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Puritans and Performers in Early Modern Dorset

This paper aims to complicate the familiar story of the rise of puritanism and the decline of drama in Dorset in the first decades of the seventeenth century.¹ Puritans, it is regularly argued, having gained control over parish administration and municipal government, often through the influence of charismatic schoolmasters, preachers, or vicars, exercised their power by putting an end both to the celebration of local customs and to the performances by travelling players. Cyril Wanklyn, the first archivist of Lyme Regis and its most prolific historian, provides a version of this story when he explains the demise of the borough's ancient custom, the Cobb ale, which, he says,

had flourished unchecked for two hundred and fifty years before its final disappearance some time after 1610. As an institution it meant a considerable amount of hilarity and some perhaps not unpardonable intoxication, according to the rough manners of that time, but it combined these characteristics with the collection of funds to assist in the upkeep of the Cobb. Barring the unseemly accessories, a Church Bazaar or Whist Drive, or what is now called a 'Carnival', might be held to-day for equally good and pious purposes. But it was exactly these accessories that stank in the nostrils of [activist preacher John] Geare and his followers. The amusements of the people, when deeply rooted, can only be changed with difficulty, but Geare succeeded where many might have failed. He started a crusade against this Cobb Ale and he must have had some force of public opinion behind him, because shortly afterwards the institution came to an end.²

David Underdown, in his monumental study of Dorchester, *Fire from Heaven*, finds the same forces at work there. When he describes the Star Chamber case of 1608 that pitted the wealthy burgess Matthew Chubb and his associate Robert Adyn against John Conditt, tailor, and his vicar, John White (the 'patriarch of Dorchester'³), Underdown suggests that as protestantism destroyed Dorchester's earliest drama, so the rise of puritanism checked dramatic activity in the early seventeenth century:

Further acrimony had been aroused by that old target of puritan militancy, stage plays. If ever Dorchester had had a native theatrical tradition it had died with the Reformation, but in the later years of Elizabeth's reign travelling companies had occasionally performed there. Adyn's first libel implies that White had made his dislike of these ungodly spectacles clear immediately after his arrival in Dorchester.⁴

Not surprisingly, historians surveying fields larger than individual boroughs, tend to conjoin even more simply the ascendancy of puritans and the decline of playing, as George Roberts does in *The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England*. He sets up his list of Lyme Regis's payments to players to leave the town without performing with the observation that 'many of the corporations having adopted the opinions of the puritan party in the reign of James I, they did not hesitate to lay out their money in order to save their borough from the profanation of a performance', and he explains the end of the Cobb ale by noting that 'such festive celebrations never survived the death-blow dwelt (sic) by the Puritans'.⁵ Puritan resistance to travelling players and to local customary celebrations is, however, not nearly as obvious nor as straightforward as these accounts of its operation make it out to be.

The records of early English drama in Dorset confirm that puritan ministers, itinerant preachers, and schoolmasters played a significant part in the efforts to regulate, eliminate, or transform for their own purposes various forms of public performance.⁶ The influence of puritan churchmen, extending as it did to the burgesses of many Dorset towns, produced serious rifts among members of the ruling élites. This was certainly the case in Lyme Regis, where in 1608 the borough Council deprived two longstanding, influential citizens of their magistracy because of their association with a reformist preacher new to the borough.⁷ In Bridport in 1614, two allegedly libellous poems satirized members of the town's oldest families, men who had been, or would be, bailiffs of the borough. One criticized 'The puritans ofe Bridporte Towne' for moral hypocrisy and self-righteousness; the other named names in accusing men and women known to be religious reformers of using their seemingly holy conventicles for the satisfaction of carnal desires.⁸ In Melbury Osmond in 1622, songs ridiculed the local preacher as a whore hunter and whore master, one of his followers as a cuckold, and his wife as the mistress of the stews.⁹ In Dorchester, John Conditt charged Matthew Chubb with libel in 1608, charges detailed in a bill of complaint that included verses addressed 'To the Counterfait Company & packe of Puritans', to a 'Tall sturdy Puritan knave', and to 'Yow puritans all wheresoeuer you dwell'.¹⁰ These verses not only mocked Conditt and his wife with salacious humour but also attacked John White, the vicar of St. Peter's, and Robert Cheek, the schoolmaster, for their puritanical doctrines

and antagonism to 'stage plaiers' and 'trew melody', and in so doing, conjoined puritan factionalism with opposition to theatrical activity.

