

Introduction

The Silk-Weavers' Song

Silence mou'd to pittie,
Sy, wherefore vndon:

Shep[herd]. Wayling for a City,
Woeful London.

—HENRY PETOWE (1604)

“CAST OUT YOUR DEAD!”

Sometime in late August 1603, Mary Black of St. Olave's parish in Southwark started showing signs of the plague: a fever and maybe a blister at first or a swelling around the neck, armpit, or groin. Probably within a day she felt joint pain, nausea, and delirium. Sores were soon visible, and the swelling would have grown to the size of a chicken egg until it burst, tearing the skin in a painful wound.¹ By August 29 she was dead.² Mary Black may have been the ten-year-old daughter of Nicholas Black, also of St. Olave's.³ At the time she was an apprentice to the silk-weaver William Muggins, who had lived in the parish since 1598.⁴ She had been learning lacemaking, buttonmaking, and silkthrowing.⁵ Her training was cut painfully short by the

plague. Like several of their neighbors in St. Olave's parish, the Muggins household was quarantined as soon as it was found that one of its members had been infected.

Shortly before Mary Black's death, one of Muggins's other apprentices, Robert Redman, also began showing signs of infection. Four days after Black's burial, Redman, too, was laid out on the street to be found by the parish's searchers, two older women whose job it was "to be viewers of the boddies of such as shall dye in tyme of Infeccon."⁶ They were followed by the parish's bearers, two men who made daily rounds traditionally crying "Cast out your dead" as they approached to cart away the corpses.⁷ A mix of grief and dread overshadowed the household as one after another showed signs of the plague.⁸ A week later William Muggins's eldest daughter, Elizabeth, had also been taken by the plague. Two days after that another apprentice, Henry Beste, also died.

Muggins's wife had just given birth. In an era with a high mortality rate for new mothers and their infants, would she or the newborn be infected? Would the other children in the household catch the plague? How would the family sustain themselves under quarantine? What would happen to the household if Muggins himself fell ill? It was in this setting, in September or early October with the plague deaths mounting outside, that William Muggins, unable to leave his home, first sat down to write *London's Mourning Garment*, a pamphlet dedicated to alderman and sheriff of London Sir John Swinnerton. The dedication was followed by a twenty-page poem, a plague prayer, and a table of the dead organized by parish up through November 17. The cover of the pamphlet featured a printer's device, the image of a scale balanced on an hourglass atop a winged skull with a cross formed out of a bone and a scythe. Judgment, time, death—the woodcut deployed the stock imagery of the *memento mori* tradition. Beneath this was carved "NON PLVS," Latin for "no more." As perfect as the image is for a plague pamphlet, it was not made especially for *London's Mourning Garment*. Rather, it had been used on numerous pamphlets printed for bookseller William Barley: a 1592 reprint of Edward Webbe's travel narrative *The Rare and Most Wonderfull Things Which Edward Webbe an Englishman Borne, Hath Seene and Passed in His Troublesome Trauailles*; a 1595 sermon (or revision of a sermon) titled *A Salade for the Simple. Gathered out of the Fourth Verse of the First Chapter of the Proverbes of Salomon*; and a translation of the French romance *The Delig[h]tful History of Celestina the Faire*, among others.⁹ The device at one

point included Barley's initials beneath the motto "NON PLVS," but the letters "W B" were apparently effaced when the device was transferred to another printer. Of all the death's head device's uses, however, *London's Mourning Garment* seems to have been its most perfect fit. In part the pamphlet argues that Londoners were terrifyingly indifferent to the tragedies that surrounded them; the woodcut called out to its viewers to remind them of the frailty of all human life and their own mortality in the time of plague.

Described by Rebecca Totaro as "one of the first brief plague epics in English," Muggins's ninety-seven-stanza poem presents a female personification of London as spokesperson for the plight of Londoners.¹⁰ As Paul Gleed has demonstrated, gendered personifications of London typically resulted in sexualized extremes: thus in 1543 Henry Howard declared London to be a "shameless whore," while in 1580 Thomas Churchyard took the opposite view, depicting London as "a maiden town that keeps herself so clean."¹¹ But Muggins's London defines herself in the first person. The closest the poem gets to a sexualized personification occurs in a description of the excitement around King James's anticipated coronation and royal entry to the city. London compares herself to "a Bryde against her nuptiall day" with James as the metaphorical groom, but the plague intervenes, postponing the monarch's entry to the city. London then describes herself as "poore London" and "helplesse Lady" (sigs. B1r, line 8; B1v, line 29; B2r, line 85).¹² As the title *London's Mourning Garment* suggests, the London of Muggins's poem is a woman in mourning dress, an eyewitness to the loss of lives and livelihoods during the plague.¹³

Muggins's poem is especially concerned with the plight of London's laboring class, those vulnerable not only to the plague but also to the smallest of fluctuations in the city's economy. While writers like Ben Jonson maintained their membership in one of London's livery companies, very few actually labored in a handicraft. This book charts Muggins's unique perspective as a poet of London's laboring class. While the plague prompted Muggins to write *London's Mourning Garment*, the pamphlet is also very much about the experience of London's poor workers confronting the indifference of the city's elite and surviving the frustrations of debt, as well as facing the terrors of the plague. In addition to deploying a female London as spokesperson, Muggins's poem is especially concerned with women. The poem describes the joys and pains of childbirth and childcare, the education of young women, the work women do, the sacrifices they make. Moreover,

in the middle of the poem, several impoverished women describe their economic distress.

The plague of 1603 ravaged London. Although the city was rarely completely free of the plague, the growth in population in and around London, the additional throngs of people arriving to view the arrival of the new king, and the heat of the summer conspired to make this wave of plague deaths particularly bad. Although bills of mortality retroactively counted the plague deaths from December 1602, it was not until March that people seemed especially concerned with the epidemic. In that month a spy using the alias Antony Rivers wrote, “The Plaugue begynneth in the citye and suburbs, especially in Southwark,” on the south bank of the Thames where Muggins lived. Before moving onto other matters, the letter explained, “It is feared this next yeare will prove very contagious.”¹⁴ A few weeks later, the plague deaths had been noted by the Court of Aldermen, who began to take action to provide for the afflicted.¹⁵

The city had been busy preparing for the festivities surrounding the coronation of King James I, a welcome change from the public mourning for Queen Elizabeth’s passing in late March. Scaffolds and decorations for various pageants had been prepared throughout the city. Preacher James Godskall asserted that the plague had truly struck London in early May, “when all things did flourish in the Countrey, and in the Citie, when we were merrie as the sonnes of the world, marrying, feasting, building, and erecting our armes trivmphant, when we lesse expected it, which hath turned also our joy into sorrow.”¹⁶ The incongruence of the plague’s intrusion on the preparations for celebrations was noted by several Londoners. Thomas Dekker surmised, “Behold, that miracle-worker, who in one minute turnd our generall mourning [for the passing of Queen Elizabeth] to a general mirth [for the coronation of King James], does now againe in a moment alter that gladnes to shrikes and lamentation.”¹⁷ Poet John Hanson, expressing a similar shock at the rapid changes in circumstances for the city, described the city’s change in fortune as “Londons late lamentable heroicall comi-tragedie” and succinctly dubbed time “a turne-coate.”¹⁸

The miseries of the plague lasted much longer than did the lamentations for the dead monarch or the planned huzzahs for the new one, however. The plague did not subside until December 1603. James held his coronation at Windsor and did not conduct the traditional royal entry to the city until the following year. By that time the epidemic had resulted in the death of

one in every five Londoners. There is no question that the plague threatened everyone in the city, but the ratio of one in five can be deceiving. Those with means fled the city. And wealthier parishes of the city, because they were less densely populated, experienced a far lower rate of plague deaths than did their poorer, more densely populated counterparts.¹⁹ For instance, for the two-week span beginning July 21 and ending August 4, 1603, the wealthy parish of St. Mary le Bow buried four people, three of the plague. In the previous five years for the same span of weeks, the church only buried two people in total, and none in the three years just prior to the plague.²⁰ Similarly, St. Benet Gracechurch saw no burials during the weeks of July 21 through August 4 in 1598, 1599, and 1601, and just one burial each in 1600 and 1602. For those same weeks the bills of mortality in 1603 recorded three burials at St. Benet's, but only one of the plague.²¹ Wealthy parishes saw a considerable spike in deaths during the plague, but not the decimation of the population other parishes experienced.

In the poor and crowded parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate, the numbers are more striking. From 1598 to 1602 the parish averaged fourteen burials during the late July through early August span. In 1603, the same fourteen days involved a staggering 333 burials, 248 of the plague.²² Whereas the wealthier parishes experienced a three- to four-fold increase in burials, St. Giles witnessed a twenty-three-fold increase in deaths. A similar story can be discerned in the even harder-hit parish where Mary Black and William Muggins lived and worked. Whereas in the previous five years St. Olave's in Southwark buried an average of 11.8 people between July 21 and August 4, during the same two-week stretch in 1603 the parish experienced a thirty-four-fold increase in burials—401 deaths, 377 of the plague.²³ While one in five Londoners died of the plague in 1603, the disease disproportionately affected the poorer sort in the city.

As the numbers suggest, non-plague deaths also increased during the plague of 1603. St. Giles reported an unusual eighty-five non-plague deaths from July 21 to August 4, 1603. This is not an anomaly. The next week St. Giles reported fifty non-plague deaths, and the week after that forty-three. St. Olave's seems to have held a narrower gap between plague and non-plague deaths. From July 21 to August 4 the parish counted twenty-four non-plague deaths, considerably lower than St. Giles's, but still twice the average of the previous five years for the parish. Some of these deaths may have had to do with comorbidities or deficient assessment of the cause of death, but many

were probably due to the breakdown in poor relief and informal networks of support for the most vulnerable in the parish.²⁴

Parishes like St. Giles and St. Olave's were overwhelmed with burials and care for the poor and quarantined. Each afternoon bearers and searchers would pass through the streets of their respective parishes. In St. Olave's they did not always have the time or energy to track down even the names of all the dead: here and there throughout the pages of the parish's register one finds blanks where the names of the deceased should be; on September 10 the clerk listed, a little below Muggins's apprentice Henry Beste's name, what he could quickly obtain of the nameless: two listings for "_____ of Robt. Parker."²⁵ These were presumably children or apprentices of Robert Parker, but their names were too difficult to come by in neighborhoods where so many people were shunning contagion or shut up in their homes under quarantine.

Households like Parker's and Muggins's were devastated. The loss of family members, often children, was painful enough, but they would face significant economic hardships as well. Merchants were reluctant to trade in the city for fear of infection. The plague orders demanded that any household infected by the plague self-quarantine for six weeks. The family's economic activity would be brought to a halt, and members of the household would have to rely on the parish's fund of poor relief for sustenance. Week after week saw the piling of corpses on the streets to be collected by the bearers and duly recorded in the parish register. By December 22, 1603, Muggins's parish of St. Olave's had buried 2,383 victims of the plague, more than any other parish in or around London.

