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CLOTHWORKERS AND SOCIAL PROTEST: THE CASE OF THOMAS DELONEY

by Roze Hentschell

Thomas Deloney, a prolific balladeer and impoverished weaver, was twice wanted for arrest by the London authorities in as many years for writing documents that criticized government policy. The two texts—one, a letter regarding the nuisance of immigrant weavers, and the other, a ballad complaining about the scarcity of grain—were both written at the height of Deloney’s balladeering in 1595. Both publications respond directly to what Deloney saw as challenges to his silkweaving profession: immigrant silkweavers infringed upon the rights of the native workers while grain shortages detracted from the health of the cloth industry. Crop failures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and particularly those of the years 1595–1597, which also coincided with depressions in the cloth trade in overseas markets due to the conflict with Spain, had a deleterious effect on the clothworkers who relied on the grain market for provisions.¹ In these publications, Deloney combines his two careers—writing and weaving—and in so doing proposes that clothmaking is crucial to the makeup of England and should be recognized as such by the government. By taking these two inflammatory, if minor, documents seriously as the immediate context for his next literary effort, *Jack of Newbury* (1597), we begin to understand the crucial contribution that Deloney’s work made to the culture of protest in the difficult decade of the 1590s and, importantly, to early modern nation formation.²

¹Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586–1660* (Berkeley 1980) 3. See Sharp 18 for the trajectory from clothworker to social misfit in the late 1590s.

²After completing this article, I encountered Jane M. Kinney’s essay on *Jack of Newbury*, in which she cursorily refers to the ballad and letter as a context for his prose narrative. It is my aim to show that a thorough analysis of the language of the protest letter—and the response to the letter—will expand the argument that Deloney’s writing was of national interest. Jane M. Kinney, “Rewriting History: Thomas Deloney’s *Jack of Newbury* and Elizabethan Politics,” *Philological Papers* 44 (1998–1999) 50–57. For recent work on Deloney’s role as protester, see also Mihoko Suzuki, “Apprentice Riots and Thomas Deloney,” *Criticism* (1996) 181–213; and Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (New

A fictionalized tale of the improbable rise to fame of an actual early sixteenth century broadcloth weaver named John Winchcombe, Deloney's best known and most popular prose work, *Jack of Newbury*, is sentimental in its account of the life of an artisan turned citizen.³ Indeed, Jack's advancement from weaver-servant to the premiere master-clothmaker in all of Berkshire, if not England, is so celebrated that even the king (Henry VIII) recognizes Jack as a national treasure. Given the sympathetic portrayal of Jack's fame as the reward for a life of hard work, it is no wonder that critics have, for decades, regarded Deloney as teaching "a doctrine of acquiescence ... so as to avoid the fear of social disturbance."⁴ If *Jack of Newbury* celebrates the wonders of a weaver, however, it is to emphasize the importance of the labor of the cloth industry and, in turn, to protest the treatment of clothworkers at the hands of the government at a time when the cloth industry was facing a major depression. By glorifying the clothworkers above all trades at a time when they were beleaguered by a dearth of grain at home, the closure of markets abroad, and a government unsympathetic to these problems, Deloney authors a radical narrative of national history in which social and economic prosperity and political security lie in the hands of the clothworkers rather than the crown.

THE SILENCE OF THE LOOMS: DELONEY'S PLIGHT
AND THE CLOTHWORKERS' PERIL

Before turning to *Jack of Newbury*, I would like to look more closely at the episodes that helped to shape Deloney's later career to show the logic of protest that defined Deloney's writing in the 1590s. The first incident, in June of 1595, was the result of his collaboration with fourteen other silkweavers in writing a letter to the pastors of the French and Dutch churches in London.⁵ Frustrated with the perceived threat to

York 1997), esp. chap. 2.

³As Merritt Lawlis explains, Jack of Newbury is most likely a composite of two John Winchcombes, a father and son who "were pioneers in the manufacture of clothing in Newbury, Berkshire." *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Bloomington 1961) 350, note.

⁴E. D. Mackerness, "Thomas Deloney and the Virtuous Proletariat," *The Cambridge Journal* 5.1 (1951) 47. For other critics who advance the notion that Deloney's writing confirms social hierarchies, see R. G. Howarth, *Two Elizabethan Writers of Fiction: Thomas Nashe and Thomas Deloney* (South Africa 1956) 42; and Bernard Capp, "Popular Literature," *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (London 1985) 210.

⁵My narrative here draws from Merritt Lawlis's introduction to *The Novels of Thomas*

their profession by the immigrant silk-weavers, the members of the Weavers' Company drafted a complaint against Dutch and French clothworkers who had come to England in the 1560s and 70s "for the Gospell's sake," that is, to escape religious persecution by the Spanish Catholics in their own countries.⁶ Although the immigrant weavers came to England to seek asylum for their Protestant beliefs, by the late sixteenth century, the London weavers began to question their motives and decry their methods:

they onely seek their own private Lucre without any Christian regard of the native born of our Countrye and without respect of the liberties and privileges graunted to the Freemen of this honourable Cittye, to the great and amazing endamage of the Common wealth and to the utter spoile and beggarie of the Queenes liege people of this facultye.⁷

The weavers charge the Protestant immigrants with several transgressions: the immigrants "kepe Apprentices and Loomes twyce or thryce as many as thay ought," thereby increasing productivity through illegal means;⁸ the strangers teach their fellow unapprenticed countrymen "the Arte of Silke weaveinge" and further teach the women in their community how to weave, women who then marry men to whom they teach the trade; finally—and perhaps most disturbing to Deloney and the London silkweavers—the immigrants "have opened and discovered the secret of our Occupacon to their worke Maisters." By revealing the trade's "secrets," the immigrant population has "growne as Cunning in

Deloney (n. 3 above) xxvii–xxviii. Found in the London Weaver's Company record office, the "Complaint of the Yeomen Weavers Against the Immigrant Weavers" is found in appendix 22 in Frances Consitt, *The London Weavers' Company, Volume 1* (Oxford 1933) 312–316. The authors sent forty copies of the letter: eleven to the pastors of the French church, the same number to the pastors of the Dutch church, and one copy each for the lord mayor and the City's aldermen (Lawlis [n. 3 above] xxviii). The letter was signed by "William Muggins, Thomas Delonye and others, June Anno domini 1595" (Consitt 316).

⁶For a discussion of the immigration of weavers from the Netherlands see Eric Kerridge, *Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England* (Manchester 1985) 227. The Dutch had settled in London by the 1580s. See Kerridge 24.

⁷Consitt (n. 5 above) 313.