Puritanism undoubtedly played its part in bringing about the decline of local customs and dramatic performances in Jacobean Dorset. But did it have, as it were, 'the lead', as Cyril Wanklyn, David Underdown, and George Roberts have argued, or was it cast in a supporting role? The evidence that survives concerning the customary Cobb ale of Lyme Regis, the controversial attempt of Lord Berkeley's men to perform in Dorchester, and even the arraignment of William Sands and company for their blasphemous puppet shows suggests that it was the latter. In all three cases, the anti-theatrical prejudice of puritans was only one factor among many in a complex ensemble of social forces shaping the culture of seventeenth-century Dorset towns.

1. The Cobb Ale of Lyme Regis

The Cobb was a long dock and breakwater made of stone and timbers that protected Lyme Regis from the destructive power of the sea and created the port on which the livelihood of many locals depended.¹¹ Constantly battered by the sea, the Cobb often needed repairs, which the ale helped to finance. Despite Cyril Wanklyn's confident claims, quoted above, about the longevity of this festive fund-raiser, when the Cobb ale began is simply not known nor is the precise year when it ceased. The earliest records of the ale, found in the town accounts from 1559 to 1564, provide no details of the celebration itself, except that successive mayors received '[a] whistill of siluer *wtha* chayne waing xj ownces whiche william Birret dyd give to be warne at the Cob ale'.¹² Nor was there any 'crusade' (to use Wanklyn's word) against it: John Geare's alleged opposition depends upon but one entry in the borough Order Book, which notes that he had obtained an act against the mayor and the Cobb wardens 'for the vsing of *profane* and irreligious abuses, as hee suggesteth'.¹³ The concluding phrase suggests not everyone at the meeting shared Geare's assessment of the activity in question, and the Order Book confirms that suggestion when it goes on to record in the same entry the decisions of the council members to appropriate civic funds for their legal defence, to put in suit a plot of land hedged in by the vicar, and to seek an act of their own forbidding all but the mayor and his brethren from sitting in the pews nearest the chancel of the church. There is no mention of the Cobb ale, no reason to assume that the general phrase, 'profane and irreligious abuses', refers specifically to it.¹⁴ Given the subsequent items in the minute book, it seems more likely that Geare was outraged not by the Cobb ale, but rather by the matter about which the city

fathers *were* defensive at this time – their privileged places in the congregation of St. Michael’s. Concerning the origin and the end of the Cobb ale, the character of the celebration and the targeted campaign against it, the records of Lyme Regis are too few and too imprecise to corroborate the view that puritan forces, spearheaded by a fierce vicar, brought an end to an ancient custom of the borough.

The records of Lyme Regis that do survive further complicate the story of the demise of the Cobb ale. They call into question the extent of Geare’s influence over the city fathers. The evidence that he had some influence does exist, but it reveals at the same time the limits of that influence. In 1608 for example, a borough order described John Viney using the same words as those applied to Robert Hassard: ‘a chiefe and *professed* favourer & vpholder of Iohn Geare’.¹⁵ Whereas Viney, apparently a smith or an ironmonger, was an incorrigible trouble-maker,¹⁶ Hassard, a member of one of Lyme’s oldest and wealthiest families, served the borough as mayor in 1601–2.¹⁷ Geare’s influence over them did not extend to a majority of burgesses of the town, however. The court hearing the charges against Viney and Hassard deprived both men of their magistracy, in part because of their association with Geare, identified in the Order Book as ‘an vnbeneficed Preacher who hath bin a cause of great factions & deuisions amongst vs’.¹⁸ The borough did support Geare’s work in other ways; however, the town’s trust was not unqualified. In 1610, just when records of the Cobb ale cease, the borough financed Geare’s establishment of a school at a cost of over £106, but only on the condition that, should the schoolmaster take up a position elsewhere, he was to leave ‘all thinges there newly sett vpp by him, as aforesaid, and the same to remayne to the Scholehowse for ever’. The list included window glass, benches, chairs, desks, and ‘his seate that he sittes in & all other thinges there sett vpp, or to be sett vpp by him’.¹⁹ Geare secured his position in Lyme, for which he regularly received a stipend,²⁰ but his ascendancy was certainly not complete at the time when evidence of the Cobb ale ceases.

John Geare’s religious views created factions and disorders within Lyme Regis, but religion did not operate in isolation. Doctrinal disputes fed, and were fed by, political and economic quarrels. The Star Chamber case of Robert Salter v. Benjamin Cooper, Richard Harvey, and Edward Rotheram (1608) names Robert Hassard, Sr., John Viney, and John Hassard among the confederates in the libellous attack on Salter.²¹ The bawdy verses, ‘The first parte of Robert Salter hunting the Cunney and doo’,²² vilify Salter for aggressive, adulterate sexual self-indulgence, but Salter clashed with Hassard and Viney because of his work as one of the farmers of queen’s customs. Striving to

undermine Salter in that capacity, the authors of the libel distributed copies, Salter alleges, not only in Lyme and its environs but also in London.