The magnitude of the plague and the personal losses at home must have weighed heavily on William Muggins. Neighbors, friends, members of his own household, even his daughter—all endured gruesome, agonizing deaths. The terror of the plague was most keenly felt at the level of the individual household, where the course of the illness was observed up close, where family members required care despite fear of contagion, where none could look away or flee for open air.²⁶ Foreign merchants brought trade to a standstill as they refused to load their ships with goods from the infected city. Many among the wealthy, who might make significant contributions to poor relief, facilitate charity, or help maintain order, had fled the pestilence. The sick and the poor were left in desperation. What could an individual householder like William Muggins do? *London's Mourning Garment* attests

to a profound sense of helpless isolation, a search for fellow mourners and some form of practical action to aid himself and his neighbors. Muggins reread parts of the Bible to compose the prayer included in *London's Mourning Garment*, and he almost certainly rehearsed his prayer at home with his surviving family members. What emotions might have coursed through them as William Muggins began: "O LORD God Almightye, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, we miserable distressed creatures, wounded with the multitude of our grievous sins, repayre vnto thee (the Phisition of our soules) for Balme to cure our Sores" (sig. D3r)?

The poem, however, dominates the pamphlet. It begins with a description of London weeping and a command that "London lament." It is here that the poem announces its epic aspirations: London declares that even Homer could not properly recount the city's tragic fall from fame and prosperity to plague and poverty (sig. B1r, lines 5–7).²⁷ The poem may be usefully broken down into several parts: London describes her former state of plenty until "Vnwelcome death" intrudes (stanzas 1–8). London then seeks fellow mourners but at first finds that Londoners are largely indifferent to the suffering of their neighbors and friends; many even attempt to take advantage of the crisis by swindling orphans and widows (stanzas 9–15). London then seeks parents and singles out mothers in particular, appealing to their shared experience of childbirth (stanzas 16–39). Prompting their tears anew, London invites the mothers to describe their troubles. A mother mourns the death of her children; an elderly widow bemoans the losses that have rendered her homeless; a young widow worries about how she will make ends meet (stanzas 40–59). London then recounts again her former fame in terms of an Icarus-like hubris. For this reason, she argues, the plague hurts all stations of life, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the sinner and the godly (stanzas 60–76). Of all those afflicted by the plague, London laments the plight of the poor, and listens in on a family worrying about poverty and crushing debt as fears of contagion cause trade to stagnate (stanzas 77–83). Having given voice to mourning mothers and widows and the family in debt, London turns to the city's authorities to demand reforms that she says will bring an end to the plague, a new spiritual and economic covenant to alleviate suffering and appease God (stanzas 84–96). The final stanza presents a vision of King James's long-awaited entry to the city, signaling an end to the plague and the fulfillment of all London has demanded for the city's renewal.

London's concern with mothers and dying children leads Totaro to dub the speaker of Muggins's epic "Mother London" grieving the losses of her "citizen-children."²⁸ Although London never explicitly describes her inhabitants as her offspring, the concern she shows for them is certainly maternal (even as she describes herself as virgin bride or forlorn lady). This image of London as mother appears to have been influential. By 1612, Thomas Middleton's lord mayor's show, *The Triumph of Truth*, performed in honor of the new mayor, Sir Thomas Middleton of the Grocers' Company, begins with a song for London noting that the new mayor had not yet arrived:

Mother of many honorable sons,
Think not the glass too slowly runs
That in Time's hand is set,
Because thy worthy son appears not yet.²⁹

After the song, Middleton explains that "a grave feminine shape presents itself, from behind a silk curtain, representing *London*, attired like a reverend mother, a long white hair naturally flowing on either side of her; on her head a model of steeples and turrets, her habit crimson silk, near to the honourable garment of the city; her left hand holding a key of gold" (lines 117–23). With the city's skyline for a crown, Middleton's London asks that her auditors not "esteem / My words the less, 'cause I a woman speak, / A woman's counsel is not always weak" (lines 128–30). Like Muggins's London, Middleton's recites her bountiful wealth, laments the neglect and indifference of some, and proceeds to advise the new mayor. Muggins's London is more radical and less apologetic, however, insisting that the wealthy give to the poor, that magistrates develop economic policies to ensure the livelihoods of laborers, and that the city's civic leaders fulfill their oaths of office. This, she argues, is the only way to ameliorate God's wrath, the presumed cause of plague.

As Middleton's pageant suggests, there was something audacious about a woman, even an allegorical woman, advising men on how to govern. Patricia Phillippy, who wrote the first extended analysis of *London's Mourning Garment*, notes the disruptive power of maternal mourning, its ability to challenge conventions of masculine control and to rebuke the wrongdoing of male rulers.³⁰ A lowly silk-weaver's advice to magistrates similarly ran the risk of appearing subversive. As Sir Thomas Smith put it in *De Republica*

Anglorum (1583), “The fourth sort or classe amongst vs, is of those which the olde Romans called *capite censii proletarii* or *operae*, day labourers, poore husbandmen, yea marchantes or retailers which haue no free lande, copiholders, and all artificers, as Taylers, Shoemakers, Carpenters, Brickemakers, Bricklayers, Masons, &c. These haue no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth, and no account is made of them but onelie to be ruled, not to rule other.”³¹ For Smith, weavers and others of the laboring class should be politically mute. Although out of necessity they might serve as constables or churchwardens, for Smith they had no right to tell the authorities about policies or how to implement them. Smith was describing the governance of the commonwealth as a whole, but the attitude he expresses regarding those who worked with their hands was often true of civic office as well. London’s aldermen and mayors were drawn from the elite members of the Twelve Great Companies of London; all were wealthy merchants or retailers, men “of some substance” as Smith would have it, and as a matter of course, each mayor was elevated to the status of knight.³² Muggins was not among the elite of his company, and in any case, his company, the Worshipful Company of Weavers, was not among the Twelve Great Companies of the city. The preeminence of the powerful men of the Twelve Great Companies is depicted in Anthony Munday’s 1615 lord mayor’s show, which featured the “Monument of London and her twelue Daughters,” with each daughter representing one of the twelve powerful guilds or livery companies.³³ If this “Mother London” had any other daughters, they were clearly not important enough to be part of the symbolic fanfare for the mayor’s show. Although the mayor’s shows sometimes valorized labor, they also replicated Smith’s sense that some of the poorer crafts ought to be passive spectators rather than active participants.³⁴

In comparison, *London’s Mourning Garment* evinces its own peculiar radicalism, but Muggins does not seem focused on disrupting the whole structure of society. His was not a world to be turned upside down. Rather, amid rapid economic changes, Muggins wanted to stabilize and restore the world as he imagined it was supposed to work. In a 1595 co-authored petition and in his 1603 pamphlet, Muggins argues that early modern society had lost its way, that the balance of justice needed to be recalibrated, not toppled over. He sought not a classless society but instead a delicate reciprocity, a finely tuned Christian commonwealth resistant to acquisitive impulses and oligarchical control. Part of the value of an intensive study of

London's Mourning Garment is the way it sheds light on how London's struggling members of the middling sort saw the economic and social changes around them, and how the experience of the plague made problems already inherent in early modern society more visible and more sharply felt.

Muggins had experienced breakdowns in the system. Discussed in greater detail in chapter 1, the 1595 petition he had a hand in composing complained that his own livery company had failed to enforce its regulations, making it difficult for struggling silk-weavers to compete in the marketplace. Although Muggins's household appears to have been productive, by October 1595 his debts were such that he was forced to appear in court before Chief Justice Edmund Anderson. Chapter 2 deals with this episode and its expression in *London's Mourning Garment* in greater detail, but the court ordered that a team of "witnesses," nearby citizens, compile an inventory of Muggins's household goods. The inventory includes the tools and raw material of Muggins's craft—looms, needles, pins, bolts of silk thread; and the finished products—various types of lace and ribbon, gloves, girdles, and garters, all assessed for their resale value.³⁵ The inventory also lists "fyve dozen & x paire of playinge cardes" and on the next line "iij dozen & a half of playing cards," in all estimated as worth twenty-seven shillings.³⁶ It would seem that Muggins's household sold playing cards as a side business, as the number of cards makes no sense for personal use. Further in one finds the household stuff, bedding, chairs, a Bible, and "sev[er]all english printyd Bokes." Much of this, especially the more valuable items, would be sold by the state to pay off Muggins's debt.

Following the language of the period, most historians would categorize Muggins as part of "the middling sort."³⁷ Primarily an urban category, according to one contemporary account in accord with Smith, this "sort" comprised "the moste part of Retaylors, and all artificers" who were by and large "neither too rich nor too poore but doe live in the mediocritie."³⁸ The men who assessed the goods in Muggins's household were all of the middling sort. Among them was a grocer, an innkeeper, a skinner, a plasterer, and a mercer. Their wealth varied dramatically. In the tax known as the lay subsidy of 1599, grocer David Floud was assessed at four times the wealth of his fellow witness, innkeeper James Leather; and one of the men who compiled Muggins's inventory does not appear in the subsidy at all, presumably because his household's worth was below the threshold of three pounds. It is not clear if these men would have categorized themselves as of the middling

sort, but there is a value in the term “middling” in that the gerund form emphasizes that people like Muggins had a less than static, secure place in London’s turbulent economy: a craftsman could make a very good living, just get by, or slip into the ranks of the dispossessed.

The term “middling sort,” while current in the period, is an imperfect replacement for class, however. Lumping together extremely wealthy merchants with impoverished craftsmen, the term always risks occluding meaningful differences that class analysis seeks to emphasize. The language of estates and sorts rather than class has been upheld in the name of a pure historicism that seeks to examine the past on its own terms. But, as Keith Wrightson has pointed out, since the tracts about sorts and estates are almost always written by and for elites, this historicism lends itself to an almost exclusively ruling-class understanding of society.³⁹ Clearly, the wealthiest in early modern England preferred to present their society as an orderly one that naturalized exploitation or rendered it indistinguishable from matters of family and status. It is no coincidence that this period saw an increasing alliance between the gentry and the wealthiest of the middling sort, with these groups clearly recognizing shared interests, the foundation of a class consciousness.⁴⁰ Yet Muggins’s participation in the 1595 petition and his subsequent 1603 pamphlet suggest that Smith’s “*proletarii*,” too, had developed a class consciousness, a sense that people in similar economic predicaments might band together to improve their condition.

In the passage by Smith cited above, the author equates “sort,” “classe,” and “*proletarii*” in rapid succession.⁴¹ Smith, at least, saw Elizabethan sorts as synonymous with classes, and while one might allege that he did not mean class in the Marxist sense, he did see artisans as the contemporary version of the Latin word Marx would seize on, “proletarians.” Evident from the number of looms counted in the inventory of his household, Muggins employed not only apprentices but one or two journeymen weavers as well. While Muggins’s status as an employer of others complicates a simple view of his class, silk-weavers themselves were beholden to silk-merchants who commissioned their work and controlled the supply and price of the weavers’ raw materials. As with the members of the commonalty discussed by David Rollison, silk-weavers like Muggins had every reason to feel a degree of class resentment for the wealthy who exerted so much influence over the markets and laws of the city as well as country as a whole.⁴² It should be clear in the chapters that follow that Muggins identified less with wealthy

retailers and merchants and more with the laboring class of which he was a definite part. Indeed, in all periods the exploiters and the exploited display a practical knowledge of class consciousness with the potential for oppressive alliances or revolutionary praxis.⁴³

Smith's description of "the fourth sort" as having "no voice" suggests a significant problem for the study of the middling sort: If they have no voice, what traces could they have left in the historical record? Indeed, in her study of Star Chamber cases, Hillary Taylor argues that even when the poor were called to testify, fear of reprisal from the elite and wealthy tended to silence or distort their statements.⁴⁴ Some recent case studies—like those contained in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson's *A Day at Home in Early Modern England* and Robert Tittler's *Townsppeople and Nation*—have helped redress this problem, especially in studies of the upper echelon of the middling sort.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Alexandra Shepard and Paul Griffiths have offered exciting research on the poorer sort as they presented themselves before the authorities.⁴⁶ One of the goals of this book is to highlight how at least one member of the poorer end of the middling sort, poet and silk-weaver William Muggins, saw early modern society and his place in it in a variety of contexts—not only before authorities but also among his peers and as he presented himself in print. This study thus redresses a significant dearth of knowledge about how the poorer end of the middling sort conceived of themselves and their society.

