# 1

# 'Illiterate Mechanick Persons': Writing, Radicalism, and the Dominant Culture

My object in this book is to revise our understanding of radicalism in the English revolution and to make new claims for its social, cultural, and literary diversity. My method can be broadly defined as literary in that I proceed in Chapters 3–5 by analysing the rhetorical strategies, stylistic devices, and discursive contexts of some of the most significant radical writing published in the 1640–60 period. My central argument, which I explain here and elaborate on in Chapter 2, is that such analysis involves a reconstruction of the various relationships between the orthodox intellectual and literary culture of early modern England and the development and expression of heterodox belief in the mid-seventeenth century. This reconstruction raises methodological and conceptual issues concerning the formation of cultural history. Yet it may initially appear to be an unfruitful, one-dimensional subject for a book-length study, for the radicals themselves, their seventeenth-century enemies, and their twentieth-century friends all represent the relationship between radical belief and elite culture as starkly adversarial. In his voluminous heresiography *Gangraena* (1646), the Presbyterian cleric Thomas Edwards blamed the 'Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices' infecting England in the 1640s on the failure to prevent 'illiterate Mechanick persons' from engaging in public discussion of religious matters. He claimed that 'the confusion and disorder in Church matters both of opinions and practises' was due to 'all sorts of Mechanicks taking upon themselves to preach and baptize, as Smiths, Taylors, Shoomakers, Pedlars, Weavers &c. there are also some women Preachers in our times'. The ignorant heretics who populate *Gangraena* and threaten to overwhelm godly order in England believe there to be 'no need of learning, nor for reading of Authors for Preachers, but all books and learning must go down, it comes from want of the Spirit, that men write such great

volumes, and make such adoe of learning'.[1] The radicals' own words, as quoted in influential works of history and criticism, seem to confirm this characterization. The Leveller leader Richard Overton was 'confident that it must be the poor, the simple and the mean things of this earth that must confound the mighty and the strong'. William Dell, New Model Army chaplain and exponent of 'free grace' or the doctrine—termed 'antinomianism' by its opponents—that the elect are set free from the moral law, insisted that 'a poor plain countryman, by the spirit which he hath received, is better able to judge of truth and error touching the things of God than the greatest philosopher, scholar or doctor in the world that is destitute of it'. Paraphrasing Acts 17: 6, Dell cited the example of the Apostles as his authority for the inversion of social, religious, and educational hierarchies: 'Poor illiterate men turned the world upside down'. The Fifth Monarchist Christopher Feake mocked those who refused to accept 'that a company of illiterate men and silly women should pretend to have any skill in dark prophecies, and to a foresight of future events, which the most learned Rabbis, and most knowing politicians have not presumed to hope for'. Isaac Pennington described the early Quakers as 'young country lads, of no deep understanding or ready expression, but very fit to be despised every where by the wisdom of man'.[2] Overton, Dell, Feake, and Pennington apparently agreed with Edwards on this issue at least: the radicals emerged from the ranks of the formally uneducated or illiterate laity and believed this very lack of education and book learning to testify to their spiritual authority.

Christopher Hill, the most influential scholar of radicalism in the English Revolution, also agrees with Edwards about the social and cultural origins of radical ideas. In *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) and numerous other books and essays over the latter half of the twentieth century Hill argues that with the collapse of traditional structures of political and religious authority in the early 1640s a 'lower-class heretical culture burst into the open'. While the evidence before the 1640s is necessarily sketchy, this popular heretical culture probably had a 'continuous

[1] Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena; Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time, vented and acted in England in the last four years*, 3 pts. (1646), i. sig. A5$^{v}$, 130–1.

[2] Overton and Dell quoted in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (1972; repr. Harmondsworth, 1991), 38, 94, 100; Dell is also quoted in Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age: A History of England 1603–1714* (London, 1980), 208; Feake quoted in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*, (1971; repr. Harmondsworth, 1991), 178; Pennington quoted in N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth Century England* (Leicester, 1987), 163.

underground existence' stretching back at least to the Lollards of the later Middle Ages. In the absence of effective State censorship, 'unorthodox men and women of the lower classes' were free to print for the first time views that had previously circulated orally in the radical underground. Writings of the 1640s and 1650s by those who were categorized by their enemies as 'Levellers', 'Diggers', 'Seekers', 'Ranters', and 'Quakers' provide the outline of 'another revolution which never happened', 'the revolt within the Revolution' which 'might have established communal property, a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic'.[3] Although this was a period of 'glorious flux and intellectual excitement', characterized by the 'overturning, questioning, revaluing of everything in England', the radical ideas surveyed by Hill were articulated by common people who had no experience of or contact with the intellectual culture of the educated elite: 'the eloquence, the power, of the simple artisans who took part in these disputes is staggering'. Nonetheless these unbookish lay people were inspired by a book. They drew their confidence from the Reformation principle that the biblical Word was accessible to all, and extended this principle to its logical anticlerical and democratic conclusions by 'asserting the possibility of any individual receiving the spirit, the inner experience which enabled him to understand God's Word as well as, better than, mere scholars who lacked this inner grace'. Emphasizing 'reliance on the holy spirit within one, on one's own experienced truth as against traditional truths handed down by others', the radicals violently rejected the notion that a university education and a facility in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew conferred superior spiritual knowledge upon a separate clerical caste.[4]

Hill repeats the claims of hostile contemporaries such as Thomas Edwards about the lowly intellectual background of the radicals, but from a positive and sympathetic Marxist perspective. Edwards uses the charge of ignorance to disqualify radical voices from being heard, whereas Hill celebrates the conditions in which ordinary people were free to engage openly in religious and political speculation. Like Edwards, however, Hill sees radical ideas and writings as an expression of a popular culture that evolved outside the institutional educational and cultural structures of

[3] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, 1977), 69–71 (69, 71); Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 13–15; see also 'From Lollards to Levellers' and 'God and the English Revolution', in *Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, ii. *Religion and Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (Brighton, 1986; repr. 1988), 89–116, 321–42.

