

# Language surrounding poverty in early modern England: A corpus-based investigation of how people living in the seventeenth-century perceived the criminalised poor<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study uses a corpus of approximately one billion words from the seventeenth century, based on data drawn from Early English Books Online, to explore shifting attitudes to the criminalised poor in England in the period. Using the methods of corpus linguistics, the study explores the representation of this group, attitudes towards them and the link, if any, between the group and punishment in public discourse. The focus is on four terms frequently applied to the group in this period, *beggar*, *rogue*, *vagabond* and *vagrant*. While all of these words appear, ostensibly, to be synonyms, this paper argues that they are near synonyms. Moreover, in the exploration of the differences in meaning between them as evidenced from the corpus data, we gain insights into the differing ways in which the group was perceived and labelled in the century.

**Keywords:** Early modern English, social history, near synonymy, the criminalised poor, public discourse, seventeenth century

## 1. Introduction

This study looks at attitudes towards a subset of poor people in seventeenth-century England, whom we will term the criminalised poor – a group who might today be termed beggars or homeless people, though this is only an imprecise and illustrative analogy. These people were criminalised for most of the seventeenth century, though the sanctions applied to them varied over time and the use of those sanctions in different geographical areas varied also. These people often begged and wandered; they were usually, but not always, unemployed and many of them were homeless. In the seventeenth century the criminalised poor were often disempowered people: they were overwhelmingly illiterate and politically powerless and, as a result, we possess scant direct testimony of their thoughts and beliefs. While we can, of course, make use of surviving literature that relates explicitly to the condition of the lowest orders of early modern society to explore contemporary attitudes towards them, we wish to go further in this study. Our aim is to look at how the criminalised poor were talked about in public discourse, i.e. in the general body of published

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<sup>1</sup> The work reported in this study was supported by a grant from the Newby Trust, which the authors gratefully acknowledge. It was also supported by the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Sciences, grant number ES/K002155/1.

works of the time, not simply works focussed upon them. For us casual mentions in texts not centrally concerned with poverty are as important as detailed studies of texts expressly on that topic.

The difficulty, of course, is in amassing and utilizing all mentions of the criminalised poor for analysis. We have done so by using computer assisted analysis to explore a billion words of writing from the seventeenth century compiled into the EEBO corpus (v. 3)<sup>2</sup> accessed via CQPweb (see Hardie 2013). This corpus currently offers access to over 39,212 texts from the seventeenth century, amounting to just under one billion words.<sup>3</sup> By analysing this collection of material we wish to answer the following questions and to interpret them, in their historic context, in the public discourse of the time:

- i.) who were the criminalised poor thought to be;
- ii.) to what extent were they objects of pity and compassion;
- iii.) to what extent were they the focus of censure and
- iv.) what was the relationship between them and punishment.

To facilitate the meaningful exploration of such a large collection of texts, we turned to corpus linguistics..

## **2. The corpus approach: representation and collocation**

Our study relies upon a review of the literature on the topic of poverty, a close reading of relevant official documents from the century and, importantly, the exploitation of techniques from corpus linguistics in order to guide our investigations of a large collection of texts from the time. We have not, as some researchers in so-called ‘big data’ approaches to the humanities have advocated (see Moretti 2013),<sup>4</sup> abandoned the text. Rather we decided to ‘trust the text’<sup>5</sup> (see Sinclair 2004). At the heart of our analysis is a rich interaction between close reading of examples and large scale characterization of the data. Given that we are interested in how a group is talked about in public discourse, our decision to work in this way follows other research on representation in corpus linguistics such as studies of how the British press constructs Muslims (Baker, McEnery & Gabrielatos 2013), how an ideologically inspired murder was represented on Twitter (McEnery, Love & McGlashan 2015, 1-23) and how genetically modified foods have been discussed in the

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<sup>2</sup> The data was made available by the Text Creation Partnership <http://www.textcreationpartnership.org/>

<sup>3</sup> The precise figure is 996,472,953 words, as available for the seventeenth century in version 3 of the EEBO-TCP corpus as used in this study.

<sup>4</sup> Notably the literary theorist Franco Moretti who argues that literature should be studied in aggregate rather by close reading.

<sup>5</sup> A dictum most closely associated with John Sinclair.

public sphere (Cook, Robbins & Pieri 2006, 5-29). Not only do those studies cycle between close and distant reading, they also, on a smaller scale than attempted here, look at change in construction over time. Our engagement with a hundred years of data did lead us to reflect, however, on what this means for corpus analyses, especially with regard to one of the major techniques of corpus linguistics, collocation.

Collocation is a simple, yet powerful, technique for revealing word meaning and through that the construction of groups. While collocation as an idea predates any approach to using computers to study it,<sup>6</sup> the beginnings of the computational approach to collocation can be traced back to work undertaken by John Sinclair in the early 1970s (see Sinclair, Jones & Daley 1970). It is commonly used in corpus linguistics and has proved, as noted, its value in work on representation and also in looking at different social groups in society such as refugees and asylum seekers (see Gabrielatos & Baker 2008, 5-38), armed rebels (see Prentice & Hardie 2009, 23-55) and sportsmen and women (see Aull & Brown 2013, 27-53). Collocation is based on the observation that words attract other words into their company. In doing so, they are imbued with meaning; it is the words which consistently co-occur with a word to a degree greater than chance would permit which begin to form what that word means. For instance, some common collocates of the word *love* are *I*, *you*, *songs*, *falling*, *affair* and *unconditional*.

Some linguists rely on their own intuition in order to search for co-occurrence patterns. In this study we have employed analysis software that uses significance statistics in order to generate collocation displays. Loose patterns of co-occurrence in the corpus were identified between two items that frequently occurred in proximity to one another but not necessarily adjacently. In this study collocates were generated using a span of five words, on both the left and right of the node, and with a frequency of at least ten. There are a variety of significance tests which can be used in order to automate collocation; in this study, we have used the Log Ratio 'effect-size' statistic created by Dr Andrew Hardie which not only identifies collocates but indicates how strong the bond is between the two words.<sup>7</sup>

Time brings in a new dimension of variation in collocation. If we look at a snapshot corpus, such as the Brown family of corpora,<sup>8</sup> we can gain the impression that collocations are static. Because we look at collocation at one point in time only, we freeze the variation that may occur over time in that process. Yet collocation should be a good guide to meaning change. By looking at collocates over time, we may gauge whether a word or concept is changing. Yet to do so we need to consider the basic range of variation that may occur. Our study relies on identifying types of

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<sup>6</sup> See McEnery & Wilson (2001, 23) for a brief discussion of the similarities between the concept of collocation and the idea of automation as developed by linguists of the Prague school in the 1930s.

<sup>7</sup> The curious reader is referred to in McEnery & Hardie (2012), chapter six, for a more detailed discussion of the procedure used to derive collocates in this study.

<sup>8</sup> See Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith (2009) for more details of these corpora and examples of their use.

collocate change over time – a technique which was introduced by Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) and developed further by McEnery and Baker (2016). Collocates were categorised into four groups: consistent, terminating, initiating and transient. If a collocate is stable, e.g. always attached to a word, it is a strong indication that the meaning it denotes is in a stable relationship with a word. These we call *consistent collocates*. Conversely, sometimes words lose collocates as they shed meaning –we call these *terminating collocates*. On other occasions they acquire collocates as their meaning develops. We call these *initiating collocates*. Also, from time to time, collocates appear with a word for a short period of time and then disappear. We term these *transient collocates* – they are usually indicative of a period in which a particular debate caused a concept to develop in a certain way for a short time before the debate abated and the collocate was discarded.

In this study we will appeal to the notion of consistent, terminating, initiating and transient collocates<sup>9</sup> to discuss the construction of the criminalised poor, as it allows us, across the century, to look at how attitudes to the group developed. In doing so we will typically look at decades. These are, of course, arbitrary chunks. However, as our techniques require sufficient data to work, contrasting decades allows us to have sufficient data to make meaningful estimates of collocation while being able to contrast broad periods across the century.

