Pugliatti, Paola: Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England

* English vagrancy and theater were association early: “vagrancy and mendacity as practices founded on simulation, disguise, and self-transformation”
* at the same time, unlicensed theatrical activities were equated by English law with unregulated and unlicensed begging
* 1545: Players are listed among vagrants in Henry VIII proclamation.
  + Players included other street professions: jugglers, peddlers, tinkers, fiddlers, beast-tamers, palm-readers, gypsies, and also prophets, preacher, bards, rhymers
  + Actors were not protected by a guild, though in Shakespeare’s time most belonged to them
  + Goes back to earliest laws (1284) by Edward I: “beggars, bards, rhymers, and other idlers and vagabonds” should not be supported by public lest they lead people to mischief with their lies.
  + 1572: Elizabeth’s provision: relief of the poor and control of unregulated disguise were conflated.
* Unclear which had the stigma first.
* Non-liveried players in London had disappeared by the 1570s; other places less clear, but getting a license to perform on tour was more difficult without a noble patron and livery.
  + Not clear whether laws against vagrancy were strictly enforced against either group. Some just sent away, some jailed for a day or two and then freed, sometimes fine, and sometimes paid not to perform.
* Some (Gildersleeve) believe these were chiefly aimed at vagrants and at actors only incidentally.
* Some (Glynnne Wickham) argue that they were energetically directed at actors—with the result that actors were forced to give up the profession.
* What was the “nature of the offense”? What was the problem?
  + Margot Heineman says they were both practical and doctrinal, trying to curtail effects of plays on discipline and order but also trying to stop propaganda of various kinds:
  + Louis Montrose says “impersonation” was subversive: “unstable locality was threateningly conjoined with unstable identity” in a society where both were circumscribed. Montrose distinguishes between fraudulent and non-fraudulent (authorized) deception.
  + Poor laws were aimed at the “crafty: poor—those who used “protean-ness” to their economic advantage.
* Did the two merge at some point? Did beggars accompany actors on the road? Did unemployed actors turned into actors?
  + Italian tradition goes from begging to professional frauds like mountebanks to the commedia del arte.
* England conflated the two activities more than other countries.
* False news and false prophecy was also illegal.
* Europe:
  + General class of laws trying to distinguish deserving from undeserving poor were passed in 1520s (later in England). These were part of an ancient tradition (cites laws of emperor Justinian)
  + These addressed a European-wide problem. Loss of people to plague resulted in demand for workers, which increased their marketability. So most of these countries passed laws limited their wages. Christopher Hill: “the compulsion to work made the poor a large cheap labour supply for the developing capitalism. “
  + Vagrancy was defined from the beginning as being “masterless”: master-servant bond was the basis of English and European social order.
  + Others thing the problem stemmed from the Reformation, when vagrancy was ascribed not only to poor but to old mendicant orders. But while Catholic countries were less strict (esp Spain) on vagrancy, and tended to except mendicant orders, the same sorts of laws were passed in both types of counties.
  + Laws enacted against poor forced them to work for low wages; if no wages, forced into military service).
  + All over Europe there was a shift from the sense that one should pity and support the poor to a sense that they should be feared as thieves and devious parasite.
  + Welfare programs like those in Elizabeth’s time seemed to gain support only if they supported merchant interest.
  + General hospital came out of the idea of forced incarceration of groups considered socially marginal. Ancestry of common prisons. Most laws compelled poor to return home, await aid privately, work if possible, or be imprisoned. Many were branded with Fs or Vs.
  + 1561: Term rogue is first used as “cant” or beggar-speak. Very little time passes between its first use as wanderer and its Elizabethan use as cheat and rascal.