *The Life of Long Meg and the mad merry pranks shee played in her lifetime*.
49 *Amends for Ladies*, II.1.46-49.
Long Meg, as well as the doubling of ‘Hic & Haec’, ‘sword and target’, ‘rogue and whore’, indicates the difficulties containing these figures in any singular category. In 1617, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley reiterate the relationship between Long Meg and Moll Cutpurse, describing Meg as the ‘first roarer’. In this index of patriarchal anxieties about gender and sexual proclivity, Long Meg is suspended between concepts and characters: she is ‘somewhat’, but also ‘not’.

Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1598) provides a prose narrative with a more sustained focus on Long Meg of Westminster, and is the most significant in length after *The Life of Long Meg*. While Nashe attempts to use Long Meg as a rhetorical device of ridicule, Deloney develops Harvey’s description of Meg’s persona and introduces an exaggerated sexual element. Deloney modifies the original narrative of *The Life of Long Meg* (c.1590) in which Meg is employed at the alehouse ‘The Eagle of Westminster’, now referring to Meg using the sexual pun ‘Margaret of the Spread Eagle’. Meg quickly becomes a romantic interest of the desirable shoemaker’s apprentice named Richard of Castelier, rivalled only by fellow countrywoman Gillian. As neither Meg nor Gillian win Richard’s affections, however, Meg is first restored to her traditional position of soldier, before finally becoming ‘common to the call of every man’.

In William Vaughan’s collection of short moralistic essays entitled *The Golden Grove* (1600), Long Meg is cited as an example of a bawd keeping ‘twenty courtizans in her house, who by their pictures she sold to all commers’.

The configuration of Meg as sexually licentious continues into the Caroline era, as in Nicholas Goodman’s *Hollands Leaguer* (1632), which refers to Meg as

---

50 *A Fair Quarrel*, II.ii.215.
51 Thomas Deloney, *The gentle craft. The second part Being a most merrie and pleasant historie, not altogether vnprofitable nor any way hurtfull: verie fit to passe away the tediousnesse of the long winter evenings* (London: 1639), A.3.’
52 Richard of Castelier’s name perhaps a corruption of Sir James of Castille of *The Life of Long Meg*.
53 Deloney, *The gentle craft. The second part*, C.2.’
54 William Vaughan, *The golden-groue moralized in three booke: a worke very necessary for all such, as would know how to gourner themselves, their houses, or their countrey* (London: 1600), P.3.’
'the famous amazon, Longa Margarita who [...] kept an infamous house of open Hospitality'. By changing her name to ‘Longa Margarita’, Goodman attempts to render Meg compatible with the classical tradition of Amazonian warrior women. These examples demonstrate that Meg’s recurrent appearances are in part informed by a continual effort to categorise her within a specific ‘type’ or identity. As language fails to capture her character, her presence in a text is marked by uncertainty and disorder.

_The Gentle Craft_ and the texts which follow, however, do not surpass the portrayal of Long Meg as a jestbook figure paralleling the waive. This is exemplified by the poetic epistle to defense pamphlet _The Womens Sharpe Revenge_ (1640), credited to pseudonymous Mary Tattle-well and Joane Hit-him-home yet widely posited as penned by John Taylor. Indeed, _The Womens Sharpe Revenge_ has been viewed as Taylor responding to his own libellous misogyny, as found in _Diverse Crabtree Lectures_ (1639) and _The Juniper Lectures_ (1639) of the previous year. _The Womens Sharpe Revenge_ thus functions as a performative enactment of the rhetorical strategies of argumentation’, situating the ghost of Long Meg at its oratory centre. Numerous epidoes from _The Life of Long Meg_ are recalled to explicate the worthiness of women. Though Meg shares the multiplicity and endurance of Robin Hood, the disparate materials she features in cannot be brought together under the singular category of ‘outlaw’. These texts do not form a neat chronology, and many of the later extant works refer to Long Meg only once or twice. As a result, Meg has not been assigned a prominent position within scholarship, and her marginal role across popular works remains largely unexplored. As the foregoing outline has shown, the texts featuring Long Meg provide a potent series of fragments through which to establish a literary account of the waive. Before outlining my

---

55 Nicholas Goodman, _Hollands Leaguer: or, An Historical discourse of the life and actions of Dona Britanica Hollandia the arch-mistris of the wicked women of Eutopia, Wherein is detected the notorious sinne of panderisme, and the execrable life of the luxurious impudent_ (London: 1632), F.1.
methodological approach to these materials in more detail, I discuss the limited scholarship produced on Long Meg.

**Long Meg in Critical Scholarship**

Long Meg is rarely made the primary focus of scholarly works: she is often reduced to a summary within a single footnote, and at most, she is the subject of an anomalous journal article. The few existing studies appear sporadically, often with around ten years between each publication from the 1980s onwards. Few publications focus on close textual analysis in their examination of Long Meg, and the literary scholars that refer to textual material do not draw comparisons across the narratives in which she is featured. As the source material for Meg’s characterisation, *The Life of Long Meg* is most commonly invoked by scholars. However, the jestbook is predominantly used to provide context to the overarching myth of Meg, rather than pursued with any specific literary interest. Meg is instead theorised according to critical trends. As this overview will show, Long Meg’s appearances in scholarship coincide with key theoretical turns such as historicism, feminism, and embodiment. The biopolitical framework of my thesis is a continuation of this pattern: Meg emerges when there is a critical vocabulary through which to discuss her.

The broader focus on Meg’s mythological status in scholarship can first be traced to the nineteenth century. In his contribution to *Notes and Queries* in 1850, Edward Rimbault responds to the second edition of Peter Cunningham’s *Handbook of London* (1849), a text which explores places of interest in the metropolis. In a passage on Westminster Abbey, Cunningham writes that he believes a ‘large blue stone, uninscribed’ in the south cloister marked ‘the grave of Long Meg of Westminster, a noted virago in the reign of Henry VIII’.57

---

Taking up Cunningham’s claim, Rimbault asks ‘[i]s it then likely that such a detestable character would have been buried amongst “goodly friars” and “holy abbots” in the cloisters of our venerable abbey? I think not’.  

Rimbault continues that he has ‘considerable doubts as to whether Meg was a real personage’, concluding with an additional query, ‘is she not akin to Tom Thumb, Jack the Giant-killer, Doctor Rat, and a host of others of the same type?’

Here, Rimbault raises significant questions regarding the history, authenticity, and prestige of Long Meg. Rimbault’s focus on ‘whether Meg was a real personage’ reflects the so-called ‘empiricist historicism’ of nineteenth century folklore scholarship. Rimbault’s focus on what ‘type’ of figure Meg is reflects the difficulties in defining her role and community in the English imagination. In excess of the existing categories for women, Long Meg embodies several ‘types’ simultaneously whilst belonging to none. For scholars studying folkloric figures to forensic and historical ends, Long Meg thus presents a frustrating case.

Long Meg does not appear as the main subject in scholarship again until 1980, one-hundred and thirty years later in the same journal. Patricia Gartenberg’s examination of Long Meg in ‘Shakespeare’s Roaring Girls’ values a more literary approach than Rimbault, providing a succinct analysis of the song of ‘Mall, Meg, and Marian, and Margery’ in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611).  

Published in the same year as the first anthology of early modern feminist criticism, Gartenberg’s reading of Meg is part of a wider revisionist movement which sought to centre the roles of women in early modern texts. The brief study of Meg as one of ‘Shakespeare’s Roaring Girls’ reiterates how this early scholarship continues to focus on Long Meg’s relation to other figures. Three years later, Gartenberg

---

59 Rimbault, p.172.
60 Knight, p.146. This ‘empiricist historicism’ is part of a wider approach to folkloric figures, also found in Robin Hood’s scholarly tradition through Joseph Hunter’s contribution to the *South Yorkshire* journal in 1831.
publishes ‘An Elizabethan Wonder Woman: The Life and Fortunes of Long Meg of Westminster’, which provides selective summaries of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635) in conjunction with speculative materials on her identity at large. While acknowledging the diffuse nature of Meg’s character, Gartenberg situates Long Meg in terms of form and genre alongside the ‘jestbooks of Scoggin and Skelton’, as all consist ‘of eighteen short chapters’.  

Scholarship on the form and genre of *The Life of Long Meg* is further developed by Frederick O. Waage three years later. The title of his 1986 article ‘Meg and Moll: Two Renaissance London Heroines’ echoes Gartenberg’s ‘Roaring Girls’ in its comparative analysis of Meg and Moll Cutpurse. Waage resists conflating Meg and Moll as archetypal masculine women, concluding that both figures ‘never compromise [their] essential self’. Waage does not share Rimbault’s preoccupation with what ‘type’ Meg fits into generically, instead arguing for Meg and Moll’s identities to be recognised as singular. Waage is particularly attentive to the historical context which shapes *The Life of Long Meg* (1635), noting how ‘the upheaval of the English Reformation’ informs ‘many of the episodes’.

Over ten years later, Bernard Capp produces a brief examination of *The Life of Long Meg* (1635) in *Notes and Queries* entitled ‘Long Meg of Westminster: A Mystery Solved’ (1998). Continuing the work of Patricia Gartenberg, Capp offers a synopsis of *The Life of Long Meg* (1635) whilst speculating on some details of her identity. In its objective to determine ‘whether Meg was fictitious or a real person’, Capp’s contribution to the *Notes and Queries* series recalls the ‘empiricist historicism’ of the nineteenth century. Capp asserts that the ‘Bridgewell Hospital court books’ corroborate that ‘Long Meg was indeed a real

---

63 Gartenberg, p.49.
65 Waage, p.110.
66 Capp, pp.302-304.
67 Knight, p.146.
person, named Margaret Barnes, and that she kept a suspected bawdy house at Westminster in the mid-sixteenth century’. After summarising the text as a whole, Capp concludes that in line with Gartenberg’s notion of Meg as a ‘female Robin Hood’, The Life of Long Meg portrays Meg with a ‘physical prowess, wit, sense of natural justice, and generosity to the poor and weak [that] recall[s] […] Robin Hood.’ Here, Capp identifies the shared characteristics which Gartenberg’s initial comment emerges from. Despite these compelling details, these similarities in character are not taken further: the relationship between Long Meg and Robin Hood is marked by the discursive tension between women and outlawry. Indeed, while Gartenberg and Capp allude to the outlaw discourse surrounding Meg through the invocation of Robin Hood, they cannot name the waive. The parallel drawn between Meg’s ‘merry pranks’ and the ‘[j]ests of Robin Hood’ (LM, A.3) in the prefatory address of The Life of Long Meg, then, is also present in critical scholarship.

What is implicit to Gartenberg and Capp’s invocation of Robin Hood in Long Meg scholarship is echoed by Lesley Coote and Valerie B. Johnson’s search for ‘the outlaw at all stages of […] “her” history’ in Robin Hood studies. Robin Hood provides an anchor to articulate an analogical tradition to the outlaw for women. My own critical approach developed from Robin Hood studies, and the comparative approach of Gartenberg and Capp remains crucial to my own rationale. Yet, while Coote and Johnson do not address the waive as part of the outlaw’s history, their definition of what constitutes an ‘outlaw narrative’ shows how women such as Long Meg can fulfil the generic criteria of the outlaw whilst unable to be named as such. Markedly, the figure of the waive enables me to explore the legal

---

68 Capp, p.303.
69 Gartenberg, p.49.
70 Capp, pp.302-303.
72 Coote and Johnson describe the ‘essential elements’ of the outlaw narrative which remain consistent as ‘disguise, trickery, official proscription, corrupt legality, and the overturning of the accepted ideological imperatives’. See Coote and Johnson, p.3.
identity of Long Meg beyond these relational terms. A peripheral discussion of *The Life of Long Meg* (1635) featured in Pamela Allen Brown’s monograph *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (2003). Brown situates *The Life of Long Meg* within the jestbook genre to exemplify how the body ‘explodes into the powerful field of jesting’. Brown focuses on the embodied ‘spectacle, sound, and gesture’ of Long Meg alongside alewife Mother Bunch, who were ‘key figure[s] […] in the world of cheap print’. Despite this shift in theoretical focus to the body, Long Meg is not at the centre of this discussion, and remains paired with another figure. In an attempt to answer Rimbault’s question of what ‘type’ Meg is, Brown describes Meg as a ‘tall, brash barmaid’ who ‘duels roaring boys who challenge her’. The conceptual flattening of Meg to a ‘barmaid’ and her various opponents to ‘roaring boys’ reiterates the difficulties Meg presents to existing modes of categorisation. In highlighting the importance of the body in jest culture, Brown’s brief exploration of ‘somatic jesting’ leads directly into my biopolitical approach. It is only the most recent study of Long Meg that has deviated from a discussion centred on the jestbook material. Maggie Ellen Ray’s 2016 journal article ‘John Taylor and the Ghost of Long Meg of Westminster: Authorship and Poetic Authority in The Womens Sharpe Revenge’ examines the 1640s defence pamphlet’s resurrection of Long Meg as a folkloric spectre of England’s past. Ray asserts that as a socially marginalised figure featured only in the epistle, Long Meg is integral to the authorial identity of water poet John Taylor. This recent shift towards a broader, more textually analytical approach to Long Meg’s tradition is vital to my own rationale. As Ray shows, even when Meg’s appearance in a text is small or

---

75 Brown, p.81.
peripheral, the impact of her presence is significant, and worthy of close analysis.

Twenty years on from Gartenberg and Capp’s alignment of Long Meg and Robin Hood, I take up Coote and Johnson’s model of the ‘outlaw narrative’ to demonstrate the interface between Long Meg and waivery. The texts featuring Meg coincide with simultaneous developments in English law and language. As the above scholarship demonstrates, by not fitting into a ‘type’ in literary or legal terms, Long Meg’s character is marked by an exclusion. The twenty-first century conceptual vocabulary of biopolitics facilitates a closer reading of this exclusion: it illuminates the connections between life and law, the bodies of women and bodies of justice, that connect Long Meg to the figure of the waive. Thomas Lemke notes that ‘the notion of biopolitics has recently become a buzzword’. However, as my methodology will demonstrate, biopolitics provides an important framework to analyse aspects of women’s legal identities otherwise inaccessible. A biopolitical approach allows me to unravel the strands of medieval law, English vernacular language, and gendered materiality, with which Long Meg ties a firm knot. In order to see the relevance of biopolitical exclusion to this study of Long Meg, I first define the legal principles of the waive. The waive carries a different set of legal significations to the outlaw which inform the representation of women in outlaw narratives.

**Long Meg, Biopolitics, and Materiality**

The waive is not explicitly named in literary texts. However, textual evidence of waivery survives in thirteenth-century legal documents. This is reflected in the limited scholarship examining the waive. Jennifer Brewer provides the most sustained exploration of the waive to date. In a close study of a Yorkshire court roll, Brewer examines cases in which women were

---

waived between 1293 and 1294. Brewer’s findings show that while fewer women were
waived than men outlawed, those that did so committed a whole range of crimes, from
larceny to murder.77 As Louise J. Wilkinson notes, ‘the brevity of [medieval] records mean
that it is not possible to reconstruct sophisticated narratives’ of events, perhaps indicating
why waivery has remained largely neglected in outlaw studies.78 While these individual
records generally supply little in terms of narrative, the anomalous details of some cases
prove invaluable, warranting further investigation. For example, in the case of Emma,
daughter of Matilda of Salfordshire, in which ‘Alice daughter of Radulf Galt’ is murdered,
‘the weapon she used to kill her victim is noted.’79 The record reports in very limited terms
how Emma, ‘daughter of Matilda de Salfordshire’ came to be waived, stating that she ‘killed
Alice daughter of Radulf Galt in the village of Brunseford with a hatchet and at once after the
deed fled and is suspected. Let her be exacted and waived.’80 As Brewer observes, the
appropriation of a household item (a hatchet) reflects configurations of women’s criminality
at large. Emma’s case serves as a reminder that while women did not have access to formal
weapons or training, weapons could be readily available and improvised. The dimension of
domestic resourcefulness to women’s crime and violence is discernible in later imaginative
literature: Long Meg of Westminster proves no exception to this, as she ‘rapt’ a unwelcomed
Bailiff on the pate with a quart pot’ in an act of anti-establishment retribution (LM, C.3’).

The approach provided by Brewer is invaluable to understanding acts of waiving
through historical and quantititative methods. However, it does not consider the broader
semantics of waivery found in common law. While Brewer suggests that the distinction

---

77 Jennifer Brewer, ‘Let Her Be Waived: Outlawing Women in Yorkshire 1293-1294’, in British Outlaws of
Literature and History: essays on medieval and early modern figures from Robin Hood to Twm Shon Catty, ed.
79 Brewer, p.34.
80 Kew, NA JUST I 1098: Wapentake of Strafforth, p.40b: “Emma filia Matildae del Salfordthure occidict
Aliciam filiam Radulf Galt in villa de Brunesford cum quadam hachia. Et statim post factum fugit &
malecreditur. Exigater & waivietur.”
between the outlaw and the waive is one of ‘mere terminology’, I argue that the waive occupies a more punitively and linguistically complex position. The early common law produced a rich literature, and it is this textual genre in which the waive is most visible through legal treatises and dictionaries. The most substantial definition of the waive is found in De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae [On the Laws and Customs of England] (c.1235). The treatise is attributed to Henry de Bracton [of Bratton], an English judge of the court known as coram rege (later known as the King’s Bench) from 1247 to 1250 and again from 1253 to 1257. On the Laws and Customs of England was considered the most ambitious legal work of the middle ages, around ten times the length of the only previous English legal treatise, Glanvill. The vast scope of de Bracton secures its importance and influence in early English law, undergoing many ‘epitomes and reworkings’ such as Fleta, Britton, and Mirror of Justices, all of which are dated to ‘the last decade of the thirteenth century’. 

As de Bracton outlines, a man is declared an outlaw if he has been summoned to court four times consecutively and ‘has failed to appear’. His absence is considered an admission of guilt, and thus he ‘forfeits the country and the realm and is made an exile’. In doing so, he ‘forfeits his friends’, and ‘may be deprived of all his goods and of his life, unless the king spares him’. However, the waive bears a distinct and separate set of conditions:

[A] woman, […] cannot be outlawed because she is not under the law (in English ‘in law’) that is, in frankpledge or tithing, as is a male of twelve years and upwards; thus she cannot be outlawed, but when she has taken to flight for a felony she may well be waived and regarded as one abandoned, for waif is that which no one claims, nor will the prince claim her or protect her when she has been properly waived, any more than he will a male who has been properly outlawed according to the law of the land. Henceforth they bear the

---

81 Brewer, p.30.
83 Brand, 'Henry of Bratton [Bracton]', (para. 5 of 10).
86 De Bracton, p.352.
87 De Bracton, p.352.
wolf’s head and in consequence perish without judicial inquiry; they carry their judgement with them and they deservedly perish without law who have refused to live according to law. This is so if they take to flight or resist when they are to be arrested; if they are arrested alive or give themselves up, their life and death will be in the hand of the lord king.  

Early English legislature shows how women were never ‘under the law’. Indeed, in the words of Susan Stewart, ‘in law [women] did not exist’. Stewart concludes that the waived woman is ‘a non-person within the law and a non-person outside the law’. Yet the very existence of the term waive, and its acknowledgement in this passage, suggests that the legal position of women is more nuanced. As de Bracton outlines in the above quotation, in medieval jurisdiction, being ‘in law’ is directly informed by being ‘in frankpledge or tithing’. Tithing refers to a historic English legal, administrative or territorial unit which originally consisted of ten householders. Each tithing operates under a system of frankpledge whereby ‘[e]very [male] who has reached the age of twelve must take an oath […] that he does not intend to be a thief nor a party to thieving.’ De Bracton elaborates on this criteria further, stating that ‘[a]ll who hold land and house, who are called “householders”, ought to be in frankpledge.’ Not only are women implicitly excluded from public law in this respect, but also from a status as land or householders. In order to be excluded and declared an outlaw, the prerequisite of ‘frankpledge and tithing’ suggests that one first has to be included both in the law and in the wider community established by the occupation and ownership of certain territories. So, while Bracton states that ‘those who serve’ the householders, referred to as ‘followers’, are also included within frankpledge, it is ‘the head of a household [who]  

88 De Bracton, p.353.  
90 Stewart, p.46.  
91 De Bracton, p.353.  
92 See “Tithing”, (n. OED, 3).  
93 De Bracton, p.351.  
94 De Bracton, p.352
answers for the appearance in court of the members of his household’ and therefore they ‘need no other pledge.’

It is in being sworn into law through frankpledge and tithing at the age of twelve that a man could be deemed an outlaw. The oath taken ensures that boys and men were contractually bound to ‘come and answer and stand […] trial’ if summoned: if he did not appear within a ‘lawful period of time, that is five months […] the fifth county court’, he would be declared an outlaw. However, in never being ‘under the law’, women could never be outlawed, and were therefore waived. A labyrinthine logic of exclusion thus underpins de Bracton’s statement. Whereas the act of outlawing an accused man is contingent on their repeated absence from court, it would seem that, according to de Bracton’s definition, women are already excluded from the judicial process which defines waivity prior to being waived. A central paradox underpins the very emergence of the term waive: how can a woman be ‘abandoned’ by law, if she was never under it in the first place? De Bracton’s statement suggests that the waive exposes a potentiality for women to be positioned further outside the law, beyond their initial exclusion. The figure of the waive therefore sits uneasily in early English law, often to the point of her total erasure. Indeed, the semantic and legal ambiguity that underpins waivity can be traced in chapter thirty-nine of the key medieval charter Magna Carta, first produced in 1215 and reissued in 1217 and 1225:

Nullus liber homo capiatur vel inprisonetur, aut dissaisiatur, aut utlaghetur, aut exuletur, aut aliquot modo | destruatur, nec super eum ibimus, nec super eum mittemus, nisi per legale iuditium parium suorum vel per legem terre.

No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned, or dispossessed, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way destroyed, nor will we go against him, nor will we send against him, save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.

96 De Bracton, p.353.
The text of *Magna Carta* gives no clear answer about its breadth in terms of gender, or who is being protected as ‘free [men]’. While the charter refers to ‘homo [man]’ and ‘homines [men]’ nineteen times, it only refers to ‘femina [woman]’ once. There are four remaining instances which address women specifically, two on the rights of widows [vidua] and two about widowed wives [uxor].98 Both are concerned with remarriage and dower, therefore reflecting the interests and anxieties of property-holding men. However, the masculine grammatical default in early law texts such as *Magna Carta* does not necessarily indicate women’s exclusion from legal subjecthood. In medieval law, ‘homo [man]’ could be used to mean human being, and the omission of women may simply reflect that there was ‘no difference in penalty’.99 However, while women could be ‘arrested’, ‘imprisoned’, ‘disseised’ or ‘exiled’, they could not be outlawed. Chapter 39 does not mention waivery, and its absence discloses the fundamentally different position women occupy in law. As David Carpenter puts it, ‘if [chapter 39] embraced women, [it] also ignored them’.100 For women, then, what lies beneath a speculative notion of inclusion, is ultimately another layer of exclusion. This exclusion is framed by the wider context of the position of women in public law: as Michelle M. Sauer notes, the legal doctrine of coverture, in which ‘a woman could only be defined as a person under the law if she was married’ established the notion that ‘an unmarried woman could not be a person since she had no male body to become part of […] she was only a person as far as being an extension of her husband’.101 *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie qui Glanvill vocatur* [Treatise on the Laws and Customs of England] (c.1187), often regarded as ‘the first textbook of English common law’, states that women possess the legal agency ‘to accuse another of injury done to her body’, in both cases

---

98 Carpenter, p.252.
100 Carpenter, p.252.
of rape and if she witnesses the death of her husband, echoing the notion that ‘husband and wife are one flesh’.\textsuperscript{102} Chapter 54 of \textit{Magna Carta} and Bracton’s \textit{On the Laws and Customs of England} (c.1235) maintained Glanvill’s stipulations, with the exception of further dictating that an appeal for the death of a husband could only be made if he was ‘slain within her arms, and in no other way’\textsuperscript{103}.

Patriarchal anxieties about marital status and the legal autonomy of women continued to inform the meaning of waivery in the sixteenth century. The lack of evidence of outlawing and waiving in the Court Session Records of the Tudor period suggests that the practice had become less frequent. However, there are anomalies which indicate that it had not been eliminated entirely. The letters and papers of Henry VIII detail cases which require the conferment of royal authority, some of which are ‘pricked by the King’.\textsuperscript{104} In November 1529, a grant was made to a couple who had previously been outlawed and waived. The document outlines the case of:

\begin{quote}
John Brewyn, of Farnam, Surrey, and Agnes his wife, executrix of Hen. Guenby, clothier, of Farnam, Surrey. Reversal of outlawry and waive; having been incarcerated in Fleet prison for debt.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

It seems that John and Agnes Brewyn did not appear before a court after being indicted for debt. While many outlaws and waives successfully fled to avoid attending their hearing, John and Agnes were captured and ‘incarcerated in Fleet prison’.\textsuperscript{106} The case indicates that Henry VIII approved the reversal of both their charges on account of the waived Agnes.

\textsuperscript{103} De Bracton, p.419.
\textsuperscript{105} Brewer, ‘Henry VIII 1529, 17-30’, p.2709.
\textsuperscript{106} Brewer, ‘Henry VIII 1529, 17-30’, p.2709.
Significantly, Agnes is described as both John’s ‘wife’ and an ‘executrix’\(^{107}\). While her legal identity as a wife reflects the context of coverture, her role as an ‘executrix’ or ‘a woman appointed to execute a will’ grants her some autonomy.\(^{108}\) Indeed, it is implied that the charge of debt against John and Agnes is reversed solely due to her access to the goods and capital of ‘Hen. Guenby’, a clothier from the same town. Though unusual, this case reiterates how women established legal agency through their relationship to marriage, property and inheritance. In this way, the practices of waivery in the sixteenth century echo the primary concerns regarding the judicial autonomy of women found in *Magna Carta*.

As Chapter Four of this thesis discusses, while cases of waivery are difficult to trace in the Tudor period, Henrician works which included definitions of waivery were reprinted for an Elizabethan audience. More cases of waivery survive from King James VI and I’s reign, suggesting a resurgence of the practice of waiving in law. The County of Middlesex Court Session Records document twenty-two separate cases of waivery between 1612 and 1615. In these General Sessions held at Westminster and Gaol Delivery at the Old Bailey, women were waived for a number of felonies, including ‘burglaries’, ‘tresspases’ and ‘riots, routs, and unlawful assemblies’\(^{109}\). In all of these cases, the waived women are defined by their marital status as either ‘wife’, ‘widow’ or ‘spinster’\(^{110}\). The use of the term ‘spinster’ in these later court sessions show that legal categories for women continued to be structured around marital status. Appended to the names of women, ‘spinster’ originally denoted an occupation, but ‘subsequently (from the seventeenth century) [was] the proper legal designation of one still unmarried’\(^{111}\). In being associated with an occupation and of being

\(^{108}\) ‘Executrix’, (n., OED, 1).
\(^{110}\) Le Hardy, pp.243-293.
\(^{111}\) ‘Spinster’, (n., OED, 2a).
‘beyond the age for marriage […] an old maid’, waivery also accrues connotations of class, age and status.\textsuperscript{112}

Waivery, then, does not function as a neutral term analogous to outlawry. The very existence of the waive exposes the extralegal reality in which women took action \textit{beyond} the law’s proscriptions. Although women cannot be outlawed as they are never ‘under’ the law autonomously, the necessity for the separate term indicates that they are capable of violating and subsequently fleeing from the law. Equally, women cannot be prosecuted directly as they do not possess the legal rights to attend their own court hearing, yet the processes of outlawry and waivery are founded upon a refusal to be present \textit{in} court. The addition of legal designations such as ‘executrix’ and ‘spinster’ in the sixteenth century and seventeenth century also demonstrate how further categories were constructed alongside the waive to grant women legal recognition outside of marriage. While Sara M. Butler suggests that the implication of coverture is the ‘total erasure of a woman’s legal personality’, I suggest that the emergence of the legal term waive carries the potential to reposition women as more visible and individualised subjects.\textsuperscript{113}

This thesis develops the limited taxonomies of exceptional women by approaching the waive as a broad cultural signifier. Long Meg does not meet the criteria of the waive in legal terms: she is not indicted for a crime, nor is she called to court in any of the surviving texts in which she appears. She is not ‘abandoned’ as the waive is in legal texts, and remains part of a community in a city-space.\textsuperscript{114} However, as Coote and Johnson note, the ‘essential elements’ of an ‘outlaw narrative’ do not necessarily involve outlawry as an event.\textsuperscript{115} There is a distinction between the legal realities of outlawry and the discourses which surround its

\textsuperscript{112} ‘Spinster’, (n., OED, 2b).
\textsuperscript{114} Bracton, p.353.
\textsuperscript{115} Coote and Johnson, p.3.
cultural representations. The outlaw figure takes on a broader role in the popular imagination as a ‘resister and challenger, a rebel as well as a freedom fighter’.

Taking into account the reductive characterisation of women to ‘weyffes and wedowes’ in both legal documents and outlaw narratives, I describe Long Meg as a waive heroine. I use the term waive heroine to provide a more nuanced account of the structural similarities between Long Meg and the outlaw heroism of Robin Hood. As Stephen Knight notes, the Robin Hood tradition reproduces the popular motif of the ‘good outlaw’, a cultural figure who can violate the law through anti-establishment sentiment and violence whilst promising merriment. While Long Meg has not been exiled to the greenwood, her relationship to the cultural discourses of outlawry can be understood in more nuanced terms through the waive. Just as the outlaw and the waive are conceived as separate terms, so too are Robin Hood and Long Meg distinct. The retrieved term of the waive thus frames this case study of Long Meg.

Biopolitics provides a framework through which to discuss the extralegal language surrounding Long Meg and the waive. In its broadest terms, ‘biopolitics’ is etymologically comprised of two parts ‘bios’ (life) and ‘politikos’ (politics); together signifying life as the basis or object of politics. Michel Foucault introduces the concept into Western philosophy to interrogate the body’s central role in regimes of power and knowledge. For Foucault, biopolitics provides a framework through which to interrogate the dialogue between the body, power, and knowledge underpinning state mechanisms. He first uses the term in his lecture La naissance de la médecine [The Birth of Social Medicine] in October 1974. In this lecture, Foucault argues that societal control over individuals is not solely accomplished through ideology, but requires political techniques which subjugate bodies. He declares that ‘[f]or the capitalist society […] it was biopolitics, the biological, the somatic, the corporal,

116 Coote and Johnson, p.3.
118 Knight, p.26.
that meant more than anything else. The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy’. 119 Foucault looks beyond the medical institution to expand his definition of biopolitics in ‘Right of Death and Power of Life’, the final section of the first volume of The History of Sexuality (1978). 120 Here, Foucault argues that life had replaced death as the main domain of sovereign power, establishing ‘a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, ordering them’ rather than ‘making them submit, or destroying them’. 121 Within this new strategy, the law functions as a regulatory and corrective mechanism. Foucault concludes that ‘it was life more than the law that became the issue of political struggles’. 122 In its aims to ‘qualify, measure, appraise, and hierachize’ 123 living subjects, the law is thus foundationally biopolitical.

While Foucault suggests that biopolitics coincides with the emergence of capitalism ‘starting in the seventeenth century’, Giorgio Agamben argues that biopolitical strategies are foundational to the Greco-Roman state. 124 In Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998), Agamben traces the etymology of biopolitics. He suggests that though ‘politikos’ offers a fairly simplistic translation in its Greek root, ‘bios’ is more pertinent. In Ancient Greek terms, life was divided into two distinct categories, zoē and bios. While zoē expresses ‘the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)’, bios refers to ‘the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group’ (HS, p.1). Politically qualified life, then, forms a part of bios: citizenship is established through an ability to function as ‘an individual or a group’ (HS, p.1), exemplified by the medieval concept of frankpledge and tithing. Despite its prefix, biopolitics is not exclusively interested in the political life of man

---

121 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.136.
122 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.145.
123 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.144.
124 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.139.
(bios), but rather how natural life (otherwise known as bare life or zoë) ‘begins to be included in the mechanisms and calculations of state power’, thus depriving or limiting the ‘living proper’ (HS, p.3) which bios represents. In other words, biopolitics is concerned with how ‘politics turns into biopolitics’, a process which makes ‘life itself both the subject and object of politics’ (HS, p.3). In effect, Agamben echoes De Bracton’s On the Laws and Customs of England. The educational materials used for the study of English common law ‘owed much to the Roman law tradition’ on which Agamben’s philosophical studies centre.125 Prominent legal treatises such as Glanvill, Britton, and Fleta, as well as Magna Carta contain Roman ‘concepts and principles’ which indicate a ‘revival of interest in Roman law’126 in twelfth and thirteenth century England. The transposition of Roman legal concepts onto English common law was heavily informed by the intellectualisation and growth of legal education: comprehensive legal training now required written instruction, formalised by the authority of the ‘learned’ law of antiquity. Anthony Musson asserts de Bracton itself is ‘infused with Roman law concepts and distinctions to the extent that it should be seen as a synthesis of both traditions’.127 Agamben’s Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998) examines the roman category ‘homo sacer’ (‘sacred man’), situating the Greco-Roman concept of biopolitics in Western philosophy. De Bracton’s Laws and Customs of England (c.1235) and Agamben’s Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998) therefore share a foundational interest in Roman law, bringing these seemingly disparate works into dialogue. 

‘[D]ivided between the forest and the city’, the bandit or outlaw occupies a space at ‘[the] passage between animal and man, physis and nomos, exclusion and inclusion […] neither man nor beast, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither’ (HS, p.105). For Agamben, the outlawed man exemplifies ‘an exclusive inclusion (which

---

126 Musson, p.38.
127 Musson, p.39.
thus serves to include what is excluded’), only featured in a document explicating the law to declare his removal from its protection (HS, p.20). It therefore seems that women, or rather waives, push this indistinction further which, by extension of Agamben’s terms, is an exclusive exclusion (HS, p.105). Magna Carta establishes that while the outlawed man is seen to be at once within the law and outside it, the waived woman is both suspended in the law and in language. Magna Carta is part of a wider pattern in which waivery is marked by a textual elusiveness, only to be mentioned fleetingly and inconsistently. While this may be in part because cases of waivery were ‘relatively rare occurrence[s]’, its absence from what sought to be the most comprehensive legal text of its time remains significant, highlighting the extent of the waive’s exceptional status.128 Noting the intersections between Roman law, early English law, and Agamben’s biopolitical model, my thesis on ‘Long Meg of Westminster: women, waives, and outlaws in Premodern England’ unravels the layers of exclusion from which the waive is formed. The layers of exclusion which define the legal status of the waive are echoed in the literary representations of Long Meg. Through the connections I draw between the Greco-Roman principles of biopolitics, the premodern waive, and Long Meg of Westminster, I do not seek to form a ‘histiographical theses or reconstruction’.129 As Michéle Lowrie puts it, ‘the explanatory value of the homo sacer resides not in its historicity, but in its being “good to think with”’.130 This thesis therefore imports Agamben’s conceptual vocabulary at the point wherein the logic of inclusion and exclusion is transposable. Like Agamben, I ‘employ historical material methods […] [not] as a historian’.131 I treat the premodern waive as less of a broad paradigm ‘standing equally for

all others of the same class’, and more as a specific case study.

What is central to my project, then, is the vocabulary of double negation, a paradox made accessible by Agamben’s key theoretical ideas of suspension and exceptionalism in law. Crucially, Agamben extends Carl Schmitt’s notion of the exception in *Political Theology* (1922). Schmitt famously asserts that the sovereign is ‘he who decides on the exception’, possessing the absolutist power to determine what the law is, who it addresses and protects, and when these defining principles should be suspended. Agamben asserts that, in order for laws to be formulated, they must be preceded by ‘the repetition of the same act without any sanction’ (*HS*, p.26). It is therefore through ‘exceptional case[s]’ that the law is first established: the exception ‘does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule’ (*HS*, p.18). The exception, not the sovereign, therefore expresses ‘the originary formal structure of the juridical relation’ (*HS*, p.20). In this sense, the authority of the sovereign does not predetermine the exception: anomalous and unlegislated activity *produces* the exception, once it presents as a frequent and unwanted problem to the sovereign. The waive emerges as an exception by committing acts which destabilises the assertion that women are not ‘in law’. She is therefore suspended; both bound to the law and abandoned by it.

Underpinning the dynamic between the sovereign and the exception is the fundamental concept of *inclusive exclusion*, in which the inclusion of life within law coincides with the exclusion of life from law. Having already determined the exception through ‘repetition’, legislature emerges from a paradox in which individuals or groups are included in the legal order to denote their exclusion. According to Agamben, the ‘law is made

---

of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through […] inclusive exclusion’ (HS, p.27). As a legal category, the waive presents a striking example of what the exception might look like in practice and how this exceptionalism might differ once positioned along gendered lines. Agamben’s relevance to the figure of the premodern waive emerges more broadly through the ‘tight integration of life and law’ that constitutes biopower. Positioned at the point where life and law converges, the biopolitical vocabulary of Homo Sacer facilitates a more nuanced reading of Long Meg as a waive figure. Biopolitics exposes the paradoxical nature of premodern law formation in both theoretical/textual and embodied/material terms. Working out from Michel Foucault, biopolitics addresses the material concerns of life, bodies, and matter, and how these materialities are intertwined with power structures. Diane Coole and Samantha Frost consider bioethics and biopolitics as integral strands of new materialist scholarship, identifying ‘the role played by the body as a visceral protagonist within political encounters’. Long Meg’s negotiations of clothing, physicality, and private and public spaces therefore reflects the ordering of ‘things, time, [and] bodies’ which shape the law. In this way, Meg’s materiality reflects how the law is part of the wider political ideology of premodern England, making knowledge and sustaining power over its subjects.

The biopolitical focus of this study reflects my emphasis on the legal materiality of Meg, examining her body as a site of exclusion through Agamben’s vocabulary. In its methodology of biopolitics and materialism, my thesis does not see literary and legal texts as oppositional, but as co-constitutively shaping meaning and matter through language. Meg emerges from a period which saw England try to forge a national identity in law and

135 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.136.
literature. Setting up the royal courts in Westminster, the ‘centralising judicial elite’ was at odds with ‘the local criminal justice system’, resulting in ‘a clash of linguistic cultures’.  

During this conflict, English remained the language of oral complaint, and it was not until 1731 that English replaced Latin as the foremost language of written legal records. The orality of Meg’s tradition, coupled with her Westminster location, suggests that she is a figure of legal resistance for a non-elite readership. In both law and literature, Meg’s characterisation is informed by what Jenny C. Mann coins as the strive for ‘vernacular eloquence’. As English antiquarians became ‘aware of their nation’s status as a former colony of the Roman Empire’, the humanist emphasis on Greco-Roman rhetorical eloquence sat uneasily with writers constructing a national history and identity. Mann argues that while a reverence for classical Latin as the ‘one true form of eloquent expression’ continued in the sixteenth century, the cultural authority of classical languages was problematised as writers ‘increasingly came to believe that England needed an equally distinguished vernacular language to serve its burgeoning national community’. For Mann, ‘the inability of English to approximate classical eloquence produces neither silence nor ineloquence, but storytelling,’ thus leading to an increased invocation of English folktales, particularly the famous outlaw Robin Hood. In the second rhetorical manual to be published in the vernacular, Richard Sherry’s _A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes_ (1550), the reader is assured to ‘[d]oubt not but that the title of this treatise all strange vnto our English eares […] perceiuynge nothing to be therin that pleaseth their phansy, [they] wyl count it but a trifle, &

---

137 Dodd, p.17.
139 Mann, p.12.
140 Mann, p.2.
141 Mann, p.3.
a tale of Robynhoode’. While the invocation of Robin Hood amongst sixteenth-century rhetoricians is intended to resolve the issue of establishing English ‘vernacular eloquence’, the presence of an English outlaw creates further anxieties. Robin Hood in his most idealised form ‘provides more fertile ground for the valorization of English rhetoric as a national product’. However, the perceived vulgarity of outlaw figures raises questions regarding social inferiority and linguistic prestige. As this thesis will demonstrate, tensions surrounding English vernacular eloquence are rooted in Meg’s embodied subjectivity.

Divided into five chapters, this thesis considers the exceptional status of the waive, and to what extent Long Meg exemplifies an exclusive exclusion from law and language. Though each chapter engages with these key terms in distinct ways, the discussion is structured by the shape of Long Meg’s tradition. Chapters One to Three foreground the jest culture and community surrounding earlier representations of Meg as a protagonist. Chapter One, ‘The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635): Suspension in law and language’ introduces The Life of Long Meg (c.1635), the first extant jestbook outlining the root narrative from which Long Meg’s tradition develops. Taking up its invocation of outlaw hero Robin Hood, my analysis of the jestbook suggests that Long Meg can be understood through establishing a parallel category, the ‘waive heroine’. Chapter Two considers the jesting community that develops between Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton. Extending the aims of Chapter One, I assert that Long Meg’s suspension in law and language produces moments in which she is able to be more subversive and dynamic than her male counterparts. Chapter Three, ‘Performing waivery?: Long Meg and the Early Modern Stage’, examines the place of Long Meg in late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Alongside fleeting invocations of Meg in works such as Nathan Fields’ Amends for Ladies (c.1611) and Robert Tailor’s The

Hog Hath Lost His Pearl (c.1612), I extend the discussion of Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton to the early modern stage. While the titular play Long Meg of Westminster (c.1594) is lost, Skelton appears across stage productions which feature Robin Hood and Long Meg. In both Anthony Munday’s The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington (c.1598) and Ben Jonson’s later court masque The Fortunate Isles and their Union (c.1624), these jesting figures are taken up as a theatrical resource, and their shared vernacular language is bound up in the ideological construction of Englishness.

Departing from the jest community, Chapters Four and Five explore communities of women surrounding Meg. Chapter Four, ‘Locating the urban waive in Elizabethan England: from legal definitions to Long Meg of Westminster’, critically examines the legal ephemera defining waivery in the Elizabethan period alongside Thomas Deloney’s The Gentle Craft the second part (c.1598). Responding to the patriarchal anxieties generated by Elizabeth I’s absolutist authority, the period sees a renewed interest in asserting the language of the law in vernacular English. Against this backdrop, the waive’s suspension in law and language shifts, and tensions between women and judicial agency surface in literary materials. In the fifth and final chapter, ‘Textual afterlives: the spectre, death, and legacy of Long Meg of Westminster’, I examine the suspension between life and death which characterises Meg’s appearances as a ghost. Returning to the first extant jestbook, I reflect on the final episode of The Life of Long Meg (1635) alongside Meg’s ghostly invocation in the pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell and Joane Hit-him-home’s The Women’s Sharpe Revenge (1640).

In producing a detailed study of Long Meg of Westminster as a textual and biopolitical subject, ‘Long Meg of Westminster: women, waives and outlaws in premodern England’ develops existing research on the roles of women in outlaw narratives in distinctive ways. Taking women’s exclusion from outlawry as my point of departure, I argue that the literary tradition of Long Meg provides an alternative to Robin Hood’s which parallels the
waive. The outlaw is a known figure: he is recognised, repeated, and reimagined in popular culture. The traditions of Long Meg and the lost waive are united by an exclusion from outlawry, and together they illuminate the tensions between gender and law in premodern England.
Chapter One

The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635): A Suspension in Law and Language

This chapter has two key aims. Firstly, by introducing the 1635 jestbook which provides the foundational narrative for Long Meg’s tradition, I demonstrate the relevance of the ‘waive heroine’ model and set up the discussion for the future adaptations of Meg in later chapters. Secondly, in its analysis of The Life of Long Meg (1635), I address the modes of exceptionality emanating from Meg’s suspension in law and language. As outlined in the introduction, I use the term ‘exception’ in the Agambenian sense to articulate the exclusion from the law which enables the waive to operate in excess of it. It is this exclusive exclusion which allows Long Meg to operate extralegally, enacting justice on her own terms. When women are made proximate to outlaws or present in outlaw(ed) spaces, they are fashioned as exceptional through being superlative and exemplary.¹ Meg is thus both exceptional and an exception in her characterisation. Her position in excess of the law must be established as unusual, and is therefore framed by extraordinary qualities and behaviour. Whilst resisting the reduction of gender to a neat assemblage of outward signifiers, this chapter suggests that the suspension in law and language central to the waive is complexly reflected in Meg’s negotiations of materiality. In the absence of a named category, genre, or identity marker, Meg is discursively constructed at the intersection between corporeality, clothing, and space.

From the outset, Meg’s exceptional status is established through her physical description. In the opening pages of the 1635 jestbook The Life of Long Meg, Meg is first defined in these terms:

[S]he did not onely passe all the rest of her Country in the length of her proportion, but every limbe was so fit to her fatnesse; that she seemed the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womens mould.

(LM, B.1)

In surpassing all others in the ‘length of her proportion’, Long Meg’s worth is determined by an embodied exceptionality (LM, B.1). Published in the same year as the earliest surviving invocations of Long Meg, George Puttenham’s The Arte of English Poesie (1589) outlines the metaphoric function of measurement through what ‘the Greeks call […] Analogie or a conuenient proportion’. Puttenham asserts that ‘comelynesse resteth in the good conformitie of many things […] with respect one to another, so as there be found a just correspondencie between them by this or that relation’. Through the rhetoric found in Greco-Roman thought, Puttenham understands ‘comelynesse’ to be determined through processes of relational measurement. The value invested in bodily quantification emerges from a pre-Cartesian moment, where human measurement was thought to extend beyond mere data to reveal the nature and worth of a person. As Paula Blank notes, early modern measurement offered a revised system of ‘qualifications, standardizations, or “normalizations”’, not only articulated in empirical terms, but with ‘discursive and performative functions’. In biopolitical terms, these measurements provided an ‘index of a society’s strength’, and were used in processes of disciplining and quantifying the body. Puttenham’s focus on ‘good conformitie’ to achieve ‘comelynesse’ reflect an investment in the body as an instrument for social control.