In the same year as the Salter case, Lyme's city fathers deprived Robert Hassard of his magistracy, partly because of his support of Geare, partly because he had failed to perform the condition for his reinstatement, to clear himself in the court of Star Chamber of charges made by John Roze in 1604. Instead, Hassard 'compounded with the saide John Roze & so stayed and avoyded the Iudiciall hearing of the saide cause'.²³ In 1612, John Roze, now mayor, exchanged 'vndecent and unreverent speeches' with John Hassard in disputes over the church rates and the town charter. Roze mocked Hassard's efforts in negotiating 'a very good charter indeed' for he had 'brought the Townte to fowre skore and odd poundes charges, and to no purpose'.²⁴ Hassard had actually spent twenty-three weeks in London to renew the charter and tried to recover expenses of over £134 in total.²⁵ John Roze was no friend of Hassard, nor of John Geare: it was in Roze's mayoralty that the civic leaders agreed to use borough funds to fight Geare's accusation that they had committed 'profane and irreligious abuses'.²⁶

All of this is to suggest that complex social forces were at work in Lyme Regis at the time when records of the Cobb ale cease. Puritans and protestants were at odds with one another for religious reasons and economic ones. Nor was the puritan faction itself a stable, harmonious group, as John Geare's actions in the Hustings Court against John Viney indicate.²⁷ Nor was there a simple alignment of puritans against local customs and conservative protestants defending them, for John Roze, mayor again in 1622, decisively changed one of the borough's old customs when he ordered that 'henceforward the Maior for the tyme being shall give over the ffeast heretofore vsuallie kept bie the Maior vppon St. Stevens daie, ... to the end that the poore maie be then entertayned at each manes pryuate house'.²⁸

The importance of the Cobb to the economic well-being and the safety of Lyme Regis as a port provides other grounds for judging as inadequate the simple conjunction of the rise of puritanism and the demise of the ale. The ale was not just an annual festive occasion for strengthening communal bonds; it was a means of raising funds for something crucial to the town, and a very successful means. The account rendered by John Roze, one of the receivers of the Cobb ale in 1601, indicates that the ale took place over two to three weeks, involved fund-raising in several nearby towns, and included six gatherings at the Cobb house.²⁹ The event required personnel, time, energy, money, and coordination (not to mention food and drink). Despite the administrative challenges it presented, however, the ale probably fostered community spirit

when successful and it turned a profit; in 1601, it netted the borough £26, which represents only a portion of the proceeds since Hassard was only one of two receivers. Besides covering the cost of Cobb maintenance, the funds raised by the ale paid for other civic projects, such as renewing the town charter or negotiating a settlement of the fee farm rent. When the latter occurred in the 1590s, the town drew on the Cobb ale account to repay hefty loans, such as the £50 borrowed of Sir George Somers alone.³⁰ The Cobb ale, like the Cobb itself, had an economic importance to Lyme that no convincing account of the demise of the ale can ignore, as those stories do that focus tightly on the power of John Geare, or the ascendancy of a puritan faction, or the rise of puritanism itself.

How did Lyme Regis do without the funds raised by the ale? Like many other boroughs in Dorset and in other counties, Lyme began to levy parish rates at this time, a steadier, more predictable, and less demanding means of parish fund-raising than an ale.³¹ Shortly after the last records of the Cobb ale, the borough also began to collect (or perhaps to collect again) an annual grant from the Crown. An act of parliament of 1585 noted that 'the said pier was partly maintained in time past by a yearly rent of 20 l. paid to the mayor by the King and Queen of this realm for certain years now determined',³² and the mayor's financial report of 1613 registers for the first time since 1585 the receipt of £20 'to the Cobb'.³³ Obviously such a subvention reduced the need for an ale. Judging from the surviving mayors' books, Elizabeth I did not provide that grant, but in the act of parliament of 1585 she did allow the borough to increase the duties it charged precisely because they were too low to cover the costs of on-going maintenance. The timing of this provision could not have been better for Lyme Regis: at the busiest time in the port's history, the borough now had the right to increase duties. The last years of Elizabeth's reign and the first decade of that of James I were a period in which the costs of Cobb repair had been reduced and the duties collected by the Cobb wardens had increased, a period when Lyme Regis would reach the zenith of its prosperity as a port.³⁴ Given these profitable economic circumstances, along with the grant from the Crown for Cobb maintenance, the city fathers could, with a good fiscal conscience, abandon the Cobb ale, especially if growing hostility to it on the part of religious reformers compounded the administrative problems the event normally presented. By 1600 then, Lyme Regis had an economic alternative to the Cobb ale and, probably, ideological opposition to it, opposition destructive of whatever value the ale might have had in developing community spirit.

