

## I. Історико-літературний процес

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### English Renaissance Pamphlet in Diachrony

**Василина Катерина. Англійський ренесансний памфлет у діяхронії.**

У статті розглядається еволюції памфлету на тлі соціокультурних трансформацій доби Ренесансу в Англії. Новий жанр, основною настановою якого було інформування англійців про актуальні події, відзначався компактністю та протейтичністю форми, тенденційністю у зображенні явищ життя та публіцистичним спрямуванням. Характерними рисами памфлетів доби Ренесансу були сенсаційність, підкреслена розважальність та інвективна риторика. Стійка зацікавленість реципієнтів у різних сферах життя сприяла поступовому розширенню тематичного спектру творів, які умовно можна розподілити на три великі групи: релігійно-політичні, літературно-критичні та соціально-побутові памфлети. Втілюючи загальні риси памфлетної літератури, кожний із тематичних підвидів своєрідно реагував на загальні тенденції у відповідних сферах життя, демонструючи різні жанрові комбінації та стилістичні модифікації. Відсутність визначеності жанрових параметрів англійської памфлетистики надавала широкий простір для творчих експериментів тогочасних митців, результати яких адсорбувалися різними літературними жанрами, а також закладали підґрунтя для формування журналістики.

**Ключові слова:** Ренесанс, памфлет, Лондон, жанр, джестові книги, пікареска, роман, наративна техніка, структурна модель.

The Renaissance period, marked by a heightened interest in the study of humanity and its place in the world, gave rise to new and original literary forms. Among these was the pamphlet—a prose genre that offered a detailed examination of the everyday life of real, earthly individuals. Due to its compact format (“between one and

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twelve sheets of paper or eight to ninety-six pages in quarto”<sup>1</sup>) – though some works, such as those by T. Nash, T. Lodge, and T. Dekker, were notably voluminous<sup>2</sup> – it became instrumental in shaping early modern journalism, particularly through its responsiveness to current events.

As J. R. Hibbard metaphorically put it, the pamphlet emerged from the union of *preaching and printing*.<sup>3</sup> The origin of the term “pamphlet” is disputed. Some attribute its first usage in *Philobiblon* (1344) by the English churchman Richard de Bury. Others trace it to the popular 12th-century Latin comedy *Pamphilus seu de amore*, influencing the Middle English “pamphlet,” or to the Old French *pamphilet*. Still others propose a Greek derivation, from *pan* or *pam* (“everything”) and *phlego* (“I burn”), suggesting a sense of passionate dissemination.<sup>4</sup>

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “the earliest known use of the noun *pamphlet* is in the Middle English period (1150–1500)”.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the term originally bore a negative connotation. Authors often used it to disparage rivals’ works.<sup>6</sup> In 1603, Thomas Bodley, founder of the Bodleian Library, dismissed such texts as “baggage books,” unworthy of inclusion in a reputable collection.<sup>7</sup>

In the 16th century, the term “pamphlet” covered a much broader range of texts than it does today. As Anna Nayman observes, “Pamphlets have eluded precise definition, although ... contemporaries recognised one when they saw one”.<sup>8</sup> During the Elizabethan era, the genre was used “not only for religious controversy but also ... for romantic fiction, autobiography, scurrilous personal abuse, and social and literary criticism”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Raymond J. Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain. Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 2003. P. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Clark S. The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580-1640. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1985. P. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Three Elizabethan Pamphlets / Ed. by G. R. Hibbard. New York : Free Port, 1969. P. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Волков А., Гречанюк Ю. Памфлет. *Лексикон загального і порівняльного літературознавства*. Чернівці : Золоті литаври, 2001. С. 392.

<sup>5</sup> Pamphlet. *Oxford English Dictionary*. URL: [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/pamphlet\\_n?tl=true](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/pamphlet_n?tl=true).

<sup>6</sup> Clark S. Op. cit. P. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Halasz A. The Marketplace of Print. Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England. Cambridge : CUP, 2006. P. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Nayman A. Thomas Dekker and the Culture of Pamphleteering in Early Modern London. London, New York : Routledge, 2016. P. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Pamphlet. *Britannica*. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/art/pamphlet>.

It is noted that “It included fiction, sketches of society, accounts of travel, literary criticism, personal controversy, theology, – the whole farrago, in short, of the non-political columns of our journals. It was in many cases written by men of much greater talent than the average journalist of the present day”.<sup>10</sup> The pamphlet of the time is a “literary chameleon”<sup>11</sup> – a new style of writing that gave scope to the creativity of Elizabethan authors. Eventually, writers began labelling their works as “pamphlets” to distinguish them from elite “romance”,<sup>12</sup> which, though still popular, was increasingly perceived as outdated and inaccessible. In England, pamphleteering flourished in the 16th century, spurred by rapid socio-cultural changes that made the genre a timely medium for addressing contemporary events.