In Puttenham’s terms, then, how can Long Meg’s exceptional dimensions be in line with ‘good conformitie’? Bound up in a distinct national identity, the ‘correspondencie between’ Meg and ‘the rest of her Country’ secures her mythological status. ‘[B]orne of very

---

3 Puttenham, p.262.
5 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.139.
honest and wealthy parents’, Meg’s proportions are not seen as a genetic aberration, but are situated in the class conscious context of ‘good lineage’ (\textit{LM}, B.1'). Meg’s use of language within the jestbook corresponds to the ‘good conformitie’ her body signifies. For example, when Meg meets an impoverished and unemployed soldier in Chapter Five of the jestbook, she tells him that he should ‘be merry and fall to some seruice, for such idle slaues as thou art, are moathes [moths] of the Commonwealth’ (\textit{LM}, C.1'). In the address to the reader, the author writes that he ‘bethought […] of Long Meg’ when he ‘was idle’ (\textit{LM}, A.3'). Echoing the address, Meg holds the former soldier in contempt as an ‘idle slaue’ (\textit{LM}, C.1') and a burden to the Commonwealth. Meg’s language is therefore used to reinforce the ideological strategies of the state: while the jestbook is written and read whilst ‘idle’, idleness itself is condemned within the narrative. Meg continues, arguing that the soldier takes delight in living ‘at the sweat of other mens browes’ (\textit{LM}, C.1'). This criticism emphasises that in Meg’s terms, the soldier’s value is determined by embodied, physical labour.

Meg also issues morals and warnings against corrupt officials using language which extrajudicially echoes the punishment of the law. Here, conformity is situated outside of the state, as Meg enacts justice on a Bailiff who has entered the tavern space to collect the debt of a patron. As failure to pay results in arrest, Meg attempts to bribe and threaten the Bailiff before giving him a ‘good knocke’ (\textit{LM}, C.3'). After hitting him, Meg menacingly addresses the Bailiff, announcing that she will ‘learne thee whilest thou livest to arrest a man in our house. By gogs bloud you villaine, Ile make you a spectacle for all such Catchpoules’ (\textit{LM}, C.3'). In a chaotic inversion of the Bailiff’s formal arrest, Meg vows to ‘learne’ him through extralegal and public ‘spectacle’ involving tying a rope around his waist and forcing him to ‘wade thorow [a] Pond’ (\textit{LM}, C.3'). Conformity is thus established through language according to Meg’s personal brand of justice, and dissenting figures are identified and punished by and through the body.
While others bodies must be disciplined according to Meg’s judgement, Meg’s own body is fundamentally characterised by a suspension, operating beyond the ‘analogie […] or conuienient proportion’ which Puttenham lauds.⁶ The physical description of Meg concludes that ‘every limbe was so fit to her fatnesse; that she seemed the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womans mould’ (LM, B.1). This suspension is not conceived as a monstrosity in the jestbook (as in the Hic Mulier pamphlet c.1620), but is part of the same ‘good conformitie’ of Puttenham’s ‘analogie’. Hic Mulier: or the man-woman ‘deliniates [the] proportion’ of the titular figure, who in having both a ‘lasciuous bawdy Bosome’ and a ‘leaden-hall dagger’, signifies ‘a mind and behaviour sutable for exceeding euery repeated deformatie’.⁷ The exceptional identity of Meg, both as an extralegal heroine and one who ‘passe[s] all the rest of her Country’ (LM, B.1) in height, enables her to evade the dominant gender ideologies of the period, exemplified by Hic Mulier. Nathan Fields’ Amends for Ladies (c.1611) makes clear that the subversive potential of Meg’s identity is not contained outside the narrative of the jestbook: in her conflation with Moll Cutpurse on the stage, she is synonymous with ‘Mistris Hic & Haec’.⁸

In the jestbook, the anatomical exactness of Meg’s ‘every limbe’ is what determines her suspension. In seeming ‘the picture and shape of some tall man’, she is aligned with a masculine appearance which, in remaining unanimated and two dimensional, does not present an embodied subject. ‘Cast in a woman’s mould’, a three dimensional form is imposed onto this ‘picture and shape’ of a man. While this ‘mould’ provides an exterior, it remains a hollow, nonporous construct. By this description, no fluids flow through the body: Meg’s gendered subjectivity is anxiously contained in a vacuum which, though it can be replicated, remains sealed. In its lack of substance and volume, a ‘picture and shape of some tall man’

---

⁶ Puttenham, p.262.
⁷ Anon, Hic Mulier: or, the man-woman: being a medicine to cure the coltish disease of the staggers in the masculine-feminines of our time. Expresst in a brief declamation (London: 1620), A.41.
⁸ Amends for Ladies, II.i.19.
cannot fill this cast. Meg is thus paradoxically marked by an absence within an absence, an exclusive exclusion, to recall Agamben’s definition of homo sacer as one ‘who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither’. Meg’s suspension is thus not represented as a fixed, relational position between a series of binaries. As the ‘picture and shape’ of a man cast ‘in a woman’s mould’, the measurement of Meg presents ‘slippages between surfaces’, man and woman, neither and both. In this way, Meg’s suspension echoes the concept of trans textuality posited by M. W. Bychowski, observing ‘the fluidity of what moves from one side to another, be it verso to recto, man to woman, or somewhere in between’. Taking up this initial description, this chapter sees Long Meg’s representation in embodied, gendered terms as part of a broader suspension in law and language. In order to participate in the archetypal behavior which parallels the ‘good outlaw’, Long Meg must negotiate the oppressively rigid gender essentialism imposed by English law. Having no place in language and no textual tradition, The Life of Long Meg jestbook produces an exceptional model resembling a ‘waive heroine’ from moments of suspension. Like the very shape and mould of Meg, the waive is a resemblance of a figure who cannot be fully materialised.

Extending the discussion of Magna Carta found in the introduction, I suggest that the extant edition of The Life of Long Meg (1635) also resides in a key moment of suspension for the waive in law. As Magna Carta takes on a new cultural relevance in the legal reforms of Caroline England, Robin Hood’s popularity recedes and Long Meg becomes culturally potent. Suspended in law and language, Long Meg’s exceptional tradition does not present as direct a challenge to ongoing tensions of sovereignty and governmentality as the outlaw. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates, The Life of Long Meg (1635) compellingly resonates with the

---

10 The phrase is M. W Bychowski’s, discussed in ‘Trans Textuality: Dysphoria in the depths of Medieval Skin’, Postmedieval, 9:3 (2018), 313-333.
11 Bychowski, p.319.
outlaw tradition, whilst continuing to be excluded from it. As an exceptional figure in literature and culture, Long Meg’s suspension in language also extends to the project of vernacular eloquence. Long Meg’s representation is further encoded in what Jenny C. Mann calls ‘the gendered relationship between Latin [the language of adult men] and English [the ‘mother’ tongue]’.

In seeming ‘the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a woman’s mould’ (LM, B.1), Long Meg is not confined to the oppositional categories of man and woman, Latin and English, and is thus inserted in the project of vernacular eloquence. Reading Long Meg in parallel to the waive, this chapter explores the material, biopolitical, legal and linguistic foundations to the originary jestbook The Life of Long Meg (1635).

Suspension in Law: The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635) and Magna Carta

Like the term waive itself, The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635) possesses a cultural significance in the context of Magna Carta. Though Magna Carta was first formulated and published in 1215, its potency within English consciousness and subsequent law-making remained for centuries after. Its popularity is thus shaped by numerous political and ideological forces. After its establishment in 1215, the charter becomes part of a broad narrative of decline and resurgence meaning that ‘each evocation has to be understood within the political culture of the time in which it is deployed’. Magna Carta, in its varying temporal stages of visibility and popularity, can be utilised as a cultural index to examine

---

12 Mann, p.147.
13 To briefly summarise, Magna Carta was initially used against King John in 1215, quickly reissued in 1217 following his death, then subsequently revised in 1225 to legitimise the ruling of young monarch Henry III, who as a boy of nine was unable to be sworn in to law due to his age, and previously assumed the throne under precarious circumstances. Magna Carta was then reiterated throughout the fourteenth century through the ‘royal confirmations of the Great Charter’ in parliament, which ‘drafted statues reinforcing [the] promises [of Magna Carta]’. In the fourteenth century, parliamentary business was conventionally preceded by a ‘public reading and reaffirmation of the Charter’. See Ralph V. Turner, Magna Carta: Through the Ages (London: Pearson Longman, 2003).
how ideas of monarchical and parliamentary sovereignty are received.\textsuperscript{15} As a textual artefact that also had practical punitive implications for living subjects, \textit{Magna Carta} is located at the intersection between law and literature. Invocations of \textit{Magna Carta} not only provide crucial insight into the political culture of a given period, but also reflect the wider textual, material culture in which law emerges \textit{in} literature. As we will see, Long Meg’s cultural visibility corresponds to that of \textit{Magna Carta}.

By the mid-fifteenth century, ‘\textit{Magna Carta} had slipped into the shadows of high politics where it remained until the seventeenth century’.\textsuperscript{16} The fundamental purpose of \textit{Magna Carta} is to assert the autonomy and rights of individual civil subjects. As we have already seen in the introduction, who is placed, pronounced, and protected is ideologically loaded, and \textit{Magna Carta} is not a neutral emblem of truth and justice: these English legal principles are shaped by the anglocentric values of the barons entrusted to write them. However, the charter remains symbolically tied to the notion of freedom. The assertion of the individual found in \textit{Magna Carta} undermines the absolutism of the sovereign, applying restraints to royal power when anxieties around leadership surface. Moments in which \textit{Magna Carta} resurfaces thus signify points of monarchical weakness and political turbulence. Tudor rule was largely marked by a powerful sovereignty capable of overshadowing the principle of the rule of law leading to \textit{Magna Carta}’s disappearance from view.\textsuperscript{17} However, the charter re-emerged in the seventeenth-century opposition to Stuart rule. From his rushed marriage by proxy to Henrietta Maria following his accession, to ‘the worst outbreak of plague in living memory’, Charles I’s rule was marked by socioeconomic and political instability from the outset.\textsuperscript{18} In light of the plague outbreak of 1625, the parliament

\textsuperscript{15} Coss, p.231.
\textsuperscript{17} Coss, p.231.
summoned was entirely new. While Charles initially ‘sought to reconvene the parliament of 1624’, he was ‘informed that its existence had ended with his father’s [James I/VI] death’, overtly expressing a lack of support for the new monarch. The internal conflict regarding Charles I’s absolutism only intensified further, as he attempted to raise funds for military and naval reinforcements through parliamentary subsidies. His misguided attempts to invoke patriotic, financial obligation in his subjects resulted in tensions within the commonwealth and a widespread lack of public support. As Kevin Sharpe puts it, ‘whilst his subjects pursued, as Charles saw it, their private interests [in providing limited or no subsidies], they unkinged the monarch whom God had placed the responsibility for protection of his people’. The greater visibility of Magna Carta, which asserts notions of parliamentary sovereignty and ‘enforces […] curbs on arbitrary royal authority’ thus indicates anxieties regarding Charles I’s increasingly questioned ability to rule.

The principles of Magna Carta figure spectacularly in both the Petition of Right of 1628, as well as the work of Sir Edward Coke, driving the concept of fundamental law. The 1628 Petition of Right, which relied heavily ‘on Magna Carta for its legal basis in reciting the common law principles of freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment […] and parliamentary consent to taxation’, was reluctantly approved by Charles. As ‘Charles warned the Commons that he would veto any bill that did more than reconfirm Magna Carta’, the formulation of The Petition of Right served a dual purpose. For parliamentary members, it confirmed their own agency and the limitations of sovereign power, and for Charles as the sovereign, it reaffirmed the limit of parliamentary committees currently attempting to extend their jurisdiction, threatening his divine right as King. Through his roles as a Member of

---

19 Kishlansky and Morrill, ‘Charles I (1600–1649)’, (para. 25 of 133).
22 Coss, p.231.
Parliament, judge and legal writer, Edward Coke proposed the petition, and was thus ‘offered […] the chance to make new law out of the greatest medieval statute’. While Charles could perhaps not reject constitutional forces at large, his attempts to censor the influence of *Magna Carta* are also seen in his seizure of Sir Edward Coke’s personal collections:

The Earl of Holland informed Secretary Dorchester that Charles I required that a book being written by Coke should be sent to the Lord Keeper for his inspection [...] In April 1632 Sir Thomas Barrington told his mother, “Sir Edward Coke hath his papers seized by reason of a report that he is about a book concerning *Magna Carta* and is likely to incur some trouble.” Another newswriter reported “sackfulls” of manuscripts being removed from Stoke Poges (Coke’s retirement residence) – among them commentaries on *Magna Carta*. In 1633 the King evidently considered calling in Coke’s published and circulated writings.

Coke’s use of *Magna Carta* to formulate a bill which was paradoxically new but also contained no further content than the original Charter had been approved by Charles in an official capacity. However, Coke’s independent use of *Magna Carta* outside of Charles’ prescribed domain of rewriting was seen as evidence of dissent. Indeed, ‘[t]he seizure of […] Coke’s collections [was] the biggest swoop made by the government in their determination to control papers of importance (either value or threat) to the state’. The complex, fragmented use of *Magna Carta* in the case of Edward Coke exemplifies how ‘there was neither universal contentment nor consensus [regarding the roles of the sovereign and parliament] in the 1630s.’

The publication of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635) therefore emerges from a political-textual climate where the evocation of *Magna Carta* was forcibly suppressed by reigning monarch Charles I. I argue that the growing instability surrounding *Magna Carta*

---

25 Sharpe, p.656.
26 Sharpe, p.657.
27 Sharpe, p.714.
has an impact on the cultural reception of the outlaw figure. The figure of the outlaw emerges directly from a challenge to the law, and in turn the authority of the sovereign. Moreover, it is Chapter 39 of Magna Carta which famously declares the protection of any ‘free man’ who is to be ‘outlawed’, thus further disrupting the inherent decisionism of the sovereign as ‘he who decides on the exception’. The celebration of the outlaw figure perhaps proves less popular in the context of Charles I’s unstable rule and the reassertion of Magna Carta. Charles I himself refers to outlawry in his ‘Proclamation for suppressing of false Rumours touching Parliament’ on the twenty-seventh of March 1629. He denounces a member of the obstinate parliamentary faction, allegedly Sir John Eliot, who in making ‘scandalous and seditious proposition in the House of Commons’ is deemed ‘an outlawed man, desperate in mind and fortune’. The King’s invocation of the outlaw to figuratively describe one who is an ‘ill disposed person’ to the State suggests that the outlaw in fiction is more culturally precarious in this historical moment.

By the seventeenth century, outlawry had accrued negative political connotations, and this shift impacted the reception of Robin Hood tales. The famous outlaw had even gained associations with regicide, as found ‘[i]n a letter from 1605, Robert Cecil, a powerful aristocrat, [which] called Guy Fawkes’s colleagues in the Gunpowder Plot “Robin Hoods”’. Writers of the seventeenth century seemed increasingly aware of the more severe political anxieties now culturally emanating from the outlaw tradition. This is best exemplified in the work of Martin Parker, who published the ballad A True Tale of Robin Hood in 1632, just three years prior to Long Meg’s reappearance in The Life of Long Meg of Westminster. Parker seeks to defuse the tensions emanating from the literary outlaw. Emphasising ‘the gentrification and the historicizing of the tradition’, the ballad strikingly concludes with a

28 Schmitt, p.5.
30 Knight, p.82.
message which suggests traditional outlaws ‘should not survive in the early modern period’. PARKER’s final message asserts that ‘[w]e that live in these latter dayes | Of Civill government, | If neede be, haue a hundred wayes, | Such outlawes to prevent’. The ballad implicitly critiques the forms of sovereignty in which outlaws previously thrived, foregrounding the quashing power of ‘Civill government’. Compounded by the renewed interest in Magna Carta, this dismissive conclusion reiterates the cultural instability which now underpinned outlawry.

The climate of controversy surrounding the outlaw tradition is also informed by the geopolitics of the 1630s. The forest, once the location of merriment outside of sovereign rule in the Robin Hood tales, was now the site of an unpopular policy. Not only was the ‘sixteenth-century legislation against Robin Hood play-games’ upheld, but Charles I also selectively re-invoked the Forest laws of Magna Carta, enforced under the new direction of lord treasurer Richard Weston. The reintroduction of these laws was in part seen as a means of improving royal revenue, and was deeply displeasing to the public. Originally formulated in Henry III’s 1217 reissue of Magna Carta, the Forest Charter stated that amercements could be imposed in cases of ‘poaching and hunting deer and boar’ and ‘purpresture, waste, and assart’. Purpresture encompassed the construction of ‘buildings and enclosures; waste was cutting down trees; and assart was clearance for the creation of new arable land’. In contrast to the law of the kingdom, shaped by both the sovereign and parliamentary members, the forest was henceforth invested with a special royal status which ensured its governance was ‘entirely a matter for him’. As David Carpenter notes, ‘the Dialogus de Scaccario

31 Knight, p.82.
34 Knight, p.82.
35 Carpenter, p.169.
36 Carpenter, p.169.
37 Carpenter, p.169.
[Dialogue concerning the Exchequer] stressed that the law of the forest […] depended on the arbitrary will of the king alone: “solius regis arbitrio [the sole judgement of the King]”.

It was the principle of total sovereignty that Charles I exploited, as he utilised eyre proceedings (a localised judicial system held by an itinerant judge) to ‘arbitrate between the respective interests of the Crown, and the forest inhabitants’.

Under Charles’ rule, this process of enforcing fines was contingent on a constant ‘redefinition of forest boundaries’ and royal territories, resulting in ‘the frequently arbitrary nature of the eyre proceedings’.

“What troubled people was not the revival of the Forest laws’, but ‘the use and payment or informers, the intimidation of juries’ and ‘the cavalier attitude towards documentary evidence’.

While the motif of the ‘greenwood’ found in The Gest of Robyn Hode once implied that though outlawed, the forest-dwellers’ attitude and lifestyle is merry, the reintroduction of The Forest Charter created new significations of corruption and civil unrest.

Conversely, the Westminster of Long Meg’s namesake and residence emerges as a fictionalised landmark when ‘cities were an amalgam of interests – clerical and lay, elite and popular – only some were alienated by royal policies’. Westminster was the location in which parliamentary MPs presented ‘the grievances of their localities’. This is exemplified in 1639, where ‘[t]he commonalty of Newcastle petitioned the town’s mayor to instruct the MPs going to Westminster “to stand out for the liberties and freedom of the subjects which is principally in the maintenance of Magna Carta and the other fundamental parliamentary laws”’. While Meg is not an MP, she is a local woman of Lancashire travelling to Westminster to pursue such liberties and freedoms. As such, the imagined setting of

---

38 Carpenter, p.169.
40 Hart, p.147.
41 Hart, p.147.
42 Sharpe, p.635.
43 Sharpe, p.858.
44 Sharpe, p.859.
Westminster presents a more utopian vision than the forest once did. Meg demonstrates an interest in protecting or ‘standing out’ for the liberties and freedoms of others, and in doing so, implicitly champions the principles of *Magna Carta*. The tensions now bound up in Robin Hood’s identity, coupled with Charles’ contempt for outlawry when confronting his wayward parliamentary subjects, may explain the increased emphasis on Long Meg of Westminster as the foregrounded folkloric hero. Long Meg, then, emerges as an analogical surrogate to the outlaw: *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* includes all the heroic deeds and merriment of an outlaw narrative, without the dangerous implications of a protagonist ever capable of being within the *polis*. It is the *exclusive exclusion* of women, both legally and textually, which leaves the waive unnamed in *Magna Carta* and Long Meg uncategorised in *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*. Long Meg of Westminster is thus able to emerge as an elusive literary construct, aligned through absence to a waive-heroine. While the text remains politically charged, Long Meg occupies a more ideologically ambiguous terrain, evading monarchical controversy and legal scrutiny where the outlaw cannot. The tales of her ‘mad merry prankes’ are thus able to be enjoyed without, at least, immediate concerns of sociopolitical disruption. To advance Gartenberg and Capp’s brief remarks aligning Long Meg of Westminster with Robin Hood, I offer a substantial account of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* as a text which presents an alternative folkloric figure suspended in law and language, working between masculinity and femininity, Latin and English. These forms of suspension are shaped by a biopolitical exceptionality at the heart of Meg’s tradition from the moment she is measured. Through examining how the language of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635) contains resonances – as well as conscious departures – from the Robin Hood tradition, I provide a nuanced approach to the absence of the waive. I outline Long Meg’s place within language as a northern figure, and how traces of the familiar narrative tropes of the outlaw tradition reiterate Meg’s relational position to Robin Hood. While Long
Meg’s tradition cannot be named, it is through the dialogue between the two figures that her exceptionality can be interrogated.

Suspension in Language: Long Meg and Robin Hood

Which man’s ‘picture and shape’ (LM, Sig. B.1) does Long Meg resemble in language? As we have already seen in the introduction, the author of The Life of Long Meg (1635) makes a case for Robin Hood in the prefatory address. In her relational position to ‘jests’ (LM, A.3), Long Meg’s identity is mediated through the outlaw. However, the network of male figures framing the address to the reader extends beyond Robin Hood to the Greek orator Cicero. The author persuades their ‘Gentleman’ readers that ‘Cicero would oft Deliberate after his weighty affaires; so I hope you will use Long Meg as a whetstone to mirth after your serious business’ (LM, Sig. A.3). In presenting Long Meg’s mirth as a ‘whetstone’ to ‘weighty affaires’, the author panders to the erudite political culture of the 1580s and 90s, in which the Elizabethan commonwealth comprised a ‘counsel of virtuous subjects [who were] informed by a fusion of Ciceronian ideals of citizenship and duty to the Protestant nation’. Suspended between Cicero and Robin Hood, classical antiquity and folkloric Englishness, Long Meg of Westminster embodies the project of vernacular eloquence for the Tudor state. As Jenny C. Mann has noted, the invocation of an outlaw figure was not uncommon in English rhetorical manuals. Indeed, the notion of ‘weighty affaires’ can also be found in Thomas Wilson’s Arte of Rhetoric (1553):

If [the audience likes] not to hear weighty affairs, we may promise them strange news and persuade them laugh […] Demosthenses, therefore, seeing at a time the fondness of people to be such that he could not obtain them to hear him speak his mind in an earnest cause concerning the wealth of his country, required them to tarry and he would tell them a tale of Robin Hood.47

46 See Mann, pp.29-54.
Just as Cicero is positioned alongside Long Meg of Westminster, so too is Demosthenes situated in relation to Robin Hood. As Wilson elaborates, the audience are ‘won together by this merry toy’ and ‘having them attentive’, will hear Demosthenes ‘earnest cause concerning the wealth of his country’. It is through their ability to captivate the national imagination that Robin Hood and Long Meg become discursive sites for ‘earnest cause[s]’ and ‘serious businesse’. The model described by Wilson, in which the Greco-Roman orator invokes the English folkloric figure is transformed in The Life of Long Meg (1635). The author of The Life of Long Meg inverts Demosthenes’ rhetorical device for his own purposes. Synthesising the contemporary popularity of Robin Hood with the classical status of Cicero, Long Meg emerges as a new subject. Drawing from overlapping sources to suit their project, the author of The Life of Long Meg reproduces a model of intellectual moderation, where classical philosophy and ‘mad merry prakes’ are enjoyed simultaneously. From this suspension between oration and storytelling, Long Meg’s ‘mould’ is formed, manufacturing a myth to bear contents of nostalgic nationalism.

Long Meg’s role in the enterprise of vernacular eloquence extends beyond the text’s prefatory address. The renovation of England’s national and linguistic identity is also heavily embedded in the Northern materiality of Meg. As Chapter Two of this thesis will discuss more fully, the narrative topography of Robin Hood and Long Meg is key to their northern identities. It is, however, worth briefly noting that Meg’s regional identity is suspended between Lancashire and London. In a titular sense, Long Meg is ‘of Westminster’, but she is also insistently a ‘Lancashire Lasse’ (LM, C.1 ). By situating her northern identity in the geography of early modern London, Long Meg embodies regional-capital tensions,

reiterating her position as ‘neither and both’. Comprised of eighteen short chapters, *The Life of Long Meg* guides us through a chronological series of adventures across the metropolis of London, many of which are marked by brute force. Once integrated in the merry world tales of cheap print, the Northern identity that Meg asserts accrues distinct stylistic and aesthetic qualities. As Harriet Philips notes, narratives centering on ‘merry England’ offered ‘a version of the past which could be imaginatively inhabited’. After completing her journey to Westminster, Long Meg is met with an accumulation of stock images, characters, and plots which resituate her regional violence in an existing tradition of Tudor nostalgia and national glory.

Arriving at the tavern ‘the Eagle in Westminster’, Long Meg is introduced to a ‘Spanish knight called Sir James of Castile, Doctor Skelton, and Will Sommers’ (*LM*, B.2). While Sir James of Castile reflects ‘the English taste for Spanish chivalric romances’, Doctor Skelton and Will Sommers occupy a different generic terrain as jestbook figures. While these figures will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two, it is the reconstructed voice and style of Henrician satirist and poet laureate John Skelton which helps to legitimise Meg’s tradition. Long Meg prompts a spontaneous eruption of Skeltonic rhyming, for ‘as soon as they saw Long Meg, they began to smile, and Doctor Skelton in his mad merry veine [...] began thus’ (*LM*, B.2):

```
Domine, domine, unde hoc,
  What is she in the gray cassock?
Me thinks she is of large length
  Of a tall pitch, and good strength
With strong armes and stiffe bones
  This is a wench for the nones.
Her looks are bonny and blithe,
  She seems neither lither nor lithe
But young of age,
```

---

49 Bychowski, p.320.
And of a merry visage […]
Therefore Hostesse if you be wise
Once be ruled by me,
Take this wench to thee.
For this is plaine,
Sheel’ doe more worke than these twaine
I tell thee Hostesse, I doe not mocke
Take her in the gray cassocke

(LM, B.2).

Skelton’s evaluative description of Meg’s ‘merry visage’ (LM, B.2) is designed to recuperate the inherited connotations of Northern barbarism found in vernacular English. Indeed, in his poem Phyllp Sparowe, Skelton claims that ‘Our natural tong is rude | And hard to enneude | With pullyshed termes lusty | our langage is so rusty’. However, the imagined Skelton of the jestbook addresses the Hostesse as ‘[d]omine, domine’, meaning ‘[l]ord, master’, and ‘used in respectful address to the clergy or members of learned professions’. This satirically reasserts the inclusion of a Latin-learned audience alongside the vernacular simplicity of Long Meg. Skelton therefore puts together a linguistic performance designed to make common Englishness ‘proper’, particularly through the emphasis on Meg’s military aesthetic. Skelton’s question ‘[w]hat is she in the gray cassock?’ demonstrates the threshold between the linguistic and the material. The voice of Skelton echoes the suspension between subject and object found in Meg’s initial description: just as she is ‘the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womans mould’, she is ‘what’, not ‘who’ (LM, Sig. B.1). Meg’s mythological shape is cloaked in a ‘gray cassock’, a ‘long coat worn by soldiers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’. Like the evocative green tunic of Robin Hood, Meg’s grey cassock provides a material signifier for her larger mythos. Indeed, in the seventeenth century ballad Robin Hood and the Bishop, the outlawed Robin exchanges his ‘mantle of green’ for an old
woman’s ‘coat of gray’ to avoid a Bishop’s detection.

This form of materiality is accompanied by vernacular language which creates ‘a set of strong and generalized positions […] through recurrent evaluate descriptions’ and ‘stereotypical value words’. Meg’s titular ‘mad merry prankes’, coupled with Skelton’s ‘mad merry veine’ (LM, Sig. B.2) demonstrate the repetition underscoring this mode of English vernacularism in merry England. The motif of ‘merry’ also establishes a further association with the Robin Hood tradition through its ‘genre meaning’, functioning as ‘a key term in this nostalgic and aestheticized vision of the outlaws’ recognisable to its early modern audience. Meg is persistently defined as ‘merry’, ‘large’, ‘tall’, and ‘strong’ (LM, B.2). Skelton’s vernacular poem of Long Meg reflects the description of ‘people inhabiting neere the north’ in William Harrison’s The Description of Britaine (1587) who were ‘white in colour, strong of bodie’. As ‘a wench for the nones’, Meg’s exceptionality is directly linked to being ‘[o]f a tall pitch, and good strength | With strong armes and stiffe bones’ (LM, Sig. B.1). Limb by limb, Meg’s martial prowess champions vernacular English, embodying a vision of Protestant plainness located in merry England.

Meg’s physical enactment in line with these linguistic relations is distinctly nationalistic. Following Skelton’s introductory rhyme, Meg must prove herself a valuable asset to The Eagle to be employed. Meg persuasively states that while she has ‘been little used to’ needlework, her service would ensure that ‘if any stale cutter comes in, and thinks to

pay the shot with swearing, hey gogs wounds’ \( (LM, \text{B.3}) \). Unconvinced by Meg’s strength, Spanish Knight Sir James of Castile challenges Meg to ‘[ex]change a box on the eare with him’ \( (LM, \text{B.3}) \). Despite Skelton ‘hear[ing] that Spaniards are of wonderfull strength’, Long Meg ‘stir[s] no more than a post’ at the impact of Sir James’s blow \( (LM, \text{B.3}) \). Long Meg, however, ‘strooke up her sleeve’, and with a ‘foule fist’, hit Sir James ‘so strongly that downe [he] fell at her feet’ \( (LM, \text{B.3}) \). Here, Meg’s violence animates the Anglo-Spanish tensions of ‘imperial competition and national self-definition’.\(^{60}\) The rivalry between Long Meg and Sir James is charged with the context of the Anglo-Spanish war (1585-1604) and the Armada invasion (1588), predating the 1635 edition of the text to its origins. The political enmity between Protestant England and Catholic Spain was further informed by the cultural and intellectual anxieties surrounding language. The insertion of the feeble Sir James into an otherwise ‘merry’ jestbook narrative indicates both a rejection and fascination with emulating Spain. As Barbara Fuchs notes, an ‘often vociferous rhetorical denunciation of Spain in the period […] did not impede literary traffic’, as the erudite Latinate texts of Spain were translated and plundered by English writers.\(^{61}\) Confronted by the courtly status of a Latinate speaker, Long Meg’s superior strength asserts the triumph of Northern and English identity in matters of conflict. The Anglo-Spanish relations embodied by Long Meg and Sir James of Castille are charged with the context of English empire building. English writers anxiously asserted propaganda in which England was not a marginal northern island, but a worthy opponent. This potent ideology is encoded in the physical dominance of Long Meg. Underpinning Meg’s besting of Sir James is the imperialistic notion that what is lost in the vernacular inferiority of the English language, can be regained through force.

\(^{60}\) Fuchs, p.4.

\(^{61}\) Fuchs, p.4.
Negotiating Materiality: Sieges, Soldiers, and Outlaws

Meg’s dynamic martial identity generates masculine anxieties in the communities from which she is excluded. Her violence cannot be wholly contained by patriotic militarism, accruing extrajudicial meaning through trickery and heroism. As the ‘picture and shape of some tall man cast in a woman’s mould’ (LM, B.1), Meg is able to negotiate and challenge the gender essentialism of early English law to achieve justice. Operating beyond the fixed model of the ‘masculine woman’, Meg’s suspension is material as well as bodily. Temporarily performing non-essential identities through clothing and props, her materiality is marked by fluidity and flexibility. This shifting gender presentation is not only key to Meg’s exceptional identity, but is also what allows her to perform extralegal acts. Like Robin Hood, Meg’s violence is tied to morality and dutiful action: she is able to violate the law to implement her own brand of justice. The composite of source materials in The Life of Long Meg can be read as a response to the absence of a literary tradition for the waive. With no tradition to draw on, Meg’s identity relies on the existing narrative tropes of soldiers and outlaws.

Building on the Anglo-Spanish triumph against Sir James of Castille, Meg is used to further a national agenda in chapters ten to twelve through the temporal political landscape of Henry VIII’s 1544 Siege of Boulogne. Invoking the military success of the previous century reasserts notions of empire and glory, now in the context of Charles I’s agenda in the thirty years war. Outside of the domestic domain of The Eagle tavern, Long Meg cannot simply enter into international combat, and must instead be enlisted in the women’s ranks as a ‘laundresse in the towne’ (LM, D.3). In order to successfully affirm the values of English vernacularism, Meg’s exploits require a suspension of essentialist laws and customs, as found in Magna Carta. This suspension is echoed by the nature of the siege itself. While in general warfare there was an emphasis on ‘a code of conduct [that] was issued to English soldiers in
1544’, in a siege, this was not the case. Sieges ‘derived from biblical precedents’, specifically ‘the Book of Deuteronomy (which provided the blueprint for the laws governing sieges in the sixteenth century’ and ‘ruled that all men in a conquered city could be killed and the women, children and goods distributed among the victorious soldiers’.

As Meg transcends her role and emerges as the leader of ‘women soldiers’ (Sig. D.3), the legal conventions of the siege are inverted. Meg’s presence and participation in warfare as a woman is thus bound up in the temporal exclusion of military law, where ‘the regulations that restrained soldiers from attacking civilians could be suspended’. 

In chapter ten, Meg finds herself defending a fellow servant, Harry the Holster, from a Constable coming to press in Westminster. After giving the Constable a ‘box on the eare’ (LM, D.2), Meg takes the press money to go to Boulogne herself. The eleventh and twelfth chapters follow Meg through her relocation to France, firstly noting ‘how she beat the Frenchmen from the walles of Bulloigne,’ and secondly in her combat ‘with a Frenchman before the walls of Bulloigne’ (LM, A.4). Meg is prohibited from donning her ‘gray cassock’ as a soldier in France, and must take on the role of ‘a Laundresse in the Towne’ (Sig. D.3). Despite the attempt to contain Long Meg’s martial identity within a feminine coded role, material slippages produce moments of militaristic exceptionalism.

In the twelfth chapter, Meg observes the arrogance of a French soldier, and sends a drum to appoint a place ‘to fight it out to the death’ (LM, D.3). After a ‘long and dangerous Combate’, Long Meg ‘overthrew him, and layd him along’ (LM, Sig. D.3). Meg’s materiality is thus embedded in her triumph to assert her exceptionalism:

[S]he puld out her symeter and cut off his head; and with that pulling off her Burganet, shee let her haire fall about her eares; whereby the Frenchmen perceiued she was a woman: and thereupon the English without Bulloigne gave a great shout; and Meg by a

---

63 Murphy, p.22.
64 Murphy, p.22.
Drumme sent the Dolphin his souldiers head, and said, an English woman sent it him. Whereupon he commended her much, and sent her an hundred crownes for her valour.

\[\text{(LM, D.3\textsuperscript{v})}\]

Despite her role as a ‘laundresse’, Meg acquires the material markers of a ‘symeter’ and ‘Burganet’ to impersonate a soldier.\(^{65}\) After successfully decapitating the Frenchman, Meg immediately removes these items of disguise, and ‘let[s] her haire fall about her eares’ \((LM, D.3\textsuperscript{v})\). This material transformation shows that, in order for Meg to be exceptional as a woman, her extralegal activities must be framed by a temporal masculinity. Sending the head to the Dolphin, the eldest son of the King of France, Meg provides material proof that ‘an English woman’ has committed the act, and receives a ‘hundred crownes for her valour’ \((LM, D.3\textsuperscript{v})\). Meg’s status as a woman disrupts conventional narratives of martial power. However, as her success in combat is seen as exceptional, it is also contained. Central to hierarchies of femininity, Meg’s hair plays a significant role in reframing Meg’s exceptional, extralegal behaviour as ‘good conformitie’.\(^{66}\) The popular Jacobean pamphlet *Hic Mulier* (1620) proclaims that short haircuts on women are ‘unchaste’.\(^{67}\) Meg ultimately rejects the ‘unchaste’ materiality of short hair whilst performing rugged English nationalism. Her ‘sudden, theatrical release of long hair’, along with her use of a scimitar recalls the romance tradition of ‘warrior women’ in the period.\(^{68}\) Indeed, Meg’s representation is perhaps influenced by Torquato Tasso’s Clorinda in *La Gerusalemme Liberata* [Jerusalem Delivered]

---

\(^{65}\) A burganet is a ‘very light casque, or steel cap, for the use of the infantry, especially pikemen’, see ‘Burganet’ (n., OED, 1a). The ‘symeter [scimitar]’ is a curved sword, ‘used chiefly in Turkey and the Middle East’ (n., OED, 1a). As the scimitar was widely understood to be the weapon appropriate to Muslims’ in the early modern period, Meg’s choice of weaponry is also vested with ‘a code of behaviour deemed barbaric in the Christian world’, and is so redeployed, given to Meg as a white English woman to deliver an exceptional model of martial power. See Debra Johanyak, “‘Turning Turk,’” Early Modern English Orientalism, and Shakespeare’s *Othello* in *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia*, ed. by Debra Johanyak and Walter S. H. Lim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.77-96 (p.77).

\(^{66}\) Puttenham, p.262.

\(^{67}\) Anon, *Hic Mulier: Or the Man-Woman*, B.2'.

(1581) and Edmund Spenser’s Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* (1590). *The Life of Long Meg* reproduces the chivalric and chaste modes of masculinity made available to women in the romance tradition for a popular English mythos.

At home in Westminster, however, these negotiations of gendered materiality manifest differently. Outside of the patriotic domain of the Siege, Long Meg performs acts of redistributive justice, decided by a self-determined, internal set of laws. Where Meg’s martial identity is less foregrounded, resonances with Robin Hood emerge. Just as Robin Hood famously robs from the rich to give to the poor, Long Meg bestow ‘liberally on them that had need’ (*LM, C.1*). While Robin Hood is singularly known as an outlaw, it is necessary for Meg’s public identity to involve a manly disguise in order for her to gain the status of a heroine. This functions as a direct appeal to the anxieties of the readership of ‘gentleman’ (*LM, A.3*) featured in the prefatory address. Meg’s public identity presents less of a threat to patriarchal culture if her dynamic activities are contingent on her wearing of conventional gentlemanly clothing. When providing extrajudicial assistance to those at home, Meg is most frequently seen not in a ‘gray cassock’, as Skelton describes, but a ‘white Sattin doublet’ (*LM, Sig. C.2*). As in the Siege of Boulogne, Long Meg’s suspension is part of a plot of disguise and reward where, once triumphant in masculine coded dress, she reinstates her femininity through revealing her hair. The doublet is first given to Meg by her mistress in Chapter Four. Receiving unwanted advances from Sir James of Castille, Meg’s mistress wishes to rebuke him, and requests that she ‘goe drest in Gentlemans apparel, and with her sword and buckler’ (*LM, B.4*) and engage him in combat. Meg has already proven her superior strength to Sir James, but ‘if she beat him, she should for her labour haue a new Petticote’ (*LM, B.4*). Long Meg’s suspension between masculine dress and feminine identity is reframed as a socioeconomic exchange, wherein agreeing to take on the disguise of a gentleman, Meg is granted greater access to aristocratic femininity. This first instance of Meg
in the doublet is situated in the context of ‘labour’ as oppose to an autonomous prank or adventure. Unlike Robin Hood’s uniform greenness, Long Meg’s materiality is based on a temporal work incentive within Westminster’s urban culture.

Meeting Sir James in Saint George’s field, Meg answers his claims to be the ‘Gentlewomans Champion’ by drawing her sword, ‘at the first bout […] bit[ing] him on the hand’ (LM, B.4). Meg’s style of combat echoes William Harrison’s definition of ‘people inhabiting neere the north’ found in The Description of Britaine (1587), not only ‘strong of bodie’, but also ‘full of bloud’. After ‘following [Sir James] so hotly’ (LM, B.4), Meg disarms the Knight. Still disguised in her doublet, Meg spares his life on the promise that he will ‘this night […] wait on my trencher at supper […] then confesse me to bee thy better at weapon in any ground of England’ (LM, C.1). As in the Siege of Bulloigne, Meg is only able to reveal her identity after the central action has taken place. Marching into the tavern in her attire, she is identified by Sir James as ‘the English Gentleman whose prowess I so highly commend, and to whom in all valour I account my selfe so inferiour’ (LM, C.1). Meg’s exceptionalism is realised formulaically through the material signifier of hair:

[P]ulling off her hat, and her haire falling about her eares, bee that so hurt him to day, is none other but Long Meg of Westminster […] and al that supper time to wait on her trencher, who had leaue of her Mistreis, that shee might be master of the feast: where with a good laughter they made good cheere, Sir James playing the proper Page, and Meg sitting in her Maiesty. Thus was Sir James disgraced for his loue, and Meg after counted for a proper woman.

(LM, C.175)

Here, the ‘good conformitie’ Meg exhibited in warfare is relocated to the tavern of ‘merry England’, where, through carnivalistic inversion and misrule, material suspension is embraced. As Mark Truesdale notes, premodern feasting was ‘marked by the suspension of all hierarchical rank, norms, [and] prohibitions’, thus reaching for a ‘world of ideals’ where

69 Harrison, p.114.
all is ‘collapsed and intermingled’. Meg’s suspension is the source of her extralegal success and fame: by materialising masculinity in the ‘white sattin doublet’, Meg is ‘counted as a proper woman’ (*LM*, C.1). In its proximity to violence, Chapter Four’s resolution of ‘good laughter’ and ‘good cheere’ over a communal supper draws on themes of feasting and festivity found in the Robin Hood tradition. Following the public declaration of ‘that so hurt him [...] is none other but Long Meg of Westminster’, Meg also gains both the title of ‘master of the feast’ (*LM*, C.1). Meg thus takes on the role of a monarch, who sits ‘in [their] Maiesty’ amid the suspension of hierarchy, while Sir James is ritualistically humiliated as ‘the proper Page’ (*LM*, C.1). As the Robin Hood tradition recedes somewhat under the resurgence of *Magna Carta*, Long Meg emerges in his place. Meg is not, as Michael Drayton later puts it, made ‘[c]hiefe ladie of the game’. In the breaching and collapse of hierarchical boundaries of law, language, and materiality, Meg’s exceptionalism can be celebrated. The violence of Meg’s actions is also displaced by temporal sovereignty: transformed into ‘a leader of an alternative society’, Meg can be ‘entered into the matrix of Agamben’s theories [...] [showing] the interaction between sovereign and outlaw’. In the final section to this chapter, I will further discuss the biopolitical implications of Meg’s suspension.

**Suspension in Law and Language: Gender, Biopolitics, and Space**

In my initial examination of Long Meg’s suspension in law alongside *Magna Carta*, I suggested that the departure from the outlaw and his forest setting reflected the political tensions of Charles I’s reign. The location of Westminster, conversely, as the site for subjects

---


71 Michael Drayton, The second part, or a continuance of Poly-Olbion from the eighteenth song Containing all the tracts, riuers, mountaines, and forrests: intermixed with the most remarkable stories, antiquities, wonders, rarities, pleasures, and commodities of the east, and northerne parts of this isle, lying betwixt the two famous riuers of Thames, and Tweed (London: 1622), R.2.

72 Johnson, p.212.
to declare parliamentary grievances, recuperates the values of individualism present in *Magna Carta*. While this will be taken up further in Chapter Two, the final section of this chapter begins to interroge Meg’s spatial and political suspension through the Aristotelian categories of *oikos* and *polis*. Returning to the central terms of biopolitics outlined in the introduction, *zøē* designated the ‘simple fact of living common to all living beings’, while *bios* constituted ‘the form or way of living proper to an individual or group’. The distinctions of *oikos* and *polis* correspond to this division, as ‘simple, natural life’ or *zøē* ‘was not an affair of the city (*polis*), but instead of the home (*oikos*)’. *Bios* was life that expressed ‘the business and concern of the (city)-state’. While Mika Ojakangas has noted that ‘it is sometimes argued that the ancient Greek society was characterized by a strict separation of the *polis* and the *oikos*, the public and the private’, it seemed that the two operate as a unit, in which ‘the *polis* is the determining entity’. Agamben suggests that ‘the conflation of [these] terms’ provides a ‘paradigmatic [reading] of our most pressing political concerns’. I am concerned with how classical Greco-Roman divisions might inform the values of early English law and impact biopolitical and spatial exclusions in gendered terms. Penelope Deutscher observes the lack of consideration of gender in Agamben’s biopolitical framework, stating that ‘[t]he examples of bare life he considers are usually formulations that one can imagine having been identified as human life and then stripped of that status or subjected to a threshold status’. Conversely, women are ‘not considered to have had a political, legal, or linguistic status [to be] subsequently suspended’. However, I argue that the very existence

---

76 De la Durantaye, p.205.
of the category of the waive, as well as the emergence of Long Meg, challenges this notion of total suspension, as well as a strict division between *oikos* and *polis*.

From the moment of her entry into Westminster, Meg is biopolitically commodified in her pursuit for work. Before securing her position at the tavern, Will Sommers swears ‘that this Hostesse should not have her, but King Harry [Henry VIII] should buy her’ (*LM, B.2*). From the outset, the jestbook foregrounds an interface between sovereign and waive, in which Long Meg is an object to be bought. When Will Sommers is asked why Long Meg should be of interest to the monarch, he explains ‘that she shall be kept for breed: for if the King would marry her to long Sanders of the Court, they would bring forth none but soulidiers’ (*LM, B.2*). Meg’s height is both the key signifier of her folkloric identity and the reason for her biopolitical commodification, exemplifying ‘the reduction of women’s possible political life to their reproductive life’.\(^\text{79}\) Meg’s martial identity is initially constructed in accordance with the passive citizenship of women, affirming that their political function is to produce and raise citizens. Through her reproductive potential, Meg is ‘figured as that which exposes another life, she is herself gripped, exposed, and reduced to barer life’.\(^\text{80}\)

For Meg, the *oikos* becomes the tavern. Significantly, the tavern is a public space which citizens can pass freely in and out of, but also functions as an enclosed, domestic setting. In occupying the domestic space of the tavern, Meg is able to transform into a microcosmic sovereign: transporting the *polis* to her domain, she becomes both a law-maker and law-enforcer. This creates moments of suspension, in which Meg resides between the *oikos* and *polis*. Within the space of the tavern, Meg retains her identity as a woman whilst unrelentingly imposing a jurdico-political structure of her own construction. In Chapter Six,

---


\(^{80}\) Deutscher, ‘The Inversion of Exceptionality’, p.67.
for example, a Bailiff of Westminster comes to the tavern attempting to collect a debt from a favourite patron. In response to the Bailiff’s insistence, Meg ‘rapt[s] him on the pate with a quart pot’ (LM, C.2'). By appropriating domestic objects as weaponry, Long Meg advocates a brand of waivery more overtly located in the oikos (home). Though rooted in domesticity, Meg’s actions are extremely violent, as she beats the Bailiff until ‘almost dead’ (LM, C.3'). Meg’s decided punishment for the pro-establishment Bailiff therefore shows a Foucauldian ‘calculated management of life’ within the confines of the tavern.81 When exiting the tavern and thus the oikos, Meg’s material suspension allows the status of her citizenship to be negotiated. In appearing in public settings such as fields and streets as a mobile subject, Meg enters into the polis (city-state).

