Blood sports: violence and the performance of masculinity in early modern drama

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/14047

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

BLOOD SPORTS:
VIOLENCE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF MASCULINITY IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2015
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation represents many years of unstinting support by a long list of individuals. At the top of that list are my readers, William Carroll and James Siemon. I will be forever grateful to Bill Carroll for his ceaseless encouragement, his commitment to help me produce my best possible work, and the generosity with which he shared his time and expertise. Thank you to Jim Siemon for the invaluable feedback he offered on my chapters as well as for allowing me to benefit from his interest in and extensive knowledge of early modern swordplay and the social functions of violence.

I would like to thank the other early modernists whose guidance and support made this project possible as well. Thank you to Erin Murphy, Christopher Martin, and Yu Jin Ko for taking the time out of their summers to read and respond to this dissertation. Thank you also to my fellow graduate students in the English department, especially Liam Meyer and Dan Salerno, both of whom I often relied upon as more seasoned scholars, but even more so as supportive friends. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Theodore Leinwand at the University of Maryland, the teacher whose ability to inspire a love of Shakespeare set me on this path as a young undergraduate.

Finally, I need to thank all the members of my family who made the writing of this dissertation possible: my sister, Anna, whose sharp eye and tireless good humor as a proofreader always made my writing look better than it was; my parents, to whom I owe completely the love of reading and learning that planted the true seeds of this project decades ago; and most of all my wonderful wife, Shihwe, whose patience and love made possible every word that I wrote.
This dissertation explores the construction of masculine identity at the intersection between early modern English drama and competitively violent entertainment. It argues that early modern Englishmen navigated a complex system of dangers and rewards associated with violent self-assertion, and that the playhouse represented a space uniquely suited to the embodying and interrogating of that system. Spaces used for performing plays frequently doubled as venues for cockfights, animal baitings, and fencing exhibitions, and the violence of such entertainments often appeared, either physically or rhetorically, in the period's drama. The project of the dissertation will be to provide a historicizing lens through which to view this violence "in play" in order to understand how early modern English drama refracted and participated in shaping the period's highly contested norms of violent self-assertion in the performance of male identity.

Chapter One maps the cultural disruptions precipitated by the importation of the Italian rapier into late-sixteenth century England. It argues that the secretive exclusivity of rapier culture rendered its novel form of violent masculinity fundamentally
"untheatrical" in comparison to more traditional male identities, leading playwrights to caricature the duelist as either a cowardly braggart or a treacherous assassin. Chapter Two examines Shakespeare's plays in light of the discourses described in Chapter One. Shakespeare's work consistently associates traditional weaponry with a threatened male honor culture while associating rapiers with the undermining of male identity through cowardice or treachery. Chapter Three considers the English hunt as a means of asserting a capacity for violence, focusing on attempts to use the wild boar as a means of restoring the hunt's fading masculine associations. The chapter ends with an extended reading of Thomas Heywood's Age plays, the English Renaissance theater's richest staging of hunting culture. Chapter Four offers an historically informed understanding of the interconnections between bearbaiting and theater by addressing the early modern image of the bear as both a terrifying representative of a threatening natural world and a figure of courageous self-defense in the face of overwhelming odds.
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INTRODUCTION

Violence and Male Identity in Early Modern England

Sometime in late 1603 or early 1604, a youthful gentleman named Richard Cholmley was visiting London from Yorkshire. At twenty-three years old, Cholmley was a young man on the rise, having been knighted the year before during James I's progress from Edinburgh to London. However, Cholmley was also "naturally choleric" (by the admission of his son and biographer, Hugh Cholmley), and just recently he had narrowly avoided losing his hand for striking a man during the hearing of a Star Chamber case (12, 17-8). Having a keen interest in the stage,¹ Cholmley decided to visit London's newest, most fashionable theater. Hugh Cholmley records what occurred at the playhouse, though the action he describes has nothing to do with the scheduled performance:

[H]e went to see a play at Black Friars, and coming late, was forced to take a stool, and sit on the stage, as divers others did; and, as the custom was, between every scene stood up to refresh himself. Whilst he was in that posture, a young gallant, very brave, clapped himself upon Sir Richard's stool; which he conjecting was only to ease the gentleman for a while, did not demand his seat; which this gallant perceiving, he began to laugh and sneer, saying, "Here is a young gentleman I have not only put by his seat, but he bears it very patiently;" and so continued jesting and making sport, insomuch as the company took notice thereof. Whereupon Sir Richard said, "Sir, is it not sufficient to do me an injury, but you must boast of it?" and, whispering him in the ear, said, "If you be a gentleman, follow me;" and presently Sir Richard went out. The gallant followed, and coming to an open place, close by, the gentleman said, "What do you mean?" Saith Sir Richard, "That you give me immediately satisfaction with your sword, for the affront you have done me." "Sir," replied the gallant, "I have no sword." "Then buy one," saith Sir Richard. "But I have no money about me," quoth the gallant. "I will furnish you," saith Sir Richard; and carrying him to a

¹ By 1609 Cholmley would become the patron of his own provincial acting company, a troupe that is known to have performed both King Lear and Pericles (Mowat 213).
cutler's shop close by, the gallant turned over many, but could find none to please him: insomuch as Sir Richard offered his own, and would take any other; but neither did that please the gallant, who whilst he there trifled away the time, his man came, and brought with him a Constable, and suddenly clasping his arms about Sir Richard's middle, said, "Mr. Constable, lay hold on him; this is he will kill my Lady's eldest son." And the Constable presently commanded him to keep the peace. Sir Richard, seeing himself surprised, said, "He meant the gentleman no harm, though he had done him an injury; of which," said Sir Richard, "I will make you, Mr. Constable, the judge:" and so drawing the gallant out of the shop, upon pretence to relate the matter to the Constable, as soon as they were in the street, Sir Richard gave the gallant two or three good blows, and withal struck up his heels, and then turned to the Constable, and said, "I, now Mr. Constable, promise you not to meddle farther with my Lady's eldest son;" who was willing to be gone with his beating; and though a great gallant and gamester about the town, and one that much frequented the ordinaries and places where there was then the most resort of company, he never appeared amongst them after. (12-3)

Regardless of how Richard Cholmley's actual encounter with the Blackfriars gallant may have differed from his son's retelling of the story decades later, the events of the latter give us a richly layered glimpse of both the necessity and the pitfalls of a capacity for violence within the male honor culture of early modern England. Richard Cholmley's initial reaction to the theft of his seat - forbearance - merely invites verbal abuse and implied references to his cowardice. Moreover, the performative nature of this abuse suggests that the gallant expects his audience to accept his behavior and agree on the inadequacy of Cholmley's response, seeing it as a failure of courage. In responding to this further insult by demanding "immediate satisfaction" in the form of a duel of honor, however, Cholmley swings towards the limits of acceptable behavior in the opposite direction, transforming mere rudeness into a matter of life and death. That the escalation is not entirely without cultural precedent can be seen by the fact that the gallant chooses
not to refuse the duel outright (which, though the only legal course of action, would call into question his own valor), instead stalling until he can find an opportunity to extricate himself upon some excuse. When that excuse arrives in the form of the Constable, Cholmley finds himself cornered in the midst of preparations for a highly criminal personal combat, and is forced to tell an outright lie (that he "meant the gentleman no harm") in order to avoid legal complications. Finally, in leading the Constable and the gallant outside only to "g[i]ve the gallant two or three good blows" before "str[i]king] up his heels," Cholmley seems at long last to find the appropriate degree of violent self-assertion. The gallant could presumably have had Cholmley charged with battery, but instead is "willing to be gone with his beating," no doubt because such a charge against his assailant would necessitate the very public disclosure of his own cowardly refusal to accept Cholmley's challenge in the first place, as well as his inability to respond to the beating in kind. As it happens, Cholmley exacts his physical revenge even without the duel, albeit revenge of a more tempered sort, and, after the victor's final emasculating reference to "my Lady's eldest son," the gallant disappears not only from Hugh Cholmley's story, but apparently from London itself.

Richard Cholmley's encounter at the Blackfriars exemplifies the complex system of dangers and rewards that violent self-assertion presented to the early modern Englishman. This dissertation explores the dynamic interplay of such considerations and the ways in which they shaped the performance of masculine identity. The location of

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2 "Striking up the heels" was a common means of assaulting an opponent in a humiliating manner but without causing any serious injury. Alexandra Shepard describes this and other similar symbolic attacks (the boxing of ears, the pulling of beards, the tweaking of noses, etc.) as "actions...far more damaging as acts of defiance or humiliation than as physical abuse" (146).
Cholmley's confrontation also points toward the specific context within which my analysis will occur. The early modern English stage represented a space uniquely suited to the embodying and interrogating of cultural expectations about the appropriate use of personal violence. For reasons that I will cover shortly, it also served as a point of physical intersection for a range of additional entertainments featuring performative bloodshed. The project of the dissertation will be to provide a historicizing lens through which to view the violence central to pastimes such as bearbaiting, hunting, and fencing matches, relating each to their presence, both physical and rhetorical, within English Renaissance drama, and situating each entertainment within the context of early modern English masculine identity.

To understand the world in which contested standards of violent self-assertion were formed, we must first come to grips with the largely alien ubiquity of everyday physical violence in early modern England, a ubiquity difficult for us to imagine in twenty-first century America. As J.M. Beattie reminds us, "there was a much greater tolerance then of aggressive physical force than today, a greater willingness to regard such behavior as an acceptable means of maintaining authority or settling disputes in both public and private arenas" (36). Early modern England was a culture in which murder was committed at a considerably higher rate than in modern-day industrialized societies. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were especially violent, even by early modern standards, with a "wave of violent crime, including homicide, in Elizabethan and
Jacobean England” (Stone 30). Nor was violent crime largely restricted to a physically and socially isolated underclass as it is in many modern industrialized nations; personal violence in early modern Europe existed at similar rates in all levels of society (Thomas Ends 51, Elias Civilizing 168, Ruff 2). Far more common than murder, of course, was non-lethal assault, such as the attack suffered by the gallant at the hands of Richard Cholmley. Although the beating administered by Cholmley might have resulted in criminal charges had the circumstances been different, there existed many contexts in which such violence was either explicitly permitted by law or tacitly approved of by the culture at large. As Keith Thomas points out, "[m]ost brawls and assaults were regarded as private matters and did not reach the law courts" (52), and in relationships with substantial power differentials physical force was employed even more casually. Husbands beat wives, parents beat children, teachers beat students, and employers beat employees, all with a regularity and level of broad social approval that most would find profoundly shocking today.

Such ubiquitous personal violence might suggest a basic breakdown in the social fabric of early modern England. Indeed, Lawrence Stone offers just such an explanation, asserting "that between 1560 and 1620 there was an abrupt rise in a wide variety of indicators of social anomaly and of a breakdown of consensual community methods of dealing with conflict" (31). That the result of any such anomaly should be interpersonal

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3 Although our evidence is incomplete, annual homicide rates circa 1600 seem to have been roughly 15 per 100,000 (Stone 26).
4 Keith Wrightson cautions us not to exaggerate the prevalence of violence by husbands against wives (99), parents against children (116), and men against other men (160), but nevertheless admits that, judging by the court records in homicide cases, "this was a society in which violence might be resorted to comparatively readily" (160).
violence, however, springs at least partially from the fact that a capacity for violence was a key (perhaps even the key) element of masculine identity. Personal courage was one of the most important attributes a man could possess (or at least seem to possess), and while courage could theoretically take many forms, such as the passive courage of the martyred saint, courage in everyday Renaissance England was conventionally associated with a willingness to meet force with force. More often than not, courage simply served as a synonym for a readiness to fight. In theory a man should only have engaged in such fighting to assert or defend his rights, but in practice much more aggressive behavior could bear the name of manly valor. Keith Thomas observes that violence was inextricably tied to masculinity, to the point where even acts of asymmetrical victimization (such as robbery and murder) could enhance the perpetrator's male identity, at least in certain circles. Thomas notes that "[t]he Tudor Homilies complained that 'the common sort of men' regarded meekness as 'a token of womanish cowardness; and therefore they think it is a man's part to fume in anger, to fight with fist and staff'" (52).

Even if we today tend to sympathize with the Homilies' dismissal of violence motivated by the need to play "a man's part," we should be cautious about characterizing such bloodshed as random, unthinking brutality. In truth, the precise limits of constructively masculine violence were endlessly contested and often differed from one

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5 Since courageous violence was the defining physical manifestation of early modern masculinity, such violence could only be committed by women through the adoption of an unnatural "manliness." Shepard observes that while "[c]ourageous women might be praised for their 'masculine' spirit, or described as 'viragos'...they were regarded as aberrations from the norm...The very idea of a martial woman was profoundly incompatible with contemporary assumptions about gender identities" (53). The present dissertation focuses on exploring the far more normative male performance of competitive violence, both because it constituted the vast majority of such violence in Renaissance England, and also because the violence of the female "virago" always entailed the additional complicating risks and rewards of adopting a privileged but normally inaccessible gender identity.
sub-group of the male population to another. The very same act of violent self-assertion which some characterized as an example of bravery and masculinity, others might see as a manifestation of bestiality, the loss of reason, foreignness, impiety, treason, or any one of a variety of other crimes, vices, and shortcomings. Such striking contrasts sprang from the fact that an individual always had to reconcile a culturally useful capacity to commit violence with a counterbalancing array of social, philosophical, theological, and political constraints. These constraints could be invoked by those against whom the violence was directed, or by those excluded from the right to commit such violence by virtue of their social status. Men had to constantly negotiate a social economy of violent capacity, taking into account its demands and its costs at all times and trying to define the boundaries of masculine physical self-assertion in terms beneficial to themselves and detrimental to their enemies. Like Macbeth, these men attempted to claim that they "dare[d] do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none," though just what sort of violence that "all" might include was a question with a multiplicity of answers. Lady Macbeth's response typifies the two dangers that men faced in choosing where to draw such a line. To fall short of the capacity for violence demanded by masculine identity would be effeminizing, and thus greater violence always offered the possibility to "be so much more the man" (the very temptation Lady Macbeth uses to overcome her husband's doubts). To exceed the bounds of legitimate masculine violence, however, would imply a bestial inhumanity, as in the "beast" that Lady Macbeth sarcastically suggests must have initially proposed the murder of Duncan (1.7.46-51). Whether
"womanish" cowardice or "bestial" brutality, extreme behavior threatened to "unman" those who failed to find the appropriate middle ground.

Almost any social context could serve as a setting for struggles over appropriate masculine violence, but some settings were more culturally central than others. The battlefield was home to the most highly esteemed variety of violence, but was beyond the day-to-day experience of most individuals. The law courts were certainly more familiar, and they were arbiters of what could legally qualify as legitimate violence. However, examples of physical force that left a substantial legal record tended to be unusual in their extremity, and the difference between legally acceptable and culturally acceptable could be substantial. If we want to explore the world in which men would have been most likely to encounter violence (both real and simulated) on an everyday basis, we need to look not at wars or murder trials, but at a class of less obviously brutal activities: popular entertainments. Violence in the form of sports and shows offered a means of participating in and watching violent acts in "mere play," play circumscribed by rules and standards which rendered those acts legally and socially acceptable to varying degrees. At the material center of these violent entertainments sat London's playhouses, many of which hosted not only plays, but also bearbaitings, cockfights, and swordplay demonstrations.⁶ Robin Headlam Wells asserts that since gender identity is actively

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⁶ These three pastimes were often regarded as kindred entertainments. A 1598 royal edict intended to regulate unlawful performers lumps together "fencers, bearwardes, and common players of enterludes" (Morsberger 15), and William Lambarde's 1576 *Perambulation of Kent* makes reference to the price of admission for "Parisgardein, the Bell Savage, or some other such common place, to beholde Beare bayting, Enterludes, or Fence playe" (187-8). Outside the playhouses there also existed a huge range of less formally organized violent pastimes. Other combat sports, such as wrestling, enjoyed widespread popularity and were typically far more dangerous than their modern day equivalents. Non-combat sports could be just as violent, and the precursors of soccer and rugby sometimes looked less like an organized
performed, and "[b]ecause theatre is also a matter of performance, plays provide a perfect means of investigating cultural and historical differences with respect to gender identity" (2). The same logic applies even more forcefully to performances specifically of violent masculine self-assertion, since these could take the form of simulated violence (as in a play), genuine but constrained violence (as in a fencing match), or deadly but only symbolically "masculine" violence (as in a bearbaiting); each of these forms allowed for the exploration of male identity in different ways.

As the primary legal means of participating in physical aggression, violence as entertainment served as a central site for the interrogation of competing sets of values and claims related to which men could be violent, how violent, where and when their violence would be allowed, and what their violence meant culturally. Competitively violent entertainments such as hunting, fencing, and bearbaiting offered an especially suitable site for such debates over the definition of early modern masculinity; as Shepherd points out, "[m]ale status and authority in early modern England were primarily gauged competitively," and "[c]ompetition between men was often expressed violently" (140).
Despite their ubiquity, of course, the violent pastimes so popular with English Renaissance spectators were routinely attacked by humanists appalled by the sports' brutality, puritan Sabbatarians offended by the audiences' impiety, and figures of governmental authority worried by the mobs' unruliness. Playwrights, who found themselves professionally immersed in these discourses and working in a literary genre that often specialized in the staging of (fictional) violence, reacted in ways shaped by both the nature of their paying customers and their own personal beliefs. My argument will not posit a uniform philosophy behind theatrical reactions to the contested values of bearbaiting, hunting, or swordplay, but will instead attempt to recover the ways in which responses to such forms of violence reveal competing points of view within the struggles over acceptable forms of masculine physical self-assertion.

**Methods of Constructing Masculinity Through Competitive Violence**

The nature of early modern masculinity has received a good deal of scholarly attention in the last twenty years. Recent feminist theory has increasingly recognized male identity as gendered rather than as a normative or generic category against which non-normative female identity was defined. Just as importantly, recent work has emphasized that the performance of masculine identity was not monolithic, but rather was "enormously diverse, contingent, and contradictory, influenced by and informing distinctions of age, social status, martial status, and context" (Shepard 1). In the present dissertation I have found David Kuchta's "The semiotics of masculinity in Renaissance England" especially helpful for its articulation of male ornamentation's different (and
often diametrically opposed) gendered meanings. Kuchta's analysis focuses primarily on the ways that the performance of masculinity differed according to class, which is also the subject of Ronda Arab's *Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern English Stage*. Arab's work seeks to correct what she sees as the inadequately acknowledged existence of explicitly non-elite masculine identities. Her work, like Kuchta's, was crucial in helping me identify the function of status within debates over early modern swordplay, though disappointingly, Arab makes no mention of the function violence might serve within the range of low-born masculinities she discusses.

All four chapters of the dissertation deal to one degree or another with the early modern Englishman's need to find an acceptably moderated level of violence. The gendered nature of moderation as a virtue in Renaissance England has been widely recognized, although the only book length study is Todd W. Reeser's *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture*. Reeser argues that "[t]hroughout Renaissance culture, moderation is either coded as - or assumed to be - masculine," and that, moreover, "moderation is so central to how men should act that the virtue can be applied to nearly any context and can be molded to numerous ideological ends" (14-5). However, Reeser's text deals primarily with French sources and has little to say about moderating violence specifically. Works on English masculinity also note the importance of moderation to male self-definition, with Bruce R. Smith even identifying "the man of moderation" as one of three "ideal type[s]" of male identity (59). Like Reeser, however, none of these works focus specifically on the function of violence.
Alexandra Shepard's *Meanings of Masculinity in Early Modern England*, however, analyzes the centrality of violence to male identity in several ways. She observes that "violence was a regular, widely recognized, and often accepted feature of male interaction, routinely functioning to assert as well as contest claims for status and authority in connection with a range of male identities" (149), an idea central to the present dissertation. In describing the ubiquity and social acceptability of violence in everyday life, Shepard notes a crucial distinction between violence and what she refers to as "violation," meaning violence perceived by its victim as transgressing social norms. Although my dissertation does not make use of the term violation to describe disputes over the propriety of given types of violence, I do seek to uncover what Shepard identifies as "the shifting boundaries between violence and violation which were easily crossed and...highly contested" (151). The only drawback to Shepard's analysis is its almost complete dependence on legal sources, a characteristic that inevitably leads her to deal only with acts extreme or unusual enough for one party to consider the incident a violation. Part of the present study's project is to extend Shepard's analysis of violence as "a regular, widely recognized, and often accepted feature of male interaction" by

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7 Shepard herself considers it "surprising that the 'masculanist context' of violence, in terms of the specifically male interests it underpinned, has not received more analysis," and points out that the work published thus far on early modern English violence has failed to attend to its "mundane rather than extreme forms" (128-9). This dissertation is especially interested in such "mundane" violence and the way it could function as a means of everyday self-definition.
examining non-legal texts and more explicitly "playful" forms of combat as sites for the contesting of masculine identity.