⁸The ordinance of the Weavers' Company of 1589 and 1594 asserts "1. That noe person of our Guild shall kepe above twoe Forreine Jorneymen, English or Stranger, at one time, for that no forreine Jorneyman shalbe admitted a Master before they have wrought as a Servant the space of seaven yeares. 2. That noe Stranger not beinge denizon shall keepe above the number of Three Loomes in his house" (Appendix 21, Consitt [n. 5 above] 311).

any worke” as the natives and thereby threatens the Londoner’s pride and livelihood.⁹ The immigrants had become too proficient in silkweaving; art in weaving skills, while desirable in Englishmen, becomes deplorable in the foreigners.

Central to the English workers’ list of grievances is that the city government actually privileges foreigners *over* the London weavers: “In all well-governed Commonwealths the natyve borne are preferred before the Straunger.”¹⁰ By not taking action against the encroaching immigrants, according to Deloney, the government unforgivably aligns itself with the foreign silkweavers. Deloney complains that while the strangers are the cause of the weavers’ “great decaye and ympoverishinge,” the city leaders and clergy ignore that debasement.¹¹ In addressing the letter to the Dutch and French pastors, Deloney and his fellow yeomen hoped that the churchmen would remedy the situation by influencing their parishioners to obey English laws and respect the native weavers in order to enable the Londoners to prosper again. The letter backfired, however, and the city government returned the insult: the lord mayor called for the confiscation of all copies of the letter and threw the free-men in Newgate prison.¹² Reiterating their grievances and complaining that they had been “restrayned from their occupacions and their families [were in] in great distresse,” Deloney and his fellow weavers successfully petitioned the lord chief justice and were released soon after.¹³

Just a year later, in July of 1596, Deloney’s writing again caused trouble with the London authorities. He was charged with composing a “scurrilous” ballad on the shortage of grain.¹⁴ While the actual ballad has not survived, evidence of its offensive subject matter is found in a letter from the lord mayor, Stephen Slany, to William Cecil, Lord Burghley. In the letter, Slany describes the ballad’s scandalous contents and its culpable author:

Thear was brought to my hands a certain ballad contaynyng a Complaint of the great want and scarcity of corn within the Realm wich forasmuch as it contayneth in it certain vaine & presumptuous matters bringing in her high-

⁹Consitt (n. 5 above) 313–314.

¹⁰Consitt (n. 5 above) 315.

¹¹Consitt (n. 5 above) 316.

¹²See “Report of the Lord Mayor on the Weavers’ Pamphlet” in Consitt (n. 5 above) 317–318.

¹³Consitt (n. 5 above) 317.

¹⁴John Stow, *Survey of London, Book V*, 1603, ed. John Strype (London 1720) 333.

ness to speak with her people in dialogue wise in very fond and indecent sort & prescribeth orders for the remedyng of the dearth of Corn & extracted (as it seemeth) out of the book published by your lords the last year butt in that vain & indiscreet manner as that thearby the poor may aggravate their grief & take occasion of soom discontentment, I thought it good to call before me the printer & the partie by whom it was putt to print, who pretended a lycence. ... The maker himself who is one Delonie (an idle fellow and one noted with the like beefore in printing a Book for the Silkweavers wherein was found some like foolish & disordered matter) I cannot yet find.¹⁵

Although we may never know the ballad's exact content, we are able to speculate on what was so illicit about the "vaine," "indiscreet," and "presumptuous" ballad that prompted Slany to attempt to arrest the author. Traditionally, the ballad's content has been considered licentious because it so offended the queen, who in the ballad—according to Slany—speaks in a familiar manner with her (working-class) subjects.¹⁶ To be sure, written discourse about the queen was carefully monitored and court officials may have considered representations of Elizabeth in conversation with the commoners seditious.¹⁷ Indeed, according to John Strype in Stow's *Survey of London*, "[t]he Magistrates of the City would by no means allow in those Days any unworthy Reflections or Speeches against" the sovereign.¹⁸

Neither the queen's presence nor her "dialogue" in the ballad, however, were most likely the principal cause of the lord mayor's distress. Slany's alarm may quite possibly lie in the resemblance between a 1595 royal proclamation and Deloney's "vain and indiscreet" ballad. Slany seems to recognize that the ballad was "extracted" from a royal pamphlet that called for restrictions on the sale of corn and promised "that the markets will be well served and the poor relieved in their provisions during this time of dearth."¹⁹ Although using the language of

¹⁵The letter is found in the Lansdowne MS 81.30 in the British Library, London. Deloney's "Book for the Silkweavers" that Slany mentions is also lost.

¹⁶See Eugene Wright, *Thomas Deloney* (Boston 1981) 37; Lawlis (n. 3 above) xxviii; and Suzuki (n. 2 above) 187.

¹⁷For reactions to writings about Queen Elizabeth in the early modern period, see Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison 1984); and Carol Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia 1994), esp. 116–118.

¹⁸Stow (n. 14 above) 333.

¹⁹Quoted in Robert Steele, *A Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of Tudor and Stu-*

the proclamation to propose a new solution to the problem of grain shortage does not break any laws, doing so implicitly underscores the impotence of the government's proclamation. Therein lies Deloney's "presumptuousness." Deloney's document indicates his distrust of official (in)action: while the royal pamphlet claims the "poor" will be "relieved," it does not say exactly *how* the projected changes will directly help the poor. Deloney's text, on the other hand, "prescribeth orders for the remedying of the dearth of Corn" in a way that "the poor may aggravate their grief & take occasion of soom discontentment." In other words, Deloney calls the poor workers to action and thus undermines the authority of the royal document.²⁰

Detecting Deloney's distrust of ineffective legislation and recognizing his position as a popular ballad writer, Slany may have predicted and feared the widespread appeal the ballad would have for the laborers of London. The primary cause for the lord mayor's alarm would have been the civic disruption the ballad could potentially cause. Events of the recent past—two social uprisings in London on the part of the workers in June 1595 in response to grain shortages—could not have been far from Slany's memory.²¹ In one instance, a silkweaver went to the home of John Spencer, then lord mayor, to rail against the government. The lord mayor, presuming the weaver mad, had him thrown into Bethlehem Hospital when, on the weaver's way there, he was "rescued by a crowd of two or three hundred apprentices."²² Slany surely did not want a repetition of these past incidents and perhaps, in an attempt to prevent any mad silk-weavers from coming to *his* door, he ordered Deloney's arrest before violence erupted in the city. From Slany's perspective, the weaver's complaint against the government could usher in

art Sovereigns, 1485–1714, vol. 1 (Oxford 1910) 11. The pamphlet is titled *A New Charge Given By the Queen's Commandment, to All Justices of Peace, and all Mayors, Sheriffs, and All Principal Officers of Cities, Boroughs, and Towns Corporate, for Execution of Sundry Orders published the Last Year for Stay of Dearth of Grain*. The pamphlet orders town officials to investigate any who might be hoarding grain, keep track of middlemen between producer and consumer, and be present at market to survey the dealings.