In a petition from 1595, Muggins counted himself among the "Freemen of the Cittye and the Yeomanry of the Company of distressed Weavers."⁴⁷ Freemen of the city had the right to practice their trades independently, sell their own wares on the open market, and employ apprentices and journeymen. There were two paths to gaining the freedom of the city: one earned it through an apprenticeship in the city, or one inherited it from one's father who had been a freeman of the city and enjoyed good standing with his livery company.⁴⁸ Because most of the apprenticeship records of the London Weavers' Company were lost in the fire of 1666, it is not known how Muggins obtained the freedom of the city. The petition he signed and helped draft describes the freeman as "he whoe was brought up in the Cittye, served many yeares to have the pryviledge thereof, who is alsoe sworne to all manner of Charges, who payes all dutyes belonginge to a Subject."⁴⁹ Given the petition's definition of a freeman of the city, it seems likely that Muggins had served an apprenticeship somewhere in London.

That Muggins counted himself among “the distressed” highlights the precarious position of craftsmen in the city. Some experienced financial stability or even upward mobility, but most were especially vulnerable to inflation, market fluctuations, and the economic fallout of natural disasters like the plague. Simply adding a child to the household might severely strain the household’s resources, as it introduced a new mouth to feed and limited the mother’s economic contributions for a time. The inventory of Muggins’s home, after all, was occasioned by a suit for unpaid debt. With several children to feed, Muggins was often on the brink of abject poverty.

Like the ruling-class pamphlets on the organization of early modern society, in *London’s Mourning Garment* Muggins describes society as organized by “degrees” or “States.” At the bottom of Muggins’s organization was the “poorest begger” and, toward the top, “the wealthiest Squire” (sig. C3v, line 454). In between Muggins enumerates artisans, tradesmen, and merchants. This is in line with *De Republica Anglorum*’s schema, but the very fact of writing a plague pamphlet, of dedicating it to an alderman, of inserting himself in the public discourse, gives the lie to Smith’s notion of a voiceless and politically passive “fourth sort.” Indeed, men and women of the poorer end of the middling sort are central to Muggins’s portrait of the city.

It is Muggins’s status as a poor craftsman, after all, that allows for the insights offered in the poem. The mothers who mourn in *London’s Mourning Garment* are destitute—one faces homelessness while another worries about being forced into prostitution. The family in debt must pawn clothing to survive the economic crisis that accompanied the plague. Like her sympathies, Muggins’s personified London makes demands that are aimed at helping workers and those too old to work. The radical, polyvocal poem is in many respects a petition in verse form, a plea that those in power attend to the needs of those who make their lives possible. Moreover, the poem presents the voices of precisely those marginalized in London’s political discourse: women and the poor. In 1595 Muggins sought to speak narrowly on behalf of his fellow “distressed weavers.” By 1603 he had expanded his view, writing his London as a spokesperson “For such as worke and take exceeding care,” those preyed on by pawnbrokers or simply impoverished by the economic disaster that came with the plague. From 1595 to 1603, from his immediate economic situation to the broader situation of the working poor in London, then, one can see the development of something very much like class consciousness in Muggins’s writing. The paratexts of *London’s Mourning*

Garment—a dedication to the sheriff at the outset, and an official-looking table of the dead in each parish at the end—might in part have functioned as ways of mitigating some of the pamphlet’s potentially seditious edge. They lend an appearance of authority to the silk-weaver’s politically charged plague poem.

This book is about *London’s Mourning Garment* and its author, his social network, and the cultural and material forces that informed his minor epic. His social network included members of the Weavers Company, writers, printers, preachers, and neighbors. Some, like Swinnerton and a few wealthy grocers, were well-to-do and elite, but for the most part Muggins associated with men and women of his social and economic station. The chapters that follow look at the conditions of Muggins’s life, the problems he faced, and how he translated these into poetry that sought not only to reflect but also to change those conditions. More often than not, literary scholarship on early modern England’s laborers—craftsmen and -women, peasants, and day laborers—has relied on representations mediated by members of the ruling class or those patronized by them. But a huge chasm exists between the way farmers thought about their lives and the representation of rustics in Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, for example. Even stage representations were often necessarily caught up in appealing in part to the conventions expected by high-paying audience members and the powerful patrons who lent their names to the various London theater companies.⁵⁰ *London’s Mourning Garment*, on the other hand, affords readers a street-level view of early modern London as represented by a member of the poor end of the middling sort. The pamphlet was certainly subject to its own conventions and distortions—no text can offer an unmediated and comprehensive view of the past—but the radically different perspective offered by *London’s Mourning Garment* is important in supplementing the statistical work of social historians and complicating our necessarily fragmented understanding of life and literature in the early modern world.⁵¹ This book follows Muggins and those in his social network from 1595 to 1603, providing an early modern laborer’s perspective on the economy, religion, authority, and local community amid the plague. At times this book confirms assumptions about members of the poorer end of the middling sort, but Muggins often surprises and complicates long-held views of his class. His reading is wider, his criticism of the authorities more incisive, and his attention to women of the middling sort more sensitive than one might expect.

WEAVER-POETS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Among William Muggins's associates, if not close friends, was Thomas Deloney. In 1595 Deloney is known to have visited Muggins's household, and the two were briefly cellmates at Newgate. Like Muggins, Deloney was a silk-weaver, but by 1595 Deloney had also acquired considerable fame as a writer of ballads, and in the later 1590s as a writer of prose fiction. Deloney's notoriety was such that by 1596 Thomas Nashe had dubbed him "the Bal-letting Silke-weauer" in his *Haue with You to Saffron-Walden*.⁵² Although Deloney worked with a number of printers in his career, toward the end of his life he developed a significant professional relationship with the printer Ralph Blower.⁵³ In 1597 Blower entered his right to print Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, probably the first edition of part 1 of that book.⁵⁴ Blower also had a hand in the earliest extant edition of Deloney's *Thomas of Reading*, and there is no reason to doubt that he was involved in its initial printing.⁵⁵ Finally, Blower appears to have printed an edition of Deloney's *Strange Histories* for William Barley, and again, Blower may well have been involved in earlier printings.⁵⁶ Blower was also the printer of *London's Mourning Garment*, and it was probably through association with the aforementioned William Barley that Blower acquired the death's head device for the cover of Muggins's pamphlet. It would seem that Deloney and Muggins had a fairly close relationship: the two shared a craft, a cell, and a printer.

Whatever deeper connections existed between William Muggins and Thomas Deloney, it is significant that both were weaver-poets. Although it is not known what Muggins had written in the 1590s, it is unlikely that his 1603 ninety-seven-stanza poem was his first attempt at writing poetry. Unlike Deloney, however, Muggins does not seem to have sought to have his work printed until 1603. He describes his pamphlet as "this my poore labour," but it is clear that for the most part Muggins earned his living in the silk trade (sig. A2r). Laurie Ellinghausen has shown how early modern professional writers born into the middling sort posed "a challenge to aristocratic literary culture" by highlighting the labor that went into writing.⁵⁷ Muggins's fleeting description of his own entry into print as the product of his "poore labour" suggests a humble awareness of this trend, although he seems not to have gone beyond this instance to forge a professional persona like those of the writers described by Ellinghausen.⁵⁸ Still, Muggins's sympathies might well complement Ellinghausen's work on more prolific

non-elite writers of the period. Of the writers discussed by Ellinghausen, Muggins most closely resembles John Taylor, “the Water-Poet”; but while Taylor joined the elite of his company, Deloney and Muggins were among the poorer weavers in the London Weavers’ Company. As will be seen in chapter 1, there was a deep divide between the company’s elite and the rank and file. The connections between Deloney and Muggins, moreover, suggest that there was a circle of weaver-poets in the 1590s, a group of writers who may not have always seen their work in print but who, like the writers discussed by Ellinghausen, nonetheless had participated in a non-aristocratic aesthetics.

Around the time that Muggins and Deloney shared a cell, William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* featured Nick Bottom, a weaver who memorizes verses from popular plays. Bottom, whose name refers both to his place in the socioeconomic hierarchy and to the technical term for the core around which a weaver’s thread was wound, recites:

The raging rocks
 And shivering shocks
 Shall break the locks
 Of prison gates,
 And Phibus’ car
 Shall shine from far
 And make and mar
 The foolish Fates. (1.2.24–31)⁵⁹

Reflecting on the image of breaking the locks of prison gates, the weaver appraises, “This was lofty” (1.2.32). When he finds himself abandoned in the woods, Bottom sings, “The ousel cock so black of hue” and then begins, like a natural literary critic, to evaluate the lyrics (3.1.110–20). And after awakening from his transformation into an ass and his tryst with the queen of the fairies, Bottom aspires to collaborate with the carpenter Peter Quince “to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called ‘Bottom’s Dream,’ because it hath no bottom.” Whether he may be called a poet or not, Nick Bottom is clearly a poetry enthusiast, albeit with popular rather than courtly tastes. Audiences are thus left uncertain as to whether Bottom’s synesthetic “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report” may be taken as

garbled scripture or a clever appropriation of Paul's epistle for the purpose of expressing the unfathomable experience the weaver has had (4.1.204–9). The actor who likely played Bottom, William Kempe, would later discuss Deloney's writing in his *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1599).⁶⁰ Shakespeare's Bottom was likely intended as a lighthearted jab at the poetic aspirations of weavers like Deloney and other craftsmen in London.

A thread connecting weaving to poetry runs throughout Shakespeare's play. Even in the "Pyramus and Thisbe" play within a play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alludes to a close connection between poetry and weaving.⁶¹ The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe had a special significance for silk-weavers like Deloney and Muggins. In Ovid's *Metamorphosis* the tale culminates in the lovers' blood changing the fruit of the mulberry tree from white to black, a sign of mourning.⁶² Whereas mulberries were considered a delicacy, the mulberry tree's leaves provided the main sustenance for silkworms and therefore the cultivation of raw silk. It would be ten years before England embarked on its own experiment in sericulture, but the centrality of the mulberry tree for the production of silk was already widely understood.⁶³ In 1599 Thomas Moffett's *The Silkwormes and Their Flies* presented in verse an argument for planting mulberry trees in England for the propagation of silkworms.⁶⁴ By 1607 King James planned to have more than ten thousand mulberry trees planted in England for the express purpose of silk production.⁶⁵ Thus, as an ass-headed Bottom reclines with the queen of fairies, she offers him mulberries not only because the fruit tended to be consumed by the privileged, but also because of its relation to Bottom's trade. More to the point, Bottom plays Pyramus, the tortured lover who, believing his beloved Thisbe dead, kills himself, declaring "O fates, come, come, / Cut thread and thrum" (5.1.275–76). Here the classical Fates with the thread of life are imagined to be involved in the technical work of weavers, "thrum" being the weavers' term for the thread that remains on the loom after the web or cloth is cut from it.⁶⁶ Is this Quince framing the role to his friend's profession, or is it Bottom's improvisation? Either way the weaver's craft becomes entangled in that of the poet.