[4] Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 14, 95, 362, 368; Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* (1993; repr. Harmondsworth, 1994), esp. 196–252.

early modern England. Popular culture in the early modern period has usually been regarded as the 'culture of the illiterate, a culture transmitted orally by customs and practice, not through the printed word'. The obvious problem in retrieving the beliefs and values of the illiterate is the necessary reliance of the historian on textual sources. Consequently it is difficult to 'discern the extent to which the historical record of this culture has been contaminated by elite commentators' and was in fact 'designed to persuade, shape, or even re-direct opinion'. Scholars have nonetheless sought to 'uncover the values of popular culture through the growing mass of "popular literature", notably ballads, chapbooks, and other ephemeral publications but also the radical and other writings of the minority of working people who recorded their views and experiences in print'.[5] Since *The World Turned Upside Down*, the great quantity of radical literature that survives amongst the 22,000 books and pamphlets collected by George Thomason between 1641 and 1660 has provided a focus for those seeking to write 'history from below'. This literature has been valued by both historians and literary critics for providing access to the culture of the common people that is not mediated through sources produced by the elite, the 'learned and educated few at the top of society'.[6]

Yet the status of radical texts as authentic artefacts of seventeenth-century popular culture becomes problematic when we check the biographical details of the writers quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Richard Overton matriculated as a sizar at Queens' College, Cambridge, in 1631 and acted in Latin plays at the university. William Dell graduated with an MA from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1631 and may briefly have held a fellowship there before becoming an Independent minister; he was Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, from 1649 until the Restoration. Christopher Feake graduated with an MA from Emmanuel College in 1635 and owned a considerable amount of property in London. Isaac Pennington matriculated at Catherine Hall, Cambridge, in 1637 and was the son of a rich merchant who became Lord Mayor of London in the early 1640s.[7] As the following chapters demonstrate, many

[5] Tim Harris, 'Problematizing Popular Culture', in Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, 1500–1850* (London, 1995), 1–27, (6, 8, 10); Jonathan Barry, 'Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective', in Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, 1500–1850*, 69–94 (69).

[6] For examples of historical and literary claims that radical writing of the English revolution provides authentic access to popular belief see respectively Barry Reay, 'Laurence Clarkson: An Artisan and the English Revolution', in Christopher Hill, Barry Reay, and William Lamont (eds.), *The World of the Muggletonians* (London, 1983), ch. 6; James Holstun, 'Ranting at the New Historicism', *English Literary Renaissance*, 19 (1989), 189–225.

[7] See *BDBR* for biographical details.

of those who made important contributions to the extraordinary radical ferment of these years possessed a considerable degree of formal education. One of the central concerns of this book is to demonstrate the range of intellectual resources employed in some of the most powerful radical writing of the English revolution. Another is to account for the disjunction between this range and the images of the radicals as 'simple artisans' and 'illiterate Mechanick persons' projected by themselves, in contemporary polemical literature, and in twentieth-century scholarship. In the process some fundamental challenges will be made to deeply embedded preconceptions about the cultural identity of radical writers, the literary sophistication of their prose, and the social composition of their intended audience. By accepting at face value contemporary claims about the ignorance or simplicity of these writers, we run the risk of failing to appreciate both the complexity of their ideas and the artistry of their writing. My point is not simply that there was a far greater diversity of culture and education amongst radical groups than has previously been appreciated; more significant is the interpretative advantage to be gained from this insight for the textual analysis of radical belief. Nonetheless the series of close readings of radical writers in Chapters 3–5 questions the axiomatic identification of the 'radical' and the 'popular'—'popular' in the sense of being 'produced by the people', rather than commonly held—and has wider implications for our approach to the writing of cultural history.[8]

## RADICALISM AND CULTURAL HISTORY

William Dell frequently appears in both *Gangraena* and *The World Turned Upside Down* as a representative of the sudden effusion of artisanal radicalism condemned by Thomas Edwards and admired by Christopher Hill. In sermons preached and published in the early 1650s Dell declared that 'the throne of the Beast in these Nations, are the Universities, as the fountaine of the ministry'. Attacking the application of 'fleshly wisdome, Rhetorical Eloquence, and Philosophical Learning' to spiritual matters, he maintained that 'all divinity is wrapped up in human learning to deter the common people from the study and enquiry after it, and to cause them still to expect all divinity from the clergy, who

[8] Barry Reay, 'Popular Religion', in Barry Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1985), 91–128 (91); preface to J. F. McGregor and Reay (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1984), p. v. See also the definitions of 'popular' in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976), 199.

by their education have attained to that human learning which the plain people are destitute of'.[9] By the 1630s the clerical profession in England was basically graduate.[10] Dell's anticlericalism is based on his substitution of inner spiritual experience for formal education as the prerequisite of religious knowledge, and the anti-intellectual rhetoric that he derives from this substitution is characteristic of radical attacks on the institutional structures of education, in particular the universities.[11] Yet Dell's rousing rejections of the relevance of formal education to spiritual knowledge rang out around the cloisters of St Mary's, the university church in Cambridge, and were delivered during his time as Master of Gonville and Caius College. In a brief discussion of Dell's virulent attacks on the principle of theological education Peter Burke has noted that 'it is ironic, to say the least, that [Dell] should have given learned references in a criticism of the function of learning in the study of divinity'. Burke is puzzled by the apparently anomalous presence of these references, mainly to patristic, medieval, and contemporary authorities: are they, he asks, important to Dell and his argument, or does he use them because he believes the reader thinks they are important?[12]

It is appropriate that Burke should point out the apparent contradiction between popular message and elite medium in Dell's argument in a contribution to a collection of essays in honour of Christopher Hill. Six years before Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), a ground-breaking study of the developing antagonisms between the cultural worlds of the educated and the humbler ranks of society, Hill presented *The World Turned Upside Down* as the story of how various groups amongst 'the lower fifty per cent of the population' sought 'to impose their own solutions to the problems of their time, in opposition to the wishes of their betters'. In recent years students of popular culture, including Burke himself, have become increasingly aware of the limitations of a bipolar model of cultural division and conflict, which tends to structure cultural history in terms of a series of preconceived binary divisions: 'elite and popular; patrician and plebeian; high and low; rulers and ruled; learned and unlearned; literate and illiterate; godly and

[9] William Dell, *Several Sermons and Discourses* (1709), 142, 144, 585. Dell's sermons in St Mary's, Cambridge, were published in *The Stumbling Stone* (1653) and *The Trial of Spirits* (1653).