In addition to the overarching theme of masculinity, Chapters One, Three, and Four of the dissertation each cover a different variety of violence with its own scholarly literature: swordplay, the hunt, and bearbaiting. Several works of historiography have been central to establishing the cultural context discussed in Chapter One, although no single work deals at length with the conflict between older and newer forms of combat. J.D. Aylward's *The English Master of Arms from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* presents a thorough history of the Masters of Defense, while Sydney Anglo's recent and authoritative *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* gives a more general overview of European swordplay in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Most importantly, Markku Peltonen's *The Duel in Early Modern England* provides the fullest available history of English dueling culture. Although Peltonen has relatively little to say about the conflict between rapier fencing and older forms of swordplay, his analysis of the duel's initial importation to England proved an invaluable aid for reconstructing the historical context on which Chapter One and Two's analysis is based. Two works by literary scholars do deal with the debates between partisans of the rapier and the short sword, but neither Charles Edelman's *Brawl Ridiculous: Swordfighting in Shakespeare's Plays* nor Robert Eustis Morsberger's *Swordplay and the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage* analyze the conflict at length. As for scholars who have looked at one of the two swordplay traditions in isolation, the Masters of Defense have received relatively little attention, but the history of dueling has been better served. The one book-length study of
dueling and its place in English Renaissance drama is Jennifer A. Low's *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture*. Low, who sees early modern English playwrights as essentially suspicious of the duel of honor, treats the conflict between slashing and thrusting forms of swordplay relatively briefly, but she makes a number of key points about the ways in which traditional means of constructing masculinity were undermined by the advent of the continental rapier. Of greatest importance for this dissertation is Low's observation that given the number of plays which featured the duel of honor as a plot device, it is striking that "[a]ctual staged duels occurred seldom; more often the combat was anticipated but avoided, or recounted as an offstage occurrence" (*Manhood* 107). Chapters One and Two use Low's intriguing assertion as a jumping-off point, though they attempt to offer a more complete analysis of the considerations that led to such a striking absence. While Low simply attributes this pattern to a relatively straightforward "skepticism of the middling sort" toward the duel (94), I argue that the staged duel's theatrical elision stems specifically from the backlash against a practice that threatened the low-born Englishman's access to a more traditional form of masculinity which had previously favored the non-elite, as well as from a certain anti-theatricality inherent in the training of rapier fencing and the performance of the duel. After Low, the most important scholar of dueling and its depictions in English Renaissance drama is Ira Clark. His work offers essential insights into the ways in which the centrality of the written word to the duello actually served to circumscribe and even supplant the violence that it purported to facilitate, an idea that the present study has built upon in its analysis of dueling and language. Like Low, Clark acknowledges that the
early modern English state produced almost no unambiguously laudatory depictions of
the duel of honor, but he suggests that the period's plays typically "condemn dueling’s
disruptions and destructions while at the same time they acknowledge dueling’s potent
appeal as proof of nobility and gentility” (Writing and Dueling 299). In addressing and
expanding on Clark's interpretation I will argue that, while the willingness to vigorously
respond to a formal challenge does still function as a marker of masculine valor in most
texts, many plays model alternative responses to such challenges that present the
possibility of an explicitly non-elite masculine identity. One such alternative is the
"therapeutic cudgeling" (either threatened or executed) of the would-be duelist, a form of
moderated violence not unlike Richard Cholmley's beating of the Blackfriars gallant.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the symbolic significance of two forms of
competitive violence involving the use of animal participants: hunting and bearbaiting.
Any exploration of early modern England's views on animals must begin with Keith
Thomas's magisterial Man and the Natural World, a work of cultural history that has
exerted a profound influence on all subsequent treatments of the topic among literary
critics. Thomas surveys the momentous changes in English attitudes toward animals in
the period 1500-1800, tracking the birth and expansion of the concept of animal rights as
well as the largely simultaneous rise of Descartes's "automaton" rejection of animal
subjectivity. Both of these movements started in earnest in the mid-seventeenth century,
though Thomas acknowledges that isolated figures did anticipate the idea of animal rights
in preceding periods (174-5). Literary scholars have recently taken a keen interest in
both of these shifts, especially those working within the recently established theoretical
school called ecocriticism. An early definition of ecocriticism by Lawrence Buell
describes it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment
conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (430), and while the
field has produced a number of fascinating insights into the intimate connections between
humans and animals in early modern English culture, the environmentalist perspective of
ecocriticism has tended to leave some topics largely unexamined.

Much ecocriticism attempts to recover what it sees as an admirable but now lost
acknowledgement of bestial agency and its associated moral entitlements, an agency and
entitlements of which the post-Cartesian animal world has largely been deprived. ¹ For
such critics, the early modern period offers the last moment in European history during
which the human and animal worlds were treated (at least by some) as a continuous
moral and theological whole rather than as two mutually exclusive categories. At the
same time, ecocriticism also tends to cast the natural world during all points in history as
the victim of a callous (or even sinister) project of degradation and exploitation by human
beings. This idea often leads to ecocritical readings that ignore the nearly universal early
modern fear of a natural world that was not yet under the remarkable degree of human
control enjoyed by 21st century industrialized societies. The most striking result of

¹ Ecocritics have tended to treat such entitlements as prefiguring modern animal rights, though they
acknowledge that earlier philosophical justifications were often drastically different. The inevitable
chronological untidiness of the slow cultural shifts identified by Thomas has tended to allow ecocritics to
pick and choose rather too freely from the range of voices described in Man and the Natural World. For
example, Bruce Boehrer admits that Thomas's history shows “human civilization…was virtually
synonymous with the conquest of nature” in the early modern period, but he chooses to emphasize that
Thomas “also traces the presence of more sympathetic attitudes toward nature from the very beginning of
the period he surveys (173). While technically true, Boehrer and other ecocritics typically ignore Thomas's
reminders that prior to the mid-seventeenth century, such sympathetic attitudes would have been viewed as
“eccentrically tender minded by the standards of the age” (152), and that even in the case of a late
seventeenth century author like Margaret Cavendish, "most contemporary readers would have thought" her
views on animal rights to be "extravagant nonsense" (129).
ecocriticism's failure to attend to such fears is that it either misreads or entirely ignores the status of dangerous animals within early modern culture. To offer one brief but representative example of this tendency we might look at a passage by Laurie Shannon, perhaps the most influential ecocritic currently studying early modern England. In Shannon's *The Accommodated Animal*, she argues that Shakespeare's plays contain "[n]umerous passages [which] reflect the interconnected issues of harmlessness, animal entitlement or liberty, and human violence." To illustrate Shakespeare's treatment of these interconnections, she quotes from "Don Pedro's dark reflection in *Much Ado About Nothing* - invoking human restraints made on a number of species all at once - that 'I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking' (1.3.30-3)" (79). The lines in question, of course, are spoken not by Don Pedro, but by his villainous brother, Don John. Shannon might be forgiven for misattributing the speech, since Don John is such a profoundly inappropriate example of the interconnectedness of animal liberty and animal harmlessness. That some animals do bite if un-muzzled is precisely the point of Shakespeare's passage. The trouble with Shannon's interpretation of early modern perspectives on the animal world is that it imagines that world populated entirely by virtuous (and victimized) Don Pedros, a point of view which completely ignores a widespread early modern assumption that human

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9 Don John's treachery is never justified by any motive other than perhaps his bastardy, an immutable malignancy tied to the sin of his conception. In this way Don John resembles the wolf, whose unalterable nature Edward of Norwich warns his readers of in his hunting manual, *The Master of Game*: "Men cannot nurture a wolf, though he be taken ever so young and chastised and beaten and held under discipline, for he will always do harm, if he hath time and place for to do it...he knoweth well and woteth well that he doth evil, and therefore men ascrieth...and hunteth and slayeth him. And yet for all that he may not leave his evil nature" (63).
civilization was constantly under threat from a dangerous and hostile environment. The same tendency has resulted in a body of ecocritical scholarship on the early modern hunt that almost entirely leaves out animals such as the boar, the bear, and the wolf. It will be the project of Chapters Three and Four to fill in ecocriticism's elision of such threatening animals and explore the ways in which the ambivalent status of these animals was employed rhetorically both by those wishing to assert a capacity for violence and those wishing to call into question the legitimacy of such a capacity.

If the inherent limitations of ecocriticism (as currently practiced) have produced a substantial lacuna in otherwise insightful research on the hunt, they have produced a fundamentally flawed orthodoxy in the scholarship on bearbaiting. Literary scholars have, almost invariably, approached the pastime and its relationship to the theater from a perspective anachronistically sensitive to the suffering of its animal participants. The tendency to see "cruelty" or "torture" (Höfele Stake 209, Fudge "Saying Nothing" 81, Scott-Warren 69, Bach 25, Willson "Gloucester" 110) as the defining characteristic of the baiting ring has led a long line of scholars to read any theatrical reference to animal baiting as a means of rhetorically figuring (and usually censuring) the brutal victimization of a human character. Andreas Höfele, probably the most influential authority on the baiting ring's linkages to the playhouse, offers a representative distillation of the critical consensus when he characterizes instances of symbolic "baiting scenes" on the English Renaissance stage as a means of "mobilizing resistance to the very cruelty it exhibits" (Stage 208). Largely identical perspectives can be found in the works of Rebecca Ann Bach, Bruce Boehrer, Erica Fudge, Terence Hawkes, Jason Scott-Warren, Meredith
Skura, and Robert F. A. Willson, all of whom focus on the supposed pity that would have been aroused in an audience by the spectacle of bearbaiting or its symbolic theatrical equivalent. Stephen Dickey, alone amongst recent scholars, rejects the idea that early modern audiences found anything disturbing in animal baiting, since "to judge from the handful of contemporary eyewitness accounts of baiting matches, again and again the audience was pleased by what it saw, cheered it on, and laughed at it” (259). Even Dickey, however, seeks to avoid envisaging an early modern bearbaiting (and theater) audience that delighted in outright slaughter, choosing instead to imagine a variety of animal baiting in which “the effective outcome...was something best expressed as a stalemate,” with "at least the chance of a 'comic' denouement” (259). Chapter Four will seek to offer an alternative interpretation of early modern invocations of the baited bear, arguing that they represent not primarily appeals for pity but rather calculated warnings of a capacity for violent self-assertion. As such, they carried with them the potential moral taint of a dangerous animals, a situation which makes the rhetorical deployment of bear analogies a fascinating opportunity to study the tradeoffs associated with claims to violent capacity.

Throughout its exploration of the specific topics outlined above, the dissertation is unified by the idea that individuals in early modern England had to reconcile a need for personal aggression with the limits on such aggression set by their culture's social norms and expectations. My articulation of this opposition is deeply rooted in the work of Norbert Elias. In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias traces the transformation of European manners since the middle ages effected by an increasing emphasis on internalized self-
control, a transformation which led to (among other things) a substantial decrease in rates of interpersonal violence. Elias generally sees acts of physical violence and domination as inherently "pleasurable" (61), and views internalized constraints on such acts as a form of self-denial. Moreover, Elias argues that for individuals subject to such constraints, "belligerence and aggression find socially permitted expression in sporting contests" (169). Elias's work thus provides a key conceptual framework for my dissertation by outlining the perpetual conflict between the individual's need for violent self-assertion and the society's need to limit the destructive potential of such self-assertion. He also establishes the importance of rule-regulated sports as a more socially acceptable alternative to less formalized bloodshed. The present study does not seek to track the progress of Elias's civilizing process over the relatively short period of time covered by the dissertation. Instead, I try to map the specific contours of the forces identified by Elias as promoting or inhibiting interpersonal violence. I will also attempt to complicate Elias's formulation by suggesting that, especially in the early stages of the civilizing process (during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), violent aggression by the individual was not merely a matter of uncontrolled natural impulses, but was also a socially constructed, socially regulated, and even socially necessary element of a man's identity, one which it could prove very costly to abandon. Additionally, I will discuss

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10 He does acknowledge that cultural pressures could encourage the enjoyment of such pleasure. In discussing the lives of the nobility in medieval Europe, Elias suggests that "[t]he pleasure in killing and torturing others was great, and it was a socially permitted pleasure. To a certain extent, the social structure even pushed its members in this direction, making it seem necessary and practically advantageous to behave in this way." (163-4).

11 For example, Elias observes that the trend toward greater civility was often articulated in terms of human versus bestial behavior, as "people, in the course of the civilizing process...sought to suppress in themselves everything that they felt to be of an 'animalistic character." (102). However, Chapters Three
the function of violent pastimes not only as a means of replacing or displacing the widespread interpersonal violence of an earlier age, but also as a site for modeling and interrogating the appropriate limits of violence outside the formal boundaries of rules-based competitive entertainment. Finally, my chapters on dueling will attempt to bring greater nuance to the class element of Elias's theory by examining a contested standard of civility in which both sides of a class-based conflict attempted to present themselves as the standard-bearers of civilized social regulation and the opponents of brutish bloodshed. As a whole, the dissertation thus attempts to capture in its full complexity a brief moment in the centuries-long cultural shift identified by Elias, a moment complete with all of the subtlety and contradictions that inevitably fade into the background of more sweepingly diachronic studies.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation's first two chapters consider the connections between swordplay and early modern English theater in the context of disputes over the nature of masculine identity. Chapter One maps the cultural disruptions precipitated by the importation of the Italian rapier and its accompanying dueling code into late-sixteenth century England, an event which fractured a relatively unified understanding of the relationship between violence and manhood. Well-born Englishmen quickly embraced the new, more lethal form of swordplay, while men unable to claim gentility were largely excluded. and Four demonstrate that a capacity for bestial violence could prove socially useful, even among the upper echelons of the English nobility. In other words, while there were certainly cultural costs associated with indulging one's violent impulses without inhibition, the culture as a whole also tended to discourage the complete renunciation of violence.
Unsurprisingly, those debarred reacted strongly against such changes, resulting in a vocal anti-rapier faction which actively opposed the new weapon's spread. Current scholarship usually describes London's stages as similarly hostile toward the figure of the duelist, usually attributing this antipathy to the class identity of playwrights and/or audiences. I will seek to move beyond these relatively reductive class-based explanations to more fully explore the characteristics of rapier culture that rendered it fundamentally "untheatrical," especially in comparison to more traditional forms of swordplay. The very lethality and exclusivity that allowed the rapier to displace the short sword also drove the new weapon out of the public's view, and Chapter One examines how the hidden nature of rapier violence led playwrights to caricature the duelist as either a cowardly braggart or a treacherous assassin.

Chapter Two will examine Shakespeare's corpus through the lens of the discourses described in Chapter One. While combat in Shakespeare's plays has received a considerable amount of critical attention in the past, most scholarship has failed to take into account the cultural significance of specific weapons. Chapter Two will explore how Shakespeare's work contrasts depictions of traditional weaponry as a means of upholding or recovering a threatened or lost male honor culture with depictions of rapiers as tools which undermine systems for constructing male identity, either comically through cowardice, or tragically through assassination and uncontrollable extra-judicial violence. In all of the plays examined, the complaints commonly voiced in the period's anti-rapier rhetoric find expression in rapier-wielding characters who embody a decidedly unheroic masculinity.
The second half of the dissertation will shift from focusing on competitive violence between human beings to consider competitive violence against and between animals. As a society that was constantly and deeply engaged with the animal kingdom and its relationship to the human sphere, early modern England's wild beasts served as both targets of and models for performative masculine bloodshed. Chapter Three will consider the hunt, and especially the royal hunt, as a means of asserting a capacity for personal violence. In early modern England the hunt's symbolism was threatened by the nation's complete lack of dangerous game, and the chapter explores the ways in which English hunting culture responded to such challenges, focusing especially on attempts to use the wild boar as a means of restoring the hunt's masculine associations. The chapter ends with an extended reading of Thomas Heywood's Age plays, a series of texts that I contend represent the English Renaissance theater's richest staging of the nation's hunting culture and the irreconcilable considerations inherent in that culture's attempts to underwrite masculine identity through physical violence.

Finally, Chapter Four addresses a site of competitively violent entertainment that moved the human participants offstage completely: the bearbaiting ring. The chapter begins by surveying the sizeable body of literary criticism concerned with the intersection between animal baiting and English Renaissance theater. I argue that much of this scholarship has been unhelpfully influenced by a need to rescue the theater's playwrights and patrons from their connections to the brutality of the baiting ring, usually by attributing to those who attended bearbaitings a sense of guilt at the spectacle's violence. Chapter Four will attempt to establish a new, more historically informed context in which
to view the interconnections between baiting and playing. Specifically, the chapter addresses the early modern image of the bear not as a helpless victim of human exploitation, but rather as a ferocious and highly dangerous representative of a threatening natural world. The chapter also explores the more positive image of the baited bear as a figure of courageous self-defense in the face of overwhelming odds, and the way in which these two images influenced the bear's status as a heraldic symbol. The chapter ends by returning to the question of the bear's place in English Renaissance drama, concluding with a look at Macbeth and Lear's Earl of Gloucester, two seemingly dissimilar "bears" with a shared rhetoric of violent self-assertion.
CHAPTER 1
"ALL THAT MAY BECOME A MAN": SWORDPLAY AND COMPETING MASCULINITIES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

The changing face of early modern English fencing techniques

At first glance, John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont's tragicomedy *A King and No King* would seem an unlikely text to turn to in attempting to reconstruct the nature of swordplay on the early modern English stage. The narrative's most important swordfight, the military single combat between the kings of Iberia and Armenia, occurs before the events of the play even begin. At no point in the play itself do any of its characters actually engage in sword fighting, either on or offstage, and the only figure to unsheathe a sword with an intention of using it is King Arbaces as he prepares to force himself sexually on the woman he believes to be his sister. It is precisely what we do not see or hear, however, that offers a revealing look at the status of different varieties of fencing technique on the English Renaissance stage. As the play opens, Bessus, a braggart soldier (and the literary descendant of Shakespeare's Parolles), has just made a name for himself by leading a rout of the Armenian enemy during Iberia's recently concluded wars. Unbeknownst to those who now hail him as a valiant hero, Bessus's "hot charge" (1.1.71) against the Armenian forces was merely a botched attempt to flee the battlefield. Over the course of the first several acts, the cowardly Bessus finds himself beaten and kicked, first by his fellow captain Bacurius (who forces him to surrender his sword), and then by King Arbaces. Finally, in act IV, the well cudgeled captain consults what the 1619 quarto refers to as "Two Sword-men" (59), individuals that Bessus himself addresses as
"Gentlemen o'th' sword" (4.3.2). Bessus tells them he has sought out their help because he "understood [them] wise and valiant persons" (4.3.5), and the Swordmen assure him at one point that they "are bound / By virtue of [their] calling to utter / [Their] opinions shortly and discreetly" (4.3.55-7). But what, then, is that calling? Certainly it is not, as we would expect, the education of craven braggarts like Bessus in the art of swordplay. Neither Swordman ever draws his weapon, and their advice to Bessus makes almost no reference whatsoever to combat. But while the nature of the Swordmen's "calling" might puzzle the modern reader, seventeenth century audiences would have understood immediately who these figures were and what sort of profession they were meant to satirize. Beaumont and Fletcher's Swordmen are representatives of a very specific variety of miles gloriosus that appeared on the English stage in the first half of the seventeenth century, largely in response to radical changes occurring at that time in the instruments, methods, and moral codes of English swordplay. In the following analysis, I will seek to reveal the ways in which the discourses concerning these changes found their way onto the English Renaissance stage, while also attempting to place debates over swordplay within the broader context of society's highly contested ideas about masculinity and violence.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, traditional English weapons such as the short sword and long sword (both designed for slashing) faced a challenge from the recently imported rapier, a highly lethal continental thrusting weapon popularized

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1 The OED offers us relatively little information on the sixteenth and seventeenth century meaning of this term beyond what we might infer from the word itself: "A man who uses or fights with a sword; a gladiator; one skilled in, or addicted to, using a sword; spec. one skilled in fencing" or "A man 'of the sword'; a warrior, military man, fighter, soldier" ("swordman, n.1.a" and "swordman, n.2").
primarily by a small number of Italian fencing instructors residing in London after 1576. Along with recent advances in the tools and techniques of swordplay, these teachers also introduced an elaborate code of conduct and an ideology of courtesy and personal honor that ultimately proved at least as influential as any incremental evolution in civilian weaponry. This code stressed above all the importance of a gentleman's reputation and the idea that the need to defend one's reputation (with violence, through the duel of honor, when necessary) superseded all other considerations and loyalties, including those owed to the crown, the law, and the church. After the military innovations of the preceding two centuries had gradually stripped the heavily armored knight of his martial relevance, the newly imported duel of honor offered to restore to the well-born Englishman a means of socially exclusive, violent self-assertion. However, while much of England's gentry and those who aspired to gentle status enthusiastically embraced the new ideology, the duello was generally treated with suspicion or disdain by the lower classes that its code of conduct had been specifically designed to exclude. Among the vast majority of

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2 For a discussion of the roots of dueling and the cultural "multi-vocality" of its links to neo-chivalry and the feudal tradition, see Peltonen pp.6-9. The ancient pedigree claimed for the duel by a wide variety of early modern commentators notwithstanding, Markku Peltonen argues convincingly that "far from being a remnant from medieval honor culture which a new humanist culture of civility replaced, the duel of honor came to England as part of the Italian Renaissance notion of the gentleman and courtier" (13).