Following Meg’s relocation to Islington, chapter sixteen details how ‘after her marriage shee kept a house of her owne’, used for the ‘lodging and victuals for Gentlemen and Yeoman’ (LM, E.1'). The fame of her house as the best ‘in all of Islington’ attracts an increasing number of inhabitants, so much so that ‘oftentimes there resorted Gentlewomen thither and divers brave Courtiers and other men of meaner degree’ (LM, E.1'). These ungoverned crowds led to an intrusion of state authority, as ‘the Constable came to search’ (LM, E.1'). Meg responds to the Constable with hostility, as she answers the door with ‘a strong Cudgell in her hand’ and exclaims ‘[c]ome in, masse Constable […] let me see your warrant, what suspected persons you seeke for in my house. I will be answerable for all that are resident’ (LM, E.1'). Here, Meg asserts herself as spokesperson for the potential criminals she houses, shifting her position as an individual body to a collective ‘constitutional body’, able to ‘speak and act in the name of a group’.82 Her rejection of legitimate law enforcers critiques the exercise of judicial authority and situates her as the microcosmic sovereign,

81 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p.139.
wielding power in representing her residents. Meg’s success as sovereign ruler and law-maker is affirmed by both the Constable’s departure and her immediate creation of four key principles which were ‘hanged by this Table in her house’ (LM, E.1⁷):

1. **Imprimis.** That what Gentleman or Yeoman came into her house, if he lost it by any default, shee would repay it him ere he past: but if he did not reveal it; and after said he was rob’d, he should have ten Bastinadoes with a cudgel and be turned out of doores.

2. **Item, Whosoever,** came in and cald for meat, and had no money to pay, should haue a good box on the eare, and a crosse made upon his backe, that he should never be suffered to drink more in the house.

3. **Item, That if any good fellow come in and bewailed his case,** that he was hungry and wanted money, he should haue his belly full of meat on free cost, and money in his purse, according to his calling.

4. **Item, That if any Ruffler came in and made an Alehouse brawle,** and when he had done, would not manfully goe into the field and fight a bout or two with Long Meg, the maides of the house should drie beat him, and so thrust him out of doores.

These and many such principles had she set up in her house, and made her house quiet.

(MLM, E.1⁷)

Meg’s rejection of the Constable, coupled with the implementation of these rules raises questions about ‘domestic jurisdiction’.⁸³ Indeed, Meg produces an ‘autonomous private sphere in the polis in whose matters the magistrates have no authority to intervene’.⁸⁴ In other words, Meg produces her own charter. As the self-proclaimed head of the residents, Meg claims the sphere of the domus [household] and the power of the dominus which conventionally belongs to the Pater Patriae (father). In the place of the institutional jurisdiction the Constable offers, Meg constructs ‘principles’ which act as ‘oaths of obedience and truthfulness’, concepts which were fundamental to both political strategies and the law. This notion of constructing an alternate, structured society with its own extralegal code of ethics is also present in The Gest of Robyn Hode. Lytell John asks sovereign of the

---

⁸⁴ Ojakangas, p.27.
foret Robin Hood to tell his merry men ‘wheder [where] that we shal go | And what life we shall lede […] Where we shall robbe, where we shall leve, | Where we shall bete and bynde’. 85 The Robin Hood of *The Gest* outlines the principles of robbing and violence, paradoxically establishing law within lawlessness. Meg’s principles further this paradox whilst also emphasising that the violation of the laws of her house will result in ejection from her society, ‘turning’ them ‘out of doores’ (*LM, E.1*). Meg therefore mirrors and practices a legitimate position in the illegitimate society of her house, exercising political power on the bodies of subjects. Her creation of these principles and ruling of the house demonstrates a further subversion of legal and linguistic boundaries. In excess of *oikos* and *polis*, subject and sovereign, man and woman, Meg’s suspension is always temporal, fluid, and in excess of the law and language as the waive is. Despite attempts to contain her within patriarchal, legal structures, her materiality shifts with the pages of the jestbook, turning from ‘verso to recto’. 86 As Chapter Two will demonstrate, the narrative of *The Life of Long Meg* is also invested in a network of figures in jest culture. The connections formed between Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton situate Meg’s extralegal identity in the broader tradition of jesting, intimately tied to outlawry in its merry origins.

---

86 Bychowski, p.319.
Chapter Two

Networks of Jest Culture: Long Meg of Westminster, Robin Hood, and John Skelton

Following the single textual study of *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635) in Chapter One, I now consider Meg’s position within language in the broader context of jest culture. The figures of Robin Hood and John Skelton, who are both invoked in Long Meg of Westminster’s jestbook, form a crucial part of the generic community through their roles as protagonists in *The Gest of Robyn Hode* (c.1510) and *The Merie Tales, Newly Imprinted & Made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat* (1567) respectively. I argue that these figures not only capitalise on an existing historical fame, but also accrue textual authority through their relation to other popular protagonists within the jest genre. Further taking up Long Meg’s generic parallel to the ‘[j]ests of Robin-Hood’ (*LM*, A.3), I examine how location, law, and language shape the discursive network between Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton. Through a comparative study of these jest materials, I continue to focus on how gendered and biopolitical differences emerge from Long Meg’s status as both a jestbook hero and a woman, constituting an example of the waive-heroine. I suggest that Long Meg’s suspension in law and language produces moments in which she is able to act more subversively than her male counterparts within the jest genre.

**Defining the Genre: Gests, Jests, and Jestbooks**

Spanning over a hundred years, the texts discussed in this chapter present significant changes in what the jest genre encompasses and resist easy summary. The scholarship on jests and jestbooks is both disparate and features in a broad spectrum of critical works across medieval and early modern studies. As jestbooks are viewed as less substantial in terms of length and
content, they are often marginalised as analogues to canonical materials. Earlier scholarship concerned with classifying folkloric subgenres, however, determines that the jestbook emerged from the material of the ‘medieval preacher’s lighter exempla’. Exempla sought to juxtapose humorous anecdotes with theological moralities in order to captivate the interest of wayward listeners. This is exemplified by Forma Praedicandi (1322), in which ‘Robert of Basevorn includes jesting as an “ornament” of a sermon and says that it should be used “when…[listeners] begin to sleep”’. Exempla thus parallel the rhetorical strategies of Cicero and Demosthenes discussed in Chapter One, who combine their erudite content with storytelling to maintain a captive audience. The jestbook saw the sermonic instruction of exempla replaced by a more secular didacticism, concerned with entertainment above all else. Basevorn’s implicit notion of ‘listeners’ illustrates the jestbook’s origins in the oral tradition of sermons, which also required the attention of an audience.

These initial links between jestbooks and oral literacy are further seen in the later conflation of jesting and jesters, in which the courtiers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century jestbooks can either become ‘an object of laughter’ or ‘a source of wit’. Chris Holcomb raises the question of who is jesting through considering a diverse range of ‘jesting situations’, such as roman oratorical jesting and pulpit jesting. In exploring these contexts, Holcomb addresses how jestbooks create anxieties regarding social decorum and the threshold between seemly and unseemly forms of jest. Unravelling the chain of meaning gest/jest/jestbook/jester/jesting in scholarship proves challenging. Though related, these terms have distinct and discrete functions and do not form a homogenised category in textual or scholarly materials. This

---

1 See, for example ‘jesting literature’ in Indira Ghose’s Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), which outlines how the humour of jestbooks and jigs emerge in comedies such as Twelfth Night.
4 Holcomb, p.139.
chapter is primarily concerned with both the earlier *gest* and the sixteenth-century *jestbook*, which I now outline further.

The earliest of the texts featured in this chapter, *The Gest of Robyn Hode* (c.1510) is not in the prosaic format of the later jestbooks, but is comprised of ‘1824 lines of well-organised poetry’ as a ‘lengthy ballad-epic’. 5 *The Gest* indicates a wider scope to the jest genre in terms of form through permutations in both verse and prose, thus demonstrating the importance later placed on the suffix ‘book’. The gest exemplified by the metrical chronicles of *The Gest of Robyn Hode* is distinct, though not entirely separate from, the jest in its later variant spelling. As Stephen Knight notes, ‘the title of the *Gest* itself gives the hero status’ as ‘it has the connotations of the Latin *res gestae*, the “things done” by a true hero’. 6 The definitions available of both the ‘gest’ and ‘jest’ remain true to this etymology, describing it as ‘a narrative of exploits: a story, tale, or romance’, especially ‘the deeds of a person or people as narrated or recorded [in] history’. 7 While the bold and daring hero remains fundamental to the construction of a jest, it being ‘originally in verse’ seems an inessential aspect in the jest criteria, and can more elusively appear as ‘a story, tale, or romance’ of any form. 8 Texts such as *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain* (c.1558) demonstrate that jests written in verse form continued to circulate well into the sixteenth century alongside prosaic collections. *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain* typifies the earlier features of the poetic gest, as it ‘combines two widely separated but interwoven episodes from a twelfth-century French poetic romance, the anonymous continuation of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*’ whilst utilising the previous success of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. 9 The simultaneous production of the traditional gests, which

---

5 Knight, p.22.
6 Knight, p.22.
7 *Gest* (n., OED, 1).
8 *Jest* (n., OED, 2a).
carried the influences of the chivalric romance of the Middle English tradition, alongside more urbanised, prose collections such as the anonymous *Sack-Full of Newes* (c.1557), resulted in a further shift in generic prestige. As the jest emerged without these chivalric source materials and privileged the interests of local communities, it began to be viewed as ‘frivolous or laughable’.10 This degradation of the jest stories corroborates with the definition of the jest as ‘an idle tale’.11 The notion of ‘an idle tale’ establishes an important connection between existing perceptions of fictionalised outlaws and the jest genre, as the priest Sloth of William Langland’s moral satire *Piers Plowman* (c.1379) not only recites ‘rymes of Robyn hood’, but also other ‘ydel tales’12 whilst drinking in a tavern. This allusion, intentional or otherwise, to ‘[t]he earliest surviving reference to Robin Hood’ suggests that the figures who populate the jest genre shape its definition as ‘idle’.13

The jest’s connection to ‘ydel tales’ which were ‘recited […] from memory’14 reflects how the genre is grounded in oral transmission, therefore captivating a large, (and not necessarily literate), public audience. An emphasis on oral circulation is certainly echoed in how later jests are framed, as ‘the chroniclers’ references say [Robin Hood’s] story is on people’s lips’,15 and equally, ‘much talk went on’ of Long Meg of Westminster, as ‘shee was in euery mans mouth, for her talnesse and her strength’ (*LM*, B.3'). John Skelton’s ‘obsess[i]ve […] self-naming and self-titling’ also indicates an agenda to cultivate a mythologised persona which could be disseminated orally.16 Yet, as I will go on to suggest, in contrast to these

---

11 ‘Jest’, (n., OED, 3).
13 Knight, p.3.
14 Ohlgren and Matheson, p.xi.
15 Knight, p.21.
assertions of Skelton’s esteemed fame and laureateship, the ‘scurrilous’ matter of his poetry ‘prompts a contrasting interpretation of Skelton as a figure of a lost merry England’.17 In positioning this posthumous, jesting figuration of Henrican laureate John Skelton alongside Robin Hood and Long Meg ‘of merry England’, I will extend Jane Griffiths notion of ‘Skelton as an associate’ to the ‘outlaw’ to include Long Meg.18 In his connection to Long Meg, Skelton speaks to the absence of the waive. The prosaic jests, which continue to refer to the oral transmission of their figures, not only reflect the rise of a print culture which no longer required its audience to recall shorter memorable ‘rymes’, but also reflect an assertion of the figure’s popularity, status, and the widespread circulation of their story amongst the people.

While the jest contains numerous factions ensuring an unstable cultural value, certain features remain crucial to the genre. The content of the jest, outlined as ‘people as narrated or recorded [in] history’,19 demonstrates the pseudo- or semi-factual principle through a real or imagined turn to ‘recorded’ materials. In framing the material as a historicised account of a figure, the jest is conventionally set in the past, usually indicated by the reigning monarch. Though there is ‘scholarly uncertainty’ about the ‘historical time depicted’ in The Gest of Robyn Hode, its context of ‘bastard feudalism, livery and maintenance, archery and forest law, and the emergence of mercantilism’ suggests it is most likely situated in the early decades of the reign of Edward III’ (1327-1377).20 The Life of Long Meg of Westminster (1635) is devised ‘in the time of Henry the eighth of famous memory’ (1509-1547), with the final chapter in ‘Queene Maires [Mary I’s] dayes’ (1553-1558). Though the The Merie Tales of Skelton (1567) does not invoke a reigning monarch, numerous bibliographical details, such as references to figures as Cardinal Wolsey, indicate that the jest is broadly situated in the period of his writing

18 Griffiths, John Skelton and Poetic Authority, p.170.
19 ‘Gest’, (n., OED, 1).
career. This is roughly between 1488 and 1528 which, as Kathleen Tonry notes, are ‘years that straddle two centuries, and most awkwardly, two epochs’ of Henry VII and Henry VIII.\textsuperscript{21} During this period, Skelton also experiences ‘two periods of remove from court favour spent, respectively, in the rural parish of Diss in Norfolk’, and in Long Meg’s locale of Westminster, both which are included in the narrative of the \textit{Merie Tales}.\textsuperscript{22} Printed in 1567, thirty-eight years after his death in 1529, publisher Thomas Colwell capitalises on Skelton’s posthumous fame and attributes the \textit{Merie Tales} as ‘imprinted and made by Maister Skelton’ himself. Though a contestable claim, this would not be unusual. Skelton previously profited from an embellished account of his life \textit{The Garlande of Laurel} (c.1523), in which he ‘delights in laying false trails […] [such as] an enigmatic Latin verse implying that [he] may have an illegitimate son’.\textsuperscript{23} As ‘[s]ome works or genres appear to be strongly associated with individual editors or publishers’, Colwell’s purchase of the license to publish ‘another jestbook on the mythical figure of John Scoggin’, Edward IV’s putative jester, suggests that his attribution to Skelton as author is mere subterfuge.\textsuperscript{24} The first line to \textit{The Merie Tales of Skelton} already establishes this parallel, stating ‘Skelton was an Englyshe man borne as Skogyn was’.\textsuperscript{25} This might indicate that Thomas Colwell was attempting to cultivate a position within the literary marketplace as a chief proprietor of a particular network of jests. Scoggin’s place within Edward IV’s court also reiterates the historically nostalgic trope of the jest. The retrospective suggests that a type of pseudo-historical manufacturing is at work, which exploits ‘a desire to find antiquity in popular myth’.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Tonry, p.721.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Griffiths, ‘What’s in a Name?’, p.230.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Lucy Munro, “‘O Read me for I am of Great Antiquity’”: Old Books and Elizabethan Popularity’, in \textit{The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England}, ed. by Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp.55-78 (p.62).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Anon, \textit{Merie Tales newly imprinted [and] made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat} (London: Thomas Colwell, 1567), Sig.A.2. Further references will be made ibid as \textit{MT}.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Knight and Ohlgren, ‘\textit{A Gest of Robyn Hode}: Introduction’, pp.80-89.
\end{thebibliography}
‘Merry England’ is thus characterised by mixed and overlapping temporalities which are easily dislodged from the chronological past. In referring to the three principal texts of this chapter collectively as ‘jests’, I draw an additional conflation between jests and jestbooks. As Chapter One has already outlined, the jestbook is a ‘genre of popular fiction in which a series of tales is organized around a central character, often with the rough outlines of a birth, career, and death’.27 In terms of content, then, and the translation of res gestae (“things done” by a hero), the jestbook parallels the jest. The jestbook genre initially, however, seems to figure more broadly. Earlier jestbooks such as A.C.’s A Hundred Mery Talys (1526) contains one hundred discrete, self-contained stories. Strikingly, A Hundred Mery Tales is published by legal humanist John Rastell, brother-in-law to Sir Thomas More, who also featured as a fictionalised tavern visitor of Long Meg in The Life of Long Meg of Westminster. Unlike the later jestbooks, which contain the biographical elements of ‘real’ figures such as More, these tales focus on anonymised, recurrent figures defined by their duty such as ‘wyfe’, ‘marchant’, and ‘shomaker’ which would later form the community of the heroic protagonist. However, A.C.’s Mery Talys is also the first text to feature Skelton as a jestbook character. In chapter forty, Skelton falls into a mote whilst trying to deliver some pheasants to the Bishop of Norwich.28 The style of jestbook, which compiles short tales to form lengthier works continues to circulate in publications such as the Tales and Quicke Answers, Merie and Pleasant to rede (c.1532). This collection contains one hundred and thirteen chapters, containing significantly more named cultural figures than its predecessor, including ‘Socrates and his scoldynge wyfe’, ‘Dantes answere to the iester’, and as before, ‘mayster Skelton the poete’.29 The incorporation of Skelton alongside these figures of classical humanism suggests an intention to elevate the genre beyond its vernacular beginnings. Anne Lake Prescott has suggested that the ‘artful

28 A.C. Mery Talys (London: John Rastell, 1526), D.1†.
29 Anon, Tales and Quick Answers (London: 1532), A1†.
microdiscourse’ found in the Tudor jestbook not only originates from the medieval exempla, but also Cicero’s De Oratore, which in its consideration of humour declares ‘there is no source of laughing matters from which austere and serious thoughts are not also derived’. Extending the aims of the Tales and Quicke Answers, Merie and Pleasant to rede (c.1532), The Merie Tales (c.1567) positions Skelton as an English figure capable of harnessing the skill of jesting ‘to enhance the power of orators and courtiers’. Yet, despite his classical learning and foregrounded laureateship, Skelton’s literary and courtly status had already become a ‘laughing matter’, and was ‘critical[ly] disregard[ed] […] within half a century’ of his death, ensuring him a suitable subject for a jestbook.

In this context of the genealogy of the jest and its changing form and style, I now examine the representation of Robin Hood, John Skelton, and Long Meg, and the shared and recursive ‘merry England’ they traverse. In examining how the action of the jests take place in both private, domestic and public spaces, I further consider the Greek terms of oikos and polis, as seen in Chapter One. In doing so, I extend Valerie B. Johnson’s terminology to consider how the ‘systematic exclusion of [women’s] bodies’ from masculine coded spaces ensures that ‘the few women who do gain entry […] are narratively designed to be exceptional’. Meg’s exceptionality emerges from her exclusive exclusion in law, and is reflected in the narrative geography of the jestbook. In the construction of space in the outlaw tradition, in which ‘the greenwood reads as masculine’, and ‘the narrative symbolism of the natural [is recentered] upon the male body’, I consider to what extent ‘town-spaces [can] be read as feminine’. As an augmentation of Johnson’s notion beyond this rigid binary, I also consider Meg’s suspension, as introduced in Chapter One. Through a comparative analysis of the jestbook

31 Holcomb, p.29.
32 Anon, Tales and Quick Answers, A1 - B1.
33 Johnson, p.22.
34 Johnson, p.24.
materials, I further interrogate how Long Meg and Skelton might constitute subversive figures in early English law and culture; their responses to ‘town-spaces’ recalling an Agambenian fluidity in which one ‘dwells paradoxically within […] while belonging to neither’.  

Long Meg and John Skelton are both, in the strictest terms, ‘neither’ with regards to their status of outlawry. In order to understand their respective positions as outlaw analogues within the jestbook genre, I firstly work out from a recognised outlaw figure of the gest genre: the overtly titled ‘prude outlaw’(*RH*, 5), Robin Hood. By examining the *Merie Tales of Skelton* and *The Life of Long Meg* alongside the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, I demonstrate how Robin Hood constitutes an important generic precursor to Long Meg and John Skelton as peripheral folkloric figures. In particular, I consider the critical zone where location, law, and life meets within early gest culture, and the impact these three key areas have on the shared fictionalised community which populates the three narratives. Here, my consideration of life encompasses Agamben’s bare life. As a subject who can be killed with impunity often juxtaposed to the sovereign, Robin Hood is also underpinned by biopolitical tensions. Despite the absence of an explicitly named outlaw, these tensions persist in the *Merie Tales of Skelton* and *The Life of Long Meg*, and are shaped by the shifting ideological pressures set up in *The Gest*.

**The Gest of Robyn Hode: Location, Law, and Life**

The *Gest of Robyn Hode* is preceded by adventure tales such as *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, a poem which is not only written in a ‘language and meter [that] indisputably indicate[s] northern composition’, but begins in the ‘depe delles’ of Inglewood Forest.  

---

36 Mann, p.147.
his knightly companions of *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, Inglewood Forest is the temporal site of
deer poaching, although under the guise of the recurrent motif of the ritualistic hunt. As we
have already seen, *The Gest of Robyn Hode* takes up this chivalric, episodic tradition.
However, *The Gest* also establishes intimate ties to an emergent regional resistance. The
*Gest* exemplifies how, once the protagonist is outlawed, the northern forest can be
transformed into a permanent residence for illegitimate subjects. As a space which is
simultaneously regulated by sovereign law and also an ungovernable wilderness, the forest of
Barnsdale is invested with biopolitical tensions.

As Stephen Knight notes, Inglewood is a popular site from which these stories
culturally emanate: the churchman Andrew of Wyntoun wrote in ‘his *Orygynale Chronicle*’
(c.1283) that ‘Litil Johun and Robert Hude | Waythmen war commedit gud; | In Ingilwode
and Bernysdaile’. In parallel to the two regional provinces mentioned by Wyntoun, the *Gest
of Robyn Hode* operates within the forests of ‘Bernesdale’ (*RH*, 9). This suggests that, in its
ey early poetic form, the gest genre shares links with the northern aristocracy, who emerge from
‘a transitional cultural context, in which a literate author has fully exploited oral stylistics and
techniques’. Through Northern figures such as Robin Hood, this poetic force is also
embodied by the outlaw. This Northern textuality also provides a distinct commentary on the
structure of Medieval English law. Reliant on localised law enforcement, the judicial system
allowed the sovereign to defer their punitive authority to regional officials such as barons,
lords, and sheriffs. Further disputes could be settled through eyres, in which an itinerant
justice and their court would preside and prosecute over cases. Justices could perform
numerous roles simultaneously, operating as ‘pleaders, attorneys, seigniorial bailiffs, and
seneschals, as well as occasionally filling royal positions such as undersheriff, sheriff, and

---

38 See Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain Since 1066* (New Haven and London: Yale University
Press, 2007).
39 Knight, p.4.
county Clerk’. The remit of the regional jurisdiction thus operated ‘beyond court’, and allowed local figures such as sheriffs not only to declare outlaws, seize property, and issue court summonses, but also corruptly favour ‘locally prominent citizens [by giving them] more influence within the evolving system of the courts’. However, by the reign of Edward IV (1461-70, 1471-83), the legal authority imbued upon provincial elites was curtailed by centralisation. Moving judicial proceedings to central courts in London and Westminster resulted in a ‘significant loss of power by the northern magnates’. As Joseph Taylor notes, ‘what better way indeed for northerners to protest the loss of legal authority and the rule of their own territory than by attaching new figures of royal jurisdiction through a chivalrous, cunning, pious, and revered “outlaw” such as Robin Hood’. The Gest not only articulates a resentment for centralised power through its overtly northern location, it is woven into the foundational aspects of the gest genre in terms of plot and characterisation. Stock figures such as the Knight and the Sheriff come to fulfil ideologically motivated roles and, in interacting with Robin Hood, serve to emphasise both his regionalism and heroism.

The geopolitical subtext of characterisation within The Gest is apparent in the second fitt, in which Robin Hood encounters an impoverished knight (later revealed to be named Sir Richard of Lee). The premise of the Knight’s misfortune is underpinned by the chivalric tropes set up in medieval ballads and romances: Sir Richard of Lee’s son ‘slew a knyght of Lancaster | And a squyer bolde’ in a jousting tournament and in order to ‘save hym’ from persecution, he ‘sette and solde’ his godes and accepted a four-hundred pound loan from a corrupt Abbott, leaving him both bankrupt and unable to repay his debt (RH, 209-212).

43 Taylor, p.317.
44 Taylor, pp.321-322.
Moreover, the Knight pledged his land as collateral in the event of late payment, leaving him with no assets. Upon hearing of his hardship, Robin Hood offers Sir Richard of Lee the money, but emphatically states ‘fonde I never to my pay | A moche better borrowe’ (RH, 263-264). He even specifies a time and place for the repayment of the secondary loan, as “[t]his day twelve moneth,” […] “Under this grene-wode tre” (RH, 315-316). Agreeing to Robin’s terms, Sir Richard of Lee departure is immediately followed by the praise of Barnsdale: the Knight reflects that ‘whanne he thought of Bernysdale, | On Scarlok, Much, and John, He blyssyd them for the best’ (RH, 329-332) and ‘[w]hanne he loked on Bernesdale | He blessyd Robyn Hode’ (RH, 327-328). With a ‘knyght of Lancaster’ dead, Barnsdale, and therefore Yorkshire, is oppositely constructed through a direct association with the triumph of the outlaw community. In establishing the North as Robin Hood’s place of residency and generosity, the Gest constructs a ‘chivalrous and cunning outlaw’, who, in the context of the political upheaval of the Wars of the Roses and an increased emphasis on centralisation, functions as ‘a symbol of resistance to southern encroachment on [Northern] territory, authority, and identity’.45 As a Northern figure absorbed into the topography of Westminster, Meg’s identity functions on a regional and national level. In encounters with corrupt members of the Westminster community, she asserts herself as a ‘Lancashire lasse’ who is prepared to ‘bumbaste’ locals (LM, B.2†). However, in international conflict with figures such as Spanish Knight Sir James of Castille and French soldiers, Meg is constructed as emphatically English.

In the Gest, Sir Richard of Lee arrives at the ‘abbottes hall’ (RH, 406), initially claiming to have “[n]ot one peny” (RH, 413) to repay him, despite his loan from Robin. To preside over this conflict, however, ‘the abbot dyde holde’ the ‘justyce of Englonde’ (RH, 371-372). The knight implores the chief justice ‘be [his] frende […] and fende me of my fone

45 Taylor, p.319.
[enemy]’, thus constructing a satirical allusion to the favouritism at work within the court system, in which ‘frende[ship]’ is wielded by important local figures to implement biased rulings (RH, 423-424). Though the chief justice attempts negotiations once the abbot tries to purchase the land outright, asking “‘[w]hat wyll ye gyve more,” […] And the knyght shall make a releyse” and ‘holde […] [the] londe in pees [peace]’ (RH, 469-468), in being retained by the abbey for both ‘with cloth and fee’, the chief justice is materially and financially, though not morally, bound to help the abbot bankrupt the knight.46 The role of the chief justice as a facilitator of corrupt elites within the Church serves as an allegory of the failure of centralisation. While centralisation sought to give ‘local officials the power legally to represent the monarch’, this episode exemplifies that through payment, this power was highly flexible and could be deferred to any figure with the financial means. As a northern yeoman, Robin Hood’s successful intervention on the injustice of centralisation fictionally reinstates regional authority through a central trope of the gest, which continues in The Life of Long Meg; corrective natural law. When positive, institutionally formed law fails, natural law, in which a self-appointed individual can supersede written law through an inherent form of moral justice, emerges as both justified and necessary.

A moral chivalric code is evidently present in the identity of Sir Richard of Lee. After the Knight reveals he is able to return the four hundred pounds, he explains that he initially withheld the repayment to see if the abbot would be ‘curtes at [his] comynge’ (RH, 483-484) and was therefore worthy of a further reward. Though the abbot is left humiliated by the Knight’s deception, he conspires to ‘capture the knight’s land through treachery via a shadily negotiated legal writ’.47 The abbot sends a lower ranking monk ‘London-ward | There to

46 On the phrase ‘cloth and fee’, Thomas Ohlgren and Stephen Knight note that it ‘echoes the Latin formula *cum robis et foedis* used to designate payment of legal services with both money and gifts of clothing. According to Child (III, 52), the practice of giving and receiving robes for such purposes was considered a conspiracy in the legal code of King Edward I, 1305-06’. See footnote 426 in Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales.
47 Taylor, p.320.
holde grete mote, | The Knyght that rode so hye on hors | To brynge hym under fote’ \cite{RH,1009-1012}, my emphasis). The abbot’s abuse and misappropriation of positive law is made possible by those who come and go from London.\footnote{Positive law as in ‘[f]ormally laid down, imposed, or decreed; proceeding from enactment or custom; conventional […] a law or body of laws artificially instituted or imposed by an authority, often as contrasted with natural law rooted in the requirements of justice and right reason’ in ‘Positive [law]’ (adj. and n., OED, 1).} The abbot not only retains the chief justice, whose jurisdiction and power emanates from the capital, but also sends the cellarer ‘London-ward’ to enact further ‘transactions of injustice’, presenting London as the locus of immoral activity, ‘rather than a site for appeal to good law’.\footnote{Taylor, p.319.} This is reiterated in the sixth fitt, when the ‘proude’ Sherrif of Nottingham, who fears Robin Hood will reduce his power to ‘nought | In all the northe londe’ \cite{RH,1295-96}, discovers that Sir Richard of Lee is harbouring the outlaws in his castle. As a figure working to fortify positive law arbitrarily to maintain his position, the Sheriff defines Robin Hood and his men through their status as outlaws, in which they are ‘the kynge’s enemys | Against the lawe and right’ \cite{RH,1274-76}. The repetition of stereotypical value words works in opposition to the Sheriff’s claims: Robin Hood and ‘the bolde archars’ are emphatically ‘noble and gode’ \cite{RH,1291-92}. While the Sheriff denounces him as a ‘traytour knyght’, Sir Richard of Lee maintains that he is a ‘trewe knyght’ and imploringly asks that the Sheriff ‘do no more to [him] | Tyll ye wyt [know] oure Kynges will’ \cite{RH,1274-1283}. The Sheriff accepts Sir Richard of Lee’s suggestion, and departs to ‘London towne | All for to tel our Kinge’ \cite{RH,1285-86}. In order to legitimise his biopolitical governance of Barnsdale, and therefore approve his claim to Sir Richard of Lee and Robin Hood, the Sheriff must also travel to London to pursue the centralising monarch. In parallel to the delay of full judicial process within centralisation, King Edward vows he ‘wyl be at Notyngham […] [w]ithin this fourteenyght’ \cite{RH,1297-1300} to take Robin Hood and the Knight himself. The sabotage of the Sheriff’s transportation of Sir Richard of Lee to Nottingham by Robin and his men, then, exemplifies both the failure of the positive law
maintained through centralisation, and the triumph of regionalism. As Joseph Taylor puts it, ‘in medieval legal theory, natural law always precedes, and supersedes positive law, from which the outlaw is cast away. Natural law, then, stands outside positive law just as the outlaw does’. The Gest therefore establishes a paradoxical inversion of these oppositional forces. Both the abbot and the sheriff, despite being civil subjects represented within the polis of London, abuse the authority of positive law for personal illegitimate gain. Robin Hood, an outlaw with no legitimate place within the polis, remains ‘gode and noble’ (RH, 1292) within the natural law of the northern forest, a lawless site of unofficial governing.

The ideological implications of this inversion culminate in the final part of the sixth fitt. Following the news of Sir Richard’s capture, delivered by one of the two women physically present in the Gest, the Knight’s wife, Robin Hood and his men ambush and ultimately assassinate the Sheriff. Paradoxically, the nature of the Sheriff’s death echoes legal execution, one that Sir Richard of Lee would have been subject to in due process in accordance to the King’s orders. Initially, Robin attacks the Sheriff using ‘a full goode bowe’, and hitting the sheriff successfully, ‘upon the grounde [the Sheriff] lay full still’ (RH, 1385-1388). Despite appearing completely dead, Robin ‘smote[s] the sherifs hede | With his bright bronde [sword]’ (RH, 1391-92) post-execution. While this is framed as to ensure the Sheriff does not ‘aryse | On his fete to stoned’ (RH, 1389-90), the Sheriff’s decapitation is also invested with biopolitical meaning. In the body politic topos of premodern England, ‘as in their classical antecendents, the head was invariably aligned with the governing elite; to hold status was to be or have a head’. The removal of the head is, then, the ultimate ‘spectacle of retributive justice’, symbolically stripping the Sheriff of his corruptly held

50 Taylor, p.328.
position within positive law. The beheading of figures of structural authority persist within the genre, carrying with them the symbolic resonances found in the *Gest*. In *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisbourne*, also set in Barnsdale, Robin encounters the sheriff’s emissary by the name of Sir Guy, who has been hired to kill him. Robin not only beheads Sir Guy, but ‘pull[s] forth an Irish kniffe | And nick[s] Sir Guy in the face | That hee was never on a woman borne | Cold [could] tell who Sir Guy was’ (*RH*, 167-170). In mutilating Sir Guy beyond recognition, Robin enacts a visceral form of extrajudicial punishment: he not only removes the head which denotes his position as a ‘governmental elite’ under the positive, although corrupt, legal authority of the Sheriff, but denies his identity as a subject altogether.

Further biopolitical complexity operates beneath the surface of the Sheriff’s decapitation in the *Gest*. As an outlaw Robin Hood ‘bears the wolf’s head’, meaning he can be hunted and killed on sight for a monetary reward without legal consequences. Through this principle of bearing the wolf’s head, the Sheriff can kill Robin Hood with impunity. However, *The Gest* inverts the narrative logic of positive law, as it is the Sheriff himself who ‘deservedly perish[es]’ and Robin Hood who faces no legal recourse. The Sheriff’s death not only reiterates the preeminent status of natural justice, but raises questions regarding the biopolitical implications of Robin Hood’s agency as an outlaw. Despite his outlawing and subsequent murder of the Sheriff, upon arriving to Nottingham, the ‘life’ of Robin Hood is preserved by ‘the hands of the lord king’. Whereas the King tentatively suggests that he will ‘take Robyn […] yf he may’ (*RH*, 1416), he also declares that “‘he that wolde smyte of the knyghtes hede, | And brynge it to me, | He shall have the knyghts londes, | Syr Rycharde at the Le’ (*RH*, 1437-1440). Robin Hood’s decapitation of the Sheriff is mirrored by the King’s

---

53 De Bracton, pp.353-354.
54 De Bracton, pp.353-354.
55 De Bracton, pp.353-354.
suggestion, forming a parallel between outlaw behaviour and sovereign will.

Robin Hood’s beheading of the English official carries more disruptive connotations than Meg’s decapitation of the French Soldier. In intercepting the Knight’s capture and beheading the Sheriff, Robin Hood disrupts the will of the sovereign and constitutes an imitation of monarchical power. Indeed, the King himself notes this threat to his sovereignty, stating that Robin’s ‘men are more at his byddynge | Then my men be at myn’ (RH, 1563-54). Yet in observing their ‘goodnesse and […] grace’ (RH, 1646) within the natural law of the forest, the King, wielding the power to suspend juridical order, pardons both Sir Richard of Lee and Robin Hood. The Sheriff’s death unmentioned and Robin’s status of outlawry lifted, Robin can be seen as the ‘embodied and corrective natural law’ that the positive law of central court requires and can thus return home.56 The King grants Robin’s pardon on the very condition that he will ‘leve the grene wode, | And all thy company, | And come […] to my courte | And there dwell with me’ (RH, 1655-58). ‘Having already established London as a place of corruption, the Gest foreshadows Robin’s own demise’, in which the outlaw is rendered ideologically incompatible with the polis of civil society.57 Within ‘the yere’, Robin’s ‘welthe […] went away’ through excessive donations to knights, all his men aside from ‘Lytell John and good Scathelocke’ had ‘agone’, and Robin is left wistfully reminiscing that ‘[s]ometyme [he] was an archere good’ (RH, 1737-1745). Robin’s proximity to the King leaves him in a state of ‘sorowe’, and that if he ‘dwele[s] longer with the kynge’, he will die of unhappiness (RH, 1751-52). Robin is permitted to return to Barnsdale ‘no lengre’ than a week, but fears the state surveillance of the positive law of London, and ‘for all drede of Edwarde our kynge | Agayne wolde he not goo’ (RH, 1772, 1799-1800). Robin remains in this mollified state for ‘twenty yere and two’ before his death at the hands of the ‘pryoresse

56 Taylor, p.328.
57 Taylor, p.336.
of Kyrkely’ (RH, 1803). Despite the resistance towards London and the city values it represents in the Gest, the Northern greenwood and its imagined community cannot avoid being ‘penetrated by values of the town market-place’.

Once Robin’s outlaw identity has been neutralised by the King’s court, he is refashioned as a salesman, answering the King’s requests for ‘grene cloth’ (RH, 1669-70). The juxtaposition of the royal court and the urban merchant here perhaps indicates the divided audience of the Gest. Though Robin Hood likely remained ‘a figure for royal and noble entertainment in London’, the Gest, like many other adventure ballads such as Galagros and Gawane and the aforementioned Awntyrs off Arthure, was also populated by Northern locales for a northern audience. Unlike Galagros and Gawane and Awntyrs off Arthure, however, the Gest marks a ‘change of consciousnesses’, whereby wholly embracing ‘the courtly-knightly ideology of adventure’, has been replaced by a ‘mercantile self-awareness and self-fashioning’. Robin Hood’s encounter with the King is not the first instance of him taking up the role of the mercantile hero. In his initial meeting with Sir Richard of Lee, Robin not only loans the Knight the money to pay his debt, but upon the insistence of Little John, they provide him with ‘lyverary, | To lappe his body therein’ (RH, 227-280) and a horse. In furnishing poor or fallen heroes such as the Knight and acting in a courteous manner, Robin Hood imitates knightly behaviour of the chivalric and Arthurian ballads which maintain an influence within the gest genre. However, Robin is constructed through the motif of cloth selling and giving, Robin also personifies ‘concomitant commercial values’. Robin is explicitly commended for his legitimate role within the market, as his men comment ‘[there] is no marchaunt in Mery Englonde | So ryche, in scarlet and grene I dare well say’ (RH, 283-284). The materiality of the outlaws, as well as the key

signifier of Lincoln green, is then also bound up in Robin’s identity as a cloth merchant, establishing a dualism to his heroism in which he is both a dynamic outlaw and a displaced craftsmen. As Thomas Ohlgren puts it, ‘the virtues celebrated in courtly-romance – martial prowess, voluntary daring, quest for unpredictable risk, loyalty to a revered lady, solidarity of the group, and largesse – have been conserved, imitated, and appropriated by the urban merchant and artisan classes, who are the producers and consumers of the Robin Hood poems.’ 61

Despite his role within the marketplace, the final figuration and fate of Robin Hood found in the Gest ensures that Barnsdale remains geographically and ideologically placed at odds with the strong central government and ‘nucleus of English law’, found in ‘London and Westminster’62. It seems no coincidence, then, that both Long Meg and John Skelton are primarily located in the very same London and Westminster that is made so emphatically distant in the Gest. As the jestbook emerges as a distinct genre from the gest, I consider whether Robin Hood is subsumed by figures such as Long Meg and John Skelton, who are constructed as compatible with London and therefore positivist models of centralisation. Though a hostility for figures of establishment continues through violence towards antagonists such as bailiffs and friars, both Long Meg and Skelton embrace London as the site of aspiration. While Long Meg’s spoken and written repetition of her origins as a ‘true Lancashire lass’ demonstrates a persistent form of regional resistance, she is also simultaneously titled as being ‘of Westminster’. As suggested in Chapter One, Meg’s suspension between these two locations links to an elevation of English identity, in which Meg’s hardy heroism reflects the cultural project of vernacular eloquence. I now take up

62 Taylor, p.318.
considerations of Meg’s topography in more detail, as well as the further gendered and biopolitical implications of location in *The Life of Long Meg* and *The Merie Tales of Skelton*.

**The Narrative Geography of the Jestbook**

As I have already noted, the *Gest of Robyn Hode* takes place in the traditional outlaw setting of expulsion, the iconic greenwood. Though the forest space Robin occupies is crucially localised to ‘Bernesdale’ (*RH*, 9) Yorkshire within the first fitt, the overall geography remains ‘general, even vague’ as ‘Little John can hurry from Nottingham, fifty miles distant, to rejoin his companions in less than a day’. Conversely, *The Merie Tales* of Skelton and *The Life of Long Meg* predominantly operate within the oppositional urban cityscape of London. However, neither Skelton nor Meg are native to London. While the outlaw Robin Hood of the *Gest* spends the first part of the narrative reclining in his forest settlement, bidding Lytell John to bring ‘ani baron, | Abbot, or ani knyght […] | to lodge to me; | [for]

His dyner shall be dyght’ (*RH*, 73-76), Long Meg and Skelton are required to be more mobile and dynamic, and must respectively find means to travel to their prescribed city domain. Through a resourcefulness, neither of them pay the charge for their journey, demonstrating an element of trickery to their negotiation of space which is archetypal to both the jestbook genre and outlaw tradition. The action that follows demonstrates that Long Meg is a more active, visible, and heroic protagonist, whereas Skelton more commonly occupies enclosed, domestic spaces, such as inn lodgings and churches, manipulating language and household items to combat a rival. As we have already seen in Chapter One of this thesis, Meg, particularly when in conventional men’s apparel, enters into public life (*polis*). Skelton’s more frequently appearances in interior settings (*oikos*) indicates an inversion of the juridicopolitical topography of London.

---

From the outset of *The Life of Long Meg*, the construction of Long Meg’s character is informed by a transforming cultural and geographic landscape. In Chapter One, Meg asserts her intentions to leave rural Lancashire and ‘come up to London to serue, and to learne City fashions’ (*LM*, Sig.B1 ), echoing the cultural climate in which ‘significant numbers of the gentry and aristocracy expected to travel from the provinces to the metropolis’.

In learning ‘City fashions’, Meg is constructed to assimilate into ‘the most fashionable quarter of the capital by the early seventeenth century’. Long Meg goes on to reiterate the prosperity of the city, stating that ‘at London may wee winne gold and weare gold […] find husbandes as well as the rest’ (*LM*, B.1 ). This suggests that Meg leaves the *oikos* (the home) on the premise of engaging in marital activities and thus financial gain in the *polis* (the city). In order to reach London, Meg enlists the services of ‘a neighbour of hers, called Father Willis’ to carry her and ‘three or foure lasses more […] to London’ (*LM*, B.1 ). In the course of the journey, Father Willis attempts to misuse his command of the *polis* by increasing his fare to ‘more than [the women] haue in [their] purses’, threatening to ‘cudgell ten shillings out of their bones’ if Meg and her companions do not comply (*LM*, B.1”). Initially, Long Meg attempts to negotiate verbally, stating ‘you are a merry man, you shall haue a gallon of Wine and if we come to keepe houses of our owne here in London, look for amends’ (*LM*, B.1”). Meg’s terms for the Carrier thematically parallel those Robin’s welcome offerings of ‘[b]rede and wyne’ (*RH*, 127) to the Knight in the first fytte of the *Gest*, thus mirroring his behaviour.

After rejecting her terms, Meg resorts to violence, as she ‘up[ped] with her staff and held him on the shoulders, where shee so beswinged the Carrier’ and insists that he not only places ‘us all three with Mistresses’ but also ‘bestow[s] upon each of [them] an Angell’ (*LM*, B.2”). As the author of Skelton’s jestbook does not entirely commit to producing a linear

65 Merritt, p.140.
narrative, it is not until the second chapter, after an anomalous incident at one of the many inns he visits, that Skelton begins his journey to London. Like Meg, Skelton travels with an assisting companion, this time a ‘Kendallman’ (MT, A.3). While Meg is forced to overpower the Carrier out of necessity, only refusing to pay a fare after the Carrier’s unjust confrontation, Skelton’s lack of payment is an incidental outcome of a prank of his own making. On their journey, Skelton and the Kendallman stop for the night ‘at Uxbridge’ and entering the lodgings, ‘the Kendallman layd hys cap upon the borde in the hall’ (MT, A.3). Skelton takes the cap, and ‘put[s] betwixte the lining and the utter syde a dishe of butter’ (MT, A.3-A.3). When the Kendallman returns, he ‘put[s] on hys capp’ whereby the butter ‘took heate of the kendallmans heade, and it dyd begynne to run ouer hys face and about his cheekes’ (MT, A.3). In another act of trickery, Skelton convinces the Kendallman he has ‘the sweating sycknes’ and that as a ‘skild physicke, and specially I the sweatynge sycknesse, that [he] wyll warrant any man’ (MT, A.3). In return for his false services, the Kendallman offers to ‘pay for [his] shot to London’, and so after sending the kendallman to bed, Skelton simply boils the capp ‘in hoat lee [hot lye] and dries it’ (MT, A.4). There is an absurdly mundane domesticity to the resolution of Skelton’s free journey in contrast to the physical danger of Long Meg’s. The material culture of food and clothing, and the practices that are bound up in them, are not only located in the oikos, but are conventionally coded as highly feminised. The invocation of the ‘Kendallman’ also echoes the manufacturing of ‘green woollen cloth’ that Robin Hood engages with in the Gest. While Robin Hood’s trade with knight Sir Richard of Lee and the King establishes a more chivalric, courtly mode of mercantilism, Skelton’s exchange with the Kendallman is formed through an exploitative trickery which culminates in a basic domestic task. Through the use of butter and bodily heat, the act is also

---

66 Chapter One of The Merie Tales details an incident where Skelton, due to extreme thirst in the night, falsely alarms the tapster and her patronage in crying that there is a ‘fyer’, which he then reveals is in ‘hys mouth’ in order to be fetched some water (Sig. A.2-A.3).

67 ‘Kendal’, (n., OED, 1a).
underpinned by the illusion of physical expulsion, and therefore the grotesque low matter bound up in the internal processes of the body. As I will demonstrate, the spectacle of the material body is key to the comedic style of the Merie Tales jestbook.