Despite the wealth of pamphlets examined in scholarly literature, there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis of the thematic and stylistic range of Renaissance pamphleteering in England. This gap highlights the relevance of the present study, which aims to trace the evolution of pamphlet in Renaissance England from its early foundations.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the distinctive poetics of various thematic types of this unique literary phenomenon by examining English Renaissance pamphleteering from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives – its genesis, the formation of its genre model, and its evolution within the English Renaissance.

It is well established that every historical period produces a holistic cultural system: a specific type of subject (active agent and apprehender), a corresponding conception of the object, and a characteristic mode of cognition. The 16th century in England was characterised not only by the dissolution of traditional social structures, due to the rise of capitalist relations, but also by a shift in worldview from theocentrism to anthropocentrism.

According to N. Starchenko, value systems of any given era are “expressed, embodied, and symbolized in artifacts, human actions, and everyday life”.<sup>13</sup> The literary process of late 16th-century

<sup>10</sup> Various Elizabethan and Jacobean Pamphlets / Ed. by G. Saintsbury. Kindle Edition, 2022. P. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Clark S. Op. cit. P. 18.

<sup>12</sup> For more detailed information on development of English prose from “romance” to “novel” see: Склярова Е. М. Особенности художественной структуры романа Р. Грина «Грош мудрости, купленный за миллион раскаяния» (1592). *Проблемы становления и развития зарубежного романа от Возрождения к Просвещению*. Днепропетровск, 1986. С. 36–40.

<sup>13</sup> Старченко Н. Публічність як домінанта культурної традиції (Волинь другої половини XVI століття). *Mediaevalia Ucrainica: Ментальність та історія ідей*. К. Критика, 1998. Т. V. С. 68.

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England reflects this transformation. It witnessed the rise of literature in the vernacular, a shift away from the outdated romance genre, and the emergence of new forms that foreshadowed the development of the English novel. Classical models, such as those found in Heliodorus, continued to influence literary production, while pastoral and chivalric romances coexisted with prose works that sought to interpret contemporary life. The terms “pamphlet” and “historie” were commonly used to describe the latter.<sup>14</sup>

The popularity of pamphlets during this period can be attributed to the specific socio-cultural climate in England in the late 16th century. The economic situation improved: inflation declined, food prices fell, and the middle class, comprising merchants, exporters, usurers, and artisans, began to prosper. According to the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* site, “During the Tudor and early Stuart period there was a great increase in social mobility, with wealth and political influence shifting from the nobility and clergy towards a “middling class” of gentry, yeomen and burghers. These were the people represented in the House of Commons, and who eventually challenged royal sovereignty”.<sup>15</sup> This group accumulated wealth and gained basic education, yet still lacked refined aesthetic tastes.<sup>16</sup> As a result, there was high demand for accessible and entertaining reading material, free from classical references and full of news, satire, and gossip.

The pamphlet, due to its flexible structure and brevity, was ideally suited to meet this demand for quick, digestible though not always entirely credible information. Along with other forms of “short prose”, it gained immense popularity, coinciding with the rapid expansion of the printing industry. Pamphlets served as vehicles for news, social commentary, and moral instruction, helping to shape public opinion. The concise, information-packed pamphlet was the most suitable genre to serve this purpose.

The rise in demand for printed materials also led to the emergence of a new type of writer – someone whose livelihood relied on literary work. As stated by Ch. E. Morgan, this shift was caused by

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<sup>14</sup> Склярова Е. М. Цит. вид.

<sup>15</sup> The Rising Middle Class. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*.

URL: <https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/history/elizabeth/middleclass.html>.

<sup>16</sup> For more details on the specific polarity of aesthetic tastes among different strata of Elizabethan society, see: Margolies D. *Novel and Society in Elizabethan England*. London and Sydney : Croom Helm, 1985. P. 18.

the decline of aristocratic patronage and the need for alternative income, making low-paying literary work a feasible way to survive.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the 16th century in England, the pamphlet had become an intellectual response to the era's social and literary needs – a genre produced by a large and growing class of professional writers who viewed their craft as a main occupation. The growth of print culture further amplified the reach of these texts, promoting both literature as a whole and the pamphlet as its most dynamic form.

As an integral part of its time's literary landscape, the pamphlet fulfilled a wide array of functions: informative, polemical, didactic, entertaining, and propagandistic. In doing so, it reflected the many dimensions of public life in Renaissance England.