That 'probably' is in order since nowhere in the records of Lyme is there evidence that John Geare or his supporters opposed the ale per se, nor, for that matter, did they inveigh against performances by travelling players.³⁵ When

these activities prompted antagonism, they did so because they made use of the churchyard. In 1606, the churchwardens discovered 'that in the week after whitsunday by reason of a cobbe aell then held in the Church yerd was throwing wth a bowll to a *par* of keells for a spon^e'.³⁶ Similarly, they presented the mayor a year later for permitting some interlude players to use the schoolhouse adjacent to the church, which venue was 'wthin the Compasse of the Church yerd'.³⁷ For the puritans of Lyme Regis, indeed for many protestants who would not align themselves with that faction, neither the ancient civic ale nor the productions of visiting troupes seem to have been the enemy. If targets at all, they were secondary ones, and their elimination was a secondary gain in a larger campaign of regulation and reform focused on renewal of respect for the sabbath and for the church and its precincts.³⁸

2. Berkeley's Men in Dorchester

In Dorchester, however, one document does place direct opposition to players and plays high on the puritan agenda. In a Star Chamber libel case of 1608, John Conditt enters as evidence the verses of Robert Adyn, a Catholic recusant who spent many years of his adult life in the Dorchester jail. Adyn, the confessed author of the poems, represents the puritans as a faction with a special antipathy toward players. He begins with what appears to be an allusion to a contentious performance:

Tall sturdy Puritan knave for soe tearmed was thy name
 By player^es whom^e thou tearmest rogues to thy face spake ye same
 Thou saiedst by the statute^s thou woulds affirme thy talle
 w^hich when thou hadst brought them forth thou couldst not at all.³⁹

He picks up the theme again when casting aspersions against John Conditt's wife, Elizabeth, and another of their sect, one Lawrence of Steepleton:

who made himself the vprights man that lived now a daies
 & Comended much your deed in beating downe stage playes
 He has to fore most willing byn to lead a quiet lyfe
 That now the divell vrgeth him to lye wth Conditt^es wife
 or else he sayes he neu^er shall recouer his disease
 She heareinge this a horse did take & rode his mynd to please.⁴⁰

The verses close with a defiant postscript, possibly added by Adyn's late brother John,⁴¹ which again foregrounds anti-theatrical prejudice:

Adyn yf this Come to thie handes behold and see
do thou not stand against stage plaiers nor Yet trew melody
ffor yf thou doest thou shalt be calld knave and foole
and so shall thy sonne in lawe chicke ye maister of the schoole.⁴²

The verses leave no doubt as to where the Adyns stand in the battle for merry England – squarely opposed to a puritan faction that *they* depict as united against plays and players.

But throughout his verses Robert Adyn oversimplifies. The status of drama in Dorchester at this time was more complicated, as were the attitudes of puritans towards plays and their use of them. Robert Cheek, the very man mentioned in the postscript, directed his students in ‘two comedies at the sheerehall’ in honour of the visit of the of Bristol in September 1623.⁴³ For this entertainment, Cheek had a precedent, ‘a Presentment of a Playe before *Bishopp* Thornburie & his Chauncellor, in his Visitac^on’.⁴⁴ The precise date of this event remains uncertain, but it was close to the period of Adyn’s verses, for John Thornborough was bishop of Bristol from 1603 to 1617. The prologue to Cheek’s ‘Presentment’ provides a rationale for producing plays. Having stated that the boys will not put on a tragedy, a comedy, or a history, the prologue assures the bishop that they will present something to teach and delight. Cheek invokes Horace’s dictum concerning the purposes of playing, but he puts the emphasis solidly on teaching, moral teaching: ‘Virtutis & vitij viam exemplo docent,/ Hanc vt sequatur, alteram vt fugiat Schola:/ Sic omne punctum retulit is quj miscuit/ Dulcj vtile. &c.’⁴⁵ Although Robert Cheek was without doubt an ally of the puritan patriarch of Dorchester, John White, and although the Adyns judged him (Cheek) to be one of the fools and knaves opposed to plays, obviously the schoolmaster himself judged some drama to be appropriate both for the education of his pupils and for the entertainment of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Robert Adyn and Robert Cheek played only supporting roles in this Star Chamber business, however. The principals were John Conditt and his wife and Matthew Chubb and his, Conditt being a tailor and a disciple of John White, Chubb the wealthiest burgess of the town and a defender of the status quo that sustained his privileges. In their dispute, politics, religion, and drama explicitly converged: Conditt accused Chubb of assisting Lord Berkeley’s Men in their effort to perform in the common hall on a Sunday, in direct contravention of the terms of the permission to play that other borough authorities had given. The plaintiffs did not object to the actors, their production, or their projected use of the guildhall, but to their disrespect for local authorities and civic ordinances. Even more reprehensible was the behaviour of Matthew Chubb, then constable of Dorchester, who first resisted the attempt of the