3 Before continuing it would be wise to clarify the exact meaning of certain key terms. Though not all swords are rapiers, all rapiers are swords, and the word "sword," if not combined with a modifier (short, long, broad, hand-and-a-half, etc.), can normally be assumed to take in all varieties, rapiers included. The term "fencing," like the word "swordplay," refers to the practice and techniques of combat with any type of sword, including the rapier. For the purposes of this chapter, the phrase "single combat" indicates a fair fight between two opponents armed with any variety of weapon whatsoever, whereas the term "duel" refers specifically to the clandestine "duel of honor," a variety of rapier combat developed in Italy during the early sixteenth century and imported to England a number of decades later. The "duello" refers to not just the combat itself but also to the elaborate formalities and communications that preceded such a fight, as well as the codified rules governing both communication and combat.

4 Francis Bacon, a vociferous opponent of the private duel, recognized the duel's appeal as a marker of class, and suggested that "men of birth and quality will leave the practice, when it begins to bee vilified, and come so low as to barbers' surgeons and butchers, and such base mechanical persons" (304).
Englishmen whose social status technically denied entrée into the world of dueling were the established teachers of England's native martial arts tradition, a group which seems to have resisted (at least for a time) the technological importations of their Italian competitors. These native English fencing instructors, an organization known as the Company of Masters of the Science of Defence, had traditionally trained the "lower orders in society" (Peltonen 94). Unlike the Italian rapier masters, the Masters of Defence taught the use of the short sword and a wide range of other weapons, most of which were both un-aristocratic in nature and far less lethal than the rapier in private fights.5 This contrast between the rapier — an innovative and foreign weapon of the Italianated courtier and duelist — and the short sword — a traditional and (allegedly) native weapon of the sturdy English peasant and soldier — shaped the basic outlines of English debates over swordplay for several decades in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. At the same time, the conflict over fencing techniques reflected and participated in much broader discourses about the construction of masculinity, the nature of national identity, and the meaning of personal honor, discourses which tended to pit those with a claim to gentility against those who lacked such a claim. While gentlemen looked down on the short sword as a crude, ineffective relic requiring no skill

5 Anglin's analysis supports this generalization based on the organization's surviving records: "That the names of only one of the 78 corporate members is to be found in university alumni lists and that none had connections with the Inns of Court clearly suggest that formal membership in the upper three ranks of the corporation remained socially non-aristocratic, despite the efforts of the Masters to recruit English gentlemen and young aristocrats as members" (407). In fact, the association between the Masters of Defence and the use of the lowly buckler or target may have been centuries old. Morsberger suggests that the defensive academies were developed in the middle ages precisely because foot soldiers, who could not afford the full armor worn by knights, had to be trained in the use of shields. In contrast, the knight's armor obviated any need for training the nobility in defensive swordplay (7-8). The rapier academies may therefore have been England's first truly "gentlemanly" schools of swordplay, and their natural interest in distancing themselves from the history of low-born English fencing students (and instructors) might have contributed to the Italian teachers' apparent refusal to teach the use of any weapon other than the rapier.
to wield, the weapon of unrefined rustics largely ignorant of modern (i.e. Continental) concepts of male honor, the peasantry and the middling sort viewed the rapier as an effete, faddish, militarily useless toy, imported from treacherous foreign lands by the corrupt city's dissipated and physically weak gentry and useful only for the murder of their fellow Englishmen. Both sides thus attempted to define attributes such as manliness, Englishness, and honor in ways that corresponded to their own perceived values and characteristics, with the culture of swords and swordplay serving as one of the most highly contested sites for such struggles.

The English popular theater participated extensively in these debates, especially regarding the question of the rapier duel's moral and legal validity. Although a consensus has emerged among modern scholars that early modern English playwrights tended to disapprove of the duello, there has been and continues to be a good deal of critical debate over the degree and nature of the theater's hostility toward the duel. Some have suggested that the stage's depictions of the duel only moved in an overwhelmingly unflattering direction following the vigorous attempts of James I to suppress dueling after 1613 (see, for example, Maxwell 84-106). Ira Clark sees the whole era's playwrights as ambivalent rather than condemnatory, and believes that the majority of the period's plays "condemn dueling’s disruptions and destructions at the same time that they acknowledge dueling’s potent appeal as proof of nobility and gentility” (Clark Comedy 299). Nevertheless, Clark judges that out of the dozens of extant plays dealing with duels and duelists, "[t]he only play that unequivocally favors duels is Sir John Suckling’s comedy
Most critics have characterized the majority of early modern playwrights as unambiguously opposed to duels and the dueling code. Jennifer Low, whose *Manhood and the Duel* is the most complete treatment of the duel's place on the English Renaissance stage, articulates the critical consensus and what she sees as the basic root of the playwrights' hostility: "[T]he skepticism of the middling sort appears in the staging of the duel, which seldom figured prominently without comedic or skewed elements surrounding its context. Even in tragedies the playwrights had difficulty maintaining the high seriousness of the duel as a cultural rite" (Low *Manhood* 94). Low believes that "in many ways the dramatists' understanding of the duel resembles that of the authors of the anti-dueling tracts" (*Manhood* 93), and that "[t]he association of the duel with heroic self-assertion...was severely compromised by the satiric or cynical portrayals of the duel in Jacobean dramas" (*Manhood* 9). Even in cases where the playwright does not actively satirize dueling culture, and despite the fact that "combats form natural climaxes," Low points out that "[a]ctual staged duels occurred seldom; more often the combat was anticipated but avoided, or recounted as an offstage occurrence" (*Manhood* 107).

The following analysis takes Low's striking observation as a starting point and tries to uncover precisely why positive depictions of rapier fencing and the dueling code

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6 Clark nevertheless offers the most convincing criticism of the idea that early modern English playwrights uniformly condemned duels and duelists. Although he admits that the period's drama offers almost no wholly positive depictions of dueling culture, Clark argues that, as a "test of the willingness of a claimant to courageously risk his life, dueling is accepted as a standard of honor and as an instrument for maintaining or at least gauging caste distinctions." He claims that most of the period's plays follow a pattern in which "dueling is honored for its test of nobility, condemned for its challenge to order and authority, and circumscribed by its own requisite customs of formal ceremony and verbal and written language" (*Comedy* 298-9).
appear so rarely in early modern English plays, and why duels themselves were staged so infrequently. I will attempt to move beyond simplistic references to dramatists' expression of the "middling sort's" values, seeking instead to sketch out the ways in which the anti-rapier attitudes of English Renaissance playwrights related to competing varieties of masculinity, the performative nature of public violence, and skepticism toward the ability of language to express physical truth.

**The rapier and martial masculinity**

As with essentially every sport in early modern English society, the relative lawfulness and cultural value of fencing were inexorably tied to its military utility. Indeed, proponents of almost any variety of pastime inevitably found themselves justifying that pastime's worth in such terms, and even the monarch himself might appeal to the necessity of martial preparedness when defending popular games against the wrath of radical sabbatarians; in James I's *Book of Sports*, one of the king's primary objections to puritan regulations against traditional pastimes is that "this prohibition barreth the common & meane sorte of people from vsinge such exercises as may make their bodies more able for warrs when wee or our successors shall have occasion to vse them" (104). Naturally, the Masters of Defence asserted their legitimacy by emphasizing

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7 Even supporters of stage plays found it necessary to associate the art form with nationalist military accomplishment, such as Nashe's speculations regarding "what hopes of eternity are to be proposed to adventurous minds" who behold "our forefathers' valiant acts....raised from the grave of oblivion, and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence." "[W]hat a glorious thing it is to have Henry the Fifth represented on the stage," Nashe reminds his readers, and asks "what can be a sharper reproof to these degenerate effeminate days of ours" (Nashe 113). Arguments about the maintenance of English martial masculinity and the defense against continental effeminacy also figured prominently in the anti-rapier campaign waged by fencing traditionalists like George Silver.
the relevance of their teachings to the defense of the kingdom. For instance, the "maisters oathe," administered to fencing students who had attained the rank of master, included the following vow:

"[Y]ou shal be true subiecte to our soveraigne Ladye quene Elizabethe and to her successors Kings of this relme of England And not to know of any person or persons committingge any treason although it weare your owne father but that you vtter it within xxiiij howers or soner yf you canne / or yf it lye in your power / And alwayes to be ready to Spende bothe your lyfe and your goodes In the Sarvis of the quens majestye Wher she shall Command yowe at all tymes gaynst Her Enymyes."

(Berry 85)

Faced with such claims, even a figure like Stephen Gosson seems to have felt obligated to acknowledge the virtue of martial training. As adamant an opponent of dueling as any writer of the age, Gosson complains that would-be duelists "thinke themselues...no men, if for stirring of a strawe, they prooue not their valure vppon some bodyes fleshe," but follows his condemnation with the caveat that, "[t]houghe I speake this too the shame of common Fencers, I goe not aboute the bushe with Souldiers," who "fight with the Woolfe for the safetie of their flock and keepe off the enemie for the wealth of their Countrie." 8

Gosson's juxtaposing of public military service with private duels of honor accurately reflects the priorities of the rapier duelist. In contrast to the Masters' emphasis on a citizen's obligations to crown and country, England's most influential foreign rapier instructor, Vincentio Saviolo, actually offers an explicit justification for the abandonment of military duty (in the midst of battle, no less) in order to uphold one's personal honor.

8 The Masters of Defence even seem to have enjoyed a certain degree of legal protection, with accidental deaths occurring during training dismissed legally as "misadventure." As a sixteenth century statute puts it, training in the weapons of war merited such protection since "such martial acts are good to be used for the defence of the realm" (qtd. in Baker 560).
Saviolo's conduct manual asserts that a man “ought to abandon both the armye, his countrie and naturall Prince, rather then to suffer” personal dishonor, and if a soldier in a besieged city should find that circumstances demand it, “hee ought to leape over the walles, to goe and defend his honor” (77). Opponents of the duello dismissed the duelists' understanding of masculine honor in strictly private terms, countering such claims with an emphasis on martial honor and the martial duty owed by an Englishman to his nation; a common refrain was that the duelist had no right to casually risk a life that the kingdom's defense might some day require. As James Cleland puts it in *The Institution of a Young Nobleman,* "there is no Valour, or great Courage to be euery day swagring, and running to the field, with litle or no regard of your life, which is the Kings, and which you should preserue carefully, to hazard it onlie for his cause." As with most rejections of rapier dueling, Cleland appeals to the sanctity of tradition, urging young gallants to do "as your predecessors haue done heretofore. Nothing could moue them to draw their swords, which they held of the king for his defence onlie, but the common cause" (234).  

While the duelist's violent code of personal honor threatened to undermine the nation's security through its depopulation, the nature of his weapon actually rendered that very violence militarily useless. As a long, thin, thrusting weapon, rapiers proved far

9 Cleland explicitly suggests that the past's more virtuous, martial violence sprang partly from a culture of more virtuous, martial sports:

    Shooting at buts, Tiltings, Tomeyes, Barriers, the true images of martiall combates, were the exercises of our forefathers. This other exercise [i.e. dueling] is so much the lesse noble by how much it respecteth but a private end...It is much more worthy, and better beseeming, for a man to exercise himself in things that assure and offend not our Commonwealth, and which respect publike securities and generall glory. (Cleland 401)
more deadly than short swords against adversaries in civilian clothing, but they could not be employed against enemies wearing even the most basic armor, and the blades were in danger of snapping off if the sword was used to execute or ward off a slashing attack.\textsuperscript{10} This combination of civilian lethality and military harmlessness led opponents of the rapier to characterize it as at once too deadly and not nearly deadly enough. George Silver dismisses the rapier as "that mischievous and imperfect weapon, which serves to kill our friends in peace, but cannot much hurt our foes in warre" (A5v). Silver was perhaps the most vocal opponent to the rise of the rapier in sixteenth century England; his \textit{Paradoxes of Defence} is both a fencing manual covering a variety of traditional weapons and an extended screed directed against the interloping continental fencing instructors.\textsuperscript{11} In \textit{Paradoxes}, Silver sets out to "prove the true grounds of fight to be in the short ancient weapons, and that the short sword hath advantage of the long sword or long rapier" (A2r). Much of Silver's text, however, focuses not on the specifics of fencing technique but rather on the rapier's contribution to the decay of England's military traditions. Silver complains that through the Italian masters' "false Fence-bookes, imperfect weapons, false fightes, and euill customes...we are disabled for service of our Prince, defence of our countrey" (56-7). He mocks the rapier's military uselessness when he observes in his dedication that "your Honour well knowes, that when the battels are ioyned, and come to

\textsuperscript{10} As the soldier, diplomat, and writer John Smythe puts it in his \textit{Discourses Military}, "rapier blades, being so narrow and of so small substance, and made of a very hard temper to fight in private frays, in lighting with any blow upon armor do presently break and so become unprofitable" (44).

\textsuperscript{11} Aylward characterizes \textit{Paradoxes} as Silver's "counterblast" to Saviolo's text (63), an interpretation supported not only by the work's subject matter, but also by the fact that Silver dedicates his books to "the right honorable my singular good Lord, Robert Earle of Essex" (A3r), precisely as Saviolo had done four years earlier (A3r). Although apparently not a member of the Masters of Defence, Silver clearly aligns himself with them in opposition to London's foreign fencing masters, and to Saviolo in particular.
the charge, there is no roome for them to drawe their Bird-spits, and when they haue them, what can they doe with them? can they pierce his Corslet with the point?" (A5r). In characterizing the rapier as militarily impotent, he highlights the weapon's inability to participate in the most ancient and highly esteemed means of establishing masculine identity and attaining male honor. The language of Silver's objections to "frog pricking Poiniards" (A4r) also constantly associates the rapier with foreign effeminacy and ineffectual, faddish innovation, while his descriptions of the short sword champion it as a weapon of venerable martial antiquity and domestic provenance. Silver's attempts to juxtapose these two characterizations sometimes yield comically nonsensical fantasies, such as his claim that "[a]pish toyes" like the rapier "could not free Rome from Brennius sacke, nor France from King Henrie the fift his conquest" (A4v). These imagined past military triumphs of English short swords over (completely anachronistic) French and Italian rapiers strikingly illustrate the tendency of many Englishmen to

12 By the time of Paradoxes' publication, French rapier fencing techniques and instructors had begun to eclipse those of Italy within fashionable English society. In Ben Jonson's 1600 comedy Every Man Out of His Humor, the buffoonish rapier duelist Fastidius Brisk is characterized as "the fresh Frenchefied courtier."

13 Brennius (or Brennus) was a Gaulish chieftain who sacked Rome in the 4th century BC.

14 For all of Silver's rhetorical excesses, there does seem to have existed a very real danger that rapiers would displace the traditional short sword even among English soldiers. Writing to Robert Cecil in 1600, the military commander John Dowdall complains that his soldiers in Ireland, "desiring a scalde rapier before a good sword," render themselves unfit for battle (Dowdall). Smythe, a writer who concerns himself wholly with the practical matters of warfare, likewise complains that "men of war, contrary to the ancient order and use military, do nowadays prefer and allow that armed men pikers should rather wear rapiers of a yard and a quarter long the blades or more than strong, short, arming swords." Like Silver, Smythe objects to the rapier's length because, when two armed formations come close enough to one another to employ their swords, "armed men in such actions, being in their ranks so close one to another by flanks, cannot draw their swords if the blades of them be above the length of three quarters of a yard or a little more," and even if they do manage to draw their weapons, "swords being so long do work in a manner no effect, neither with blows nor thrusts, where the press is so great as in such actions it is" (43-4). Given the concerns of actual soldiers like Dowdall and Smythe, it would seem that the rapier's threat to English martial readiness was more than simply a rhetorical convenience for opponents of the weapon's peacetime use.
associate traditional slashing weapons with an idealized history of English conquest on the continent, as well as the widespread idea that English national identity resided not in the affectedly Continental gentry but rather in the unaffectedly English peasantry. Such associations would ultimately have important ramifications for the way playwrights depicted different varieties of swordplay on the English Renaissance stage.

Accusations regarding the rapier's inadequacy as a weapon of war must have stung the weapon's proponents, since texts by rapier instructors occasionally make half-hearted attempts to defend its relevance on the battlefield. George Hale, whose book on rapier fencing bears the unambiguous title *The Priuate Schoole of Defence, or The Defects of Publique Teachers*, optimistically suggests that the practice of rapier fencing might serve the "Publique good abroad, for auoyding bloud, if the state of War should require a single Tryall" (A5v). Joseph Swetnam also briefly asserts that "a Rapier will doe as good seruice in the wars as a short sword, if a skilfull man haue him in hand" (173), though he offers little support for the opinion ("much virtue in if," as another famous rapier fencer might say). For the most part, though, rapier manuals ignore military applications altogether, choosing instead to define male honor in purely civilian terms, and references to the rapier in the context of war are usually confined to the scornful dismissals voiced by the weapon's opponents. Some of the most memorable critiques appeared not in anti-dueling pamphlets but rather on the stage. One short university play, in fact, takes as its entire subject the argument between different schools
of swordplay. The anonymous Work for Cutlers\textsuperscript{15} concerns the interaction between three personified weapons: Sword, Rapier, and Dagger.\textsuperscript{16} Rapier and Sword enter arguing about their relative worth, but are soon followed by Dagger, who attempts to reconcile his two friends. In urging them to let him settle the quarrel, Dagger observes that "you knowe me equally allyed to you both, and therefore shall proue an impartiall ludge" (47),\textsuperscript{17} and generally the play concerns itself less with advocating a certain style of combat than with cramming every conceivable swordplay pun into its 300 lines.

\textsuperscript{15} Work for Cutlers, or, A Merry Dialog Between Sword, Rapier, and Dagger was performed at Cambridge University in 1615 and published the same year (Harbage and Schoenbaum 104-5).

\textsuperscript{16} In the context of Work for Cutlers and many other texts, "sword" refers to a short sword or, more generally, any slashing sword.

\textsuperscript{17} Daggers could be used in the off-hand by combatants wielding either a rapier or a short sword. In the case of the short sword, the dagger would take the place of a buckler or target.
However, Dagger's delivery of the play's resolution seems almost to preclude the possibility of Rapier's involvement in lawful violence:

Sword, you shall beare Chiefe force in the Campe, and be made Generall of the Field, to beare away euery where. As for you Rapier, since Duells are put downe, you shall liue quietly and peacablie heere 'ith Court, and goo euery day in Veluet: You shall be Frendes with euerie one, and bee on euery ones side, that if occasion serue, and Sworde be absent, so that matters are driuen to a push, Rapier shall be the onely man to performe a Combate: And I my selfe will backe you both, as occasion shall serue.