Moreover, there appears to have been a longer history of weaver-poets in sixteenth-century England. Forty years before Muggins's and Deloney's stay at Newgate, several prisoners there (perhaps sitting in the same space Deloney and Muggins would later occupy) received letters from another weaver-poet, John Careless of Coventry. Careless wrote to his fellow prisoners in Newgate

from the King's Bench, a prison located in the south of London where he languished for roughly two years while awaiting execution for his outspoken Protestantism. Printed several times in the sixteenth century, Careless's letters provide a window into the weaver's experience of Protestantism amid Mary I's re-Catholicization of England. He wrote not only to his wife, Margaret, and bedfellow William Tyms but also to prominent reformers like John Bradford, John Philpot, and Augustine Bernher, as well as imprisoned Protestants like Harry Adlington, the wives of several of the imprisoned, and others.⁶⁷ Interspersed among the letters Careless also penned several devotional poems and a record of his interrogation under Dr. Thomas Martin.⁶⁸

Although he describes himself as "a poor man without learning," Careless's letters not only offer comfort to his fellow Protestants but also often evoke a degree of playful wit.⁶⁹ In his letter to John Philpot, Careless writes, "O my good master Philpot, which art a principal pot indeed, filled with most precious liquor, as it appeareth by the plenteous pouring forth of the same—O pot most happy, of thy high Potter ordained to honour, which dost contain such heavenly treasure in thy earthen vessel."⁷⁰ To Master Bartelet Green, one of the Newgate prisoners, he wrote, "A full dainty dish art thou for the Lord's own tooth. Fresh and *green* shalt thou be in the house of the Lord, and thy fruits shall never wither nor decay."⁷¹ Writing to his bedfellow William Tyms at Newgate, Careless again punned on a surname: "Blessed be God for thee, my dear brother Tyms, and blessed be God again that ever I knew thee, for in a most happy *time* I came first into thy company."⁷² John N. King suggests that such passages are to be read as an imitation of St. Paul's admonition that martyrs find joy in their suffering, but Careless also offers more macabre linguistic play, as when he describes Bishop Bonner as "the common slaughter-slave of England," or when he glosses bishops as "bite-sheeps."⁷³ Careless's particular habit of constructing spiritual meaning in puns and extended metaphors suggests an allegorical turn of mind whereby the world is replete with spiritual meaning to be deciphered through the poetic play of language.

Careless's own name presented the most contentious of spiritual meanings for the Protestant weaver-poet. Careless recalls that at the start of his interrogation, Dr. Martin declared, "Careless! By my faith I think the same; and so I ween it will appear by thy conditions, by that time we have done with thee."⁷⁴ Careless retorts, "Though my name be Careless, yet perchance you shall not find me so careless in my conditions as your mastership doth

presuppose.” Whether Martin actually punned on Careless’s name, the debate over the meaning of his name is emblematic of the larger battle over interpretation of scripture that ensues, a contest in which Careless proves to be an astute lay theologian and an extraordinarily deft debater. Similarly, John Philpot’s letter to Careless was largely organized around a series of puns on the word “care”: “Since God hath willed you at your Baptism in Christ to be Careless, why do you make yourself careful? Cast all your care on him.”⁷⁵ Careless seizes on Philpot’s conceit, at one point signing a letter “John Careless, still careful for you,” and later signing a poem “Continue constant in Christ and Careless,” where careless comes to mean not ignorant or reckless but focused on the spiritual rather than the worldly.⁷⁶

Deloney and Muggins were likely familiar with at least some of Careless’s writing. Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* was widely read, and Deloney reworked material from *Acts and Monuments* in his ballad “The Duchess of Suffolk’s Calamity.” Careless’s poetry, moreover, was well-known independently of Foxe. One of his poems originally appearing in Miles Coverdale’s *Certain Most Godly, Fruitful, and Comfortable Letters* (1564) also circulated separately as a broadside ballad.⁷⁷ Careless’s poem begins:

Some men for sudden joy do weep,
And some in sorrow sing,
When that they lie in danger deep,
To put away mourning.

Between them both will I begin,
Being in joy and pain,
In sighing to lament my sin,
But yet to rejoice again.⁷⁸

As with his letters, the twenty-eight-stanza poem consoles the suffering Christian. “A ballad of John Careless &c.” was licensed for publication in 1586, and presumably again under a slightly different title in 1624 and another time in 1635. But the ballad was already known by 1583: *A Declaration of the Death of John Lewes* (1583) was “to be sung to the tune of John Careless.”⁷⁹ As late as 1635 printers of ballads could still confidently instruct that a ballad be sung to “To the tune of, *O man in desperation* or, *Some men for sudden joys do weep*.”⁸⁰

The enduring popularity of Careless's poem is further attested to by Thomas Nashe, who in *Haue with You to Saffron-Walden* refers to it disparagingly as "the godly ballet of John Careless, or Green Sleeves moralized."⁸¹ In *Medicines for the Plague* (1604) Nicholas Bownd speaks admiringly of the poem, however, arguing that Careless describes for readers the appropriately Christian attitude toward the plague.⁸² In a further indication of its popularity, Shakespeare adapted the poem in *King Lear* (1606), when the fool remarks:

Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,
And go the fool among.⁸³

Similarly, Thomas Heywood alludes to the poem for a song in *The Rape of Lucrece* (1608):

When Tarquin first in Court began,
And was approved King:
Some men for sudden joy gan weep,
But I for sorrow sing.⁸⁴

The last two lines nod to Careless's poem, but the first two adapt Deloney's ballad, "The Noble Acts of Arthur of the Round Table," printed in his collection of ballads *The Garland of Goodwill* (1596).⁸⁵ Deloney's ballad begins, "When Arthur first in Court began, / and was approued king."⁸⁶ That Careless and Deloney were thus yoked together in the poem hints at Heywood's awareness of a tradition of popular weaver-poets in early modern England.⁸⁷ By the same token, Nashe singles out Careless and Deloney in *Haue with You to Saffron-Walden*, a pamphlet that primarily ridicules the writer Gabriel Harvey for, among other things, his humble birth as "the eldest sonne of the halter-maker." Nashe's allusions to weaver-poets fits a general pattern of the pamphlet to lump Harvey in with the poor craftsmen who lacked university education.⁸⁸ Nashe's antipathies aside, the allusions to and adaptations of Careless demonstrate the poem's popularity. Surely, two Protestant weaver-poets like Muggins and Deloney took an interest in the substantial literary notoriety of one of their brethren from the previous generation.

The link between poetry and weaving goes back well into classical antiquity when the likes of Homer, Sappho, and Pindar drew attention to the physical similarity between loom and lyre and therefore used weaving as a metaphor for poetry and storytelling.⁸⁹ Anthony Tuck, moreover, theorizes that many songs and stories of antiquity may have developed as mnemonic devices for the production of complex patterns in textiles. This, argues Tuck, explains the images of Circe and Calypso singing while weaving in Homer's *Odyssey* as well as the frequent link of storytelling with weaving in the plays of Euripides.⁹⁰

The connection between text and textile, singing and weaving, persisted into the sixteenth century. In chapter 3 of Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury*, for instance, the eponymous broadcloth weaver, is visited by Henry VIII and his entourage. After dining, Jack invites his guests to view his people at work. They first view weavers attending one hundred looms and singing "The Weauers Song," a ten-stanza poem that charts the "band of amity" among weavers, with allusions to Hercules and the biblical giants whose spears were like "Weauers beames."⁹¹ "The Weauers Song" argues that the unity of weavers is such that the fall of Troy would not have occurred had Paris or Helen been involved in the craft.

After praising and rewarding the weavers, the king advances to view women carding and spinning wool, who "in dulcet manner chanted out this song, two of them singing the Ditty, and all the rest bearing the burden."⁹² The song, called "The Maidens Song," is about the earl of Northumberland's daughter, who helps a Scottish knight escape prison.⁹³ She travels with him to a river, which she must be importuned to cross; once she does so, the knight abandons her for his wife and children in Edinburgh. The song's refrain—"follow my love, come over the strand"—refers to (and only really makes sense at) the dramatic moment of crossing the river's strand, where the lady is in fact stranded. If such refrains also functioned as mnemonic devices, however, "come over the strand" probably referred as well to the repeated act of adding carded strands of wool in the process of spinning.⁹⁴ Along the same lines, the emphasis on amity among weavers in "The Weauers Song" relates directly to the cooperation needed between weavers in operating a broadcloth loom. The production of poetry entwines itself in the material process of weaving and serves a mediating function in establishing collaboration and community among laborers. The production of poetry among the weavers here seems to be pragmatic and fundamentally

social. It provides mnemonic devices but also inducts weavers into an aesthetic of shared practices that define the community.

These instances from *Jack of Newbury* need to be read in part as entertainment for Jack's royal guests, but the idea that weavers had a special relation to song was prevalent in the period.⁹⁵ In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Duke Orsino remarks of the song "Come away, come away death," "The spinsters and the knitters in the sun / And the free maids that weave their thread with bones / Do use to chant it" (2.4.42–44). And in the folio printing of *Henry IV, Part 1*, Sir John Falstaff laments, "I would I were a weaver; I could sing all manner of songs" (2.4.119–20). Stage directions to John Phillips's *The Play of Patient Grissel* (1560) indicate that Grissel is to "sing some song, and sit spinning," while in Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1608) it is clear that Audrey is to sing while spinning.⁹⁶

The association of weavers with singing and poetry continued into the nineteenth century when, in 1809, Lord Byron complained of "Moorland weavers" who "boast Pindaric skill," a fairly pointed reference to sometime poet Thomas Bakewell of Staffordshire, who was not really a weaver for much of his life but identified as such; like Nashe two hundred years earlier, Byron's point seems to have been to disparage more generally weavers and other artisans who tried their hands at poetry.⁹⁷ Among the weaver-poets hailing from England, Scotland, and Ireland around that time were John Webb (1768–1840), Robert Millhouse (1788–1839), Samuel Bamford (1788–1872), Robert Tannahill (1774–1810), James Maxwell (1719–1801), James Orr (1770–1816), Bernard Short (1803–1842), Thomas Stott (1755–1829), James Campbell (1758–1818), and Francis Boyle (1810–1881), to name only a few.⁹⁸ One might attribute the rise of weaver-poets in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to an increase in literacy and a contemporary taste for seemingly "authentic" portrayals of working-class life à la Stephen Duck, but these poets were preceded by other weaver-poets—Careless, Deloney, Muggins, and any number of others invisible to us because they printed anonymously or not at all.

In *Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver* (1845), Scottish weaver-poet William Thom (1799–1848) reflected on the link between weaving and poetry and its relation to his own development as a writer. Thom explains that poems and songs were often recited to keep up the morale of the many impoverished weavers as they worked: "Let me again proclaim the debt we owe those Song Spirits as they walked in the melody from loom to

loom, ministering to the low-hearted; and when the breast was filled with everything but hope and happiness, and all but seared, let only break forth the healthy and vigorous chorus ‘A man’s a man for a’ that,’ the fagged weaver brightens up. His very shuttle skytes along, and clatters through in faithful time to the tune of his merrier shopmates!”⁹⁹ The songs set the rhythm of weavers’ labor on the loom. As with the examples from *Jack of Newbury*, the poetry of weavers, as Thom describes it, again appears to be geared to the communal and the pragmatic.