In this context, several thematic groups of Elizabethan pamphlets can be identified. Each group is characterized by a set of stable features, distinct stylistic traits, and specific compositional and rhetorical conventions, which makes it possible to view them as genetic forerunners of the various genre modifications that pamphleteering would undergo in the 17th and 18th centuries.

One of the earliest forms of Elizabethan pamphlets is the religious-political pamphlet, which arose from the interaction of extra-literary factors. These included the specifics of the Reformation movement in England, the contentious question of Queen Elizabeth Tudor's eligibility for the English throne, and the relative accessibility of book production. Simultaneously, the formation of this type of pamphleteering was encouraged by literary realities as well: revival of the ancient rhetorics, the development of the sermon as an independent literary form, the widespread distribution of translated philosophical, political, ethical, and legal treatises by Italian and French humanists, and so on.

The first religious-political pamphlet entitled *A Supplication for the Beggars* (1529) was written by Simon Fish, calling for the dissolution of monasteries. Another notorious pamphlet by John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), as well as a prearranged answer to this antifeminist pamphlet by John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithful and Trewe Subjects* (1559), also belong to this group of pamphlets. In connection with the above-mentioned thematic cluster, one can also mention the controversy with Martin Marprelate concerning the True

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<sup>17</sup> Morgan Ch. E. *The Rise of the Novel of Manners: A Study of English Prose Fiction between 1600 and 1740*. N.Y. : Russel and Russel Inc., 1963. P. 44.

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Faith. This dispute was launched by an unknown author who wrote under the pseudonym of “Martin Marprelate” (*Oh Read Over D. John Bridges* (1588), *Just Censure* (1589), these writings got vehement answers from the famous Renaissance writer Thomas Nashe (*An Almond for a Parrot* (1590)) as well as from several anti-Marprelate essayists. It is noteworthy that the arguments presented in these writings were highly subjective as well as politically or religiously biased, which drew the opponents into the dispute and thus made religious and political issues very personal, violent, and invective.

A distinctive feature of religious and political pamphlets as a literary genre is their lack of plot. A pamphleteer selects and organizes facts according to their own plan, intended to create a static and deeply subjective image of some phenomenon. After informing readers about a topical issue, the author aims to warn them, to motivate them to take action, and to urge them to stand “for” or “against” a particular aspect of reality. Written for educated and aesthetically sophisticated readers, such pamphlets aimed to provide a foundation for their intellectual engagement: thinking, reasoning, and decision-making. Thus, a religious and political pamphlet resembles an orator’s speech, with a focus on rhetorical technique serving as the key stylistic factor in this thematic variety of the genre.

The tendency toward persuasion and rhetorical eloquence is equally evident in the second major group of Elizabethan pamphlets, which may be classified as literary-critical. These pamphlets addressed issues of creative activity and poetic technique, serving as arenas for vigorous polemics on questions of literature and art. The theatrical controversy, for example, found expression in works such as Stephen Gosson’s *The School of Abuse* (1579) and Thomas Lodge’s *A Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays* (also known as *Honest Excuses*, 1579). Pamphleteers’ reflections on the nature of contemporary literary production often took the form of critiques of euphuism and the tradition of chivalric romance, as seen in Thomas Nashe’s *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) and *Lenten Stuff* (1599). These debates frequently escalated into personal attacks on literary rivals and fervent defences of individual authorial style. The most intense and sustained of such literary disputes was the infamous pamphlet war between the Harvey brothers and Thomas Nashe.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more detail on the controversy see: Green N. The Harvey Nashe Quarrel. *The Oxford Authorship Site*, 2000. URL: [http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Nashe/Harvey-Nashe\\_quarrel.pdf](http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Nashe/Harvey-Nashe_quarrel.pdf).

Nevertheless, the defining feature of literary-critical pamphlets lies in their marked inclination toward critical pathos rather than the articulation of a coherent or constructive literary position. These debates often evolved into sharp satire, frequently distilled into biting sarcasm. Such pamphlets served as a crucial genealogical source for the development of English literary-critical discourse in later periods, influencing figures such as Ben Jonson, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Alexander Gerard, and Thomas Reid.

The third and most numerous group of pamphlets consists of narratives focused on social and moral themes, offering satirical portrayals of particular social groups and criticism of aspects of daily life perceived by the authors as ethically or socially problematic. In *An Alarum Against Usurers* (1584), Thomas Lodge voices strong opposition to moneylenders, who, according to widely held opinion at the time, had amassed their wealth through dishonest means. Lodge “exposed the ways in which moneylenders lured young heirs into extravagance and debt”.<sup>19</sup> The book also presents moral and religious reflections on the dangers of greed and the importance of living a righteous life.