(47-8)

If the anonymous author of *Work for Cutlers* is relatively gentle in his dismissal of the rapier duelist's martial potential, other playwrights were less polite. In Philip Massinger's *Maid of Honor*, the soldier Bertoldo rages against the fashionable, braggart gallants and their pretensions to violent capacity. When asked to describe “the difference betweene the city valour, / And service in the field,” Bertoldo dismissively responds that the latter is “more / Then roaring in a taverne, or a brothel” (123). The cowardly roarers scorned by Bertoldo populate any number of English Renaissance city comedies, but none can match Ben Jonson's greatest braggart coward, Bobadill, in *Every Man In His

18 James I (perhaps unwittingly) similarly gives the lie to the rapier duelist's claim of violent capacity. In *Basilikon Doron*, James advises his son and those who wait on him at court to "wear no ordinary armour with your clothes but such as is knightly and honorable: I mean rapier-swords and daggers. For tuilyiesome weapons in the court betoken confusion in the country" (133-4) (James appears to be using armour here to refer to both swords and protective clothing: "Military equipment or accoutrement, both offensive and defensive, in the widest sense" [*OED* "armour, n.3.a"]). The passage illustrates how ubiquitous the rapier had become among the English aristocracy by 1599, even among those who (like James) unequivocally condemned the practice of dueling. However, the fact that a zealous anti-dueling partisan such as James would embrace the rapier in opposition to "ordinary armour" and "tuilyiesome" weapons (the *OED* defines "tuilyiesome" as "Quarrelsome, contentious" [*"tuilyiesome, adj."]], presumably meaning short swords or military weapons) also reveals just how fully detached the rapier could become from not just military combat, but violence of any kind. After all, James proudly styled himself the "Prince of Peace." That such a weapon might nevertheless suggest a "knightly and honorable" appearance also indicates the degree to which a genuine capacity for violence had receded into the background of the gentry's masculine identity among those who opposed the duel.

19 Rapier's one chance for lawful violence occurs only in the absence of Sword, and even the inclusion of this limited exception looks primarily like a means of squeezing in the punning reference to "a push."
Humour. At one point, Bobadill offers to "undertake...for the public Benefit of the State, not only to spare the entire Lives of [the queen's] Subjects in general, but to save the one-half, nay, three-parts of her yearly Charge in holding War, and against what Enemy soever." When asked how he would accomplish such a feat, the duelist explains that it is merely a matter of simple arithmetic:

I would select nineteen more to myself throughout the land, gentlemen they should be of good spirit, strong and able constitution; I would choose them by an instinct, a trick that I have, and I would teach these nineteen the special tricks — as your punto, your reverso, your stocca, your imbroccata, your passada, your montaunto — till they could all play very near, or altogether as well as myself. This done, say the enemy were forty thousand strong, we twenty would come into the field the tenth of March or thereabouts and we would challenge twenty of the enemy. They could not in their honour refuse the combat; well, we would kill them; challenge twenty more, kill them; twenty more, kill them; twenty more, kill them too. And thus would we kill, every man his twenty a day, that's twenty score; twenty score, that's two hundred; two hundred a day, five days a thousand. Forty thousand — forty times five, five times forty — two hundred days kills them all, by computation. And this will I venture my poor gentleman-like carcass to perform (provided there be no treason practiced upon us) by fair and discreet manhood, that is, civilly by the sword. (4.2.69-88)

In the figure of Bobadill, Jonson caricatures the rapier duelist as a man who presumes to define the boundaries of "fair and discreet manhood" with mathematical precision, but who then offers a definition which confirms the speaker's masculinity while simultaneously rendering any physical test of that masculinity impossible; Bobadill's 40,000 enemy soldiers would inevitably refuse his terms, preferring the "treasonous" alternative of actual military combat, a form of violence for which both Bobadill and his rapier are singularly ill suited. Though Bobadill predates Hale's fantasy of "single Tryall"
by fifteen years, the latter's similarity to the former suggests that the rapier duelists' absurd posturing mocked by Jonson had changed relatively little over the course of the early seventeenth century. Tellingly, though filled with single combats between kings and princes wielding military weapons, the English Renaissance theater seems to have left us not a single instance of a rapier duel in the midst of a war. Some scenarios seem to have simply been too far-fetched even for the popular stage.

**Rapier fencing's threat to non-aristocratic masculinity**

While the upper-classes embraced the duello as a means of recovering the claim to masculine violent capacity which they had lost with the changing reality of sixteenth century warfare, the rapier represented a serious threat to the construction of lower-class masculinity on a number of fronts. Aside from simply excluding non-gentlemen from the code of the duello, the importation of rapier fencing also weakened or even reversed the traditional gender associations of two attributes: Englishness and strength. As Low points out, while “in Shakespeare’s time the possessor of virtue [was] always the superior element of a dichotomy: aristocrat/plebeian, man/woman, spirit/body,” the “Englishman/foreigner” opposition was the one “dichotomy of this culture valorizing those of low social status” (*Manhood* 98). To the degree that continental culture was considered effeminizing, men in the lower orders of English society benefited from an association with traditional "English sturdiness." In addition to the linkages between class and Englishness, Ronda Arab has demonstrated that muscularity could also figure into the construction of a specifically non-aristocratic masculinity. Since "corporeality
was...valued as manly when reflected in physical strength...[t]he relationship between physical strength and masculine control opens up more possibilities for discourses resisting dominant hierarchies between the masculinities of highborn and low-born men, since those engaged in manual work were often perceived to develop great strength through their daily labor” (18). However, with the importation of the needle-sharp rapier, which required relatively little strength to use effectively, the capacity to inflict violence on another individual became not the province of the sturdy Englishman, but rather that of the Italianated court dandy. Thus the ability of skillfully wielded Italian rapiers to defeat strongly wielded English short swords began to undermine the two most important means of constructing low-born masculinity.

Not surprisingly, defenders of traditional (and now explicitly lower-class) forms of swordplay sought to counter these serious challenges to longstanding assumptions about English male identity. As usual, Silver led the charge, and his Paradoxes takes a clever tack in undercutting the rapier’s challenge to strength as a marker of masculinity. Rather than dispute the claim that a rapier might be wielded effectively without great strength, Silver turns the weapon’s own advantage against it and infantilizes the rapier duelist by pointing out that a mere child could use such a sword, with its "boyish, Italian, weake, imperfect fight" (24). The rapier becomes a "childish toy wherewith a man can do nothing but thrust" (32), and even worse, its attack might just as easily be frustrated by

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20 Arab's recent Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern English Stage represents the first major work on plebeian masculinity during the period, but her text does not address the significance of dueling, personal combat, or competitive violence. Although Low does make brief reference to Silver’s valorization of the physically strong English ploughman, and Shepard discusses the ways in which interpersonal violence served as "a vital tool in men's maintenance of hierarchy and reputation," no scholar has yet offered an extended analysis of uniquely non-aristocratic forms of masculine violence available to low-born men in Renaissance England.
a child as by a man, for "the blow [of a short sword] requireth the strength of a man to be warded; but the thrust [of a rapier] may be put by, by the force of a child" (22). Worst of all, since masculine identity depends so heavily on an ability to inflict violence, the rapier actually turns men into boys, and vice versa. Silver laments that the rapier instructors "have made many a strong man in his fight weake...and manie of our desperate boyes and young youthes, to become in that Rapier-fight, as good men as England yeeldeth, and the tallest men in this land, in that fight as verie boyes as they and no better. This good haue the Italian teachers of Offence done vs, they haue transformed our boyes into men, and our men into boyes" (56-7). For Silver, rapiers do not simply fail to effectively demonstrate a masculine capacity for violence, they actually threaten to eliminate the very possibility of a stable adult masculinity altogether.

Several early modern English plays closely echo Silver's rhetoric. In Henry Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abington*, the servingman Dick Coomes laments the damage done to English masculinity by the rise of rapier fencing:

> I see by this dearth of good swords, that dearth of sword-and-buckler fight begins to grow out: I am sorry for it; I shall never see good manhood again, if it be once gone; this pokings fight of rapier and dagger will come up then;

21 Ironically, Rapier in *Work for Cutlers* employs the same criticism of Gunne (who does not appear onstage), observing that "Gunne, Alas, hees No-body: any little Boy will make him roare" (45). In some ways, firearms represented an even more extreme example of the practical and cultural trade-offs of the rapier: weapons of greater lethality and further reduced physical prerequisites that nevertheless suffered from associations with treacherous cowardice. For example, in addition to abhorring the duel of honor, James I also scorned "Gunnes and traiterous Pistolets" and considered them the weapons of "brigands and cut-throats" (28-9). Occasionally, early modern writers even link the rapier and the gun to one another as symbolically parallel weapons. In *A King and No King*, Bacurius discovers that one of the swordsmen is concealing a "small piece of artillery" (i.e. a pistol) on his person (5.3.73), a transgression that results in a sound beating at the hands of Bacurius.

22 Coomes's affection for sword and buckler fencing owes something to his identity as a swashbuckling roarer, an earlier and less deadly figure of violent bragadocio who preceded the rise of the rapier in English society.
then a man, a tall man, and a good sword-and-buckler man, will be spitted like a cat or a coney; then a boy will be as good as a man, unless the Lord show mercy unto us; well, I had as lief be hanged as live to see that day. 23

(F3r)

Other playwrights brought the rapier-wielding boy right out onto the stage. In Massinger's *The City Madam*, the decayed London gallant Sir Lacy finds himself in a violent confrontation over a woman with Mr. Plenty, a country gentleman. While the two wooers face off against one another, Lacy's servant Page draws his sword against all three of Plenty's country servingmen, shouting “Draw! My little rapier / Against your bumb blades! I'll one by one dispatch you” (15). 24 Given the youth implied by the title "Page," and the reference to a "little rapier," it seems likely that Massinger intended Lacy's servant to represent a boy "transformed" into a man by the possession of a rapier. Page's assumption that the three (presumably) full-grown rural servingmen will obediently take turns being killed "one by one" recalls Bobadill's plans for dispatching an army of 40,000 men. Massinger actually recycled the Page character from one of his earlier plays, *The Maid of Honor*. Also simply referred to as Page, this earlier embodiment of diminutive violence accompanies and serves the odious gallant Fulgentio. In the course of delivering a marriage proposal from his master, 25 Page begins by threatening to use his “poniard" to

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23 The same rhetoric of emasculation underlies Coriolanus's fear that, if the population of the city discovers him alone in Antium, "wives with spits and boys with stones / In puny battle [will] slay [him]” (4.4.5-6). The bird-spit, like the distaff, is not only an ineffective weapon, it is also a symbol of feminine identity. All Shakespeare quotations are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare* unless otherwise noted.

24 The word "bumb" appears in the *OED* only as "a pimple" ("bumb, n."), but the term "bumpkin" for a clownish rustic was already in use by the late sixteenth century ("bumpkin, n.1"). In the context of the scene, a "bumpkin" blade would almost certainly have meant a traditional slashing sword.

25 Fulgentio is himself a caricature of the dandified, belligerent, cowardly gallant. He draws his sword repeatedly for little or no reason, but when an actual duel seems likely, he declines by citing "the late Edict made / 'Gainst duelists" (158). As for his marriage proposal, the object of his affection rejects him, observing that "I am doubtful whether you are a man, / Since for your shape trimmed up in a Ladies dressing / You might pass for a woman" (143).
"disemboge [the] soule" of the recipient's visiting friend if he won't admit him to the lady's presence. Horrified, the friend calls the boy a “Hercules…Bound up in decimo sexto” and a “Tamburlaine in little” (139–40). Before Fulgentio finally arrives to put an end to the encounter, the boy-made-man has bellowed an appalling series of threats and curses, ending by planting an unsolicited kiss on a horrified waiting woman. Both The Maid of Honor and The City Madam were written and staged decades after Silver originally lamented the rise of "our desperate boyes," but the intervening years seem to have done little to diminish anxiety over the rapier's undermining of adult English masculinity.

For their part, rapier proponents could do little more than attempt to redefine the terms in question, as Hale does when he argues that "[t]hat which wee call Strength, is not onely a Bucke-beating\textsuperscript{26} abilitie of the arme; for the point, to which all vse of weapon is now with great reason reduced, is not so blunt but small force makes it enter" (B4v). Centuries-old assumptions about physical strength and its relationship to violence could hardly be transformed with such ease, however, and the early modern English stage is more or less devoid of physically powerful characters overcome by smaller, weaker individuals wielding thrusting weapons. Like the would-be military rapier duelist, such figures only find theatrical life as elements of anti-rapier satire.

If the irrelevance of strength to rapier fencing facilitated comparisons between its practitioners and children, its emphasis on the primacy of training left it open to an even

\textsuperscript{26} Probably "buckler-beating," though perhaps "buck" here refers to "[a] washing tub, a vat in which to steep clothes in lye" (\textit{OED} "buck, n.3"), a comparison that would turn the buckler's masculine symbolism on its head by associating it with the decidedly feminine equipment of laundering clothes.
more damning association with "artfulness." Champions of the short sword (even those invested in traditional fencing instructors like the Masters of Defence) tended to describe effective use of their weapon primarily in terms of "nature" rather than "art." Silver's preface promises "an Admonition to the noble, ancient, victorious, valiant, and most brave nation of Englishmen, to beware of false teachers of Defence, and how they forsake their owne naturall fights"; his emphasis on the "naturall" here certainly refers to an inborn "Englishness," but it also glances at the difference between a style of combat based on an innate, organically derived ability (consisting in part of elements such as courage and strength) and its alternative, an unnaturally imported and consciously learned variety of swordplay. Silver sees the Italianated rapier duelist as a combatant constrained and ultimately vitiated by the artificiality of his technique. In contrast to "[o]ur ploughmen," Silver claims, "the Schooleman is...fast tyed to such schoolplay as he hath learned, [and] hath lost thereby the benefit of nature, and the plowman is now by nature without art a farre better man then he" (25). In one especially extreme passage, Silver actually claims that a man with no formal training in swordplay must inevitably prove a better combatant than a man trained by the Italian instructors:

[I]f I should chuse a valiant man for service of the Prince, or to take part with me or anie friend of mine in a good quarrell, I would chuse the unskilfull man, being vnencombred with false fights, because such a man standeth free in his valour with strength and agilitie of bodie, freely taketh the benefit of nature, fighteth most braue, by loosing no oportunitie, either soundly to hurt his enemie, or defend himselfe, but the other standing for his Defence, vpon his cunning Italian wardes, Pointareursa, the Imrocata, Stocata, and being fast tyed vnto these false fighetes, standeth troubled in his wits, and nature thereby racked through the largenesse of false lying or Spaces, whereby he is in his fight as a man halfe maimed, loosing the oportunity of times and benefit of nature, & whereas before
being ignorant of these false Rapier fights, standing in the free libertie of nature given him by god, he was able in the field with his weapon to answere the valiantest man in the world, but now being tied vnto that false fickle vncertaine fight, thereby hath lost in nature his freedome, is now become scarce halfe a man, and euerie boye in that fight is become as good a man as himselfe. (71-2)

In embracing the foreign practice of rapier fencing, England's gentry have abandoned the "natural" English masculinity they should possess. For all his training in the finer points of violence, the rapier duelist's "false fightes" ultimately create an equally false male identity, rendering him "scarce halfe a man," while the untutored English traditionalist can "answere the valiantest man in the world" purely on the basis of innate English courage and strength.

Lodowick Carlell stages just such a paradoxical contrast between puissant ignorance and impotent skill in his 1637 comedy The Fool Would Be a Favorite.\(^27\) In one of the opening scenes, Carlell introduces the clownish Young Gudgen, a wealthy rustic attempting to pass himself off as a gentleman. The absurdly belligerent Gudgen throws out threats and challenges left and right, vowing to kill his servant for watering his horse, his tailor for expecting payment in advance, and even his own father for criticizing his fencing technique. Old Gudgen refuses to fight, but the son promises to "let you see the fence is alter'd since your sword and buckler time," and the young man can only be persuaded to spare his father by the suggestion that he duel the tailor instead. For his part, the tailor agrees to "one bout sir, and it were at Cudgels," though Young Gudgen scornfully dismisses the suggestion of combat with "base Cudgels." The text gives no

\(^{27}\) The play did not see publication until 1657, but Harbage and Schoenbaum give 1632 and 1638 as the likely limits of its date of composition, with 1637 most likely (Harbage Annals 136-7).
indication of what weapons the pair ultimately use; presumably the tailor acquiesces to Gudgen's insistence on rapiers, though it is not inconceivable that the tailor wields a cudgel and Gudgen a rapier. Whatever arms are employed, Young Gudgen quickly gets the worst of the fight, but then rages at the tailor for having failed to play by the rules: "Oh Rogue do you offer to strike, and then to thrust against the Order of fence, this 'tis to play with ignorance." The tailor objects that "it was against my will, I did not think it possible I could have hit your skillful worship, wilt please your worship try another bout?" Needless to say, Young Gudgen declines.\textsuperscript{28} That untutored natural ability overcame formally trained skillfulness (or at least the pretension to it) may surprise the tailor, but it would hardly have surprised Silver, a man who insisted that the sword and buckler's time had never really passed in the first place.

Of course, Silver's suspicion of the efficacy of fencing instruction raises certain questions about his approval of the Masters of Defence (if natural valor inevitably overcomes learned skill, why bother training at all?), and an emphasis on the importance of "natural" skill left the anti-rapier faction open to the charge that they advocated willful ignorance; Hale accuses them of something along these lines when he mocks those who "hold opinion that Skill auayleth little or nothing in fight" (A8r). Nevertheless, the idea that a combatant (and especially an English combatant) had certain "natural" abilities or habits was so widespread that it even found its way into the manuals of the rapier masters themselves. Joseph Swetnam, a proponent of rapier fencing, emphasizes the importance

\textsuperscript{28} Like Bobadill, Gudgen refuses to participate in violence with those who eschew the duelist's punctilious adherence to "the Order of fence." In both cases, the duelist's strict code of conduct is revealed as nothing more than a means of disguising his cowardice and harmlessness.
of continually practicing one's rapier technique because "it is the nature of an Englishman to give blowes, especially if in anger" (qtd. in Aylward 81), and insufficiently engrained art might lead to a regression (as Swetnam sees it) toward the natural. Swetnam's readership aside, early modern English society as a whole remained highly mistrustful of any tradition emphasizing art over nature. While art, in its myriad forms, certainly had its champions, it was perpetually forced to defend itself against one endlessly repeated charge: that to be "artful" was simply a synonym for lying. The culture's widespread suspicion of artifice found especially emphatic expression among low born men financially excluded from the use of the rapier by the prohibitive cost of instruction. Fencing traditionalists already considered the failure of the duelist's physique to accurately represent his capacity for violence a variety of dangerous and destabilizing deception, and, as we will see shortly, various associations between rapier fencing and dishonesty would further undermine the weapon's functionality as a symbol of heroic masculinity.

29 Nor was England unique in this respect. Although Montaigne (unlike Silver) acknowledges rapier instruction to be "an Arte profitable to hir end" and highly useful in the context of the duel of honor, he maintains that it is not properly a vertue, since she draweth her stay from dexteritie, and takes her foundation from other than from herselfe...therefore have I seene some of my friends, renowned for great Maisters in this exercise, in their quarrels to make choise of weapons, that might well take the meane of this advantage or oddes from them; and which wholly depended on fortune, & assurance that their victory might not rather be imputed to their fencing, than ascribed to their valour...In my infancy, our nobility scorned the reputation of a fencer...deeming the same as a mystery of craft and subtilty, derogating from true and perfect vertue. (“On cowardice, the mother of cruelty,” vol. II, no. 27, 400-1)

The philosophy of the earlier French nobility and of Montaigne's friends notwithstanding, it was an emphasis on efficient lethality championed by men like Swetnam that defined rapier fencing in late sixteenth century Europe. A faith and interest in inborn valor as the primary determinant of success in combat became a marker of outdated modes of violence, modes using weapons that tended not to impose such a consistently mortal cost upon the loser.
Public short swords and private rapiers

After the arrival in London of the first Italian rapier masters in the 1570s, the foreign fencing instructors came to be known as the "private" schools, while the Masters of Defence were referred to as the "public" schools. These terms communicated the exclusivity of the expensive rapier academies, but they also reflected the relative everyday visibility of these two types of institution and their respective varieties of swordplay. While the teachers and pupils of the rapier schools were largely hidden from public view, the Masters of Defence routinely staged highly theatrical bouts for the entertainment of audiences and the advertisement of the schools' services. Typically, matriculating students would be led through the city with great ceremony before arriving at the site of their final examination, a test of skill that consisted of an all-day fencing exhibition known as "playing a prize." Students, who were required to pay the travel expenses of the instructors they fought, defrayed their costs by collecting coins thrown onto the stage by the audience. Appropriately, the location for such combined displays of skill and commerce was often one of the public amphitheaters, with the Theatre, the Bull, the Bel Savage, and the Curtain all serving as popular venues for prize playing.