[10] Helen M. Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (London, 1998), 62.

[11] L. F. Solt, 'Anti-intellectualism in the Puritan Revolution', *Church History*, 25 (1956), 306–16; Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 300–5.

[12] Peter Burke, 'William Dell, the Universities, and the Radical Tradition', in Geoff Eley and William Hunt (eds.), *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill* (London, 1988), 181–9.

ungodly'. These dichotomies have been found to be insufficiently flexible to do justice to the complexities of early modern society: first, to instances of 'vertical' rather than 'horizontal' cultural division, exemplified in England by the evidence for Puritan varieties of faith amongst both the highest and lowest ranks of the population or by the promotion of traditional festive culture by the royalist nobility; secondly, to the role of the 'middling sort' of people, who accounted for at least thirty per cent of the population.[13] The middling sort were able to read, buy, and, increasingly, write books and pamphlets. While there has been much debate about levels of literacy in the early modern period and over the methods by which these levels can be ascertained, historians have become accustomed to thinking in terms of a 'literate world of yeoman, tradesmen and craftsmen' in seventeenth-century England.[14] Research into the social composition of separatist congregations and larger radical movements such as the Fifth Monarchists and the Quakers indicates that the rank and file membership did not come from the bottom 50 per cent of the population, who were 'the labourers, cottagers, paupers'. Rather they were 'independent craftsmen and small tradesmen . . . husbandmen and yeoman . . . the "middle" sort of people; the less illiterate sections of the population; those who would have been included in a Leveller franchise'. The links between the separatist and gathered Churches of London and the Leveller movement are unsurprising in that the Levellers not only pressed for religious toleration but spoke for this socio-economic constituency of small tradesmen and merchants. Only the small groups of labourers who followed Gerrard Winstanley's call to dig the common land in 1649–50 support the argument that organized radical religion flourished amongst the bottom half of the population.[15] In his prophetic and intensely millenarian writings of 1650 George Foster, about whom virtually nothing is known, recounts how God—'that Mighty Leveller'—spoke to him and interpreted his visions. One of Foster's visions is strikingly suggestive of the socio-economic base of radicalism in this period: he saw a man on a white horse 'cutting down all men and women

[13] Harris, 'Problematizing Popular Culture', 15–16, 19.

[14] Margaret Spufford, 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth Century Autobiographers', *Social History*, 4 (1979), 407–35 (430); Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London, 1982), 183–98; Keith Thomas, 'The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England', in Gerd Baumann (ed.), *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition* (Oxford, 1986), 97–131.

[15] Barry Reay, 'Radicalism and Religion in the English Revolution', in McGregor and Reay (eds.), *Radicalism in the English Revolution*, 1–22 (18); F. D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1985), 33; John Gurney, 'Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger Movement in Walton and Cobham', *Historical Journal*, 37 (1994), 775–802.

that he met with that were higher than the middle sort, and raised up those that were lower than the middle sort, and made them all equal'. In one of his first pamphlets the tailor and itinerant preacher Laurence Clarkson, who was associated with a variety of radical religious groups between 1645 and 1660 and was briefly imprisoned on the charge of being a 'Ranter', defined the 'oppressors' as the 'nobility and gentry' and the 'oppressed' as the 'yeoman, farmer, the tradesman and the like'.[16]

The boundaries defining popular culture in the early modern period have been extended in recent years. The predominately literate middling sort have been studied within the context of a culture of the non-elite that was marked at most levels (including, if to a much lesser extent, semi-literate sections of the poorer sort) by an increasing familiarity with the world of writing and print.[17] This incorporation of the literate middling sort into the category of the popular can be seen as an attempt to maintain the status of popular culture as a distinct area of study in the light of arguments that our necessary reliance on textual sources precludes any direct contact with the mentalities of the common people. According to these arguments, since our sources 'tell us about the interaction of elite and popular cultures', that interaction should become the focus of research. Scholars should thus be less concerned with 'the false problem' of establishing what is and what is not popular culture than with identifying how 'differing cultural configurations criss-cross and dovetail in practices, representations, or cultural products'.[18] William Dell's anticlerical and anti-intellectual sermons from the pulpit of St Mary's, Cambridge, exemplify this interaction of 'differing cultural configurations'. Dell, as a university graduate, minister, and academic, is unquestionably one of the 'learned and educated few at the top of society', yet he voices the arguments of popular lay radicalism by attacking the clergy and the universities as structures of power designed to keep the 'plain people' in ignorance and subjection. At the same time this populist rhetoric is structured by a series of learned textual references and allusions that are only comprehensible to an elite audience or readership. Dell's sermons resist categorization as either 'elite' or 'popular', even in terms of an expanded

[16] George Foster, *The Sounding of the Last Trumpet* (1650), 17–18; Laurence Clarkson, *A General Charge, or Impeachment of High-Treason, in the name of Justice, Equity, against the Communality of England* (1647), 10.

[17] Reay, 'Popular Culture in Early Modern England', in Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England*, 1–30 (1–2).