Before considering our initial work on identifying words of interest, we should note that we were able to easily navigate between collocations and the texts in which they were present in the system we used to analyse the corpus. The interface back into the texts is provided by another useful tool from corpus linguistics, the concordance display. In this, data is presented showing one example of the use of a word of interest per line, with context around the word showing to the left and the right of it. Those wishing to explore further context can click on the word and get up a larger chunk of text around the example. The program also provides information about the text the example is drawn from, including the work's title, date of publication and author. If the user wishes to do so they may, of course, access the full text for reading, as we did on occasion in this study. However, generally the concordance display allows swift and reliable access to large numbers of examples in a way that enhances and speeds the process of analysis.

### **3. Identifying words referring to the criminalised poor in early modern English**

To begin to explore the data, it might be tempting to simply use our intuition when compiling a list of early modern English terms which might have been used to describe the criminalised poor.

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<sup>9</sup> We should note that a hundred years is a long time and we may see collocates appear more than once, hence we may need to apply these labels multiply across time, e.g. a collocate may appear for a short time at the beginning of the century (e.g. the 1610s), disappear for thirty years and then return and remain stable for the remainder of the century. Its first appearance we could call transient, its later appearance we would call initiating.

However, our intuition is an unreliable source. Some of the terms we might think it may be perfectly reasonable to look for may not have been in use at all four hundred years ago or even forty years ago. For instance, although the noun *tramp* – which is commonplace now – is thought to have come into use during the latter half of the seventeenth century, there are no examples of its present-day meaning in our seventeenth-century corpus. Similarly, although the word *migrant* does appear in our corpus, it can be entirely disregarded as it is only used in a handful of Latin texts.

We decided to use two guides to select the words we would look for in the corpus: official records and the frequency of relevant words in the corpus itself. We uncovered information relating to how words to describe the criminalised poor were used by men who held a position within local or national government by using British History Online. By searching this online digital library of key historical sources, which allows researchers to search for specific keywords, we can not only obtain frequency information relating to our terms, we can also restrict our query to specific genres of documentation or centuries.<sup>10</sup> A preliminary search of parliamentary, administrative and legal primary sources from the seventeenth century revealed that four words *beggar*, *vagabond*, *vagrant* and *rogue* were repeatedly mentioned, not only in state legislation but in sessions rolls, state papers and county records. These were also words used to describe the criminalised poor in our corpus frequently enough to allow us to analyse them in each decade throughout the century.

The following graph illustrates how the usage of these words fluctuated throughout the seventeenth century in the EEBO corpus. Note that the graph conflates the singular and plural forms of the words and that rather than simply present the raw frequencies of these words, we have normalised the data in order to show frequencies per million words. This is a necessary step as it allows us to compare occurrences of these terms in each decade against one another accurately, i.e. it factors out the fact that there is a fluctuation in how much printed material was produced in each decade, allowing a stable comparison across the century.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

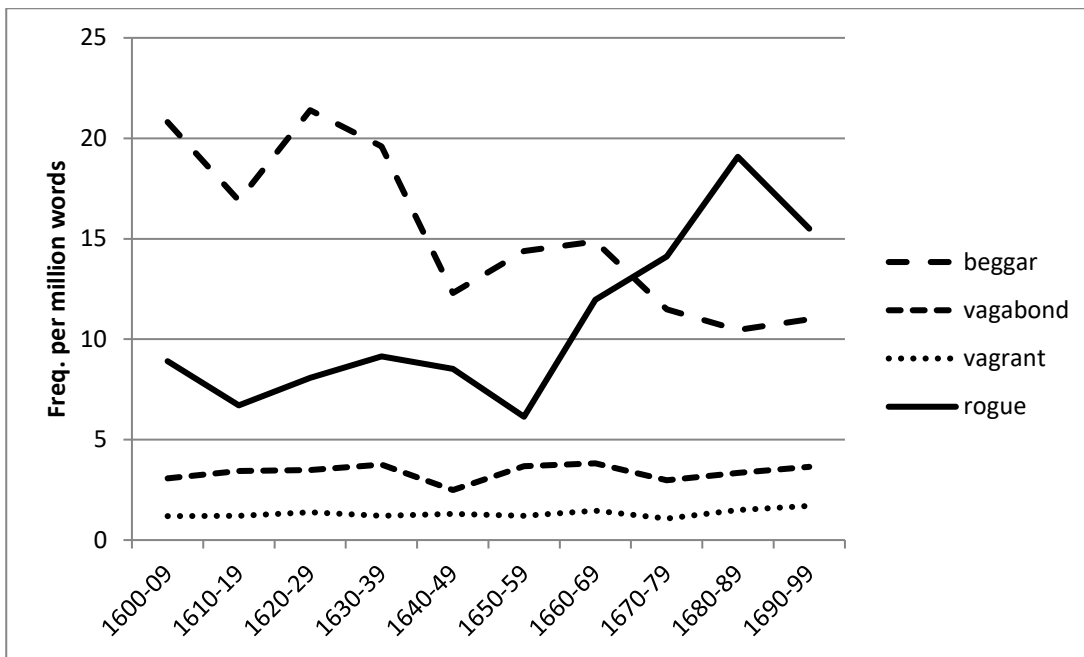


Figure 1. The frequency of four terms referring to the criminalised poor in the EEBO corpus in the seventeenth century.

We can now proceed to begin to answer the questions we had about public discourse in the seventeenth century in an exploration of the words *beggar*, *vagabond*, *vagrant* and *rogue*. There are many instances in our corpus of these four words being strung together: for instance, the phrase ‘rogue, vagabond, or sturdy beggar’ occurs 19 times and, at first glance, these words may appear to be synonyms. From the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, *beggar*, *vagabond* and *rogue* all appear as strong collocates of one another. These three terms also collocate with *vagrant* throughout the second half of the century. However, there is textual evidence that these are near-synonyms rather than true synonyms. By exploring the collocates of these words not only will we be able to reflect on vagrancy in the century, we will also reveal the subtle distinctions between four words with apparently similar meaning. Let us begin with the question ‘who were the criminalised poor thought to be?’

#### 4. Who Were These People?

Unsurprisingly, these were people who begged. *Beg* appears as a consistent collocate of *beggar* and initiates as a collocate of *vagabond* in the 1640s, collocating with it consistently thereafter. While *beg* does not collocate directly with *vagrant* or *rogue*, both vagrants and rogues are implied to beg through their strong association with *beggar* – *beggar* is a consistent collocate of *rogue*, and initiates as a consistent collocate of *vagrant* from 1650 onwards. So, whether directly or by association, the group we are looking at can be strongly associated with the process of begging.

Categorising beggars is a complex task because the group was composed of many different kinds of people, frequently moving in and out of poverty – some were looked upon with sympathy while others were viewed as ‘undeserving’. Moreover, begging was, to a certain extent, a grey area legally. Throughout the sixteenth century, the official stance on begging oscillated – in some years the practice was prohibited entirely and in others it was tolerated on the condition that the beggar possessed a formal license. In 1601, with the revision of the Elizabethan Poor Law, begging was criminalized conclusively. However, not only did the practice continue, but some parishes turned a blind eye or even actively encouraged impotent residents to beg. We must not, therefore, assume that all seventeenth-century beggars were perceived to be members of the thriftless poor.

The criminalised poor are also strongly characterized by their itinerant status – *wandering* is a consistent collocate of *vagabond*, *vagrant* and *rogue*. The word also attaches to *beggar* consistently from the 1650s onwards. The mobile nature of the vagrant is clear in our data - the word *vagrant* collocates in the 1650s with *wander*, while *vagabond* collocates strongly with *wanderer* throughout the century. Public discourse suggests the criminalised poor were highly mobile in spite of the fact that movement was illegal for people without a legitimate passport.