²⁰As Roger Manning notes, protests about grain shortages "suggest a decline of popular confidence in the ability of the city magistrates to dispense justice in an even-handed manner." *Village Revolts: Protest and Popular Disturbances in England* (Oxford 1988) 206.

²¹Manning (n. 20 above) 204.

²²Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford 1979) 329.

more widespread social protest. While the printer and publisher were both jailed for their part in the production of the ballad, officials never apprehended Deloney. He apparently disappeared from London and may never have published another ballad, “scurrilous” or otherwise.²³

While the explicit subjects of Deloney’s two publications are the silkweaving immigrants and the perilous grain shortage, they are implicitly concerned with the victims of those vexations, the English clothworkers. In both documents, Deloney implies that the producers of England’s most famous product suffered a grievous loss as a result of unwanted immigrants, grain shortages, and, most disturbingly, a government that should control those problems.²⁴

Threatened by laborers who would work for less money, the clothworkers found themselves using language which pitted “stranger” against “native” to defend what they saw as their rightful occupation. Deloney’s complaints against the population of immigrant weavers indicate that native silkweavers—those who had an ancient claim to one of England’s oldest trades—felt that they were becoming replaceable by foreign immigrants who neither knew nor cared about the long and glorious tradition of English clothmaking. Deloney’s plea to the immigrant churchmen was part of a general disgruntlement with foreign clothworkers who earlier in the century had been enthusiastically welcomed into England to help increase the production of cloth.²⁵ But while the English clothworkers embraced the commercial expansion of the trade, they also felt an increasing hostility toward the immigrants. Native clothworkers charged the immigrants with a multitude of transgressions including “producing inferior goods ... trading secretly with

²³J. W. H. Atkins, “Elizabethan Prose Fiction,” *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 3 (Cambridge 1909) 367. While Deloney’s critics generally agree that he abandoned broadside ballads in favor of prose narratives sometime in late 1596, the argument that this renunciation of ballads was a direct result of his arrest warrant is merely speculation.

²⁴Like Deloney, I use the term “clothworker” loosely to describe anyone who is involved in the manufacture of cloth (including wool, kersies, and silk), from the carder to the dyer. “Clothworker” also more specifically refers to those workers particularly associated with the finishing of the wool production process such as fullers, dyers, and shearmen.

²⁵The English government and indeed the native clothworkers initially perceived the textile skills of immigrants from Flanders and the Netherlands as well as those of the Walloons as a fortunate expansion of the English broadcloth industry. See Nigel Goose, “The ‘Dutch’ in Colchester: The Economic Influence of an Immigrant Community in the

each other, sending their profits home ... and even conspiring against the state. It was also complained that they held themselves too much apart, and failed to share the secrets of their trade with the native population.”²⁶ The inflated accusations of the immigrants point to a growing anxiety regarding the foreign clothworker in England. The English clothworkers, first deeming the foreign clothworkers’ presence as beneficial, came to see it as a usurpation of the national product and, by extension, a violation of the nation.

Similarly, Deloney’s pamphlet on the grain shortages participates in a growing distress among clothworkers over poor harvests. Although grain shortages affected the nation’s economy at large, communities of clothworkers were particularly devastated.²⁷ Harvest fluctuations affected the demand for material goods, particularly textiles.²⁸ Clothworkers were hit from both ends: if they could not sell cloth, neither could they buy food. In the late 1590s, harvest failure, the throttling of the cloth trade abroad due to market closure as a result of foreign war, and an absence of expendable income at home, led clothworkers into what was regarded as a national crisis.

As a result of his ballad on the grain shortage and pamphlet against the foreign silkweavers, Deloney earned notoriety amongst a readership he had never targeted—government officials. Strype posits that certain “ballads” and “libels” written during the late sixteenth century reflected “boldly and seditiously upon the Government, particularly in the case of a Dearth: often against the Strangers that came and settled here, and followed their trades: which the Apprentices and others took grievously.”²⁹ In his focus on complaints against “dearth” and “strangers,” Strype may certainly refer to Deloney’s two illicit publications. While Deloney’s “libels” might have earned him a place in the *Survey of London*, his discontent was indicative of the frustrations among clothworkers at large. Like many other silkweavers, Deloney’s profession was

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 1.3 (1982) 266.

²⁶Goose (n. 25 above) 271.

²⁷The majority of food riots in the 1590s occurred in large cloth-producing centers and the participants were mainly clothworkers. Laborers who existed at a level of subsistence resorted to sometimes violent disturbances to make their plight known to an uncaring government. See Sharp (n. 1 above) 13.

²⁸B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England 1600–1642* (Cambridge 1959) 16.

²⁹Stow (n. 14 above) 333.

disrupted, if not altogether halted, by the growing crisis of the 1590s. According to Thomas Nashe, Deloney was driven to poverty by the “silencing of his looms” in 1596.³⁰ However, Nashe indicates that Deloney will survive in these times of difficulty because he “hath rime inough for all myracles.” While Deloney was weaving silk in the 1590s, he was also writing ballads ; he was, after all, not just a silk-weaver, but a “Balletting Silke-weaver.”³¹ The conjunction of these two types of work underscores Deloney’s unique position as a writer of imaginative texts who attempts to transform, as he questions, the state of the cloth industry.

“A FAITHFUL UNITY”: THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

That Deloney most likely never published another ballad after 1596 suggests that the depression in the industry, as well as his two recent scrapes with the London authorities, might well have changed the nature of his work. Deloney’s next literary effort, *Jack of Newbury*, reconciles the two careers, silkweaving and writing, that had ended in disappointment. While many clothworkers turned to rioting and seizing grain as a form of protest in the face of an unsympathetic government, Deloney turned to prose narrative. Whereas the looting of grain trucks and the physical violence of rioting was a destructive display of discontent, Deloney’s writing becomes an instructive form of protest, one which aims to construct a new vision of the English clothworkers as a cohesive group of individuals. In response to the perceived government passivity to the clothworkers’ crisis in the late 1590s, Deloney creates an idealized version of a nation where workers are revered.³² In *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney envisions an England whose past as well as future relies on the interests of merchants and laborers.

³⁰Thomas Nashe, *Have With You to Saffron-Walden* in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald McKerrow (London 1840) 84. Nashe jokes that Deloney’s privation forced him to resort to drinking “carded ale.” While Nashe refers to ale which has been mixed with other substances to make it cheaper, his joke is also a reference to Deloney’s profession—wool cloth had to be “carded,” or combed—which had also been debased by external influences.