[18] Harris, 'Problematizing Popular Culture', 10; Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia C. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1988), 37–40 (38). Cf. Bob Scribner, 'Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?', *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989), 175–91.

concept of popular culture that encompasses those 'middle sort of plain-hearted people', as one artisan radical put it, who were literate but yet 'destitute of school learning and human arts and sciences'.[19]

My contention in this book is that to understand the culture of radicalism in the English revolution we need to develop a greater understanding of how that culture was shaped not simply by conflict between the cultural worlds of the high and the low, of the learned and the unlearned, but by their interaction. I show how university-educated radicals draw on their knowledge of learned culture and their experience of institutional education to expose those systems and structures of knowledge as a means of preserving hierarchical and antichristian relations of power. Recent studies have argued that the history of orthodox ideologies and cultural practices in England needs to be understood in terms of a dynamic process of dialogue with heterodoxy.[20] Orthodoxy, after all, can only be defined in relation to what is deemed heterodox by those in positions of power and authority in a society. In my discussions of the Leveller Richard Overton (Ch. 3), the 'Ranter' Abiezer Coppe (Ch. 4), the Quaker Samuel Fisher (Ch. 5), and the Fifth Monarchist John Rogers (Epilogue) the articulation of radical belief is also revealed to be the product of dialogue between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Heterodox ideas are expressed through satirical application of the cultural resources provided by an orthodox education, or through the heterodox interpretation of texts—whether Latin grammars, academic plays, or works of biblical philology—usually considered representative of orthodox values. The languages of the dominant culture are frequently scrambled and misapplied for the purposes of parody and subversion, but also to develop and articulate new and radical modes of thought.

This focus distinguishes *The English Radical Imagination* from previous literary-oriented work on radical literature of the English revolution, such as Nigel Smith's study of the influence of Continental spiritualist writing on radical religious belief and expression. Smith defines the context for his study as the 'gap between orthodox university education and the ways in which the unlearned came by what they knew . . . the extent to which extreme sectarian knowledge systems were produced by men who were unlearned if literate'.[21] In my discussion of the

[19] Clement Writer, *An Apologetical Declaration* (2nd edn., 1658), 78–9.

[20] Roger D. Lund, 'Introduction', and J. G. A. Pocock, 'Within the Margins: The Definitions of Heterodoxy', in Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1995), 1–32, 33–53.

[21] Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), 267.

intellectual origins of Leveller ideas in Chapter 3, however, I examine how William Walwyn, who came from a comparatively prosperous background but did not go to university, used translations of classical and humanist texts that he bought in London in the 1630s to develop theories about the uncertainty of knowledge and the consequent necessity of religious toleration. This is a different instance of how heterodox ideas were formed from an interaction between elite and popular cultures. Yet, as with my case studies of university-educated writers, the example of Walwyn questions the theory that these heterodox ideas had previously circulated orally for generations in a lower-class radical underground, bursting into public view in the 1640s with the greater publishing freedoms brought about by the breakdown of centralized authority during the civil wars. The role of Walwyn's reading during the 1630s in shaping the religious and political views that he expressed in print during the 1640s illustrates how literacy begot heresy rather than vice versa.

This point is related to my decision to choose 1630–60 as the period covered by this study rather than to begin in 1640. Other than Walwyn, the radical writers who are discussed in detail in the following chapters were at university in the 1630s. In demonstrating how these writers use their access to elite discourses of cultural authority to shape the development and expression of their heterodox ideas, I am suggesting a continuity between their cultural experiences during the 1630s and their radical visions of the 1640s and 1650s. It is significant in the context of this study that the 1630s was the peak period for university entry in early modern England after the highpoint of the 1580s; indeed in terms of proportion of the male year-group university entry in the 1630s was higher than at any time until the twentieth century.[22] The sudden surge of admissions in the late sixteenth century led to some concern about the potentially subversive activities of unemployed and discontented graduates, who have been described as the 'alienated intellectuals' of early Stuart England. In *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589), Thomas Nashe warned of the dangers to the stability of Church and State posed by disaffected scholars: 'This green fruit, being gathered before it be ripe, is rotten before it be mellow, and infected with schisms before they have learnt to bridle their affections, affecting innovations as newfangled, and enterprising alterations whereby the Church is mangled'. The increase in admissions in the 1630s seems to have led in the 1640s to something like the situation envisaged by Nashe. Amidst the unprecedented turbulence of the civil wars there were more new graduates than for several generations; these

[22] Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England*, 112.

men had gone to university in preparation for a clerical career but found the established Church system and their own career structures in disarray. Some of these alienated intellectuals—the sons of merchants and yeoman 'who had become learned in vain and could only blame society for their personal disappointment'—were doubtless attracted to the 'innovations' and 'alterations' of radical ideas, as well as to the financial support offered by itinerant preaching or the role of pastor to sectarian congregations.[23]

The radicals discussed in Chapters 3–5 also emerged in the 1640s from mostly orthodox religious contexts. It is now widely accepted that until the rise of Laudianism in the 1630s Calvinism was the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Church of England. 'Puritan' in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods was used as a term of abuse for those few who pressed for a transformation from an episcopalian to a Presbyterian form of Church government, or, more ambiguously, to denote the most zealous Calvinists, who were distinguished by their zeal rather than their Calvinism. These 'hotter type of Protestants' sought reform from within the established Church.[24] There does seem to be some consistency in what has been called the 'lay religious impulse' in early modern Europe, centred around the rejection of mediating forms—ceremonial, clerical, educational—between the individual and the divine.[25] However, the Puritan backgrounds of the writers who provide the focus for this study indicate that their radical beliefs are better explained as a reaction to or a development of the ambiguities and contradictions of Calvinist theology than as an expression of heretical ideas which circulated in a timeless 'radical underground'. They are the product of a specific cultural and historical context rather than the efflorescence of an autochthonous folk irreligion, welling up from the depths of popular culture.

[23] Mark H. Curtis, 'The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England', *Past and Present*, 23 (1962), 25–43; Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth, 1985), 472; Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, 139.