While anyone in London might readily see the Masters of Defence vigorously demonstrate their skill on the amphitheater stage, however, only a handful of individuals

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30 A letter written by the Lord Mayor of London in 1583 refers to "certain fencers" who had "set vp billes" advertising such an event and who "desire[d] to passe with pomp through the citie" prior to playing their prize at the Theatre (qtd. in Chambers IV.293), pomp which another letter from a year earlier reveals to include "companie Drumes and shewe" (qtd. in Berry 2).
31 Earlier prizes had been played in a wider variety of locations, but by the mid-1570s it seems that almost all prizes were held either in theaters or at inns which would eventually become theaters (Berry 3).
ever witnessed the rapier techniques of Saviolo and his countrymen. On a number of occasions proponents of traditional English arms and swordplay challenged the Italian fencing teachers to play a bout in public in a test of the newly developed rapier fencing against older weapons and techniques, but as far as we know, not a single foreign instructor ever deigned to step onto a London stage in defense of his craft. The refusal of fencing masters like Saviolo to engage in public bouts may have stemmed partially from the fact that they considered themselves gentleman, and thus "regarded such displays on their own part as demeaning" (Low 19), a perspective that no doubt did little to endear them to the lower-class adherents of sword and buckler fencing. Italian masters also cautioned their students against engaging in casual friendly bouts with one another, allegedly due to the dangerousness of their weapons and the possibility that a good-natured practice match could easily turn into a life-and-death duel. For the rapier instructors, "fencing [was] not a game...the goal [was] never mere recreation so much as it [was] physical fitness and a readiness to respond to insults with confidence in one's dueling ability" (Low 19-20). Moreover, secrecy seems to have been valued by the rapier instructors as a means of giving their students an edge during combat, and Sydney Anglo even suggests that "the notion of secret strokes was an obsession with continental fencers" (17). Silver notes disapprovingly that the Italian fencing master Rocco Bonetti's

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32 Silver complains loudly in his Paradoxes that the rapier teachers have refused to fight him, and even goes so far as to assert in his dedication that "there is no certaine defence in the Rapier, and that there is great advantauge in the short Sword against the long Rapier, or all maner of Rapiers in generall, of what length soever... which whether I can perfome or not, I submit for triall to your Honors martiaall censure, being at all times readie to make it good, in what maner, and against what man soeuer it shall stand with your Lordships good liking to appoint" (A6-A6v). Half chivalric challenge and half fencing exhibition advertisement, Silver's dedication seems to have been met by the usual silence from the Italian fencing instructors.
school contained "a roome which was called his priuie schoole, with manie weapons therein, where he did teach his schollers his secret fight, after he had perfectly taught them their rules" (65).

For their part, rapier instructors objected that the Masters of Defence did their students a disservice in allowing the public to see their techniques. Hale laments that the public instructors "will suffer their Schollers to see one anothers practise, and likewise they themselues will discouer euery mans play to any man," since "[t]o let any man see anothers practise, giueth much advantage to the spectator, and is much prejudiciall vnto him whose practise is seene: and [it is] most murtherous and damnable in the Teacher to betray their owne Schollers to death" (C1v). Hale advises rapier students to "let euery man make his owne Practise priuate, and with those hee may haue no cause to deale withall: for [the Masters of Defence's]...Player-like fights at many Weapons vpon Stages, are mere shadowes without substance" (C2v). Unlike the continental rapier instructors, however, the Masters of Defence did not necessarily see themselves as educating their pupils primarily with mortal combat in mind. Hale's use of the word "spectator" and his characterization of prize playing as "player-like fights" are both apt; the training in and (as we shall see shortly) employment of traditional English weapons often took place within emphatically performative contexts. But if Hale objected to what he saw as "our commonly applauded, rude, and buffeting play" (C7r), those spectators doing the applauding presumably had different ideas about the appropriate expression of masculinity through violence. Perhaps inevitably, it was the standards of the sizeable audiences attending prize playings in London's amphitheaters — rather than the small
circle of aristocrats learning secret rapier techniques in "priueie schools" — which found expression in English Renaissance plays.\textsuperscript{33}

A fascinating incident that occurred during a trial by combat in 1571 will serve to illustrate the way in which the Masters of Defence and their audiences viewed the relationship between masculinity, public violence, and performance. The combatants, both of them proxies for parties in a property dispute, were George Thorne, about whom almost nothing is known, and Henry Naylor, a Master of Defence most notable today as the fencing instructor of Richard Tarlton.\textsuperscript{34} The authorities set up an arena that closely resembled an open-air amphitheater, with "scaffoldes one aboue an other for people to stande [on] and behold" the fight.\textsuperscript{35} Thorne seems to have arrived unobtrusively early in the morning, but Naylor's entrance later on looked like nothing so much as the prelude to a prize playing:

\begin{quote}
Naylor about vii. of the clocke, came through London...[and] before him went foure dromes playing all the waye, the gauntlet cast down by George Thorne, was borne before the sayd Naylor vpon a swerdes point, & his baston (a staffe of an elle longe, made tapar wyse tipt with orne) with his shild of hard lethar was borne after him. (qtd. in Berry 10).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Prize playing continued well into the seventeenth century, and its violence retained a strong association with masculine identity even on the eve of the civil war. For instance, in Richard Brome's \textit{The Antipodes}, the protagonist Peregrine is tricked into believing that he has traveled to an "anti-England" on the opposite side of the globe, a society in which all of seventeenth century England's cultural norms are reversed. To demonstrate the reversal of gender roles, Brome's stage directions indicate the entry of a "Woman, her head and face bleeding, and many Women, as from a prize." Peregrine remarks, "It doth amaze me. / What can her husband be, when she's a fencer?" In answer, he learns that "He keeps a school, and teacheth needlework, / Or some such arts which we call womanish" (4.4.1-6). Even on the opposite side of the world, and even when the very idea of gendered violence has undergone a shocking inversion, one of the clearest ways to demonstrate masculine identity remains participation in legal, public, non-lethal combat.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} Tarlton himself attained the rank of "master" in 1587 (Berry 6), though there seems to be no evidence that he ever employed his abilities as a fencer on the stage.

\textsuperscript{35} The crowd in attendance is estimated to have been 4,000 strong (Berry 6).
Ultimately the chief justice stopped the fight due to the non-appearance of one of the two parties in the original dispute, but before the crowd could disperse, Naylor made a striking proposal:

[The Chief Justice] willed Henry Naylor to render agayne to George Thorne, his gauntlet, whereunto the said Naylor aunswered, that his Lordshippe might commaunde hym any thyng, but willingly he would not render the said gauntlet to Thorne except he could wyn it, and further he chalenged the sayde Throne to playe with him halfe a score blowe, to showe some pastyme to the Lorde chiefe Iustice and the others there assembled, but Thorne aunswered, that he came to fight and would not playe. Then the lord chiefe Iustice commending Naylor for his valiant corage, commaunded them both quietly to depart the field.

(qtd. in Berry 11)

Naylor's challenge to engage in combat for the entertainment of those in attendance might have struck a rapier duelist like Hale as nothing more than an invitation to a "player-like fight" (Thorne, for one, makes a strict distinction between "fight" and "playe"), but the fact that the Lord Chief Justice explicitly commended Naylor for his "valiant courage" demonstrates that the construction of early modern English masculine identity depended on competing, often mutually exclusive standards of physical violence. As we will see, the potential lethality of a combatant's weapon, far from being the only means of underwriting the legitimacy of bravery, could actually be read as a threat to traditional standards of English masculinity.

If the rapier instruction occurring at the private academies was unusually secretive by the standards of English martial arts education, the duel itself was more clandestine.

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36 Berry suggests the interesting (if perhaps slightly fanciful) possibility that the Chief Justice was inspired by Richard II's role in stopping the judicial combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray in Shakespeare's play (6).
still. Markku Peltonen, the foremost modern chronicler of Renaissance English dueling culture, defines the duel of honor specifically as “a private or secret fight, caused by an insult and organized by a challenge in order to prove one’s sense of honor” (2). Always illegal in England and eventually the subject of an intense anti-dueling campaign by James I, the duel, of necessity, occurred well away from public scrutiny. Not surprisingly, the secrecy shrouding both the rapier schools and the illegal combats their students were trained to participate in led some to suspect that the rapier wearing gallants’ boasts of a capacity for deadly violence were little more than posturing. Opponents of the rapier and dueling asserted that the hidden knowledge of rapier fencing — its "tricks," as Bobadill tellingly puts it — were mere deceptions, easily revealed as such by the "honest" swordplay of the sword and buckler. Silver claims that "it grew to a common speech among the countrie-men, Bring me to a Fencer, I will bring him out of his fence trickes with good downe right blowes, I will make him forget his fence trickes I will warrent him" (1-2). Precisely this kind of scene occurs in William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money*, in which the comical Frisco, servant to the Portuguese Pisaro, finds himself contradicted by Ned, one of the play’s native English characters. In response, Friso asks ominously if Ned "giue[s] the Gentleman the ly," to which Ned's fellow Englishman replies, "I sir, and will giue you a licke of my Cudgell, if yee stay long and trouble the whole streete with your bawling." In the context of *Englishmen for My Money* and other works that valorize native English "plainness," the rapier marks its wearer not as a dangerous man but rather as a figure of fun, an obvious coward in dire need of a therapeutic beating with an "honest" English cudgel.
The finest theatrical representation of the suspicions regarding the reality of the rapier's lethality is Jonson's Captain Bobadill, who claims to have defeated six "masters of defence" from the "public school[s]" (*Every Man In* 4.7.16-24), and brags that he "could have slain them all" were it not that he "delight[s] not in murder" (4.7.46-7). After Downright beats him soundly, of course, Bobadill protests that he was legally "bound to the peace" (4.7.115) and forbidden to fight, and that moreover he had been "struck with a planet" and thus "had no power to draw [his] weapon" (4.7.121-2).37 Once again, the English cudgel (a suitable symbol for the uncomplicated and inborn strength and valor of the English peasant) reveals and punishes the emptiness of the rapier's loudly threatened violence. Bobadill's counterpart in *Every Man Out of His Humor*, Fastidius Brisk, is a similarly bloodless terror with his rapier. In one past encounter, recounted in great detail by Fastidius himself, we hear how his enemy "advanced his rapier to strike" while Fastidius aimed a thrust at the man's arm:

Sir, I missed my purpose in his arm, rashed his doublet sleeve, ran him close by the left cheek, and through his hair. He again, light me here (I had on a gold cable hatband, then new come up, which I wore about a murrey French hat I had), cuts my hatband (and yet it was massy, goldsmith's work), cuts my brims, which by good fortune, being thick embroidered with gold-twist and spangles, disappointed the force of his

37 Morsberger believes that Jonson explicitly models Bobadil on Saviolo and Downright on Silver (22-3), while Aylward believes that Jonson's model for Bobadil was Bonetti (49). Bobadil certainly does embody many of Silver's complaints about the foreign fencing instructors, such as the story in his *Paradoxes* about an encounter between the Italians and a group of Masters of Defence drinking at an alehouse: "[T]he maisters of Defence did pray them to drinke with them, but the Italians being verie cowardly, were afraide, and presently drew their Rapiers...The next morning after, all the Court was filled, that the Italian teachers of Fence had beaten all the maisters of Defence in London, who set upon them in a house together" (66-7). Silver remains silent on whether the Englishmen had been spared because the rapier masters "delighted not in murder."
blow: nevertheless, it grazed on my shoulder, takes me away six purls of an Italian cutwork band I wore, cost me three pound in the exchange, but three days before...I, being loath to take the deadly advantage that lay before me of his left side, made a kind of stramazon, ran him up to the hilts, through the doublet, through the shirt, and yet missed the skin. He, making a reverse blow, falls upon my embossed girdle (I had thrown off the hangars a little before), strikes off a skirt of a thick-laced satin doublet I had (lined with some four taffetas), cuts off two panes, embroidered with pears, rends through the drawings out of tissue, enters the linings, and skips the flesh. (4.6.69-94)

The passage's impossibly precise swordplay results in misses so near that the gallants’ elaborate garments (described in loving detail) are massacred while the combatants themselves escape left completely unscathed.

Fastidius's absurd lies comically illustrate one of the characteristics of the newly developed rapier technique that made adherents to the older style of slashing swordplay suspicious. Unlike traditional weapons such as the long sword and short sword, which were designed primarily for hacking and slashing, the rapier's long, thin blade and

38 If George Silver objects to the fact that the "thrust [of a rapier] may be put by, by the force of a child," we can imagine how he would have reacted to a thrust capable of being frustrated by a hat brim (no matter how lavishly embroidered).

39 The parallels between the fashionableness and foreign origins of a gallant's clothing and his rapier technique did not go unnoticed by proponents of the short sword. Silver observes that since the arrival of "our outlandish teachers" (A4v), the “[f]encing…in this new fangled age, is like our fashions, everie daye a change, resembling the Camelion, who altereth himselfe into all colors save white” (A3). Stow recalls that in the 1570’s, “he was held the greatest gallant, that had the deepest Ruffe, and longest Rapier” (869). As Low points out, however, “[t]he sartorial display that seemed effeminate to merchants seemed masculine to courtiers” (Manhood 20). David Kuchta identifies the source of this disconnect in different underlying assumptions about the relationship between ornamentation and masculinity:

In country ideology, following fashion was a sign of effeminacy and servitude, while the freeborn gentleman's virtue was signified by 'simplicity and wholesome pleasures based on religion and respect for tradition,' as Perez Zagorin has written. Country gentlemen linked effeminacy with sumptuous display and political dependence: manly simplicity signified political autonomy; restraint symbolized freedom. (234)

Among the low-born, "simplicity" as a masculine virtue became associated not only with clothing and visual aesthetics but also with martial technique (see, for instance, complaints about the rapier fencer's "tricks"), and, as we will see shortly, language.
needle-sharp point made it an extremely dangerous thrusting weapon, though relatively impractical for cutting attacks. However, the very characteristics that made the rapier so deadly also made it more difficult to distinguish between genuinely courageous fighters and mere braggarts. Whereas the slashing attack of the short sword was likely to leave a fighter with long, highly visible but relatively superficial cuts (and later scars), even a fatal hit from a rapier might leave nothing behind but a small puncture mark. In the moments immediately after Mercutio has received his mortal injury at the hands of Tybalt, Benvolio is surprised ("What, art thou hurt?" [3.1.88]) and Romeo is optimistic ("Courage, man; the hurt cannot be much" [3.1.91]). As the dying Mercutio knows, however, though the puncture is "not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door...'tis enough, 'twill serve" (3.1.92-3). If a lethal blow could result in a barely visible wound, a nearly-lethal blow might leave behind no mark at all, a fact that Fastidius exploits at absurd length in his outlandish tale. A form of masculinity built on mere tales, of course,

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40 Although Troilus may look down on "such as boasting show their scars" (4.7.174), he hardly represents a figure of unimpeachable martial character. Coriolanus's military credentials are fully in order, and when he scorns to show the plebeians "the unaching scars which [he] should hide, / As if [he] had received them for the hire / Of their breath only!" (2.2.144-7), his reticence springs not from any ambivalence about the scars' meaning, but rather from an aversion to turning the marks of valor into nothing more than a means of currying favor with his inferiors. Lafeu believes that "[a] scar nobly got, or a noble scar, is a good livery of honour" (All's Well That Ends Well 4.5.83-4) and York mocks Somerset for want of courage by urging him to "Show me one scar character'd on thy skin / Men's flesh preserved so whole do seldom win." (Henry VI Part 2 3.1.300-1 ). When, after killing Saturninus, Lucius must appeal to the stunned Roman citizenry's respect for his military bravery in service of Rome, he reminds them that "[m]y scars can witness, dumb although they are, / That my report is just and full of truth" (Titus Andronicus 5.3.113-4). Henry V imagines a veteran of the Battle of Agincourt will "strip his sleeve and show his scars. / And say These wounds I had on Crispin's day." (4.3.47-8) and, after being beaten by Fluellen, Pistol comically inverts this image and tells the audience that "patches will I get unto these cudgell'd scars, / And swear I got them in the Gallia wars." (Henry V 5.1.79-80). While Pistol's absurd plan proves that even a scar can dissemble, it also demonstrates that scars represented important physical evidence needed to back up claims of personal courage. Styles of swordplay less likely to leave such evidence inevitably raised suspicions, and it is telling that all of the above quotes refer, either implicitly or explicitly, to wounds caused by traditional slashing weapons. Chapter Two will examine in far greater detail Shakespeare's sensitivity to the cultural associations of slashing versus thrusting swordplay.
was a flimsy identity indeed, and the rapier fencer's dependence on language rather than physical proof to communicate his capacity for violence inevitably left him vulnerable to the suspicion that he was a harmless Fastidius rather than a deadly Tybalt.

**Theatrical and un-theatrical fencing techniques**

Even when the rapier's critics acknowledged the weapon's lethality, they often characterized the deaths involved in uniquely un-theatrical terms; in cases where the rapier performed its violent function with deadly efficiency, that bloodshed still might not successfully "perform" the duelist's masculine capacity for violence. George Silver sums up the origins of the problem in an evocative turn of phrase when he claims that the Italian masters "teach vs Offence, not Defence" (A5). The rapier, which could be used in conjunction with a dagger (or less commonly a cloak), was never paired with a buckler or target. This meant that rapier fencers often relied entirely on the sword itself to deflect blows aimed at them by their opponents. The fact that rapier duels always occurred without the use of shields or armor led instructors such as Silver to view the weapon as almost purely offensive, and thus uniquely (and foolishly) dangerous. Silver argues that "the Italian fight is imperfect because neither the Italians, nor any of their best scholers do never fight, but they are most comonly sore hurt, or one or both of them slaine," since it is impossible to "fight safe" with such weapons (3-5). In a rapier duel, one must, of necessity, seek the life of one's opponent, since "kill or be killed is the dreadfull issue" of such a combat (A5r). If both swordsmen follow this advice, "they are most commonly
both slain, or both hurt” (49). Occasionally, of course, both combatants are in sufficient awe of the fearsome reputation of their opponent's weapon that the fight ends in a less deadly and more comical variety of draw. Silver offers his readers descriptions of both situations:

Now when two do happen to fight, being both of one mind, that the thruster hath the vantage, they make all shift they can, who shall give the first thrust: as for example, two Captaines at Southampton even as they were going to take shipping upon the key, fell at strife, drew their Rapiers, and presently, being desperate, hardie or resolute, as they call it, with all force and ouer great speed, ran with their rapiers one at the other, & were both slain. Now when two of the contrary opinion shall meet and fight, you shall see verie peaceable warres betweene them: for they verily thinke that he that first thrusteth is in great danger of his life, therefore with all speede do put themselves in ward, or Stocata, the surest gard of all other, as Vincentio saith, and thereupon they stand sure, saying the one to the other, thrust and thou dare; and saith the other, thrust and thou dare, or strike or thrust and thou dare, saith the other: then saith the other, strike or thrust and thou dare for thy life. These two cunning gentlemen standing long time together, upon this worthie ward, they both depart in peace, according to the old proverbe: It is good sleeping in a whole skinne. (7-8).