³¹Nashe (n. 30 above) 84.

³²Insofar as Deloney emphasizes the work of the lower classes in his text, his story is consistent with what Richard Helgerson calls a narrative of “inclusion,” which “works to broaden the national community.” *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago 1992) 11.

Deloney's focus on the cloth industry also presents an industry historically important to England's vision of itself. Harkening back to the past by "rais[ing] out of the dust of forgetfulness a most famous and worthie man,"³³ the famous weaver John Winchcombe, Deloney lends historical import to his tale. By emphasizing that Jack is *both* "famous" and "forgotten," Deloney indicates the tension in the position of his own fellow clothworkers. In *Jack of Newbury*, Deloney emphasizes the cloth industry as an English institution whose workers are to be valued. This sentiment would have resonated with the specific class of laborers adversely affected by recent economic troubles and yet crucial to the economic health of the nation.

The struggles that faced clothworkers—especially London silkweavers—in the late 1590s are rewritten in *Jack of Newbury* as a story of a prosperous and hopeful English community of rural clothworkers. In telling his story, Deloney looks to the rural past in order to challenge the urban present.³⁴ Deloney chooses to position his vision of the cloth industry in the thriving early decades of the sixteenth century. That Deloney shows us a portrait of an industrious and successful cloth industry with a diligent leader does not mean, however, that he conceives of his own culture of clothworkers in the same way. By considering the relationship between his earlier writings that criticize government policy and his literary work, we cannot ignore the stake he had in the fate of his fellow clothworkers, and we cannot help but see that Deloney's text is a bold critique of the challenges faced by the community of workers in the 1590s. Deloney's text reconstructs the image of his profession and its contributions to England and, in so doing, reveals the nation's very fissures.³⁵ *Jack of Newbury* might be regarded as Deloney's metaphor, his myth of a rebuilt industry and a unified nation that stands in opposition to the threatening realities faced by his fellow clothworkers.

³³Thomas Deloney, *Jack of Newbury* 1597, *The Novels of Thomas Deloney*, ed. Lawlis (n. 3 above) 3. All subsequent references to *Jack of Newbury* will be cited within the text.

³⁴As Raymond Williams has argued, "in every kind of radicalism the moment comes when any critique of the present must choose its bearings between past and future." Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford 1973) 36.

³⁵As Homi Bhabha suggests, sentiments of nationalism step in at times of crisis to heal the wounds of fractured communities: "the nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor." Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *Nation and Narration* (London and New York 1990) 291.

Deloney's project of glorifying the English clothworkers begins even before his narrative does, in the prefatory letter to his readers. He addresses the epistle to "all Famous Cloth workers in England," to whom he wishes "all happiness of life, prosperity and brotherly affection" (3).³⁶ The letter reveals Deloney's aim in *Jack of Newbury*, the adulation of the cloth trade and especially its workers, when he announces his subject: "Among all manuell Arts used in this Land, none is more famous for desert, or more beneficiall to the Commonwealth, than is the most necessarie Art of Cloathing. And therefore as the benefit therof is great, so are the professors of the same to be both loved and maintained" (3). Despite the crises facing the cloth industry in the 1590s, Deloney suggests a fantastic and flourishing trade. He begins with a letter addressed to the "famous," "happy," and "prosperous" clothworkers at a time when many were disenfranchised, despondent, and poverty-stricken. The fantasy of the cloth trade as a booming industry underscores the very bleak state of the industry of the 1590s and draws attention to the workers' sorry plight.

While the "Art of Cloathing" receives top billing in this epistle, Deloney reveres the artisans behind the art for providing the sustenance of a nation. The "excellent ... commoditie" of cloth is that "which hath been, and yet is the nourishing of many thousands of poore People" (3). The country's clothiers are still those who feed and provide jobs for the working poor. Deloney's admonition that the clothworkers are "to be both loved and maintained" suggests that the government has not given them their due respect, the very project proposed by Deloney in the offensive publication of 1595 (my emphasis). *Jack of Newbury* will highlight the people behind the looms, the workers who labor long and arduously to create the perfect commodity for England. To do this, Deloney writes for a citizen audience about matters near to their own experiences. He tells his intended audience that he writes "in a plain and humble manner, that it may be the better understood of those for whose sake I take pains to compile it, that is for the well minded Clothiers, that herein they may behold the great worship and credit which men of this trade have in former time come to" (3). Again, Delo-

³⁶While Deloney addresses his epistle to the clothworkers, his audience was certainly broader. *Jack of Newbury* was reprinted no less than eight times in twenty-three years. See Laura Caroline Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Eliza-*

ney emphasizes that contemporary clothiers—a group of men whose simplicity prompts him to write plainly—have not been given the “credit” that they deserve, the credit that their historic predecessors have been given. Importantly, the clothworkers to whom he specifically speaks are “in England.” He ends his letter by “commend[ing]” the clothworkers “to the most high God; who ever increase, in all perfection and prosperous estate, the long honoured trade of English Clothiers” (3). The clothworkers’ virtues are to be acknowledged by England’s most supreme authority: God shall see that the clothworkers aim to further the nation’s “honoured trade” and come to represent all that is “perfect” and “prosperous” about England. Because no product is “more beneficial to the commonwealth” than cloth, Deloney makes clear that to value the clothworkers is to value England. These workers, he suggests, are at stake in the very definition of the nation.

One important way Deloney draws the current state of cloth is by imagining—and to a certain extent inventing—ideal working conditions. Deloney’s epistle written with “brotherly affection” to “all famous cloth workers” refers back to John Winchcombe’s early sixteenth century, a time most closely linked to the guild system, and imposes on it a large workshop system and, in so doing, creates a utopian work environment. His “house” is at once workshop and domestic space, large cottage industry and intimate center of production. With no analogous systems existing in Elizabethan England, Deloney forces his readers to *imagine* Jack’s workshop, further pushing them towards a communal fantasy quite separate from their economic realities. Jack, the master of production, is experienced with and intimately tied to the product on which his employees work as well as to the employees themselves. Jack’s beginnings as an apprentice to a wealthy clothier suggest his ties to manual labor. His own success—his swift rise from apprentice to journeyman to master of a large production workshop—would likely have left those of his audience who were themselves journeymen in awe.³⁷ While Jack keeps his workers in the position of wage-earner indefinitely, his meteoric rise to the top of his profession allows for a working class fantasy and reveals the tensions at work in the text. As a “clothier,” Jack is neither artisan nor merchant; rather he

bethan Popular Literature (Cambridge 1985).