bailiffs to lock the players out of the guildhall lest they perform on Sunday, and then, having failed in his resistance, ‘*p*remptorily & disdaynfullye sent them word in threatning manner that he would be eaven wth them’.⁴⁶ Chubb went further still and, to his discredit (which of course Conditt was trying to establish), broke the very laws he had sworn as an officer of the borough to enforce. In the words of Conditt’s bill of complaint, Matthew Chubb,

in dispight of the then Magistrate of the said Towne and other the Burgesses their Assistantes *w*hich formerly wthstood him in this behalf did that same Evening of the said Saboth daye him self being a Constable of the said Borough at that tyme cause and procure the said players to playe in An Inne in the same towne to the heigh Contempt of Almighty God and his *Majesties* proclamac^on to the Contrarye.⁴⁷

This formulation of the charges leaves open the possibility that John Conditt, his wife, and their friends did not object to plays, if performed in the Common Hall on weekdays and in accordance with local by-laws. If they and other Dorchester puritans were foes of players and plays, as Robert Adyn’s libel insisted, they chose to silence that opposition in presenting this bill of complaint. In other contexts, some puritans – such as Philip Stubbs, John Northbrooke, or William Prynne, whose case the Dorchester merchant William Whiteway followed closely – did express fierce antagonism to theatre.⁴⁸ In the records of early English drama in Dorset, however, dramatic activity *per se* is at best a secondary issue – secondary to the sacredness of the churchyard, the holiness of the sabbath, the need for respect for local authorities, and the desire for law and order. Given the silences in John Conditt’s complaint, it seems that the puritans of Dorchester did not judge theatre itself to be an issue at all.

This generalization also oversimplifies somewhat, since it depends upon the assertions of one party in a legal dispute. Writing in the adversarial situation defined by the court of Star Chamber, John Conditt can hardly be trusted to be neutral and objective. To appreciate the complexities of the conjunction of drama and religion in this case, the defence of Matthew Chubb, a rather coy and no-less-biased defence, has to be heard. Asked to recount the visit of Berkeley’s Men to Dorchester,

mathew Chubbe for aunswer saeth that some of the same stage plaiers, as this *defendant* remembreth did at or abowt ye tyme in ye said bill menc^oned ask leave of this *defendant* beinge an officer, to plaie, wthin ye said towne to whome this *defendant* made aunswere, that hee for his *part* was *contented* they should play/ also that this *defendant* to accompanie S^r Adrian Scrope

Knight this *defendant* being his tenant, did goe to a play at ye In mencioned in ye said *complaynantesbill* where the said knight lodged, but at other tymes this *defendant* hath verie seldome frequented anie plaies, nor favored plaieres more than some others of his place have done for this *defendant* for his *part* hath had of late yeers littel delight to bee *pr*esent at plaies.⁴⁹

Chubb sidesteps the issues that exercise Conditt: playing on the sabbath? – Chubb cannot quite remember when the performance occurred; vowing revenge on the whole pack of them? – Chubb portrays himself as a good constable attending to business as usual; acting in contempt of the law by attending the performance at the inn? – Chubb grants that he was in the audience, but as a loyal tenant of Sir Adrian Scrope, not as an avid theatre-goer (like the Catholic Robert Adyn) challenging the wisdom of the authorities.⁵⁰ Chubb then concludes in a way that suggests that whether a person likes or dislikes plays *is* an important issue. Whether or not Chubb's appetite for theatre had abated is less important than the rhetorical manoeuvre he performs at this point. Chubb foregrounds, in the end, the issue that the alleged enemies of dramatic activity ignore. While Dorset Puritans direct attention to the sabbath, the churchyard, social peace, and the laws of the realm, their foes urge that the courts take into consideration whether a person is for or against plays and players. Because plaintiffs and defendants both had privileges to protect and causes to advance, their definitions of the relevant issues (among them one's attitude toward travelling players or toward ancient customs) formed part of a strategy designed to give them some purchase on power, to help them win from the court a decision in their favour. Playing to the justices of the court of Star Chamber, it might well behoove a puritan, such as John Conditt, to silence his or her anti-theatrical prejudice just as it might serve the interests of a clever defender of the established order, such as Matthew Chubb, to position himself or herself somewhere between a puritan's antagonism toward the theatre and a recusant Catholic's promotion of it.