[24] Influential essays on this topic are Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter Revolution', in Conrad Russell (ed.), *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London, 1973), 119–43; Peter Lake, 'Calvinism and the English Church', *Past and Present*, 114 (1987), 32–76. Both are reprinted in Margo Todd (ed.), *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England* (London, 1995), 53–70, 179–207.

[25] For an attempt to summarize the 'lay religious impulse' see Michael Mullett, *Radical Religious Movements in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1980), 65. The most comprehensive discussion of 'radical spiritualism' in sixteenth-century Europe remains G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Phila., 1962). In *England's Troubles: Seventeenth Century Political Instability in a European Context* (Cambridge, 2000), 247–68, Jonathan Scott seeks to place English radical religious belief in the intellectual contexts of the European radical Reformation.

## THE RHETORIC OF ENTHUSIASM

In combining biographical detail and literary analysis to relate the radical beliefs expressed by writers in the 1640s and 1650s to their cultural experiences in the 1630s my approach bears some comparison with that adopted by David Norbrook in his important recent study of the republican imagination as an evolving element within the dominant culture rather than a sudden response to regicide or a counter-cultural phenomenon. Norbrook 'concentrates on writers from the elite' in order to 'trace republican elements not just on the extreme margins of pre-1649 literary culture but close to its centre'. He argues that these ' "middle of the road" republicans may not have caught the modern imagination as much as the Levellers, Diggers and radical prophets, but they deserve attention'.[26] The distinction here rests on the assumption that these more extreme radicals were unfamiliar with the intellectual and literary culture of their day. I seek to dispel this assumption and in so doing revise the critical commonplace that claims to prophetic inspiration—pejoratively termed 'enthusiasm' in the seventeenth century—were a means of escape from social, educational, and cultural disenfranchisement. According to Keith Thomas, the point about religious prophecy and inspiration is that they were 'potentially open to everyone'. For 'artisans and petty tradesmen' who lacked the education to engage in biblical exegesis or political philosophy 'prophecy was an easy way of gaining attention'. In *The Puritan Experience* (1972) Owen Watkins refers to figures such as Abiezer Coppe as 'vulgar prophets', who claimed divine inspiration because 'lacking both educational background and identification with an established denomination, they could invoke only the authority of personal experience'. Barry Reay describes the Quaker elevation of the spiritual authority of the 'inner light' above that of the Scriptures as 'the uneducated man's and woman's way of rejecting the hegemony of a learned elite'. A literary critic has recently argued that radical writers in this period adopted the 'manic' persona of the prophet in their writings because there was 'no other available language of self-authorization' for 'uneducated lay people'. In this reading the rhetoric of enthusiasm 'is a particular strategy for speaking and writing with an authority otherwise unavailable to those assigned a lowly social identity'.[27]

[26] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge, 1999), 14–15.

[27] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 177; Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London, 1972), 61; Barry Reay, 'Quakerism and Society', in McGregor and Reay

The language of these critical representations echoes that of hostile contemporary commentators such as Thomas Edwards who were 'convinced that the subversive attitudes of the unlettered and ungodly multitude could find expression in the doctrines of enthusiasm'.[28] Edwards's warnings about 'swarms' of 'all sorts of illiterate Mechanick preachers, yea of Women and Boy preachers' invading the towns of England in the continued absence of a Presbyterian Church government are evidently designed to play upon elite anxieties about the collapse of social hierarchy. 'Mechanick' and 'mechanical' were familiar terms of class distinction in early modern culture. They explicitly designated an artisan, a person who engaged in manual labour, but were pejorative in their association with the 'mean', the 'vulgar', and the uneducated. References to 'mechanicals' in Shakespeare are 'most often the embodiment of a distinct class voice, tied to the attempt to . . . distinguish high from low'— as in York's 'base dunghill villain and mechanical' in 2 *Henry VI* (I. i. 193) or Cleopatra's 'Mechanic slaves | With greasy aprons, rules and hammers' (V. ii. 209–10).[29] However, the claim in *Gangraena* that radical movements were composed of 'all sorts of Mechanicks' has been substantiated, as we have seen, by research into the social composition of the Baptists, the Levellers, the Fifth Monarchists, and the Quakers, which has found the rank and file to have come from the lower-middling sort in both urban and rural areas. There are also numerous examples of radical writing which appear to confirm the claim that enthusiasm was a means for those previously cast in the role of cultural dependants to assert their authority and autonomy. An instance of the 'Mechanick Enthusiast' frequently cited by contemporaries and critics is the cobbler Samuel How, pastor of a separatist church in pre-war London. In the posthumously published *Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning* (1640) How condemned the notion that 'knowledge of arts and sciences, diverse tongues, much reading' in any way increased a person's ability 'to understand the mind of God in his word'. The humanist curriculum had rather imported heathen corruptions into the primitive Christian faith. Study of classical languages and literature was 'the means

(eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, 141–64 (146); Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge, 1996), 28, 37, 41.

[28] J. F. McGregor, 'Seekers and Ranters', in McGregor and Reay (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, 137.