³⁷See David N. Margolies, *Novel and Society in Elizabethan England* (London 1985) 145–146, on the shifting status of the journeyman at the end of the sixteenth century.

is an employer of the various artisans who labored with his materials.³⁸

Deloney's Jack represents a kind of clothier who owned and was in control of the management of his product, an employer who was disappearing, if not already vanished, from the contemporary cloth producing scene. In his civic pageant, *Himatia-Poleos* (1614), Anthony Munday describes the bygone cloth producer: "the Wooll-winder ... did carde and spinne his wooll, then weave it into cloth, full, rowe, sheare, dresse, and dye it, and sell it afterwards in his shop, performing all these severall offices thereto, by himself and servants."³⁹ Munday here describes a system of production in which the clothier-worker owns both the materials and the instruments of production and sells the product of his labors. He laments that this form of producing woolen broadcloth has given way to a production process that is fractured by its many disparate points of production: the production system "hath branched it self into divers other Companies, and of one entire Trade or Mysterie, is become many."⁴⁰ The unified workshop that Deloney presents subscribes to the ideal of "one entire Trade," which knits together the industry such that the workers themselves form a unified workforce, the face of the national product.⁴¹

To show the benefits of the clothworkers' productivity, Deloney constructs an idealized work environment that contrasts sharply with what his readers would have been familiar. Deloney represents Jack's workshop as a "great household" where his laborers work on all aspects of the cloth-producing process. Jack's "Ware-houses" are filled with several rooms under one great roof where the workers perform the acts of weaving, fulling, shearing, and dying of several types of cloth. Some rooms are filled "with wooll, some with flockes, some with woad and madder,"⁴² and some with broad clothes and kersies readie dyed and

³⁸E. Lipson, *The History of the Woollen and Worsted Industries* (London 1965) 72.

³⁹Anthony Munday, *Himatia-Poleos: The Triumphs of Olde Draperie, or The Rich Cloathing of England* (London 1614) 2.

⁴⁰Munday (n. 39 above) 2.

⁴¹Munday's nostalgia for the bygone days of the cloth producer who worked "by himself" is also felt by John May, the cloth tax collector to James I. May laments the passing of the age where clothmakers were part of a community of men who, at the same time that they worked independently, belonged to a brotherhood of laborers all working for a common purpose. *A Declaration of the Estate of Clothing Now Used Within This Realme of England* (London 1613), sig. B2v.

⁴²Two types of dyestuffs.

drest, besides a great number of others, some stretched on the Tenters, some hanging on poles, and a great many more lying wet in other places” (28). Deloney’s presentation of Jack’s workshop, however, would have seemed a part of a distant past compared to the clothworkers’ current mode of production. Successful weavers in the late sixteenth century would possess three or four looms but larger manufacturing centers were unusual.⁴³ Further, cloth production during Deloney’s time relied on the “putting out system,” which was based on the distribution of wool by clothiers to spinners, weavers, and cloth finishers. Once the particular labor was completed, the clothier would pass the product on to the laborer in the next stage of production.⁴⁴ While the cloth trade in the 1590s was fractured in its production processes, Deloney represents the past cloth trade as a unified and flourishing industry in order to imagine future prosperity for England’s cloth industry.

This fantasy of production is nowhere more clearly described in the text than in the description of the laborers of Jack’s house: “Within one room ... There stood two hundred Loomes ... Two hundred men, the truth is so / Wrought in these Loomes all in a rowe” (26–28). The two hundred men and looms suggest the immense space of the workshop, which is further magnified by the fact that by each loom “a prety boy, / Sate making quilts” (26). In a nearby room, separated from the men, a hundred women “Were carding hard with joyfull cheere” while in an adjacent room two hundred maidens “all day did spin” (27). The fantastical number of men, women, and boy workers—700—is augmented by 150 children “wool pickers,” fifty “shearmen,” eighty “Rowers,” forty dyers, and twenty fullers (27).⁴⁵ In addition to the thousand-plus clothworkers Jack employs, he also keeps a full kitchen staff so that his workers can live on the premises like a “great household and family” (28). Jack’s workshop is not necessarily striking for the size or the

⁴³Kerridge (n. 6 above) 196.

⁴⁴Stevenson (n. 36 above) 32.

⁴⁵“Quil”: a Piece of reed or other hollow stem on which yarn is wound; hence a bobbin, spool, or pirn of any material; “wool picker”: this job most likely refers not to the picking of wool off of sheep but rather to that activity of separating debris from the sheep’s wool once it has been cut from the animal; “shearman”: one who cuts off (the superfluous nap of woollen cloth) in the process of manufacture; “rower”: one who raises the nap on cloth; “fuller”: one who cleanses or thickens the wool by beating it with wooden mallets (*OED*).

amount of production that takes place there—curiously, we are never told the specifics of that—but rather for the sheer multitude of people that work together and the variety of production.⁴⁶ Perhaps even more stunning is the notion that the workers in Jack’s factory are content: the boys make quills with “mickle joie;” the carders work while they sing with “joyfull cheere.”⁴⁷ Jack’s workplace is enormous at the same time as it retains an intimacy associated with the domestic household. Importantly, this notion of “domestic” space suggests the workshop’s status as *both* home and factory. By portraying the nation’s industry through a place where laborers both live and produce, Jack’s workshop represents an idealized vision of an England where cloth workers *are*, as he hopes in his opening letter, both “loved and maintained.” The solidarity felt among the clothworkers in Jack’s workshop, the love they feel towards him, and their high level of productivity point to a utopian England and at the same time remind the readers of their own industry that was multi-faceted, plagued with problems of disunity, and threatened by the foreign other. The nation in *Jack of Newbury*, then, becomes an imagined community for Deloney’s fellow clothworkers, one they may envision and to which they may aspire.

If Jack’s workshop is a strange world of cloth production compared to that of his contemporary readers, it is made familiar through the very form in which he describes it—the ballad. Deloney, who spent several years of his life writing ballads to supplement his income as a silk-weaver, certainly knew the popularity with which ballads were received. The description of Jack’s astonishing workshop in ballad form makes it more imaginable on two counts: first, the ballad form, which often claims to refer to “actual” historical instances, gives Jack of Newbury’s workshop a grounded referent in John Winchcombe’s past. Secondly, the ballad creates a communal sense through its very form.

⁴⁶On the divided nature of the cloth industry, see Kerridge (n. 6 above) 176.

⁴⁷Interestingly, the workers who are most demonstrative in their joy are the quillers, who are children, and the carders and spinners, occupations generally associated during the early modern period with women. The traditionally “male” clothworking jobs— weaving, shearing, and fulling—are taken more seriously here. Joan Pong Linton suggests that the women’s singing “trivializes their labor, turning them into entertainment for the men.” “*Jack of Newbury* and Drake in California: Domestic and Colonial Narratives of English Cloth and Manhood,” *English Literary History* 59.1 (1992) 29. The text suggests, however, that the male and female workers are separated in different rooms of the warehouse.