Following their respective journeys to London, the narrative geography of both Long Meg and Skelton is highly visible and can be mapped chapter to chapter. While Long Meg spends the majority of the narrative venturing into the city of Westminster, traversing both land and sea, and even travelling abroad, much of the action in the Merie Tales of Skelton remains in various enclosed domains. These interior spaces, if mentioned, are usually determined by the role of the figures who visit and populate them, and in turn, shape the (inter)action and conflict with protagonist Skelton. This includes, though not limited to, a ‘Bishop [...] [at] the pulpet’ (A.8v), a ‘fryer [...] at Dys’ (MT, B.2v), a miller ‘in the countrey’ (C.1v), and ‘the vinteners wife [...] in a tauerne’ (MT, D.2v). While these interior locations represent generic sites of action in popular folklore, they are framed within a significant wider geography. Skelton’s movements reflect the biography of his lifetime, including his schooling at Oxford, his priesthood at Diss in Norfolk, his visit to the king’s court in London, and imprisonment in Charing Cross, Westminster. Aside from her military excursion to Boulogne, Meg moves exclusively through the fictionally reconstructed cityscape of Westminster and its surrounding areas. In Chapter Four, Meg agrees to meet Sir James of Castille in Saint George’s Field, and in Chapter Five, a soldier in the Tuttle Fields, challenging the men to fight on both occasions. As Charles Edelman notes, Saint George’s Field is ‘on the South Bank of the Thames between Southwark and Lambeth, one of London’s militia’s training grounds’. Similarly, the Tuttle Fields is ‘a large piece of open land in Westminster on the left bank of the Thames’ which was also ‘a training ground for

68 See A. C Mery Tayls (c.1526), which includes episodic chapters such as ‘Of the frere in the pulpet that bad the woman leue he r babelynge’, A.2v.
troops, for archery practice, and often the site of duels’.\footnote{Edelman, p.374.} In Chapter Seven, Meg goes to ‘S. Nicholas Shambles to buy calves heads’, a distinct site in Westminster which was from ‘the year 1322’ was designated by the mayor as one of the licit ‘markets appointed’ to ‘sell fish or flesh’.\footnote{James Howell and John Stow, \textit{Londinopolis: a historical discourse or perlustration of the city of London} (London: 1657), p.84. For more on the suburban meat trade in Westminster, see also Merritt, pp.182-184.} This detail reflects the flourishing food market within Westminster whilst further exemplifying the parallels between the mercantile classes and jest protagonists already seen in Robin Hood’s \textit{Gest}. Through the invocation of these known landmarks, Meg’s identity is woven into the mercantile and military fabric of early modern Westminster. The inclusion of locations form part of the process of a ‘historical manufacturing’ of Robin Hood, Skelton and Long Meg, in which geographical details are inserted into the narratives to create a sense of authenticity and cultural ownership.\footnote{A.W Barnes, ‘Constructing the Sexual Subject of John Skelton’, \textit{ELH}, 71:1 (2004), 29-51 (p.29).}

Skelton and Long Meg are not only shaped by these external sources, but become the inscribers of their respective literary topographies from within the text. The jestbook authors establish a further dimension of material truth to their protagonists using the authority of the written word. For Skelton, given his laureateship, priesthood and status as an ‘Oxforde […] scoler’ (\textit{MT}, A.4\textsuperscript{v}), this emphasis on textual legacy is unsurprising. Skelton’s legacy finds its way into \textit{The Life of Long Meg} through his appearance as ‘Doctor Skelton’ (\textit{LM}, B.2\textsuperscript{v}), a member of the local community who composes a ‘mad merry’ poem introducing Long Meg in the second chapter of the jestbook. From within \textit{The Life of Long Meg}, Skelton’s invocation, like Robin Hood’s in the initial address to reader, provides a means of framing Long Meg within an existing popular English tradition. Skelton’s interplay with language from within the text emerges more as an ‘uncomfortable collision between elite and popular forms of writing, between the centre and the margins’.\footnote{Lucy Munro, \textit{Archaic Style in English Literature 1590-1674} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.201.} In the \textit{Merie Tales}, Skelton’s literary
reputation is not confirmed through writings about himself, but is established by his enlistment to write for others. In Tale IV, for example, Skelton is asked by a Welshman to ‘write a fewe woords […] in a lytle Byll’ (MT, A.5ᵛ) to give to the King at the court in London. Skelton’s writerly prestige is confirmed by his ability to produce a ‘patent’, a legal document ‘conferring some privilege, right, office title, or property’. However, after agreeing to compose the bill on the Welshman’s behalf, the content dictated is a ludicrous joke. In praise of bodily excess, it reads ‘drynke, more dryne [sic] […] and a lytle crome of bread: an a great deal of drynke to it […] Put out the little crome of bread, and sette in: all drynke, and no breade’ (MT, A.6ᵛ). The patent, though prestigious in form, constitutes a Rabelaisian praise in content, its repetition of ‘drynke’ establishing a ‘pronounced hyperbolism of [the] bodily image [of] […] gluttony, drunkenness, and immorality’. The notion of Skelton producing a state document is thus rendered a mockery. The joke reiterates the tension between Skelton’s history as an esteemed writer and his posthumous emplacement within folk culture. The paradoxical interplay between high and low, convention and corruption, is also present in the two chapters of the *Merie Tales* which take up Skelton’s composition of epitaphs. This imagined scenario reflects his career and reputation in which he used the ‘formal phrases and features of the conventional epitaph’ to ‘speak ill’ of subjects such as ‘his former parishoners of Diss’.

The subject of one of Skelton’s fictionalised epitaphs can be found in Chapter Five of the *Merie Tales*, in which ‘Swanborne the knaue’, a local figure who he knew from when ‘he was a boye in Oxforde […] dyed and was buried under the wall of St. Peters Church’ (MT, A.7ᵛ). Swanborne represents a departure from the traditional satiric epitaph, which are

74 ‘Patent’ (n., OED, 1).
‘chiefly political or religious in character’, and is instead depicted as a notoriously unintellectual and ordinary man. The chapter details numerous instances in which he is emasculated by his violent wife who ‘woulde diuers tymes in the weeke kimbe his head with a iii footed stoole’ and ‘beat him under the bed, or into the bench hole’ \((MT, A.7^v)\). The basis of Swanborne’s characterisation as a weeping man being chased by his wife into a ‘bench hole [privy]’ reiterates his formulation within the Rabelaisian scatology of low comic tradition. Despite his lack of status, Skelton decides to ‘make an epitaph’ for him following his death, and utilises the permanence and place of the surface of ‘the churche wall’ \((MT, A.7^v)\). The epitaph’s place upon the church wall demonstrates a recognition that ‘these poems concern local matters’, and are therefore distinct to Skelton’s real and imagined topography. In finding its origins in Greco-Roman traditions, the epitaph is also considered ‘the most noble, ancient and learned part of a monument’ of antiquarian literary origins, therefore requiring a reputable writer. While Skelton’s actual epitaphs notably use both Latin and English alongside each other, the \textit{Merie Tales} depicts Skelton as the producer of an irregular hybridised verse combining Latin and English:

\begin{verbatim}
Belsabub his soule saue  
Qui iacet his hec a knaue  
Fam scio mortuus est  
Et iacet hic hec a beast  
Sepultus est amonge the weedes; God forgive him and his misdeeds!
\end{verbatim}  
\textit{(LM, A.7^v)}.

The pseudo-Skeltonic epitaph mirrors those written by the poet in his lifetime. It simultaneously addresses ‘Belsabub [the devil]’ to save Swanborne’s soul, and God to ‘forgive him and his misdeeds’, therefore achieving the ‘contemptuous but affectionate’

---

77 Scattergood, p.180.  
78 Scattergood, p.183.  
80 Scattergood, p.182.
style of many of his satirical epitaphs (*LM, A.7*). Yet, in slipping between Latin and English, classical eloquence and common vernacular, the inscription on the wall of St Peter’s Church produced does not retain any noble quality, and appears disordered and rudimentary in its macaronic couplets. The fictionalised Skelton’s mock-epitaph echoes the linguistic suspension of Chapter One, signalling towards a desire to exchange one thing for another, Latin for English, and in the process forming a discursive structure which is strictly neither. As vernacular English cannot meet the metric demands of classical verse, nor does it accommodate the grammatical distinctions of classical Latin, the result emerges as both confusing and comically unnatural. In presenting Latin and English as interchangeable, the author of the jestbook may also be making an attempt to unite two linguistic communities in the project of vernacular eloquence. The outcome of what might be an unsuccessful attempt to establish linguistic unanimity also intentionally leaves Skelton himself the true subject of derision, not Swanborne. In providing a posthumous critical representation of his life and career, the jestbook’s accreditation of Skelton as the author of unskilled verse adopts similar strategies to an epitaph itself. As language performance conferred status, the epitaph from within the jestbook constitutes a derogatory intrusion on the remembrance of Skelton as a poet.

While Skelton is represented as comically abusing his access to permanent and prestigious modes of writing, Meg makes attempts to establish a local poetic authority using limited material resources. Like Skelton in Chapter Five of the *Merie Tales*, Meg also inscribes a note on a wall: ‘[i]f any man aske who brought this to pass | Say it was done by a Lancashire Lasse’ (*LM, C.1*). Skelton’s public inscription is made official through his status as a priest and its emplacement at the Church. The unofficial nature of Meg’s writing is more closely described as graffiti. Meg’s sentiment is produced as an act of self-remembrance, operating as a marked attempt to establish a site-specific tradition within Westminster. The
couplet demands both collective participation in remembering and further oral dissemination, as the viewers of her inscription are required to ‘aske’ and ‘say’ in response to what is written. In being written in ‘chalke’, Meg’s topographical inscription is characterised with an urban impermanence that Skelton’s is not, his being written on an official ‘role’ (*LM*, C.1 ᵛ). This material-textual temporality can also be seen in Chapter Nine, in which Harry the Hostler and Long Meg travel to ‘Knights-bridge’ for ‘[s]hrouing’ on Shrove Tuesday (*LM*, D.1 ᵛ). As they are ‘walking homeward’ at ‘Saint James corner’, they encounter two thieves who take a ‘hundred markes from a poore carrier’ and then ask for the ‘gownes and purses’ of Long Meg and her companions (*LM*, D.1 ᵛ). Having ‘stript […] into her petticoat’, Meg becomes ‘light and nimble’, declaring that she ‘must haue a hundred markes out of [their] flesh’ (*LM*, D.1 ᵛ) in order to repay the carrier. After beating them into submission, the two thieves ‘intreated her upon their knees to spare their liues’ (*LM*, D.1 ᵛ). Meg’s resolution involves forcing the men to take an oath. Much like Robin Hood in the *Gest* and Long Meg’s four principles at her house in Islington, these terms form a moral code according to natural law, including declarations such as to ‘rob no children or innocents’ and ‘neuer hurt woman, nor company that any woman is in’ (*LM*, D.2 ᵛ). Despite Skelton’s elite access and ability to produce patents, Long Meg’s ruling more accurately echoes the didacticism of legal documentation. Yet having ‘no books about [her]’, Meg commands the thieves to ‘sweare on the skirt of [her] smocke’ (*LM*, D.2 ᵛ). In her exclusion from the *polis* and the textual production which underpins it, Meg relies on an alternative material authority which is bound up in embodied femininity. In a similar tone to her writing on the wall in chalk, Long Meg’s final words to the thieves are ‘If any aske you, who carried your bones? Say, Long Meg of Westminster met with you once’ (*LM*, D.2 ᵛ). In being denied access to the patriarchal sphere of public literary production, Meg’s self-proclaimed status is reliant on oral transmission. *The Life of Long Meg* thus creates a recursive loop, containing a suspension between oral and
written dissemination. The potent English orality used by rhetoricians such as Cicero is positioned inside the text, making Meg both the storyteller and subject of her own mythos. Meg’s vernacular language is used to memoralise her didactic heroism: her common language is tied to the common law in her own extralegal terms.

**Gendering Biopolitical Difference in the Jest**

Echoing the final section of Chapter One, I now examine the gendered biopolitical implications of the jestbook narratives of Long Meg and Skelton. While the introduction to this thesis outlined the legal discourses which delineate waivery and outlawry, *oikos* and *polis*, I now turn to the jest materials discussed to explore how the boundaries between these terms might be renegotiated in literary imagination. In employing a biopolitical framework, I am able to consider the point where law, location, and gender intersect, informing the construction of jestbook protagonists.

The *Merie Tales* of Skelton and *The Life of Long Meg* both explore the biopolitical concept of sovereign exceptionalism through situating their figures through times of war. These wars are exceptional as juristic order can be suspended by the legally independent sovereign and individual bodies are captured and used to further state power. The military press offers an example of such exceptionality, exposing the relationship between human life and political strategy. Conventionally, the press sought ‘chief men of habilitie of body’\(^81\) within the *polis* who could be compulsorily enlisted on behalf of the sovereign into the military and naval forces. Yet, much like the regulation of Northern barons and officials in the context of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, the positive law which underpinned the press was corrupted by implications of class, wealth, and status. As Patricia Fumerton notes, ‘the more

---

\(^81\) Excerpt from a statement from Privy Council in January 1599, which outlines that ‘weake and impotent people or of vagrant and idel persons’ were not welcome in the military. See Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.198.
well-to-do citizens often bought themselves out [of service] with bribes’, and press officers could reject vagrants and ‘sickly-looking men’, instead ‘raid[ing] private houses in search of young tradesmen’. The persecution of occupational workers through impressment is no coincidence, and reflects the anxieties of the jestbook audience who were also of a mercantile class.

Themes of sovereign exceptionalism and natural law complicate the representation of the press in both jestbooks, raising questions regarding gendered biopolitical difference. In The Life of Long Meg in which the Siege of Boulogne is fictionalised, it is noted that while there is a ‘general presse through England’, it was ‘especially about London and Westminster’ in order for Henry VIII to ‘leaue the borders of his Land Strong’ (LM, D.2[v]). The emphasis on the location of Westminster as the primary site for the press, coupled with the aforementioned utilisation of known military training fields, contributes to the geopolitical formation of Long Meg’s martial identity. As a woman excluded from the polis and therefore the press, Meg’s initiation into the military emerges from exceptional circumstances. In chapter ten, a press officer comes to collect ‘Harry the Ostler [innkeeper], that was a servaunt for Long Meg’, and Harry ‘being very loth to goe’, defers to Meg’s protection (LM, D.2[v]). Meg initially ‘intreats’ the constable, stating that ‘if […] he was prest forth, his Mistresse were undone’ (LM, D.2[v]). Unable to convince the officer, Meg is compelled to act with force and violence and ‘lent [the Constable] a box on the eare’, and with that, ‘all the street was on an uproare’ (LM, D.2[v)]. The centralized positive law embodied by both the officer of The Life of Long Meg and the sheriff of the Gest is superseded by the natural law wielded by their respective figures of exception.

As we have already seen in Chapter One, Harry the Ostler is contained within the

---

oikos of Meg’s household, in which she operates as both law-maker and law-enforcer. Just as ‘the outlaw’s confounded identity imitates his unique connection to the king’,\(^{83}\) so too does the ‘state-household analogy’ of Meg’s alehouse and home enable a slippage between queen and commoner.\(^{84}\) In their roles as extralegal sovereigns, both Robin Hood and Long Meg not only avoid prosecution entirely, but their lives are also further absorbed into roles within the state mechanism. For Robin Hood, this entails becoming a member of the King’s Court, and for Meg, taking on Harry’s press and volunteering for service. After Meg’s violent episode with the Press Officer, the Captain intervenes. Upon discovering a woman assaulted the constable, the Captain ‘smiles’ (\textit{LM}, D.3\(^{r}\)), reiterating the codification of violent women as a comic and inconsequential. Meg responds by both verbally and physically boasting her martial prowess, as she tells the Captain to ‘neuer laugh […] for I dare doe as much as any troope’ before disarming an onlooker of his ‘Caliver [firearm]’ with ‘nimbleness and acuitie’ (\textit{LM}, D.3\(^{r}\)). While this exemplifies a triumph of extralegal morality, it also offers a model of force that champions ‘a patriarchal rhetoric to encourage women’s loyalty and service’.\(^{85}\)

In the \textit{Merie Tales}, Skelton is exempt from any press due to his role at ‘the parysshe of Dys’ (\textit{MT}, B.7\(^{r}\)), constituting a different form of theological exceptionalism. However, in Chapter Seven, Skelton encounters a ‘cobler […] a tall man and a greate slouen, otherwise named a slouche’ (\textit{MT}, B.7\(^{r}\)) who he attempts to persuade into service as an unofficial advocate of the press. In a striking parallel to Long Meg, the cobbler is known for his ‘great bones’ and ‘tall’ stature, thus meaning his body is highly valuable when used as an instrument of the state, as Skelton observes ‘in all this country theare is not a more likelier manne to dooe such a feate as thou arte’ (\textit{MT}, B.7\(^{r}\)). While Meg’s biopolitical role within war is immediately determined as one of violence, Skelton suggests that the cobbler uses his

\(^{83}\) Taylor, p.322.
\(^{85}\) Walker, p.87.
height to ‘bere a standard’, whereby one bears ‘a lorde, or a knyghtes, or a gentlemannes armes […] and the souldiers that be vnder the aforesayde persons [shall bee] fayghtnge vnder the banner’ (MT, B.7v- B.8v). Skelton’s initial suggestion that the Cobbler engages in an ornamental, elite practice as oppose to ‘fayghtynge’ indicates a preoccupation with nationalistic prestige omitted entirely from Long Meg’s narrative. It quickly materialises that, like Harry the Ostler, the Cobbler wishes to evade service altogether, offering Skelton ‘a fatter capon, [so] that [he] maye bee at home’ (MT, B.8v). This proposed exchange reiterates the importance placed on mercantilism and food in the jest genre. Indeed, the ‘fatter capon’ reflects the negotiations of material sustenance used to ‘control and contain rebellion’ in the period. More significantly, the cobbler’s desire to remain within the oikos is represented as ‘slouen[ly]’ cowardice, therefore fulfilling a comic convention of popular folklore and reiterating the ideological value of sovereign duty.

The chapter concludes with the cobbler’s excuses, in which he declares that he is ‘sicke chill go home to bed; I thinke I shall dye’, resolving that he ‘wyll not goe to warre; my wyfe shall goe in my stead, for she can fyghte and playe the deuell wyth her distaffe’ (MT, Sig. C.1v). This conclusion indicates two distinct stereotypes. The feeble man, placidly residing in domesticity, and the emasculating violent woman, resistant of her emplacement within the oikos. These characters emerge as subjects of ridicule and a source of comedy, yet they also reflect patriarchal anxieties about the bodily autonomy and physical power of women. While the wives of both the Cobbler and Swanborne in the Merie Tales echo familiar cultural stories of cuckoldry, Long Meg maintains her status as a heroine. Though violent towards those who are in need of extralegal punishment, Meg refuses to engage in combat in marriage and is ‘her Husbands master’(LM, B.8v), upholding the social and moral order of wifehood within the oikos.

86 See Truesdale, p.135.
The theme of subversive domestic practices persists in both the *Merie Tales of Skelton* and *The Life of Long Meg* through the role of material objects. While for Skelton, this domesticity is characterised by a comedic crudeness, Long Meg repurposes the domestic items located within the *oikos* in acts of justice. As Chapter One has shown, these acts occur both within the tavern space and on behalf of the sovereign abroad. Long Meg not only appropriates a ‘quart pot’ to beat a demanding bailiff with, but also takes on the role of ‘laundresse’ (*LM*, C.2) in the Siege of Boulogne in which she ‘caused her women soulidiers to throw downe stones and scalding water’ (*LM*, D.3). This episode is recalled in woodcut form in the later edition of the jestbook *The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster* (1750). Through the imaging of the woodcut, Meg’s materiality gains another dimension, as she is depicted holding a laundry paddle over her shoulder:

![Figure 1: Title page of Anon, The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster (London: 1750).](image)

---

87 It is likely that all other woodcuts featured in *The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster* are generic. This titular image therefore provides the only surviving depiction of Long Meg.
The woodcut reveals a discrepancy between the descriptions of Meg’s actions at war in *The Life of Long Meg* (1635) and the iconography produced in the 1750 edition. ‘[L]ate at work’ as a laundress (*LM*, D.3 ͭ), Long Meg quickly responds to the French invasion of the walls at night. While the English soldiers are ‘in a dead sleep’, Meg takes a ‘halbert in her hands’ (*LM*, D.3 ͭ) and defends the area with ‘her women soouldiers’ (*LM*, D.3 ͮ). While Meg uses a halbert [a combination of a battle axe and spear], a cudgel, and a symeter during various episodes of combat, none of these weapons are represented in the above image. Meg’s size and scale accurately reflects the narrative’s description of ‘every limbe’ being ‘fit to her fatnesse’ (*LM*, B.1 ͭ), yet her iconography is emphatically domestic and feminine. Wielding the paddle, she is shown pulling up her skirt, evoking the impracticality of traditional feminine clothing in combat as well as a lower social decorum. This later visual depiction suggests an agenda to foreground Meg’s subversive domesticity above all else, firmly locating her in the sphere of the *oikos*.

In a striking parallel to Long Meg and her laundry paddle, Skelton makes shocking and explicit use of a ‘washing bettle’ in chapter nine of the *Merie Tales*. While Long Meg removes the laundry paddle from its conventional setting and elevates the role as laundresse to one of heroism, Skelton uses the item in a prank which figures him as ‘a practical and violent man, who is also a buffoon’. 88 In this tale, as ‘Skelton ryd into ye countre’, he decides to stop at an alehouse (*MT*, B.4 ͭ). Claiming the last available room, Skelton encounters a friar who also ‘dyd desire to haue lodgyng’ and requests to ‘lye with’ him (*MT*, B.4 ͭ). Though Skelton agrees to share a bedroom with the Friar, his mischievous intentions are quickly revealed, as he ‘fill[s] all the cuppes in the house and whitled the frere’ (*MT*, B.4 ͭ). After plying the Friar with drink, Skelton orders ‘get you to bed, and I wyll come to bed within a while’ (*MT*, B.4 ͭ). Skelton’s plan culminates in a humiliating and violent scatological joke:

88 Barnes, p.36.
Skelton went to the chaumber, and [...] sayd to the wyfe, Geue me a washyng betle. Skelton then caste downe the clothes, and the freer dyde starke naked: then Skelton dyd shite upon the freere navel and bellye: And then he did take the washing betle, and dyd strike an harde stroke upon the freere [...] Freere felt hys bellye, and smelt a foule savour, had thought hee had ben gored, and cried out and sayde: helpe, helpe, helpe, I am kylled. They of the house with Skelton went in to the chaumber [...] The freere sayde: I am kylled, one hathe thrust me in the bellye. Fo, sayde Skelton, thou drunken soule, thou doost lye, thou haste beshytten thy selfe.

(MT, B.4°-B.5°).

Skelton’s use of the washing bettle is far from its heroic appropriation in *The Life of Long Meg*. Here, the bedroom does not offer a private enclosure, but echoes the collective, communal laughter of Rabelaisian carnival in which ‘evacuation is a riotous public spectacle’. The scene is both one of humour and humiliation, in which ‘the figure of Skelton is neatly woven back into an early modern tapestry of perverse clerical sexuality’. While Meg’s jestbook tradition elevates Englishness through heroic, often patriotic force, Skelton is relegated to the lowly prankster.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the jest genre finds a fictionalised community in Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton. These figures have a shared place in the cultural project of English language reform, wherein the potency of Northern identity and vernacular expression are foregrounded in the search for a national, poetic identity. Through their distinct narrative geographies, these texts not only situate the jest figures at the threshold between real and imagined, but provide material sites from which to build an English mythos. In navigating these spaces, Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton articulate biopolitical tensions found in the *oikos* and the *polis*. In Chapter Three, I consider how these tensions manifest when Long Meg, Robin Hood, and John Skelton reach the early modern stage.

---

90 Barnes, p.36.
Chapter Three
Performing Waivery?: Long Meg and the Early Modern Stage

Four years after the now missing jestbook *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* appears in the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London (August 1590), Long Meg is the titular figure in a lost play. *Long Meg of Westminster* was first recorded in Henslowe’s Diary on Friday the fourteenth of February 1594, and was performed at the Rose playhouse an additional fifteen times by the Admiral’s Men up until 1597. As a lost play, of course, what is definitively known of its content is limited. The absence of a play is not unusual; out of the thirty-seven plays the Admiral’s company performed between 25 August 1595 and 18 July 1596, only six survive. The disparity between what is lost and what remains within this one year alone reflects the fragmented evidence of early modern drama at large, from which it is ‘impossible to be accurate about the subjects and genres represented by the repertory’. Like the waive in premodern law, Long Meg is only traceable on the stage through moments of suspension: while she is made visible by the titular entries in Henslowe’s diary, the principal playtext is absent. This chapter takes up the challenge which a lost play such as *Long Meg of Westminster* presents, engaging with the burgeoning area of theatrical scholarship concerned with the patterns and echoes between lost and extant materials. As Matthew Steggle notes, the study of lost plays considers dramatic works beyond the close analysis of script(s), considering all documents of performance as part of its textual life. While the content of *Long Meg of Westminster* cannot be recovered, the traces she leaves in plays and the records

---


of the Admiral’s Men suggest that her character splinters in different dramatic genres: as a Henrician jestbook figure residing in London, Meg’s identity straddles the tropes of Tudor history and city comedy. I firstly examine the plays which invoke Long Meg relationally and symbolically alongside London-centric groupings of women. Secondly, and more significantly, this chapter reads Long Meg through the company of the Admiral’s Men in the years corresponding and adjacent to the staging of *Long Meg of Westminster* (1594-1597). Where the playtext is absent, the repertory offers an ‘organising principle’ through which to understand the resonances of a play through the company’s wider output. Repertory studies therefore rejects the author-centric analysis of a single work, focusing on material signifiers such as buildings, costumes, and actors as sites vested with meaning.

One such actor is Edward Alleyn, star of the Admiral’s Men, whose thundering voice breaks through the silence of the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play. Roslyn Knutson suggests that Long Meg offered Edward Alleyn ‘a fine part in drag’, sharing the distinct characteristic of ‘considerable height’. Though speculative, Knutson’s fleeting comment indicates how Long Meg might appear on the stage as an embodied subject. The most prolific and sustained period of Alleyn’s career occurs within the same date parameters of *Long Meg of Westminster*’s performance, both taking place between 1594 and 1597. Alleyn’s body therefore becomes a possible site of intervention on the otherwise elusive remains of Long

---


6 Munro, *Children of the Queen’s Revels*, p.4.


8 Rutter, p.20. See also S.P Cerasano, ‘Edward Alleyn, the new model actor, and the rise of the celebrity in the 1590s’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 18 (2006), 47-60.
Meg’s stage history. While we cannot be certain of how the jestbook narrative of Long Meg is represented in the *Long Meg of Westminster* play, the body of the actor presents a new, more immediate dimension of materiality and a physical glimpse of the waive. Evidence of Alleyn’s physical stature, coupled with details on the dimensions of the Rose playhouse, suggests that he ‘probably looked like a giant to his audiences at the Rose’. Amongst the surviving personal affects left by Allen after his death in 1626 is his signet ring, an item which is displayed prominently ‘on the last finger of his right hand’ in the only identified portrait of him, held at The Dulwich Picture Gallery. While the looming full-length depiction of Alleyn could overstate his height with artistic embellishment, the exceptional size of Alleyn’s ring allows us to make some more realistic evaluations of his physical stature. As a tangible artefact, the ring indicates Alleyn met the criteria of ‘mythic proportions’ which would ensure his suitability for the role of ‘a Maid called for her excesse in heighte’ (*LM*, B.1). Perceptions of Alleyn’s size are also enhanced by the stage design and structure of the Rose playhouse. The archaeological excavation of the Rose in 1989 revealed that the theatre was a ‘remarkably small and intimate’ venue designed as a fourteen-sided polygon with only a ‘71-foot diameter’. This originally contained ‘a tapered thrust stage’ of which ‘nearly all the groundlings would have had to stand in front’. ‘Spectators standing in the pit, looking upwards’, then, ‘would have viewed Alleyn from a perspective that would have added further to the sense of physical eminence that he projected’. The staging of

---

9 It is worth noting that scholars such as David Kathman have more recently explored how women’s roles were allocated on the pre-Restoration professional stage. Kathman concludes that ‘until the early 1660s, female roles on the English stage […] were played by adolescent boys, no younger than twelve and no older than twenty-one or twenty-two’. Knutson’s assertion regarding Alleyn playing Meg is thus used speculatively here to explore the possibilities of Meg’s physical staging. See David Kathman, ‘How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2007), 220-246.
Edward Alleyn both physically and spatially therefore echoes Long Meg’s title and tradition; the emphasis on her height, proportion, and physical dominance are the key material signifiers of her character.

This chapter takes Edward Alleyn’s possible performance as Long Meg as its starting point. Knutson’s supposition of Alleyn performing as Meg captures the exclusion of women from participating in their own subjecthood. The legal exclusion of women thus extends to the commercial stage, forming a physical as well as textual arena from which they are prohibited as actors. Indeed, as Jean E. Howard notes, while evoked ‘at the representational level, women were presentationally excluded on the early modern professional stage’, creating the paradoxical phenomenon of ‘the absent-present “woman” [in] Elizabethan and Jacobean commercial theat[re]’. Viz Nardizzi suggests that the outdoor playhouse constitutes ‘a novel kind of early modern “house”’ or oikos. Taking up Nardizzi’s assertion, I suggest that while the oikos is not strictly opposed to the polis, women’s exclusion from onstage activities suggests that, in gendered terms, the stage acts as augmentation of the polis. For women, the professional London stage constitutes another space in which they are absent from their own representation; they are paradoxically included to be excluded. Indeed, Long Meg does not appear physically in any of the surviving stage plays this chapter discusses. Just as the waive is only included in law to be excluded from it, Long Meg is included in the theatre to be excluded.

---

17 There is an important distinction here between the absence of women in the onstage activities and the absence of women from theatrical activity altogether. As Natasha Korda notes, women participated in ‘various sorts of theatrical activity as playwrights, patrons and performers’. However, as this chapter’s focus on the lost Long Meg of Westminster play specifically concerns the playing companies in London’s commercial theatres, the exclusion of women remains foreground. As Dympna Callaghan has argued, exclusion from the all-male professional stage ‘is not remedied by those rare instances of female performance’ that occurred beyond its purview. See Natasha Korda, Labors Lost: Women’s Work and the Early English Stage (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p.16 and Dympna Callaghan, Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.8.
In dramatic works, Long Meg’s presence is symbolic. She does not contribute to the central action or impact the plot, but possesses a popularity which warrants fleeting invocation. Under this symbolic status, Long Meg’s original position as a waive-heroine is subsumed by broader cultural anxieties about women operating outside the law. The expansive taxonomy in which Long Meg is located reflects a larger unease with women’s intervention in public matters of the polis. However, in the body of Edward Alleyn and the frayed margins of lost plays, Long Meg’s exclusion is also situated in a textual network of plays interested in reviving folkloric figures. The aesthetic and stylistic resonances between Robin Hood, John Skelton, and Long Meg in the jestbook tradition, discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, can also be found in the repertory of the Admiral’s Men. This chapter follows Tom Rutter’s recent suggestion that the plays that the Admiral’s Men were staging at the Rose theatre over the course of the 1590s demonstrate the development of a distinct house style formed by ‘subject matter, theme, characterisation, treatment of materials and more’. While Rutter qualifies that ‘any study that sets out to identify patterns of influence across theatrical repertories is, to some extent, presupposing the coherence of those repertories bodies of work’, I propose that the pre-existing network of jest culture between Robin Hood, John Skelton, and Long Meg raises questions about the ‘extent to which different playing companies possessed distinctive corporate identities’. Rutter’s model for recognising patterns within repertories echoes Roslyn Knutson’s term ‘play-cluster’, defined as ‘group[s] of plays exploiting the same historical matter but treating that matter without much concern for genre, style, or historical accuracy’. In the case of the Admiral’s Men in the 1590s, I argue that the ‘play-cluster’ found in the period of Long Meg’s production and performance is distinctly interested in producing outlaw/waive figures. I take up Knutson’s and Rutter’s

18 Rutter, p.1.
19 Rutter, p.11.
approach to demonstrate how *Long Meg of Westminster* might be reframed by its connections to Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (c.1598) through the figure of Skelton. Through their shared status in English folklore, Long Meg and Robin Hood are embedded in the construction of vernacular eloquence for the stage, both enabling and disrupting the project of English rhetoric in the process. In Ben Jonson’s court masque *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (c.1624), the discursive contact zones between these figures and sources culminate outside the repertory of the Admiral’s Men. In the following pages, I discuss known invocations of Long Meg in extant stage plays. These surviving representations of her character provide context to her exclusion from the ‘play-cluster’ engaging with themes of outlawry.

**Long Meg and Extant Drama: Staging Law, Playing Women**

Following the lost play *Long Meg of Westminster* (c.1594), the first peripheral presence of Long Meg in stage plays remains within the repertory of the Admiral’s Men. From 1596 to 1599, Thomas Heywood worked as an actor and playwright for the Admiral’s Men. During this time, Heywood produced part one of *The Fair Maid of the West* (c.1597-1603), a play straddling the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. In the period closely following the success of the lost play *Long Meg of Westminster*, Long Meg’s English martial identity is foregrounded by Heywood, echoing the ‘singular woman commander[ship]’ of Elizabeth I. Boarding a ship dressed ‘like a page with a sword’, tavern maid and protagonist Bess Bridges comments ‘[m]e thinkes I could be valiant on the sudden: | And meet a man i’th field. | I could doe all

---

22 Jones. p.84.
that I have heard discourst | Of Mary Ambree or Westminster’s Long-Meg’.

Although Bess’s clown companion Clem notes that she will ‘come short of Long Meg’ in terms of height, the figures are linked through patriotic servitude made possible through the device of wearing men’s apparel, directly echoing a recurrent motif in The Life of Long Meg of Westminster of ‘meet[ing] [a man ] i’th field’ (LM, Sig. B.4v) for battle. As a martial English heroine ‘who is said to have fought in the siege of Ghent of 1584’, Mary Ambree’s narrative occupies a relational position to Long Meg’s. Heywood conflates these well-known folkloric figures with Bess as a ‘distillation of Elizabeth’s persona’, using the qualities of chastity, virtue, and masculine leadership to frame their cross-dressing. The relationship between Mary Ambree and Long Meg endures and extends throughout the Jacobean period with ideologically motivated variations. Indeed, Long Meg is invoked in the Shakespearean canon. In The Tempest (c.1610-1), the drunken boatswain Stephano sings of ‘Mall, Meg and Marian and Margery’. The alliterative grouping of these four figures, coupled with their relegation to the margins of song, demonstrates their exclusion from the centre of narratives. However, Shakespeare’s reference to Meg also demonstrates an understanding of her cultural potency. The martial link between Mary Ambree and Long Meg is anomalously positive, and the emphasis on fashioning her as the masculine woman par excellence points to a broader pattern. Once transported to the stage, Long Meg is more intimately tied to the late-Elizabethan and Jacobean political and sexual landscape in which ‘clothing and accessories [are] a site’ of anxiety.

Through the demands of physical staging, a further layer of meaning is added to the

---

24 The Fair Maid of the West, Part I, II.iii.15.
26 The Tempest, II.ii.43.
description of Meg in the jestbook as ‘the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a womans mould’ (LM, B.1). In The Life of Long Meg, Meg’s masculine clothing and weaponry are framed as politically benign necessities, bound up in public justice and military service. Meg adopts conventionally masculine clothing and accessories in order to enter public spaces and best male adversaries with greater ease. On the Jacobean stage, however, the slippage between male and female gender signifiers leads to an increased regulation of Meg’s character. This ambiguity is also underpinned by an additional layer of exclusion: Long Meg’s embodied presence on the overwhelmingly male stage is marked by further discursive complexities through the additional layer of cross-dressing within cross-dressing.  

In the imagined case of Edward Alleyn, he is a man performing the role of a woman who convincingly disguises herself as a man. Meg’s identity as ‘neither/nor and both/and’ in terms of gender leads to her conflation with gender non-conforming categories at large. As Chapter One discussed, the jestbook considers Long Meg’s gendered subjectivity as part of her exceptionality. Yet, as the proximity of Long Meg to ‘Mistris Hic & Haec’ in Nathan Field’s Amends for Ladies (c.1611) exemplifies, Meg’s reputation as a jestbook heroine is eclipsed by the gender ambiguity critiqued in the Hic Mulier and Haec Vir pamphlets (1620). Surviving playtexts suggest that once Long Meg is placed outside the creative authority of the Admiral’s Men, her distinct physicality is complicated by the wider context of the ‘women […] [who] carry the double threat of masculinity and continental fashion’ in the Jacobean period, particularly in communities of city crime.  

The shift in Long Meg’s representation is exemplified by Thomas Dekker’s Satiromastix (c.1601) and Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s Westward Ho! (c.1604). For

---

28 For layers of cross-dressing see also Rosalind in William Shakespeare’s As You Like It (c.1599), ed. by Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006). Rosalind poses as boy shepherd Ganymede in order to enter the forest space, where the Duke has been exiled to ‘live like the old Robin Hood of England’ (I.i.111). Rosalind does not pose as a noble outlaw, like the Duke, but has a ‘swashing and a martial outside’ (I.3.117) as Ganymede, paralleling Long Meg’s exterior.  

29 Chess, p.45.
Dekker, Long Meg’s name becomes a generic title loosely applied to a multitude of women operating outside the terms of *femmes covert*, particularly widows and bawds. As Garthine Walker notes, women were being identified and prosecuted with increasingly ‘apparent intensity’ from around 1600, placed in ‘categories of unruliness’ such as ‘scolds […] witches, dominant wives, [and] masterless maidservants’. In *Satiromastix* (1602), Widow Miniver is called ‘my Long Meg a Westminster’ and ‘Mary Ambree’ in a verbal sparring with Tucca. In Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s *Westward Ho!* (1604), the bawd Mistress Birdlime is asked ‘What kin art thou to Long-Meg of Westminster? th’art like her’, followed by the more direct ‘Mary Ambree, do you not know me?’. The waive’s suspension in law and language is reflected in these dramatic representations of Meg, in which her character malleably signifies ‘a cumulative and composite notion of women’s legal pursuits’. Long Meg and Mary Ambree are stripped of the positive connotations of martial valour and further displaced by a cluster of associations, chiefly connected to sexually illicit behaviour. Indeed, in *Westward Ho!*, Mistress Birdlime, who is told she is like ‘Long-Meg of Westminster’, is a procuress to three men named Tenterhook, Wafer and Honeysuckle. Some of *Westward Ho!* takes place in the illicit location of Brentford, which is also the titular location of the lost Admiral’s Men play *Friar Fox and Gillian of Brentford* (c.1599). The elision of Long Meg’s character with more conventional roles for women such as widow and bawd establishes a more limited characterisation for her on the stage, which is conceptualised either as a biopolitical tool of patriotic military service, or as a symbol of sexual

---

30 ‘Femmes covert’ referring to women legally covered by the status of their husbands.
31 Walker, p.102.
35 As we will see in Chapter Four, the figures of Long Meg and Gillian are brought together as rivals in Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1598) and offer another narrative which associates Meg with sex work.
transgression. In both roles, Long Meg further recedes into a symbolic status in which her distinct identity is effaced, instead becoming an index for feminine virtue.

Amongst the diffuse references to Long Meg in these extant works, there are also traces recalling the power of her singularity in the lost play. In the Nathan Fields’ *Amends for Ladies* (c.1611), there is a second reference to the lost play of Long Meg. This comes shortly after the embodied appearance from Moll Cutpurse, who is addressed as both Long Meg and Mary Ambree. In some inconsequential dialogue between two Lords, Lord Proudly asks ‘What d’ee this afternoon?’, to which Lord Fee-Simple replies ‘Faith I have a great mind to see long-megg and the ship at the Fortune’ (II.i.151-3). As Martin Wiggins notes, this could refer to a second play or an alternative title, ‘performed at the Fortune either as Long Meg or *Long Meg and the Ship*’ around 1610. Long Meg’s intrusion into the narrative of *Amends for Ladies* (c.1611), while partly bound up in capitalising ‘on the appearance of the real Moll Frith on the Fortune Stage in March or April of that year’, is also motivated by the distinctly separate popularity of the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* production. Fields’ more singular recognition of Long Meg and her success on the early modern stage is echoed in the moralising theatrical criticism of I.H’s *This Worlds Folly, or a Warning-Peece discharged upon the wickednesse thereof* (1615), which warns that Long Meg is ‘bombarding London with the spirit of theatricality’. The author appears to allude to the Fortune playhouse, where The Admiral’s Men relocated to in 1600. Referring to the audience as ‘Fortunate-fatted

---

36 Wiggins, p.66.  
37 Anthony B. Dawson, ‘Mistris Hic & Haec: Representations of Moll Frith’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33:2 (1993), 385-405, (p.385). At the beginning of Act Two to *Amends for Ladies*, Moll Cutpurse appears before mercants Seldom and his wife Grace on the premise of running an errand for ‘her master’ Sir John Love-all. To assert her comparative virtue, Grace rejects Moll, referring to her as a ‘sword and target’ before listing ‘Marie Vmbree, Long-Meg’. This is not the first nor last association with Meg and roarsers: in *Pasquils Jests: With the Merriment of Mother Bunch* (c.1604), the laughter of Mother Bunch is described as being ‘lowder than the great roaring Megge’. In the Jacobean play *A Fair Quarrel* (c.1615-7) by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, Meg is referred to as ‘the first roarer’.  
fooles’, they conclude that ‘[t]he roaring Meg (not Mol) of all scurrile villanies vpon the
Cities face’.\(^{39}\) This striking moment of differentiation of ‘Meg (not Mol)’ reiterates that these
figures are not wholly conflated in the national imagination. Indeed, what the invocations of
Long Meg largely fail to address in terms of performing waivery, the study of the lost *Long
Meg of Westminster* play can attempt to address.

In order to negotiate the ephemeral nature of lost plays, I now return to Roslyn
Knutson’s notion of ‘play-cluster[s]’.\(^{40}\) Knutson observes a ‘Robin Hood cluster’ in the
repertory of the Admiral’s men between 1598 and 1600. This included, though is not limited
to, ‘the lost “Richard Coeur d’Lion’s Funeral”, the lost “Robin Hood’s Pennyworths,” and
*Look About You*, as well as Anthony Munday’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*
and Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle’s sequel *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*.\(^{41}\)
By examining the theatrical records of the Admiral’s Men alongside the lost *Long Meg of
Westminster* (c.1594) and Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle’s extant *The Downfall* and
*Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (c.1598), I want to suggest that these Robin Hood plays
also have a place in the cluster in which Long Meg resides.

**The Lost Play of Long Meg: ‘play-cluster[s]’ and the Waive in the 1590s**

What we know of the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play is limited, but provides some initial
context which connects her to contemporaneous drama. While there can be no definitive
confirmation, evidence of Long Meg’s pairing with figures featured in *The Life of Long Meg*
and intertextual allusions to episodes from the text in other drama suggest that the plot of the
play follows that of the jestbook, at least partly. It is highly possible that ‘[t]he Woolner

\(^{39}\) I.H., *This Worlds Folly, or a Warning-Peece discharged vpon the Wickednesse thereof* (London: 1615), B.2: Moll is described to have ‘Meg of Westminster’s courage’ in Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* (V.i.2–3).

\(^{40}\) Knutson, ‘The History Play’, p.89.

\(^{41}\) Knutson, ‘The History Play’, p.89. The Robin Hood ‘play-cluster’ has recently been taken up for The Globe’s ‘Read Not Dead’ programme, performing six Robin Hood plays from the early modern period. See <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/seasons/read-not-dead/> [accessed 08/09/2019].
episode’, which details how Meg ‘vses Woolsner the singing-man of Windsor, that was a great eater, and how she made him pay for his Break fast’ (LM, A.4), is referred to in John Webster’s *The White Devil* (1612). Moreover, Henslowe’s 1598 inventory records a costume for famous Henrican jester Will Summers. *Long Meg of Westminster* is ‘the only play in the company’s previous repertory known to be set during the character’s lifetime’, and like the Woolsner, Summers also ‘features in the source material’ as part of Meg’s social group. Whether *Long Meg of Westminster* was a new play in 1594 is met with some speculation, as its first recorded performance is the only play ‘marked with “j” in the spot where Henslowe more commonly placed “ne”’ to signify a new addition. Still, because Henslowe ‘recorded performances by the Admiral’s men in consecutive years, 1594-1597, we are able to distinguish two categories of old plays in the company repertory: revivals and continuations’. Revivals were both common and profitable between 1594 and 1595, and ‘[t]he receipts that Henslowe recorded at daily performances […] indicate that most of the old scripts were as profitable for Henslowe – and thus presumably for the Admiral’s men – as the new plays brought into production that year’. In the case of *Long Meg of Westminster*, out of the total sixteen performances recorded by Henslowe, five took place between February and March in the first year, 1594. Following a hiatus of thirteen months, *Long Meg* returned to the stage on the 30th of April 1595 with a further seven performances between April and September. *Long Meg* is then

43 Wiggins, p.65.
47 See Greg, *Henslowe’s Diary*, pp.21-22. ‘Longe Mege’ was performed on the 14th February 1594, 20th February 1594, 1st March (marked as 29th February) 1594, 4th March 1594, and 13th March 1594. See also Roslyn Knutson’s entry on ‘Long Meg of Westminster’ in Lost Plays Database [accessed 12/03/2018].
again ‘remounted in November 1596’ for a further three performances. This second revival ‘flopped after a successful opening (47s., compared to [the two] later performances [of that year] at 5 [and] 11s’), before finally, on the 28th of January 1597, making its final performance, returning 7s. The greatest number of performances occurring in the two years is unsurprising in the context of retaining public interest, as ‘[p]lays that reached commercial exhaustion needed a recovery period if they were restaged at all’. Equally, what appears in Henslowe’s Diary to be a repeated revival of Long Meg of Westminster is testament to its continued cultural significance and economic viability. Indeed, Long Meg of Westminster was initially ‘so successful that it brought in more revenue during its first run that either of Christopher Marlowe’s plays’, Doctor Faustus and 1 Tamburlaine, performed at the same time. While Marlowe’s works were performed more frequently ‘in the company’s repertory for the 1594-95 season, ‘Doctor Faustus and 1 Tamburlaine (thirteen performances) did no better than “The Siege of London” (seven performances, both 33.9s) […] and none of their revenues compared to the 41s. that “Long Meg of Westminster” (nine performances) brought in, on average’. Long Meg of Westminster’s greater popularity in relation to well-studied works such as Marlowe’s demonstrates that ‘what strikes us as dominant or frequent may in fact be […] over-represented’.