When rapier fights such as Silver describes found a place on the English Renaissance stage, they took the shape of either absurd farce or senseless tragedy. We can see an example of the former in Twelfth Night's combat between Sir Andrew and Viola. Sir Toby observes before the "duel" that "oxen and wainropes / cannot hale them

41 Silver's characterization of the rapier as a strictly offensive weapon may serve the purpose of his polemic, but it nevertheless expresses a common and longstanding concern about the likely uses to which gallants might put their rapiers. As early as 1562 Elizabeth issued a royal proclamation prohibiting the carrying of "long swords and rapiers, sharpened in such sort as may appear the usage of them can not tend to defense, which ought to be the very meaning of wearing of weapons in times of peace, but to murder and evident death" (Hughes and Larkin 191).
together" (3.2.51-2) and presumably the characters bear out his prediction.\(^{42}\) The tragic opposite of such mutual faintheartedness appears in a number of plays where two characters engage eagerly in an ill advised duel. In Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, Barabas uses a "challenge feigned" (2.3.373) to trick Mathias and Lodowick into a rapier\(^{43}\) duel over the love of Abigail, during which they kill one another. A similar rapier duel occurs in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* between the squires Serlsby and Lambert, again over the love of a woman.\(^{44}\) Here too both combatants "fight and kill each other" (84), but the senselessness of their violence is echoed and compounded by the subsequent fight between their sons. Having just watched their fathers slay one another in Friar Bacon's enchanted glass, the sons immediately and fatally stab each other. In a fit of remorse for the consequences of his magic, Friar Bacon breaks the mirror, exclaiming that "[t]he poniard\(^{45}\) that did end the fatal lives / Shall break the cause efficiat of their woes" (85).

The violent rashness of the characters in all three examples of mutual slaughter seems to reflect Silver's views on just what kind of combat the newly popular rapiers encouraged and facilitated. If we assume that these fights would have followed Silver as closely in their choreography as they do in their moral import, they seem likely to have been staged

\(^{42}\) In this particular case the duelists know nothing of how to use their weapons, but their fear of the opponent's rapier and their mutual willingness to "depart in peace, according to the old prouerbe" certainly echoes Silver's description. Recent interpreters, in an attempt to deliver a spirited duel for their audiences, have occasionally ignored the combatants' unwillingness to fight. See, for instance, Trevor Nunn's 1996 film, in which the combat between Viola and Sir Andrew is a lengthy and (despite some slapstick moments) highly skilled demonstration of swordsmanship. Such stagings may appeal to modern audiences, but they do so at the expense of the scene's central joke: that no one onstage is less interested in or capable of dueling than the duelists.

\(^{43}\) The weapons are never specifically identified, but Barabas notes while observing the fight that initially the two duelists "thrust not home" (3.2.5).

\(^{44}\) In this case Lambert explicitly urges Serlsby to "draw thy rapier" (83).

\(^{45}\) The poniard, a small thrusting weapon, had recently been introduced from the continent, and was closely associated with the larger rapier in the English cultural imagination.
as relatively brief, uncomplicated encounters, a far cry from the lengthy, exciting contests that some modern commentators seem to imagine were carried out in every instance of swordplay on the English Renaissance stage.\textsuperscript{46} Thus even when rapier duels were staged, and even in cases where the results of the duel were deadly, the actual fight itself may well have been brief and anti-climactic. For all their lethality, the duelists in Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay and The Jew of Malta would hardly have presented an appealing model of masculine violence for the emulation of the audience's gallants.

The un-theatrical elements of the duello stand out even more starkly when compared to the tradition of informal English sword combats that preceded the introduction of the rapier duel. While the counterpart of Bonetti's "priueie schoole" and "secret fight" was the exuberantly theatrical spectacle of a prize playing in a London amphitheater, the counterpart of the duel itself was unquestionably the street-brawl. In contrast to the clandestine duel of honor, however, London's sword and buckler affrays before the 1570s were highly public events. John Stow, commenting retrospectively on the nature of English swordplay before the rise of the rapier, observes that "[w]hen every servingman, from the bas to the best, carried a buckler at his backe...it was usuall to have frayes, fights, and quarrells, upon the sundayes and holidays, sometimes twenty, thirty, and forty swords and bucklers, halfe against halfe, as well by quarrells of appointment as by chance" (1024). Such encounters were of course illegal (strictly speaking), but they never elicited the kind of concerted attempt at wholesale suppression by the crown that

\textsuperscript{46} For instance, Morsberger (5) and Edelman (7) both suggest that, as a rule, the English Renaissance audiences that attended prize playings expected simulated swordfights to be staged as verisimilar recreations of such entertainment.
the rise of the private duel eventually provoked. One reason for English society’s relatively tolerant attitude toward its "frayes, fights, and quarrells" was the simple fact that such combat left behind very few bodies. Stow observes that while "sword and buckler men...made great shew of much furie, and fought often, yet seldome any man hurt" (1024), a situation that arose from the nature of the weapons themselves. Lawrence Stone points out that "the heavy sword...and the buckler or shield...allowed the maximum muscular effort and the most spectacular show of violence with the minimum threat to life and limb" (242). Since wounds from slashing attacks killed far less readily than wounds from thrusting attacks, and since the buckler allowed even minimally skilled combatants to parry most blows safely, English swordplay prior to the rapier actually posed little threat to public safety. Silver goes so far as to suggest the impossibility of two skilled swordsmen seriously hurting one another in a sword and buckler bout:

[I]t is most certaine, that men may with short swords both strike, thrust, false and double, by reason of their distance and nimblenesse therof, more dangerously then they can with long Rapier: and yet when two fight with short swordes, having true fight, there is no hurt done: neither is it possible in anie reason, that anie hurt should be done betwixt them of either side, and this is well knowne to all such as haue the perfection of true fight. (9)

Silver's short sword is, paradoxically, both more "dangerous" and less lethal than the rapier. While we can chalk the former claim up to wishful thinking on the part of a champion of the short sword, the latter claim is borne out by Silver's less partisan contemporaries. The truth is that, for all their vaunted martial utility, the sword and buckler were simply not very effective tools for killing a similarly armed opponent.

47 Stone characterizes sword and buckler combat as "not much more dangerous than all-in wrestling" (242).
Short sword fencing thus came to occupy a place in society akin to a sport or pastime, a status that facilitated the openness of street brawls. In fact, the "spectacular show," as Stone terms it, was actually the main point of the entire activity. Sword and buckler combat became a ubiquitous nuisance on the streets and fields of London precisely because it offered men a relatively safe but highly public means of demonstrating their masculine physical identity. The brawls were not merely treated as a sport by the participants: they were intended to function as a spectator sport.

Though we might expect that the openly recognized disconnect between this "shew of much furie" and the actual danger inherent in the swordplay would have left the sword and buckler open to charges of dissembling, early modern commentators actually seem to have taken the opposite view; there exist essentially no references to traditional swordplay that call into question the authenticity of its violence or raise the possibility that the signifiers of combat did not accurately reflect the signified capacity for masculine bloodshed.

Moreover, the abilities associated with successful sword and buckler fighting — namely, size and strength — were rendered visible to everyone by virtue of their basic nature, while the rapier fencer's skill was unseen and, until demonstrated, always open to doubt.

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48 The "sportization" (to borrow a term from Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning) of swordplay was hardly unique, following as it did the similar progressions of activities like hunting and archery. Moreover, early modern English pastimes that modern day spectators might recognize more readily as sports sometimes entailed a greater risk of serious injury than sword and buckler fencing. Sixteenth century soccer, for example, often included a very real risk of permanent injury or even death.

49 Of course the spectators for such combats often embraced the swordplay's performative element less warmly than the fighters themselves. Stow recalls that "in the Winters season, all the high streetes, were much annoyed and troubled with hourely frayes, of sword and buckler men" (1024). Undoubtedly some Londoners welcomed the reduction in brawling and the greater "civility" brought about by the rapier's arrival. The violence, though far more deadly than it had been with sword and buckler fights, did at least occur out of sight.

50 Even after a successful demonstration of violent capacity by a rapier fencer, a traditionalist like George Silver might still attribute the victory to simple chance, since in such "imperfect fights...be his...strength
unlike sword and buckler brawlers, however, rapier duelists lacked the opportunity to openly stage their abilities, and for the spectators of sixteenth century England, seeing was believing. A system of masculine self-fashioning defined by hidden ability and private combats (no matter how lethal) simply lacked the everyday physical immediacy of more traditional forms of swordplay.

**Short swords, fair play, and all the violence that becomes a man**

The characteristic of sword and buckler fencing that made it publicly palatable — its limited risk of serious injury — sprang from factors other than simply the physical particulars of the weapons. Widely accepted standards of personal combat predating the duel placed certain limits on the acceptability of lethal swordplay. The Masters of Defence themselves stipulated in their oath that even in a serious fight, the practitioner of their craft should not seek his enemy's life except in immediate self-defense:

> You shal be Mercifull, And Whearas you happen to have the vpper hande of your enimye That is to saie Without Weapon or vnnder your feete or his backe towards you, then you shall not kill him savinge your selfe harmelesse without daunger of Death Excepte it be in the service of the prince. (89)

In contrast, Saviolo explicitly cautions his students against sparing their adversaries, precisely because of the dangerousness inherent in rapier duels:

> [D]oo the best you can when you haue your weapon in your hand, and consider that fighetes are dangerous, and you know not the minde and purpose of your enemye, whome if you should chaunce to spare,

and agility so great...[the fighter's] vertue [is] tied to fortune” (A4v). Silver carefully ignores the possibility that such victories have more to do with skill than fortune.
afterwards peraduenture he may kill you or put you in danger of your life...for if he be either a man skilfull at his weapon, or fierce or furious, he may peraduenture doo that to you, which you would not doo, (when you might) to him. Wherefore...it seemeth childish to saie, I will go and fight, but I will spare and fauour him

Beyond a simple disapproval of killing, participants in traditional armed street brawls also seem to have adhered to certain tacitly agreed upon rules of fair play. Stow observes that in sword and buckler fighting, not "one of twentie [would] strike beneath the waste, by reason they held it cowardly and beastly" (1024). Stow's articulation of the widely acknowledged standards that controlled and limited the danger of sword and buckler combat demonstrates the ways in which, even before the importation of the rapier, the culture of English swordplay suppressed lethal violence by branding the use of particularly dangerous techniques emasculating. In his Annals of Queen Elizabeth (1625), William Camden describes how Englishmen previously fought by "slashing and cutting one the other, armed with Targets or Bucklers, with very broad weapons, accounting it not to be a manly action to fight by thrusting and stabbing, and chiefly under the waste" (qtd. by Sieveking in Worke for Cutlers 27). Even as late as the Interregnum, these sixteenth century limits on masculine violence were still widely remembered. Sir Hugh Cholmley's memoirs discuss a feud between Charles Neville, 6th Earl of Westmorland, and Sir Richard Cholmondeley, an ancestor of the author:

[The feud] occasioned continual fighting and scuffles between the Earl's men and Sir Richard's, when they met, whether in London streets or elsewhere, which might be done with less danger of life and bloodshed than in these succeeding ages; because they then fought only with buckler and short sword, and it was counted unmannerly to make a thrust. (7-8)
The language used by all of these authors ("cowardly," "unmannerly," "not manly action") suggests that the use of lethal violence was checked by explicitly characterizing it as un-masculine. As Macbeth might put it, the sword and buckler combatants remembered by Cholmley, Stow, and Camden "dare[d] do all that may become a man; / Who dare[d] do more [was] none" (1.7.46-7).

With the introduction of the rapier, anti-dueling commentators seized upon the traditional characterization of lethal violence as emasculating in order to discredit the duelist's masculinity. Just as opponents of the rapier tried to cast its reduced reliance on physical strength as indicative of boyishness, the same writers attempted to turn the weapon's central advantage — its greater lethality — into a mark of unmanly cowardice. For Cleland, the willingness to kill signifies not valor but fearfulness, as indeed does the willingness to duel in the first place:

I think it rather proceedeth of cowardlines then of courage, that yee go about at the verie first to kill your enimie, as appeareth by manie mens practise, that tremble for feare so longe as they see him aliue...Euerie man confesseth that it is greater valour to beate his foe, to cause him to confess his fault and repent, then to kill him. This is the onlie waie to bee reuenged...Hee cannot repent himselfe (which should bee the principall end of this combate) when hee is killed. (236-7)

51 Cholmley, an aristocrat living decades after the sword and buckler's heyday, reimagines and articulates earlier standards of conduct in terms of a more general well-born male propriety. Nevertheless, the mid-seventeenth century "manner" he refers to is every bit as gender-bound as the expectations of masculine behavior expressed by earlier commentators like Stow and Camden.
Cleland actually follows Montaigne, who asks "What is it that now adayes makes all our quarrells mortall?," and finds the answer in modern man's cowardice:

What is it, if it be not Cowardise? Every man seeth, it is more bravery and disdaine for one to beate his enemie, than make an end of him; and to keepe him at a bay, than make him die. Moreover, that the desire of revenge is thereby alayed, and better contented...And that's the reason we doe not challenge a beast or fall vpon a stone, when it hurtes vs, because they are incapable to feele our revenge. And to kill a man, is to shelter him from our offence...It is rather an action of feare, than of bravery; Of precaution, than of courage...Our forefathers...were sufficiently valiant not to feare their adversary, though he lived, and were wronged: Whereas we quake for feare, so long as we see him a foote.  
("On cowardice, the mother of cruelty," vol. II, no. 27, 399)

Both Montaigne's and Cleland's accusations of cowardice reflect an aversion to the logic of duelists like Saviolo, who warns his students that once engaged in combat, a living opponent may "put you in danger of your life" if spared (11).

Needless to say, such appeals to traditional associations between masculine identity and the limits of personal violence did little to convince the rapier masters or the fashionable gallants they instructed. If the rapier's lethality was characterized as un-masculine savagery by its opponents, the sword and buckler's relative harmlessness could be seen by the duelist as a variety of masculine inadequacy. Rapier instructors routinely cited the ineffectuality of the slashing blow as compared to the thrust as a reason for adoption of the latter technique; for the would-be duelist, who expected to fight only in life-and-death combats, the slashing blow's tendency to inflict superficial wounds could hardly be counted among the short sword's virtues. Di Grassi explicitly recommends

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52 Montaigne's nation suffered an epidemic of dueling violence that far outstripped any parallel crisis in Cleland's England; as many as 10,000 duelists died in France between 1589 and 1610 alone (Nye 26).
concentrating on the thrust because "blowes of the edge, though they were great, yet they are verie fewe that are deadly, and that thrustes, though litle and weake, when they enter but iiij. fingers into the bodie, are wont to kill" (qtd. in Anglo 112). In John Webster's character sketch of "An ordinary Fencer" (i.e. a Master of Defence, as opposed to a foreign rapier instructor), he picks up on criticisms such as Di Grassi's when he mockingly observes that the ordinary fencer's "wounds are seldome above skin-deepe" (27). Nevertheless, many writers, especially those excluded from the community of the duello for reasons of class, reacted to the rapier fencer's thrusting swordplay much as they would have reacted to a sword and buckler combatant who employed thrusts and struck below the waist: it was unmanly behavior, despite its efficacy in a no-holds-barred fight.

Regardless of their position on the period's debates over fencing technique, early modern English writers do unanimously agree that public sword and buckler brawls declined due to the introduction of the rapier; as "the fight of Rapier and Dagger tooke place...then suddenly the generall quarrell of fighting abated" (Stow 1024). Middleton's Falso, in *The Phoenix*, remarks that "since sword and buckler time, I have observed, there has been nothing so much fighting...There are no good frays o' late" (112). Even Silver grudgingly admits that since the introduction of the rapier "[t]here are few frayes," though he adds that there are "more valiant Gentlemen slaine now then were then" (56). From his perspective, the suppression of a minor public nuisance has come at the cost of both an increase in killings and a substantial deterioration of English masculinity:

It hath been commonly held, that since the Italians haue taught the Rapier fight, by reason of the dangerous vse thereof, it hath bred great ciuilitie amongst our English nation...it cannot be denied but this is true, that we
are more circumspect of our words, and more fearefull to fight...But wherof commeth it? Is it from this, that the Rapier maketh pece in our minds; or from hence, that it is not so sufficient defence for our bodies in our fight? He that will fight when he is armed, will not fight when he is naked: is it therefore good to go naked to keepe peace? he that would fight with his Sword and Buckler, or Sword and Dagger, being weapons of true defence, will not fight with his Rapier and Poiniard, wherein no true defence or fight is perfect...What else is it, but to say, it is good for subjects to be poore, that they may not go to law: to lacke munition, that they may not fight, nor go to the warres...these Italian peacemakers...have made many a...valiant man fearefull. (56-7)

An objective commentator would point out that rapiers increased the risk of swordplay not through any deficiency as implements of defense, but rather through their devastating effectiveness as implements of offense; at the level of the rapier's social effect, however, Silver's complaints look far more legitimate. Over the course of only one or two decades, widely accepted means of publicly demonstrating masculine traits like courage and a capacity for violence had disappeared, and the new symbology for communicating such traits lacked the straightforward intuitiveness seen (and heard) in the clash of sword against buckler. Moreover, the rapier's class exclusivity barred much of the population from accessing the means of constructing this new form of male identity. The naturally courageous sturdy Englishman seemed to have fled, and worst of all, he had been chased from the field by a figure incapable of demonstrating any of the traditional outward signs of courageous masculinity. When the short sword had been carried by "every servingman, from the bas to the best," its actual use could be seen by anyone in the prize playing arena, the public fencing school, or even the street. The rapier, hidden away by private schools and secret challenges, offered no means of openly demonstrating the threat implied by its reputation. In carrying a sword and buckler, a mid-sixteenth century
servingman might have communicated a capacity for violence through an actual physical demonstration of his abilities; in carrying a rapier, a late-sixteenth century gallant had to rely on something far less universally trustworthy: words.

The duello's dependence on language

Although the reasons for the rapier duel's failure to replace the sword and buckler fight on the English Renaissance stage are obviously complex, the rapier's greatest weakness may have stemmed from its dependence on and association with language. Modern scholars, perhaps not surprisingly, have tended to favor characters whose skill lies more with the pen than the sword (see, for example, Taylor\textsuperscript{53} and Low\textsuperscript{54}), but English

\textsuperscript{53} James O. Taylor admiringly likens Hamlet's satirical wit to a weapon, and thinks that the Hamlet-as-satirist-fencer pattern reaches its pinnacle in the scenes with Ophelia and his mother. With these two women, his speech becomes pointed and rapier-edged as he strips away their self-deception and ignorant or blind dissimulation. He becomes the satirist-avenger flensing with words in order to chastise those sullied by court pollution. At this point Hamlet is using language as his only weapon; but he is using it with great effect, to judge from the anguish he causes both Ophelia and Gertrude. Indeed, he is as menacing and relentless as the aggressive swordsman who presses every advantage in the fray. (212)

\textsuperscript{54} Low claims that "Hal's mastery of rhetorical possibility demonstrates the ability to remake the world which, corporealized, enables him to best Hotspur in swordplay." She believes this is achieved through Hal's manipulation of language during his short parley with Hotspur: "Hal's verbal agility renders him the conqueror of the monologic Hotspur, whose narrow focus has prevented him from seeing beyond the battle to the strategies it serves for both sides" ("Those Proud Titles" 284). While Low's reading may raise certain interesting points about the political contrasts between the two characters, her analysis completely elides the actual combat that Shakespeare builds to as the climax of the play's (physical) action. In a very real way, Hal conquers Hotspur by winning a swordfight, a point so obvious that many critics simply ignore it. For audiences, of course, the centrality of that swordfight to the play's structure can hardly be ignored.
Renaissance theater audiences were inclined to take the opposite view.\textsuperscript{55} Words, which served (at best) as mere abstract expressions of actual truths, inevitably raised questions of veracity. Katharine Maus has pointed out that "in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England the sense of discrepancy between 'inward disposition' and 'outward appearance' seems unusually urgent and consequential for a very large number of people, who occupy virtually every position on the ideological spectrum" (13). For many Elizabethan writers "[p]ersons and things inwardly are" while "persons and things outwardly seem" (Maus 5, italics in original). As we have seen, such a perspective favored the sword and buckler fencer, whose size and muscularity promised to render visible the "inward" truth of his violent capacity in a way that the rapier duelist's words simply could not.\textsuperscript{56} As Maus points out with regard to Hamlet, the "conviction that truth is unspeakable implicitly devalues any attempt to express or communicate it" (1). We will see shortly that a dependence on language permeated almost every component of the duello, from the would-be duelist's instruction in technique to his eventual participation in personal combat. With its violence so extensively mediated by the written and spoken

\textsuperscript{55} I certainly do not claim that the Elizabethans and Jacobean writers would always have associated linguistic skill with deception, physical weakness, or cowardice, but rather that the truth of speech was forever open to doubt in a way that the truth (or at least the reality) of physical violence was not.