While the ballad form may seem to locate the narrative as an exaggerated folklore, the mundaneness of the recounted activities—weaving, spinning, carding—return the narrative to the world of the everyday. Ballads, a cheap form of fiction, would have been accessible to a large portion of the working class audience.⁴⁸ Further, one needed not be literate to enjoy the ballads—they were very often read aloud and generally were set to music.⁴⁹ Because Deloney's ballad is about clothworkers who are busy *working* at a time when so many clothmakers were not, it allows for a concrete example of what a nation of busy workers would look like. This fantasy transports the readers away from their own circumstances and enables them to imagine the possibility of a unified national industry supported by a community of clothworkers who contribute to the well being of England.

It is this emphasis on the national contribution on the part of the clothworkers, perhaps more than anything else, that moves *Jack of Newbury* from simply a nostalgic work by a disgruntled weaver to a nationalistic narrative of activist politics. As a way to legitimize the national contribution of clothworkers, Deloney emphasizes the significance of Jack's military efforts. Jack gathers forces from within the ranks of his workshop to help England's efforts against Scotland. While King Henry VIII "was making warre in *France* ... *James*, king of *Scotland*, falsly breaking his oath invaded *England* with a great army and did much hurt upon the borders" (30). Although Jack was commanded to gather six men "to meete the Queene in *Buckinghamshire*, who was there raising a great power to go against the faithlesse king of Scots," he shows up having gathered fifty men in "white coates, and red caps with yellowe Feathers ... fiftie armed men on foot with pikes, and fiftie shot in white coats also" (30). Jack, in a display of great loyalty, humbles himself before the queen and emphasizes his pride in his profession:

⁴⁸For an introduction to the ballad see V. E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and Guide from the Beginning of Printing to the year 1897* (Harmondsworth, UK and New York 1977); and Louis Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca 1958).

⁴⁹Benedict Anderson suggests that "no matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York 1983) 132.

Most Gracious Queene quoth hee, Gentleman I am none, nor the sonne of a gentleman, but a poore Clothier, whose lands are his Loomes, having no other Rents but what I get from the backs of little sheepe, nor can I claime any cognisance but a wodden shuttle. Nevertheless, most gracious Queene, these my poore servants and my self, with life and goods are ready at your Majesties commaund, not onely to spend our blouds, but also to lose our lives in defence of our King and Countrey. (31)

Jack here is the model subject, one who would lay down his life and the lives of his men to serve the king he loves. His humble assertion of his position reminds the queen that he has nothing but his life to give: no lands, no rents, no cognisance. A lack of “cognisance” here could mean “lack of knowledge” or refer to Jack’s lack of an emblem distinguishing the retainers of a noble house. Instead of a cognisance, Jack claims he only possesses a “shuttle” or a weaving instrument. It is Jack’s “shuttle,” however, that *is* his “cognisance” in both senses of the word: his weaving implement is both his emblem (it represents him) and his knowledge (it is through the production of cloth that he knows the world). Jack’s display prompts the queen to assert that he is “though a Clothier by trade, yet a Gentleman by condition, and a faithful subject in heart” (32). On the other hand, Jack’s astonishing effort—bringing along 144 more men than required—may also be seen as a vaunting display of his wealth. As Laura Stevenson suggests, Jack’s effort “shows the queen that he is not just the most loyal, but the most powerful man in Berkshire.”⁵⁰ These two attributes, loyalty and power, are in tension with one another as Jack usurps the function of the crown by raising a private army at the same time as he represents himself as intensely loyal to that crown. Deloney revises the role of the faithful subject to make space for one who also contributes significantly to the nation. Rather than “lands,” Jack possesses “loomes” and it is with these looms that he has become wealthy enough to contribute to the nation’s well being and security.

Despite the improbability that there was ever such a meeting between John Winchcombe and Katherine of Aragon,⁵¹ this display of mutual reliance was common even in the late sixteenth century. Indeed, as Stevenson suggests, Elizabeth “was increasingly dependent on the

⁵⁰Stevenson (n. 36 above) 115.

⁵¹Lawlis (n. 3 above) 350, note.

loans of London merchants as her reign progressed, and the court, like the country, profited from England's trade."⁵² Profit for the crown, however, did not necessarily lead to respect for the laborers, and the government was not always sensitive to the precarious position of the cloth industry when it called on the trade companies to lend financial support. By inserting this episode, Deloney foregrounds the common interest which binds the court and the clothworkers. That is, the continued health of the cloth industry relied on the notion that in order for the clothworkers to prosper, they needed the support of the crown.

While Queen Katherine has given Jack and his followers her utmost approval, it is not until Jack has the attention of the ultimate sovereign, King Henry VIII, that the clothworkers can be fully glorified. Henry comes to Berkshire on a progress and, in anticipation of the king's arrival, Jack clothes thirty of his men in "blewe coates, faced with Sarcenet,"⁵³ while he dresses himself "in a plain russet coate, a paire of white kersie breeches, without welt or gard" (35).⁵⁴ Jack ornaments his men in showy colors and expensive fabrics to demonstrate his fortune and benevolence toward his servants; their clothes signify that they are deprived of nothing. At the same time, his own attire, without ornamentation and made from traditional homespun cloth seems to assert his humble position in the face of his king. Yet while his clothes may assert his humility, they also tell another story. First, the fabrics from which his suit is made are the same fabrics that were in the sixteenth century generally associated with the British cloth industry: heavy, coarse, and simply made textiles. Not only does Jack labor for the clothes on his back, but he chooses decidedly British stuffs.

The king sees Jack and several of his men at a distance with their swords drawn as they defend "a company of Ants from the furious wrath of the Prince of Butterflies" (36). What ensues is a series of actions on Jack's part, which at once humble him to the king and suggest contempt for his authority. When asked by the king's messenger to go before the king, Jack declines: "his Grace hath a horse, and I am on foote, therefore will him to come to mee" (36). This gesture of defiance

⁵²Stevenson (n. 36 above) 107.

⁵³"A very fine and soft silk material" (*OED*).

⁵⁴Walter Money, historian of Newbury, suggests that King Henry and his court were actually at Newbury in 1516. Wolsey was probably with the king because there is evidence that Wolsey wrote a letter on 10 Sept. 1516 from Newbury to Sir Richard Jerningham. Walter Money, *A History of Newbury* (1887; Maidenhead, Eng. 1972) 26.

is coupled with the argument that he would never leave his people in a time of potential invasion: “while I am away, our enemies might come and put my people in hazard as the Scots did *England*, while our King was in *France*” (36). Referring to his own involvement in the protection of England, which resulted in the battle at Flodden Field, Jack admonishes his sovereign for being an absent king. This, however, is not the message he asks the herald to give to the king. Rather than sending this criticism of the king’s policies, Jack appeals to the king’s sensibilities as defender of his people: “and tell his Majestie, hee might think me a very bad Governour that would walk aside upon pleasure, and leave my people in peril” (36). The king agrees to approach and upon his arrival near Jack and his “troops,” they “put up all their weapons, and with a joyful crie flung up their caps in token of victorie” (36).