Returning to the aforementioned actor Edward Alleyn, however, provides a possible link across numerous productions in the repertory. Beyond the compelling speculation of Alleyn’s embodiment of Long Meg, the performance roster of the Admiral’s Men ‘shows a predominance of “large” roles […] from the 1580s onwards’, around the beginning of

records the 13th September 1595 date as a repeat of the 28th August performance, but Greg records the last performance under the 13th September, transcribed from Henslowe’s Diary.
50 Schott-Syme, p.509.
51 Ray, pp.929-930.
52 Schott-Syme, p.504.
Alleyn’s acting skills and partnership with Henslowe (whose step-daughter he married in 1592), made him extremely influential, and his status ‘directly affected the management of the repertory of the Rose playhouse, from the selection of the plays to be performed to the order and frequency with which they were scheduled’. Alleyn even had ownership of some significant playbooks, which he then sold to Henslowe for him to be cast in. In this respect, the Admiral’s men profited from operating as Alleyn’s personal repertory. As protagonists which require a singular, imposing figure to portray them, Alleyn’s involvement in productions which centralise waives and outlaws seems likely. At the height of the popularity of *Long Meg of Westminster* in 1595, a new play-text entitled *Longshanks* was entered into Henslowe’s *Diary*, marked as “‘ne’” on the 29th August, which is now also lost. Edward Alleyn later sold *Longshanks* along with eight other playbooks to the Admiral’s Men between 1601 and 1602. *Longshanks* refers to an epithet for George Peele’s *Edward I*, as ‘Abel Jeffes entered a play called “the Chronicles of Kinge Edward the first […] surnamed Edwarde Longshankes”’ into the Stationers’ Register on the 8th October 1593.

However, it is possible that the London playhouses in 1595 and 1596 ‘played *Edward I* in competition with the Admiral’s *Longshanks*’. With content which either parallels or adapts that of *Edward I*, *Longshanks* constitutes another significant titular role for Alleyn underpinned by outlawry. Moreover, *Edward I* also features ‘Queen Elinor’, a romantic companion of Welsh Prince-rebel Lluellen (Llewelyn), and a figure who later features as Robert’s antagonist in Munday’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*. In Peele’s *Edward I*, ‘Queen Elinor’ is characterised as both ‘royally munificent in granting money to maimed soldiers’ and ‘a venomous harpy […] whose longing is for nothing worse than to box

---

54 Cerasano, ‘Edward Alleyn’, p.50.
her husbands ears’. Queen Elinor’s martial charity and violent domesticity echoes episodes of the jestbook *The Life of Long Meg* and, most likely as an analogue, the *Long Meg of Westminster* stage play. Peele’s Elinor is also placed in increasing proximity to waivery as she is cast as ‘Maid Marian’ in Prince Lluellen’s play-game, as the aristocrat-rebel declares ‘[w]eelen get the next daie from Brecknocke the booke of Robin Hood […] and wander like irregulerers up and down the wildernesse, ile be the master or misrule, ile be Robin Hood’.}

While Alleyn is thought to have played Edward I himself in Peele’s production, S. P Cerasano has noted that ‘playhouse inventories of costumes taken in 1598’ might suggest ‘Robin Hood’ be added ‘to the list of parts associated with Alleyn’. From its ‘prominence in the inventories, and the evidence regarding [its] popularity in the reportorial calendar’, the inclusion of “‘Roben Hoodes sewtte’” amongst other items such as “‘Tamberlanes breches of crimson velvet’” suggest Alleyn’s direct involvement. Though it cannot be confirmed whether the script or content of the lost *Longshanks* (c.1595) is identical to that of George Peele’s *Edward I* (c.1593), the shared historical milieu of this play-cluster, all of which star Alleyn, indicates a ‘house-style’ with a distinct interest in figures of waivery and outlawry. As performances of *Long Meg of Westminster* were still ongoing at the time of *Longshanks* first staging, it is significant that Alleyn may have performed ‘as Long Meg one afternoon (August 28)’ and ‘Longshanks the next (August 29)’. These consecutive performances might exemplify the thematic ‘forms of duplication’ found in the theatrical scheduling, particularly through ‘the pairing of two-part plays on consecutive afternoons’. As The Rose’s ‘plain stage [was] built for rapid changes of the plays’, the visual distinction from one

---

60 Knight, p.51.
62 Cerasano, ‘Edward Alleyn’, p.52. Alleyn is perhaps most famous for his role as Tamburlaine.
63 Knutson, ‘What was James Burbage Thinking????’, p.122.
64 Knutson, *Playing Companies*, p.57.
play to the next would be limited. By embodying both Long Meg as a ‘tall man cast in womans mould’ and Longshanks, which also functions as ‘a nickname for a tall or long-legged person’, Alleyn’s physicality acts as a potential site for continuity in this succession of performances. The staged identity of Longshanks answers the call for an equivalent to Long Meg found in The Life of Long Meg, as Will Summers speculates that ‘if the King would marry her to long Sanders of the Court, they would bring forth none but souldiers’ (LM, B.2). The literary status of Long Meg, Longshanks, and fleetingly Long Sanders, is principally defined through their height and size. The proximity and doubling of the roles of Long Meg and Longshanks, alongside intertextual references to Robin Hood, reiterates the overlapping narratives of waivery and outlawry in the 1590s repertory of the Admiral’s Men. The concurrently performed roles of Long Meg and Longshanks in 1595 stage a proximity between narratives of waivery and outlawry, perhaps made legible by the body of Edward Alleyn.

These concurrent roles not only reflect the possible production of parts for Edward Alleyn by the Admiral’s Men, but a more collaborative phenomenon across repertories and genres. Long Meg and Robin Hood are linked in the English cultural imagination through the address to the reader in The Life of Long Meg (1635), which states that ‘many men made many pleasant jigges, as the Jest of Robin-Hood […] I bethought me of Long Meg of Westminster, and her merry prankes’ (LM, A.3). Though more difficult to trace on the stage, the narrative drift between Long Meg and Robin Hood, waivery and outlawry, continues in the play-cluster which surrounds the performance of Long Meg of Westminster. Long Meg continued to be staged until 1597, ending just one year before the first performance of Munday’s Downfall in 1598. While Edward Alleyn might connect the figures of Long Meg,

---

66 ‘Longshanks’, (n., OED, 1).
Longshanks and Robin Hood through records of his external roles in acting and production, John Skelton has the potential to establish an analogue between Long Meg and Robin Hood on the stage. Through examining the continuities between the jestbook *The Life of Long Meg*, the lost Long *Meg of Westminster* play (c.1594-97) and *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (1598), I argue that Long Meg and Robin Hood can be joined together by Skelton in terms of narrative and generic style.

As with Edward Alleyn, traces of the recurrent role of Skelton can also be found in the costume inventory of the Admiral’s Men. Henslowe’s accounts shows that ‘friars were a regular part of the spectacle at the Rose and Fortunate playhouses in the 1590s and early 1600s’ such as ‘Munday and Chettle’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*’, in which the roles of Skelton and the Friar are collapsed.67 Represented as the author of *The Downfall*, Skelton’s character provides interludes of plot exposition whilst also joining the interior cast of the play as Friar Tuck. Alongside this known Robin Hood play, the ‘narrative sources and historical subject matter’ of lost plays such as “‘fryer fox and gyllen of branforde’ [Admiral’s (1599)] […] “long shancke (Admiral’s, 1595-96) […] “Robin Hood[‘s] penerthes” (Admiral’s, 1600); “Skelton and Skogan” (Admiral’s, 1601)” imply a more extensive use still.68 The chain of signification between these productions suggest that the ‘anachronistic aesthetics’ of the Admiral’s Men output is in part shaped by the practical limitations of resources, a factor from which they accrue shared ‘affective resonances’ across performances.69

Something more potent and deliberate also underpins the archaic invocation of

---

Skelton. John Skelton is an important Henrician figure woven into the fabric of jest culture: he is the protagonist of *The Merie Tales, Newly Imprinted & Made by Master Skelton Poet Laureat* (1567), in Long Meg’s community in the source material for *Long Meg of Westminster, The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635), before significantly appearing in Munday’s *Downfall*.\(^{70}\) As both a jestbook figure and Tudor poet laureate, Skelton’s presence signifies both elite archaism and national folkloric appeal. In his writing career, Skelton developed a verse form eponymously called the Skeltonic. Comprised of short, jaunty couplets, Skeltonic verse is often characterised by an exhaustive rhyming which is anarchic by nature, a quality which generates a comedic absurdity. The Skeltonic composition is distinctly linked to the poet’s identity, and easily emulated in its recognisable style and metre.

Situated amongst other anachronisms found in Shakespeare, Lucy Munro cites the Skeltonic verse in Munday’s *Downfall* as an example of an archaism, a ‘word or linguistic convention regarded as ‘old [but still] in […] living memory’.\(^ {71}\) Skelton and the synonymous Skeltonic form fulfils this criteria, thus making way for a historically manufactured identity valued by English speakers from across the social strata. The Skeltonic verse is thus an evocative linguistic device designed to elicit historical and national nostalgia. Skelton appears reciting Skeltonic rhyme in the analogue *The Life of Long Meg* jestbook, and is likely to have been amongst the *dramatis personae* for the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play, and. I therefore extend Munro’s exploration of the form beyond *The Downfall*. I suggest that Skelton becomes a dominant motif and the Skeltonic verse a ‘shared stylistic resource’ for Robin Hood and Long Meg, absorbed into their narratives to boost their literary and pseudo-

---


\(^{71}\) Munro, ‘Speaking History’, p.540.
historical status.\textsuperscript{72} For Munro, Skelton’s presence and language conveys the dramatic archaism of the past, both old enough to embody the prestige of tradition and recent enough to be recognised by the audience.\textsuperscript{73} By inserting Skelton in their respective literary communities, Munday and the anonymous author of \textit{Long Meg of Westminster} pursue a shared goal in drawing on England’s literary past to enhance the sense of ‘aesthetic and national belonging’ of their respective protagonists.\textsuperscript{74} In the absence of an archaic voice distinctly belonging to their own protagonists, both narratives borrow the Skeltonic to assimilate existing historical overtones which their audiences are familiar with. In an attempt to address the absence of the \textit{Long Meg of Westminster} play and the uncertainty of how the material approaches her as a staged subject, I turn to the contextual and chronological relationship between texts and how constructed identities such as Skelton’s intersect across these narratives. While we cannot be certain of Skelton’s role in \textit{Long Meg of Westminster} on the stage, examining the surviving material in Munday’s \textit{The Downfall} and \textit{The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington}, the source jestbook \textit{The Life of Long Meg of Westminster}, and the later appearances of Skelton alongside Long Meg in Ben Jonson’s \textit{Fortunate Isles and their Union} (c.1625) enables a more developed, albeit speculative, understanding of the cultural significance and representation of Long Meg on the stage.

In \textit{The Downfall}, Munday presents Skelton as both the writer and performer of the play, functioning both as ‘a character in a frame narrative set at the Tudor court’, and a player as ‘Friar Tuck in the main narrative of Robin Hood’.\textsuperscript{75} As Skelton belongs to the Tudor court, he cannot be wholly assimilated into the topography of Robin Hood. Munday therefore

\textsuperscript{72} Lucy Munro, ‘Skeltonics: Jonson, Shakespeare, the Literary Past and Imagined Futures’, \textit{Shakespeare}, 12:4 (2016), 338-350 (p.338).
\textsuperscript{73} Munro, ‘Speaking History’, p.521.
\textsuperscript{74} Munro, ‘Speaking History’, p.526.
\textsuperscript{75} Munro, ‘Skeltonics’, p.340.
demonstrates a knowingness regarding Skelton’s temporal and generic dislocation through separating him from the pastoral location. For Skelton, the forest is merely a construct manufactured by his theatrical company. Munday’s invocation is thus underpinned by an artificial archaism, a theatrical device to aid the illusion that the entertainment is of a former time. Munday opens the play with an induction scene, framing the central action of the play in a preparatory discussion of the performance between Skelton and Sir John Eltham. While the origins of his identity are ambiguous, the fictitious Sir John Eltham is overtly connected to a royal court of Skelton’s lifetime, as he reports that ‘the King himselfe, | As wee were parting, bid mee take great heede | Wee faile not of our day’. Written by Skelton for the King, Munday’s play also contains ‘disparate forms of “audience”’, forming tensions between Skelton’s audience of a past monarch (either Henry VII or Henry VIII), the real audience of ‘the monarch at the time, Elizabeth, who actually saw the play at court, and the other, Southwark audience of the play’. By inserting Skelton in the author-audience relationship, Munday sets up a temporal dislocation which alienates Robin Hood from the present political climate, thus diffusing ‘any institutional expression of egalitarian sentiment’ under Elizabethan rule. Invoking Skelton in an authorial role enables Munday to position the gentrified ‘Robert, Earl of Huntington’ as a construct of the past, and thus contest competing representations of Robin Hood which remain embedded in the historical, cultural, and national memory. Skelton’s lived identity as a successful writer allows Munday to establish a narrative for Robin Hood self-conscious in its deployment of archaism, one which asserts that while ‘many talk of Robin Hood that never shot in his bowe […] Skelton writes of Robin Hood what he doth truly knowe’ (TD, 116-117). Munday thus exploits the recent

76 Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, ‘The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington’ in Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales, ed. by Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), i.i.17-19. Further references will be made ibid the text as TD.
memory of Skelton’s poetic authority to ‘legitimate his version of Robin Hood’, whose role as a distinguished outlaw-hero is reduced to that of a distressed gentleman.

Skelton is introduced to the audience through Eltham’s naming question ‘[h]owe, maister Skelton? What, at studie hard?’ (TD, I.i.4), and his identity is consistently confirmed linguistically through the spoken passages written in the style of the Skeltonic. As an idiosyncratic but recognisable form, Munday’s use of the ‘fond ribble rabble’ (TD, I.i.139) of the Skeltonic exemplifies a ‘deliberate adoption of [a] form of speech that would have registered as old-fashioned or outmoded to the speaker’s audience’. It is through the Skeltonic, then, that spectators are confronted by the historical artificiality of Skelton’s insertion in a Robin Hood narrative. In scene six, “Skelton”, agitated by the establishment figure of Warman’s man Ralph, forgets his role as Friar Tuck, and descends into a forty-six line Skeltonic. While Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren suggest that it is ‘the vanity of the world’ which causes the Skeltonic outburst, Munday seems specifically preoccupied with using the form to expose the linguistic pretensions of Ralph, who uses obscure ‘“inkhorn” terms’ borrowed from classical languages. Before exposing the secondary identity of Skelton, the “Friar” lists these terms with annoyance, asking ‘[d]eigne, vouch, protract, complement, obsecrate? Why, good man tricks, who taught you thus to prate?’ (TD, I.vi.838-839). In the Skeltonic, the Skelton/Friar figure recalls how ‘[m]en dead many daies’ adopt the ‘vaine foolery’ of ‘pure Priscian speech’ in order to achieve the ‘praise […] Of Poets Laureate’ (TD, 847-874), a level of status which Skelton achieved himself in part through the

---

80 This recognition is perhaps also achieved through distinctive costuming, as later seen in Inigo Jones’ sketches for Ben Jonson’s The Fortunate Isles and their Union (c.1624). See Martin Butler ‘Introduction: The Fortunate Isles and their Union’ The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online <http://universitypublishingonline.org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/fortunate/facing/> [accessed 01/05/2018].
81 Munro, ‘Speaking History’, p.520.
merit of his vernacular ‘babble’ (*TD*, 138) in Skeltonics. Skelton’s rejection of a character who adopts classical linguistic values constitutes a self-conscious disruption to the elevated Robin Hood narrative on Munday’s part. The stylistic hybridity which emerges from staging outlaw Robin Hood as an earl gives Skelton a dual purpose in the play. The historical authority of Skelton authenticates the generic elevation which turns Robin Hood into an aristocratic earl, but through speaking in Skeltonics, he also undermines the gentrified status of the narrative through eruptions of vernacularism. The tensions of Skelton’s dual function is reiterated by the disruptive spontaneity of the Skeltonic. Unable to contain his rhymes and continue with the central Robin Hood story, Skelton is reprimanded by Little John/Sir John Eltham, told to ‘[s]toppe, master Skelton; whither will you runne?’ (I.vi.890). The Skeltonic rejection of Ralph’s classical rhetoric is also metatextual praise for England’s past, echoing the notion that if English ‘was to achieve the literary status of classical Greek and Latin […] [it] should instead look to its own past, and to the work of such writers as Chaucer and Gower’, 83 and for Munday, Skelton.

The reanimation of Skelton in *The Downfall* thus brings together disparate forms of high and low literary traditions to embody the English ‘vernacular eloquence’ previously discussed in this thesis. Indeed, Jenny C. Mann argues that, in attempting to approximate classical eloquence for an English audience, sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers produce ‘neither silence nor ineloquence, but storytelling’. 84 This storytelling, Mann explains, is charged with ‘connections between rhetoric and the English outlaw’, a figure both ‘emphatically English, yet […] culturally and socially vulgar’. 85 However, in Munday’s *The Downfall*, the generic elevation of Robin Hood to Earl Robert complicates the English vulgarity of the outlaw, and is thus supplemented by the familiar but doggerel vernacular of

---
83 Munro, ‘Speaking History’, pp.526-527.
84 Mann, p.3.
85 Mann, pp.6-7.
Skelton and his poetic form the Skeltonic. In the absence of the ‘disruptive and disjunctive temporal mixture’ produced by the ‘doubly fictional construct’ of *The Downfall*, Skelton may have taken on a more singular, secondary role in the *Long Meg of Westminster* play. On the most likely basis that the plot of *The Life of Long Meg* is reconstructed for the stage in *Long Meg of Westminster*, Skelton then has a secure place in Long Meg’s tradition through his temporally congruent role in the jestbook. While Skelton remains external to Robin Hood’s social universe in *The Downfall*, Skelton’s biography as a Tudor London-centric poet coheres with the temporal world of Long Meg. Munday’s Robin Hood depends on Skelton’s identity to affirm his place within English ‘vernacular eloquence’ as an outlaw. Conversely, Long Meg retains some individualistic power in the national imagination, and is directly invoked as a counterpoint to the classicalism of Greco-Roman traditions. Robin Hood’s textual authority is enshrined in the past through competing chronicle sources and previous plays, a historicisation which is only later mediated through Skelton. For *Long Meg of Westminster*, Skelton is essential to the development of Long Meg’s faux-genealogy. *The Life of Long Meg*’s invocation of Skelton therefore supplements the historical legitimacy of her tradition without undermining the project of vernacular eloquence.

As Chapter One of this thesis outlined, Lancashire-born Long Meg’s induction into the Westminster community is framed by ‘Doctor Skelton’. In the second chapter of the jestbook, Skelton produces a persuasive Skeltonic rhyme in which he suggests the tavern hostesse should consider Meg for employment due to her ‘large length | Of a tall pitch, and a good strength | With strong armes and stiffe bones | This is a wench for the nones’ (Sig. B.2ᵛ). Just as Munday asserts that *The Downfall* contains the ‘Robin Hood what [Skelton] doth truly knowe’ (116-117), Skelton is constructed to authenticate the history of Long Meg’s tradition. From the outset of *The Downfall*, Munday’s Skelton must contest with existing

---

86 Munro, ‘Speaking History’, p.532.
representations of Robin Hood. In *The Life of Long Meg*, Skelton is responsible for culturally embedding her in the nation’s cultural memory. While Skelton appears in *The Downfall* through an artificial insertion on the margins of the Robin Hood story, he is more easily assimilated into Long Meg’s community. In *The Life of Long Meg*, the Skeltonic is not positioned as a corruption of the narrative warranting repression. Meg’s physicality is the defining feature of her folkloric status, and thus invites such vernacular storytelling, as ‘streight as soone as they saw Long Meg, they began to smile, and Doctor Skelton in his mad merry veine, blessing himself, began’ (LM, B.2⁺ - B.2⁺⁺) to rhyme. Unlike the jestbook, however, Skelton’s appearance in the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play would produce a moment in which Long Meg’s tradition could be actively embodied through physical staging. The Skeltonic features in *The Life of Long Meg* to describe Meg’s striking physicality. As an evocative poetic device, the Skeltonic is used to embed the visual signifiers of Meg in the historico-national imagination.

Though there is no way to be certain of the staged dynamic between Skelton and Long Meg, a surviving exchange in the ‘amateur single play’ *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* (c.1612) offers a fleeting indication of Meg’s role within ‘vernacular eloquence’ alongside Skelton. Like Skelton in *The Downfall*, Robert Tailor’s *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* begins with an exchange between a playwright and player, this time a fallen gallant named Haddit who, in order to generate income, has ‘cash rhymed out of him’ producing ‘jig[s]’ for actors.⁸⁷ Echoing Sir John Eltham’s opening question ‘“[h]owe, maister Skelton? What, at studie har?’, the player awaiting pages from Haddit asks, ‘what, at your study so early?’ (*HP*, I.i.104) Haddit responds with the Latin phrase, ‘*Aurora Musis amica* [dawn is a friend to the Muses]’ (*HP*, I.i.105), which the Player does not understand. Not only does this

---

⁸⁷ Robert Tailor, *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl*, in *Three Renaissance Usury Plays*, ed. by Lloyd Edward Kermode (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), I.i.103. Further references made within the text as *HP*. 
delineate a point of contact between socially disparate audiences, but it also produces a moment which reflects the gendered tensions which underpin vernacular eloquence. Explaining his use of Latin, Haddit remarks that ‘it is so much my often converse that, if there be none but women in my company, yet I cannot forbear it’ (*HP*, I.i.108-109). Here, Haddit denotes the linguistic exclusion of women from classical rhetoric, reinforcing the ‘gendered relationship between Latin [the language of adult men] and English [the ‘mother’ tongue]’. Haddit’s ambivalence to whether he is understood by women, though asserting his intellectual status, is perceived by the Player as troubling. The Player echoes Skelton’s hostility towards Ralph’s Latinate speech in *The Downfall*, stating that ‘I hope you have made no dark sentence in’t; for I’ll assure you our audience commonly are very simple, idle-headed people, and if they should hear what they understand not, they would quite forsake this house’ (*HP*, I.i.126-129). Tailor self-consciously notes that the linguistic exclusion of women also extends to players and spectators alike. The Player’s comment suggests that despite the cultural preminence of Latinate languages, their obscurity and elitism leads to public dissent. The use of vernacular language is fundamental: Haddit’s writing must be ‘Engished’ to secure its popularity with ‘simple idle-headed people’ (*HP*, I.i.127).

Awaiting the unseen content of the performance, the Player then inquires to the ‘small matter’ of the jig, to which Haddit reassures ‘[a] small matter! You’ll find it worth Meg of Westminster, although it be but a bare jig’ (*HP*, I.i.112-113). While women are included to be excluded in classical language as well as in law, Haddit’s invocation of Long Meg offers a moment in which the English heroine embodies – like Robin Hood – ‘an outlying vernacular rhetoric […] charged [with a] combination of aspiration and inferiority’. Haddit devalues his work in stating it ‘be but a bare jig’, but uses Long Meg of Westminster to emphasise its

---

88 Mann, p.147.
‘worth’ (I.i.112-113). This echoes the opening address to the reader in *The Life of Long Meg* jestbook, which states that ‘many men haue made many pleasant jigges, as the Iest of Robin-Hood […] I bethought me of Long Meg of Westminster […] as a whetstone to mirth after your serious businesse’ (*LM*, A.2). Robin Hood and Long Meg are therefore encoded in English vernacular reform: their ‘pleasant’ and ‘bare’ jigs provide a crucial counterpart to the ‘serious businesse’ (*LM*, A.2) of classical language. Robin Hood’s outlaw status is undermined through his gentrification in *The Downfall*, warranting the metadramatic intervention of Skelton to reassert vernacular language. Long Meg is excluded from classical language from the outset, and her affiliation with Skelton suggests a renewed engagement with the vernacular English tradition. The proximity of Haddit’s comment on speaking Latin in the company of women to the assertion of Long Meg’s vernacularism also reiterates the tension between women, law, and language. *The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl* positions Long Meg at the centre of vernacular reform whilst reiterating her gendered exclusion from Latin art.

This exclusion extends to Meg’s material presence on the stage, as Robert Tailor does not assign Long Meg an embodied role. While Munday’s *Downfall* delivers a performance of Robin Hood, Haddit’s ‘jig’ is never staged within the play. In reducing Long Meg to a metaphoric symbol, a direct intrusion of the microcosmic *polis* of the stage is avoided whilst still facilitating the ‘storytelling’ that the project of ‘vernacular eloquence’ demands.90 In *The Downfall*, Robin Hood is both socially gentrified and politically mollified through entering the imagined space of the court, a place where classical language is employed. Through the exclusion of women from the *polis* of the stage, Meg remains firmly outside the court and thus retains her disruptive potential. This disruption develops a growing generic separateness through the wider cultural perceptions of women in public spaces. The presence of women is

---

90 Mann, p.3.
thus associated with ‘wantonness […] ale-brewing and tavern keeping’, establishing connections between Long Meg and figures such as ‘Skelton’s Elinor Rumming and Robert Copland’s Jyl [Gillian] of Brentford’. The Skeltonic provides a potent framing device for these Tudor figures, the resources of The Admiral’s Men taken up by Ben Jonson in the court masque The Fortunate Isles and their Union.

The Cultural Politics of the Skeltonic in the Antimasque of Meg

In the alternative playing area of the Jonsonian court masque The Fortunate Isles and their Union, Long Meg is granted an embodied, though silent, staged presence. Though ‘design’d for the Court, on the Twelfth Night, 1624’, The Fortunate Isles was not performed until the 9th January 1625, at Whitehall Banqueting House. This was Jonson’s last masque for James VI and I, and the content reflects Charles’s impending assent to the throne. The accession foreshadowed fraught inter-European relations, as ‘one of Charles’s first acts as king was to commence the sea campaign against Spain that his father had so long refused’. At first glance, The Fortunate Isles and their Union is an odd, economically-motivated assemblage of existing resources, as ‘the main masque recycles material that had been prepared but not performed when Neptune’s Triumph was cancelled in 1624’. In contrast with the public plays of London companies, the private masques of the early Stuart court deliver a different mode of performance. The spectacle and content of the masque negotiates the politics of its elite audience.

The generic shift from the public play to the court masque shapes how the project of vernacular eloquence is represented. The division between masque and antimasque found in

---

93 Butler, ‘Introduction: The Fortunate Isles and their Union’, [accessed 01/05/2018].
the court performance offers a means through which to dramatise the relationship between vernacular English and classical eloquence, as Lucy Munro neatly summarises:

Where the masque stresses late-Jacobean Britain’s “nationalistic pride and separateness”, the antimasque satirises Rosicrucianism, a pan-European movement predicting that apocalyptic change and spiritual enlightenment would come out of the religious conflict in which continental Europe was engulfed.94

Here, Munro explains how *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* is organised into a British led masque and a Eurocentric antimasque. The structure of the performance establishes a dialogue between English vernacular figures and Greco-Roman culture. Long Meg traverses both the masque and antimasque in two distinct ways, developing her flexible but central role in the project of ‘vernacular eloquence’.95 Jonson develops the interface between the archaism of Skelton and the emergent identity of Long Meg of Westminster by invoking the Skeltonic form, echoing *The Life of Long Meg* jestbook and the content of Munday and Chettle’s *The Downfall* (c.1598). While Munro explores how the Skeltonic becomes a ‘shared discourse of marginality’96 applied to a community of figures from Tudor popular culture, I argue that Jonson capitalises on the existing relationship between Skelton and Long Meg. Their pairing is already embedded in the national imagination through the jestbook *The Life of Long Meg*, and is thus the site from which to extend the project of ‘vernacular eloquence’ to include other figures such as Elinor Rumming, Tom Thumb, Doctor Rat, and Mary Ambree.

The masque introduces a ‘Melancholique Student’97 appropriately named ‘Merefool’, who is enthralled in the intellectualism of Rosicrucian pamphlets and longs to make contact with significant figures from the movement. Jophiel, an ‘aery Spirit’, hearing the ‘bombing

---

94 Munro, ‘Skeltonics’, p.342.
95 Term from Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric*.
96 Munro, ‘Skeltonics’, p.348.
97 Ben Jonson, *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (London: 1625), Sig. A.2. Further references will be made ibid as *FI*.
sighes’ of Merefool, falsely promises to resurrect any figures he wishes to converse with ‘for [his] sport’ (*FI*, A.2'). When asked ‘what [he] would see, or whom’ (*FI*, A.4'), Merefool suggests a multitude of philosophical figures signifying elite classical learning such as Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Plato, Archimedes and Aesop. Jophiel rejects all of Merefool’s suggestions, claiming that all he has requested are preoccupied, stating ‘[m]e thinkes, you should enquire now, after Skelton | Or Mr. Scogan’ (*FI*, B.2'). Those with the literary status of classical Greek and Latin are replaced by figures of England’s literary past, constructing an equivalent or superior tradition rooted in historical and linguistic nostalgia.

In a parallel to Munday and Chettle’s *The Downfall*, Jonson positions Skelton and Scogan in an external frame narrative. Their status in English literary history ensures their role to introduce the ostensibly unknown figures to Merefool. This establishes a degree of separation between the fictional status of Skelton and Scogan and the twelve figures from Tudor jest culture. Before these figures emerge, Merefool questions the poetic authority of Scogan, whose identity is a conflation of ‘Henry Scogan, poet and addressee of Chaucer’s “Lenvoy and Socgan”’ and ‘John Scogan, the pseudo-historical jester to Edward I’, protagonist of *The Jest of Scogan* (c.1570).98 Merefool is positioned as a metacritic of the prestige of English literary figures, as he asks ‘But, wrote he like a Gentleman?’(*FI*, B.3'). This commentary enables Jonson to authenticate Skelton and Scogan as symbols of ‘vernacular eloquence’ from *within* the text, as Jophiel replies that Scogan wrote‘[i]n rime! Fine tinckling rime; and flow and verse’ (*FI*, B.3'). While this may well be true of Henry Scogan, there is no evidence of Scogan’s style within Jonson’s court masque: it is the Skeltonic form which proliferates through the performance, spreading across the speech of Scogan to Skelton to Jophiel like a ‘stylistic contagion’.99 The Skeltonic is no longer confined to the poetic voice of Skelton, nor

98 Munro, ‘Skeltonics’, p.342.
99 Lucy Munro ‘Skeltonics’, p.343.
exclusively located in the outlaw/waive plays of the Admiral’s Men, but has taken on a more diffuse quality under Jonson’s direction.

The fourteen figures that Scogan and Skelton introduce emerge systematically, six of those individually named are assigned their own Skeltonic, while the remaining, ‘more up-to-date’ figures are simply listed as ‘four knaves, two Ruffians, Fitz-ale and Vapors’, the ‘Child of Tobacco’ (FI, C.1 v). The six figures introduced by Skelton, Scogan and Jophiel are Howleglasse, the ‘medieval German prankster […] first printed in English in 1528’, Elinor Rumming of Skelton’s poem The Tunnyng of Elinor Rumming (c.1545), Marie Ambree ‘[a]s the Ballad doth vaunt’, folkloric Thomas Thumb, and curate Doctor Rat of ‘the Tudor comedy Gammer Gurton’s Needle (c.1575) and Long Meg herself. Initially, Merefool dismisses their intellectual and cultural merit, remarking ‘[y]ou talk’d of Elinor Rumming, I had rather | See Ellen of Troy’ (FI, B.4v). Here, Jonson places figures of popular vernacularism and classical mythos in opposition to set up the transition towards English vernacular eloquence. These figures operate as animated symbols, physically present but unable to articulate vernacular eloquence in their own voice, echoing the linguistic exclusion of the lowly player found in The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl (c.1612). The Skeltonic thus becomes the persuasive poetic device through which vernacular eloquence is negotiated. The potent history which ties the Skeltonic to Long Meg of Westminster spreads throughout the community of figures, thus convincing Merefool of the value of Tudor jest culture. This is visible in the intertextual use of the lines 232-243 of Skelton’s The Tunnyng of Elinor Rumming (c.1545), a poem which is imitated in the ‘Doctor Skelton’ poem in The Life of Long Meg jestbook. While Elinor Rumming is present as an embodied character herself, she is internal to Skelton’s fictional world. Conversely, Long Meg possesses some singularity in

100 Fitz-ale was possibly one of Jonson’s own figures, known for his role as the ‘Herald of Darby’ and later recognisable in The King’s Entertainment at Welbeck in Nottingham-shire (London: 1633).
101 Butler, ‘Notes on the List of Figures in The Fortunate Isles and their Union’, [accessed 01/05/2018].
the national imagination as a titular protagonist of the lost *Long Meg of Westminster*.

Returning to the Skeltonic rhyme discussed in Chapter One, the parallels between the two passages illustrates how Jonson reproduces and extends Long Meg’s place within vernacular eloquence through the Skeltonic:

Me thinks she is of large length  
Of a tall pitch, and a good strength  
With strong armes and stiffe bones  
This is a wench for the nones.  
Her lookes are bonny and blithe,  
She seems neither lither nor lithe,  
But young of age,  
And of a merry visage  
Neither beastly or bowsie  
Sleepy nor drowsie  
But fair fac’d, and of a good size

(*The Life of Long Meg, B.2*).

Of Westminster Meg  
With her long leg,  
As long as a Crane;  
And feet like a plane:  
With a paiare of heeles,  
As broad as two wheeles;  
To drieve downe the dew,  
As she goes to the stew:  
And turnes home merry,  
By Lambeth ferry.

(*The Fortunate Isles and their Union, C.1*).

The discursive points of contact between the Skeltonic and Long Meg of Westminster are thus built into the tradition of vernacular eloquence and reinforced by Jonson. In the court masque, Long Meg’s physical presence provides an aesthetic, embodied counterpart to the linguistic imitation of Skelton. Jonson also develops Long Meg’s place within the English imagination: he not only refers to her as ‘Westminster’s Meg’, but specifies her ‘travels home merry, | By Lambeth ferry’ (*FI, C.1*), a mode of transport used to cross the Thames between Lambeth and Westminster and an area notorious for its stews and alehouses. Once coupled
with the influence of *The Tunnyng of Elinor Rumming*, the Skeltonic produces a London-centric conflation of Long Meg in which source materials collapse in on each other. Jonson’s invocation of ‘Lambeth Ferry’ demonstrates how the vernacular can be used to ‘conjure a particular location and community, creating a union of language, land, and population’. The bodies of the players intermingle with Skelton’s voice to form a staged spectacle of Englishness. Long Meg’s Skeltonic navigation of London’s cityscape in such proximity to the classical islands of the Blessed demonstrates how English eloquence is produced at the margins of classical rhetoric. By concluding that Long Meg and her peers authentically represent ‘the company o’ the Rosie-Crosse’ (*FI, C.1*), Merefool both reinforces the project of English vernacular eloquence and undermines the integrity of the pan-European Rosicrucianism, which has convincingly absorbed Tudor folkloric figures into its classical movement. Jonson draws attention to the Merefool’s assertion, as Jophiel reminds both him and the audience that the ‘twelve persons’, including Long Meg, are a ‘company of players’ (*FI, C.1*). In the antimasque which follows, the twelve distinct folkloric identities are absorbed into the roles of ‘the masquers’ who ‘are discouer’d sitting in their seuerall seiges’ (*FI, C.2*). The staged division of these figures in various seats of rule and empire emphasises the notion that the vernacular eloquence which England produces is used to establish a territorial identity, in which Meg is set up to occupy Westminster and ‘Lambeth Ferry’ (*FI, C.1*). Long Meg’s inclusion in the antimasque thus reflects how the London-centric identity of the English waive is encoded in the imperialist ideology of linguistic difference. As the antimasque dramatises ‘the point of Reuolution being come | When all the Fortunate Islands should be ioyn’d’ (*FI, C.2*), the performance reiterates the fantasy of Britain as a peaceful nation, encoding Stuart power in the obscure satire of Rosicrucianism.\(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\) Mann, p.30.

\(^{103}\) Butler, ‘Introduction: The Fortunate Isles and their Union’, [accessed 01/05/2018].
The theatre provides a physical space to stage the conflict between individual bodies and the mechanisms of the law, often whilst under sovereign spectatorship. Transporting Long Meg to the stage therefore demands new forms of exclusion. The waive is not named or represented as an analogue to the outlaw in dramatic works, and there is a heightened awareness of Long Meg as a construct. Meg’s diffusion and plurality serves different purposes: she is simplified as a martial figure and becomes a loose signifier of urban crime. Through her relational position to widows, bawds, and roarers, Long Meg’s capacity for political disruption as a waive figure is contained within more conventional identities for women. Through the exclusion of women as players on the commercial stage, Long Meg is also absent from her own representation as the protagonist of the lost *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*. The distinct physicality of Edward Alleyn reiterates this embodied exclusion further. In this way, the staging of Meg echoes Susan Stewart’s assertion that the waived woman is ‘a non-person within the law and a non-person outside the law’.\(^{104}\) Assigned no dialogue of her own, the staging of Long Meg in Jonson’s *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* also raises questions about how she was conveyed visually to an audience, and which distinct material markers were inscribed on the body of the player.

Through examining the Admiral’s Men’s ‘play-cluster’ relating to outlawry which surrounds the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play, Long Meg gains a more visible position on the stage. *Long Meg of Westminster* (c.1594) and *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* (c.1598) both feature the ‘shared resource’ of *orator regius* John Skelton as part of their aesthetic and linguistic landscape. The invocation of Skelton alongside outlaw/waive figures found in both *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* and Ben Jonson’s *Fortunate Isles and their Union* suggests that, through the language of the eponymous Skeltonic, elite and populist language coalesce. Skelton enables Long Meg to negotiate her exclusionary position

\(^{104}\) *Stewart*, p.46.
and become a positive construct within language. Once framed by Skeltonic narration, the distinct Englishness which Long Meg embodies is situated at the forefront of the project of ‘vernacular eloquence’. What could not be achieved in the jestbook *The Merie Tales of Skelton*, is thus possible on the early modern stage. Preceding *The Downfall* by at least four years, the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play might provide the original outlaw/waive link to Skelton. As the title of this chapter suggests, while the notion of ‘performing waivery’ remains an irresolvable question, it may be that the lost *Long Meg of Westminster* play provides one answer.

Now departing from the communities of jesting found in Long Meg’s tradition, I turn to the alternative groupings of women which surround Meg elsewhere. As Chapter Four shows, the protagonists clustering in the repertory of the Admiral’s Men are taken up by Thomas Deloney in *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1598).105 Taken alongside the reception of the waive in Elizabethan law, Deloney’s romantic development of Meg suggests a period of heightened concern regarding the judicial agency of women.

---

105 Deloney brings the protagonists of these Admiral’s Men plays together in one text, not only through pairing Long Meg with Gillian, but also through the addition of figures such as Thomas Stukeley, ‘the hero of the anonymous play *Captain Thomas Stukeley* (probably performed by the Admiral’s Men in 1596). See Rutter, *Shakespeare and the Admiral’s Men*, p.22.
Chapter Four  
Locating the Waive in Elizabethan England: from Legal Definitions to Long Meg of Westminster

This chapter critically examines the legal ephemera defining waivery in the Elizabethan period alongside Thomas Deloney’s literary invocation of Long Meg of Westminster in *The Gentle Craft the second part* (c.1598). I first trace the re-emergence of the distinct legal term ‘waive’ in the Elizabethan period. Owen Rogers and John and William Rastell attempt to reintroduce the term ‘waif’ into the English language via legal dictionaries: Rogers in his glossary to *Piers Plowman* (1561) (a text which famously references the ‘rymes of Robin Hood’, B V.395) and William Rastell in *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words, and Terms of the Laws of this Realm* (1579). It is worth noting that both these texts are printings of earlier works: Rogers’s glossary was originally added to a copy of *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede* by Reynold Wolfe in 1553, and John Rastell wrote *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words, and Terms of the Laws of this Realm* before his death in 1536.1 I argue that waivery has a renewed cultural currency in a period governed by a queen regnant’s troubling absolutist authority within a post-reformation, patriarchal legal discourse. Both printers are attempting to reinsert the term ‘waive’ into the English language, suggesting that there is a more nationalised English epidemic revolving around waivery emanating from the Elizabethan period. As Peter Coss notes, while *Magna Carta* maintained its cultural prevalence beyond the medieval period, there was an intriguing ‘hiatus under the Tudors’2. While Chapter One of this thesis began to trace *Magna Carta* alongside Long Meg of Westminster from the date of the first extant copy of *The Life of Long Meg Westminster* (1635), this chapter takes up the earlier, more elusive gaps, spaces, and silences of *Magna

---

2 Coss, p.231.
*Carta* in Elizabethan England. In the absence of *Magna Carta* and the ancient constitutionalism which defined terms such as outlawry and waivery, I consider where and why these terms re-emerge, if at all. As we have already seen, despite its more peripheral position in legal texts, outlawry remains prevalent in literature through the presence of figures such as Hereward the Wake, Robin Hood and Fouke le Fitz Waryn. In contrast, there are no available literary materials which overtly explore waivery in parallel to these definitions. Alongside these discrete legal strands, I examine how attitudes to waivery might also be discernible in the fictional representations of Long Meg of Westminster, and how Long Meg might reflect the tensions between Elizabeth’s absolutism and the waive.

Divided into four sections, this chapter explores the tensions between law and literature in the Elizabethan period, raising questions of how juridicopolitical anxieties might resurface in Meg’s tradition, corresponding to the emergence and effacement of waivery. The first section, ‘Sovereignty and Subjectivity: waivery and *Magna Carta* in Tudor England’ traces the shifting reception of the absolutist jurisdiction found in *Magna Carta* across the Tudor period. The second section, ‘The Elizabethan Waive as a Lexicographical Subject’ charts the increased proximity of law and literature which follows the emergence of legal dictionaries. As new statutes seek to redefine the parameters of the law, waivery is characterised by a severance in law and fiction. John and William Rastell offer a definition of waivery which echoes ancient constitutionalism, while reprinted literary works such as *Piers Plowman* establish a wider, more diffuse function for the waive. The effacement of waivery is taken up in the third section, ‘Situating Meg: Gender and Genre in the Works of Thomas Deloney’, which explores Deloney’s representation of Long Meg in *The Gentle Craft, The Second Part* (c.1597-8). Deloney reimagines Long Meg of Westminster within the social world of shoemakers. In doing so, Deloney’s Meg does not, as in *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*, infiltrate the *polis* with a personal brand of justice, but forms one of the two
love interests of ‘Richard Casteler’. In the final section, ‘Reimagining Meg: from Manhood to Maidenhead’, I explore how Meg’s gendered subjectivity is anxiously contained by binary gender ideology in Deloney’s narrative, reflecting the patriarchal tensions generated by Elizabethan rule. Revising Meg’s merry and martial jestbook identity, Deloney performs ideologically motivated revisions to her character which assert different ideals of maidenhood. In losing her singularity as a protagonist and receding into a more conventional romantic role, the effacement of Long Meg’s extralegal activity parallels the obscurity of waivery.

**Sovereign Subjectivity: Waivity and *Magna Carta* in Tudor England**

In order to consider historical context of *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1597-8), I return to a question posed in the first chapter of this thesis, of how the reception and visibility of *Magna Carta* reflects the cultural and political climate of the law. In formulating Chapter thirty-nine, *Magna Carta* determines that ‘[n]o free man is to be […] outlawed […] [without] the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land’. The cultural value invested in the charter therefore significantly reflects approaches to outlawry, whilst establishing an allusion to waivity through its omission. Yet, as we have already seen in Henry de Bracton’s *On the Laws and Customs of England* (c.1235), waivity is explicitly defined in influential ancient legal works elsewhere. As crucial sites of definition, *Magna Carta* and de Bracton reflect the cultural and legal prominence of waivity within specific historical moments. As the prestige and prevalence of de Bracton and ancient constitutionalism recedes, the terms within it, such as waivity, so too become effaced.

For Tudor England, the inviolable authority of *Magna Carta* was first undermined by

---

3 Carpenter, pp.52-53.
the ‘absolutist jurisprudence’ of Henry VIII which accompanied the Reformation. In response to Pope Clement’s refusal to divorce him and Catherine of Aragon, ‘Henry claimed the popes had no authority over kings and that matters of marriage could be settled only within Henry’s realm of England’. In order for the grounds of his annulment to be legitimate, Henry VIII made numerous legislative changes against the English clergy and broke with Rome. The abolition of papal authority was seen as an assertion of royal supremacy in direct violation of the first clause of Magna Carta, which stated the ‘king’s promise […] “to protect the liberties of the English church”’. From this moment, Catholic resistance to the reformation was often articulated by invocations of Magna Carta alongside a notion of the charter as ‘a written contract between church and state’ which had now been violated. Figures such as Robert Aske and Sir Thomas More, the latter who features in The Life of Long Meg as a jestbook character, invoke ‘the memory of Magna Carta’ to argue that Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy breached ‘“that great bulwark of English law” which freed the Church from secular power’. As the authority of Magna Carta became increasingly eroded by the religious jurisdiction of the sovereign, a more widespread ‘attack on tradition’ accompanied the Reformation, meaning ‘customs themselves were [now] seen to have no intrinsic value’. The essence of English law thus became less invested in ‘particular precedents or customs’ like Magna Carta, and more concerned with ‘maxims which enshrined its reason’. English legal dictionaries emerged to replace old statutes and reframe ancient constitutionalism under new terms. This uprooting and repackaging of existing legal

---

7 Wilson, p.350.
8 Wilson, p.344.
9 Brooks, p.97.
10 Brooks, p.99.
traditions generated new works produced in a climate where legal and literary textual production were intimately tied. These texts thus determined the preservation of certain legal terms, the inclusion of waivery indicating a renewed interest in its meaning. The reintroduction of the waive in law and language is anxiously reflected in Thomas Deloney’s representation of Long Meg. Deloney avoids recalling Robin Hood by omitting Meg’s outlaw behaviour from his narrative. Outside the legal genre, the visibility of the waive thus continues to be limited.