This brief analysis of these strong collocates starts to answer the question posed – the criminalised poor are the wandering poor who beg. Yet the identity of the people in the group is often obscured - in the EEBO corpus, we found that vagrants and vagabonds collocate consistently with *persons*. None of the words considered collocate consistently with any nouns or pronouns which indicated male or female sex or other individualizing feature.

While not through consistent collocates, there is some evidence that rogues and, to a lesser extent, beggars tended to be referred to as male. *Beggar* collocates with *fellow* in the 1650s and most of these matches refer to a man rather than an associate or person of equal status. In its singular form, *beggar* collocates with *he* and *him*, as well as with *fellow*. *Rogue* (its singular and plural) collocates with *whoreson* in data for the 1670s; *he* and *him* in the 1680s; and *fellow* in the 1680s and 90s. *Wife* also collocates with *rogue* in the 1670s with the resulting concordance lines primarily featuring interactions between a male rogue and his female spouse: ‘Aye, you drunken Rogue, said his Wife, go, break your neck, do’ (Lover of ha, ha, he 1674). *Rogue* also collocates with *she* in material of the 1670s but, this use is figurative as men sometimes referred to their sweethearts as rogues, perhaps because they had stolen their hearts - thievery, as will be shown, was closely associated with the criminalised poor.

Women were more vulnerable to poverty in early modern England (Crawford & Gowing 2000, 105) so why do we not see strong ‘female’ collocates appearing with *beggar*? This might be explained in terms of the people parish officials deemed to be worthy recipients of poor relief. Women formed the highest proportion of settled paupers in parishes; in other words, they were the

largest recipients of poor relief. Historians have shown that many parishes were particularly reluctant to grant relief to able-bodied males and, perhaps as a consequence of this and the fact that men were most likely to migrate, most vagrants and unlicensed beggars were male (Beier 1985, 51-52, 216).<sup>11</sup>

Research by Tim Hitchcock concerning the image of the literary beggar in the eighteenth century offers an alternative explanation for the lack of 'female' nouns and pronouns co-occurring with *beggar*. He argues that, despite street surveys of the time revealing most beggars were female and often married or widowed with children, eighteenth-century writers deliberately chose to depict professional male beggars. This was a throwback to the genre of rogue literature, peaking in popularity in the late sixteenth century, which delighted in divulging the activities and professional tricks of a threatening counter-culture of rogues and beggars (Hitchcock 2005, 80-89). It is likely that seventeenth-century writers were influenced by this earlier rogue literature or, at the very least, wished to profit from public interest, already piqued, in beggars who were also thought to engage in dishonest practices.

What of the age of the criminalised poor? Historians have previously attempted to reconstruct the ages of a cross-section of vagrants and beggars by studying parish records. There was no accepted retirement age in early modern England: the aged were expected to continue to support themselves until they were physically no longer able to do so. However, once elderly people became too infirm to work, parishes tended to look upon these resident indigents with sympathy. Poor law statistics have shown that elderly infirm residents made up a significant proportion of those receiving poor relief. Many parish pensioners, those receiving poor relief, were still forced to beg in order to supplement their income because the amount they received was not sufficient to live upon. Many elderly people viewed begging as what has been termed the 'last phase in a life-cycle of labour' (Hindle 2004, 71). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that *old* collocates with *beggar* and *rogue* in two decades' worth of material (the 1650s and 1670s for *beggar* and the 1670s and 1690s for *rogue*).

Very young children were, like the elderly, often recipients of poor relief, and *children* and *child* are transient collocates of *beggar* in the 1660s and 1680s. However, these collocates show why close reading of results via concordancing is important - a close inspection of these examples reveals that in these decades it is not simply child beggars who are being focussed upon. The vast

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<sup>11</sup> Griffiths (2008, 204) has argued that a 'feminization' of crime-labels is apparent in the Bridewell records after 1620 with more women being accused of crimes particularly linked to urban growth. He found that, towards the end of the sixteenth century, only a little over one-quarter of vagrants were female, but this had increased to over forty percent in the 1640s. Similarly, at the start of the seventeenth century, women constituted around thirty percent of all wanderers, beggars, nightwalkers, vagrants, rogues and loiterers brought before Bridewell but, by the middle of the century, this had increased to around half. These increasing proportions of criminalised females were not straightforwardly reflected in wider public discourse as the century progressed.



majority of concordances concern ostensibly respectable fathers endangering the financial futures of their offspring by engaging in politically foolish or immoral acts. Penury is thus presented as a direct consequence of misconduct. However, some writers reverse this causality by suggesting that beggary leads to vice – an alternative public discourse is active in which beggars are thought to pose a threat to children by, for example, professionally training their children in the art of begging because younger beggars were likely to inspire a greater degree of sympathy. Robert Sanderson declared in 1686 that ‘Idle wandering Beggars train up their Children in a Trade of begging, and lying, and cursing, and filching, and all idleness and abominable filthiness’ (Sanderson 1686). Instances of poor children begging were common and, in some cases, this was condoned by the authorities. In Ipswich in 1597, for example, the census showed thirteen cases of children begging with or without parents, eleven of whom were under the age of seven. In reality, parents who allowed their children to beg had probably exhausted all other options as they ran the risk of having their children removed by local officials (Hindle 2004, 72-73). The notion of beggars exploiting children was asserted even more vehemently by earlier writers. In *The Ship of Fools* of 1509, an adaptation of Sebastian Brandt’s *Das Narrenschiff*, Alexander Barclay described how some beggars deliberately disfigured their own children: ‘mangling their facis, and brekinge their bonis; To stere the people to pety that passe by’ (cited in Carroll 1996, 49). Beggars were also thought to pose a threat to other people’s families in terms of stealing children. Other social commentators despaired that the children of beggars were fated to follow in their parents’ footsteps. A collection of the words of John Maynard, printed in 1669, included the assertion that: ‘The Children of idle Beggars take up the same wandering course of life as their Fathers did before them. And it is commonly seen (for the most part) that whole Families are tainted with the same vices of their Stock.’

Another feature of the identity of this group that one might think would be present in public discourse relates to occupations. Legislation passed in 1572 judged people to be vagabonds if, among other things, they worked as pedlars, tinkers, bearwardes (bear keepers), minstrels or fortune tellers. Only fortune telling is indirectly part of public discourse around the criminalised poor - *Egyptians* and *gypsies* are transient collocates of both *vagabond* and *beggar*. A reading of the concordances for these examples reveals these people are associated with palm reading. As the seventeenth century progressed, Roma people travelled throughout the country, often in large families. Gypsies or ‘counterfeit Egyptians’ were automatically considered to be vagrants and a series of acts, introduced in the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, ordered their deportation and imposed penalties on native English people who took up their way of life. However, constables

were often reluctant to confront Roma travellers and instead preferred to give them money in order to expedite their exit from parishes.<sup>12</sup>

An occupation of note is *soldiers* which in the 1640s and 1650s collocates with *vagrant*. This transient collocate highlights the presence of large numbers of discharged soldiers during a period of particularly intense political upheaval. The problem of wandering former soldiers was already established well before this period. In the sixteenth century throughout Europe, the strengthening of central governments and unavoidable financial retrenchment meant that wealthy nobles were less able to wage private wars fought by hired soldiers. Men who had previously been employed as armed retainers of great noble households and, from the reign of Henry VIII, demobilised sailors and soldiers, wandered the country in increasing numbers. Their military background and, specifically, their knowledge of weaponry worried the government and intimidated local enforcers of the law. As Pound has commented, in normal circumstances, the problem posed by former soldiers could be managed and legislation had been put in place by the end of the sixteenth century to facilitate ex-servicemen returning home without any need of harassing the communities through which they passed. However, in times of dearth, these men proved to be a frightening presence and swelled the numbers of those desperate for work. In 1589, for instance, the arrival of soldiers returning from the Drake-Norris Expedition to Portugal, coincided with Bartholomew Fair and caused high levels of popular anxiety for months afterwards (Salgãdo 1972, 11; Pound 1986, 2-3).