Lest King Henry think that he is being insulted by Jack’s impetuosity, “Jack of Newberie with all his servants fell on their knees, saying: God save the King of *England*, whose sight hath put our foes to flight, and brought great peace to the poore labouring people” (36). Jack’s performance reveals his somewhat duplicitous humility. His behavior prior to this moment is by any standards potentially treasonous; he refuses to come to the king when asked for and insults the king’s war policies. Yet Jack’s ultimate actions leave Henry with the impression of Jack as a true and honest subject: he prostrates himself before and exalts the king in the name of the working poor. While Jack’s final action seems to consolidate the king’s authority over his subjects, his previous actions—especially his comments regarding the absent king, which could be perceived as subversive—are kept from the king. And while Jack’s self-association with the laboring poor places him in the king’s eyes as a harmless yet productive subject, his great wealth and stake in what happens to his trade give him a certain power. Any potential for subversion, though, might seem to be undercut by Jack’s subsequent humility. Jack explains that he “intend[s] to be no longer a prince, because the majestie of a King hath eclipst my glorie ... and humbly I yeeld unto his Majestie all my sovereign rule and dignitie, both of life and goods, casting up my weapons at his feete, to doe any service wherein his Grace shall command me” (37). Jack’s renunciation of sovereignty to the king is a gesture of deference. And, yet, it is surprising in that it suggests that Jack possessed any sovereignty *at all*. Jack thus presents conflicting versions of himself: he is at once a prince

and a poor laborer; he worships the king at the same time as he is an outspoken critic of the King's policies; he is both subject to a sovereign and himself a sovereign.⁵⁵ Jack cannot then be confined to the role of either loyal subject or insurgent; he is both.

The episode in which the king comes to Newbury would certainly have resonated for the readers who would have recognized the king's companion, the sycophantic Cardinal Wolsey, Henry's lord chancellor, as the butterfly from which Jack is defending his ants. The numerous insults that Jack hurls in the direction of Wolsey seem to go unnoticed by the king. Jack tells the king that their reason for defending the Ants against the Prince of the Butterflies is because "the Butterflie was much misliked, but few durst say anie thing to him because of his golden apparell: who through sufferance grewe so ambitious and malapert, that the poore Ant could no sooner get an egge into her nest, but he would have it away" (37). The king, seemingly oblivious to the implications of Jack's fable replies simply, "These were proud Butterflies" (37). Jack's veiled comments recall the lord chancellor's excessive display of wealth as well as his outrageous tax policies during the 1520s.⁵⁶ Picking up on this doubleness and "gall'd by the Allegorie of the Ants," Wolsey suggests to the king that Jack "hath not stucke this day to undo himself onely to become famous by receiving of your Majestie" (39). Rightfully suspicious that Jack's allegory was directed against him, Wolsey is less generous in his impression of Jack as he suggests that Jack glorifies the king to advance his own reputation. By staging the Ants' defense of their hill from the Butterflies, however, Deloney is less interested in revealing Jack's desire to "become famous," than revealing Wolsey's own ambition and impudence.

Understanding Jack's accusations perfectly, Wolsey claims that Jack, "being King of Ants, do carry a great grudge to the Butterflies" (37). The King of Ants' "grudge" against the Prince of Butterflies does not merely stem from the Butterfly's vanity and ambition, but also from the power that the Butterfly has over the Ants: Deloney's criticism emphasizes the grievous position of the Ants, the symbol for the cloth-

⁵⁵As Stevenson suggests (n. 36 above, 124), while "Jack's princeliness is allegorical fiction, his power is not. ... He says he is a poor clothier, but this too is simply a pose: 'poor' in this context loses its standard meaning, and 'clothier' comes very close to meaning 'lord.'"

⁵⁶Paul Salzman, *English Prose Fiction, 1558–1700* (Oxford 1985) 408.

workers. In a peculiar departure in the text, where Deloney's tone changes from that of storyteller to that of chronicler, he describes the lord chancellor's vanity as well as his devastating foreign policy regarding the clothworkers:

This Cardinall was at that time Lord Chancellor of *England* and a wonderfull proud Prelate, by whose means great variance was set betwixt the King of *England* and the French King, the Emperour of *Almaine*, and divers other Princes of Christendom, whereby the trafficke of those Merchants was utterly forbidden, which bred a general woe through *England*, especially among Clothiers: insomuch as having no sale for their cloath, they were faine to put away many of their people which wrought for them. (38)

Deloney suggests that the outcome of Wolsey's wars on European countries is that clothworkers have fallen into poverty as a result of the market closures abroad. By removing the reader from the story into a larger historical narrative, Deloney forces us to consider the oppression faced by the clothworkers. The disregard that Wolsey has for the clothworkers is reflected in their fate: they are simply "put away" like useless instruments. Deloney expands the ramifications of these wars: because the cloth industry has fallen into a depression, "a general woe" is felt throughout the nation. We find a source for his complaint in an 1528 episode in Holinshed describing the effects of the wars with Spain on the cloth merchants: "the trade of merchandize was in maner fore-let here in England, and namely the clothes lay on their hands, whereby the commonwealth suffered great decaie, and great numbers of spinners, carders, tuckers, and such other that lived by clothworking, remained idle, to their great impoverishment."⁵⁷ The "common people" view the foreign conflicts as separate from their own cause: this war is only "between the emperour and the king."⁵⁸ Not able to sell their cloth, the once valuable commodity becomes ultimately worthless. Remaining "idle," the clothworkers are neither eating nor are they fighting for the crown. Holinshed suggests, and Deloney later echoes,

⁵⁷Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, ed. Henry Ellis, (London 1808) 3.735.

⁵⁸Just before this, Holinshed suggests that during the reign of Henry VIII the masses were given relief in the form of "grain" from the continent during times of dearth. Similarly, large quantities of grain from the Baltic region were imported to England during the harvest failures of 1594–1596. See Ralph Davis, *English Overseas Trade: 1500–1700* (London 1973) 18.

that these wars affect not only the clothworkers: “the commonwealth” as a whole “suffered great decaie.” As cloth goes, so goes the nation.