The tradition of English legal dictionaries began with the laywer and printer later responsible for the reintroduction of the term waive in 1579, John Rastell. John Rastell started his printing press ‘between 1510 and 1519’ at ‘the south side of St Paul’s Cathedral’, which produced a ‘steady output of legal and humanist books’.11 While this included Rastell’s own legal dictionaries, the press was also responsible for printing ‘the comic Jests of Widow Edith’.12 Not only is Rastell’s first legal dictionary Exposiciones terminorum legum anglorum [The exposicions of the termes of the lawes of England] (1525) published contemporaneously to the Jests of Widow Edith (1525), but the jests are also reprinted in 1573, just three years prior to William Rastell’s printing of his father John Rastell’s An Exposition of Certaine difficult and obscure wordes (1579) that contains a definition of waivery. The proximity of the influential legal works which determine the inclusion of waivery to the ‘a female rogue who moves from town to town’ reiterates the tensions between law and literature.13 Like the jestbooks of the press, legal dictionaries ‘proved very popular’ and John Rastell’s first work, Exposiciones terminorum legum anglorum, was ‘the first English [legal] Dictionary in the format with […] definitions of words in alphabetical

---

12 Davareux, p.12.
13 Munro, ‘A Woman’s Answer is neuer to seke’, p.xviii.
order’, and ‘went through thirty editions in the course of 300 years’. Magna Carta was ‘no longer on the regular curriculum’ at the Inns of Court, and had been replaced by ‘broadly worded statutory texts as a framework for disputations on difficult points of law’. The ‘obscure language of the foundational texts’, usually in Latin or Law French, led to the production of glossaries including an English translation such as Exposiciones terminorum legum anglorum. In ‘translat[ing] […] the definitions of some 160 Anglo-French legal terms in current use at the time’ into English, Rastell attempts to create a legal resource more ‘accessible to law students and lay people alike’.

While waivery remains absent from Exposiciones terminorum legum anglorum, one of the one-hundred and sixty legal terms translated by John Rastell is outlawry. The definition includes a substantial level of detail which suggests a legal prominence and practical application. In his initial synopsis, Rastell seems to paraphrase Bracton as he describes outlawry:

[When an exist goth forth against any man or proclamation […] yf the defendaunt appere not the coroner shall giue jugement y he shalbe out of the proteccyon of the kyng […] the parte utlawyd shall forfet all his goodis and catels to the kyng and […] shall forfet all hys lands.

Rastell also extends his definition with additional paragraphs outlining how outlawry could only be ‘reversyd and adnullyd’ through the ‘purchasing of hys charter of pardon of the kyng’. The elaboration on the pardon of outlaws as an exclusively ‘monarchical prerogative’ reflects a departure from the localised judicial system, in which ‘the Church, the great earls, and the feudal lords’ had wielded judicial power. This notion of the pardon

16 Nevalanien, p.50.
18 Rastell, G.3ᵛ.
solely as a royal power would be further realised in Henry VIII’s Jurisdiction in Liberties Act in 1535, which declared that ‘no pardon could be given to any person other than the monarch’. While this substantial definition suggests outlawry has a certain cultural part in iterating Henry VIII’s absolutism, the definition is also, like Magna Carta, marked by a temporal omission of waivery. In demonstrating parallels to de Bracton and reinvoking the term in 1579, Rastell demonstrates knowledge of the term, suggesting its presence in *Expositions of Certaine Difficult and Obscure wordes* is underpinned by a shift in intent. I therefore take up my previous point that the growing instability surrounding *Magna Carta* and written legislation has an impact on the cultural reception of the waive and accordingly Long Meg.

Though *Magna Carta* continued to be marginalised as a legal work throughout the Tudor period, it played a limited role in attempts to give authority to new legislation. In 1542, George Ferrers translated *Magna Carta* as *The Great Charter called in latyn Magna Carta, with diuers old statutes whose titles appere in the next leafe newly corrected*. Not only was this ancient charter ‘newly corrected’, but was translated into English to search ‘the great extremities of the common lawes before the makynge of statutes’. While the translation of *Magna Carta* into English suggests a motivation for it to be widely disseminated, it no longer functions as the universal juridicopolitical document, but as an ‘extremit[y]’ of common law and peripheral resource for creating new statutes. Following the accession of the first English queen regnant Mary I (1553-1558), establishing the authority of modern law is pursued with a renewed ferocity. Mary’s sovereignty raised questions about the ideology surrounding women monarchs, and called for a ‘new feminized politics […] yet to be defined’ in

---

20 Novak, p.21.
21 George Ferrers, *The Great charter called in latyn Magna Carta, with diuers old statutes whose titles appere in the next leafe Newly corrected* (London: 1542).
England. The accession of Mary I therefore called for a gendered revision of the ‘prevailing political language, forms and expectations of the “public part” of England’ determined by male predecessors.\textsuperscript{23} Many proposals for the practice of queenship were formed on the basis of undermining the sovereign legitimacy of women. In the first weeks of Mary I’s reign, ‘it was suggested, most likely by former Edwardian councillors, that Mary’s queenship be prescribed by reversing the traditional order of coronation and parliament: so parliament would meet and confirm Mary’s legitimacy before she was crowned’.\textsuperscript{24} The push to have parliament first authorise Mary’s sovereignty sought to undermine her divine right as ruler: the assertion of her dependence on council attempts to establish a model of limited sovereignty for women from the outset. While Mary’s Catholic supporters urged her to rule above statute law as an ‘unbridled queen independent of parliament’, in April 1554, parliament instead passed “[a]n Acte declaring that the Regall power of thys realme is in the Quenes Maiestie as fully and absolutely as ever it was in anye her mooste noble progenytours kynges of thys Realme”\textsuperscript{25}. The act iterated that Mary’s sovereignty was parliamentary, and therefore ‘equal to that of a king’.\textsuperscript{26} Informed by these juridicopolitical pressures, \textit{Magna Carta} was absorbed into legal works containing new statutes, formulated as one universal document. This is exemplified by an earlier printing prefaced by William Rastell titled the \textit{Collection of all statutes} (1559), which functions both as an educational textbook for practicing lawyers, and a framework for current legislature within the justice system. However, the \textit{Collection of all statutes} is underpinned by an assertion of the reforms to English law, in which \textit{Magna Carta} is marked as the ‘begynning’\textsuperscript{27} and henceforth consigned

\textsuperscript{24} Whitelock, p.65.
\textsuperscript{25} Whitelock, p.66.
\textsuperscript{26} Whitelock, p.66.
\textsuperscript{27} See full title: Anon [prefaced by William Rastell], \textit{A Collection of all statutes, from the begynning of Magna Carta vnto the yere of our Lorde 1557, which before that yere imprinted whereunto be addyd the collection of the statues made in the fourth and fifth yeres of the reignes of King Phillip and Queene Mary, and also the
to history. It is therefore more pertinent still that waivery reappears in William Rastell’s later 1579 publication, as it demonstrates an intention to preserve its legal relevance.

A turn towards a model of ‘limited sovereignty’ was only furthered still by Elizabeth I’s rule. Following Mary Tudor’s legacy of parliamentary queenship, Elizabeth I’s accession in 1558 was already characterised by patriarchal anxieties regarding the sovereign power of women. In 1558, John Knox published his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* as an attack on Mary. Knox famously states that ‘[t]o promote Women to beare rule, superioritie, dominion, or empire above any Realme, nation, or Citie, is repugnant to Nature [...] it is subversion of good order’ and ‘God’s law’. To further his case against monarchical women, Knox cites ‘the seconde’ of Aristotle’s ‘Politikes’ which asks ‘what difference shal we put [...] whether that women beare authoritie, or the husbandes that obey the empire of their wyves be appointed to be magistrates?’.

Knox’s question is answered by Agamben’s biopolitical reading of the Aristotelian terms of oikos and polis. As Aristotle outlines that women are excluded from political life and confined to the oikos (home), both the waive and the woman-as-sovereign exist within a form of gendered exceptionalism. In violating the law and being brought to justice, the waive enters the polis only to be excluded from it. The woman-as-sovereign also shares this paradoxical position through her simultaneous inclusion as presiding over the polis whilst also being excluded from it as a woman. In this way, the ‘simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception’ can therefore be seen to extend to the waive and Elizabeth I.

While Knox apologetically revoked his own assertions about the sovereign rule of

---

*Statutes made in the first yere of the raigne of our soueraygne lady Queene Elizabeth.* Like John Rastell’s *Exposiciones terminorum legum anglorum* (London: 1559).

28 Wilson, p.350.


30 Knox, B.2.

women after Elizabeth’s I accession a few months after *First Blast of the Trumpet*’s printing, patriarchal tensions more insidiously persisted in juridicopolitical writings. John Aylmer, Lady Jane Grey’s tutor, published a reply to Knox, *Harborowe for faithfull and trewe subjects*, one year later in 1559. While Aylmer offers a limited defence of Elizabeth as divine sovereign, he emphatically argues that ‘the regiment of England is not a mere Monarchie’ but a combination of ‘monarchy, oligarchy, and democratique’. Aylmer assures his readers that, through this tripartite governance, Elizabeth I ‘can ordein nothing without’ parliament, and if she ‘wer a mere monark, and not a mixte ruler’, he might ‘feare the matter more, and the les to defend the cause […] to haue a woman ruler’. Bolstered by the ‘scholastic Aristotelianism’ exemplified by Knox, Aylmer thus affirms the growing notion that in order to stabilise uncertainties surrounding ‘a woman ruler’, ‘any statute, including *Magna Carta* could be changed by parliament to bring English law into line with the laws of reason and the laws of God’. This juridicopolitical shift was accompanied by an intensified scepticism towards ancient constitutionalism as outmoded and a continued effort to rework English legal authority in new publications. In 1569, the first printed edition of de Bracton warned the reader ‘to take into consideration changes in the common and statute law since he wrote’, reiterating how these principal legal works continued to be devalued through emphasising their ‘antiquyte’.

However, the waive is not lost to the antiquity of *Bracton*, but is decidedly reinserted at the margins of two Elizabethan texts: the aforementioned Owen Rogers glossary to *Piers Plowman* (1561) and John Rastell’s *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words*.

---

32 John Aylmer, *An harborovve for faithfull and trewe subiectes agaynst the late blowne blaste, concerninge the gouernmen[f]t of vvemen.* wherein be confuted all such reasons as a straunger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to obedience (London: 1559), H.31.
34 Brooks, pp.107-108.
and Terms of the Laws of this Realm (1579), published forty-three years after his death by his son William Rastell. The glossaries and dictionaries in which waivery appears reflect a renewed effort to establish definitions in print for legal terms outside of established works such as Magna Carta. In the absence of the singular authority provided by ancient constitutionalism, the emergence of waivity in such disparate texts reiterates how ‘[t]he legal thought of the period must be pieced together from the examination of the odd textbook, one-off tracts, lectures delivered to students at the Inns of Court, and speeches made at meetings of courts as quarter sessions and as-sizes’. If the waive and the sovereign woman are linked by their paradoxical position within the polis, the anxieties that emanate from their shared suppression in law might also emerge in literature. As the gendered lines of juridicopolitical power are renegotiated under Elizabeth I, textual representations of the paradoxical legal agency of women shift and recede. Before exploring Elizabethan approaches to waivity in imaginative literature through The Gentle Craft, the Second Part, I chronologically chart explicit invocations of waivity in glossaries and dictionaries.

The Elizabethan Waive as a Lexicographical Subject

In Elizabethan England, waivity re-emerges as part of a wider project to consolidate the legal vocabulary now translated into vernacular English in print. Between 1475 and 1640, over a hundred ‘monolingual glossaries and specialist dictionaries’ were published, ‘including translators’ glossaries, which were typically appended to texts translated from Latin’. The recording of ‘most common everyday words’ was not a concern until around ‘the early eighteenth century’, which saw an influx of monolingual English dictionaries such as Edward Phillips’ The New World of English Words (1658) and later, more famously, Samuel

---

36 Brooks, pp.78-79.
37 Nevalainen, pp.49-50.
Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).38 Waivery is therefore codified as non-core vocabulary, its place within recordings of specialist terms demonstrating a collective effort to maintain recognition of its meaning and use during the sixteenth century. In keeping these terms in circulation through translation, Rogers’s and Rastell’s respective works articulate the tensions between novelty and antiquity. While in legal textuality, translation occurred from Latin and Law French to vernacular English, literary works written and circulated in Middle English were also bound up in a self-conscious, politically suffused process of intralingual preservation and change. As the examples that follow will demonstrate, the function and meaning of waivery develops and begins to be deployed in more varied contexts. Its continued use as a specialist medieval legal term alongside broader applications constitutes a suspension between preserved antiquity and a new terrain of broader lexicography.

The theme of legal-linguistic suspension is generically pertinent to Owen Rogers’ reprinted iterations of *Piers Plowman*. Despite its primary poetic function, *Piers Plowman* reiterates the intersections between law and literature, as it contains ‘more than a hundred legal terms’, making ‘Langland’s work stands out as the most saturated in legal concepts and terminology’ in its time.39 The popularity of *Piers Plowman* is well-known ‘in the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century’, apparent from ‘its continued manuscript circulation and recopying’, but it was not until 1550 that *Piers Plowman* was printed.40 The ‘cultural circulation’ of *Piers Plowman* in print is therefore part of a wider pattern which requires an ‘active decision to reinsert [the] older text into the Elizabethan book market’.41 Its printing after ‘about two hundre yeres paste’ therefore suggests a ‘striv[ing] to maintain [its] position as [a] living cultural artefact’, its content still both meaningful and marketable to an

38 Nevalanien, p.50.
41 Munro “‘O Read me for I am of Great Antiquity’”, p.56.
Elizabethan audience. As the title of Owen Rogers’s 1561 publication suggests, *The Vision of Pierce Plowman, newly imprinted after the authours olde copy... Whereunto Is annexed the Crede of Pierce Plowman, neuer imprinted with the booke before* compiles two key existing texts of the fourteenth century. Despite its titular claim to be ‘newly imprinted after the authours olde copy’, Owen Rogers’s edition ‘was not based on a manuscript at all; it was a direct reprint’ of the second of the three editions which made up the ‘first printed edition’ of *Piers Plowman* by Robert Crowley (1550). The ‘annexed’ *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede* was printed by Reynold Wolfe three years after Crowley in 1553. In producing copies of these two texts as a single edition, Rogers’s publication lacks ‘any discussion of his actual editorial practice’, echoing the omission of source materials that accompanies the manufactured antiquity of jestbooks. While *Piers Plowman* itself ‘remains unglossed’ as Crowley ‘provides no glossary in any of his editions’, Wolfe includes, on the final ‘leaf’ of *Crede*, a ‘forty-eight word’ glossary to ‘a poem over 800 lines long’. The interplay between the original fourteenth century *Piers Plowman* (1372-89) and *Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede* (1393-1401), Crowley and Wolfe’s respective editions printed during the reign of Edward VI (1550-1553), and Owen Rogers’s ‘newly imprinted’ collation of Crowley and Wolfe’s work in 1561 ensures that, despite the inevitable repetition of copying, the texts are temporally and ideologically discursive. I revisit two elusive examples within Rogers’s *The Vision of Piers Plowman* to consider perceptions of waivery during the early reign of Elizabeth I.

I first turn to the Prologue to the B-text of *Piers Plowman*. In its opening sequence, Will the Dreamer asserts that ‘Bischopes and Bachelers, bothe Mistres and Doctours’ should ‘shryven [their] paroschienes’ by leaving the wilderness of the Malvern Hills for London to

---

44 Kelen, p.49.
provide for the poor. From London, some of those enlisted ‘seruen the kyng and his siluer tellen, | In Cheker and in Chauncelrie chalangen hise dettes | Of wardes and of wardemotes, weyues and streyves’ (B. Prol. 92-94). Here, Langland invokes Royal Commissions of debt collection within the Exchequer and Chancery as a method of generating revenue. These debts are collected from ‘wardes and of wardemotes, weyues and streyves [waifs and strays]’ and bestowed upon the sovereign in legal recourse (B. Prol. 94). While these categories have specific applications within the law in context, their meaning is also characterised by plurality and uncertainty. In being paired with ‘streyves’, ‘weyues’ loses its singularity and its meaning takes on new, more ambiguous significations. Together, waifs and strays are defined as ‘property which is found ownerless and which, if unclaimed within a fixed period after due notice given, falls to the lord of the manor or to the King, e.g. an article washed up on the seashore, an animal that has strayed’. This definition is echoed in *Fleta seu Commentarius juris Anglicani*, a medieval common law treatise established around 1290 which Langland’s poetic notion is in accordance with. *Fleta* states that ‘[i]f anyone, who claims the enjoyment of the franchise of waif [libertatem weyuii], find an animal wandering in his fee, he shall make it known forthwith to the adjoining town-churches and markets […] and if he do this, after a year and a day no action is available to anyone, but by the law of nations the animal becomes the lord’s property’. According to Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A Shepherd, the phrase ‘weyues and streyues’ could refer to ‘lost property’ such as ‘strayed cattle’, but could also ‘according to another interpretation, the property of deceased aliens

---


46 Alford, B.Prol.94, fn.

47 The anonymous author of the book is sometimes referred to as ‘Fleta’, although this is not in fact a person’s name. Similar to other medieval legal treatises such as *Bracton*, the work was likely to have been composed by a number of jurists.

48 Alford, p.167.
with no legitimate heirs’. The lack of linguistic differentiation between women, animals, and objects as property is also seen in definitions of waivery as a singular legal term. Henry de Bracton’s *On the Laws and Customs of England*, which precedes *Fleta seu Commentarius juris Anglicani* by approximately fifty-five years, describes the waive as ‘that which no one claims’. Though it remains unclear as to whether Langland’s ‘weyues and streyues’ refer to unclaimed subjects or objects, the juxtaposition of ‘wardes’ to ‘weyues and streyues’ is significant alongside Bracton’s definition of the waived woman.

‘Wardes’ refers to ‘an under age heir’ which the King could claim the holdings of. In its opening statement on the waive, *Bracton* declares that ‘[a] woman, who cannot be outlawed because she is not under the law (in English, ‘in law’) that is, in frankpledge or tithing, as is a male of twelve years and upwards’. As previously outlined in the introduction to this thesis, tithing refers to a legal or territorial unit which originally consisted of ten householders. Each tithing adheres to the system of frankpledge whereby ‘[e]very [male] who has reached the age of twelve must take an oath […] that he does not intend to be a thief nor a party to thieving.’ Both ‘wardes’ and ‘weyues and streyues’, then, could refer to those placed outside of the law through their exclusion from ‘frankpledge or tithing’, thus leaving their property and themselves to be ‘regarded as one abandoned’. The parallels between this fragment of *Piers Plowman* and Bracton’s definitions suggest a development of more ambiguous connotations for waivery. Indeed, a more generalised application of ‘weyue’ is perhaps also found in *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede*, ‘an alliterative poem […] heavily influenced by Piers Plowman’ primarily through its ‘poor but charismatic ploughman named

---

50 De Bracton, pp.353-354.
51 Robertson and Shepherd, p.7.
52 De Bracton, p.353.
53 De Bracton, p.351.
54 De Bracton, pp.353-354.
Piers’. In his glossary, Wolfe defines the word ‘wayuen’, to mean ‘banysh’, an approximate to outlawry in non-gendered terms. However, in the Crede text itself, ‘wayuen’ is assigned a metaphoric function, used to mean ‘wayuen the trewethe [truth]’ (C.4). The broadening of ‘weyue’ in terms of meaning and function not only demonstrates the process of language change, but perhaps indicates ideological change too. Through its new multifunctional usage, the singularity of the waive as a figure and a woman is diffused. In contrast with the outlaw, the identity of the waive is not deemed legally or culturally pertinent to retain a specific, singular title.

Despite the absence of waivery in the highly influential Exposiciones Terminorm Legum Anglorum (1525), John Rastell printed Thomas Littleton’s Lyttleton Tenures in Englysshe between 1528 and 1530. Littleton outlines the meaning of ‘vyllenage’, to refer to those who carry out ‘the donge and fylth of the lord vnto the land’, asserting that ‘a man that is villayne is call[ed] vyllayne, and a woman that is a vyllane called nyefe, as a manne that is outlawed called an outlawe, and a woman that is outlawed is called a wayue’. In offering no separate definitions for outlawry and waivery, these terms occupy a relational position to exemplify the gender difference delineating legal terms. Littleton’s discussion of ‘vyllenage’ echoes the legal treatise The Mirror of Justices compiled by and attributed to Andrew Horne. While this was written in Anglo-Norman around 1290, it was not translated into English until 1646. Littleton emulates Horne’s work, reproducing the homogenised categories of ‘nyefe’ and ‘wayue’ for an English-speaking Tudor audience. John Rastell’s peripheral invocations of waivery in the Henrician period are replaced by a more substantial definition in the

---

56 Anon, Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (London: Reynold Wolfe, 1553) D.3v.
57 Thomas Littleton, Lyttleton Tenures in Englysshe (London: John Rastell, 1528-1530), Sig. E.7v.
58 In its translation, the text states that ‘the waive is nothing else but a villainesse’. See Andrew Horne, The booke called the mirrour of justices made by Andrew Horne ; with the book called the diversity of courts and their jurisdictions ; both translated out of the old French into the English tongue by W.H (London: 1646), H.7v.
Elizabethan period. In 1579, William Rastell publishes John Rastell’s *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Wordes and Termes of the Laws of this Realm*, redefining the waive for a woman monarch:

Waive is a woman that is [o]utlawed, & shee is called wayue, as left out or forsaken of the law: & not an utlawe as a man is: For wemen are not sworne into leetes to the Queene, nor to [the] lawe, who therefore are within the lawe, whereas wemen are not, and for y cause they cannot besaid out of the lawe in so much as they neuer were within it: But a man is called utlawe, beause that hee was once sworne to the lawe and nowe for contempt hee is put out of the lawe, and is called utlaw, as one should say without benefit of the lawe.\(^{59}\)

In his initial statement, Rastell echoes dhole Bracton’s definition of waivery as ‘a woman, who cannot be outlawed because she is not under the law (in English, ‘in law’) that is, in frankpledge or tithing, as is a male of twelve years and upwards’.\(^{60}\)

Rastell emphasises the paradox fundamental to the waive, in which women ‘cannot besaid out of the lawe in so much as they neuer were within it’, yet the waive is defined by being ‘left out or forsaken of the law’. Yet despite these similarities, Rastell’s account includes some significant additions. While de Bracton reasons that women’s separate categorisation in waivery is due to their exclusion from ‘frankpledge or tithing’, Rastell asserts that women’s exclusion from outlawry is due to ‘not [being] sworne into leetes to the Queene’.\(^{61}\) Here, Rastell offers a definition of waivery which emphasises Elizabeth’s active role in legitimising the juridical status of her subjects. As none of the subjects ‘sworne into leetes’ are women, Rastell emphasises the exceptional status of Elizabeth as a woman ruling within the law. In Agamben’s terms, Elizabeth I’s is both the sovereign who decides on the exception and the exception herself: her expulsion from the political community is what determines her capacity to suspend

---

\(^{59}\) William Rastell, *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Wordes*, Bb.iiij.\(^{1}\)

\(^{60}\) De Bracton, pp.353-354.

\(^{61}\) Rastell, *An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words*, Bb.iiij. Leetes are ‘a special kind of court of record ‘which determine ‘the district over which […] [court] jurisdiction extend[s]’, see ‘Leet’ (n., OED, 2).
and exist outside of the law. While the monarch is normally characterised principally by unlimited authority, what comes afterwards challenges Elizabeth’s exceptional status by asserting a model of limited sovereignty. In Rastell’s terms, women are ‘not sworne into leetes to the Queene nor to [the] lawe’, establishing a separation between ‘monarchy, oligarchy and democratie’ reflective of John Aylmer’s Harborrowe for faithfull and trewe subjects (1559). Whereas de Bracton emphasises that the ‘life and death’ of all legal subjects are ‘in the hands of the lord king’, Rastell’s definition suggests that juridicopolitical agency does not rest solely with the Queene, but with the law itself. These developments mark a cultural shift in which the sovereign is no longer entrusted with the sole responsibility to suppress waivery. The separatism of sovereignty and law reflects the competing modes of legal power emanating from Elizabeth I as a woman ruler and an androcentric government seeking autonomy.

Despite these tensions at work within Rastell’s text, An Exposition of Certain Difficult and Obscure Words, and Terms of the Laws of this Realm proved immensely popular beyond its initial publication in 1579, most prevalently in the 1590s and early 1600s. Rastell’s text was reprinted in 1592, 1595, and 1598, and then in 1602, 1607, 1609, 1615, and 1618. Markedly, the initial surge in reprints of Rastell’s work clusters around the period in which Meg first emerged and became textually prevalent. In 1590, the first known edition of the jestbook The Life of Longe Megg of Westminster was entered into the stationer’s register, along with A Ballad of Longe Meg of Westminster in the same year. A second ballad appeared in 1595, The mad merye pranckes of Long Megg of Westminster, and the stage play Longe Megge ran from 1594-1597. Due to their popularity, these narratives, which foreground Long Meg of Westminster in their titles, have been read out of existence, and the material is now lost. Thomas Deloney’s The Gentle Craft, the second Part (c.1598), however, survives. Deloney’s text, then, is the only available source material through which to examine Long Meg’s shifting

---

62 See Agamben, Homo Sacer, p.111.
cultural identity in Elizabethan England.

Thomas Deloney is the first named author attributed to a text which uses Long Meg of Westminster as a sustained character, producing the first surviving text which includes but does not centralise Meg as the sole protagonist. Instead, Long Meg is one of many subjects incorporated into a more diffuse narrative ‘held together by the theme […] of the glory and worthiness of shoemakers’.63 The Gentle Craft, the second part therefore marks a departure from the singularity of Long Meg’s tradition, as she recedes into secondary character roles, followed by peripheral invocations in Jacobean stage plays. What were once Meg’s defining characteristics — operating beyond the law to assert a form individualistic justice; participating in conventionally masculine modes of dress and violence; her location of Westminster — are removed from the narrative. While still popular culturally and therefore commercially valuable as a figure, these originary aspects of Long Meg of Westminster present a threat to the precarious late-Elizabethan and early Jacobean ideals of law, womanhood, and power. Deloney neutralises Long Meg of Westminster by resituating her in a narrative of competing English domesticity and romance, no longer the textual waive of The Life of Long Meg but a ‘rather serious young woman intent on winning the love of, and marrying, a young apprentice’.64 In resituating Meg in a more stereotypically feminine domain, Deloney seeks to diffuse the singularity of Long Meg, who, like Elizabeth I, represents a form of gendered extralegal power.

It is striking that Thomas Deloney’s The Gentle Craft, the Second Part (c.1598) is also published in the same year as the third reprint of Rastell’s Expositions. Though working in different genres, Rastell and Deloney both define the juridico-political position of women in their respective narratives. Rastell’s Expositions and Deloney’s The Gentle Craft, the second part sit at the intersection between law and literature: they both negotiate the gender politics of

64 Gartenberg, p.53.
Elizabethan legal identities, and reveal the patterns of visibility and effacement which surround waivery. While Rastell reproduces an existing definition of waivery in law, ensuring its continued circulation, Deloney’s reimagining of Long Meg marks a cultural shift in the way textual waivery is represented. The tension between Rastell’s definition of waivery and textual representations of Long Meg persists in the Jacobean period. By 1607, the definition of waivery in Rastell’s *Expositions* had been changed to reflect James I’s accession, stating that ‘women are not sworne into leetes by the King, nor to the law, as men are’.65 The edition retains the distinction between the power of the King and the judicial agency of the law, leaving traces that suggest a limited sovereignty within the text. Rastell’s nuanced definition denotes a curious and timely preservation of waivery in legal discourse. The hiatus in fictional representations of Long Meg’s occurs towards the end of Elizabeth’s reign, and persists through most of James I’s reign. Meg does not re-emerge until the final years of the Jacobean period, in the 1620 *The History of Long Meg of Westminster*, before the extant Caroline era jestbook *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* in 1635. Two years after the year Rastell’s *Expositions* ceases to be reprinted with such frequency in 1618, Long Meg of Westminster re-emerges as a singular protagonist in 1620. As the only surviving text which substantially features Long Meg during the period in which Rastell’s definition circulates, *The Gentle Craft the second part* gives a crucial insight into the changing representation of Meg alongside the waive.

I now situate the emergence of Long Meg in Deloney’s broader textual output. Deloney’s transition from ballad writing to prose fiction, like the wider cultural shift from ancient constitutionalism to legal dictionaries, is marked by new negotiations of gender and genre. *The Gentle Craft, the second part* can be seen as a response to anxieties emanating from gendered exceptionalism: both Elizabeth I and Long Meg exemplify an infiltration of the *polis*

65 John Rastell, *An Exposition of Certaine Difficult and Obscure Words, and Termes of the Lawes of this Realme: newly amended and Augmented Both in French and English, for the helpe of Such young students as are desirous to attaine to the knowledge of the same* (London: 1607), 195.
which, as women, they are excluded from. The nostalgic setting of Henrician England in *The Gentle Craft, the second part* allows Elizabeth to be omitted from the narrative. Just as Elizabeth I’s singular absolutism is challenged by the collectivity of central democracy, Meg’s plurality alongside Gillian also destabilises her position in the narrative.

**Situating Meg: Gender and Genre in the Works of Thomas Deloney**

As the first known named author to produce a version of Long Meg of Westminster for their own work, the authorial and generic context of Thomas Deloney provides a new illuminating approach to Long Meg’s emergence and reception. In Thomas Nashe’s *Have with you to Saffron Walden* (1596), Deloney is notably described as ‘the Balletting Silk-Weauer [who] hath rime inough for all [his] racles’.66 Records of ‘the baptism of his son Richard at St. Giles Cripplegate’67 indicate his move from Norwich to London by October 1586, where he continued to write. By the early 1590s, Deloney had garnered fame and recognition for his ballad writing. Like the earlier jestbooks and ballads of Long Meg, many of the early editions of Deloney’s ballads, such as the collection *The Garland of Good Will* (1593) ‘have been read out of existence’ due to their extreme popularity.68 While varied in subject, the ballads capitalised on the public appetite for ‘topical reportage’, from ‘political news’ such as *The Queenes Visiting of the Campe at Tilsburie with her Entertainment there* (1588), to more ‘sensational events’, exemplified by *The Lamentation of Master Pages wife of Plimmoth, who being enforced by her parents to wed against her will, did most wickedly consent to his murther, for the love of George Strangwidge* (c.1591).69 In the latter text, Deloney further demonstrates his view of criminal women as viable literary subjects, as the ballad details the ‘lawlesse loue’

---

of Master Pages’ wife Ulalia in a scaffold speech style confession, which first detailed in *Sundry Strange and Inhuman Murthers Lately Committed* earlier that year. Along with the initial publication *Sundry Strange and Inhuman Murthers Lately Committed*, Deloney’s ballad forms the basis of Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker’s analogous lost play *Padge of Plymouth* (1599). Here, the adaptation of Deloney’s work indicates an intertextual fluidity between pamphlet materials and stage plays, in which ephemeral works are mined for source material.

While Deloney himself demonstrates this process of borrowing by incorporating George Strangwidge into *The Gentle Craft, the second part* as a shoemaker’s antagonist, the criminal behaviour of Ulalia is not extended to Long Meg in *The Gentle Craft, the second part*. The shift in the characterisation of criminal women in Deloney’s fiction perhaps reflects a need to transcend the troubled history of his polemic writings. Indeed, in 1595, the month of the apprentice riots, Deloney was imprisoned for “printing a Book of the Silk-Weavers” in order to alleviate their “great decaye and impoverishting” due to competition from foreign labour. Connections between craftsmen and illegal activity intensified in the 1590s: the proclamation ‘Enforcing Curfews for Apprentices’ notes the ‘very outrage lately committed by some apprentices and other being masterless men and vagrant persons’. In June 1596, Deloney’s lost ballad *On the Want of Corn* was also ‘suppressed by the Lord Mayor’, as it ‘featured the queen conversing with a poor subject’ during a period of food shortage and famine. These incidents of subversive authorship demonstrate how Deloney, like Robin Hood and Long Meg, was willing to impose a personal brand of social justice which rejects the authority of positive

---

70 Thomas Deloney, *The Lamentation of Master Pages wife of Plimmoth, who being enforced by her parents to wed him against her will, did most wickedly consent to his murther, for the love of George Strangwidge* (London: 1591), line 3.
73 Suzuki, p.181.
law and leads to judicial punishment.

Following these incidents of imprisonment and censorship, however, Deloney turns to the genre of prose fiction, with *The Gentle Craft, the second part* constituting one of his ‘four works [produced] between 1597 and 1600’. Abandoning his direct criticism of the Queen and her policies surrounding the labour law of apprentices, Deloney’s prose fiction constitutes a new mode of self-fashioning which centralises the glory and worthiness of craftsmen. Indeed, the first of these prosaic works, *The Pleasant History of Jack Winchcomb, in his younger years called Jack of Newbury* (c.1597), is dedicated ‘[t]o all famous cloth workers in England’, the first part of *The Gentle Craft* (c.1597) to ‘all the good Yeoman of the Gentle Craft’ and *The Gentle Craft, the second part* (c.1598) to ‘the worshipfull company of Cordwaynors’, more overtly known as London’s shoemakers’ guild of which Deloney is associated with as a member. Deloney’s prose fiction therefore marks a new project; to demonstrate the societal value and rightful equitable treatment of craftsmen through generic elevation. Rather than overtly include the dichotomy of the Queen and peasant in these narratives, as in the stark political criticism of *Of Want of Corn*, Deloney presents the imagined upward social mobility of his disenfranchised community of craftspeople. The first part of the *The Gentle Craft* (c.1597) ‘has the clear purpose of offering a mythologized ancestry for the “gentle-craft” of shoemaking’, concluding with a shoemaker named Simon Eyre who becomes ‘the mayor of London’. While *The Gentle Craft, the second part* is also held together by the theme of shoemaking, the narrative is far more disparate. As part of the continuation of his utopian model, Deloney characterises women as more loveless than ‘lawless’ in *the second part*. In contrast to the first part of *The Gentle Craft*, where Margery Eyre’s counsel is essential to her

---

76 Thomas Deloney, *The Gentle Craft, The Second Part* (1639) Sig. A.2’. While the *The Gentle Craft, the second part* dates to c.1598, the earliest surviving complete edition dates from 1639. Further references will be made ibid the text as GC.
77 Salzman, ‘Thomas Deloney’, (para. 7 of 12).
78 Deloney, *The Lamentation of Master Pages wife of Plimmoth*, line 3.
husband’s political advancement to mayor, the women of the second part struggle to secure a husband, taking on a further politically diminished role.

The romanticisation of Deloney’s Long Meg alongside the displacement of Elizabeth I is also founded on a basis of further legal exclusion. The London Weaver’s Company imposed ‘more juridicial language in [their] ordinances’, particularly concerning ‘the exclusion of women’. By 1577, the ‘ordinance doubled the penalty for training women to six shillings, eight pence’. In context with Deloney’s address to ‘Cordwaynors’, which celebrates the collectivity of men, then, Long Meg’s exclusion from a central role in artisanal heroism is unsurprising. As the agent of Long Meg’s relegation to secondary romantic interest, Deloney further parallels the Robin Hood tradition by returning to a notion of a yeoman text for a yeoman audience, a reframing strategy which centralises the heroic masculinity of the intermediate classes. Deloney conflates Long Meg with the ‘shoemaker’s wife’, echoing early roles for women in the Robin Hood ballads such as the sheriff’s wife in *Robin Hood and the Potter*. Both texts are not only affiliated with the crafts of artisanal classes, but also celebrate the gendered interplay of ‘commercial and “domestical” duties’ found in early forms of mercantilism. Like the shoemaker’s wife, the sheriff’s wife of *Robin Hood and the Potter* plays a peripheral role in the exchange of goods, ensuring the success of her husband. However, while ‘[t]he sheriff’s wife exists’ to create ‘heterosexual rivalry between men over a woman’, it is Richard Casteler who functions as the ‘object of flattery’ between Gillian and Long Meg. In contrast to the sheriff’s wife, who is ‘designed to lack the agency’ of the men in the greenwood, Long Meg and Gillian share a domestic rivalry from within their prescribed town-space. Deloney’s Mistress Eyre of the first part of *The Gentle Craft* as an aspirational wife to

---

79 Ladd, p.994.  
80 Ladd, p.994.  
82 Johnson, p.27.  
83 Johnson, p.27.
a Shoemaker forms the basis of ‘Margery Eyre’ in Thomas Dekker in his stage play *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (c.1599). Long Meg’s absorption into the ordinarily titled Margery also marks the loss of her status as a folkloric protagonist, allowing her to be devalued as she seeks the role of the wife. In enhancing the domesticity of Long Meg to the point where her outlaw behaviour is eclipsed, Deloney asserts a narrative which both champions patriarchal order and avoids the contentious allegory of queenly sovereignty. The changing approach to gender and genre in Deloney’s prose fiction therefore reflects anxieties regarding conventionally masculine modes of power, and how they could be wielded by both Long Meg and the reigning sovereign.

Deloney suppresses the aspects of Long Meg’s characterisation connecting her to waivery, but capitalises on her broad appeal in popular culture. In the second address in *The Gentle Craft, the second part*, Deloney promises ‘the courteous readers’, that in ‘this rude pamphlet’ they ‘shall see […] mad merry pranke’ (*GC, A.2*), directly appropriating the title of the jestbook *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster, containing the mad merry pranke shee played in her lifetime*. While the address to the ‘Cordwaynors’ suggests that ‘this pamphlet doth not minister matter worthy your grave view’, the ‘courteous readers’ are reminded that ‘wee have herein no cause to talke of Courtiers and Scholers’ (*GC, A.2*). The adoption of jestbook characters in the spirit of commercial success is not confined to Long Meg in Deloney’s fiction: in *Jack of Newbury* (c.1597), ‘Will Sommers,’ a Henrician jester also present in *The Life of Long Meg*, is ‘tied to a post by […] [Jack’s maidservants] and beaten with “wet dogs droppings”’. Deloney’s dedicatory addresses indicate an awareness of the power of jestbook figures as both a source of lowbrow humour and a cultural celebrity in which the national imagination can be captivated through the invocation of a name. As these addresses

---

illuminate, in *The Gentle Craft, the Second part*, Deloney attempts to retain Long Meg’s currency as a jestbook figure whilst also inserting her into his ‘idiosyncratic ideology of [...] craft governance’.  

Deloney’s borrowing from the jestbook genre also extends to narrative structure, as he compiles *The Gentle Craft, the second part* as a series of self-contained tales. The first three chapters follow Richard Casteler and the women ‘that secretely affected him’, Long Meg of Westminster and Gillian of the George (*GC, A.3*). As a young shoemaker, Richard Casteler had ‘the custome of all the Pretty Wenches in the Citty’ as he ‘knew the length of every maidens foot so well, that he aboue all other best pleased them’ (*GC, A.3*). Deloney’s naming of Richard Casteler recalls Sir James of Castille in *The Life of Long Meg*, joining the courtly identity of the Spanish Knight with the English craftsman. Though ‘few there was that wished not themselves to be his wife’ (*GC, A.3*), the narrator asserts that the ‘merriments’ of Long Meg and Gillian ‘remaine [most] in memorie’ (*GC, A.3*). Despite this assertion, Gillian’s characterisation lacks memorability and detail, described only as ‘a proper neat wench’ and also ‘the other’ (*GC, A.3*), reiterating her relational position to Long Meg of Westminster both as an antagonistic device and symbol of true feminine virtue. Deloney’s initial synopsis of Meg’s personage, however, draws heavily on existing materials:

Margaret was a maiden borne in Lancashire, in height and proportion of body, passing the ordinary stature of women, and therewithal very comely, and of amiable countenance, her strength was agreeable to her stature and her courage as great as them both: she was [...] such a one as would be sodainely angry, and soone pleased, being readier to revenge her wrongs by weapons, then by words: and therein did shee differ from the nature of other women, because she could not abide much brabling.

(*GC, Sig. A.3*)

In retaining the key signifiers of Meg’s regionalism, physicality and temperament in his initial description, Deloney replicates an already comprehensive and recognisable character for both

---

85 Ladd, p.982.
ease and popular appeal. Though her name and distinctive marker of height goes unchanged, Long Meg’s pairing with Gillian also creates moments of doubling. Beyond this first assessment of Gillian and Meg in separate terms, Deloney states that ‘both of them as wily as they were witty, who among all the Maides in Westminster were reputed to be the best seruants; having therefore good wages, they maintained themselves gallantly’ (GC, A.3ᵛ). Through the financial independence and success of their shared occupation, Deloney asserts that the equal eligibility of Long Meg and Gillian is determined primarily through their employment: ‘maintain[ing] themselves gallantly […] [and] honestly’, Deloney claims ‘that no man could quip them with bad liuing’ (GC, A.3ᵛ). Deloney’s change to Long Meg’s occupation indicates a shift in her social class. Whereas The Life of Long Meg sees Meg earn her position as a tavern maid by beating Sir James, Deloney both Gillian and Long Meg as the ‘Maides in Westminster […] reputed to be the best seruants, having therefore good wages’ (GC, A.3ᵛ). As alehouses were considered ‘a habitable site of vagrancy’, 86 the location of Meg’s employment and violent conflict is also removed from the plot. Crucially, Deloney also revises Long Meg’s relationship with language. In The Life of Long Meg, Meg asserts that she will first ‘speake […] so faire’ but if ‘words will not prevail, Ile rib-roast him with a cudgel’ (LM, B.1'). Meg’s valuing of ‘faire’ language over violence is in direct opposition to Deloney’s reframing of her character, as he claims that she is ‘readier to revenge her wrongs by weapons, then by words’ (GC, A.3ᵛ). As Meg engages in no physical combat in the tale, Deloney’s initial representation of Meg is undermined by the content of his narrative. In contrast to The Life of Long Meg, Deloney aligns subversive behaviour with Meg’s speech, rather than her actions. Meg’s upward social mobility distances her from ‘brabling’ (GC, A.3ᵛ) women, repositioning her as suitable for courtship with the shoemaker.

Before focusing more squarely on the gender politics of Long Meg’s characterisation, I offer a brief synopsis of *The Gentle Craft, the second part* as a whole. The textual community is comprised of fifteen characters who, in order of appearance, are Richard Casteler, Long Meg, Gillian, Robin, Peachey the shoemaker, Strangwidge and Strukeley, Harrie-Nevell, Tom Drum, Sir John Rainsford, Mistris Farmer the Widdow, Doctor Burket, the Greene king, the Greene King’s wife, and Anthony the fiddler. While figures such as Robin and Tom Drum appear in multiple narratives, the roles of Richard Casteler, Long Meg, and Gillian are contained within the first three chapters. Chapter One sets up the rivalry between Gillian and Meg, as they walk home from the market discussing the beloved shoemaker Richard under the false pretence that neither love him in an attempt to deter the other. In Chapter Two, Long Meg goes to Richard’s workshop to be measured for a new pair of shoes, a transaction which provokes flirtation and sexual punning. During her visit, Richard’s associate Robin is introduced, and Meg invites both Richard and Robin to gather at her house in secret for posset while her master is not at home. As soon as Meg leaves Richard’s workshop, Gillian enters with the offering of a venison pasty. In exchange for a good suit of apparel, Robin agrees to try and gain Richard’s favour on Gillian’s behalf. Later that night, Richard and Robin arrive at the house of Meg’s master, where she has prepared the posset for them. After her Master returns to the house earlier than expected, Meg rushes to hide the posset in the outdoor privy. The Master going to relieve himself, scolds his buttocks on the boiling contents below. Meg is forced to attend to his injury, and Richard and Robin slip away having never sampled the posset. Chapter Three details Richard’s marriage to a Dutch woman, and the humiliating shortcomings of Long Meg and Gillian in being tricked by Robin. While Richard is away wooing in London, Robin tends to the shoemaker’s workshop. As Meg and Gillian come by to suspiciously inquire of Richard’s whereabouts, Robin deceptively suggests that the other is obstructing Richard’s true love for them. Robin then convinces Meg and Gillian to go to Tuttle Fields, where Richard will be
waiting for them. As per Robin’s plot, Richard never appears, and the two women are escorted home for loitering by an officer. In an effort to get revenge on Richard after he announces his marriage, Meg and Gillian arrive at the ceremony unannounced and interrupt proceedings with a song detailing how Richard has wronged them both. The chapter concludes with an overview of their later years, in which Gillian is married with children and Meg, after a brief period in the army, becomes a sex worker. Chapter Four continues to follow the character of Robin, and how he sings before the King after their victorious return from Boulogne. The King, being so pleased with his song, rewards him with money and an invitation for all the shoemakers of Westminster to join in his company. The end of this chapter also notes Richard of Casteler’s death, and while he never had children, donated generously to orphaned children in Christs Hospital in London.