\textsuperscript{56} In theory an individual's appearance might deceive in much the same way that his or her words do, but early modern English views on the traditional association between physical stature and combat ability seem to leave little space for such deception. A telling indicator of this association is the simultaneous early sixteenth century advent of two separate but related meanings of the word "tall": "Good at arms; stout or strong in combat; doughty, brave, bold, valiant" ("tall" adj A.I.3), a meaning that first appeared in or around 1529, and "High of stature; of more than average height. Usually appreciative." ("tall" adj A.II.6), a meaning that first appeared in or around 1530. Readers of early modern texts will have noticed the difficulty often associated with determining which definition is intended in any given use of the word, an ambiguity that underlines just how closely the two meanings were associated with one another in the English Renaissance imagination.
word, the rapier's physical dangerousness inevitably suffered from the devaluation of communication identified by Maus.

Although Continental rapier instructors tended to emphasize the importance of secrecy during training, they were unusually open and vocal about their craft in one important way: the production of printed instructional materials. While England had already seen books from the Italians Agrippa in 1553, Di Grassi in 1570, Viggiani in 1575, and the Spaniard Carranza in 1569, it was not until Silver's 1599 *Paradoxes* that England finally produced a text on fencing written by an Englishman (Aylward 57, 73). Hale, a proponent of rapier fencing, even attempts to cite his 1614 manual's novelty as a selling point, claiming that "the Science of Defence...was neuer before in our Language brought to any method. The professors thereof being so ignorant, that they could rather doe, then make demonstration" (A3v). In the preface to *The Compleat Angler*, Izaak Walton recalls that Hale was laughed at by his fellow Englishmen for trying to teach fencing through a book (Anglo 22), though Hale was not the only English author who scorned what he perceived as the illiteracy of the Masters of Defence. Webster mockingly observes of the "common fencers" that they "are such things, that care not if all the world were ignorant of more Letters then onely to reade their Patent" (27). We can also catch a hint of the accusation of anti-intellectualism in Florio's condemnation of the sword and buckler, which he describes as "[a] clownish dastardly weapon, and not for

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57 Silver's *Paradoxes* figure so centrally in any discussion of late sixteenth century debates over English fencing technique precisely because the period's traditionalists left behind so few written records of their values and practices.
a Gentleman” (qtd. in Soens 151). Florio's characterization of the sword and buckler as "dastardly" could carry the modern meaning of "despicable cowardice," but in 1578 the word could also mean "[i]nert of mind or action; stupid, dull." The sword and buckler were the peacetime weapons not just of the lower classes, but more specifically of the uneducated.

Just as they had with the rapier's greater lethality and reduced physical requirements, however, proponents of sword and buckler fencing turned the weapon's virtues into vices. The connection between stature and violent capacity possessed an intuitive logic that the connection between literacy and violent capacity lacked, and so the vocabulary of the continental rapier duelist came to be seen by some as nothing more than an additional layer of empty posturing. For their part, the foreign fencing instructors and their manuals offered caricaturists a rich opportunity for the transformation of potent violence into impotent verbiage, with volumes such as Saviolo, his practice supplying opponents with an extensive store of untranslated Italian fencing terms. George Silver, in mocking the rapier's uselessness on the battlefield, asks if one can "hew asunder [the enemy's] Pikes with a Stocata, a reuersa, a Dritta, a Stramason, or other such like tempestuous termes?" (A5-A5v). The Italian fencing terminology became so closely associated with rapier fencers that nearly forty years after Silver's Paradoxes, Thomas Nabbes employed the same terms as allegorical shorthand for belligerent but empty braggadocio in his masque Microcosmos. The figure Choller, one of the four humors

58 Florio is known to have been a friend of Saviolo's, and Aylward, convinced that Saviolo would have needed a native English speaker to collaborate with on his Practice, points to Florio as the most obvious candidate (60).
59 OED "dastardly, adj.2"
60 OED "dastardly, adj.1"
personified in the play, is described in the dramatis personae as "[a] fencer. His clothes red" (165). In introducing himself, Choller claims to "have learn't a mystery" that includes "our stocatas, imbrocataas, madritas, puntas and puntas reversas; our stramisons, passatas, carricadas, mazzas and incartatas." When another character asks "what's all this," Choller replies that they are "terms in our dialect to pusle desperate ignorance" (175). The hot-tempered Choller does eventually fight with two other characters, but the three figures "fall...by the eares" in the best comic tradition (197). Choller never draws his weapon and certainly never demonstrates any of the fencing terms he rattles off; these are revealed to be ciphers which ultimately signify nothing and serve only to impress in their indecipherability. Although French fencing techniques had supplanted those of Italy in England's academies when Nabbes was still a small child, Italian fencing terms and the threats that accompanied them – rather than the methods the terms referred to and the violence such threats promised – continued to embody the essence of rapier fencing in many English imaginations for almost half a century. The duelists tongues, not their swords, made the noise uniquely associated with their technique.

Equally damning for rapier fencers was the emphasis of dueling manuals on instructing their readers not just in fencing technique, but also in the proper conduct of a courtier and the exact linguistic forms of respect that a gentleman should expect to observe. In some cases, the discussion of such considerations threatened to overwhelm a book's treatment of actual swordplay. The full title of Saviolo's manual, the most important translated into English during the sixteenth century, reads Vincentio Saviolo,
his practise, in two bookes, the first intreating of the use of the Rapier and Dagger, the second of Honor and honorable quarrels. The second book is, by a substantial number of pages, the longer of the two.\textsuperscript{61} Just as rapier training was reduced by its critics to a collection of harmless words useful only to "pusle desperate ignorance," the elaborately formalized system of courtesy that supposedly shaped and regulated the duel itself was mocked as little more than a means of producing and accepting flowery lies. Focusing on precise standards of verbal propriety and flattery, dueling manuals served as templates for the development of a purely artificial civility. Such manuals assumed that "dissimilation was an integral part of civil conversation…because social life took precedence over inner life" (Peltonen 30). Peltonen points to passages from both Montaigne and Raleigh that mock "the absurd nature of giving the lie" since "the whole theory of courtesy implied nothing so much as constant lying" (127).\textsuperscript{62} What the gentleman saw as courteous behavior expressing his elite social status, however, the merchant or servingman, excluded from the community established by such conduct manuals, might well interpret as simple dishonesty. As the duelist's emphasis on language came to displace the actual violence of the duel in the minds of many, that language was inevitably associated with deception.

The duello's supporters claimed, of course, that the duel itself existed only to enforce the maintenance of a necessary code of civility. Problematically, that code's

\textsuperscript{61} Most scholars now accept Ruth Kelso's contention that in fact, Saviolo "borrows the whole of Honor and Honorable Quarrels, the second part of his Practice, from Muzio's Il Duello," an earlier sixteenth century Italian text (33).

\textsuperscript{62} In essence, to "give someone the lie" simply meant the act of calling them a liar. This symbolically important insult became the subject of much precise definition and analysis in the duello manuals of the sixteenth century.
stringency meant that the motives behind any given duel were themselves often nothing more than verbal slights or insults. One of Low's most interesting observations regarding depictions of the duel of honor on the early modern stage is that the sorts of conflicts that precipitated duels in real life almost never gave rise to duels in plays. Even when playwrights treated the duel unsatirically, they “tended not to use quarrels over precedence as the motivation for duels...instead, the quarrels that instigated staged duels usually sprang from serious family wrongs." Low sees this pattern as an attempt to present duels in such a way that "the audience might more easily empathize with the story (Manhood 94), but in so doing the playwrights tacitly acknowledged that the conflicts at the root of duels in real life were untheatrical. The fact is that the duel's typical motivations were no more dramaturgically promising (at least outside of comedy) than its technical and cultural characteristics. Although physical violence could certainly result in a challenge, dueling manuals and the culture of the duello as a whole focused far more often on the elaborate guidelines regarding degrees of "the lie" and what sort of satisfaction such insults demanded. Much like the duel itself, which most individuals were more likely to encounter on a fencing manual page than on a London street, the motivations for the duel of honor existed primarily as words. In the end, the elaborate system of verbal courtesy that had been imported from Italy along with the rapier threatened to displace the swordplay itself. 63 Combining the duelist's code of conduct

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63 Clark actually sees the replacement of violence by its codifying language as a conscious intent of the duello's elaborate code. For Clark, the precise etiquette of sending and receiving challenges represents an attempt by proponents of the duel to limit violence by supplanting it with language, in much the same way that the crown sought to supplant that violence through the language of the courts. As Clark puts it, "dueling constitutes a discipline of brute force that both apologists and polemists were self-consciously trying to subordinate to themselves by circumscribing it or replacing it with formal ceremonies and
with suspicions about the reality of the rapier's deadliness, and building on a tradition of
the *miles gloriosus* that provided a template for the juxtaposing of valiant speech and
cowardly action, English Renaissance playwrights developed the braggart, cowardly,
Italianated fencer into one the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century's great comic
stock characters.

"The lie" in all of its minutely differentiated degrees was an especially popular
target on London's stages. Ben Jonson recorded his objection to the physical
insubstantiality of duelists' motivations in his copy of Clement Edmonds's *Observations
vpon Caesars Commentaries*; Herford and Simpson note that Jonson underlined the
following passage:

[T]he word lye is of as great consequence, as any stabbe or villanie watsoeuer....But I would faine learne when honor first came to be measured with words, for from the beginning it was not so. Caesar was often called to his face theefe, and dronkard, without any further matter; and the liberty of inuectiues, which great personages vsed one against another, as it beganne, so it ended with words. (326)

Jonson later put a very similar sentiment in the mouth of *The New Inn's* Lovel, one of the playwright's few idealized characters. Lovel expresses nothing but scorn for the duello,
objecting that "the things true valour is exercised about / Are poverty, restraint, captivity,
/ Banishment, loss of children, long disease...Not trivial things which but require our confidence" (176). He laments that gentlemen "are now come to that delicacy / And tenderness of sense, we think an insolence / Worse than an injury, bear words worse than

writing" ("Writing" 105). Regardless of whether or not we accept any such motivation at the root of works by authors like Saviolo, the almost universal scorn for such "formal ceremonies" seen in English Renaissance drama suggests that playhouse audiences failed to see the social virtues of such a system.
deeds" (178). As Low points out, the vast majority of Jonson's peers seem to have
shared this point of view, and the non-comic duels which appeared onstage invariably
sprang from the kinds of motivations listed by Lovel rather than the "tenderness of sense"
cultivated by dueling manuals like Saviolo's.

After the duelist's formalized language of courtesy had given way to his
formalized language of insult, the language of insult finally escalated into...yet more
language. Just as the duel of honor's motivation usually sprang from verbal rather than
physical wrongs, its initial steps took the form of a written rather than a physical
confrontation. The written challenge came to play a central role in dueling culture, and
Peltonen argues that these elaborate rhetorical exchanges to arrange the specifics of the
duel became almost as important as the duel itself, and, for their participants, just as
“real” (5-6). For a semi-illiterate population, of course, such exchanges did not exist
with the same degree of reality as the actual violence that they supposedly facilitated.
Not only did the centrality to the duello of written exchanges bar the majority of early
modern Englishmen from participating in that culture (which was, of course, the point), it

64 Lovell's lecture on the evils of dueling hits on most of the major objections voiced by the enemies of
rapier fencing. See, for example, his insistence that true valor "springs out of reason / And tends to perfect
honesty; the scope / Is always honour and the public good: / It is no valour for a private cause." (173).
Interestingly, Jonson holds the dubious distinction of having personally killed two opponents in single
combat, once using a short sword (during his time as an infantryman in the low countries during the early
1590s) and once using a rapier (during his famous duel with Gabriel Spencer in 1598) (Riggs 18-9, 49-50).
Jonson's plays, however, uniformly valorize the kind of military (or pseudo-military) courage associated
with his earlier encounter and denigrate the foolish (and usually deceptive) braggadocio of the rapier duelist.
Clearly, even among some members of English Renaissance society who felt obligated to participate in the
culture of the duello, the importance of more traditional standards of masculine violence persisted.

65 Gregory Semenza identifies a similar trend within the traditionally aristocratic sport of hawking, in which
writers of hawking manuals "deemphasiz[ed] the physical aspect of the sport, in favor of a pedantic
knowledge of its intricate details." As Semenza points out, the shift served primarily to protect the
activity's social status: "Athleticism could be achieved by anyone. Latinity was a different story" (Sport,
Politics 45). As rapier dueling demonstrates, however, such protection came at the risk of fracturing
formerly uniform cultural standards, such as the basic characteristics of masculine identity.
also added another layer of obfuscation that rendered the signs and ceremonies of violence even more inaccessible and opaque to the excluded population. The theater, as an art form accessible to the lettered and the unlettered alike, was a natural site for the acknowledgement of a largely illiterate population's suspicions regarding a secretive and textually-dependent system of personal violence, and as a unique locus for the intersection of ornate language and physical theatricality, it offered an especially appropriate environment for the presentation of figures whose defining characteristic was a discontinuity between action and speech.

*The Little French Lawyer's man that will all others kill, and last himself*

The most complete satire of rapier fencing and dueling culture may be Massinger and Fletcher's *The Little French Lawyer*, an early seventeenth century city comedy that takes in practically the entire range of anti-rapier criticisms examined thus far. When the young gallant Cleremont finds himself abandoned by his second immediately before a duel, he must desperately seek a replacement among a series of passing strangers. After several failures, Cleremont finally recruits a small, timid lawyer with the bookish name of La-writ. Although willing to assist, La-writ admits that he can't speak to the quality of his sword, never having drawn it before, and Cleremont must ultimately help the diminutive lawyer in removing the rapier from the scabbard it seems to have rusted into.  

66 However, despite employing the unusual tactic of fighting with his eyes closed,
La-writ proceeds to defeat and disarm not one but two opposing duelists. Following his victory, La-writ becomes "possest...with the sprit of fighting, and quarrels with all people" (III.ii.24). Having neglected his cases in the fervor of his newfound belligerence, La-writ finds that the judge Vertaigne has ruled against his clients. When the lawyer responds by sending the judge a challenge, Clermont objects that Vertaigne is "no sword man...hee's a Judge, an old man," but La-writ will not be appeased and advises Clermont to "let him learne," since one is "[n]ever too old to be a Gentleman" (III.ii.107-11).

Vertaigne himself expresses disbelief that the individual who he knew as "a little figent man...a notable talking knave" could have transformed so completely (III.ii.160-2).

Realizing that reason will not prevail with La-writ, Vertaigne arranges for a foolish kinsman to serve as his proxy. Vertaigne describes his kinsman, Sampson, as a man "much of [La-writ's] abilitie, / His wit and carriage," and resolving to set "these two pitch barells together," he arranges a time and place for the combat (III.175-89). For their parts, Sampson and La-writ are equally happy to slaughter one another despite never having met. When asked what he will do should La-writ relent, Sampson replies that "Hee dies relenting, / I cannot helpe it, he must die relenting, / If he pray, praying, ipso could still be effectively wielded. The crown seems to have taken such claims quite seriously, issuing proclamations limiting the maximum acceptable length of swords in 1557, 1562, 1566, and 1580 (see Hughes and Larkin, proclamations 432, 493, 542, and 646). Attempts to control rapier length must have had little or no effect, however, since William Harrison could claim in 1587 that many Englishmen carried swords "of a great length and longer than the like used in any other country, whereby each one pretendeth to have the more advantage of his enemy...But as many orders have been taken for the intolerable length of these weapons, so I see as yet small redress" (237-8). Unable to control the excessive length of rapiers, the weapon's late sixteenth century enemies focused on calling into question the usefulness of the sword's exaggerated dimensions, a strategy hinted at by Harrison's skeptical "pretendeth." Silver mockingly dismisses the rapier's usefulness on the battlefield, where "there is no roome for them to drawe their Bird-spits," and La-writ's inability to draw his rapier from its scabbard unaided may spring from its impractical length. As always, that which one camp construes as an expression of masculine identity ("the greatest gallant" having the "longest Rapier," as Stow puts it), the opposing camp seeks to reinterpret as a marker of physical harmlessness.
facto, praying" (IV.ii.5-7). La-writ, similarly bloody-minded, vows that "were there no more cosins in the world I'd kill him, I do mean, sir, to kill all my Lords Kindred. For every Cause a cousin." When asked what he will do if Vertaigne has only one cousin, La-writ replies that he will then kill "[t]he next a kin then, to his Lordships favour, the man he smiles upon." La-writ sums up the absurd extremity of his newfound ethos by telling Cleremont, "Give me the man, that will all others kill, / And last himselfe" (IV.iv.8-23).

When the two duelists finally meet, they greet one another in the affected language of the courtier, with Sampson claiming that he has "come fairly, to kill him honestly," and La-writ responding that "I come to kill my Lords / Nephew like a gentleman, and so I kisse his hand" (IV.iv.40-2). The fight itself, of course, is all an elaborate joke played on the two foolish combatants, and, in a scene that echoes Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, both fighters are stripped of their swords. Fletcher and Massinger improve on Shakespeare's comic conclusion, however, in also having Sampson and La-writ remove their doublets, since the garments are "too stiff" for the rapier combat. Unarmed and largely undressed, La-writ and Sampson are left shivering and alone to find their own way home. La-writ cleverly advises Sampson to "kick me, and beat me as I goe, and I'le beat thee to, to keepe us warme" (IV.iv.115-27). As they exit, kicking and beating one another, the pair encounter the crippled soldier Champernell who soundly thrashes La-writ, saying that he "must beate him, beate him
into his business aye, he will be lost els." This therapeutic assault finally cures La-writ of his passion for fighting, and he thanks Champernell for revealing that he had been "possest," which he "never understood, before [the] beating" (IV.vi.162-76). Pacified and chastened, the little French lawyer returns to his clients and gives up the ways of the duelist for good.

La-writ serves as an exemplary symbol for the alleged emptiness of the rapier fencer's swordsmanship and moral code. The diminutive duelist demonstrates the rapier's ability to render size and strength irrelevant, making it impossible to draw conclusions about a combatant's capacity for violence on the basis of his appearance. Even more troublingly, La-writ's instantaneous success (sans eyesight) against trained opponents suggests that the mystery concealed by the rapier instructors' "secret fight" is actually the utter irrelevance of their teachings. The rapier, worn initially for mere fashion by an individual who cannot even draw it unaided from its scabbard, turns a meek and bookishly-named "talking knave" into a bloodthirsty madman, hungering for murder with no regard whatsoever for the rule of law, the license of a gentle, the demands of Christian mercy, or even the most basic expectations of normal human motivation. The duelist's bloodlust is juxtaposed with the absurd conversational niceties demanded by the code of the duello, and his weapon is shown to be incapable of harming a man armored in

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67 Champernell, lamed in battle, seems to represent the supporters of an anti-rapier military tradition who objected to the weapon's uselessness in war. Upon being mocked for his infirmity by the gallants Verdoone and Beaupre earlier in the play, Champernell observes that "You are indeed, fine gallants, and fight bravely / I'th' City with your tongues, but in the field / Have neither spirit to dare, nor power to doe, / Your swords, are all ledd there." (III.i.20-3).

68 The depth of La-writ's associations with empty language actually go beyond his name, his profession, and the hollow civility of his exchanges with Sampson. In the moments before his initial duel, the lawyer decides to fight with his bag of legal documents slung in front of his body as a form of comically
nothing more substantial than a stiff doublet. Finally, and predictably, the climactic duel deflates into the therapeutic beating ultimately suffered by so many harmless, braggart rapier duelists in early modern English city comedies. Here (and elsewhere on the English Renaissance stage) standards of male identity are ultimately maintained through physical combat, but the system of enforcement exists in spite of, not because of, the presence of the rapier. It is the non-lethal cudgeling, beating, and kicking of the would-be duelist that reestablishes society's standards of civility and the capacity for masculine violence.