[29] Patricia Parker, '"Rude Mechanicals"', in Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (eds.), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge, 1996), 43–82 (45–7). The text used for quotations from Shakespeare is *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, Mass., 1974).

of bringing in all those abominable errors that the earth hath drunk in, both in doctrine and practice'. Indeed he declared that 'such as are taught by the Spirit, destitute of human learning, are the learned ones who truly understand the Scriptures' for 'the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3: 19)'.[30] A more flamboyant example is the London goldsmith Thomas Tany, who issued a 'Disputative challenge to the Universities of *Oxford* and *Cambridge*, and the whole Hierarch of *Roms* Clargical Priests', in which he declared: 'know I was and am the Gold-Smith, and God hath made me the refiner's fire, to refine the Gold from the dross, which is, but thus much to separate ye Priests from your trade of lies'. Tany's profession becomes symbolic of his prophetic status, so raising the divine authority of the 'mechanic' above that of the university-trained cleric. He repeatedly emphasizes that 'I am not learned in what I declare'. This lack of learning and his persecution by the authorities testify to his divinely sanctioned role as prophet and martyr: 'I am in Prison at the writing hereof, and the Prisons were always the Prophets schooles, we read true lectures in the empty walls, in our restraint, without *Baals* Books, in which ye learned Priests so much glory'. Tany has taken his 'Degrees' in spiritual learning not at Oxford and Cambridge but in 'them two Land-Colledges', Newgate and the King's Bench. Having undergone an alchemical process of spiritual transmutation which has burnt away his carnal knowledge—'the power of my God did overpower my understanding, and manhood and wisdom; which is indeed the very Devil in man'—his language ironically confounds the interpretation of the learned, providing a divine rationale for the solipsism of his prose: 'I know what I write, though it be dark unto you'.[31]

More celebrated examples of the 'Mechanick Enthusiast' are Gerrard Winstanley and George Fox. A good deal is now known about Winstanley's failed career as a cloth merchant in London in the early 1640s and his subsequent life as a corn chandler in Surrey, before prophetic visions later in the decade inspired him to identify the Fall with economic, political, legal, and educational monopolies and to establish agricultural communes which would restore men to their Edenic state of perfection.[32] For Winstanley, the 'preaching clergy, or universative

[30] The phrase 'Mechanick Enthusiast' is from Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dipt* (1645; 5th edn. 1647), sig. B3$^{v}$; Samuel How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching without Humane Learning* (1640), 12–13, 24–6.

[31] Thomas Tany, *Theauraujohn High Priest To the Jewes* (1652), in *The Writings of Thomas Tany*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London, 1988), 26–30.

[32] J. D. Alsop, 'Gerrard Winstanley: Religion and Respectability', *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), 705–9.

power' sought to monopolize scriptural interpretation and religious knowledge for their own financial gain. The minister claims superior spiritual authority by dint of his education but only to 'force people to maintain him from the earth by their labours for his sayings, by the laws of the kingly power. He says some are elected to salvation and others are reprobated; he puts some into heaven, thrusts others into hell never to come out, and so he is not a universal saviour'. The clergy strive to distinguish themselves from the common people on the grounds of their formal education because 'the light of truth that springs up out of the earth, which the scholars tread under feet, will shine so clear, as it will put out the candle of those wicked deceivers'. In line with his belief in the potential for universal salvation, Winstanley outlined a scheme for universal education in *The Law of Freedom* (1652) which has been described as exhibiting 'a kind of intuitive Baconianism'. Arguing that 'the secrets of the creation have been locked up under the traditional, parrot-like speaking from the universities and colleges for scholars', he advocated vocational training in the various manual trades and liberal education by means of discussion groups in each 'digging' commune. These forms of education were, however, merely a supplement to the spiritually pedagogic act of cultivating the land, through which all men 'may learn the inward knowledge of things which are, and find out the secrets of Nature'.[33]

Winstanley may have ended his life as a Quaker. The Quaker doctrine of the inner light or 'internalized apocalypse' developed the enthusiastic conviction that the Spirit speaks to man apart from the Word in Scripture into an enduring sectarian ideology. One of the best-known statements of the sufficiency of the Spirit's teaching comes from Fox, foremost of the early Quakers and one-time apprentice to a shoemaker and sheep grazier, in his journal entry for 1646:

> At another time, as I was walking in a field on a First-day morning, the Lord opened unto me, 'that being bred at Oxford and Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ': and I stranged at it, because it was the common belief of people. But I saw clearly, as the Lord opened it to me, and I was satisfied . . . But my relations were much troubled at me, that I would not go with them to hear the priest: for I would get into the orchard, or the fields, with my Bible, by myself . . . And I saw that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge, did not

[33] Gerrard Winstanley, *A New-Yeeres Gift for the Parliament and Armie* (1650), in *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writings in Stuart England*, ed. David Wootton (Harmondsworth, 1986), 234; Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Hill (Cambridge, 1983), 102, 351–4, 361–5; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform, 1626–1660* (London, 1975), 367–9.

qualify or fit a man to be a minister of Christ; and what then should I follow such for? So neither them, nor any of the Dissenting people, could I join with: but was as a stranger to all, relying wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

For Fox, divine revelation, or 'opening', did not end with the Apostles but was an ongoing possibility, potentially available to anyone. In 1658 he had a meeting with a representative of the Protectorate despatched to Durham to investigate the possibility of establishing 'a college there to make ministers of Christ'. Fox 'went to the man and reasoned with him and let him see that this was not the way to make them Christ's ministers by Hebrew, Greek and Latin and the seven arts which was all but the teachings of the natural man'. Fox cited the examples of Peter and John, who 'could not read letters' but 'preached the word Christ Jesus, which was in the beginning before Babel was'. He maintained that the Holy Spirit was 'the saints' teacher in the Apostles' days and so it was now'; only those who have 'the same pouring out of the Holy Ghost as the Apostles had' are possessed of religious truth, regardless of their degree of formal education.[34]

Enthusiasm evidently licenses a disruption of the ordering social principle of decorum, according to which discussion of religious matters is a function of education, ordination, and office. The claim to prophecy can be used to invert the relationship between sign and signified, between exterior power and interior glory, between formal 'human' learning and personal spiritual knowledge. For Thomas Edwards, as we have seen, the dangers of popular sectarianism and heresy were constituted in terms of gender as well as class; the collapse of both public and domestic order was exemplified by the appearance of women preachers who had rejected their subordinate place within society and the family. The opportunity for public expression granted to women by the conviction that the simple and the weak were more likely to be subject to prophetic visions has been illuminated by a considerable amount of scholarship in recent years.[35]

[34] The term 'internalized apocalypse' is taken from M. H. Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Themes and Variations', in C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 353–6 (see also G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford, 1946), 26); George Fox, *The Journal* (1694), ed. Nigel Smith (Harmondsworth, 1998), 10, 255–9.

