Lecture 12: “popular” books and literacy

Extra reading assignments: from Early English Books Online (an e-resource on HOLLIS): to browse: [John Bond], The poets knavery discovered [1642] (discusses pamphleteering); Marchament Nedham, The Levellers levell’d (pamphlet in play form, 1647); Bevis of Southampton or Guy of Warwick (romances).

I. Approaches to popular culture
- Studies of Reformation-Counter-Reformation: top-down reforms
- Peter Burke, Pop culture in EME: late 17th split “high-low”
- Chartier: appropriation; cf. Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms

II. Cheap print:
- Bibliothèque bleue, chapbooks, pliegos sueltos
- Sources: contemp reports; ownership; business records; surviving texts (Pepys collection); regressive arguments from 19th ct.
- Genres (from Spufford, Small Books and Pleasant Histories): small godly books (c. 30%), small merry books (c. 34%), almanachs (15-20%), histories/romances (c. 20%--half historical, half “realistic”).

III. The impact of the English Civil War (1640-60)
Nigel Smith, Literature and Revolution in England 1640-60
- End of royal censorship: lay religious authors appear; rel radicals first exploit pamphlet, but then are attacked in pamphlets
- Newsbooks from 1640s (vs earlier kinds); Cromwell censorship of opposition newsbooks in 1650s.
- Rise of the pamphlet: a few professional writers (the hack writer)

IV. Literacy
R. A. Houston, Literacy in Early Modern Europe
- Sources: indirect and direct evidence. Protestation oath of 1642 (England): male illiteracy of 53%-79%. Some benchmarks(Europe-wide): late 15th 95% illiterate; 1800: 50% males can sign. Decline, but not at same rates
- Great variations: place (17th Swedish initiative!), social status, sex, town vs country. Literacy does not imply “modernization”—drops with industrialization (Laqueur in Literacy in historical perspective, ed. D. Resnick)
- Schooling (but adult learning often more important): erratic