Thom then describes the development of new weaver-poets in the shops. “It was not enough that we merely chaunted or listened,” writes Thom, “but some more ambitious or idle if you will, they in time would try a self-conceived song.”¹⁰⁰ So began Thom’s career as “the factory-distinguished writer.”¹⁰¹ Early nineteenth-century Scotland differed a great deal from sixteenth-century London, but Thom’s description of the recitation of poetry or song while weaving bears a striking resemblance to Deloney’s in *Jack of Newbury*: they even use the same verb, “chaunted,” emphasizing the rhythmic, repetitive nature of the work. As weavers were taught their craft, so they came to be attuned to listening to or chanting the poetry of the past, and whether out of boredom, a desire for praise, or genuine inspiration this incited some to write their own verses. One imagines a similar set of material conditions leading Deloney and Muggins to compose poetry, at first for their fellow weavers but eventually for a larger audience. Deloney made his fame as a writer of ballads and then prose fiction, but Muggins seems to have only entered print for the purposes of collective action in petition or poem.

In addition to their own tradition of poetry and song, sixteenth-century weaver-poets were likely influenced by developments in vernacular drama. Bottom, after all, is a theater enthusiast. David Katham has noted that companies had long paid players for entertainment during feast days. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, players began paying companies, among them the London Company of Weavers, for the use of their halls until the professional playhouses eliminated the necessity.¹⁰² Deloney, moreover, occasionally alludes to Shakespeare’s plays and especially to his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* (and some of Deloney’s works were adapted to the stage in turn).¹⁰³ In 1554, while imprisoned in Coventry and waiting to be transferred to the King’s Bench, John Careless was briefly released from prison so that he could participate in the Weavers’ play of the Nativity, one of only two parts of the Coventry Corpus Christi cycle to survive.¹⁰⁴

One wonders if Careless, accused of heresy, might have infused his role with any signs of Protestant zeal. Ultimately, the Bible and Reformation theology had a greater influence than did theater on sixteenth-century weaver-poets. Careless willingly embraced the role of Protestant martyr in the 1550s. By 1560 Bishop of London Edmund Grindal included two weavers, William Betts and Thomas Upcher, among the sixty men he ordained as deacons, and he made Walter Richardson, probably also a weaver, into a priest.¹⁰⁵ In 1579 a utopian dialogue concerning the fictive commonwealth of Crangalor explained that silk-weavers were the most zealous of their citizens, devoting all their time to weaving and praying.¹⁰⁶ In the 1580s and 1590s Deloney promoted his Protestant faith in such ballads as “A Pleasant Dialogue between Plaine Truth, and Blind Ignorance” where Truth is a zealous Protestant who successfully convinces Ignorance to reject Catholicism, and “The Duchess of Suffolk’s Calamity” which framed Protestant exile Catherine Brandon as a national hero.¹⁰⁷ And the quarto of *Henry IV* has Falstaff wishing he were a weaver so that he could “sing psalmes,” decidedly more pious than the vague “songs” of the folio.¹⁰⁸

Although many craftsmen sang psalms (and songs), there is a consistent notion in the period that weavers were particularly pious. In the archives of the Worshipful Company of Weavers, amid copies of their early ordinances, are three folio pages on which someone copied out extracts from the Gospels in Latin; and the ordinances of 1379 begin, “In the name of the Fader, of the Sone and the Holy Gost,” a decidedly spiritual preamble for secular rules of the craft.¹⁰⁹ By the late sixteenth century weavers came to be associated with zealous Protestantism, so much so that at times weavers were satirized for their outspoken Puritanism. In George Chapman’s comedy *Monsieur D’Olive* (1606), the title character recalls an encounter with “Upstart, a weaver,” a moralizing artisan who, though “a little fellow,” had been “blown up by inspiration / That had borne office in congregation” to rail against tobacco as “a pagan plant, a profane weed / And a most sinful smoke, that had no warrant / Out of the word; invented sure by Satan.”¹¹⁰ The bombastic tirade against tobacco continues for many lines. D’Olive is invested in lampooning the weaver’s argument, but the characterization nonetheless says something about the perception of weavers in the period. Before it came to be associated with a style of inflated rhetoric, the word “bombast” referred to puffed up cotton wool used as padding in doublets and other woven items, and “fustian” originally referred to a thick cloth; in the 1590s these woven products

came to refer also to the “blown-up” rhetoric evident in *Monsieur D’Olive’s* tale of the Puritan weaver.¹¹¹ A decade later, in *Hengist, King of Kent* (1616–20), Middleton would also satirize the extreme religious outlook of weavers through his character Oliver, self-described “Puritan and Fustian-weaver altogether,” who upon being told to bow to the new lord mayor, vaunts, “I was not born to stoop but to my loom” (5.1.156, 164).

Robert Wild’s satirical ballad *Alas Poore Scholler, Whither Wilt Thou Goe?* (1641) similarly associates weavers with an overweening Puritanism. Among the speaker’s laments about the decay of learning is an anecdote about preaching alongside a weaver:

Once, I remember,
 I Preached with a *Weaver*,
 I quoted *Austine*,
 He quoted *Dod* and *Cleaver*,
 I nothing got,
 He got a Cloak and Beaver.
 Alas, poor scholar, whither wilt thou go?¹¹²

The author’s point is that learning, signaled by citations of St. Augustine, is devalued in favor of quoting popular Puritan preachers like John Dod and Robert Cleaver. The scholar is outdone by a Puritan Nick Bottom. It is worth noting, however, that although Wild’s weaver may be disparaged here, he is also literate, devout, and, most important, willing to audaciously enter into the public sphere. Representations might fall far afield of any lived reality for early modern weavers, but Muggins, like the weaver-poets who came before and after him, also felt the urge to voice his thoughts in the public sphere.¹¹³

MUGGINS’S READING

Unlike previous generations of weaver-poets, Muggins was born into an early modern England where the Reformation, the spread of humanist learning, and the printing press naturally exposed him to a range of reading beyond the immediate tradition of the weavers’ shop. One may presume that Muggins read a selection of the popular literature of the day—ballads, almanacs, a psalmbook. However, the estimation of what was typically read by commoners is often driven by numbers of editions of the particular text

coupled with a priori judgments of popular taste. A careful study of *London's Mourning Garment* for echoes of other texts yields concrete and at times surprising results.

It comes as little surprise that Muggins was a dedicated and lively reader of the Bible. The prayer Muggins included in *London's Mourning Garment* alludes to Old and New Testament passages throughout and provides some sense of which passages Muggins read most ardently. For example, in describing the sinfulness of London in its prosperity, the prayer announces, “our Wine is bitter as the Wine of Sodom, and our grapes as the grapes of Gomorrah: wee are become as the seede of the wicked corrupt children, disobedient seruantes, a rebellious people, & now that we are rich, and are waxen fat, we spurne with the heele, like y^e vnruely Heifar, we are sicke of long prosperity, & haue surfeited of peace and plentie” (sig. D3v). The prayer moves seamlessly from one biblical allusion to another, from the vineyard imagery of Deuteronomy 32:32 to “the seede of the wicked corrupt children,” a direct quote from Isaiah 1:4, to the disobedient and rebellious, an allusion to either Isaiah 30:9 or Psalm 78 (or both), to “waxen fat, we spurne with the heele,” a clear echo of Deuteronomy 32:15, to the “unruly heifer” of Hosea 4:16.¹¹⁴ Muggins’s prayer is a creative reassembling of evocative imagery gleaned from his reading. Scarcely a sentence goes by in the prayer without two or three scriptural references. This was not altogether unusual for the period. Prayers were supposed to be heartfelt and even spontaneous, but many worried that they also needed to speak in a language God might understand. Thus, the most effective prayers, some thought, would express genuine zeal while relying heavily on words, phrases, and images from the Bible.¹¹⁵ As George Herbert would put it some decades later, prayer was—or at least could be—“God’s breath in man returning to his birth.”¹¹⁶

A careful examination of *London's Mourning Garment* reveals that Muggins favored particular books of the Bible. He alludes to the Psalms, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah far more than all of the New Testament books combined. Favoring the Old over the New Testament, while not peculiar to Muggins, suggests a more radical, even Puritan, mindset, as does the writing of his own prayer rather than merely relying on the state-authorized prayers issued during the plague.¹¹⁷ Within the books he alludes to most, moreover, Muggins clearly favored the more poetic passages: the Psalms, of course, but also, the first third of Jeremiah and its companion

Lamentations.¹¹⁸ Taken together, Muggins was keenly interested in the Israelites' exile into Babylon and the hope of reclaiming the promised land. At the same time, for Muggins, Jeremiah's admonishing the Israelites for their lack of faith spoke as much to Londoners in 1603 as it did to the Israelites in 500 BCE. Just as Muggins's poem situated London as the site of epic mourning, the prayer pieced together a biblical narrative of London's hubristic failure to recognize God's grace and the demands of a socioeconomic covenant expressed in Isaiah and Jeremiah in particular. As in so many of the books of the Old Testament, a city's pride and failure to tend to the poor resulted in a devastating plague, but with the hope that through pious devotion the plague might cease and London might really become a new Jerusalem. The weaver-poet was concerned with the day-to-day struggles of the middling sort in London—labor, debt, childrearing—but he also strove for prophetic heights, discussed more fully in chapter 4 of this book.

Without doubt, Muggins drew most of his poetic inspiration from the Bible. As the head of the household he was responsible for the spiritual education of his children and apprentices, and it is probable that like many, he followed some variation of the practice recommended by Lewis Bayly in 1613: "Call euery morning all thy familie to some *conuenient* roome; and first, eyther reade thy selfe vnto them a Chapter in the word of *God*, or cause it to be read distinctly by some other. If leasure serve, thou maist *admonish* them of some remarkeable good *notes*; and then kneeling downe with them in reverent sort, as is before described, pray with them in this manner."¹¹⁹ In *London's Mourning Garment's* eulogy for the child Bess, the bereaved mother recalls the pleasure she took in observing her daughter read (sig. C1r, line 292). This passage and Elizabeth Muggins's probable education is discussed in more detail in chapter 3, but here it is worth noting the value Muggins's poem placed on a young woman's literacy. How Muggins himself learned to read and write is unknown, however. Although literacy places Muggins among the better educated of his craft, his name does not appear in lists of grammar school students, nor is it clear how much Latin he could read.¹²⁰ Outside the formal structure of Elizabethan grammar schools and without the extensive resources of the gentry, Muggins's literacy must have involved persistent dedication, literate parents, or a master weaver who saw the ability to read as of significant spiritual or economic value.¹²¹ If *London's Mourning Garment* is at all autobiographical, one can imagine that Muggins similarly dedicated himself to teaching his children to read, perhaps asking

that his eldest daughter occasionally read passages from the Bible aloud for the household's edification.

