

## PART VII

### POPULAR CULTURE

*Mary Ellen Lamb, Southern Illinois University, United States*

“Popular culture” in the early modern period is a field particularly riven by debate. Should it be defined in terms of traditional festivities, by its resistance to a dominant power bloc, or simply as a majority of non-elite people? Is an “oral” culture effectively distinct from a written one? What about the new print media? Can a romance be called “popular” if it is read by elites as well as by lower-status social classes? Is it read differently by different groups, such as women, and if so, how can we tell? If elite groups participated in popular festivities, read the same romances, and sang the same ballads as the non-elites, can we refer to a distinctively “popular” culture at all? The term “popular” has come to signify radically different groups and their activities.

This chapter lays out four narratives that attempt to encompass popular culture, each with its own definition of the “popular”: (1) in terms of traditional popular festivities, (2) engaged in popular resistance, (3) as a non-elite majority, and (4) as a mode of hybridity in early modern subjects. Each of these narratives has implications for the kinds of scholarship performed on Shakespeare’s plays.

#### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Resisting binary definitions of popular culture
- Four narratives of popular culture
- Traditional popular festivities and the reformation of merry England
- The traditional festivities model: implications for Shakespeare criticism
- The popular resistance model: implications for Shakespeare criticism
- A non-elite majority
- The non-elite model: implications for Shakespeare criticism
- Hybridity in early modern subjects
- The hybridity model: implications for Shakespeare criticism
- Limitations of the four models

### 63. ORAL TRADITION

*Steven Newman, Temple University, United States*

From studies by scholars in a variety of fields – historians, folklorists, literary scholars, musicologists – broadside ballads have emerged as a model of the rich interchange between orality and literacy in early modern culture, a feedback loop in which ballads often appear in print and then are transmitted orally or recorded by hand, are changed in the process either by accident or intention, and then pass back into print. How and why does Shakespeare use ballads if they are properly understood as part of oral tradition but not limited to it? This chapter considers four ballads in Shakespeare’s plays as examples of the complex workings of oral tradition in early modern culture.

#### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Ambivalence about ballads
- *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Bottom’s balladic vision
- *2 Henry IV*: Falstaff’s balladic dream denied
- *Hamlet*: tragic jigs and the limits of balladic agency
- *The Winter’s Tale*: the truth of broadside ballads

## 64. CHEAP PRINT

*Douglas Bruster, University of Texas, United States*

The publishing spectrum in early modern England featured, at one end, lengthy books in Latin and sumptuous folios such as *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (1623). At the other end, many things that today we would not define as “books” came from the presses in millions of sheets. Scholars call much of this output cheap print. Serving both secular and sacred purposes, cheap print included such short forms as ballads, single-sheet almanacs, and broadsides. Defined more broadly, cheap print also extended to slightly longer but equally popular forms, such as book almanacs and short pamphlets. Many of Shakespeare’s characters allude to cheap print, suggesting that it was an inescapable part of his world.

### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The family of cheap print
- The cost of cheap print
- Ballads
- Ballad format
- Common ballad themes and topics
- Cheap print at home
- Almanacs
- Shakespeare and cheap print
- Falstaff and print
- Ballads in *The Winter’s Tale*

## 65. POPULAR FICTION

*Steve Mentz, St. John’s University, United States*

The popular fiction of Tudor–Stuart England has at times seemed a kind of cultural background noise, an undifferentiated narrative repository from which dramatists, poets, and humanist writers sometimes plucked raw material. Print provided an important new outlet for popular narrative forms. It also opened up a new kind of career path for authors such as Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Deloney, who helped pioneer an emerging strain of market-oriented authorial consciousness. Between the disruptive force of the new medium of print and the incoming flood of new and old literary models, the development of prose fiction in early modern England reveals a microcosm of cultural change and continuity.

### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Questions of influence: Italian novella versus Greek romance
- The Italian novella
- Greek romance
- Questions of style: John Lyly and Philip Sidney
- *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*
- Questions of form: Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge
- Questions of authorship: Thomas Nashe and Thomas Deloney
- *The Unfortunate Traveler*
- The futures of popular fiction

## 66. TRADITIONAL ENTERTAINMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS

*François Laroque, University of Paris, Sorbonne Nouvelle III, France*

As a playwright, Shakespeare was interested in folk-culture and festive events because they represented primitive forms of spectacle that could serve as coarse analogues or counterexamples to his own playworld. Shakespeare was no antiquarian, however. Unlike other playwrights, Shakespeare never transposes to the stage a carnival banquet or riot. Rather, he proceeds obliquely, through allusions and indirection, either in the titles of his plays or in moments of holiday misrule that are generally interrupted, thus hardly ever allowing the spectator to get an entire and thorough view or idea of what these entertain-

ments and celebrations may have been like in real life. This technique of condensation turns the web of festive allusions into intriguing images or textual riddles that must be interpreted if not always clarified by editors and critics.

#### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Clocks versus seasonal cycles
- Holidays and entertainments of the calendar
- Turning folklore into poetry
- The uses of misrule
- Puritan attacks against traditional entertainments
- Cleopatra as the feminine counterpart of Falstaff

### 67. FLYTINGS, POLEMICS, CHARIVARIS

*Martin Ingram, Brasenose College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom*

The phenomena discussed in this chapter are not merely very striking manifestations of “popular culture”; they vindicate the very use of the concept, because they can hardly be understood in other terms. “Flytings” were verbal slanging matches traded by either sex (but as often as not between women) in the streets of cities, towns, and villages. Another manifestation of popular culture was biting satires, most commonly taking the form of mocking rhymes, that erupted in similar social contexts. Even more impressive were “ridings,” the English variant of what the French called *charivari* – a noisy, mocking demonstration, sometimes by large numbers of people, involving symbolic props and accompanied by raucous noise.

#### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- What is “popular culture”?
- Legal perspectives
- Flyting speech
- Mocking rhymes
- Targets of satire
- Species of insults and invectives
- Purposes of abuse
- Riding skimmington
- Occasions
- Penal and festive contexts
- Marital roles and martial prowess
- London and the provinces
- Symbolic energy
- Anxiety about cuckoldry
- Participants

### 68. NEWS CULTURE

*Jason Peacey, University College, University of London, United Kingdom*

This chapter outlines the nature of, and changes in, news culture from the 1580s to the 1620s and links them to the chronology of Shakespeare’s life and career, as well as to the ideas evident in his plays. International warfare and domestic crisis provided an impetus for these innovations in communicative practices. The time in which Shakespeare lived and worked involved world-historical conflagrations – from the wars of religion to the Thirty Years War – that helped to shape contemporary consciousness, informed contemporary literature, and molded news culture. As a result, Shakespeare’s plays reflect important facets of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century news culture, the ways in which this was changing, and contemporary responses to the possibilities and problems that it posed.

#### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- News culture before Shakespeare
- The transformation of news and the emergence of Shakespeare
- News culture at the end of the Shakespearean era
- Contemporary responses to news culture

## 69. WOMEN'S CULTURE

*Alison Findlay, University of Lancaster, United Kingdom*

Shakespeare's texts do not ignore the parts women played in various aspects of popular culture, even though his female characters are a minority and the protagonists are mostly elite. Exceptional figures from that minority set up forms of rebellion against the patriarchal status quo and can be read as forms of "popular protest" in a political sense. Jests constitute one type of popular resistance in Shakespeare's texts. More easily traceable throughout Shakespeare's work, however, is an awareness of the social hybridity of early modern women. Shakespeare's work makes use of this fluidity to conjure a constantly shifting web of sympathies and identifications between fictional women and readers or audience members.

### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Woman characters in Shakespeare
- Women and the professional theater
- Popular festivity and rites of passage
- Women, the Reformation, and community
- Women and rites of passage
- Birth as staged secrecy
- Popular resistance
- Queenly resistance
- Tragic resistance in Jacobean England
- Material traces and affective magic
- Becoming the mistress: boy actors and women's parts
- Becoming the mistress: courtship
- Ballads and popular affect
- Slipping into tragic lyric
- A life framed by song: the Jailer's Daughter
- "Goodnight sweet ladies"