[35] Some of the most notable studies are Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), 42–62; Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88* (London, 1988), 25–53; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 45–53; Rachael Trubowitz, 'Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England', in James Holstun (ed.), *Pamphlet Wars: Rhetoric in the English Revolution* (London, 1992), 112–33; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth Century England* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992); Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester, 1996).

The Fifth Monarchist prophet Anna Trapnell is one of the most striking examples of those women who justified their authority to speak publicly on religious and political matters by opposing revelatory experience to the academic qualifications denied to women in the period:

the creature can never learn the lesson of humiliation and self-denial, till it hath been in the School of free grace, that is, the free School where the best learning is to be had, the poor and fatherless here finds mercy . . . oh what a manner of love is this! that makes no difference between fools and learned ones, preferring ideots before the wisdom of the world, making the ignorant and erring Spirit to have the greatest understanding?

The language in which Trapnell celebrates her assurance of salvation suggests that the doctrine of 'free grace', or 'antinomianism', was felt by its adherents to provide a release not only from the guilt of sin and the bondage of religious formalism but from the Puritan tendency to regard ignorance as a sign of damnation.[36] While prominent heresiographers such as Edwards represented antinomianism as a belief in universal salvation and thus as a subversion of the Calvinist doctrine of election, free grace more usually involved an extension of Calvinist theology to its logical conclusions by denying the relevance of moral and religious law to the always-already-saved elect. Despite this retention of the Calvinist division of elect and reprobate, 'free grace had democratic implications'; for if works are irrelevant to salvation and some have been predestined to be saved whether they are sinners in this life or not, then anyone, no matter their status in society or their level of education, could be one of God's saints.[37] Both enthusiasm and antinomianism were thus potential constituents of a revolutionary ideology in that they offered immense spiritual power to those who felt themselves to be in a powerless social position. Just as free grace is fundamentally Pauline in its opposition of the dead, fleshly letter of the Mosaic law to the redeemed life of the Spirit in Christ (see e.g. Romans 7: 5–6), so an authorizing biblical text for both 'Mechanick' preachers such as Samuel How and female prophets such as Trapnell was 1 Cor. 1: 27: 'God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty'. The Pauline language of inversion and paradox provided radicals of the English revolution

[36] Anna Trapnell, *A Legacy for Saints* (1654), 15–16; John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, 1991), 143–5, 153, 250–1.

[37] David Wootton, 'Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution', in J. H. Burns (ed.), with the assistance of Mark Goldie, *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991; paperback edn. 1996), 412–42 (441); A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford, 1998), 201–6.

with divine sanction for the reversal of seventeenth-century hierarchies of social status, education, and gender that had been regarded as God-given.

Richard Coppin, an itinerant Berkshire lay preacher, also looked to Galatians 1: 12 to justify his public intervention in religion and politics: 'For I neither received it of men, neither was I taught it by men, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ'. Coppin declared that his commission to preach came from the divine presence within, not from 'Oxford and Cambridge, or the schools of Anti-Christ, by the laying on of hands of the Bishops or presbytery'. The main theme of Coppin's *Divine Teachings* (1649) is that all learning in 'so far as it is human' is false: as 'the life of a Saint is even the life of God himself' it 'cannot be said to . . . learn of, or be taught, anything but what is itself'. The elect 'Saint', in other words, is made absolutely self-sufficient by inner revelation. The 'Ranter' Abiezer Coppe, the most notorious radical prophet of the 1640s, supplied a preface to *Divine Teachings* in which he introduces this concept of the pedagogic sufficiency of the indwelling spirit. Coppe emphasizes his lowly social and educational identity but only to magnify his prophetic identity as the mouthpiece of God: 'To the (nominal) Author is given the tongue of the learned, though he knoweth not letters'.[38] These examples again seem to confirm the ascription in *Gangraena* to unlearned (though evidently literate) 'Mechanick persons' of the heretical belief that 'there is a perfect way in this life, not by Word, Sacraments, Prayer, and other Ordinances, but by the experience of the Spirit in a mans self' (i: 24). Yet while Coppin appears to have had little experience of institutional education Coppe was a star pupil at Warwick School in the early 1630s and went on to Merton and All Souls Colleges in Oxford. At one point in Coppe's first publication under his name alone, *Some Sweet Sips, of Some Spiritual Wine* (1649), he addresses at some length his former 'Cronies', the 'Scholars of Oxford' (*CRW*, 51). So Coppe had in fact attended one of Coppin's 'Schools of Anti-Christ'. As I show in Chapter 4, Coppe's knowledge of institutional education is central to the elaborate rhetorical strategies of his prose. Despite the explicit rejection of any authority but the indwelling Spirit in both *Divine Teachings* and *Some Sweet Sips, of Some Spiritual Wine*, and the similarities between their anti-intellectual, anti-formalist language and argument, Coppe structures his polemic around a sophisticated parody of his experience of being taught Latin

[38] Richard Coppin, *Truths Testimony and a Testimony of Truths Appearing* (1655), 16; Coppin, *Divine Teachings* (1649; 2nd edn. 1653), 16, 19, 22–3; Abiezer Coppe, 'An Additional and Preambular Hint' to Coppin, *Divine Teachings*, in *CRW*, 74.

grammar which provides a stark contrast to the plain, scriptural style of the formally uneducated Coppin.