Religious identities also link to the criminalised poor in the century. References to vagrant Jewish people were present in historical or biblical texts within our corpus, as were mentions of vagabond monks who were a particular group condemned by St Benedict for rambling about the countryside in pursuit of good food and entertainment. Quakers were thought to share many characteristics with vagabonds – rootlessness, idleness, and wandering – and in the 1670s in our corpus *quaker* collocates with *vagabond*. Life in seventeenth-century England was characterised by religious intolerance and between the 1650s and 1670s Parliament made it extremely difficult for Quakers to practise their faith: an act of 1662 made it illegal to refuse to take the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown which Quakers were reluctant to do and the Conventicle Act of 1664 reiterated that meetings by groups whose members had refused to pledge allegiance were not to be tolerated. On closer inspection, the references to the transient collocate *quaker* highlighted in the vagabond texts mostly referred to a law passed by the Massachusetts Colony in May 1661, known as the Vagabond Quaker or Cart and Whip Act. It declared that Quakers were rogues and vagabonds and rendered them liable to be stripped to the waist and whipped from town to town until out of the Colony. If

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<sup>12</sup> 22 H. VIII, c. 10; 1 & 2 P. & M., c. 4; 5 Eliz I, c. 20; 39 Eliz. I, c. 4 2. See Kent (1981, 36-37, 45 n.10). Roma are still nicknamed gypsies today and many Romani organisations now use the term themselves.

they returned they would face the even harsher penalties of branding and death (Way 1998, 251-278).

Beggars are strongly associated with death in public discourse - *die* is a consistent collocate of *beggar* throughout the century, while from the 1650s onwards, *died* initiates as a consistent collocate of *beggar*. The word *die* is strongly tied to the recurrent pattern *die a beggar*, which accounts for over 63% of the co-occurrences of *die* and *beggar*. This phrase focusses on the penniless state of a person at death and often stands as a warning to those who would wish to engage in some act which will cause beggary to result, as in ‘Who loves Gaming to excess, makes it his business to die a Beggar’ and ‘if he leaves not those cheating tricks he shall die a Beggar’ (Le Chétardie 1683; Trigg 1684). By cautioning that a person will ‘die a beggar’ rather than simply become a beggar, writers are intertwining warnings of financial catastrophe with those of death and thus alluding to the collective suspicion that death might follow on the heels of poverty. The phrase ‘the beggar died’ accounted for over 80% of the co-occurrences of these words but this is a less interesting example – a close inspection reveals that all of the instances of ‘the beggar died’ come from a quotation from the Bible relating to the death of Lazarus. Nonetheless this pattern, plus the one relating to *die* show clearly that death and beggary are closely linked in public discourse in the century. Setting aside the collocation of *beggar* and *died* because of its focus upon Lazarus, the causes of death expressly stated around the collocation of *beggar* and *die* are few, though the following conditions are associated with beggars dying in those examples: *diseased*, *distracted*, *hunger*, *miserable* and *starve*. Though the evidence is limited, the message is clear – the death of a beggar is linked to misery, disease and hunger.

The answer to ‘who is a beggar’ is clearly that, in various ways, beggars may be described as undesirable – they are certainly not gentlemen. Except in one important respect. The words *gentleman* and *gentlemen* collocate with *beggar* in the middle of the century (1620s-1650s) when the collocation is used principally to create a contrast between beggars and gentlemen as in the following example: ‘A Beggar asked an Alms of a Gentleman, who gave him a Tester: the Beggar thanked him, and said he would pray to God heartily for him; but the Gentleman bid him pray for his self, and not for him, for he did not use to take any Alms usury’ (Winstanley 1667).

## **5. Attitudes to Begging and Vagrancy: Sympathy and Compassion**

Given the negativity of the representation of the criminalised poor in seventeenth-century public discourse reported so far, it is important to look at the data to see whether this was offset in any way by more positive, or at least compassionate, views. Religious issues dominated the political and cultural landscape in seventeenth-century England and, accordingly, a large proportion of the texts

within Early English Books Online are religious in essence. Many authors mentioned beggars in rhetoric exhorting rich people to act charitably or in sermons which contrasted the lives of the rich with those of the poor. Throughout the century writers showed limited awareness the criminalised poor experienced poverty and that their lives were difficult. It is principally through the words *beggar* and *vagrant* that sympathy was indicated, as will be shown.

The link between vagrancy and poverty is very marked in the data. Over the century, the collocate *poor* is a consistent collocate of both *beggar* and *rogue*. *Poorest* consistently collocates with *beggar*, and *importunate* collocates with *beggar* from the 1640s onwards. The word *poor* also collocates consistently with the word *vagrant*. This suggests that these words have, at the core of their meaning throughout the century, the concept of poverty and want. Most historians reject the notion that people making a living through begging in early modern England made significant profits though there is documentation of a small number of wanderers being apprehended with large amounts of cash in their possession (Beier 1985, 111). The image of the rich beggar or rogue is represented only very weakly in our corpus as a figurative device; very few texts refer to people begging needlessly as a result of habit or covetousness and one writer assures us that, ‘a Rich Rogue will be sure to be always pretending’ (Dennis 1696).

The criminalised poor are poor people – but were they candidates for charity? Writers certainly showed an understanding of circumstances which led to a person becoming dependent upon charity: most notably, *beggar* collocates consistently with *blind* in the century. This did not stop them describing beggars in unflattering terms - a consistent collocate of *beggar*, *rags*, marks beggars out as badly dressed and suggests a sense of repulsion at the beggar’s physical appearance; this is illustrated by a juxtaposition used in a sermon by Anthony Tuckney in 1676: ‘Unfit for the Beggar with his Rags and Filth to press into a King 's Presence-Chamber...’ Another sermon, printed in the following decade but probably composed in the period 1649-53, equated the physical degradation of beggars and rogues with their alleged lack of moral fibre: ‘The third sort of those that live unprofitably and without a Calling, are our idle sturdy Rogues, and vagrant towns-end Beggars: the very scabs, and filth, and vermin of the Common-wealth’ (Sanderson 1686). The transient collocate *sores* supports this notion of disgust. Moreover, other transient collocates, *multitude* and *swarm*, reveal not only the commonplace belief that the numbers of beggars were becoming unmanageable but that these people were perceived to be akin to rodents or insects. In 1662 Charles II made reference to ‘the multitude of Beggars and poor People which *infest* [our italics] the Kingdom’ (Charles II 1662). The author of *A Present remedy for the poor* also chose to describe the destitute by employing a collective noun usually associated with large numbers of insects: ‘The number of Beggars increases daily, our Street swarm with this kind of People...’

(Anon. 1700, 6).<sup>13</sup> The notion that the pollution and uncleanness with which poor people were associated could present a source of danger emerged as an element of Christian humanism in the sixteenth century (Slack 1995, 6-7). Fears of infection were justified during a period when communities were at the mercy of recurrent plague epidemics and when syphilis - sometimes referred to as the 'filithie' or 'fowle disease' - was prevalent, particularly in London (Carroll 1996, 127).<sup>14</sup> There was a popular belief that poor people were more susceptible to disease – again, probably a legitimate concern.<sup>15</sup>

Yet beggars were thought to be worthy of charity - *beggar* collocates consistently with *alms*. The nature of charity was in flux in seventeenth-century English society but the country continued to embrace a Christian tradition of almsgiving. Almsgiving was a negotiated transaction: before the Reformation, donors believed that helping the poor would reduce the time spent in purgatory after their deaths. Funeral doles, which were very common, were similarly reciprocal arrangements whereby poor funeral attendees received charity and the deceased were ensured a good turn-out for their funeral and plenty of mourners to pray for their souls. Even after the Reformation, when almsgiving became more discriminating and centralised, Protestants were encouraged to give to the destitute to prove their Christian virtue (Archer 2002, 228-229). In 1649, the physician and social reformer, Peter Chamberlen, wrote that provision for the poor was the most essential duty of the rich: '... men are entrusted with riches, that (as Gods Stewards) they might reward the laborious industries of the poor'. Chamberlen also highlighted another element in this business exchange: by preventing the poor from starving, richer people were buying their obsequiousness during a period of intense social and economic pressure. He argued that if poor people were not given bread, they would forcibly take it (1649, 1,3).<sup>16</sup>

While *beggar* was the only term to collocate with *alms*, if we look beyond consistent collocates, both *beggar* and *vagabond* do have *relief* as a transient collocate. *Beggar* collocates with *relief* in the 1630s, 1650s and 1680s. Were the words *relief* and *alms* used almost interchangeably by writers in our corpus? *Alms* collocates with words such as *give*, *prayer*, *fasting*, *charity* and *bestow*, indicating that it was used to mean voluntary contributions to the needy, frequently connected with religious practices. The collocations of *relief* suggest it was a more nuanced term.