3. Sands' Puppeteers in Beaminster

In contrast to the posturing of Conditt and Chubb in their submissions to the court of Star Chamber, the judgment against William Sands and his company of puppeteers provides what one might think of as typical puritan opposition to players. The plaintiffs in this case, heard at the Quarter Sessions in 1630, object explicitly to the content of the shows. They complain 'that William Sands the elder Iohn Sands and William Sands the yonger doe wander vp and downe the Countrey and about nine others of their Company wth certaine blasphemous shewes and sights *wh*ich they exercise by way of poppett playinge

contrary to the Statute. made *against* such vnlawfull wanderers'.⁵¹ Among the records of early English drama in Dorset, this document is unique in that it finds moral fault with a theatrical presentation. Although such a critique seems typical of puritan attitudes, nothing in the court order identifies it as such, nor should we assume that blasphemy was an exclusively puritan concern.

While distinctive in registering a moral judgment against the puppet shows, the Beaminster judgment quickly attaches that objection to other problems. The major one is disorder, for Sands and company performed 'late in the night in a disorderly manner', caused a brawl involving John Sands and 'a disorderly inhabitant of the same Towne', and on one occasion, 'pursued the *præcher* that *præched* at Beaminster aforesaid, from the Church to his house and entred the said house, and there challenged him for his sermon and gaue him threatninge speeches'.⁵² Poverty is a secondary factor, the court taking into consideration 'the great dearth of Corne and other victualls at this time and the extremity that is like to come on the poore of this Countrey'. The crucial factor remains, from a legal point of view, vagabondage. Summarizing the case against the Sands, the court begins by noting that they are 'vnlawfull wanderers' and ends by invoking the 'two seuerall Proclamacons his *Maⁱestie* hath commaunded the puttinge in execucⁱon the Law and Statutes *against* such wanderers'.⁵³ In tying a moral judgment against the puppet shows to these other issues, the Quarter Sessions order resembles the use of respect for the churchyard to curtail Cobb ale games and the use of respect for the sabbath to impugn Matthew Chubb's magistracy.

Summary

Surprisingly, a survey of all the records of early English drama in Dorset up to 1642 produces scarcely any straightforward evidence of puritan opposition to local customs or travelling players. Indeed, only the allegedly libellous verses of a cranky Catholic recusant set forth puritans as crusaders against stage plays and travelling players *per se*. Perhaps the documents needed to establish that connection have simply not survived. But even the materials that do survive, materials used to tell the story of the rise of puritanism in Dorset and the concomitant decline of public performance of various kinds, are silent about crucial information, or imprecise as to what they refer, or nuanced so as to serve the rhetorical purposes of their authors. To the extent that the records shed light on the personalities of puritans of early seventeenth-century Dorset towns, they require that we complicate any notion of a monolithic, stable puritan faction with an agenda different from that of moderate protestants.⁵⁴

Similarly, except in the mind of Robert Adyn, the anti-theatrical prejudice of puritans never appears in isolation; instead, it gets caught up in the pursuit of other ecclesiastical, political, social, and economic projects, such as respect for the sabbath and the churchyard, the regulation of vagabonds, and the maintenance of social order. When attached to these other concerns, puritan antagonism to plays and ancient civic customs seems to be of secondary importance in the Dorset records.

Let me emphasize that 'seems', so as to add two final complicating factors. The first highlights the limitations of the documents themselves – legal documents generated by particular courts that take up particular issues. In the absence of laws against church ales or travelling performers per se, the opponents of these activities would have to link them to the charges that the various courts heard: to libel for a case in Star Chamber, to vagabondage for the Quarter Sessions, to improper use of the churchyard for the court of the dean of Salisbury. As a result, a concern that appears to be secondary in importance may have been relegated to that position not because of the priorities of the complainants, but because of the parameters of the courts. The second complicating factor acknowledges the limitations of this study, which has limited its field to the records of the county of Dorset. From time to time, those records point beyond the borders of the county. In the case of *Conditt v. Chubb*, for example, the plaintiff accuses Chubb of directing the second libellous poem against Mr. William Parkins, the prolific Cambridge divine.⁵⁵ In the Bridport Star Chamber case of *Miller et al. v. Maries et al.*, the defendants counter accusations of libel with the claim that the religious reformists 'gave enterteynement to one Traske a young hot headed and excommunicated Mynister',⁵⁶ that is, John Traske, who became more notorious when in London he founded the Brownists and preached in support of the reinstatement of the Jewish sabbath. Like many another itinerant preacher and lecturer, Parkins and Traske represent the circulation of puritan ideas through the county of Dorset. Although the records of Dorset provide little evidence of puritan antagonism to ancient customs or travelling players, the anti-theatrical prejudice assigned to Dorset puritans by local and county historians may have been imported, so that with the dissemination of puritan doctrine came the demise of dramatic performances. That story, however, a story beyond the scope of this paper and the REED volume on which it is based, would be a very complex story indeed.