Chapters five to nine loosely centre on the figure of Peachey the famous Shoemaker and the community which surrounds him. In Chapter Five, Peachey encounters the villainous sea captains (or rather, pirates), Strangwidge and Strukeley, while in chapters six and eight, the narrative turns to Tom Drum and Harry Nevell, who seek to go into Peachey’s service as apprentices. Chapter Seven introduces the Knight Sir John Rainsford, who assists a widow forced to carry the corpse of her husband through the village, having no money to pay for a proper burial. Chapter Nine follows Peachey’s apprentice Harry Nevell further as he attempts to court the widow Mistress Farmer, and deceives his rival Doctor Burket. Finally, chapters ten and eleven introduce the Green King. The Green King has striking connections to Robin Hood, as Deloney appoints him as the ‘jollie Shooemaker’ who ‘shewed himselfe before King Henry, with all his men cloathed in greene, he himselfe being suted all in greene Satten’ (GC, L.1). Here, Deloney directly inserts his elusive character the Green King, into the recorded event of 1510 in which Henry VIII was reported, with other noble menne’ to come ‘sodainly in a morning […] all appareled in […] Kentishe Kendal, […] like out lawes, or Robyn Hodes
men. In chapter ten, the Green King has suspicions that his wife is a witch, and after arguing with her boards a barge with Anthony the fiddle player, who plays him a song on their journey. When the Green King returns, his wife’s behaviour has transformed. In the final chapter, the Green King’s wife convinces him to go abroad to make up for his marital negligence. Though contained within the first three chapters, Long Meg is broadly situated in an assemblage of folkloric figures recalling Tudor England. Deloney’s incorporation of Tom Thumb and Doctor Burket is echoed by Ben Jonson’s *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*, which includes Long Meg, Tom Thumb and Doctor Rat as three of its twelve masquers. Unique to Deloney’s narrative, however, is the adaptation of Meg for a romance plot. In order to rehabilitate the image of shoemakers, Deloney depoliticises Meg and refashions her along more traditionally feminine lines. In doing so, he attempts to defuse the tensions between women and law which characterise Meg’s tradition.

**Reimagining Meg: from Manhood to Maidenhead**

Attempting to assert patriarchal traditions, Deloney omits the aspects of Meg’s character which align her with outlaw Robin Hood, and anxiously emphasises her maidenhead. Despite his omission of her brand of extralegal justice, Long Meg proves disruptive to the conventions of romance. Indeed, the initial revisions made to Meg’s character markedly fail as the narrative unfolds. Though Deloney claims that ‘no man could quip [Long Meg and Gillian] with bad liuing’, he self-consciously adds that ‘it fell out otherwise’ (*GC*, A.3). The emphasis on how Meg ‘differ[ed] from the nature of other women’ in terms of her angry and weapon-wielding tendencies contains echoes of Meg’s originary position as a dynamic heroine protagonist. While in *The Gentle Craft, the second part*, Meg participates in no real verbal or physical

---

87 Knight, p.46.
confrontation, her presence remains disruptive to Deloney’s narrative roles for women. Meg’s incompatibility with a wholly domestic role therefore leads to her punishment. Her widely known subversions in law and language, though having no impact on the plot of *The Gentle Craft* itself, are interpreted by Deloney as indicators of her immorality. While in *The Life of Long Meg*, Meg is deemed punishable due to her acts as ‘a swearer […] and a brawler’ and ultimately, ‘a publike offender’ (*LM*, E.3), Deloney reimagines Meg’s legal transgressions in a more stereotypically feminine capacity by denoting her sexual availability.

Lamenting her ‘burdensome […] maiden-head’ (*GC*, A.4) in conversation with Gillian, Meg outlines her desire to marry. Meg describes what she perceives to be an ideal scenario in marriage, detailing how her husband:

[S]ets her on his knee, and wantonly stroking her cheeke […] fetching many stealing touches at her rubie lips, and so soone as he heares the Bell ring eight a clocke, he calles her to goe to bed with him. O how sweet doe these words sound in a womans eares?

(*GC*, A.4)

The single chapter of *The Life of Long Meg* which explores her marriage to a soldier contains no such amorous declarations. The husband of *The Life of Long Meg* physically challenges her to ‘try her manhood’ in a duel, which Meg refuses on the principle of wifely obedience (*LM*, D.4). While in *The Life of Long Meg*, Meg’s acts of law-breaking are within a code of morally justified violence, Deloney transposes the perceived immorality of Meg’s law-breaking onto a domestic setting. In doing so, Deloney presents Meg’s subversive nature through language which has no impact on the main action of the narrative. The dialogue which expresses Meg’s sexual lasciviousness is placed in contrast with the virtuous innocence of Gillian. In response to Meg’s fantasy of being ‘close between a paire of sheetes’ with a husband, Gillian asks ‘[w]hy, what of that […]?’, to which Meg knowingly quips ‘[n]ay nothing […] but they sleep soundly all night’ (*GC*, A.4). Though it is Gillian who is initially described as Meg’s other, it is Meg’s status as a folkloric figure which leads to her ‘othered’ characterisation, leaving her
as a failed model of domestic maidenhood.

Meg’s sexualisation is also used to undermine Richard Casteler, as she calls ‘into question his sexual potency’. In an attempt to deter Gillian’s attraction to Richard, Long Meg remarks that Richard is known as ‘the wakeful cock of Westminster’, and that while ‘he be a Cock by name, hee will neuer prove a Cock of the game’ (GC, B.l). The emasculating implications of Meg’s sexual punning are later fully realised as Casteler is ‘unable to impregnate the meek Dutch woman he eventually marries’, concluding that he is ‘no perfect man’ as they ‘neuer had child’ (GC, Sig. E.4v). Her belittling speech not only successfully replicates the lowbrow comic relief of the original jestbook, but also has significant impact on the narrative. Although Deloney’s text omits Meg’s masculine performativity from the plot, Meg’s presence both threatens Casteler’s masculinity and foreshadows his impotence. The increased regulation of cross-dressing outside of a context of seasonal merriment emanated from magistrates, who believed that ‘a woman would only adopt such a disguise to breach the conventions of […] law’. This prevalence of cross-dressing on the streets of London — a strategy overwhelmingly used by criminal women — informs Deloney’s attempts to suppress Long Meg’s literary identity as a violent law-breaking heroine, often disguised as a man. In describing her as ‘passing the ordinary stature of women, and therewithal comely’ (GC, A.4v) instead of a ‘tall man cast in a womans mould’ (LM, B.l), the gendered markers of Meg’s extraordinary mythological status are effaced to enhance her conventional attractiveness in Deloney’s romance plot.

The tale concludes with neither Meg nor Gillian obtaining Casteler, and their alternative futures further reveal the moral subtext to their doubling. While Gillian ‘in the end was well

88 Morrow, p.399.
89 Morrow, p.399.
married, and became a good house-keeper, living in honest name and fame till her dying day’, Meg ‘in a melancholy humour went her waies’ (GC, E.2'). Due to her innocence and virtue, Gillian is rewarded with conventional domestic fulfilment. On the other hand, unable to be contained within the ‘common lot of women (marriage and children)’, Meg seeks alternative livelihood.\(^92\) Initially, Deloney uses Meg to reassert the ideology of ‘post-reformation poor relief through employment’, as she laments that ‘one of my ripe age, bone and bignesse hath all this while liv’d in London idly, like an unprofitable member of the common-wealth […] I will be better impoy’d’ (GC, E.2').\(^93\) Deloney’s sudden declaration that Meg lives ‘idly’ and ‘unprofitabl[y]’ is in direct contradiction to his description from Chapter One of The Gentle Craft the second part, which states that she is ‘reputed’ as one of the ‘best seruants; having therefore good wages’ (GC, A.3\(^\nu\)). Here, Deloney briefly returns to the material of The Life of Long Meg, as he reports how Meg ‘attended on the Kings arms to Bullen, and while the siege lasted, became a landresse to the Camp’ (LM, E.2'). The heroics and physical combat of Meg’s original exploits at war go unmentioned, therefore omitting the subversion of the domestic role of ‘landresse’ (LM, E.2'). Deloney then concludes that after coming home from war, Meg ‘became common to the call to every man, till such a time as all youthfull delights was banished by old age’ (GC, E.2').

While Meg’s singularity as a woman once determined her status as a waive-heroine figure, it is the source of her societal vulnerability and subsequent sexual ‘offences’ (GC, E.2') in The Gentle Craft, the second part. Just as the singular absolutism of female sovereign Elizabeth I is decentralised in favour of central democracy, the individualistic heroism of Long Meg is so too replaced by the androcentric collectivity of the yeoman. Where Meg would previously be the agent of wit and humiliation through pranks and violent retribution, it is ‘a

\(^{92}\) Gartenberg, p.53.
\(^{93}\) Ladd, p.992.
wel trusted fellow [...] held in high reputation among all shoomakers in Westminter’ (GC, B.3) named Robin who plays the trickster. Sharing the name of the famous outlaw hero Robin Hood and giving ‘merry speeches [...] in rime’ (GC, Sig. B.3), his duplicitous actions are at Meg and Gillian’s expense. Both Gillian and Meg attempt to obstruct one another in the courtship of Casteler, and enlist Robin to help ‘procure his good liking’ (GC, C.1'). In a striking parallel to Meg’s plot with the Hostesse to ‘goe and meet Sir James in Saint Georges field [...] [and] beat him’ with the incentive of a new Petticote (LM, B.4'), Gillian offers Robin ‘a good sute of apparel’ (GC, C.1') in exchange for his influence over Casteler’s affections. While Meg dutifully bests Sir James and wins the petticoat, Robin exploits their requests for his own ‘jesting’ (GC, D.1'). When Casteler is ‘mist from his business’ to go ‘secretly a wooing’ his future wife in London, Robin convinces Gillian and Long Meg that while ‘his master loued [them both] inturely’ (GC, C.4'), their respective obstruction of one another left Casteler indecisive. Robin then persuades both women that ‘his Master was newly gone into Tuttle field, and he left word [...] to meet him there’, and cautions them to ‘take heed’ of one another (GC, D.1').

The Tuttle field, once the location of Meg’s successful combat and trickery with a soldier in Chapter Five of The Life of Long Meg, is transformed into the site of her humiliation. In this climactic scene, both women stand passively in the field awaiting Casteler, and are left disappointed when he fails to appear. In the Tuttle field, Meg does not challenge Gillian physically or verbally as her rival: the women ‘stalkt round about the field’, picking herbs until ‘it was dark night, and so late, that at last the watch met with them [...] [and brought] them home both together’ (GC, D.2'). Robin’s scheming has a more tragic impact than any of Long Meg’s pranks in The Life of Long Meg. As Meg is ‘merily inclined’, she ‘shooke off sorrow’, but Gillian returns home devastated, declaring that ‘death is sweet to them that live in sorrow, and to none should he be better welcome than me, who desires nothing more than to end my
miseries’ \((GC, \, D.4\)\). In a brief return to her typical mischievous disposition, Meg persuades Gillian to invade Casteler’s wedding wearing ‘disdainfull [willow] branches […] to his great disgrace’ \((GC, \, E.1\)\). However, their display at Casteler’s wedding does not leave his marriage in ruins, merely momentarily disrupting it through a song lamenting their misfortunes. Long Meg and Gillian sing of how their ‘good will, […] travel and paine […] have gotten nothing but scorne and disdaine’, which elicits no response from Casteler, but his bride is ‘heartily sorry’ \((GC, \, E.2\)\). Meg and Gillian’s song provides a reflective and passive summation of events, and does not present a direct challenge to Casteler. Their impact on the narrative is communicated symbolically through the spectacle of their song, the materiality of the willow branches satirising Casteler’s infertility. In The Life of Long Meg, Meg also uses singing as a form of disruption in her confrontation of a Vicar who will not pay his fee at the tavern. However, this song accompanies her extralegal actions, transforming her violence into a musical performance:

[K]naue, quoth she, must I knocke out of your bald pate, two shillings and twopence more, and so oftentimes will I wring your head against the wall: and with that shee began to sing a faire plaine song betweene the post and Master Vicars pate.

\((LM, \, B.4\)\)

Meg’s ‘faire plaine song’ is accompanied by the percussive impact of ‘Master Vicars pate’ against the post. While Deloney’s Meg and Gillian passively stand to deliver their song, mimicking their waiting in the Tuttle Field, The Life of Long Meg integrates song as a plot device to punctuate a moment of natural justice. By hitting the Vicar’s head against the wall, Meg’s speech and song is legitimately threatening and thus achieves retribution. Without the link between common language and the common law found in ‘faire plaine song’, the language of Deloney’s Meg is rendered ineffective. Indeed, Deloney’s claim that Meg is ‘readier to revenge her wrongs by weapons, then by words’ \((GC, \, A.3\)\) is undercut by the framing of her song at the narrative’s conclusion.
Despite their characterisation as ‘wily as they were witty’ (GC, A.3v), then, the women of *The Gentle Craft, the second part* are ultimately ‘less witty in themselves than the source of wit in others’.\(^94\) Casteler’s implied impotence, while perceived as a failing, is partially redeemed by his ‘good and godly deeds’ in contributing to the ‘reliefe of the poore fatherlesse children of Christs Hospital in London’ (GC, Sig. E.2). Meg’s moments of domesticity and submissiveness in *The Gentle Craft* cannot be divorced from her folkloric origins. Her fluid relations with gender and positive law, now both unstable and desperately enforced, are reimagined as symptoms of sexual licentiousness, and she is therefore punished. Conversely, Casteler’s fate is ideologically biased by his occupation as a shoemaker, Deloney’s unusual cultural position of being a popular author affiliated with a craft elevating the artisanal figure to a worthy example for other men to follow. Richard Casteler offers a somewhat limited first example of Deloney’s reassertions of the ‘heroic masculinity’ of artisans from within the ‘domestic jurisdiction’\(^95\) of the home. As David J. Morrow notes, ‘in Elizabethan England, since at least the work of Thomas Churchyard in the 1570s’, gendered tensions emerge from the opposition formed between ‘away as a site of vigorous, manly subjectivity and home as a place of idleness and the infantilizing, effeminizing mother’.\(^96\) In response to this exclusion, the setting which was once Meg’s jurisdictional domain as a woman confined to *oikos*, is textually reclaimed by Deloney as a place of English masculinity and entrepreneurial production. This opposition is thematically woven into chapters five onwards, which feature another shoemaker named ‘Peachey’, a figure less concerned with romantic rivalry, and more so providing a utopian representation of artisanal craftsmen.

While Peachey is positioned as a successful singular protagonist elevated by the English heroism of shoemaking, Long Meg is further transformed into a diffuse cultural marker.

---
\(^94\) Munro, “*A Womans Answer is neuer to Seke*”, p.xii.
\(^95\) Term in Deutscher, ‘Sacred Fecundity’, p.59.
\(^96\) Morrow, p.402.
Deloney’s invocation of Long Meg goes beyond her self-contained narrative of chapters one to three, as in the final chapter the Greene King, to discredit his wife, declares ‘[I] will trust you as little on your word as Long Meg on her honesty’ (GC, L.3'). While at the beginning of Deloney’s narrative, Long Meg was a respectable servant-maid with a key role in the narrative, his conclusive symbolic use of her name, while demonstrative of her popularity, also indicates her increasingly peripheral position in the text. The instability of her identity is indicated both by her ultimate lack of physical presence and her coupling with dishonesty. Her marginalisation is informed by the elision of the waive and more conventional narrative roles for women, such as wife and sex worker. The overlapping, complex registers which shape Long Meg of Westminster reflects wider cultural perceptions of waivery, which are also marked by cultural diffusion. Texts in circulation, such as Rastell’s dictionaries and Piers Plowman, demonstrate how the political tensions which underpin waivery are allayed by the increasing plurality and uncertainty of the term. The dualism of waifs and strays found in Piers Plowman parallels the doubling of Long Meg and Gillian. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, Meg’s singularity recedes along with her place in the present, as she is further displaced as a ghost. Haunting the margins of these communities of women, Meg appears in Mary Tattlewell and Joan-him-home’s The Womens Sharpe Revenge (1640), where her exclusion from law extends beyond the grave to the scene of a mock trial.
Chapter Five
Textual Afterlives: the Spectre, Death, and Legacy of Long Meg of Westminster

Thus far, this thesis has explored the varying iterations of Long Meg across genres to demonstrate how the premodern waive experiences forms of suspension in law and language. While the outlawed man is explicitly included in the polis to designate his exclusion, the exclusion of women from the law complicates the process of waiving, establishing an exclusive exclusion.\(^1\) As the foregoing chapters have demonstrated, this distinction is reflected in the textual difference which underpins Long Meg of Westminster, who is both unable to be assimilated into outlaw narratives, nor explicitly form a waive category of her own. Long Meg’s characterisation as a waive, while exceeding the sphere of law, is rendered absent in language. This chapter examines the suspension between life and death which characterises Meg’s appearances as a ghost. Returning to the first jestbook, I reflect on the final episode of *The Life of Long Meg* (1635) alongside Meg’s ghostly invocation in the pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell and Joane Hit-him-home’s *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* (1640). I consider to what extent these texts reveal how Meg, once reanimated as a ghost, is situated in another exclusionary position through her liminality.

As a ghost, Meg’s presence is further marked by disembodiment. As Chapter Three demonstrated, on the stage, Meg is predominantly restricted to a figural invocation, and when granted a stage presence, she is only represented by a male actor on the pre-Restoration commercial stage. In *The Women’s Sharpe Revenge*, Meg’s inclusion in the narrative is also characterised by an exclusion through the immateriality of her spectral presence. She is situated in proximity to the law without being positioned within it: even in the afterlife, the waive does not possess an imagined legal subjecthood. The dialogue between spectrality and

---

\(^1\) An extension of Agamben’s term inclusive exclusion introduced at the beginning of this thesis.
law is further illuminated by the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben which underpins this thesis.

One of Agamben’s more recent works, Nudities (2011), echoes the suspensions and thresholds that exist within forms of life, of being and ‘non-being’, found in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1998). Although Nudities consists of ‘disparate essays’ which do not centralise biopower as in his previous works, the collection demonstrates Agamben’s continued interest in ‘the juxtaposition of bodies and words’. ² While Homo Sacer is primarily concerned with the political and legal dimensions of embodiment, Nudities primarily explores the role of the body within a specific set of cultural paradigms. Titles such as ‘On What We Can Not Do’ and ‘Identity without the Person’ found in Nudities share Homo Sacer’s preoccupation with how embodied experiences can be defined through negation. In establishing a (physical, linguistic) presence in order to declare something absent, the paradox of inclusive exclusion found in Homo Sacer can be seen as a broader continuation of Agamben’s exploration of negative foundations. By defining the ‘not’, and the ‘without’ in language, Nudities can also be situated in parallel with the principle of inclusive exclusion found in Homo Sacer, exposing the ‘originary structure of negativity’³ which underpins Agamben’s overarching philosophical approach.

The theme of negation is present from the opening chapter of Nudities, ‘Creation and Salvation’, which delineates the terms of creation and salvation to determine the roles of prophets, angels, poets and critics. ⁴ For Agamben, ‘non-being’ is positioned within the analogy of memory, where ‘a loved one’ can only be present ‘on the condition that he or she is disembodied and turned into an image’. ⁵ The approach to ‘non-being’ in ‘Creation and

---
Salvation’ foreshadows Agamben’s analysis of the spectre in the fourth chapter of *Nudities*, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living Amongst Spectres’. Just as the ‘non-being’ is ‘turned into an image’ through memory in ‘Creation and Salvation’, Agamben suggests the spectre is a composite ‘of signs, or more precisely signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time’ (*N*, p.38). The spectre can also be more elusively found in chains of signification: ‘non-being’ operates beyond the premise of the spectre as a ghostly body. Agamben demonstrates this semiotic approach to spectrality through examining a ‘place of signatures’, Venice (*N*, p.38). Working out from Manfredo Tafuri’s inaugural address at Venice’s University Institute of Architecture in 1993, Tafuri laments the death of the city and attempts to rejuvenate ‘the “cadaver” of Venice’ for the cultural event of ‘host[ing] the World’s Fair’ (*N*, p.37). Extending the notion of Venice as a ‘cadaver’, Agamben argues that Venice, ‘if it somehow still exists […] beyond the state that follows death and the consequent decomposition’, is really in the ‘new state […] of the specter’, who ‘appears without warning […] creaking and sending signals’ (*N*, p.37). If Venice is pronounced dead, its spectrality is found in the familiar locations of its former life. The ‘specter […] of the place’ is then traceable to ‘everything that happened in some lane, in some piazza, in some street’, its spatial diffuseness ‘suddenly condensed and crystallized into a figure that is at once labile and exigent’ (*N*, p.39). While in this case, Agamben finds an example of the spectre in a place rather than in a figure, Agamben’s reading of spectrality as ‘a form of life’ remains relevant (*N*, p.39). In being ‘disembodied and reduced to an image’, Agamben’s reading of the spectre of Venice can be seen as a form of ‘non-being’ (*N*, p.8), its criteria of being comprised of a set of signs and signatures facilitating far more diffuse readings. From bodies, to places, to objects, the spectre is ‘the most nebulous and subtle entity’ (*N*, p.39). In being ‘of Westminster’, both the spectrality of body and place are relevant to Long Meg’s ghostly appearances.
While Agamben’s concerns regarding forms of ‘non-being’ in Nudities may appear divorced from the conceptual framework of Homo Sacer, I argue that Agamben’s account of spectrality can be read against Long Meg’s ghost to further explore her biopolitical exclusion. Indeed, the very definition of the waive echoes Agamben’s expression of ‘non-being’: capable of being cast outside the law having never been within it, the waive is deemed, as Susan Stewart puts it, ‘a non-person within the law and a non-person outside the law’. Like the two concepts of creation and salvation, Agamben’s two approaches to ‘non-being’, the juridicopolitical of Homo Sacer with the poetic and cultural of Nudities, coincide. As the first text in which Long Meg is featured explicitly alongside the law, The Womens Sharpe Revenge (1640) produces a moment in which these forms of ‘non-being’ surface in the waive. In one of the two prefaces addressing the reader, Long Meg is raised from the dead to defend women against ‘the libels of misogynists’, particularly from John Taylor’s Juniper and Crabtree Lectures (1639). Following this, the pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell and Joan Hit-him-home assemble ‘[t]welve good women’ to form ‘a Feminine Jury’ to determine the worth of men. The generic style of the lecture pamphlet is underpinned by the poetics of law, its format utilising the ‘classical rhetorical strategies of argumentation such as judicial oration’ through which the twelve women engage in debate. Indeed, a significant part of the case is structured around the notion of accidence as a legal paradigm: using ‘the branch of grammar which deals with the inflection of words’ to itemise how Taylor ‘opposeth all the Rules of Grammar’ (WSR, Sig. B.9 Ͱ), from the nominative to the ablative. Later, a Latinate proverb is ‘Englished’ (WSR, Sig. C.2 ͬ). The Womens Sharpe Revenge therefore utilises the language of early modern law, in which both the poetic ‘non-being’ of Nudities and the

---

6 Stewart, p.46.
7 Ray, p.919.
8 Mary Tattle-well and Joane Hit-him-home, The Womens Sharpe Revenge: or an answer to Sir Seldome Sober that writ those railing pamphlets called the Juniper and Crabtree Lectures (London: 1640), B.6 Ͱ. Further references will be made parenthetically as WSR.
9 Ray, p.924.
political ‘non-being’ of *Homo Sacer* coalesce. In this way, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* reflects the importance of reading premodern law ‘as a social discourse, [and] as a series of institutional functions and rhetorical effects’,\(^{10}\) thus addressing the poetical and political concerns of Agamben. The relationship between the forms of ‘non-being’ in Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* and *Nudities* are also enmeshed in *The Women’s Sharpe Revenge*. As a literary work which withdraws from the ‘self-protective doctrine of unity, coherence, and univocality’ of legal texts, the authors of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* utilises a generic hybridity which inserts women in discourse ‘[which] traditionally sought to exclude [them]’.\(^{11}\) In situating women at the centre of jurisprudence from which they are traditionally excluded, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* provides a textual site of legal inclusion. In attributing the ‘rhetorical effects’ of the law to a ‘feminine jury’, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* occupies a more nuanced generic position not only through the discursiveness of legal discourse, but also through centering women in imagined legal practices. While women are ostensibly excluded from possessing the juridicopolitical agency of formal legislature, texts such as *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* reveal how women were assigned a more expansive quasi-legal role in imaginative contexts.

In the case of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, then, what (or who) comes to embody ‘non-being”? I argue that the interface between Long Meg and the legal aspects of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* enables a further reading of the spectre of the waive as a category of non-being. Positioning Long Meg outside the jury and featuring her only in the epistle, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* offers a later example of Long Meg’s suspension in law, a suspension which continues to be characterised by exclusion. The increased proximity of Long Meg to practices and rhetoric of law establishes a shift in her exclusionary position. Not

---


\(^{11}\) Kahn and Hutson, p.3.
only does she face the dual exclusion of the waive, being cast out of the law having never been ‘in law’ in the first place, she is now physically excluded in being rendered immaterial as a ghost. The tripartite of woman/waive/spectre central to Long Meg’s identity here establishes a new form of hyperexclusion. While a community of women are included in fictionalised legal practices in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, Long Meg’s exclusion from this community reiterates the waive as ‘that which no one claims’. Having ‘perished without the law’ and transformed into a spectre, Long Meg remains unclaimable in her final form, even to the alternate judicial community of women in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*.

Tied to the past as a ‘posthumous or complementary [form of] life’ (*N*, p.39), the spectre also fulfils a different narrative function. Agamben asserts that the spectre is intimately tied to the notion of history, and thus lends itself to moments of crisis and examination. The ‘signs, ciphers, or monograms’ of a spectre are ‘etched onto things by time’, and a spectre therefore ‘always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity’ (*N*, p.38). The spectre of Long Meg thus carries the date of 1590, a historical moment articulated by the assemblage of signifiers which forms her identity. In Agamben’s terms, a spectral presence such as Long Meg’s allows for a return to the past capable of diffusely addressing the political and theological tensions of the present. Presenting Meg as a ghost and therefore a memory also establishes a shift in her textual function. While Meg had previously required historic figures such as Skelton to position her within a faux-genealogy, her death enables her to be enshrined in the past and secures her legacy as a heroine. As Maggie Ellen Ray has observed, Long Meg’s presence indicates both ‘the social utility of marginal figures’ and the ‘poetic authority that can be located in English folkloric traditions’. Once transformed into a ghost, Long Meg’s status as a waive figure

---

12 De Bracton, p.353.
13 De Bracton, p.353.
14 Ray, p.920.
ensures that she remains excluded from the law in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*. Meg’s literary legacy is bound up in national identity, and the project of producing a tradition of English vernacular eloquence. Citing Jenny C. Mann’s *Outlaw Rhetoric*, Maggie Ellen Ray notes that the process of Long Meg’s inclusion in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* ‘seems analogous to the way early modern rhetoricians used the figure of Robin Hood as a touchstone to represent the national and cultural validity of vernacular eloquence’. In answer to Agamben’s question in ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living among Spectres’, ‘to whom does the spectre of language turn?’(*N*, p.40), it may be that the answer is outlaw/waive figures. Agamben suggests that the spectre of languages such as Latin, suspended between living and dead, can provide unexpected openings between past and present. The outlaw/waive is both haunting and haunted, generating new contexts for such dead language[s] through combining the ‘spectre’ of classical rhetoric with the English vernacular.

In refusing traditional poetic values, references to the figures of Robin Hood and Long Meg reflect the state of vernacular English rhetoric. Just as the outlaw is included in legal treatise to assert his exclusion, Robin Hood is included in rhetorical manuals, such as Richard Sherry’s *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550) to assert his exclusion and difference from classical rhetoric. As a ghost, however, Robin Hood becomes the exception to this *inclusive exclusion*, appearing within the courtly context of Anthony Munday’s *Metropolis coronata, the triumphes of ancient drapery: or, Rich cloathing of England, in a second yeeres performance In honour of the advauncement of Sir Iohn Iolles, Knight, to the high office of Lord Maior of London* (1615). Munday outlines his creative decision to ‘fetch [the ghost of Robin Hood] from the Forrest of merrie Shirwood’, explicating that ‘[s]ince

---

15 Ray, p.941.
16 Sherry, A1⁺-A2⁺.
Graues may not their Dead containe, | Nor in their peacefull sleepe remaine, | But Triumphes and great Showes must vse them, | And we vnable to refuse them'.¹⁷ For Munday, Robin Hood is included and assimilated into the *polis* through the Lord Mayor’s Paegant. While acknowledging the exploitation of how the outlaw is ‘vse[d]’, Munday also alludes to the irrepressible relevance and popularity of Robin Hood which ensures his inclusion. *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* continues to reflect the gendered implications of Meg’s suspension in language. Not only is Long Meg absent from rhetorical manuals, but from the rhetorically stylised narrative of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*. Long Meg holds a different position within vernacular eloquence, one marked by a further textual suspension from the law and rhetoric situated within the *polis*.

**A Ghostly Ruse: The Life of Long Meg and Caroline Anti-Catholicism**

Before turning to *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* to examine the tensions which characterise these suspensions, I return to the final episode of *The Life of Long Meg*. In Chapters One and Two of this thesis, I primarily situated the jestbook in the context of its first recorded publication in 1590. In this final chapter, I use the context of the 1635 reprint to explore how the jestbook’s treatment of Meg as a ghost converses with *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, published five years later in 1640. The historical moment in which these texts are (re)produced enables a further examination of the waive in the later context of the reign of Charles I and the foreshadowing of the English Civil War (1642-1651). In the case of *The

---

¹⁷ Anthony Munday, *Metropolis coronata, the triumphes of ancient drapery: or, Rich cloathing of England,* in *a second yeeres performance In honour of the advancement of Sir Iohn Iolles, Knight, to the high office of Lord Maior of London, and taking his oath for the same authoritie, on Monday, being the 30. day of October. 1615. Performed in heartie affection to him, and at the bountifull charges of his worthy brethren the truely honourable Society of Drapers, the first that receiued such dignitie in this cite*. Deuised, and written, by A.M. citizen, and draper of London (London: 1615), C.1v.
Life of Long Meg, the revival reasserts a model of ghostly invocation explicitly tied to Catholic parody. This episode is found in the final chapter of the jestbook, in which a corrupt priest visits Meg on her death bed to claim penance from her for ‘the great sinnes [she] committed’ as a ‘lewd woman’ (LM, E.3 ͬ). The representation of the Catholic priest is situated within a temporal schism: the jestbook is ostensibly published in 1590, the extant reprint dated at 1635, and with the final chapter in which the ghost of Long Meg features set ‘[i]n Queene Maires dayes, when Friers and Monks began againe to shew themselues’ (1553-1558) (LM, E.2 ͮ). In Devori Kimbro’s terms, these ‘moments of Catholic “crisis” […] form a recursive loop by which the parameters of the threat can be understood’. These contingently recurrent tropes of English anti-Catholicism are captured ‘not only [in] doctrine,’ but are also iterated through ‘stereotypical representations of Catholics and their desire to overthrow Protestant sovereignty’. Through its multi-temporalities, The Life of Long Meg is encoded in this ‘recursive loop’, articulating the spiritual anxieties being negotiated across the late Tudor and Stuart period. In the 1590s, the structure of English Protestantism was changing: attempts to introduce a Presbyterian form of church governance finally ended, and tensions emerged between conformists and precisians from the Church of England’s ‘moderate strain of puritanism’. A unifying discourse of anti-papery therefore established a Protestant identity which could be shared amongst puritans and bishops, enabling them to ‘put the Presbyterian upheavals behind them’. Meg’s ghost first emerges from a religious climate in which English national Protestant identity formation was being devised and stabilised by anti-papal polemic. By inserting Meg as a triumphant spectre of Protestantism in a historical setting of heightened Catholicism, the text affirms a commitment to Elizabethan sovereignty

19 Kimbro, p.i.
21 Milton, p.31.
and its dominant religious ideology. Following the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, anti-Catholic rhetoric intensified further under James I’s direct support. This included the founding of Chelsea College, which provided an ‘institution for the systematic production’ of anti-papal writings.\textsuperscript{22} James I also established the Oath of Allegiance in 1606, which sought to impose absolute royal supremacy over the Pope and further repress Catholic recusants.

However, the accession of Charles I (1625) complicated the textual production of anti-Catholic sentiment. Catholic Stuart queens Anne of Denmark and Henrietta Maria were regarded as ‘objects of anti-Catholic rhetoric and paranoia’,\textsuperscript{23} threatening the patriarchal hegemony through both their queenship and religious practices. In the transition from medieval Catholicism to Counter Reformation Catholicism, the religion now ‘represented the threat of foreign, Jesuit take-over’ for Protestants, and a dynastic marriage alliance to a Roman Catholic nation might result in conversion across England.\textsuperscript{24} These anxieties are directly informed by the introduction of French princess Henrietta Maria to the English court, whose marriage to Charles I was affixed to a treaty ‘with a Catholic identity already firmly established’.\textsuperscript{25} This treaty ‘allowed for the practice of her faith, including the keeping of priests and the saying of the Mass’, and culminated in the opening of a new chapel, constructed by Inigo Jones.\textsuperscript{26} On the 10\textsuperscript{th} of December 1636, Henrietta Maria’s chapel opened for its first mass, and England established permanent relations with the Vatican.\textsuperscript{27} The year following the reprinting of \textit{The Life of Long Meg of Westminster} was therefore marked by Protestant anxieties regarding the French queen’s public declarations of Catholicism. Indeed, Henrietta Maria’s court rulings and public identity constitutes a form of sovereign

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Milton, p.32.
\item[25] Dunn-Hensley, p.31.
\item[26] Dunn-Hensley, pp.31-32.
\item[27] Dunn-Hensley, pp.32.
\end{footnotes}
exceptionalism alongside the written legislation implemented and enshrined by Charles I. By August 1628, a proclamation was produced which ‘commanded the detention of all Jesuits and a strict punishment for all who received them’.28 Anti-Catholic persecution continued in 1631 through enacting a commission of enquiry into the jurisdiction of law courts. This ordered ‘that a stop be put to practice whereby lax prison-keepers let their charges go abroad “and which is most insufferable priests and Jesuits are let loose to say masses and to seduce our people in all places to the great and just offence both of God and laws”’.29 While Charles implemented policies which targeted Catholics on a political and fiscal basis, the popularity of anti-papal texts decreased. Chelsea College no longer received support from the King, the Oath of Allegiance was ‘rarely imposed’, and it became increasingly clear that Charles ‘enjoyed the Roman Catholic cultural ambience and this, combined with his increasing devotion to his Roman Catholic wife, helped create an atmosphere conducive to more moderate accounts of differences with Rome’.30 By the 1630s, Charles had given orders to censor anti-papal language and arguments, removing passages from several books.31 Meanwhile, Henrietta Maria accommodated numerous ‘insufferable priests’ in her courtly retinue and openly advocated for ‘say[ing] masses’ in her personal chapel. Henrietta Maria’s exemption from the ‘just offence of God and laws’ determined by Charles’ jurisdiction demonstrates her exceptional status. Haunting the Protestant public imagination, the juridicopolitical separatism of Henrietta Maria’s Catholic court prompts the reintroduction of the secondary exceptional figure of Long Meg in popular consciousness. In the first chapter of this thesis, I noted how the tensions between Charles I’s policy and the perceived threat of Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria might re-establish the demand for Long Meg’s model of

28 Sharpe, p.301.
29 Sharpe, p.301.
30 Milton, p.62.
English womanhood. Through her treatment of the Friar in the final chapter of *The Life of Long Meg*, Meg’s extralegal activity usefully reinforces Charles’ policy, and suggests a union between the natural justice of the waive and positive law of the state. *The Life of Long Meg* therefore exemplifies the ‘utility of the marginal figure’: it is Long Meg’s suspension in law which allows her to disseminate the anti-Catholic ideology of Caroline law to the Protestant readership of the jestbook.\[^{32}\]

The reproduction of *The Life of Long Meg* is perhaps also underpinned by the personal agenda of its printer. The extant 1635 copy of the text states that the jestbook was ‘printed by John Beale for Robert Bird […] to be sold at his shop in St. Lawrence Lane’. While Robert Bird remains untraceable beyond surviving records of texts, printer John Beale was a Church of England clergyman and writer. In July 1629, he matriculated at King’s College Cambridge, and was a fellow there from 1632 to 1640.\[^{33}\] During his time at Cambridge, Beale wrote that he ‘oft-times saved [his] purse by looking over books in stationers’ shops’.\[^{34}\] In 1631, Beale gained access to the private library of the recently deceased Master of Trinity, Samuel Brookes. By ‘devouring all writings’, Beale wrote that he had become ‘fully acquainted with the vulgarity and singularities of all eminent Jesuites and other Romanists’.\[^{35}\] The partnership between Beale and Bird was thus marked by religious concerns: prior to the reprinting of *The Life of Long Meg*, the pair collaborated on *Heauens happines: or a briefe epitome of the blessed and happy estate of Gods saints in heauen, unfolded vnto vs* in 1632.\[^{36}\] As a jestbook, *The Life of Long Meg* does not carry the explicitly polemic character of the texts being systematically purged under Charles I’s orders. At its

\[^{32}\] Ray, p.932.


\[^{35}\] Stubbs, p.474.

conclusion, *The Life of Long Meg* carries a more diffuse anti-papal sentiment and can therefore be reprinted without appearing politically seditious. Beale’s interest in reprinting *The Life of Long Meg* may not only be informed by his status as a Church of England clergyman, but through his alleged participation ‘in a secret society (sub rosa) […] associated with the Rosicrucian movement’. As Chapter Three discussed, Ben Jonson established a link between popular English figures such as John Skelton and Long Meg and the humanist learning of European Rosicrucianism in the staging of *Fortunate Isles and their Union* in 1625. The emergence of Meg’s spectre in 1635 is therefore informed by, as Agamben puts it, the ‘signs, or more precisely signatures […] etched onto things by time’ (N, p.38). Through her emergence from the temporal-spiritual governance of Elizabeth I, Long Meg is etched with an anti-papal signification, one which Beale perceives as ideologically valuable in the religious climate of 1635.

Continuing the theme of trickery found in the previous chapters of *The Life of Long Meg*, Meg’s appearance as a ghost is framed as a moralising strategy rather than a supernatural occurrence. This subverts the structure of biographical jestbook narratives as many conclude with the death of the protagonist. The beginning of the chapter reflects this tradition, as it opens at Long Meg’s deathbed, where ‘shee lay so mortally sicke, that the Physicians gaue her ouer’ (*LM*, E.2’). Hearing of her frail state, a Masse Priest named Friar Oliver resolves to ‘fetch some spending money from her’ (*LM*, E.3’) and visits her. From the outset, the Friar’s motivations are marked by a financially exploitative frivolity. As *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* also later demonstrates, there is an emphasis on the community exclusively comprised of women which surrounds Long Meg. Arriving at Long Meg’s house, Friar Oliver observes that ‘diuers of her neighbours come to see how she did’, all of which

37 Stubbs, p.470.
are referred to as ‘the Wives’ (LM, E.3'). Despite their presence, he proceeds to outline how ‘she must take the pennance of the Church’ for her behaviour:

'[T]is the Visitation of the Lord for the great sinnes you haue committed: you haue beene counted a lewd woman, a swearer. A rufder, a fighter, and a brawler, as you may see here in your Chamber the signes; and with that he pointed to the Swords and bucklers, Pike-Staues and Halberts that hung there: these, quoth he, are tokens of your ill life, and how in your sicknesse you haue not repented you of your former ill life.

Friar Oliver establishes a narrative in which Long Meg’s acts as a waive-heroine are deemed a moral sickness. In the presence of the visiting women, Long Meg feels unable to confront the Friar’s ‘sawcinesse’ and instead ‘deman[d] what her pennance might be’ (LM, E.3'). The Friar’s response offers a rare moment in which Long Meg’s emplacement outside the law is acknowledged, as he states that as Meg has ‘beene a publike offender, [she] must haue publike pennance’ (LM, E.3'). Here, Friar Oliver addresses how the exceptionalism of the waive-heroine is established through the slippage between criminality and morality, law and justice. Presenting Long Meg with a choice between ‘publicke shame’ or ‘fiue pound for fiue solemn Masses’ (LM, E.3’), she chooses to make the payment. Exposing the hypocrisy of his moral superiority, the Friar’s ‘heart leap[s] at the sight of the gold’ (LM, E.3’) and he immediately leaves accompanied by all the visiting wives. His exit emphatically concludes with the assertion that ‘a more bawdy Frier there was not in England, and that knew Meg well enough’ (LM, E.3’). In keeping with the formulaic structure of the jestbook episodes, Meg’s retribution involves meeting men in Tuttlefields ‘drest […] in mans apparel’ with ‘reuege broyld in her brest’ (LM, E.3’).

This final encounter features a secondary layer to Meg’s disguise: she presents herself as a man as before, and additionally as ‘a spirit sent from God to torment’ the Friar (LM, E.4’). As Long Meg’s identity is abstracted by her disguise, it is clear that the function of ghostliness and haunting in The Life of Long Meg is yet to be bound up in her cultural and
national memory. This may be in part informed by the imperative of death: in order to be depicted as a ‘real ghost’, Long Meg must first die. While the chapter charts Meg’s decline in health, the ‘reuenge [which] broyled in her brest’ enables her to ‘start up (sicke as she was) and drest her selfe in mans apparel’ (LM, E.3\textsuperscript{v}). From this point in the narrative, Meg’s proximity to death is abandoned altogether to allow the tale to reach a more triumphant conclusion. The absence of Meg’s death in this formative text therefore produces a suspended legacy, in which Meg’s tradition, though structurally complete, is marked by a biographical ambiguity. Although Meg’s appearance as a ghost ensures her death is implicit, in The Womens Sharpe Revenge (1640) there is no exposition contextualising this. The reprinting of excerpts of The Life of Long Meg under The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster (1750), contrary to its change in title, offers no further details on the ‘whole […] death’ of Meg either. Her death deemed textually insignificant, Meg is thus suspended between life and afterlife.

Reflecting the moralising aspect of many of The Life of Long Meg’s episodes, Meg’s pseudo-apparitional state echoes ‘the prevalence of didactic ghosts, both before and after the Reformation and in both Protestant and Catholic sources’.\textsuperscript{38} The trope of didactic ghosts demonstrates how they might function as ‘ministers of the wrath of God, messengers on his behalf, or providential tormentors of the consciences of malefactors’.\textsuperscript{39} This certainly seems to be case in The Life of Long Meg, as Meg claims that she is both ‘a spirit sent from God to torment’ (LM, E.4\textsuperscript{v}) the Friar and ‘sent […] from God, not onely to tell thee of thy sinnes, but to enjoyne thee pennance for the same’ (LM, E.3\textsuperscript{v}). The friar’s ‘amazed’ acceptance of Meg’s ghostliness, however, perhaps specifically capitalises on ‘the idea that ghosts were tied to Catholicism […] a recurring trope of Reformation Polemic that became a lingering

\textsuperscript{38} Francis Young, English Catholics and the Supernatural 1553-1829, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp.81-82.
\textsuperscript{39} Young, pp.81-82.
preoccupation in English culture’. Indeed, Meg proceeds to mirror and satirise the Friar’s exploitative approach. Just as the Friar did at her bedside, Long Meg systematically itemises the Friar’s ‘offences’ and hypocrisies, declaring that he ‘art a whoremaster, frequenting the company of light and lascivious women, given to couetousnesse, and sitting all day bibbing at the Ale house, when [he] shouldest bee at thy booke’ (LM, E.3v). Continuing her parallel form of retribution, Long Meg asserts that ‘the Lord sent thee thy choice’, in either the public humiliation of being ‘whipt naked’ from ‘this place […] to the Priory in Westminster’, or ‘else pat twenty nobles to the poor mens box’ (LM, E.4v). The options given by Meg demonstrate her lack of personal financial incentive and outlaw-like redistributive justice, situated in direct contrast to the Friar’s motivations of greed. Responding to Meg’s assertion that she is ‘a spirit sent to torment thee’, the Friar solicits ‘[i]n nomine Jesus’ to ‘auoid Satan’ (LM, E.4v). The friar’s interpretation of Meg’s ghostliness as Satanic further affiliates his characterisation with the ‘stereotyped view of Catholics as superstitious and obsessed with the macabre’. As before, Meg responds with imitation, requesting ‘[i]n nomine Jesus’ that he ‘stand […] and with that she reacht him such a rap, that the Frier thought his backe ha beene broken’ (Sig. E.4v). Beyond the humour this slapstick moment evokes, this exchange also situates Latinate language as a corrupted form at odds with Meg’s physical force. In satirising the Friar’s linguistic assertion of Catholicism and advocating violence, Meg embodies the rejection of Catholicism encoded in English Protestant identity formation.

Significantly, Meg’s relationship with ghostliness is first founded in performance and trickery. This is perhaps in part informed by a desire to maintain the delineation between Meg and Catholicism, as ‘ghost belief became synonymous with Catholicism, since […] without purgatory there were no ghosts’. Should Meg be assigned the role of a ‘real ghost’ in the

---

40 Young, p. 79.
41 Young, p. 79.
42 Young, p. 79.
narrative, her presence would tacitly endorse Catholic doctrine. Meg’s spectral ruse is not only used to reinforce ideas of Catholic gullibility regarding supernaturalism, but also reflects Meg’s position within law. As Peter Marshall notes, ‘in a couple of Jacobean star chamber cases […] defendants were alleged to have fabricated appearances of spirits in order to terrify the plaintiffs into handing over their property to them’.\textsuperscript{43} Meg’s faux-apparitional state therefore maintains an emphasis on her position in excess of positive law and her exclusion from Catholic spirituality. Under the institutional formation of positive law, the Friar maintains his corrupt practices and position of power. In mirroring the illicit practices of the star chambers cases, this final tale takes up the trope seen in previous chapters of \textit{The Life of Long Meg}, in which Long Meg’s status as a waive enables her to supersede positive law in the name of natural justice and the redistribution of wealth. Unable to meet Meg’s monetary demand of twenty Nobles, the Friar offers ‘ten Angels in gold, and fourteene shillings in white money’ in exchange for the ‘satisfaction of mine offences, giue it for my sinnes to the poore’ (\textit{LM}, E.4\textsuperscript{4}). Due to the Friar’s shortcomings, Meg goes beyond the reported cases of the Star Chamber, not only ‘terrify[ing]’ the Friar into returning the money he solicited from Meg, but resorting to violence. Indeed, ‘soone as she fingred the money, she told him, that seeing he wanted some odde money, that his body should pay it: and with that she light upon the Friers pilch, and beat him so sore, that he trusted better to his feet than his hands, and so ran away’ (\textit{LM}, E.4\textsuperscript{4}).