Based on its estimated worth in the inventory of his household goods and on citations in *London's Mourning Garment*, it appears that Muggins owned a Geneva Bible that he consulted with great regularity.¹²² The citational style (i.e., the bringing together of disparate phrases from the Bible for his prayer) suggests the use of a commonplace book where Muggins recorded salient lines from his reading under various headings.¹²³ But what else did Muggins read? The inventory of his household with its "viiij sev[er] all english printyd Bokes" assessed at eleven shillings provides only the vaguest of clues. Whereas the inventory assesses the value of "one dozen of shorte White Pynns," "one pound of blew thredd," "iij Pynpillowes," and further in domestic items like "one paire of Tonges" and "ij old yron Potts," the books did not hold enough individual value to be listed by title.¹²⁴

Muggins read the Bible, and he knew Deloney's writing and shared with it a keen interest in representing the concerns of commoners, but Muggins's reading went well beyond scripture and the popular ballad of the day. *London's Mourning Garment* is written in rhyme royal, a seven-line stanza in iambic pentameter rhyming a-b-a-b-b-c-c—a subtle, complex form.¹²⁵ As Elizabethan poet George Gascoigne puts it, "The first and thirde lines do aunswer (acrosse) in like terminations and rime, the second and fourth, and fifth, do likewise answeere eache other in terminations, and the two last do combine and shut vp the Sentence."¹²⁶ That is, the stanza is made up of both alternating rhymes and couplets, with the fourth line serving as both the end of alternating rhymes and the beginning of the couplets. For Gascoigne the final couplet offers a kind of closure. Muggins exploited this "shut[ting] vp" and the shift to couplets for dramatic effect. For example, in one stanza Muggins describes a marriage cut tragically short by the plague:

The joyfull Brydegroome married as to day,
 Sicke, weake, and feeble before table layde,
 And the next morrow dead and wrap't in clay,
 Leauing his Bride, a widdow, wife and mayde,
 Which sudden change doth make her so dismayde,
 That griefes and sorrowes doth perplexe her heart,
 Within three dayes she takes her husbands part. (sig. C4r, lines
 512–18)

The wedding day is taken up by four lines of alternating rhymes that, along with disruptions in the meter at the second and fourth lines, slow the pace of the first death. Whereas the tragedy might end with the bride left both widow and maid, the fifth line introduces the “sudden change” in fate with a rapid rhyme on “mayde.” The two couplets sprint across three days, with rhyming couplets quickening the pace of the stanza to emphasize the rapid spread of the plague and its effects. The rhyme scheme is used to emphasize the sudden overwhelming speed with which the plague takes lives. Elsewhere Muggins employs the final couplet to forcefully moralize the stanza’s point, as in a passage in which London condemns the city’s brothels surmising at the end of the stanza, “Like wicked SODOME, doth my Subburbs lye, / A mighty blemish, to faire LONDONS eye” (sig. D2r, lines 629–30). Throughout Muggins works various effects within the confines of the rhyme royal stanza form.

Muggins had read enough to know that rhyme royal was the stanza form appropriate to the seriousness of his subject matter. Gascoigne describes rhyme royal as “seruing best for graue discourses,” and George Puttenham in his *Arte of English Poesy* (1589) declared it as “the chiefe of our ancient proportions” appropriate for a “historical or graue poem.”¹²⁷ It was the stanza form of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Thomas Wyatt’s “They flee from me,” John Lydgate’s *The Fall of Princes*, and much of its Tudor sequel, William Baldwin’s miscellany *Mirror for Magistrates*. Although less often used in the later Elizabethan period, it was also the stanza form for Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*. Which of these, if any, had Muggins read?

Muggins was familiar with Homer and Ovid, as *London’s Mourning Garment* alludes to works by both ancient writers. The poem begins by describing London in its glorious preparations for King James’s royal entry, with foreign princes arriving “like to AGAMEMNONS gallant trayne” (sig. B1r, line 15). To help with the pageantry, “PIGMALION foorth his skilfull Caruers sent” (sig. B1v, lines 47), and to fund the festivities, merchant strangers “scattered coyne, like IVPITERS showres of Golde” (sig. B1v, line 41). If Muggins attended one of London’s grammar schools before embarking on an apprenticeship, he may have read Ovid in Latin. But both *The Metamorphoses* and Homer’s *Iliad* had been translated into English by 1598.¹²⁸

Other allusions in *London’s Mourning Garment* are harder to track. Muggins’s dedication asserts, “the Vertuous minde, respecteth not so much the valewe of the guift, as the good will of the giuer,” a paraphrase of Seneca. Muggins might have read Seneca’s *De Beneficiis* or Arthur Golding’s 1578

translation of it, but this particular aphorism had been paraphrased so frequently as to be virtually idiomatic.¹²⁹ Similarly, Muggins refers to “Cunning APPELLES with his pencill” (sig. B1v, line 48), a reference to the ancient Roman artist whose unmatched skill was related in several anecdotes in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History*. Maybe Muggins had read *The Natural History*, which had been translated into English in 1601; maybe he found the references to Apelles in Abraham Fleming’s translation of Claudius Aelianus, itself largely a summary of anecdotes from Pliny; or maybe he found references to Apelles elsewhere.¹³⁰ Still, Pliny the Elder, Seneca, Ovid, Homer—what is significant here is the breadth of Muggins’s classical allusions: he knew enough about these classical writers to recognize their currency among early modern readers.

Muggins was also well aware of contemporary texts. *London’s Mourning Garment* was not the first “mourning garment” pamphlet. The earliest use of the phrase in a title was Robert Greene’s *Greene’s Mourning Garment Giuen Him by Repentance at the Funerals of Loue* (1590). This was followed by William Worship’s popular devotional work *A Christians Mourning Garment*, which had reached its third edition by 1603. Muggins may have appreciated Worship’s pamphlet, with its claim that weeping was the appropriate Christian posture. It seems almost certain, however, that *London’s Mourning Garment* was in part a response to Henry Chettle’s pamphlet *England’s Mourning Garment* (1603), an account of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth along with two pastoral poems: one mourning the death of Elizabeth, the other celebrating the ascension of King James. The pamphlet’s shepherds—Collin, Thenot, Dryope, and Chloris—seem blissfully unaware of the plague’s spread through London. *London’s Mourning Garment*’s polyphony of mourning Londoners rehearsing their hardships and losses provides a stark contrast with Chettle’s idyllic countryside shepherds.

The plague did not go unnoticed by Chettle, however. About a month before *London’s Mourning Garment* appeared in print, Chettle issued *A True Bill of the Whole Number That Hath Died in the Cittie of London, the City of Westminster, the City of Norwich, and Divers Other Places* (1603). Chettle’s bill included a brief history of the plague, beginning with ancient Rome, and emphasized its spread outward from London to Norwich, over one hundred miles away.¹³¹ Regardless of whether he knew of this other publication of Chettle’s, Muggins was keenly aware of the bills of mortality issued in London. *London’s Mourning Garment* ends with a table listing the numbers

of dead by parish between July 14 and November 17. Indeed, for an early reader of the copy of *London's Mourning Garment* held at the Huntington Library, the table of the dead appears to have been of great interest—this individual tallied the total burials for London within the walls and, as the final handwritten note explains, “burialles in all” (sigs. E1v–E2r).¹³²

And Muggins had surely read other plague pamphlets. *London's Mourning Garment* refers to a “Most true report” of the plague’s spread to the countryside. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries every visitation of the plague was immediately followed by an outpouring of plague writing—sermons, medical tracts, pamphlets, and broadsides with debates on the causes, supposed cures, thundering condemnations, prayers, or journalistic “Most true report[s]” of the plague’s progress through the city and country.¹³³ Ernest B. Gilman describes the proliferation of plague texts as a collective effort to fill the traumatic void created by the epidemic.¹³⁴ That printers were ever willing to produce these works attests to a readership hungering for solutions or solace.

Muggins, of course, produced his own plague pamphlet, and he seems well aware of its contribution to the field. The same stanza that mentions a “Most true report” describes the suddenness of the plague’s effects:

You see the runner, in his race is tript,
Well when he went, dead ere his journeyes done:
You see how soddaine, beauties blase is nipt,
Which sought all meanes, deaths danger for to shunne,
You heare what successe, followe them that runne. (sig. D2r, lines 638–52)

The stanza’s “You see” and “You heare” gesture to the abundance of plague pamphlets in 1603 and before. In particular the stanza echoes a passage from physician William Bullein’s popular *A Dialogue Bothe Pleasaunte and Pietifull Wherein is a Goodly Regimente against the Feuer Pestilence with a Consolacion and Comfort against Death* (1564), where Death brags, “I ouerthrowe the Daunser, and stoppe the breath of the singer, and trippe the runner in his race. I breake wedlockes, and make many widdowes.”¹³⁵ Bullein’s *Dialogue* had been reprinted in 1573 and 1578, a popular work mixing the medical and moral with the stuff of jest and satire.¹³⁶ Some of the imagery in this particular passage is echoed in Muggins’s tale of the bridegroom

who died immediately after his wedding, while Muggins's "runner in his race" is an unmistakable nod to Death's vaunt in *A Dialogue*.

Among the clearest signs of Muggins's reading is revealed in the first sentence of *London's Mourning Garment's* dedication to Sir John Swinnerton. It draws on Thomas Wilson's dedication to King Edward VI in his *The Rule of Reason, Conteynyng the Arte of Logique*, first printed in 1551 but reprinted several times in the sixteenth century. Wilson begins his dedication, "If my power & habilitie were answerable to my good wil, most excellent Prince and sovereign Lord, this token of mine humble dutie which I now offer unto your Majestie, should be as great & precieuse, as by reason of the contrarie, it is base and slender."¹³⁷ Muggins echoes Wilson in his own dedication to Swinnerton: "Right Worshipful and graue senator: if my knowledge and learning, were answerable to my good will and affection: this my poore labour now mourning in a sable Weede, should be as great and precious, as to the contrary it is weake, and slender" (sig. A2r). The "sable Weede," "poor labour," and anxiety about levels of education are Muggins's own additions, but the particular rhetorical gesture and the syntax are overtly Wilson's. Having never penned a dedication and worried about the impact of the bold statement the pamphlet made about the failure of magistrates to fulfill their duties, Muggins must have thought it prudent to follow a trusted model very closely.

Beyond cribbing a passage from Wilson, however, Muggins's knowledge of *The Rule of Reason* is not wholly unexpected. Wilson explains that he wrote *The Rule of Reason* in English to make the study of logic available to those "barred, by tongues vnaacquainted"—that is, for those with little or no Latin, namely those who had never been to university, where logic comprised one third of the university *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (to be followed by the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).¹³⁸ While rigorous, Wilson's text was not by any means dull. As an example of a faulty syllogism, Wilson offers up the following Falstaffian logic:

He that drynkes wel, slepes wel,
 He that slepes well, sinnes not,
 He that sinnes not, shalbe saued.
 Therefore let vs drynk wel, and we shalbe saued.¹³⁹

More often, however, Wilson promotes the logic of the Tudor commonwealth, a combination of humanist thought, reciprocal relations in the

political hierarchy, and Protestant theology. The very idea of providing the rules of logic in the vernacular, of course, was a radical humanist project. As a part of his reformist agenda, a “romishe bishop” is made to mouth several faulty syllogisms for Wilson to dissect.¹⁴⁰ And a faulty syllogism praising Nero provides Wilson the chance for a digression on tyranny and right rule.¹⁴¹ The echoes of *The Rule of Reason in London’s Mourning Garment* reveal Muggins to have been something of an autodidact, someone keen to take advantage of the expansion of print culture to further his personal education. Muggins could have spent his spare time reading the latest salacious ballad, or not reading at all, but instead he dedicated his time to a treatise on syllogisms and faulty reasoning.