Notes

- 1 This paper is based on work completed for Rosalind Conklin Hays and C.E. McGee (eds), *Dorset*, which appears as part of Rosalind Conklin Hays, C.E. McGee, Sally L. Joyce, and Evelyn S. Newlyn (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, REED (Toronto, 1999). I am indebted to Rosalind Conklin Hays, co-editor of the volume, for her work on various boroughs and county records; to Abigail Young for checking the transcriptions of the dramatic records and translating the Latin documents; and to St. Jerome's University, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the University of Leeds for the opportunity to present an earlier version of this paper at the International Medieval Congress in 1996.
- 2 Cyril Wanklyn, *Lyme Regis: A Retrospect* (London, 1922), 8–9.
- 3 For this characterization see Frances Rose-Troup, *John White: The Patriarch of Dorchester* (New York, 1930).
- 4 David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992), 31–2.
- 5 George Roberts, *The Social History of the People of the Southern Counties of England in Past Centuries* (London, 1856), 40; 327.
- 6 See Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994), 111–99; subsequent references to Hutton's work identify situations analogous to those in Dorset.
- 7 Dorset Record Office [DoRO]: LYR/D1/1, 26 and 29. Since the publication of REED *Dorset/Cornwall*, the DoRO has revised the reference numbers for various collections, including that of Lyme Regis. In this article I have used the new system, which replaces 'DC/LR' with 'LYR'.
- 8 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 158.
- 9 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 225–9.
- 10 For printed excerpts from the bill of complaint see, Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 173–9, and for libellous verses attached as exhibits, see especially 179–84. Quotations in this essay are taken from the copy preserved as The National Archives, Public Record Office [NA, PRO]: STAC 8/94/17, mbs 20–2, one attached to the original bill of complaint, rather than from an administrative copy, which occupies mbs 12–13, a copy evidently prepared for the use of the commissioners who took the formal answers of the defendants.
- 11 John Fowles, *A Short History of Lyme Regis* (Boston and Toronto, 1982), 10–14.
- 12 See Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 299, for printed excerpts from DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 44. Subsequent entries in this manuscript concerning passing on the whistle appear on pages 47 (1559–60), 50 (1561–2), 54 (1562–3). Other

entries appear in the drafts of the mayors' accounts for 1560–1 (LYR/G2/1, f [36v]), 1563–4 (LYR/G2/1, f 33); 1564–5 (LYR/G2/1, f [31v]), and 1565–6 (LYR/G2/1, f [32]). For more records relating to the Cobb ale, see 'Lyme Regis Cobb Ale', Appendix 3 of Hays, et al (eds), *Dorset/ Cornwall*, 297–308.

13 See DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 42.

14 DoRO: LYR/N23/2/ art. 84 (1610), one of a number of miscellaneous legal documents, records that the constables were fined for allowing unlawful games to be played at Beaufront on the sabbath as on weekdays. Although this is used as evidence of the crusade against the Cobb ale, the document itself makes no mention of the ale, nor is there any reason to assume that because unlawful games were played, the ale must have occasioned them. As the evidence for Cyril Wanklyn's story of the decline of the ale is slim, so is that for David Underdown's account of players in Dorchester, which depends entirely upon implications of the submissions in *Conditt v. Chubb*. There is no record in the Dorchester records of a local theatrical tradition prior to the Reformation nor to visits by travelling players in Elizabeth I's reign. The extant civic records of Dorchester are simply too late to substantiate Underdown's claims. Similarly, George Roberts attributes to puritanism the readiness of towns to pay players to depart without playing, although the one financial record that specifies the reason for such a stipend identifies the plague as the reason for turning the players away.

15 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 26 and 29.

16 The first records of John Viney appear in a bundle of Quarter Session documents, DoRO: LYR/A4/1 (5 August 1591), in which he is accused of calling Richard Davy a 'horson beaste' and Thomas Witwell a 'foole and horson Bastard'. A recognizance of 1593 (DoRO: LYR/A5/1) requires that John Viney keep the peace, especially vis-à-vis William Davy, merchant. Judging from the Cobb wardens' account of 1604–5, Viney served as one of the receivers of the Cobb that year and he spent some time in London in 1603 negotiating the renewal of the town's charter (DoRO: LYR/G7/5). The last records we have of John Viney are also legal ones: he was presented for playing unlawful games in 1617 (DoRO: LYR/B1/8, 203) and he appears in the proceedings of the Hustings Court as a result of a dispute with John Geare (DoRO: LYR/A5/1, 468–73; LYR/B1/8, 51–4, 84; LYR/B3/3, 47). That he is a smith or an ironmonger is suggested by his payment of dues for importing five tons of iron in 1605–6 (DoRO: LYR/G7/6).