This assertion of physical force as a form of payment echoes the perils of Meg’s initial journey into London, in which the Carrier threatens that ‘if they would not pay him his money, he would cudgel ten shillings out of their bones’ (Sig. B.1\textsuperscript{v}). For Meg, these forceful actions function as an extralegal measure, in which the Friar’s retribution is a transactional exchange inscribed onto ‘his body’ as ‘pay[ment]’ (Sig. E.4\textsuperscript{4}). Through the lack of

juridicopolitical recognition of the waive and the ghost, Meg’s violence doubly operates outside the formality of positive law and therefore does not have legal significance. The material imperative of the attack, however, is at odds with the feigned immateriality of the ghost, and is ultimately exposed on Meg’s terms. The community of women who left Meg’s bedside to accompany the Friar return as an audience to Meg as she reveals her cunning trick. Seeing how the Friar was hurt, the women are ‘sore agast’, but as soon ‘they saw her [Meg’s] face, and knew all, their feare was turned to laughter’ (Sig. E.4⁴). The extralegal justice of Long Meg, initially viewed as a paranormal aberration, is thus recuperated as an act of jesting which centres on women. While ‘women are often erased from the recreational and communal contexts of jesting’,⁴⁴ The Life of Long Meg offers a conclusion in which women are the sole beneficiaries of Meg’s ghostly trick.

After Meg reveals her identity, the women go ‘to the Tauerne, and spen[d] the Friers fourteene shillings in good cheere’ (LM, E.4⁴). Here, Meg’s ghostly intervention provides the financial and social means to enable celebration and revelry amongst women. The sense of community established through this ‘good cheere’ (LM, E.4⁴) extends further to demonstrate the role of women in the oral dissemination of ‘ghostlore’.⁴⁵ Long Meg’s triumph is also described as ‘newes’, demonstrating the slippage between fabricated narratives and current affairs.⁴⁶ ‘[T]he newes’ of the Friar’s public humiliation is entrusted with Meg’s neighbourly community of women, through which it ‘came to the eares of all the Friers in Westminster’ (LM, E.4⁴⁶). The successful transmission of Meg’s actions is attributed to ‘women [being] good secretaries’, and the tale thus concludes that ‘Frier Oliver was serued, which was such a disgrace to him, that a long while after he was ashamed to shew his face in the streetes’ (LM,

⁴⁴ Munro, ‘A Woman’s answer is neuer to seke’, p.xi.
⁴⁵ This term is taken from Peter Marshall, Beliefs and Dead in Reformation England, p.232, but used more broadly by folklorists to describe the trope in which ghosts appear within folklore. I use ghostlore here to reflect the orality of Meg’s tale and its popularity and circulation among the people of Westminster.
E.4). An irony is established through description of the women as ‘good secretaries’, as contrary to being well-entrusted with secret, private matters, the incident comes ‘to the eares of all the Friers in Westminster’ (LM, E.4). Much like Robin Hood’s ‘merrie men’, the neighbourly community of women are therefore a mobilising force in the social circulation of both Long Meg’s legacy and the Friar’s public ‘disgrace’ (LM, E.4). This conclusion also demonstrates how ‘women in early modern England […] enjoy[ed] some degree of quasi-public power; as brokers of gossip’ and ‘makers and breakers of reputation’.  

Indeed, the Friar is ‘ashamed to shew his face in the streetes’, and is thus removed from public life through such power (LM, E.4). Conversations between women had legal consequences: through public knowledge, people ‘could be reported to the ecclesiastical and secular courts for sexual misbehaviour and other offences’. Meg’s exceptionalism as a waive shifts through her temporary status as a ghost: her suspension in living subjecthood enables her to persecute the Friar in a model where positive law cannot be invoked. Once posing as a ghost, the legal signification of the waive, in which ‘their life and death [is] in the hands of the lord king’, no longer coheres. In being perceived as neither living nor dead, Meg’s ghostly trick enables her to be further suspended from legal-material consequences. Meg’s exceptionalism is thus encoded in the symbolic overthrow of Catholicism and enshrined in the storytelling of women. In demonstrating the utility of the ghost by negotiating the suspension of women’s agency in law, the final chapter of The Life of Long Meg provides a crucial precursor to The Womens Sharpe Revenge.

---


48 Ingram, p.49.

49 De Bracton, pp.353-354
‘Rising out of her grave’: Resurrecting Long Meg in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* (1640)

*The Womens Sharpe Revenge* first emerges as an intertextual response to a series of intensely misogynistic publications, Joseph Swetnam’s *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615), and most significantly John Taylor’s *Diverse Crabtree Lectures* (1639) and *Juniper Lectures* (1639).\(^50\) The latter works of John Taylor are of such significance that the address following Long Meg’s ghostly invocation directly targets ‘the passionate Author of those pitiful pamphlets’, referring to him throughout by ‘the Title of Sir Seldome Sober’ for his ‘mere Knavery’ (*WSR*, B.2). The attention devoted to Taylor in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* has informed the view that he himself is the author of ‘both the instigating attacks and [the] responding defense’, constructing a serialised controversy of which his identity and authorship is central to.\(^51\) This attribution is advanced by Bernard Capp in his 1994 monograph *The World of John Taylor The Water Poet*, who posits that both the *Crabtree Lectures* and the *Sharpe Revenge* were ‘entered together in the [Stationer’s Register] on the 24 April 1639’.\(^52\) Capp further speculates on the allusions to the *Revenge* in Taylor’s two preceding controversy pamphlets, noting how ‘he had already written a mock epistle by “Hannah Hit him home’ in the *Crabtree Lectures*.\(^53\) The commentary foreshadows, even advertises, the publication of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, suggesting that ‘divers women set their helping hands, to publish such a Booke themselves in their own praise, with

---

\(^{50}\) While the time lapse between Swetnam and Taylor here suggests a lack of correlation, the controversy emanating from Swetnam’s publication continued through numerous responses from women such as Rachel Speght’s *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), Esther Sovernam’s *Ester hath hang’d Haman* (1617), Constantia Munda’s *Worming of a Mad Dogge* (1617), as well as the anonymous satirical play *Swetnam the woman-hater arraigned by women* (1620), performed at London’s Red Bull Theatre. The author(s) of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* also allude to Swetnam specifically, as Meg asserts that she has ‘frighted Fencers from the Stage’. Swetnam was a highly successful fencer and instructor, publishing a manual entitled *The School of the Noble and worthy science of defence* in 1617.

\(^{51}\) Ray, p.920.


an answer to this Booke: called by the Name of *Sir Seldome Sober, or The Womans Sharpe Revenge against the author*.54

Such claims to Taylor’s sole authorship can be understood in the context of Jacobean additions to the ‘*querelle des femmes* [the debate about women]’, which often appears as ‘an exercise of wit and ingenuity between male writers rather than practical or philosophical discussions’.55 Rooted in ‘medieval, continental, scholastic soil, which was fed by classical satire on women’, the genre combined ‘Aristotelian, and patristic ideas about the nature of women’ with ‘local and vernacular culture and traditions of misogyny and humour’.56 Operating on the logic of attack and defence, these texts often appear ‘in clusters, sometimes with both attack and defense by the same author’.57 Speculation on the authorship and gender identity of *querelle des femmes* tracts is reflected in earlier pamphlets such as Constantia Munda’s *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* (1617), the response published and printed in the same place as the author and attacker Joseph Swetnam’s *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615). *Mortalities Memorandum* (1621) also reflects the layers of ambiguity surrounding women’s authorship: while Rachel Speght refers to Constantia as a woman, ‘the knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Italian texts and of legal language demonstrated in *The Worming* makes this doubtful’.58 Rachel Speght is widely confirmed as both a woman and published polemicist, confirming the presence of women’s voices in such debates. However, it is Munda’s use of ‘legal language’ which undermines the legitimacy of her authorial persona. As the final response to Swetnam was published in 1617 by Munda, Taylor’s *Juniper Lectures* (1639) constitutes a revival of a generic tradition which

54 John Taylor, *A juniper lecture With the description of all sorts of women, good, and bad: from the modest to the maddest, from the most civil, to the scold rampant, their praise and dispraise compendiously related. Also the authors advice how to tame a shrew, or vexe her* (London: 1639) pp.143-144.
55 Deirdre Boleyn, “Because Women are not Women, Rather Might be a fit subject for an Ingenious Satyrist”: Constantia Munda’s *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* (1617)’, *Prose Studies*, 32:1 (2010), 38-56 (p.39).
56 Boleyn, p.39.
57 Boleyn, p.39.
had declined over twenty years ago, now framed as satiric and polemic ‘lectures’. What had not declined, however, were concerns regarding women’s access to law and language. Regardless of speculation on the authorship of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, the subject matter reflects anxieties about the growing agency of women within both the language of law and the legislation of language.

*The Womens Sharpe Revenge* employs highly stylised rhetorical techniques which function beyond the genre of querelle des femmes, entering into a more elusive territory through its emphasis on litigation. Framed as a trial with a jury and contains numerous charges against Taylor, the text accuses him chiefly of ‘railing, bitter, invective Pasquills, and Scurrilous Libels, some written, some printed, and all disperst and scattered abroad, all of them made and forg’d on purpose to calumniate, revile, despight, jeere, and flout women’. While the law is marked by a ‘self-protective doctrine of unity, coherence, and univocality [which has] traditionally sought to exclude’ other genres, pamphlets such as *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* reiterate how, when the law concerns the regulation of language, the courts can become a site of slippage between litigation and fiction. Indeed, libelling is both a literary and legal phenomenon. This ambiguity is reflected in *the Womens Sharpe Revenge* through its trial structure: it is divided into sections which systematically itemise the claims being made against Taylor, outlining the women ‘chosen for the jury’ and making the case that he is ‘no schollar’ nor ‘poet’ before concluding a somewhat nebulous verdict that ‘he is found guilty of detraction’ (*WSR*, A.12). Here, detraction refers to ‘the action of detracting from a person’s merit or reputation’ synonymous with ‘depreciation, disparagement,

---

59 Boleyn, p.39.
60 Mary Tattle-well and Ioane Hit-him-home, *The Women’s Sharpe revenge: or an answer to Sir Seldome Sober that wit those railing pamphlets called the Juniper and Crab-tree lectures. Being a sound reply and a full confutation of those Bookes: with an Apology in this case for the defense of us women* (London: 1640), B.2v. Further references will be made parenthetically as *WSR*.
61 Kahn and Hutson, p.3.
defamation, calumny, slander’. It is on the periphery of this literary-litigious hybrid that the ghost of Long Meg emerges to enact poetic justice.

Long Meg’s ghostly presence in the first epistle of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* reflects how participation and authority in different modes of law has gendered implications. Throughout the early modern period, ‘virtually all substantive law dealing with the regulation of language concerned defamation’. These laws included slander (spoken attacks) and the aforementioned ‘Scurrilous Libels’ (*WSR*, B.2ᵛ) (written attacks) which Taylor is accused of. The origins of English defamation law shares in the locale of Long Meg through ‘[t]he 1275 Statute of Westminster’, which made it an offence of defamation to “tell or publish any false news or tales’ where discord ‘may grow between the King and his people, or the great men of this realm’. This law of *scandalum magnatum* covered writing as well as speech’, but was solely concerned with defamation against the sovereign and great officers and peers of the realm. In 1605, Attorney-General Sir Edward Coke, who would later establish the 1628 Petition of Right using *Magna Carta*, redefined these parametres of defamation in his report *De libellis famosis*. Coke extended the scope of the 1275 Statute of Westminster *scandalum magnatum* so that ‘whether the libel was truthful or not was irrelevant: the damage it did to the natural ties of obedience and good order made it dangerous to the state’. These changes in defamation legislature create a surge in defamation actions, particularly from women in London. By 1633, two years prior to the reprinting of *The Life of Long Meg*, ‘as many as 70 per cent of cases at the court [in London] concerned defamation, and 85 per cent of those

---

62 ‘Detraction’ (v, *OED*, 2), my emphasis.
65 May and Bryson, p.5.
66 May and Bryson, p.5.
were sued by women’. These were mostly cases of slander dealt with in ecclesiastical jurisdiction, litigation on which was so prolific that it ‘made London’s principal ecclesiastical jurisdiction look like a women’s court’. The Womens Sharpe Revenge therefore offers an augmentation of women’s legal legacy beyond their role as plaintiffs and voices of testimony. In invoking the status of ‘scurrilous libels’, the women of the Sharpe Revenge insert themselves in the judicial mechanism of ‘the higher criminal courts’. The premise of The Womens Sharpe Revenge is therefore haunted by the principles of Long Meg’s characterisation: the text depicts women negotiating the boundaries of positive law to exercise extrajudicial authority over men.

Yet Meg’s presence within the text is underpinned by far more complex relations between law and language, ones which do not establish a cohesive extrajudicial community. The authority that Meg possesses as both a textual waive and a ghost is configured as entirely separate from both Mary Tattle-well and Joane Hit-him-home and the ‘jury of twelve women’ within the text. Here, Long Meg not only proves incompatible with the law, but the language of the law through its associations with rhetoric and civil order. Meg’s exclusion is made apparent through the contrast between the first and second epistle. This is reflected in the two most recent critical editions which reproduce The Womens Sharpe Revenge, emerging from the historical revisionism of feminist scholarship in the 1980s. In Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus’ Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of Controversy in England, 1540-1640 (1985), while the first epistle is transcribed in full, Long

---

68 Gowing, p.28.
69 Walker, p.100.
Meg’s epistle is reduced to a brief description, summarised in three sentences. Meg’s exclusionary position is thus further demonstrated through the ambivalence towards her presence and textual significance in modern reproductions. The first epistle which precedes Long Meg’s introduction, is ‘of female fraility’ and addressed ‘to the Mal-gender in generall’ (WSR, A.3¹). In this initial address, ‘the Masculine sexe’ are greeted with the ‘attributes following: affable, loving, kind and courteous’ (WSR, A.3¹). In an effort to gain the allyship of men, the text is framed by a performed ideal of femininity and domestic piety. Somewhat critically, however, the epistle notes that since they ‘will not be Combatants for [them] in so just a cause’, they instead entreat their male readership ‘to become competent Judges, to censure indifferently betwixt the Accuser, and the Accused’ (WSR, A.6ᵛ). These roles not only extend the legal model of the text to its audience, but also emphasise the civil order of the law. It is defamation law, the branch of law which The Womens Sharpe Revenge is most concerned with, which ‘articulates society’s rules of civility’.⁷¹ The case of The Womens Sharpe Revenge is framed by a rhetorical civility in which, paradoxically, the speakers simultaneously demonstrate their skill in the art of eloquence whilst protesting their exclusion from it.

Positioned from within the civility of legal process as ‘Judges’, the men that the first epistle addresses are also rendered incompatible with the title of ‘Champion’ (WSR, Sig. A.6¹). Despairing that ‘among you all wee cannot find one Champion to oppose so obstinate a Challenger’, the epistle concludes that the authors were ‘compelled to call a Ghost from her Grave, to stand up in the defence of so proud a defiance’ (WSR, A.6ᵛ-A.6ᵛ). Meg is thus positioned as an otherworldly surrogate: in the absence of masculine defence, she is appointed as the primary protector of women. As a ghost, Meg’s appearance is informed by both resentment and a sense of duty. She asks ‘[w]hat peevish Knaue | Hath wakned my dead

---

⁷¹ Shuger, p.78.
ashes?’ (WSR, A.8) before noting that she was ‘forc’t […] through innocent Womens clamours’ (WSR, A.8) which she felt ‘compelled’ to answer. Much like the ruse against the Friar in *The Life of Long Meg*, then, Meg’s ghost has a dynamic and didactic purpose in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*. However, speaking from the realm of the afterlife rather than posing as a ghost, Meg is positioned as an omnipresent observer to ‘look on what […] wee women [have] done’ since her death that might explain why men ‘should thus affront our sex’ (WSR, A.8). While Meg gains the title of the ‘Champion’ of women through the authority of the past she embodies, she also acquires another layer of exclusion as a ghost. This renders her further exempt from participating in the law, thus limiting her impact on the narrative. As a ghost, Meg is able to observe the present actions of women without possessing the agency to act herself. In addition to the suspension Meg experiences in law and language seen in Chapter One, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* offers a new model of Long Meg in which she is also suspended in life and death.

Meg’s relegation to the afterlife is informed, at least in part, by her existing status as a waive figure. As a disruptor of civil order operating outside of and beyond the law, she cannot weaponise the rhetorical devices of litigation used against Taylor in the main body of text, and must instead take on a separate function. Following the initial explanation for her resurrection, Meg’s narration recalls details of her character and tradition in rhyming couplets. The summation of her identity within these rhymes both ensures her suitability to defend women, and the authenticity of her violent threats to her male audience. As we have already seen, Meg is framed as a folkloric figure in the jaunty skeltonic rhymes of Doctor Skelton in *The Life of Long Meg*. Equally, in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*, the rhyming form that Meg’s epistle takes is not a prestigious or literate one, recalling the memorable but rudimentary connotations of the ‘rymes of Robyn Hode’ in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*. If ‘linguistic mastery [is] synonymous with [the] civil order’ of the law, Long Meg’s ineloquent
rhymes mirror her lawless status as a waive.\textsuperscript{72}

In another striking similarity to \textit{Piers Plowman}, the outlaw/waive figure’s rhymes can be advantageously transmitted orally in vernacular English. Meg is not absorbed into the community of women who have access to the rhetorical civility of the law: as we have already seen in previous chapters, Meg is a figure for English nationhood, embodied through vernacular language. Just as her graffiti in \textit{The Life of Long Meg} emphasises the oral dissemination of others ‘asking’ of her exploits, in \textit{The Womens Sharpe Revenge}, Long Meg ‘hear[ing]’ women’s ‘fame so branded […] Must to [her] ashes give both life and tongue’ (\textit{WSR}, A.9\textsuperscript{t} - A.9\textsuperscript{v}). Long Meg’s value and prestige as a ‘champion’ is thus defined by an exclusively English orality. Indeed, Long Meg’s graffiti, written ‘hard by [Westminster] stairs’ in \textit{The Life of Long Meg} reads that ‘if any man askes who brought this to passe | Say it was done by a Lancashire Lasse’ (\textit{LM}, E.1\textsuperscript{t}). In Agamben’s terms Westminster operates, both literally and metaphorically, as a ‘place of signatures’ (\textit{N}, p.38). The material landscape of Westminster thus provides a site for the oral dissemination of Northern myth: through the third-person marker of ‘a Lancashire Lasse’ (\textit{LM}, E.1\textsuperscript{t}), Meg ‘confers additional speaking authority on herself’ whilst living, setting up a site of memory tied to her regional identity.\textsuperscript{73} This use of a third-person structure persists beyond the grave in \textit{The Women’s Sharpe Revenge}, as Meg introduces herself as ‘I Margery, and for my upright stature | Sirnam’d Long Megge: of well disposed nature’ (\textit{WSR}, A.9\textsuperscript{t}). However, while Meg’s graffiti emphasises her Lancashire status in \textit{The Life of Long Meg}, the ghost of \textit{The Womens Sharpe Revenge} rejects it. Long Meg’s epistle continues, stating that ‘rather for mine honour, then least scorne | Titled from Westminster, because there borne’ (\textit{WSR}, A.9\textsuperscript{t}). While Long Meg possesses the agency to self-memorialise whilst living in \textit{The Life of Long Meg}, her ghostly representation

\textsuperscript{72} Mann, p.53.

\textsuperscript{73} Ray, p.928.
in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* is framed within an exclusively Londoncentric narrative. Once proclaimed dead, the proximity of Long Meg’s poetic identity to English law increases, where women’s defamation cases were taking place on unprecedented levels. This may be nothing more than an oversimplification of Long Meg’s tradition, but it also constitutes a curious rewriting of her regional identity, and a diffusion of the regional-capital tensions found in the original jestbook. This shift is perhaps informed by the project of English vernacular eloquence which underpins the case for women’s legal inclusion in *The Women’s Sharpe Revenge*. The ‘barbarisme’ associated with English vernacular language was often culturally tied to more rural and regional areas.74 Within the cultivated judicial-rhetorical context of *The Women’s Sharpe Revenge*, Meg’s Lancashire identity represents a ‘barbarous intrusion of un“naturall” language’.75 As a ‘Lancashire Lasse’ (LM, E.1†), Meg’s ghostly presence would irrevocably disrupt the pseudonymous women’s attempts to infiltrate the spheres of rhetoric and law. These linguistic tensions are addressed in the main text, where they argue that ‘women are not so learned as men’ because they ‘confine us within the compasse of our Mother Tongue’ (WSR, C.9*) in order to prevent from ‘vindicat[ing] our owne injuries’ (WSR, C.9†). Here, linguistic exclusion *determines* legal exclusion: the absence of ‘generous and liberall Educations’ (WSR, Sig. C.9*) for women denies them the rhetorical tools to self-advocate in law. The posthumous relocation of Meg’s origins to Westminster therefore reflects what Claire McEachern terms a ‘poetics of political proximity’.76 Once transformed into a ghost, Meg can be refashioned as a more suitable extrajudicial representative in memory, one who will not muddy the artfulness of the legal community of women in the axis of identification between ‘land, language, and people of

74 Mann, p.181.
75 Mann, p.177.
England’. Meg’s alienation from both her regional origins and the judicial community of the main text is used to establish a further schism between women and waives, where the waive’s legal and linguistic exclusion provides a useful counterpoint to argue for women’s inclusion.

Long Meg’s rhymes continue to selectively recall the tradition set out in the jestbook narrative: her ‘tongue’ is used to outline her dynamic physicality whilst living. Following Agamben’s assertion that the memorialisation of a figure is contingent on becoming ‘disembodied and turned into an image’ (N, p.8), Long Meg’s ghost is largely defined through images of weaponry. After fleetingly invoking her ‘upright stature’ to explain her namesake, Meg immediately threatens her adversaries, inviting them to ‘confesse thine errour, fall upon thy knees, | From us, to begge thy pardon by degrees | Else, I that with my sword and buckler durst | Front swaggering Ruffians, put them to worst’ (WSR, A.9ᵛ). The rhymes that follow further allude to Meg’s violent exploits in the episodes of the jestbook, recalling how she ‘often, to abate [men’s] prides | Cudgeld their coats and lamm’d their legs and sides’ (WSR, A.9ᵛ). Here, Meg’s attacks assert a physical dominance which ‘vehemently offers an alternative authority on which to rest poetic agency’. The invocation of Long Meg and her rich biography insists upon ‘the utility of the marginal figure as one necessary to society […] motivated by her own intrinsic sense of what is worthwhile and valuable’. What determines Meg’s exclusion from the judicial oration is then also what imbues her with authority: it is her tradition of violence which constitutes a form of corrective natural justice. As such physical violence remains at odds with notions of civility in positive law, Meg’s ghost would undermine the rhetorical project of The Womens Sharpe Revenge should she be granted further inclusion in the text. Meg’s violence is also underscored by a ‘strictly English authority’ through an emphasis on her martial identity. Indeed, the most detail in the epistle

77 McEachern, p.12.
78 Ray, p.924.
79 Ray, pp.932-933.
80 Ray, p.939.
is devoted to outlining Meg’s military exploits, reframing her natural justice as both lawful and civil within the exceptionalism of state combat. Here, Meg’s ghost ‘represents the alternative to the distant, erudite, and non-native traditions of ancient Greece and Rome’ found in English law, embodying the nostalgic nationalism of Henrician triumph.\textsuperscript{81} Meg is transported as an English martial heroine to the political climate preceding the English Civil War, which began just two years after the publication of \textit{The Womens Sharpe Revenge} in 1642. In this context, Meg’s associations with low forms of English vernacularism do not carry the same connotations once reframed by militaristic prowess, as she proudly declares that:

\begin{quote}
Tis knowne the service that I did at Bulloigne,
Beating their French armes close unto their woolein:
They can report that with my blows and knocks,
I made their bones ake, worst then did the Pocks.
Of which King Henry did take notice then,
And said; amongst my brave and valiant men,
I know not one more resolute or bolder,
And would have laid his sword upon my shoulder,
But that I was a woman: And shall I
who durst so proud an Enemy defie?
So fam’d in the field, so noted in the Frenches,
A president to all our Brittish Wenches
\end{quote}
\textit{(WSR, A.10\textsuperscript{1}-A.10\textsuperscript{v})}.

Once acting under the sovereign direction of ‘King Henry’, Meg’s violence can take place ‘without usurpation of any civil authority’, thus temporarily reconfiguring her position in law and language.\textsuperscript{82} The inherent value of rhetorical civility is secondary to the national interest in force and victory. In the context of armed conflict, an exception occurs in which the state

\textsuperscript{81} Ray, p.941.
\textsuperscript{82} Walker, p.87.
suspends the law on the grounds of self-preservation. By recalling how she beat the ‘French
armes’, Meg’s ghost is nostalgically invoked to assuage fears of socio-political turmoil and
assert the extrajudicial triumph of a former time. Gaining recognition for her skills and
strength, Meg surpasses ‘brave and valiant men’, and would achieve knighthood ‘but that
[she] was a woman’ (*WSR*, A.10\(^{v}\)). Just as Long Meg is used to measure the ideological value
of the inclusion of women, so too is Meg positioned in relation to soldiers. While men are
shamed for their inadequate patriotic service, Meg’s active defence exemplifies ‘an extension
of positive discourse of feminine’ virtue.\(^{83}\)

The legalistic case of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* capitalises on this aspect of Meg’s
identity: they assert that while ‘women [have] never rebelled, or commenced Suites of Law
against the King’, they also ‘[stand] up, man’d and maintained the walls, and stopt and
defended the Breaches’ when men ‘give it up to spoile or ransacke’ (*WSR*, D.5\(^{v}\)). In order to
gain access to the tools of rhetoric, the speakers of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* frame their
legal inclusion as part of sovereign duty. When law and civility are no longer fundamental to
national interests, Long Meg is the figure par excellence of ‘Brittish wenches’ (*WSR*, A.10\(^{v}\)).
In this moment of legal suspension, ‘the justification of rhetoric’s value to England becomes
less tenable’, and instead Meg’s reanimated ‘life and tongue’ are used in an attempt to unite a
‘commonweal of native speakers’.\(^{84}\) The delineations of linguistic inclusion and exclusion
therefore extend to the readership of *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*. The pamphlet
‘reproduces literary styles and subjects recognisable to an educated or widely read audience’,
exploiting the ‘meanings and constructions by which readers are included or excluded
according to their knowledge’.\(^{85}\) Long Meg functions as an avatar for low vernacular culture
to appeal to an English audience. As a ghost, her role is fleeting and allegorical. She is

---

\(^{83}\) Walker, p.93.
\(^{84}\) Mann, p.183.
\(^{85}\) Boleyn, p.46.
materially absent from the epistle and excluded from the main narrative altogether.

The invocation of Long Meg as a ‘non-being’, ‘disembodied and reduced to an image’ (N, p.8) ensures that her suspension in law presents no legitimate threat to the rhetorical project of the main body of the text. This further layer of exclusion is reiterated in the questioning of Taylor’s literary credentials, asking ‘[h]ow have you stuff your Store-house, with a Catalogue of common prostitutes and Curtizans, which made me thinke when I first saw your Booke, it has been the Register of Bride-well’ (WSR, F.12). ‘I Margery, […] Sirnam’d Long Meg’ has been speculatively traced to ‘Bridewell Hospital court books’ as a woman ‘named Margaret Barnes [who] […] kept a suspected bawdy house at Westminster’. Such self-conscious criticism of the appointed ‘President to all Brittish Wenches’ suggests that, despite her ghostly status ‘the problem of disorder continues to haunt the project of vernacular rhetoric as a whole’.

In _The Womens Sharpe Revenge_, Long Meg is an intrusive but useful figure of ‘English rhetoric’s outsider status’, her grave a site to enact the gendered tensions ‘between order and outlawry’. While Meg is incapable of being ‘chosen for the Jury’, the women who ‘had the first and prime voyce[s]’ are, like Jonson’s courtly retinue in _Fortunate Isles and their Union_ (c.1625), names and figures from English popular culture. _The Womens Sharpe Revenge_ outlines how ‘the fore-women […] who gave up the Verdict’ were each invested with an alliterative action, as ‘Sisley set him out, Sarah set on his skirts, Kate call him to account, Tomasin tickle him, Prudense pinch him, Franke firk him, Besse bind him, Christian commit him, Parnel punish him, Mall make him yield, Beterish banish him, Hellen Hang him’ (WSR, B.6 - B.7). The violent responses of the jury directly echo the physical force of Long Meg in the epistle. Moreover, as we have seen in Chapter Three, Meg is placed in a tableau of allegorical figures on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, chiefly

---

87 Mann, p.22.
88 Mann, p.22.
Kate, Bess, and Mall. The assemblage of this jury explicitly acknowledges how Meg’s legal exclusion is uniquely symbiotic with the linguistic exclusion in *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*. While Meg is marked by a further disembodiment as a ghost, she also regains her singularity, and achieves this individualistic role on the same grounds of her exclusion.
Conclusion

The premodern waive emerges from early English law as an unwanted subject, marked by a resistance which seeks to both suppress and deny her existence. The waive exposes a further layer of legal withdrawal for women beneath their foundational exclusion, thus presenting a paradox which poses a persistent problem to the androcentric rigidity of the law. From de Bracton (c.1235) to Rastell (c.1579) the waive is shaped by a series of absences. The relationship between women and outlawry is thus marked by tension, and the anxieties waivery generates resurface in literature. Where the outlaw maintains a cultural potency through figures such as Robin Hood, the waive recedes into obscurity.

In this thesis, my invocation of the waive answers Craig Dionne’s call to address what makes categories of outlaws, rogues, and vagabonds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ‘distinctly different’.1 Early modern urban print culture sees a reconstituted humanist order in which an ‘aesthetically rendered’ classification of outlaw categories are produced. Even as they resist an easy taxonomic approach, the waive continues to face exclusion from the assemblage of figures explored by Dionne. In the absence of an overt literary tradition for the waive, Long Meg of Westminster provides a compelling case study. In excess of existing categories for women in outlaw narratives, Meg’s characterisation ‘recall[s] Robin Hood’ whilst being fundamentally excluded from the outlaw tradition.2 Through close textual analysis, I have extended the brief observation of Gartenberg and Capp to illustrate that while Meg shares the potent merriness of Robin Hood, she is excluded from the canon of national prestige. Robin Hood studies should be expanded to consider how protagonists such as Meg are fashioned laterally to outlaws whilst being unable to be named as such. It is from this absence that the waive emerges as a viable subject.

---

By using a biopolitical approach, specifically Agamben’s terms suspension, exceptionality, and *exclusive exclusion*, I have been able to critically examine this absence. Agamben’s terms enable me to articulate the layers of negation which form the waive’s experiences of law, language and politics. The status of the waive within law, a presence paradoxically characterised by an absence, is only traceable through moments of suspension. Agamben’s delineations of inclusion and exclusion, *oikos* and *polis*, express the divisions concerning this suspension. Rather than seeing these categories as oppositional, Meg resides at the extralegal threshold between these terms. In belonging to neither, Meg echoes the *exclusive exclusion* of the waive in law. As Bracton states, women do not belong ‘under the law’ from the outset. The extralegality of both Meg and the waive produces a further state of exclusion beyond the official judicial model and Agamben’s own terminology.

As the structure of this thesis shows, Meg is fractured by two distinct literary communities in early modern England. In the jest genre, Meg’s merry, martial identity is aligned with the existing materials of Robin Hood and John Skelton. The gender politics of ‘merry England’ are made legible on the generic and physical spaces of the jestbook. The Skeltonic form is easily absorbed into the language of jesting, endorsing Long Meg as a new jestbook figure in a literary history of vernacular Englishness. Skelton’s doggerel rhyming features in the overlapping dramatic representations of Long Meg and Robin Hood, bringing the project of English vernacular eloquence onto the early modern stage. The composite of a simulacrum of Skelton alongside the identities of Long Meg and Robin Hood, fabricates a nostalgic English literary culture of both past and present. However, once extrapolated from the sphere of jesting, Meg is manufactured in other ways. As either Deloney’s romance figure or a Taylor’s ghostly invocation, Meg is rendered secondary in the narrative focus, signifying a totemic Englishness. By this means, Meg becomes more malleable as a vessel for authorial agenda.
Beyond these literary works, Meg’s legacy is preserved in an afterlife of objects. No longer an embodied subject, ‘the picture and shape of some tall man cast in a woman’s mould’ (LM, B.19), Meg is turned to stone. While much of Meg’s literary tradition is lost, a Bronze Age stone circle in Little Salked, Cumbria, retains the name ‘Long Meg and her Daughters’. The namesake is traceable through the antiquarian chorographers of the mid-to-late seventeenth century. For example, in Joshua Childrey’s Brittanica Baconica: or the Natural rarities of England, Scotland & Wales, the stone circle is mentioned in the ‘Cumberland’ section of his alphabetical cataloguing of counties. Of Cumberland, Childrey writes:

This County (like the rest of the rough Northern Countries) hath sharp piercing aire […]
At Salkelds upon River Eden, is a Trophee of Victory, called by the Country People, Long Meg and her Daughters. They are 77 stones, each of them ten foot high above the ground, and one amongst the rest is fifteen foot high.  

Outside of her literary tradition, Meg is reduced to the material signifier of her height: although she retains a location in Lancashire, she becomes the embodiment of a fifteen foot stone. The rhetoric of measurement throws Meg into a further state of subjectivity. Through the significant epithet of ‘Long’, Meg loses her woman form, existing in the Northern landscape only in a context of objectification and materiality. The maternal implications of ‘Long Meg and her Daughters’ also indicates a corruption of her textual legacy. This is famously echoed by William Wordsworth in his 1822 poem The Monument commonly called Long Meg and her Daughters, near the River Eden in which he refers to her as a ‘Giant-mother’. This is not the case in The Life of Long Meg, where Long Meg does not fulfil patriarchal duties beyond refusing to fist-fight her husband. Long Meg and her Daughters

---

3 Joshua Childrey, Brittanica Baconica: or, The natural rarities of England, Scotland, & Wales. According as they are to be found in every shire. Historically related, according to the precepts of the Lord Bacon; methodically digested; and the causes of many of them philosophically attempted (London: 1662), p.170.
perhaps forms part of a wider pattern, where Meg’s memory is shaped into something more conventional and domestic. The daughters made of stone may be the closest Long Meg gets to a band of merry men. Yet Meg’s exclusion from outlaw narratives should not permit the conceptual flattening of her tradition. As this thesis has shown through its study of the premodern waive, without new theoretical approaches to literary figures such as Long Meg, the nuance of their history is lost.
Appendix
A textual chronology of Long Meg of Westminster

1589: Martin Marprelate, *Theses Martinianae*

John Lyly, *Pap with an Hatchet*

1590: Anon, *The Life of Long Megge of Westminster* (lost jestbook)

Anon, *A Ballad of Longe Meg of Westminster* (lost ballad)

1593: Thomas Nashe, *Strange News*

Gabriel Harvey, *Pierce's Supererogation*

1594-1597: Anon, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (lost play)

1595: Anon, *The madd merye pranckes of Long Megg of Westminster* (lost ballad)


1597-1603: Thomas Heywood, *Fair Maid of the West*, part I

1600: William Vaughan, *The Golden Grove* moralized in three booke: a worke very necessary for all such, as would know how to gourne themselues, their houses, or their countrey

1601: Thomas Dekker, *Satiromastix*

1605: Thomas Dekker and John Webster, *Westward Ho!*

1610: Nathan Field, *Amends for Ladies*

1611: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

1613: William Gamage, *Linsi-woolsie, or Two centuries of epigrammes*
1614: Robert Tailor, *The Hog Hath Lost his Pearl*

1617: Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A Fair Quarrel*

1620: Anon, *The History of Long Meg* (lost jestbook)

1624: Ben Jonson, *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*

1632: Nicholas Goodman, *Hollands leaguer: or, An historical discourse of the life and actions of Dona Britanica Hollandia the arch-mistris of the wicked women of Eutopia*

*Wherein is detected the notorious sinne of panderisme, and the execrable life of the luxurious impudent*

1632: Anon, *The History of Long Meg* (lost jestbook)

1635: Anon, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster*

1640: Mary Tattle-well and Joane Hit-him-home, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge*

1654: Edmund Gayton, *Pleasant Notes on Don Quixote*

1666: Poor Robin, *Poor Robin's jests: or, The compleat jester Being a collection of several jests not heretofore published. Now newly composed and written by that well-known gentleman, Poor Robin, knight of the burnt island, and well-willer to the mathematicks. Together with the true and lively effigies of the said author*

1750: Anon, *The Whole Life and Death of Long Meg of Westminster*
Bibliography

Primary materials

All materials are taken from EEBO unless stated otherwise.

Anon, ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode (c.1510)’ in Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales, ed. by Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp.90-148

Anon, Tales and Quick Answers (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1532)

Anon, Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (London: Reynold Wolfe, 1553)

Anon, Hic Mulier: Or the Man-Woman: being a medicine to cure the coltish disease of the stagers in the masculine-feminines of our time. Expret in a brief declamation (London: 1620)

Anon, Heavens happiness: or A briefe epitome of the blessed and happy estate of Godssaints in heauen, vnfolded vnto us, printed by J. Beale for Robert Bird (London: 1632)

Anon, The Life of Long Meg of Westminster containing the mad merry prankes shee played in her life time, not only in performing sundry quarrels with divers ruffians about London but also how valiantly she behaued her self in the wars of Bolloingne (London: 1635)


A.C, Mery Talys (London: John Rastell, 1526)

Aylmer, John, An harborovve for faithfull and trevve subiects agaynst the late blowne blaste, concerning the gourmne[n]t of vvementh: wherin be confuted all such reasonas a
stranger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to obedience
(London: 1559)


Childrey, Joshua, *Britannia Baconica: or, The natural rarities of England, Scotland, & Wales. According as they are to be found in every shire. Historically related, according to the precepts of the Lord Bacon; methodically digested, and the causes of may of them philosophically attempted* (London: 1662)


Dekker, Thomas, *Satiromastix* (London: 1601)

Dekker, Thomas and Webster, John, *Westward Ho!* (London: 1605)

Deloney, Thomas, *The Lamentation of Master Pages wife of Plimmoth, who being enforced by her parents to wed him against her will, did most wickedly consent to his murther, for the love of George Strangwidge* (London: 1591)

Deloney, Thomas, *The gentile craft. The second part Being a most merrie and pleasant historie, not altogether vnprofitable nor any way hurtfull: verie fit to passe away the tediousnesse of the long winter evenings* (London: 1639)

Ferrers, George, *The Great charter called in latyn Magna Carta, with diuers old statutes whose titles appere in the next leafe Newly corrected* (London: 1542)

Fields, Nathan, *Amends for Ladies* (London: 1611)

Gayton, Edmund, *Pleasant Notes on Don Quixote* (1654)

Glanvill, ‘Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie qui Glanvill vocatur (Glanvill)’ in *Early English Laws*

<http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/texts/glanvill/> [accessed 13th August 2016]
Goodman, Nicholas, *Hollands Leaguer: or, An historical discourse of the life and actions of Dona Britanica Hollandia the arch-mistris of the wicked women of Eutopia Wherein is detected the notorious sinne of panderisme, and the execrable life of the luxurious impudent* (London: 1632)


Harvey, Gabriel, *Pierces supererogation or A new prayse of the old asse A preparatiue to certaine larger discourses, intituled Nashes s. fame.* (London: 1593)


Holinshed, Raphael, *The first and second volumes of Chronicles comprising 1 The description and historie of England, 2 The description and historie of Ireland, 3 The description and historie of Scotland: first collected and published by Raphaell Holinshed, William Harrison, and others: now newlie augmented and continued (with manifold matters of singular note and worthie memorie) to the year 1586,* (London: 1587)

Horne, Andrew, *The booke called the mirrour of justices made by Andrew Horne ; with the book called the diversity of courts and their jurisdictions ; both translated out of the old French into the English tongue by W.H* (London: 1646)

Jonson, Ben, *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (London: 1624)

Knox, John, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva: 1558)

Langland, William, *The Vision of Pierce Plowman, nowe firste imprynted by Roberte Crowley,* (London: Robert Crowley, 1550)

Langland, William, *The vision of Pierce Plowman, newlye imprynted after the authours olde copy, with a brefe summary of the principall matters set before every part called*
passus. Whereunto is also annexed the Crede of Pierce Plowman, neuer imprinted with the booke before, (London: Owen Rogers, 1561)


Littleton, Thomas, *Lytleton Tenures in Englysshe* (London: John Rastell, 1528-1530)


Marprelate, Martin, *Thesis Martiniaenae: That is, Certain Demonstrative Conclusions, sette downe and collected (as it should seeme) by that famous and renowned Clarke, the reuerend Martin Marprelate the great: serving as a manifest and sufficient confutation of al that euer the Colledge of Catercaps with their whole band of Clergie-priests, haue, or can bring for the defence of their ambitious and Antichristian Prelacie* (1589)


Munday, Anthony, *Metropolis coronata, the triumphes of ancient drapery: or, Rich cloathing of England, in a second yeeres performance In honour of the advancement of Sir Iohn Iolles, Knight, to the high office of Lord Maior of London, and taking his oath for the same authoritie, on Monday, being the 30. day of October. 1615. Performed in heartie affection to him, and at the bountifull charges of his worthy brethren the truely honourable Society of Drapers, the first that receiued such dignitie in this citie. Deuised, and written, by A.M. citizen, and draper of London* (London: 1615)


Nashe, Thomas, *Strange newes, of the intercepting certaine letters, and a conuoy of verses, as they were going priuilie to victuall the Low Countries*, (London: 1592)
Nashe, Thomas, *Have With You to Saffron Walden* (London: 1596)


Rastell, John, *An exposition of certaine difficult and obscure words, and termes of the lawes of this realme: newly amended and augmented both in French and English, for the helpe of such young students as are desirous to attaine to the knowledge of the same* (London: 1607)


Sherry, Richard, *A treatise of schemes [and] tropes very profytable for the better understanding of good authors, gathered out of the best grammarians [and] oratours by Rychard Sherry Londoner. Whervnto is added a declamacion, that chyldren euen strapt fro[m] their infancie should be well and gently broughte vp in learnynge,* (London: 1550)

S.R., *Poor Robin's jests: or, The compleat jester Being a collection of several jests not heretofore published. Now newly composed and written by that well-known*
gentleman, Poor Robin, knight of the burnt island, and well-willer to the mathematicks. Together with the true and lively effigies of the said author (1666)

Tailor, Robert, *The Hogge Hath Lost his Pearle* (London: 1614)

Tattle-well, Mary and Hit-him-home, Ioane, *The womens sharpe revenge: or an answer to Sir Seldome Sober that writ those railing pamphlets called the Iuniper and Crabtree lectures, &c. Being a sound reply and a full confutation of those bookes: with an apology in this case for the defence of us women* (London: 1640)

Vaughan, William, *The golden-groue moralized in three booke: a worke very necessary for all such, as would know how to gouerne themselves, their houses, or their countrey,* (London: 1600)


**Secondary materials**

Acquisto, Jospeh, ‘Saving Literary Creation: Agamben and Baudelaire, the Poet and the Critic’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 54:3 (2014), 53-65


Boleyn, Deirdre, “‘Because Women are not Women, Rather Might be a fit subject for an Ingenious Satyrist’: Constantia Munda’s The Worming of a Mad Dogge (1617)’, Prose Studies, 32:1 (2010), 38-56


Butler, Sara M., Divorce in Medieval England: From One to Two Persons in Law (New York: Routledge, 2013)


Cerasano, S.P, ‘Edward Alleyn, the new model actor, and the rise of the celebrity in the 1590s’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 18 (2006), 47-60


Christensen, Ann C., ‘Being Mistress Eyre in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*’, *Comparative Drama*, 42:4 (2008), 451-480


Deutscher, Penelope, ‘The Inversion of Exceptionality: Foucault, Agamben, and “Reproductive Rights”’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107:1 (2008), 55-70

Deutscher, Penelope, ‘Sacred Fecundity: Agamben, Sexual Difference, and Reproductive Life’, *Telos*, 161 (2012), 51-78


Griffiths, Jane, John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)


Gurr, Andrew, Shakespeare’s Opposites: The Admiral’s Company 1594-1625 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Gurr, Andrew, ‘Runs of Plays in Early Modern London’, Notes and Queries, 63:1 (2016), 28-33


Henslowe, Phillip, Henslowe’s Diary, ed. by Walter W. Greg (London: A. H Bullen, 1904)


Kelen, Sarah A., Langland’s Early Modern Identities (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)


Knight, Stephen, and Ohlgren, Thomas (eds), Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000)


Knutson, Roslyn, The Repertory of Shakespeare’s Company (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1991)

Knutson, Roslyn, Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare’s Time (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Knutson, Roslyn, ‘What was James Burbage Thinking??’, in Thunder at a Playhouse: Essaying Shakespeare and the Early Modern Stage, ed. by Peter Kanelos and Matt Kozusko (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), pp.116-130


Laclau, Ernesto, “‘Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?’”, in Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life, ed. by Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp.11-27


Lockey, Brian C., ‘Elizabethan Cosmopolitan: Captain Thomas Stukeley in the Court of Dom Sebastian’, English Literary Renaissance, 40 (2010), 3-32

Lockey, Brian C., Early Modern Catholics, Royalists, and Cosmopolitans: English Transnationalism and the Christian Commonwealth (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015)


McInnis, David, and Stegge, Matthew (eds), Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)


Mills, Catherine, The Philosophy of Agamben (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008)


Mukherji, Subha, Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Munro, Ian, ‘A Woman’s Answer is neuer to seke’: Early Modern Jestbooks, 1526-1635 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Munro, Lucy, Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
Munro, Lucy, *Archaic Style in English Literature 1590-1674* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Munro, Lucy, “‘O Read me for I am of Great Antiquity’: Old Books and Elizabethan Popularity”, in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp.55-78


Munro, Lucy, ‘Skeltonics: Jonson, Shakespeare, the Literary Past and Imagined Futures’, *Shakespeare*, 12:4 (2016), 338-350


Rimbault, Edward, ‘Long Meg of Westminster’, Notes and Queries, 41 (1850), 172


Sauer, Michelle M., Gender in Medieval Culture (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)


Seligmann, Raphael, ‘With a Sword by Her Side and a Lute in Her Lap: Moll Cutpurse at the Fortune’, in Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many Headed Melodies, ed. by Thomas LaMay (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp.187-211

Scattergood, John, John Skelton: The Career of an Early Tudor Poet (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014)


Smith, Peter J., *Between two Stools: Scatology and its representations in English Literature, Chaucer to Swift* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)