Robert Greene’s pamphlet *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592) satirizes the arrogance and pretensions of newly wealthy craftsmen who aspire to aristocratic status without possessing the corresponding virtues or cultural refinement. Barnaby Rich, a former soldier who exchanged his musket for a pen, repeatedly addressed military themes in his writings, drawing attention to the conditions within the English army and raising questions about the legitimacy of England’s involvement in foreign conflicts. His most notable works in this vein include *A New Description of Ireland* (1578) and *A Soldier’s Wish* (1604). In *Pierce Pennilesse His Supplication to the Devil* (1592), Thomas Nashe exposes what he sees as the moral decay of London, portraying it as a microcosm of broader societal corruption. Employing the allegorical framework of the seven deadly sins, Nashe ridicules the affluent middle class and illustrates how the pursuit of luxury and the irresponsibility of the aristocracy contribute to the decline of social order.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Lodge. *Britannica*. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Encyclopaedia-Britannica-English-language-reference-work>.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis C. S. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1954. P. 400.

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A distinct subgroup within this thematic variety of social-moral Elizabethan pamphlets comprises works that depict the lives of those on the margins of London society – the so-called conny-catchers.<sup>21</sup> Robert Greene was among the first authors to explore this subject in detail, thereby laying the groundwork for the later development of English rogue and criminal literature. In his conny-catching pamphlets, Greene details the strategies employed by thieves and swindlers to defraud honest citizens of their money and possessions. Although he claimed that his primary purpose was to warn naïve country gentlemen about the dangers posed by urban tricksters, a close reading of these texts reveals that their central function was entertainment. Through vivid storytelling, Greene not only narrates episodes of successful deception but also subtly instructs readers on the value of shrewdness and practical intelligence in navigating social life. The Renaissance celebration of wit and creativity shifts the readers' sympathies: rather than identifying with the duped gentlemen, audiences are more often drawn to admire the ingenuity of the rogues, who outwit their victims, frequently portrayed as gullible or motivated by greed and dubious ambition.

The popularity of Robert Greene's criminal pamphlets, along with their considerable commercial success, gave rise to a wave of imitators – and at times critics – of Greene's style in Elizabethan England. This trend is evidenced by the publication of works such as *The Kind-Heart's Dream* by Henry Chettle (1592), *Greene's Ghost Haunting Conie-Catchers* by Samuel Rowlands (1602), and numerous pamphlets by Thomas Dekker. Among Dekker's contributions, *The Belman of London* (1608) stood out as particularly successful with contemporary readers, further cementing the appeal of rogue fiction.

It is important to note that, in contrast to the religious-political pamphlet – which is functionally aligned with the sermon – the conny-catching pamphlet belongs more naturally to the tradition of picaresque literature. Its features include the use of colloquial or low-register vocabulary, a characteristic protagonist such as a swindler, social outcast, or beggar, and a focus on trickery as a means of sailing through or transforming one's life circumstances. These elements closely line up the conny-catching pamphlet with the English Renaissance jest tradition, particularly with anonymous collections

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<sup>21</sup> "Conny-catcher" is an Elizabethan term for a con man or trickster. The writer Robert Greene exposed their tricks in a series of popular cony-catching pamphlets in the 1590s. (Cony-catcher. *Writer's Reference Center*. URL: <https://fofweb.infobase.com/wrc/Detail.aspx?iPin=DLLT0234>).



such as *A Sack Full of News* (1558) and *The Merry Tales of Master Skelton*”(1567). As in the jest, the didactic impulse in conny-catching pamphlets is often incidental or secondary, frequently giving way to pure entertainment.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, the compositional structure and narrative techniques found in the conny-catching pamphlets suggest that both Robert Greene and his followers were familiar with the continental picaresque tradition. It is well established that translations of Spanish picaresque novels – particularly the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* and Mateo Alemán’s *Guzmán de Alfarache* – enjoyed considerable popularity in England. The influence of these works is evident in the episodic structure, focus on marginal or roguish protagonists, and the interplay of moral commentary and entertainment that characterizes much of the English rogue literature of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the largely plotless religious-political pamphlet, the conny-catching subgroup is characterized by the presence of a dynamically unfolding plot, which serves as a fundamental structural feature. The dominance of the entertaining element ensures sustained reader engagement. Given that the primary audience for such literature consisted of relatively inexperienced readers, their attention was captured not through lofty intellectual reflections but through witty and believable tales of clever rogues outwitting gullible victims. To meet these expectations, authors of conny-catching pamphlets typically composed thematically linked short stories featuring compact exposition, rapid development of events, and – almost invariably – a happy ending for the rogue.