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<sup>13</sup> Gabrielatos & Baker (2008, 5-38) have shown how words which create clear negative prosodies such as *swarm*, *flood* or *gang* have been used by present-day British journalists to refer to refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants.

<sup>14</sup> Also see Corporation of London (1655) and Griffiths (2008, 266).

<sup>15</sup> Griffiths (2008, 200-201) explains how respectable citizens were disgusted at the smell enveloping vagrants and feared they might catch an airborne infection. Insanitary living conditions were blamed for crime statistics and more words associated with dirt were used after 1600 in the London courts.

<sup>16</sup> Historians have argued that the introduction of the old Poor Law itself, and the subsequent attempts to confine poor people to workhouses and prisons, was an attempt by the rich to control their poorer contemporaries and ensure the continuation of the social status quo. Although it seems to have happened very rarely, there is evidence of pensioners having had their payments reduced or stopped as a result of behaviour that was deemed to be inappropriate. This included drunken or unruly conduct but also sexual impropriety. See Slack (1995, 33).

Collocates such as *almes-houses*, *distressed*, *indigent* and *maimed* often appeared in official texts referring to the assessment of poor parishioners and the distribution of poor relief payments. However, whenever *beggar* and *relief* co-occur, the relevant texts overwhelmingly refer to charitable personal donations only: beggars may have been considered to be appropriate recipients of good-will handouts, but discourses did not indicate they were worthy of poor relief payments or that they received any such official benefits. Vagabonds and rogues, meanwhile, were not considered deserving of either private or public forms of assistance. *Vagabond* collocated with *relief* in the 1630s and 1680s, but these concordances showed the examples to derive from official laws suppressing rogues and vagabonds.

The collocates *gate*, *door*, *doors*, *street* and *streets* occurring with *beggar* give some indication of where beggars were likely to plead for money or food. Interestingly, the collocate *door* appeared consistently throughout the century but *gate* and *street* did not appear until the 1630s. This might indicate a changing relationship between almsgivers and beggars. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, despite recurrent legislation forbidding unlicensed begging, beggars were far more likely to be given shelter and food in people's homes. In later years, when a person's private property was regarded as being more inviolable, writers also described beggars standing at *gates* and, to a lesser extent, in *streets*.

## 6. Attitudes to Begging and Vagrancy: Censure

Of all of the collocates there is only one which is both shared by and consistent for *beggar*, *rogue*, *vagabond* and *vagrant*. It is a clear marker of disapproval and censure – *idle*. Beggars were consistently described as idle throughout the seventeenth century. 'It's a point of justice to whip an idle beggar, but more excellent to prevent Idleness and beggary...' (Vines 1656). Vagabonds and vagrants were also presented as being *idle*; *idle* collocated with *rogue* too but this co-occurrence reduced in strength and frequency as the century progressed – it is possible that rogues were presented as being slightly more industrious because writers assumed they were busily engaged in tricks and deceit.<sup>17</sup> It is useful to isolate the word *idle* in order to ascertain whether it was simply used by contemporary writers as a synonym for *unemployed* or if it almost always suggested characteristics best associated with laziness. We analysed *idle* by looking at its collocates. Most of them did suggest slothfulness or frivolousness: *tattlers*, *lusks*, *droan*, *sedentary*, *time-wasting*, *slow-bellies*, *prattlers*, *tittle-tattle*, *sloathful* and *loiterers*. Yet *unemployed* did occur as a collocate of *idle* and while these matches sometimes related to joblessness it was never in relation to poverty and

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<sup>17</sup> Basu (2014, 48) has written that in the cony-catching pamphlets of Greene and Dekker, the cony-catcher is often depicted as hard working which contradicts the stereotype of the lazy vagrant in rogue literature.

vagrancy. It is likely, therefore, that the word *idle* was mostly used by writers in order to simply condemn the slothful characters of certain people or groups of people rather than simply to indicate unemployment. Indeed, close reading shows that a discourse of beggars being lazy pervaded through almost every essay on the subject of poverty in the seventeenth century. The word *lazy* collocated with *beggar* throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century which suggests that the perception that beggars were indolent strengthened as the decades progressed.

As noted in the previous discussion of children, in public discourse in the seventeenth century there was a belief that the state of poverty itself rendered people lazy and useless: ‘It encourages Idleness, and makes several whose strength and abilities might render them useful Members of the Society, to be not only useless, but pernicious and mischievous’. Later, the same author reasoned that confining and setting the poor to work within institutions would free ‘the Nation from all lazy and idle Beggars’ (Anon. 1700, 15-16). The anonymous author of *Stanley’s Remedy* related the account of how Thomas Harman attempted to employ sturdy beggars and wandering rogues by giving them some sustenance and a daily penny for gathering stones on his property and then on that of his neighbours. It is perhaps unsurprising that Harman reported that vagrants proceeded to avoid his parish but this was used as evidence of their inherent idleness (Anon. 1646).<sup>18</sup>

While beggars may be thought to be suitable recipients of charity, they were also simultaneously people of whom public disapproval was expressed. A term that collocates consistently with *beggar* throughout the century contains an implicit negative characterisation – this collocate is *sturdy*. *Sturdy beggars* was a phrase used to describe able-bodied adults who chose not to work; members of this group were deemed by the state to be living illegally. Indeed, an analysis of the phrase *sturdy beggar* shows how members of this group were portrayed stealing food from others; being punished by the authorities; and, as this quotation from Robert Anton’s prose shows, being violent: ‘Whereupon ye Fayry Champion, like a valiant sturdy Beggar, took the Butler by the brains, & dashed his heels against the wall...’ (Anton 1613). Towards the end of the century *lusty* collocates with *beggar*, initiating in 1670 and then collocating consistently with the word. A *lusty beggar* was equivalent in meaning to a *sturdy beggar*.

*Beggar* also consistently collocates with *proud*. If begging was to be tolerated, then there was an expectation, supported by Christian charitable tradition, that beggars must be self-effacing and grateful. When writers presented beggars as being *proud*, they were inverting this popular expectation to draw out their readership’s hostility to the poor. Consider the collocate *bold*, which collocates with *beggar* in the 1660s and 1670s; *impudent* which collocates with *rogue* from 1650

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<sup>18</sup> Beier (1985, 151, 167) has explained the origins of *Stanley’s Remedy* which was actually written in the reign of James I to convince the authorities that Thomas Stanley, a man of dubious character, should be allowed to take charge of the London Bridewell as a private contractor. Stanley got his way in 1602 and, for a six month period under his care, Bridewell became an out-and-out brothel. See also Griffiths (2008, 221).

onwards and is a transient collocate of *beggar*; and the transient collocates of *beggar*, *shameless* and *refuse*. They all support the notion of an ungrateful and disrespectful beggar. On first glance, one might assume that the transient collocate, *refuse*, referred to people who refused to give alms to beggars; on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the beggars were the ones portrayed as refusing to accept certain donations. Perhaps because of acts like this, from the 1640s onwards, *fools* becomes a collocate of *beggar* and it is easy to find examples of beggars described as fools in our data: ‘...he became a fool, and a beggar, and a laughing-stock to them...’ (Norden 1620).