The Bible, poetry, plague pamphlets, popular ballads, treatises on logic—Muggins read widely. His books were among his prized possessions. Just before the Bible and English printed books in the inventory of his goods is a “danske Chest,” a box made of spruce or pine in which it seems Muggins kept his books.¹⁴² In addition to his reading and acquaintance with Deloney, Muggins had other points of access to the literary circuit in London. Before moving to St. Olave’s, Muggins lived about one block from two print shops, those of Edward Alde and Cuthbert Burby. More than mere workspaces, Elizabeth Eisenstein describes early print shops as sites of lively intellectual exchange.¹⁴³ While it is impossible to know how engaged he was with the comings and goings of the nearby shops, Muggins was definitely acquainted with other printers. Along with Deloney, Muggins shared his cell with printer Gabriel Simson, and by 1603 Muggins had teamed up with Blower to print *London’s Mourning Garment*.

Whether in consultation with his printer or on his own, the decision to dedicate the pamphlet to Swinnerton hints at a significant knowledge of London’s literary scene. At the moment that Muggins wrote his dedication, Swinnerton was a prosperous wine merchant, sheriff of London, and alderman for St. Giles, Cripplegate.¹⁴⁴ Ten years later he would rise to the position of mayor. At the same time, he was a prominent part of a civic patronage system. While most studies of patronage have focused on the court and other titled nobility, London’s civic officers—mayors, aldermen, sheriffs, and wardens of livery companies—also contributed to a system of support fostering theater, music, the visual arts, and writing in the city.¹⁴⁵ Thus, carpenter Richard More dedicated *The Carpenters Rule* (1602), a pamphlet about the proper measurement of timber, to alderman and former mayor

(and translator of Euclid) Sir Henry Billingsley and “To the Worshipful, the Master, Wardens, and Assistants of the Companie of Carpenters of the citie of London.” Richard Robinson dedicated his *Certain Selected Histories for Christian Recreations* (1577) “To the worshipfull maister Symon Roo, nowe Maister of the worshipful Companie of Lethersellers in London and to the Wardens and whole fellowship of the same.” And schoolmaster William Averell dedicated his *A Dyall for Dainty Darlings* (1584) to William Wrathe, warden of London’s Company of Mercers.¹⁴⁶ In a similar vein, writers might seek patronage from the lord mayor: in 1590 Robert Greene dedicated his translation of Orazio Rinaldi’s *The Royal Exchange* to then mayor Sir John Hart and his two sheriffs, Richard Gurney and Stephen Soame (who would go on to be mayor a few years later); Ralph Blower dedicated his printing of *A Rich Store-House of Treasury for the Diseased* to then mayor Sir Thomas Skinner; and in 1600 Henoah Clapham dedicated *A Description of New Jerusalem* to then lord mayor Sir William Ryder.¹⁴⁷

Among these civic dedicatees, Swinnerton stands out as an especially active figure in London’s arts and letters. Indeed, by 1606 Swinnerton had himself entered print with an epistolary pamphlet attempting to persuade a gentlewoman to convert to the Protestant faith.¹⁴⁸ But Swinnerton was more often a significant local patron. Whereas such dedications tend to cluster around the short period an individual dedicatee occupied highest office (mayor or master of his company), Swinnerton emerges as a dedicatee in some twenty or so printed works from 1602 to just before his death in 1616.¹⁴⁹ The pageantry for Swinnerton’s lord mayor’s show was written by Thomas Dekker.¹⁵⁰ Henry Peacham, Anthony Munday, Joseph Hall, and Michael Drayton all dedicated works to Swinnerton.¹⁵¹ Thomas Ravenscroft singled out Swinnerton and his fellow alderman, Sir Thomas Hayes, as “most True and honourable affectors of Musicke,” and Wentworth Smith described the patron as “the great Fauourer of the Muses.”¹⁵²

Dedications in print are only the most immediate evidence of Swinnerton’s patronage. In his dedication to Swinnerton, Smith further alludes to “hauing receiued some fauours from you, for priuate things.”¹⁵³ The indication is that much of Swinnerton’s patronage of Smith and others occurred outside of print, in manuscript or performance. Swinnerton hosted a private performance of the lost play *Cardenio* in 1613.¹⁵⁴ And Swinnerton appears to have been close to King’s Men actors John Heminges and Henry Condel. Heminges even named one his children Swinnerton, suggesting that

the patron served as godfather at the child's christening.¹⁵⁵ Most revealing of Swinnerton's reputation as a prominent patron of London's arts, in 1607 the Merchant Taylor's Company prepared for a banquet in honor of King James; the company decided that they would ask Swinnerton "to conferr with Mr. Benjamin Johnson the Poet, aboute a speech to be made to welcome his Majestie, and for musique and other inventions which maye give likeing and delight to his Majestie."¹⁵⁶ Among all the members of the company, Swinnerton made sense as the man to reach out to Jonson and to arrange the music for the high-profile event.¹⁵⁷

London's Mourning Garment was among the earliest works to be dedicated to Swinnerton. The mayor in 1603, Sir Robert Lee, was the dedicatee for several printed works that year, including two plague pamphlets: Thomas Thayre's *A Treatise of the Pestilence* and Henry Holland's *Spirituall Preseruaties against the Pestilence*.¹⁵⁸ Both make mention of the sheriffs, Swinnerton and Sir James Pemberton, but Muggins chose to dedicate his pamphlet to Swinnerton alone. Muggins's choice here is yet another indication of his engagement with London's literary scene. He knew that Swinnerton, more than Lee or Pemberton, was appreciative of poetry and prayer. In addition to echoes and allusions of specific texts in *London's Mourning Garment*, Muggins's knowledge of the local patronage system indicates something about his familiarity with the literary world of London.

SOURCES AND METHOD

Rebecca Totaro has described Muggins as "the man about whom we know so little," while the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* simply lists Muggins as the author of *London's Mourning Garment* and offers no further biographical detail.¹⁵⁹ This book seeks to redress the dearth of knowledge about Muggins as well as the lives of the poorer end of the middling sort more broadly. Tracking the activities of a member of the middling sort is particularly challenging. Most did not leave behind diaries or copious records of their lives. Many scarcely appear in the archives at all. Among the archival sources used in this project, parish registers have proven invaluable. In 1538 Thomas Cromwell ordered that each church in England maintain a parish register, a record of the baptisms, marriages, and burials performed by the church. Not every church immediately complied, and the information recorded varies. The small parish of St. Mildred's in the Poultry, where Muggins lived from

1595 (or earlier) to 1598, felt it important to record not only baptism date but date of birth. The church's leaders apparently thought that the parish register had been instituted to ensure that churches were performing baptisms in a timely fashion. Large parishes like St. Olave's in Southwark, where Muggins lived from 1598 through at least 1603, typically included the trade or status of individuals listed in the register. In this case, the church's leaders felt it was important to be able to distinguish in their records parishioners of the same name, a likelihood for larger parishes.

In addition to aiding in tracking individuals, the parish registers also provide a picture of the parish—who lived and died there, what trades were practiced, who was getting married or giving birth. Two of Muggins's children were baptized at St. Mildred's. The Poultry was about the size of a soccer pitch, and nearly all the residents met weekly for church services. The parishioners are sure to have known one another. St. Olave's in Southwark was a much larger parish, and while many parishioners knew one another, the parish also afforded some anonymity. St. Olave's baptized four of Muggins's children. Often the registers include the names of churchwardens, so one has a sense of who in the neighborhood had risen to significant prominence. The churchwardens accounts and vestry minutes survive for both churches but yielded somewhat less in terms of tracking Muggins and his known associates. Still, various church records allow for one perspective on early modern subjects and their immediate communities.

Wills also provided significant information about Muggins's surrounds. In my research I consulted every extant will to come out of St. Mildred's in the Poultry and St. Olave's in Southwark in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One can find the trade of individuals and their family members, the possessions they held dear, and the people they knew. Muggins did not leave a will and was not named in any of the wills from St. Mildred's or St. Olave's, however. His friends and family members simply did not die with enough goods to have left a will that included him. In and of itself, this tells us something about social networks of the period. Despite the wide range of means among the middling sort, like stuck with like. Prominent tradesmen of St. Mildred's might leave something for the nameless poor, but if they left anything to neighbors by name, those neighbors were invariably of a similar wealth and status.

Like the parish registers, the records of the lay subsidy, an occasional tax of householders assessed at three pounds or more, provide information

about Muggins and his neighbors. Organized by ward and parish, the lay subsidies list names and assessed value, and occasionally other details. Muggins's appearances in the lay subsidy of 1598 through 1600 indicate a period of economic stability and even prosperity for the household. Moreover, the lay subsidy provides a window into the relative wealth of Muggins's neighbors, those in similar or far better economic circumstances. A large number of subsidy payers in a small parish suggests a wealthy parish, while the fairly short list of names for St. Olave's in Southwark indicates the general poverty of the parish.

The importance of the Worshipful Company of Weavers to Muggins is pieced together from a variety of sources, especially the Guildhall "Remembrancia" and the records of the company itself. Held by the London Metropolitan Archive, the records of the Company of Weavers detail practices of the company, their governance, and occasionally disputes.¹⁶⁰ The most prominent weavers held office. Muggins was not among them, but as chapter 1 explores more fully, Muggins was involved as a member of the company's Yeomanry and was among a group of silk-weavers who challenged the authority of the company's leadership through the aforementioned co-authored petition. Other company archives similarly shed light on the craftsmen of London, their practices, and their interactions with one another. Muggins even makes a brief appearance in the records of the Drapers' Company.

Traces of individuals from the middling sort are clearest when they were in trouble. The Guildhall "Remembrancia" includes copies of correspondence between the monarch, the lord mayor, aldermen, and other civic authorities from 1579 to 1664. Here one finds Muggins mentioned among the handful of other silk-weavers imprisoned for their petition. A short while later Muggins appeared in Chancery Court for his outstanding debt. Together these documents provide names of Muggins's close associates, his adversaries, and the inventory of everything in his household. The archives of church, livery company, and court thus provide some sense of how Muggins appeared not only in print but before his fellow parishioners, his fellow silk-weavers, the courts, and civic authorities.

The archives have their limitations, however. The many parish registers I have consulted do not yield a record of Muggins's marriage, so his spouse remains nameless in this project. Similarly, there seems to be no record for the birth of Muggins's daughter, Elizabeth. One would want to view the

record of Muggins's apprenticeship and the records of those apprenticed to him, but the company's apprentice rolls were lost in the fire of 1666. The petition Muggins co-authored in 1595 has also been lost—but not, fortunately, before it was transcribed by Frances Consitt.¹⁶¹ One full page of the inventory of Muggins's home has been so damaged that it is illegible. Such is the fragility of early modern manuscripts.

Still, a number of basic facts of Muggins's life can be presented here. Muggins lived in the Poultry until 1598. He may have lived there several years, but the earliest his name appears in the parish register is 1595. At that time the household included Muggins; his wife; their eldest daughter, Elizabeth; and an apprentice named Thomas Stephenson. We know the details surrounding Muggins's imprisonment for his co-authored petition, and because of his problems with debt, we know the location and contents of Muggins's household in the Poultry. In 1598 Muggins moved to St. Olave's in Southwark. He appears in the lay subsidy of 1598, 1599, and 1600, assessed at three pounds. We know the names of Muggins's children, when they were baptized and, in several cases, when they were buried. And we know the names of Muggins's apprentices. In all, the archives provide a fairly detailed record of Muggins from 1595 to 1603.