Replicating almost exactly the language of Holinshed later in his narrative, Deloney emphasizes the gravity of the situation that the clothworkers in *Jack of Newbury* face:

By meanes of the warres our King had with other countries, many Merchant strangers were prohibited from comming to *England*, and also our owne Merchants (in like sort) were forbidden to have dealing with *France*, or the *Low-countries*: by meanes whereof, the Clothiers had most of their cloth lying on their hands, and that which they sold was at so low a rate, that the money scarcely paid for the wooll, and workemanship. (56)

Considering Deloney’s earlier disgruntlement with foreign weavers, it may seem surprising that he laments the prohibition of “merchant strangers” in England. This complaint, however, is only to point out the true victim of the wars: the domestic cloth industry and those involved in England’s national trade suffer the effects. Despite earlier episodes in which Jack and his men pledge eternal duty to the king, here the clothworkers are not participants in his wars. Loyalty to the cloth industry, then, precedes loyalty to the crown.

Deloney’s interest in referring back to earlier struggles between the clothworkers and their government reveals the extent to which clothworkers were personally invested in the crown’s military action abroad. The late 1580s to the 1590s—the very years Deloney was most likely active as a member of the silkweavers’ company—were similarly marked with depression in the cloth market due to wars with Spain.⁵⁹ Though by the late sixteenth century the entrepôt at Antwerp had been in decline for many years, trade to the continent had been brisk, especially since the advent of the new draperies. Conflict with Spain during the 1580s and 1590s halted this healthy industry and drove many of the trade, including silkweavers, into poverty. While the dearth of grain as a result of disastrous harvests during the late 1590s surely compounded the poverty of domestic clothworkers, it was, as R. B. Outhwaite puts it, “only one of a succession of problems, and the duration of this whole period of difficulty coincided generally with the years in which Eng-

⁵⁹See Peter Clark, “A Crisis Contained? The Condition of English Towns in the 1590’s” in *The European Crisis of the 1590’s: Essays in Comparative History* ed. Peter Clark (London 1985) 49.

land was in open conflict with Spain.”⁶⁰

The conflict with Cardinal Wolsey, historically as well as in *Jack of Newbury*, reached a happy conclusion in a relatively short time: within two months Wolsey agreed to exclude Antwerp from the embargo and later a formal truce was reached.⁶¹ Deloney dramatizes this conclusion to suggest that social protest on the part of the clothworkers had direct effect on this reversal of policy. In a letter to “all the chief clothing townes in England,” Jack calls for a unified front of clothworkers to combat the depressed state of the industry:

having a taste of the generall grieffe, and feeling ... the extremitie of these times, I fell into consideration by what meanes we might best expell these sorrowes, and recover our former commodity ... I found that nothing was more needfull herein then a faithfull unity among our selves. This sore of necessity can no way be cured but by concord ... Dear friends, consider that our Trade will maintaine us, if wee will uphold it, and there is nothing base, but that which is basely used. (57)

The letter appears to be a romanticized re-narrativization of his letter of 1595. By drawing on his experience of writing the letter from the silkweavers, Deloney shows that words can indeed mobilize a dedicated community. While Deloney’s letter landed him in Newgate, Jack’s letter prompts a “faithful unity” of clothworkers—112 men representing the country’s 60,000 clothworkers—to go to London and express their complaints to their sovereign. Indeed, Jack claims the clothworkers will not attain relief unless they themselves make an effort to protest their condition. Unlike the government officials who arrested Deloney in June 1595, the king, who comes to realize that the clothworkers are indispensable to the commonwealth, agrees that they shall have their “griefs redressed” (57). The king, believing the clothworkers to be “in the number of the best Common wealths men,” delivers a petition to Wolsey. Remembering his quarrel with Jack and further insulted by Jack’s reference to the Cardinal’s lowly birth, Wolsey arrests him and all the other protesting clothworkers.⁶² Finally, Wolsey grants the cloth-

⁶⁰R. B. Outhwaite, “Dearth, the English Crown, and the ‘Crisis of the 1590s,’” *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays in Comparative History* ed. Peter Clark (London 1985) 23.

⁶¹H. C. Bindoff, *Tudor England* (England 1950) 123.

⁶²Jack refers to Wolsey’s status as a son of a butcher when he jokes that “if my Lord Cardinals father had been no hastier in killing of Calves then he is in dispatching of poore

workers their suit “so that in short space, Clothing againe was very good, and poore men as well set on work as before” (60).

In the world of *Jack of Newbury* clothworkers can complain about the impoverished state of the industry and gain the king’s ear. They can write letters to mobilize, protest the sovereign’s foreign policies, and still be deemed by the king “the chief Yeomen of our Land” (58). They can insult the lord chancellor’s familial background and still be forgiven. All this can occur in the narrative because the crown values the cloth industry above all others. Yet, while the world of *Jack of Newbury* is one in which his king lauds Jack, the emblematic clothworker, it is the esteem of his fellow clothworkers that brings Jack his fame and consolidates his status as “the famous and worthy clothier of England.” The text questions the sovereign as the site for the nation’s unity in favor of an alternative commonwealth in which the *wealth* of the nation is founded upon the *common* people. Because the labor of the clothworkers becomes that which is most effective in defining England as a unified community, the text rejects the policies of the sovereign as being able to do the same. We might read this as a challenge to Deloney’s sovereign, Queen Elizabeth and her counselors who were, at best, ambivalent to the clothworker’s plight. The irony of Jack’s exclamation, “God save the King of *England*, whose sight hath put our foes to flight, and brought great peace to the poore labouring people” (36), would not have been lost on the laborers of the 1590s who, although “poore,” were not at “peace.” Perhaps Elizabeth’s father (or at least the representation of him) could bring peace to the laboring poor, but she has been ineffectual in this regard. Deloney’s text is a call for clothworkers to understand that their difficulties are similar to the plight of the workers in his story. His prefatory letter underscores that the “professors” of the “most necessarie Art of Clothing” need to be both “loved and maintained” (3). Deloney’s text is a logical extension of his pamphlet of 1595 and his ballad of 1596 in that he is genuinely interested in promoting the betterment of the clothworkers of England. That his narrative is fiction should not cloud the aims of his project: to remind a government concerned with national economic prosperity that it should not take the producers of this prosperity, the clothworkers, for granted.

mens sutes, I doubt he had never worne a myter” (59). Wolsey, hearing a report of this slight, believes Jack is “infected with *Luthers* spirit” (59). I thank an anonymous reader for pointing out that this accusation of Protestantism further points to Jack as protester.

For Deloney, text and textiles are intimately linked in that they help the reader to imagine a future beyond the status quo. Deloney's narrative does not simply celebrate the work of the clothworkers; he presents them as effective and socially transformative members of a unified nation.

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