However, from the 1650s onwards, *merry* collocates with *beggar*. This collocate primarily derives from the Richard Broome comedy, first staged in the early 1640s, named *A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars*. As the century progressed, more playwrights became interested in beggars and other minority groups such as gypsies. Their works tended to be light-hearted in tone - Christopher Hill, for instance, has shown how Broome idealised the beggar’s lifestyle - but they nonetheless showed awareness of the social reality of increasing numbers of beggars and vagrants wandering the country (Hill 1972, 39).

There is no doubt from our analysis that *rogue* is a term used to refer negatively to the criminalised poor. It has been postulated that the term *rogue* was coined by Thomas Harman but the first unequivocal mention of the word in the EEBO corpus occurs earlier, in 1563: a work by Laurence Humphrey who was president of Magdalen College, Oxford, makes reference to ‘the wandering skulls, of roges and roamyng beggars’ (Humphrey 1563). However, a more ambiguous reference to ‘roges which he knew well garnished of victual’ appears in a text of 1484 (Pisan 1484).

Griffiths (2008, 198-199) has listed some of the labels attached to people brought to the Bridewell court between 1550 and 1660 – *harlot*, *idle*, *lewd*, *unruly*, *vagabond* and so on – which, he believes, were present in street slang and in the legal language of the time. He believes that there was a cultural intersection between these different types of language: the vocabulary of everyday people influenced legal language which appeared in courtroom jargon, laws, and handbooks and vice versa. Griffiths has observed that the sudden increases in certain labels appeared after the same term had been used in new legislation. *Vagrant*, for instance, tended to be used in the 1570s over the more old-fashioned *vagabond* in the wake of statutes passed in 1572 and 1576 which used the word. Interestingly, Griffiths argues that *rogue* culminated in usage at Bridewell in the 1570s because it was first mentioned in legislation of 1572 and also appeared in a number of rogue tracts ‘that gave the term publicity and colour’. In wider discourse of the seventeenth century, contained within the EEBO corpus, there is no such obvious links between the release of legislation mentioning our search terms and an increase in their frequencies. For instance, two vagrancy acts of the first decade of the seventeenth century (1 James I 1604, c.7; 7 James I 1609, c.4), and *An Act against Vagrants and wandring, idle dissolute persons* of 1657, which all referred to rogues,



vagabonds and sturdy beggars, appears to have made no impact on the frequencies of these terms. We must look elsewhere for an explanation of the growing popularity of the term *rogue* throughout the century.

Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz have explained that, in the 1560s, rogues were perceived to be vagrants who ‘used disguise, rhetorical play, and counterfeit gestures to insinuate themselves into lawful society and political contexts’ but that the meaning of the term gradually widened to include any social deviant or outcast (Dionne & Mentz 2006, 1-2). Our analysis showed that, as the seventeenth century progressed, the negativity centred on the term *rogue* intensified further. For example, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, a link between the criminalised poor and sexual immorality emerges. Rogues became associated with sexual immorality and infection, collocating with *whore* (a collocate initiating in 1650) and *pox* (initiating in 1660). In 1660, William Sheppard links ‘common harbourers and entertainers of Whores, Rogues or Thieves’ in a compilation of warrants designed for Justices of the Peace.

In contrast to the other words studied, *rogue* undergoes a massive and negative change of meaning from the 1650s onwards. In our analysis *beggar* attracts 24 initiating collocates in the century, *vagabond* attracts 8 and *vagrant* attracts 4. By contrast, *rogue* attracts 43 initiating collocates. These are overwhelmingly negative in character, e.g. *cheating*, *cunning*, *damned*, *impudent*, *incorrigible*, *notorious*, *rascals* and *villains*. Of these 43 new collocates, only 6 initiate before 1650. In other words, *rogue* undergoes a notable change of usage in the latter half of the century. A word which has negative connotations attracts many more. This trend is more marked for *rogue* than the other words – for example, *beggar*, which also attracts a good number of initiating collocates in the century, has them spread more evenly. 9 of its new collocates are attracted to it prior to 1650, with the remainder attaching to it afterwards. Of the collocates that do attach to *beggar*, they are not as negative. Only five of the new collocates attracted to *beggar* are clearly negative in tone (*canting*, *fools*, *importunate*, *miserable*, *thieves*). Also, in the century *beggar* loses a negative collocate – *drunk* falls away from being associated with *beggar* after the 1630s. By contrast, 16 of the 23 initiating collocates for *rogue* are negative. Both *vagabond* and *vagrant* remain relatively more neutral as though both attracts new collocates in the century, only one, the collocate *fugitive* which attaches to *vagabond* consistently from the 1640s onwards, is clearly negative.

How can we account for the marked change in usage of the word *rogue* in the latter half of the seventeenth century? *Rogue* is the only one of our terms which is directly connected to a literary sub-genre, *rogue literature*, but this peaked in popularity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries so cannot be held responsible for the changes we have identified. The types of books within which the word *rogue* appears in the second half of the century offer clues. A sample of 100

texts per decade which reference rogues, between and including 1660 and 1690, reveals that the word was used in a variety of genres – in histories, dictionaries, poetry, religious tracts, official legislation and so on. However, in the 1660s, 1670s and 1690s, approximately one quarter of the appearances of *rogue* appeared in plays. This is easily explained by the resurgence of the theatre in Restoration London; in the 1680s, in which only four works in our sample were plays, the theatre suffered a decline as royal patronage declined after the death of Charles II (Linker 2011, 73). Scholars such as Roger Thompson have explored the growth of bawdy works during the Restoration period (Thompson 1979). Accordingly, many of the plays in our samples were crowd-pleasing comedies which dealt with the baser aspects of life in London; the term *rogue* was often applied as an insult to a ne'er-do-well character that was judged to have behaved discourteously: 'What an impudent rogue is this?' (Clark 1663). *Sirrah* and *slave* collocate with *rogue* – both terms which denoted a person of low social standing. Texts referencing rogues which were not plays were more likely to use the term specifically to indicate the vagrant or begging poor. *Beggar*, *vagrant* and *vagabond* were far less likely to be used in generalised abuse directed at male adversaries.

Of the more transient collocates in the corpus, one for *beggar* in the 1660s strikes us as interesting, the word *catch*. This is brought about by a frequent use of the saying 'the beggar will catch you'.<sup>19</sup> Concordances of this phrase usually contain advice warning that poor financial management will lead to the condition of beggary itself. However, research by Hank Dragstra on the presentation of poor people in early seventeenth-century literature may also shed light upon the origins of this phrase. Dragstra (2004, 316) has found that beggars provoked deep-seated anxieties that were based in superstition and argues that popular aversion to associating with beggars arose from the notion that beggars would attach themselves to donors and become a permanent source of financial weight.

We have already shown how *alms* was more strongly associated with beggars than with any other group of people. *Thieves* is a consistent collocate of rogues and initiates as a consistent collocate of *beggar* in the 1630s. Yet a close reading of the examples suggests that *rogues* and *beggars* are constructed as often personally associating with thieves rather than being directly engaged in theft themselves. Rogues were most strongly associated with lawlessness: *rogue* collocates strongly with *thieves*, *thief*, *rob*, *robbers*, *steal* and, to a lesser extent, with *murderer*. Rogues were also frequently described as being dishonest through collocates such as *rascal*, *villain*, *lying*, *lies*, *lie*, *cheating*, *cunning* and *tricks* and this negative characterisation intensified as the century progressed, as noted.

