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**Review Essay: A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640***

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"what" of history than to the "why." Critics, meanwhile, will find many insights into the coteries, patronage, and changing conventions of a rapidly changing age.

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A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640*, Methuen, 1985.

Did an Elizabethan underworld exist, and, if so, what was its nature, what its extent? Who were the Tudor and Stuart vagabonds; what were their reasons for "maundering"? What was the attitude of mainstream society about the problem of rootlessness, and what measures were taken to curb it? Answers to these questions are to be found in this brief, lucidly written volume. Such answers, valuable in themselves, also help to explain why Shakespeare included the swindling chapman Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* and how the Restoration author Anne Finch could devote a poem, "Fanscomb Barn," to a sham cripple and his female traveling companion.

Beier's method is twofold. First, he analyzes arrest records from parishes and relies on what is already established about demographic and economic trends of the period. Second, he gives life to this material by interweaving interpretation drawn from depositions taken by justices of the peace. He concludes that fluctuations in market conditions along with changes in the economic bases of English life created widespread unemployment from the time of Henry VII until the Restoration, the hardest times occurring between 1560 and 1640. "If masterless men have modern counterparts, they are the unemployed of the Great Depression of the 1930s, or the jobless millions of today's inner cities." Men, mostly young, wandered looking for work. Women and often children joined them.

No portrait does justice to the variety of people on the road. The Irish fled wars elsewhere. Tinkers and chapmen plied trades which were proscribed without much reason. Pregnant girls, soldiers released from service, and itinerant radical preachers swelled the ranks. Many became professional beggars, aware that begging paid more than day labor. The attempt to regulate such beggars through passports merely bolstered a thriving industry in counterfeit papers. Criminals prowled the highways, both the lowly "footpads" carrying cudgels and the more gentlemanly, mounted "high lawyers."

Until the birthrate fell off and the demand for labor increased, few of the solutions attempting to stem the tide of tramps had much effect. Summary justice fell into the hands of local authorities, who applied the

non-solution of whipping transients and sending them on to the next town. An alternative of bribing them to leave was applied willy-nilly often at the same locations where whippings took place. Workhouses were proposed, and Bridewell came into existence. Along with similar institutions around the country it was less an employment scheme and more a system for retribution. Its alternative, transportation to Virginia and elsewhere, resulted in countless deaths of children and young adults.

Was there, then, an Elizabethan underworld as was made famous by Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker, and others? Yes, but only as a small part of a larger phenomenon of poverty and unsettled life. What of Shakespeare's sly balladmonger? He is at once a breath of fresh air in the stifling authoritarian atmosphere of early Stuart England and a dangerous atavistic force, even as was the case on both accounts with so many masterless men. And "Fanscomb Barn"? It celebrates the period as a rosy past, a past like that evoked today by the songs of Woody Guthrie.

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Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

In their introduction to this highly readable volume of eighteen essays, the editors challenge present male-dominated, elitist views of the Renaissance. Because they believe that socio-economic topics ought to be included in Renaissance studies, they advocate adopting the name Early Modern for the period from roughly 1450 to 1700. Using a Marxist approach, they argue that the development of centrally administered nation states, changes in family structure, and the growth of the early capitalism that caused the mid-seventeenth-century "bourgeois" revolution, more closely link this period to the modern world than to the medieval or ancient worlds.

Most readers will find the goal of rewriting the Renaissance laudable although many will reject this methodology. This disagreement should not discourage them from reading these essays, some of which contain information that contradicts the editors' remarks. In Stephen Orgel's study of Prospero's Wife, which uses a Freudian paradigm to explore parental-child relationships in *The Tempest*, readers are confronted with Caliban, the monster child of the witch Sycorax. Even if Shakespeare did not believe that witches coupled with the devil and gave birth to monsters, many in his audiences believed this superstition. Historians relying upon anthropological