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I have wanted to write about literature and social class for many years, and I am glad I have finally managed to produce something. The book has gone through a number of possible forms, iterations, and guises, large and small, broad-brush and myopically focused. I hope I have written a book in a form and style that more or less works for some, possibly many, readers. Consideration of class has been a relatively marginal subject in English and literary studies for a long time now, despite the occasional complaints of scholars, and the wonderful work of literary critics such as David Aers, John Barrell, Sandy Byrne (whose book, *Poetry and Class* appeared just as I was finishing this one so is not as fully incorporated into the argument as it might have been), John Goodridge, Donna Landry, Neil Rhodes (and many others acknowledged in the text), and historians such as Patricia Crawford, Rodney Hilton, Anne Laurence, Sara Mendelson, Steve Rigby, Kevin Sharpe, Alex Shepard, E. P. Thompson, Andy Wood and Keith Wrightson. It will be obvious to many pioneering writers how much I owe to their work. I hope the book stimulates productive further debate, whatever its failings. A second volume covering material from the beginning of the nineteenth century should follow in due course.

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