The notion that the criminalised poor steal runs through contemporary literature and is prevalent in archival documents. Magistrates from Shropshire linked together 'begging and

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Anon. (1630).

filching' among petty crimes carried out by the poor (Hindle 2004, 75). The anonymous author of *An Essay For the raising a National Fishery by the Poor of England* (1700, 2) observed that sturdy beggars and vagabonds will 'not scruple to Murder, Rob, or commit any other violence' when their needs are not met by begging. Gilbert Malkin (1697, 5) expressed a degree of perhaps unintentional empathy when linking paupers with begging and theft: 'all people will Conclude, that the Poor get five times more by Begging and Stealing, than the Parish Rates come to...'

The strong link between thieving and vagrancy evidenced in the public discourse of the time seems to support research in the area which has explored the link between the two. Hindle (2004) has examined the extent to which poor people resorted to theft as a means of making a living and has concluded that casual stealing was widespread among the disorderly poor. In a large sample of examinations acquired from a selection of jurisdictions between 1571 and 1641, 45 per cent of vagrants were suspected of theft. Hindle believes that instances of theft are under-represented in surviving archival data from criminal proceedings because thieves would often be dealt with in informal ways and the pilfering of food, in particular, was looked upon with sympathy as a crime of necessity. Vagrants who burgled houses, however, even if they only stole edible items, could not hope for leniency (Hindle 2004, 81-92). From the seventeenth century onwards, the pilfering of smaller food items was also less likely to be viewed as a crime of necessity: Justices reasoned that the passing of the 1601 statute meant that such crimes were no longer unavoidable. In the second half of the century, contemporary writers also showed a marked disinclination to accept the notion that it was justifiable for poor people to steal in circumstances of intense need. In 1676, Gabriel Towerson wrote 'And indeed, as those necessities, which we sometimes fall under, do mostly arise from sloth and idleness, or a living above that condition wherein God hath placed us; so, that bare necessity can be no warrant to us to invade our Neighbours Goods...' Contemporaries' perceptions of poor people stealing were also coloured by anecdotes, some no doubt true, of vagrants burgling houses while their owners were engaged in preparing alms for them or of thieves insisting that they were only seeking victuals when they were caught red-handed inside a property (Ben-Amos 2000, 325).

## **7. Attitudes to the Criminalised Poor: Punishment**

Another difference in the portrayal of the criminalised poor occurs in relation to words which denoted the treatment of beggars and rogues. An analysis of collocates which denoted detainment and punishment might not only help historians understand how begging and vagrancy was tackled by parish officials but may also illuminate what ways these methods followed or differed from governmental directions. A study of official legislation shows how the state instructed local officials

to deal with unlicensed beggar and vagrants. In 1495, Henry VII threatened vagrant men and women with three days in the stocks and removal to the hundred (a division of a county) where they were born, formerly lived, or were best known.<sup>20</sup> In 1531, during the reign of Henry VIII, penalties for wandering became more severe: vagabonds would be whipped, rather than stocked, and returned to their place of birth or former dwelling for three years. *Beggar* is the only one of our terms to collocate with *stocks* in data for the 1660s. Robert Sanderson declared in 1663 that ‘...he that helps one of these sturdy Beggars to the stocks, and the whip, and the house of correction, not only deserves better of the Common-wealth; but doth a work of greater Charity in the sight of God, than he that helps him with meat, and money, and lodging’ (Sanderson 1663).

In 1547, the accession of the child-king, Edward VI, left the ruling classes feeling particularly sensitive to the possibility of power struggles at court which might destabilise the political balance of the country. There was renewed determination to suppress any vagrancy threat and, in the same year, a legislation of unprecedented savagery was enacted against the unsettled or unemployed (1 Edward VI c.3). Any able-bodied person discovered being out of work and refusing offered employment, could be tried by two Justices of the Peace and, if found guilty, was to be branded with a ‘V’ on their chest and sold into slavery to the informant for two years. Those who tried to escape from slavery were to be bonded for life on a first attempt and executed on a second. Historians have postulated that local authorities may have been repelled by the brutality of this act because it appears that parish officials refused to put it into practice. Its clauses regarding vagabonds were repealed in 1550 (3 & 4 Edward VI c.16) and the act of 1531 was re-enacted in its stead (Pound 1986, 40). In 1604, however, the branding of incorrigible rogues with the large letter R was revived (1 James I c.7; also see Carroll 1996, 43). While *vagabond* is not clearly associated with either branding or slavery in the corpus, *slaves* does initiate as a collocate of *beggar* from the 1640s onwards. But none of the examples relate to people who have achieved slavery by this route. Though *rogue* collocates with *branded* in the 1660s all of these matches appear in one single document so have less significance, i.e. there is no evidence that discussing the branding of rogues was part of general public discourse.<sup>21</sup> There were no collocates which referred to the practice of ear boring and, in this case, the absence of a collocate might be just as significant as its presence.

As the seventeenth century progressed, punishments for vagrants and sturdy beggars tended to be of the form of whipping rather than ear boring and executions. Whipping was perceived to be an effective means of humiliating and ridiculing the victim and whipping posts increased in popularity,

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<sup>20</sup> Pound believes the 1495 act was rarely put into force and it took a severe economic crisis of the late 1520s, where harvest failures and a slump in the clothier industry led to hunger and unemployment, for the government to harden its resolve (Pound 1986, 37).

<sup>21</sup> John Florio’s Italian-English dictionary of 1598 highlighted the association between branding and rogues and vagabonds: he offered a definition of a stigmatic as ‘that is marked with a hot iron, that beareth a marke of shame. Also a rogue, a vagabond, an infamous detected fellowe’. See Florio (1598).

most notably in London in the 1590s (Fumerton 2006, 27-28). Whipping, like branding, also left a mark on a victim's body so served as a permanent reminder of the vagabond's crimes. *Whipped* is a collocate of *rogue* in data for the 1640s and *whip* or *whipped* is a collocate of *beggar* for data in the 1620s, 1640s, and 1650s; *whipped* also appears as a collocate of *vagabond* when one examines the data for the seventeenth century as a whole. Texts did suggest that rogues and beggars were whipped: 'If he, whom we call Christ, was God, God was subject to many ignominies to be called a Seducer, a Blasphemer, a Drinker of Wine, a Glutton, to be scourged at a post like a rogue and hanged like a thief; therefore he was not God'. Interestingly, this example did draw clear distinctions between those people that were whipped and those who were hanged. *Rogue* collocates in almost every decade with *hang*, *hanged* or *hung* which suggests a strong early modern association between this particular punishment and roguery. However, none of the collocate matches appeared in texts authored by officials; the vast majority appeared in fiction which often used the word *rogue* as a generalised insult. The hanging of rogues, therefore, was something more alive in popular imagination than sanctioned by official legislation; in reality a rogue was only liable for execution if he was incorrigible or if he had been found guilty of theft. Indeed, one text asserted that England did not subject rogues to severe punishments unlike many of its European counterparts (Hearty lover of his country, 1695). Similarly, *banished* is a collocate of *rogue*, but only in material for the 1660s, and no mention of the word appears in official texts.

*Rogue* and *vagabond* both collocate with *punish*, *punishing*, *punishment* and *punished*, particularly in the second half of the century; *vagrant* is a transient collocate of *punish* in data for the 1650s but *beggar* does not co-occur with these terms at all. These matches highlighted texts which described, for instance, plague sufferers being 'punished as a Vagabond' if they conversed in company after having been ordered to self-quarantine themselves<sup>22</sup>; to servants who were to be 'punished by whipping as a vagabond' (Wingate & Manby 1666) if they travelled away from their former masters without an appropriate testimonial; and to penalties against people without legal settlement (Manby 1667). Some texts reproduced official legislation, such as commandments that, for instance, foreigners from Scotland, Ireland or the Isle of Man were to be punished as rogues as were soldiers or mariners who begged without a license (Collyn 1655). Another text, echoing a vagrancy law of 1610, detailed the punishment of men who deserted their families: 'The person that shall run from his Family, and leave it to the Parish, is to be punished as an incorrigible Rogue: And he that doth threaten so to do, is to be sent to the House of Correction, unless he can give Sureties for the discharge of the said Parish...' (Sheppard [no date]).