The conny-catching pamphlet, in turn, developed a rich historical and literary legacy. Firstly, its narrative techniques were inherited by the so-called “rogue” prose of the 17th and 18th centuries, most notably exemplified by Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724). Secondly, it contributed to the development of the “low” tradition within the Elizabethan novel: writers such as Thomas Nashe, Henry Chettle, and Thomas Deloney often incorporated episodes reminiscent of criminal pamphlets into their fictional

<sup>22</sup> For more detailed account of the jest poetics refer to: Торкут Н. М. Жанрова модель англійського ренесансного джесту: генеалогія, поетика та історико-літературна перспектива. Ренесансні студії. Запоріжжя, 1998. Вип. 2. С. 28–39.

<sup>23</sup> In particular, P. Salzman points out that the translation of *Lazarillo de Tormes* survived 8 editions within one century, while *Guzmán de Alfarache* was republished 7 times: Salzman P. English Prose Fiction, 1558–1700. A Critical History. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1985. P. 207.

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narratives. In this way, the conny-catching pamphlet served both as a stylistic and thematic precursor to later developments in English prose fiction.

The thematic diversity within the pamphlet genre is further accentuated by distinct stylistic contrasts. Religious-political and literary-critical pamphlets typically employed an elevated rhetorical style, characterized by bookish vocabulary, frequent references to classical works, passionate appeals, and rhetorical questions. Such stylistic choices indicate that these texts were intended for a well-educated readership. In contrast, social-moral pamphlets – written both for and about the emerging middle class – adopted a more accessible language, closer to everyday speech. Conny-catching pamphlets, in particular, made extensive use of low-register vocabulary and urban slang to authentically depict the lives and voices of London's underclass. According to C. S. Lewis, “very roughly, we may distinguish stylistically an earlier period when formal rhetoric dominated the pamphlet, and a later period in which the illusion of *ex tempore* speech is attempted”.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to differences in subject matter, stylistic coloring, and narrative organization (i. e., plot-driven versus plotless narration), the various thematic groups of pamphlets also diverge in their functions. The openly polemical and highly subjective tone of religious-political and literary-critical pamphlets stands in sharp contrast to the more subtly conflicted aims of the conny-catching pamphlets, which oscillate between moral instruction and entertainment. On the one hand, the pamphleteer presents his work as a warning, intended to protect unsuspecting readers from the dangers posed by urban swindlers – an intent typically expressed in the prefatory material and reiterated throughout the narrative. On the other hand, the text often shifts focus toward celebrating the cleverness and dexterity of the conny-catchers themselves, seeking to amuse the audience and evoke admiration for the ingenuity of these rogue protagonists. This duality reveals an underlying tension between moralizing purpose and the irresistible appeal of narrative entertainment.

Despite the aforementioned differences among the thematic groups of pamphlets, they all share several unifying genre features: a focus on socially relevant issues, a strong sense of topicality in their

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<sup>24</sup> Lewis C. S. Op. cit. P. 404–405.

narratives, and the introduction of a distinctly subjective perspective on contemporary events and phenomena.

All Renaissance variations of the English pamphlet, without exception, followed a relatively fixed and easily recognizable structural pattern. Their extended, often elaborately phrased titles functioned as summaries of the text, highlighting the central issues addressed. The introductory section typically included a dedicatory address to a patron and/or a direct appeal to readers, frequently accompanied by apologies for the publication, ostensibly prompted by external circumstances. Pamphleteers often used this prefatory space to advertise their previous or forthcoming works; Robert Greene, for instance, did so in nearly every other pamphlet. Following these respectful bows to the public, the author would present the main content, with the structure of the narrative, often echoing the form of a Socratic dialogue, guiding the reader toward a predetermined and “correct” conclusion, as envisioned by the author.

Thus, as an organic component of the literary landscape of late 16th-century England – and one that gained popularity due to prevailing socio-cultural conditions – the pamphlet emerged as a vivid reflection of various aspects of Elizabethan life. The main thematic groups of the pamphletistics – religious-political, literary-critical, and social-moral – while sharing a common compositional structure and exhibiting features of a unified genre, differ markedly in their functions, stylistic approaches, and narrative techniques. Each was directed toward a distinct readership, ranging from the elite courtly audience to members of the lower social strata. Yet all these varieties represent modifications of a single genre that, during the English Renaissance, was still in its formative stage and lacked clearly defined boundaries. Absorbing elements from the sermon, the jest, and the picaresque tradition, the pamphlet did not prove to be a literary dead end; rather, it persisted in various forms across later periods and played a seminal role in shaping the “low” tradition of the English novel.

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