The lack of such standard data as Muggins's birth, apprenticeship, and marriage makes me reluctant to consider this book a biography. Rather, *A Weaver-Poet and the Plague* is part literary criticism, part microhistory.¹⁶² The years covered in the pages that follow, 1595 to 1603, mark a high point in Elizabethan literature: Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* was printed for the first time in 1595. In 1596 Edmund Spenser's second installment of *The Faerie Queene* appeared in print. Francis Bacon's essays were printed in 1597. The miscellany *The Passionate Pilgrim* was printed in 1599. In the same year the Globe Theater was built just a mile from Muggins's home in Southwark. The years 1595 through 1603 saw the emergence of a number of early modern England's great dramatists: Ben Jonson, John Marston, and John Webster. And William Shakespeare wrote some of his most enduring plays in these years: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet*. These were significant years in the establishment of what would come to be the canon of early modern English literature.

London's Mourning Garment is an admittedly marginal text from the period, but that marginality is very much the point. The routine impulse to examine canonical texts necessarily skews our understanding of the literature

and culture of the period. Just as Thomas Smith discussed craftsmen as passive objects of rule, so the canonical drama of the period frequently portrayed commoners as clownish objects of ridicule.¹⁶³ The importance of examining the working poor on their own terms is readily apparent: Muggins was not illiterate, laughable, or passive. Literate and poor, committed to his reading of the Old Testament prophets, Muggins stands out as a writer very different from the aspiring court poets who dominate the literary canon. Muggins worked a craft to survive and gradually felt the need to use his acquired knowledge and skill to advocate first for his fellow weavers and then for the working poor and economically vulnerable in London.

Thus, this book is a contribution to a literary history from below. Whereas similar projects have surveyed tropes or attempted to reconstruct popular print culture, this book works from the vantage point of a single weaver and his world. That is, I consider this book to be a microhistory. Microhistory is characterized by a reduction in scale of historical study. Rather than nations or “great men,” microhistories generally focus on a village, a neighborhood, or an obscure individual. Microhistories often examine what on the surface appears esoteric in the past—the misprisions of an eccentric Italian miller, a young drummer turned prophet, an enslaved woman taking on the role of evangelist—to highlight the important contributions of the marginalized individuals who nonetheless lived lives that complicate our sense of the past.¹⁶⁴ Rather than a history of major developments, microhistories typically investigate localized events—a trial, conversion narrative, or folk tradition—often to get at the lived experience of commoners. Instead of anomalous cases, however, microhistories more often than not uncover complex social networks extending beyond the expected walking distance of the average villager, highlight the individual or collective agency of the non-elite, or pose particular challenges to the grand narratives of a given period.¹⁶⁵

Some might allege that extrapolating anything from the atypical cases that occupy many microhistories must necessarily distort one’s understanding of the past. While quantitative studies are invaluable, Arthur E. Imhof has suggested that notions of “average” and “typical” when applied to the disparate “small worlds of the past” might obscure as much as clarify. In his discussion of the average age of marriage, for instance, Imhof argues that in early modern German towns there were so many deviations as to make the so-called typical age of marriage a meaningless imposition by

scholars.¹⁶⁶ Following Edoardo Grendi, Giovanni Levi suggests that microhistory’s engagement with the particular and qualitative aims “to furnish more realistic and less mechanistic representations.”¹⁶⁷ Or, as Peter Lake puts it in his study of the “odd” and “obsessive” seventeenth-century debate between John Etherington and Stephen Denison, a microhistorical approach “can show us aspects of the period that are all but invisible in other more normal, conventional or typical sources.”¹⁶⁸ A microhistorical approach does not preclude generalizations, however. Especially in an anthropological mode, microhistories often provide crucial new understandings of how various groups lived their lives and coped with crises.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, microhistories often show how history’s grand narratives and focus on the elite occlude important ways that others—women, the poor, the enslaved—have been significant, if overlooked, actors on the historical stage.

In some sense, the structure of *London’s Mourning Garment* itself can be said to reflect the tension between qualitative and quantitative approaches to the past inherent in microhistory’s relation to other historiographic methods. The final pages of the pamphlet offer a table of the dead up through November 17, 1603. The table begins:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Albones in Woodstreet ----- | 174 |
| Alhallowes Lumbarstr. ----- | 107 |
| Alhallowes the great ----- | 278 |
| Alhallowes the lesse----- | 220 |

It continues, parish by parish, enumerating the dead. In the suburbs, the numbers are staggering:

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Georges in Southwarke ----- | 895 |
| Giles without Creeplegate ----- | 2455 |
| Olaues in Southwarke----- | 2459 |
| Sauiors in Southwarke----- | 1858 |

But the table of the dead works in tandem with the pamphlet’s prayer and the poem. While the prayer situates London in a biblical narrative of loss and redemption, the poem offers portraits of individual Londoners. It gives voice to a personified London, but then London listens to the voices of the distressed Londoners. The table of burials in the city gives a broad, impersonal

view of deaths during the plague; the poem insists on a close-up picture of what it meant to live during the tragedy. The desperation of the widow or the family in debt, the sorrow of the mother who has lost her children—these tell us things that no numeric table could possibly express.

Microhistorians Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni describe their practice as a “prosopography from below,” a careful tracking of names to reveal a complex web of connections.¹⁷⁰ *A Weaver-Poet and the Plague* owes much to that particular method. I have made extensive use of parish registers, records of the lay subsidies, wills, and other documents from the period to track the name William Muggins, to locate his household, and the names of people he knew or likely knew, to trace the contours of his life. *London’s Mourning Garment* then ceases to be a text existing like a generic message in a bottle floating through the archives, and instead becomes the product of particular social practices within a complex web of social relations.

A Weaver-Poet and the Plague thus provides a careful reading of *London’s Mourning Garment* within a microhistorical study of William Muggins and his social network to highlight the perspective of the lower end of the middling sort in early modern London. The chapters that follow are organized around Muggins’s movements from 1595 to 1603, but they also focus on his acquaintances—Thomas Deloney, Gabriel Simson, Humphrey Milward, James Balmford—and his attachment to important institutions in early modern London: his livery company and the two parish churches he attended, St. Mildred’s in the Poultry and St. Olave’s in Southwark. The book is about how Muggins translated his experiences of poverty, prison, debt, birth, and death into a poetry of social and spiritual reform. But it is also about the Mary Blacks and Henry Bestes of the period, people often lost in statistics or overlooked entirely.

Chapter 1 covers Muggins’s relationship to the London Weavers’ Company and his fellow weaver-poet Thomas Deloney. As the institution through which most young men received their training and freedom to practice their trade, Muggins’s decision to join in collective action at variance with his livery company marks a vital starting point for this book. Muggins and his fellow petitioners found themselves imprisoned at Newgate. Although Muggins seems to have prized an idealized hierarchical order, the experience of joining with his fellow disaffected weavers opened up an ideological fissure from which the weaver-poet and his cellmates could begin to critique the practices of those in positions of authority: the lax enforcement of specific

regulations within the weavers' craft, the Elizabethan prison system, and ultimately Muggins's more comprehensive critique of Londoners' rampant acquisitiveness and indifference to the suffering of the city's most vulnerable.

Alongside the livery company, the parish church was without a doubt among the most important institutions in Muggins's life. Chapter 2 follows Muggins to his household in the parish of St. Mildred's in the Poultry. Unlike the livery company, the parish was inclusive of women. Two of Muggins's children were born in the parish and baptized as St. Mildred's by its rector, Thomas Sorocold. Historians have emphasized the marginal role men played in childbirth, but *London's Mourning Garment* offers a surprisingly detailed and sensitive view of labor and infant care. Women were central to birth as midwives, and women of the parish gathered to tend to the infant and the new mother. Birth was a communal event. Muggins and Sorocold's writings give us a sense of the anxieties and celebrations of the parish as new life came to the community. Just as chapter 1 examined the centrality of the livery company but also Muggins's marginal place within it, so chapter 2 focuses on the ways parish communities forged community but also the limits of such communities. A part of the fabric of life in the Poultry, Muggins was soon entangled in a dispute over outstanding debt. Debt was a part of life in early modern London. Writers of the period registered general cultural anxieties and resentment about debt in *The Merchant of Venice* and a number of other plays and poems. Muggins's experiences in the Poultry similarly led the weaver-poet to consider the fragility of new life against the inevitability of debt for those struggling at the bottom of the socioeconomic system of Elizabethan London.

Muggins's financial problems eventually led him to move his family to St. Olave's in Southwark, where a lease could be purchased more cheaply. Here Muggins's finances improved. In the crowded parish he became a subsidy man, someone with sufficient wealth to be taxed. While the subsidy was a burden, it was also a communal measure of wealth and status. But Muggins's time in Southwark was also marked by death. Three of his children and three of his apprentices were buried at St. Olave's. While the state's plague orders limited attendance at funerals, Muggins presents mourning as a necessary and uniquely productive, communal practice. In that sense, *London's Mourning Garment* resists the isolation brought about by the plague as well as the cultural premium on moderate mourning as exemplified by Ben Jonson's "On My First Sonne." Instead, Muggins focuses specifically on the

capacity of a community of women to mourn fully and efficaciously. Muggins's London elicits tears from the destitute women of the poem who in turn relate their losses. The shared experiences of women in the poem lead from isolation to collective, communal mourning that in itself protests the self-interested, acquisitive society Muggins saw as the core problem of his city. Chapter 3 thus argues for the ultimately political relationship between local, communal funeral rites and Muggins's experiments in elegy in *London's Mourning Garment*.

Chapter 4 continues to follow Muggins's social network in Southwark. Despite the state's attempts at uniformity, each parish was unique, its own social, economic, and spiritual unit. While St. Olave's parish could once be counted as among the most devoutly Catholic, by the 1590s St. Olave's was decidedly more theologically radical and diverse than the Poultry. This and the parish's much greater concentration of poor craftsmen and laborers amplified Muggins's sympathies with the disenfranchised in London. But it was the plague that led Muggins to enter print. This chapter examines the centrality of women and the poor to Muggins's reading of the Old Testament prophets. Listening to the mourning women, London calls for action. Here the radicalism of St. Olave's seems to have informed Muggins's more prophetic mode as he denounces the acquisitive indifference of Londoners and calls for a new socioeconomic covenant, much like an early modern Jeremiah.

A Weaver-Poet and the Plague thus argues that poorer members of the middling sort were not passively ruled and politically mute, as Smith would have it, nor were their views simply undereducated echoes of the elite. On the contrary, Muggins's focus on women runs counter to much of the misogyny found in the poetry of his courtly contemporaries, and Muggins's ideas about how the city should work is markedly different from the practices of many of England's aristocrats and wealthy merchants.¹⁷¹ *London's Mourning Garment* is overtly a spiritual meditation on the plague, but that meditation led Muggins directly to an analysis of the socioeconomic problems he experienced from 1595 onward. The longer title of Muggins's pamphlet singled out "wealthy Cittizens," and the pamphlet was dedicated to one such wealthy citizen, but the poem focused on the "other her Inhabitants," too: impoverished families, homeless widows, and grieving mothers unsure of their economic future. The poem insists that the wealthy have a duty to the poor and that the city's magistrates were sworn to protect the livelihoods of those

who worked. Smith and others might depict England as stable and orderly, threatened only by those who challenged authority. A study of poetry by a member of the laboring class of the middling sort in early modern London complicates that view. A mix of economic analysis and vatic poetry, *London's Mourning Garment* frames Muggins as a poet of London's most vulnerable, those savaged by the plague of 1603 and kept poor by the growth of acquisitive oligarchic control of the city's institutions. It was on their behalf that Muggins wrote in his poem, "O you of LONDON, now heare LONDON speake" (sig. D1r, line 582).