In 1576 legislation entitled *For the Setting of the Poor on Work, and for the Avoiding of Idleness* ordered the erection of houses of correction in every county and corporate town primarily

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<sup>22</sup> If a plague sufferer with visible sores broke quarantine, they were to be punished as a felon.

to ensure that young people were ‘brought up in labour and work’. These establishments, known by the generic name of Bridewell, were essentially casual prisons where poor people were sent by means of summary justice for punishment, usually whipping, and rehabilitation in the form of hard labour (18 Elizabeth I c.3; see Beier 1985, 10, 164-165). None of our terms collocate with *house* or *Bridewell*, but *rogue* and *vagrant* collocate with *correction* when, respectively, material of the 1660s and of the entire century was considered. George Meriton’s 1669 guide for parish officials, for instance, explains how rogues must be sent to the House of Correction, along with their families if their children were over the age of seven (Meriton 1669). A more detailed examination of the matches highlighted by the word *correction* showed that *vagrant* was used as many times as an adjective as it was as a noun in these cases: vagrants were described as being sent to the Houses of Correction, but so were ‘vagrant rogues’ and ‘vagrant, sturdy, and idle Beggars’.

In literature of the latter half of the seventeenth century, *rogue* collocates with *apprehend* and *apprehending* and *vagabond* collocates with *apprehending* in data for the 1660s. The matches of both terms did not refer to the rogue’s personal experiences of being detained but instead related to the bureaucratic process, including a payment of two shillings to members of the public, for the apprehending of rogues, vagabonds or sturdy beggars. We must not assume that every penniless stranger was whipped and expelled when entering a parish. Local officials used discretion in determining which strangers should be subjected to vagrancy legislation and they probably allowed the majority of poor travellers to pass through unmolested. Constables were consequently often being accused of not doing enough to enforce the full extent of the law upon vagrants and this is reflected in some of the texts in our corpus: ‘If the Constable do not his best endeavour for apprehending every such Vagabond, Rogue or sturdy Beggar, and cause them to be punished and conveyed according to this Act, he shall forfeit Ten shillings’ (Corporation of London 1687). Private inhabitants were also expected to do their part in apprehending vagrants. The vagrancy law of 1604 declared: ‘Every Person or Persons shall apprehend or cause to be appended, such Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy beggars as he or they shall see or know to resort to their houses to beg, gather, or receive any Alms, and him or them shall carry or cause to be carried to the next Constable, upon pain to forfeit for every default Ten shillings’ (City of London 1655; see also Fumerton 2006, 28).

Significantly, beggars were not frequently described as being the subject of detention or punishment and this provides another example of how contemporaries appeared to look upon beggars with less severity than their vagabond, vagrant and roguish counterparts. This may be because a significant proportion of beggars with whom seventeenth-century people came into contact were acting with the tacit permission of their parish authorities. Our corpus analysis suggests that roaming was considered to be more objectionable than mendicancy: although ordinary

people may have felt harassed by beggars, the masterless, unsettled vagabond was the subject of wider anxieties as he was perceived to threaten the social order itself.

## 8. Conclusions

This study has traced words that seventeenth-century writers used to describe and identify the criminalised poor. An awareness of the meaning and frequency of these terms can guide historians who are engaged in close reading of primary source documents. By collaborating with corpus linguists, historians are not only able to use established corpus methods but can also contribute to the development of future corpus software. As a result of this study, for instance, work is currently being undertaken to sort the texts contained within the EEBO corpus into literary genres which would facilitate the discovery of patterns of social attitudes within certain types of printed works.

In terms of increasing our understanding of contemporary attitudes to poor people who begged and roamed, the words *beggar*, *vagrant*, *vagabond* and *rogue* are of the most relevance, occurring alongside words which indicate poverty, wandering and homelessness. They appeared in high frequencies in our corpus of seventeenth-century texts and very often related to very poor people who lived by means of begging and who had no fixed abode. Identities of beggars, rogues, vagabond and vagrants were forced upon poor people by authorities who endeavoured to manage and control them by means of licenses and passports, penalties, and sometimes financial aid (Slack 1995, 12; Pound 1986, 7). These identities were not decided upon objectively nor were they fixed – a self-sufficient person might become a beggar in old age; in one parish he/she might be given relief; in another he/she might be whipped and expelled. Our corpus analysis has highlighted dominant discourses of the time which involved members of these groups stealing and lying, being idle and ungrateful, and being apprehended and punished.

There were differences in the ways in which images of beggars, rogues, vagrants and vagabonds were constructed by seventeenth-century writers. *Vagrant* tended to be used to mean a poor wanderer but was also frequently used as an adjective to present more abstract ideas. *Vagabond* was also linked with begging and wandering but it was also used very frequently to refer to religious or historical groups. The frequency in usage of both of these terms was fairly even and the dominating collocates described wandering and idleness. From the 1630s onwards, however, ‘punishment’ terms co-occur with *vagabond*.

Established historiography tells us that, as the early modern period progressed, attitudes towards people experiencing poverty tended to harden and that, in the seventeenth century, debates about managing growing numbers of poor people, including beggars and vagrants, intensified. Historians describe how social commentators living in early modern England, fearing vagrancy was

reaching menacing proportions, became preoccupied with proposals for compulsory work schemes and the establishment of workhouses; they perceived poverty to be a moral problem which threatened the well-being and future economic viability of the children of the lower orders. Our analysis shows that seventeenth-century attitudes towards the criminalised poor were diverse; the use of the word *beggar* was nuanced and showed no radical signs of diachronic change. The negative characterisation of beggars, whereby they were presented as being foolish, idle, drunk and proud, was present throughout the century but it was modified by other collocates which revealed writers were aware that beggars lived in poverty and often with disability or disease. Seventeenth-century texts also conveyed a sense of disgust at the beggar's clothing and skin that was not present in literature concerning other groups of the criminalised poor.

The usage of the word *beggar* steadily declined over the century whilst that of *rogue* dramatically increased after 1650. Indeed, rogues were constructed in the most damning ways by writers, being portrayed as deceitful, clever and immoral, and this characterisation intensified as the century progressed. The beggar was never considered with the same degree of hostility as the rogue. While rogues were portrayed as industriously working to cheat and steal, beggars were presented as being lazy and inept. It appears that writers increasingly used the word *rogue* to describe a particular kind of vagrant person who begged - these people were not local poor who might simply be nuisances or objects of disgust; they were wandering strangers who presented a danger to their contemporaries. Early moderners who absorbed these constructions were led to believe that a subsection of very poor people posed a real threat to their safety and such fears helped to ensure the success of the moral reform movement at the end of the century.

Our study has also served to show that words which may appear to be near synonymous are, in fact, distinguished apart subtly. The words *vagrant* and *vagabond* are more neutral words for the criminalised poor, linked to poverty, idleness and wandering, but only weakly linked to malefaction. *Rogue*, on the other hand, has all of these links but also links strongly to malefaction and does so increasingly as the century progresses. *Beggar*, while sharing the associations the other three words have with wandering, poverty and idleness, has some of the links of *rogue* to malefaction but also, crucially, has links to charitable giving. So the words, while similar to one another, are not identical.

As is apparent from this brief thumbnail sketch of the meanings of the four words examined, when writing about the criminalised poor, seventeenth-century authors expressed only a very limited sense of compassion or awareness of social circumstances. Despite the practice of begging being outlawed by the state, many religious works encouraged Christian charitable-giving and the presence of the collocates *alms* and *relief* suggested that many people were still willing to bestow charity upon beggars. However, an investigation of these collocates showed that donors worried



about the worthiness of recipients and felt pestered by the ever-present beggar. It would be interesting to discover to what extent this negativity extended into public discourses which concerned poor people who were not criminalised, e.g. the impotent poor who were more likely to be eligible for poor relief, and if a corpus analysis would reveal any significant change in attitudes to the needy in the eighteenth century and beyond.

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