The rhetoric of enthusiasm as manifest in the prophetic texts discussed in this book emerges less as a discursive escape from educational and cultural disempowerment than a complex, allusive, and exuberant satirical mode which has affinities with the ludic 'folly' tradition of Erasmian humanism. The 'popular' language of prophetic inspiration is fused with the 'elite' language of humanist play. More confusingly, the claim of ignorance is combined with the display of learning. As I explain in Chapter 2, this apparently contradictory construction of discursive identity may be explained by locating radical strategies of self-representation in relation to long-established cultural stereotypes of the heretic that were circulating in print in the 1640s. The radical fusion of popular and elite languages that I identify in these writings may be contrary to expectation but it bears comparison with the notion of 'bricolage' that has been used to illuminate the nature of radical belief and expression in England in the aftermath of the French revolution. In his study of William Blake and the culture of radicalism in the 1790s Jon Mee shows how Blake, in common with other 'radical bricoleurs' of his time, combines 'elements from across discourse boundaries such that the antecedent discourses are fundamentally altered in the process'. While these seemingly disparate rhetorical resources 'might seem to the modern reader to be mutually exclusive', they are fused to effect the 'disruption and transformation of hegemonic discourses'. This breaking down of cultural authority facilitates the creation of 'new languages of liberation'.[39] The subversive rhetorical strategies identified by Mee are also evident in the radical writing of the English revolution—even if liberation for the religious radicals of this earlier period is mostly defined in terms of greater obedience to the will of God.[40] Yet where Mee finds bricolage to be typical in the 1790s of 'artisan radicals' and those 'barred from orthodox channels of knowledge and its transmission', in the 1640s and 1650s it seems to be more characteristic of those who had previously passed through those orthodox channels. Effective parody depends, after all, on familiarity with the forms of language and behaviour which are the object of ridicule or subversion.

The interaction of popular and elite in the radical culture of the English

[39] Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford, 1992), 8–10.

[40] A point strongly made in J. C. Davis, 'Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution', *Historical Journal*, 35 (1992), 501–30.

revolution was evidently not a purely textual phenomenon. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, Abiezer Coppe's preface to Richard Coppin's *Divine Teachings* indicates that individuals from different cultural backgrounds moved in the same social milieu, held similar opinions, and must therefore have influenced the development of each others' religious and political beliefs. While this study is primarily concerned with the textual expression of radical belief, its findings suggest that more historical work needs to be done on how radicalism flourished in the social interface between the learned and the merely literate. Chapter 5, for instance, concentrates on the rejection of the Bible as a rule of faith by Samuel Fisher, one of the few early Quakers with a university education. Yet the intellectual basis on which Fisher sets Quaker belief will be shown to illuminate the nature of that belief as it was expressed by 'mechanick' Quakers who also ventured into print. Nigel Smith has previously shown how translations of mystical, occult, and Neoplatonic texts circulated in unlearned lay culture in the mid-seventeenth century. The translators of these texts were necessarily educated men: John Everard, who had a doctorate in divinity from Clare College, Cambridge, explicitly sought to disseminate spiritualist ideas and beliefs associated with the radical Reformation amongst '*Tinkers, Cobblers, Weavers, Poor sleight Fellows*'.[41] Everard, who died in 1641, caused problems for the Caroline authorities because heresies espoused by 'a scholar of [his] undeniable achievement could not be dismissed so easily' as those spread by 'ill-bred laymen'.[42] The example of the Elizabethan separatist Churches provides a model of how religious dissent had previously developed in early modern England in a situation where university graduates interacted with the middling sort. The rank and file separatists were merchants, craftsmen, and artisans. The separatist leadership was 'provided very largely by the University of Cambridge'. From the pen of men such as Robert Browne and Henry Barrow came attacks on the forms of grammar, rhetoric, and logic in which they themselves had been trained.[43]

The culture of radicalism in the English revolution encompassed the perspectives not only of artisans such as Richard Coppin, Gerrard Winstanley, and George Fox, but of university men such as John Biddle,

[41] Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, chs. 3–5; John Everard, *The Gospel-Treasury Opened*, 2 pts. (1657), i: 86.

[42] T. Wilson Hayes, 'John Everard and the Familist Tradition', in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob (eds.), *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London, 1984), 60–9 (66).

[43] Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), 72–4 (72); Robert Browne, *A Treatise upon the 23. of Matthewe* (Middelburg, 1582), 182–9.

the antitrinitarian often cited to illustrate the limits of Cromwellian toleration. Biddle had briefly been a fellow at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, after taking his MA at the College in 1641; in 1634 he had published verse translations of Virgil's *Eclogues* and Juvenal's *Satires*. Biddle put his skill in Latin to heterodox use after the regicide. He was behind the 1652 translation from the Latin of the antitrinitarian *Racovian Catechism*—the translation seems to have been licensed by Milton and was then suppressed by Parliament—and worked on the proofs of a new edition of the Septuagint Bible while in prison awaiting sentence for refusing to recant his views.[44] The diversity of educational and cultural background amongst the radicals of the English revolution substantiates Roger Chartier's rejection of the assumption that 'it is possible to establish exclusive relationships between specific cultural forms and particular social groups'. This assumption, Chartier believes, leads scholars to work deductively rather than inductively; to mould the evidence to fit certain predefined notions of cultural division.[45] One charge that might be made against my method in this book is that I myself in acting as heresiographer valorize those with education and culture and exclude the many unlettered men and women amongst the clamour of radical voices during the 1640s and 1650s. My point though is not to conclude that the 'Ranter' Laurence Clarkson is a less interesting writer than the 'Ranter' Abiezer Coppe because Coppe went to Oxford and his writings satirize humanist pedagogy while Clarkson was a tailor whose early pamphlets display a shaky literacy. My point is that to treat Coppe as if he were Clarkson is to do a disservice to them both and to impede our appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the English radical imagination.

[44] On Biddle's authorship of the translation see H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford, 1951), 193; on the issues surrounding its licensing, possibly by Milton, see Stephen B. Dobranski, 'Licensing Milton's Heresy', in Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (eds.), *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge, 1998), 139–58.

[45] Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia C. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 3; see also Chartier, *Cultural History*, 30.