17 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 305; see also DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 177.

18 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 29.

19 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 36.

- 20 DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 221 (1615) begins the payments to Geare of a stipend that he will receive every year until 1634–35.
- 21 See Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 218–22 (NA, PRO: STAC/8/258/15), for the allegedly libellous verses in the bill of complaint; unfortunately this is the only document we have of this case, and we lack the answer of Robert Hassard to the allegations that he was a confederate in support of the lampoon.
- 22 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 219.
- 23 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 26. In John Roze's bill of complaint in this case (NA, PRO: STAC 8/250/14), religion was not among the issues at stake. Roze charged Hassard with malfeasance in office, alleging that during his mayoralty Hassard had accepted bribes from those intent on settling legal disputes in their favour, allowed debtors and fathers of illegitimate children to escape from Lyme Regis without paying the normal fines to the borough, and severely and unlawfully punished some debtors, civic officials, and victims of brutality. Some personal animus informed Roze's charges because Hassard's malfeasance had cost Roze financially. Having provided suerty for one defendant, Roze had to pay a £14 penalty when Hassard hastily decided the case. Perhaps most important was Roze's final complaint: Robert Hassard arbitrarily set the poor rate for Roze at 150% of what Hassard himself had to pay.
- 24 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 40.
- 25 DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 140–4.
- 26 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 42.
- 27 Cyril Wanklyn, *Lyme Leaflets* (London, 1944), 71–5.
- 28 DoRO: LYR/D1/1, 63.
- 29 DoRO: LYR/N23/1, f 63; N23/2/ f 75.
- 30 DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 140–4. The debt to Somers was repaid from the Cobb ale account of Sylvester Jourdain. The borough also borrowed money from Jourdain, from a Mr. Bydgwood (elsewhere 'Bidgood'), and from Robert Hassard 'in time of their Cob Ale office'.
- 31 Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 151–2 and 161–3.
- 32 John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 3rd ed, W. Shipp and J.W. Hodson (eds), 4 vols, 1861–74 (East Ardsley, Wakefield, 1973), 2.65.
- 33 DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 213.
- 34 Fowles, *A Short History*, 15.
- 35 That Lyme Regis paid players to leave the town without performing is usually taken as a consequence of a puritan ascendancy within the borough; however, none of the entries of rewards given to players to send them away without playing (entries that begin in 1621) specifies a reason for this decision. See

- Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 223–4, for printed excerpts from DoRO: LYR/G1/1, 242 (1621–2), 252 (1623–4), 257 (1624–5), and 298 (1633–4).
- 36 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 308.
- 37 WRO: D5/28/9, item 24. See Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 222, for another excerpt relating to this presentment.
- 38 See Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 134, and the concluding paragraph of this essay concerning how the nature of the documents produces a conflation of issues.
- 39 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 179.
- 40 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 179.
- 41 See Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 342, n179–83, for the suggestion that John Adyn helped to compose the poems or, at least, the postscript.
- 42 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 180.
- 43 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 199.
- 44 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 171.
- 45 Hays, et al., *Dorset/Cornwall*, 172, ‘They teach in school the way of virtue and vice by example, how to follow the one and flee the other. So he who mixed the useful with the pleasant has reported every point, etc.’, translation, 318.
- 46 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 177.
- 47 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 177.
- 48 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 202–5.
- 49 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 190–191.
- 50 In his defence, Matthew Chubb tries to shift the blame from himself to Robert Adyn. Because he was an ardent Catholic – one who had been convicted for his recusancy, one who, according to John Conditt, after the death of Queen Elizabeth I, offered to sell his horse to have a mass said in St. Peter’s Church (NA, PRO: STAC 8/94/17, mb 17) – he was easily established as a foe of all on the protestant spectrum. On the importance of Catholicism as a factor in the disposition of these issues, see Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, 140–3.
- 51 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 121.
- 52 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 122.
- 53 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 122.
- 54 We should in fairness do the same with respect to Robert Adyn. His cantankerous reputation is a product of the allegations of Conditt and, to a lesser extent, the defensive shifting of responsibility by Chubb. The libel that Adyn confesses he wrote is in part a serious engagement of points of doctrine preached by John White.
- 55 NA, PRO: STAC 8/94/17, mb 7.
- 56 Hays, et al. (eds), *Dorset/Cornwall*, 161–3.