**The sounds and symbolism of early modern swordplay**

The association between rapier fencing and deceptive language on the English Renaissance stage made the weapon an appealing point of focus not just for literal depictions of fraudulent masculinity, but also for more metaphorical representations of dishonesty and the decay of social values. For instance, in Richard Brome's *The

ineffectual armor. Though his inexplicable skill in combat renders such precautions unnecessary, the gesture's uselessness reflects the ways in which the rapier's critics defined the weapon in terms of language's inability to successfully replace physical action. La-writ's papers can no more perform the protective function of a buckler than rapiers (and their reams of printed and written language) could perform the short sword's function in constructing masculine identity through public violence.

69 Other literary forms drew similar comparisons. For example, William Davenant, seeking a metaphor to criticize revenge as cowardly and underhanded in his narrative poem *Gondibert*, looks to the respective cultural associations of broadsword and poniard:

> When thou giv'st death, thy Banners be display'd!  
> And move not till an open Foe appears!  
> Courts lurking war shews Justice is afraid;  
> And no broad Sword, but a coss Poniard wears. (189)

Gosson employs a nearly identical (though less explicit) system of metaphors in linking the corruption of modern language and the corruption of modern swordplay:
Sparagus Garden, Sir Hugh Moneylack and his two confederates, Springe and Brittleware, seduce the rural naïf, Tim Hoyden, who has come to London with dreams of acquiring the manners of a gentleman. The values that Moneylack instills in Hoyden — "to like no mans wit but his owne: to slight that which he understands not: to lend mony, & never look for't agen...to owe much, but pay little: to sell land, but buy none...to fight for a whore: to cherish a Bawd, and defie a trades-man" — are the stuff of any number of similar narratives of urban corruption, but along with such morals Moneylack also trains Hoyden in the use of "single Rapier complemt." The "bouts" which Hoyden observes are played by Springe and Brittleware, during which they exchange unctuously fawning and rhetorically elaborate praise for one another (Springe greets Brittleware as "Noble Master Fine-wit, the single example of Court-Ceremony, if my apprehension deale fairely with me"). This courtesy, of course, is entirely feigned, and after each compliment the speaker offers an aside in which he reveals his genuine, scornful opinion of his opposite.

For Brome, the rapier symbolizes the completely empty social affectations associated

The knowledge in weapons may bee gathered to be necessary in a common wealth, by the Senators of Rome, who in time of Catilins conspiracies, caused Schooles of Fencers to be erected in Capua, that teaching the people howe to warde, and how to locke, how to thrust, and how to strike, they might the more falsely coape with their enemies. As the Arte of Logique was first sette downe for a rule, by which wee might Confirmare nostra, et refutare aliena, confime our owne reasons, and confute the allegations of our aduersaryes, the end beeing trueth, which once fished out by the harde encounter of eithers Argumentes, like fyer by the knocking of Flintes togethier, both partes shoulde be satisfied and striue no more...Those dayes are now chaunged, the skil of Logicians, is exercysed in caueling, the cunning of Fencers applied to quarrelling: they, thinke themselues no Scholers, if they bee not able to finde out a knotte in euery rushe; these, no men, if for stirring of a strawe, they proue not their valure vpon some bodyes fleshe.

The "harde encounter" ending without (metaphorical) bloodshed and resulting in a truth "like fyer by the knocking of flints togethier" certainly sounds like Silver's idealized short sword combat and the spark of a slashing blow against a buckler. The deadly thrusting of a rapier, in contrast, would produce no sparks (or truth) of any kind, no matter how diligently the duelist has searched for an excuse to "prooue...[his] valure vpon some bodyes fleshe."
with London gallants, a variety of hollow performance that has nothing whatsoever to do with truth or honor.

Like Brome and his "single rapier compliment," Thomas Middleton also uses the image of the sword-made-word as a means of likening different kinds of language to their equivalent forms of violence. In *The Phoenix*, an extended metaphor which links various legal tactics to symbolically appropriate weapons (such as a writ of delay to a long sword) results in the following comparison between rapiers and short swords:

*Falso:* [W]hat call you sword and buckler then?

*Tangle:* Oh! that's out of use now! Sword and buckler was called a good conscience, but that weapon's left long ago. That was too manly a fight, too sound a weapon for these our days. 'Slid, we are scarce able to lift up a buckler now, our arms are so bound to the pox. One good bang upon a buckler would make most of our gentlemen fly i' pieces. 'Tis not for these lindy times. Our lawyers are good rapier and dagger men; they'll quickly dispatch your - money.

A "good conscience," like the sword and buckler, is "too sound" for the play's modern breed of emasculated gentlemen, men incapable of withstanding (morally or physically) violence as direct, unambiguous, and "honest" as that offered by the sword and buckler of old. Such men prefer the rapier, a weapon that, like Middleton's rapacious and unscrupulous lawyers, dispatches through deceit.  

70 As in *The Little French Lawyer*, the association here between lawyers and rapier combatants is no accident. Many commentators mock the pseudo-legalistic precision of the duello's linguistic and behavioral codes, and the lawyer presents a perfect parallel to the caricatured duelist: a man who uses an alien tongue both to mark himself off as a member of an exclusive (albeit much ridiculed) community and to intimidate and manipulate those fellow men who lack such membership. Inevitably, of course, satires of both lawyers and duelists ultimately reveal their language to be the emptiest variety of shibboleth, a cant constructed to uphold no values whatsoever beyond the immediate interests of the speaker.
Middleton’s use of the word "bang" is certainly apt, as it communicates not merely the substantial force employed in sword and buckler play, but also the resounding noise which that force inevitably produced. In contrast to the rapier and its emphasis on words and speech, the noise most commonly associated with sword and buckler combat was the actual sound of the violence itself, a sound which undoubtedly constituted a major element of the "great shew of much furie" made by the brawlers of Stow’s description.72 Certainly such noise figured prominently in later recollections of the sword and buckler's heyday. The belligerent servingman Coomes in Two Angry Women of Abington nostalgically recalls his trusty sword, but the blows he remembers with such fondness landed not on flesh but on steel:

I had a sword, ay, the flower of Smithfield for a sword, a right fox, i' faith; with that, an a man had come over with a smooth and a sharp stroke, it would have cried twang, and then...come in with a cross blow, and over the pick of his buckler two ells long, it would have cried twang, twang, metal, metal: but a dog hath his day; 'tis gone, and there are few good ones made now. (F3r)

71 The counterargument made by rapier proponents was that dull-witted, lower-class brawlers were constitutionally fitted to bludgeoning. Hale characterizes the Masters of Defence’s pupils as "Butchers, Byt-makers, Shoee-makers, or Truncke-makers, men envendor'd to the hide, rather able to bear blowes then auyod them" (C7r). The cudgelings that occurred on the English Renaissance stage, however, were often delivered by the very butchers and shoemakers derided by Hale, and the recipients of the blows tended to be the gallants to whom Hale addresses his text.

72 Indeed, it was the characteristic that became the very name for such combatants. "Swashbuckler," a term for a "swaggering bravo or ruffian" first used in the mid-sixteenth century (OED "swashbuckler, n.a"), derived from the verb "to swash," meaning "To make a noise as of swords clashing or of a sword beating on a shield" (OED "swash, v.3"), which itself seems to have derived from a slightly earlier use of the same word to mean "Expressive of the fall of a heavy body or blow: With a crash" (OED "swash, adv. A"). Sword and buckler fighters thus came to be quite literally defined by the noise of their combat.
Coomes's reminiscences illustrate the centrality of sound to the spectacle of sword and buckler combat on London's streets, but noise was likely to have played an even more important role in the purely fictional exertions of actors performing combats on London's stages. The non-verbal elements of early modern theater remain, of course, frustratingly evanescent. Ironically, the enemies of such sword and buckler stage combat have left us the most extensive record of its auditory impact. More commonly than the trumpet, the drum, or even the cannon, the clash of sword and buckler is cited by early modern commentators seeking to characterize the theater as a place of ear-splitting noise. Webster, in describing "An excellent Actor," observes that his voice should be "not lower then the prompter, nor loawder then the foile and Target" (42), while Jonson's fictional lover of silence, Morose, singles out sword and buckler fighting as the very

T' avoyde, to warde, retiring to give ground  
They reke not, nor hath nimble[n]esse heere a part:
Rage and revenge bereave all vse of Arte.  
Their Swordes at halfe Sword horribly resound  
You might here mette: No foote from steppe doth parte
("On cowardice, the mother of cruelty," vol. II, no. 27, 401)

Far more venerable authorities than the clownish Coomes associated the "twang" of sword against metal with virtuous violence. Montaigne quotes the following passage from Tasso in order to contrast rapier fencing's overemphasis on skill with the admirably straightforward expression of physical force found in traditional slashing swordplay:

T' avoyde, to warde, retiring to give ground
They reke not, nor hath nimble[n]esse heere a part:
Rage and revenge bereave all vse of Arte.
Their Swordes at halfe Sword horribly resound
You might here mette: No foote from steppe doth parte

("On cowardice, the mother of cruelty," vol. II, no. 27, 401)

Alfred Harbage observes that Elizabethan audiences experienced scenes of warfare almost entirely through sound: "The techniques which the Elizabethan presenters devised [for staging battles] recognized the impossibility of creating an illusion of mass combat by visual means. The audience did not see the battles so much as hear them. What it saw was displays of skill by two or occasionally four combatants on that small sector of the battlefield symbolized by the stage. Often it did not see even that" (Theatre 52). Harbage cites Tamburlaine as an example of a play revolving completely around giant battles that nevertheless stages almost no combat whatsoever.

In fact, the period's theatrical swordplay as a whole has left modern scholars with precious little direct evidence of its existence. In the vast majority of cases, playwrights seem to have been satisfied with inserting a perfunctory "they fight" and leaving the specifics to be worked out in the playhouse. As Charles Edelman points out, "[w]ithin the very few eyewitness accounts of Shakespeare’s plays in Elizabethan times... there is not a single descriptive reference to any of the swordfights" (1).
Having come to regret his marriage to Epicoene, Morose wishes himself anywhere else, even the loudest imaginable locations, such as "a belfry, at Westminster Hall, i’ the Cockpit, at the fall of a stag, the Tower Warf...London Bridge, Paris Garden, Billingsgate, when the noises are at their height and loudest. Nay, I would sit out a play that were nothing but fights at sea, drum, trumpet and target!" (4.4.13-8). In the prologue to 1613’s *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare warns that "they / That come to hear a merry bawdy play, / A noise of targets, or to see a fellow / In a long motley coat guarded with yellow, / Will be deceived" (13-7). The noise of short sword and target combat must have rung in the ears of audiences long after Shakespeare's day, for over twenty years later, in 1635, the prologue to Thomas Nabbes's *Hannibal and Scipio* assured the audience that its "[l]adies [need not] feare the horrid sight: / And the more horrid noise of target fight / By the blue-coated Stage-keepers: our sphaeres / Have better musick to delight your eares." Along similar lines, William Davenant's prologue to *The Unfortunate Lovers* looks back with condescending nostalgia on the "silly Ancestors" of his 1638 audience, those who would have "with...delight...expect[ed] a jigge or Target fight, / A furious tale of Troy, which they ne're thought / Was weekly written, so 'twere strongly fought" (19-30).

Bruce Smith reminds us that a theater like the Globe was actually "a device for propagating sound," in which "the stage...acted as a gigantic sounding board: made of reverberative material, it translated vibrations in the air above into standing waves in the air underneath, producing a harmonically rich amplification of the voices of actors positioned on top" (208-9). Needless to say it would also have produced substantial amplification of swordplay as well, much to the distress of a figure like Morose.

The appeal of slashing swordplay’s acoustic element may also have figured into the sounds of another of Renaissance England's wildly popular entertainments: the morris dance. In one of the morris dance's variations, dancers carry sticks which they periodically strike against one another, creating a loud "clack." Smith points out that the dance "seems to have taken shape as choreographed combat" (144), a combat in which the noise of battle has become formalized into the beat of the dance's rhythm.
If the noise of theatrical sword and buckler combat came in for widespread ridicule among early seventeenth century playwrights, however, the ubiquity of that ridicule merely reflects the immense popularity of such spectacles during the preceding decades, a popularity that sprang from the direct visibility (and audibility) of slashing swordplay's violence. The din of sword against target, though it may have offended the sensibilities of some audience members, served as proof of the force of the blow. In contrast to the noisy boasts and threats of the Italianated duelist with his meaningless foreign fencing terms, the crash of steel that characterized sword and buckler fights left no troubling gap between threat and performance; a combatant's violent capacity was demonstrated rather than promised, and demonstrated with a direct, literal physicality that made it naturally theatrical. The rapier, though indisputably a more efficient tool for killing, simply could not match the performative force of England's more traditional weapons. Decades after it had displaced the short sword in actual combat, the rapier continued to be mocked on the English stage as a weapon of cowardly braggarts who promised much and performed little. Characters like Beaumont and Fletcher's Swordmen undeniably generate noise, but some varieties of noise were more trustworthy than others in early modern London and its theaters. In *A King and No King*, the subplot of Bessus and his rapier instructors does finally reach a climax of violence and sound, but that climax does not consist of the cacophonous "bangs" of a final, epic sword fight; instead, the resolution concludes with craven screams of pain as Bessus and his teachers are shamefully kicked about the stage by Bacurius. With their "quiet swords" taken, their
"killing tongues" silenced, and their cowardice revealed at last, the humiliated Swordmen finally limp away supported by Bessus. George Silver would have cheered.
CHAPTER 2
POINTS ENVENOMED AND LIES DIRECT:
THE TREACHERY AND COWARDICE OF SHAKESPEARE'S RAPIER
DEULISTS

Rapier length and the (mis)measure of masculine honor

To take the measure of Shakespeare's views on rapier fencing, we might begin by looking at two scenes in which his characters take the measure of the physical swords themselves. The rapier's length was not only one of its defining characteristics, it was also a point of contention for the weapons opponents, including the English crown, which attempted to regulate rapier length on no fewer than four separate occasions.\(^1\) The would-be duelist, however, had strong reasons for wanting to carry the longest blade possible, since an emphasis on the thrust meant that even a small length advantage could theoretically prove decisive in a rapier fight. As Di Grassi observes, rapier "thrustes, though litle and weake, when they enter but iiij. fingers into the bodie, are wont to kill" (qtd. in Anglo 112). For this reason, it became customary for combatants to compare the length of their weapons before fighting, in order to ensure that neither duelist's sword conferred an unfair advantage. In theory, the practice enforced fair play and confirmed that the duel's outcome depended solely on the skill and valor of its participants. In Shakespeare's works, however, the measuring of swords takes on very different associations, associations that serve not to demonstrate the legitimacy of the duel of honor but rather to link it with treachery, deception, empty bravado, and cowardice.

\(^1\) See Chapter One, p.86.
2.1: Illustrations from Italian rapier instructor Nicoletto Giganti's 1628 fencing manual *Scola, overo teatro*. Note the grid lines, indicating the primacy of precisely controlled distance in thrusting swordplay, and thus the importance of sword length.

Shakespeare's most famous duelist fails to verify the nature of his opponent's weapon, with tragic consequences. In plotting the murder of Hamlet that will occur
during the play's climactic fencing match, Claudius points out to Laertes that the prince's own honorable nature will allow the assassins to arrange for a fatal "accident" during the fight:

He, being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and, in a pass of practice,
Requite him for your father. (4.7.106-11)

Claudius's remark ensures that the audience will closely observe the moment when the duelists select their swords, and Shakespeare uses that focus to highlight the danger of deception inherent to rapier fencing. In preparing for the match, Laertes rejects the first weapon he picks up ("This is too heavy; let me see another"), after which he presumably chooses the unbated rapier instead, while Hamlet, seemingly taking the first sword proffered by Osric, fails to exercise sufficient caution:

**HAMLET:** This likes me well. These foils have all a length?
**OSRIC:** Ay, my good lord. (5.2.202-4)

Though the rapiers may indeed "have all a length," Hamlet's decision not to actually examine the blades himself allows the fatal treachery to go undetected. Shakespeare thus

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2 Note that before Laertes contributes the idea of poisoning the rapier's point, and before the king suggests the "back or second" (4.7.125) of the tainted drink, the original plan calls for a simple fencing accident. Such mishaps certainly occurred, most famously in the case of the fencing instructor John Turner. In an ill-fated 1604 practice bout with rapier and dagger, Turner put out the eye of his student, the Baron of Sanquhar. Eight years later the Baron finally exacted his revenge by having Turner assassinated. Although the Baron was hung for his part in the murder, Turner seems to have had a troubling habit of such accidents; he had previously killed another opponent during a friendly bout by making a thrust through the eye (Aylward 81).
transforms the measuring of swords from a formal proof of the duel's legitimacy into an essential precaution necessitated by the rapier's associations with deception. *Hamlet* suggests that such formal ceremonies dominate rapier fencing not because of its interest in a strict code of masculine honor, but rather because the weapon's very nature invites the duel's participants to undermine any such code.

While Shakespeare treats the measuring of weapons as a necessary safeguard for a highly dubious form of combat in *Hamlet*, in *As You Like It* he satirizes the same practice as an example of the cowardly duelist's empty shows of false valor. The clown Touchstone, in listing his qualifications as a courtier, describes a quarrel in which he and his opponent resolved their differences "[u]pon a lie seven times removed" (5.4.64). Lampooning the absurdly precise degrees and variations of "giving the lie" as defined in books like Saviolo's *Practice*, Touchstone recounts the gradually escalating insults and counter-insults that would normally have led to a rapier duel:

I did dislike the cut of a certain courtier's beard. He sent me word if I said his beard was not well cut, he was in the mind it was. This is called the Retort Courteous. If I sent him word again it was not well cut, he would send me word he cut it to please himself. This is called the Quip Modest. If again it was not well cut, he disabled my judgment. This is called the Reply Churlish. If again it was not well cut, he would answer I spake not true. This is called the Reproof Valiant. If again it was not well cut, he would say I lie. This is called the Countercheck Quarrelsome. And so to the Lie Circumstantial and the Lie Direct. (5.4.65-75)

The duelists' elaborate rhetorical attacks and parries mimic the rhythm of actual combat, forming a bloodless, epistolary duel-before-the-duel. In the end, however, this war of words is as close as the two courtiers ever get to an actual fight, since Touchstone and his
opposite prove too cowardly to carry the ritual through to its bloody conclusion; "I durst go no further than the Lie Circumstantial," Touchstone admits, and his adversary "durst not give me the Lie Direct; and so we measured swords, and parted" (5.4.77-9). Here, the act of measuring swords (with obvious phallic undertones)\(^3\) actually displaces the violence of the combat itself, reducing the duel of honor to nothing more than a comparison of fashion accessories. With the techniques of rhetoric supplanting the techniques of swordplay, and the ceremony that should begin the combat concluding it, Touchstone's "duel" reveals the rapier and its code of conduct to be nothing more than the fraudulent symbols of a coward's equally fraudulent masculine identity.

In both *Hamlet* and *As You Like It*, the formal measuring of swords underlines the rapier's associations with deception. When Shakespeare focuses on the weapon's reputation for destructive lethality, that deception takes the form of treacherous violence and assassination. When he focuses instead on the opposite but equally pejorative image of the rapier as the weapon of harmless braggarts, the deception takes the form of an empty bellicosity and a performance of the duello's linguistic ceremonies in the absence of its physical violence. In the analysis that follows I will attempt to demonstrate the striking consistency with which Shakespeare uses these two tropes – one tragic and one comic – in depicting rapiers and rapier combat. Reading Shakespeare's references to swordplay through the lens of Chapter One's reconstruction of anti-rapier rhetoric, we

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3 Just as a weapon’s relative lethality could either bolster or undermine masculine identity, depending on cultural perspective, an excessively long weapon could be a sign of either manliness or cowardice. Stow observes that in the London of the 1570s, “he was held the greatest gallant, that had the deepest Ruffe, and longest Rapier” (869), but in his *Conversations with Drummond*, Jonson brags that Gabriel Spencer's sword had been ten inches longer than his own (Riggs 49). Presumably Jonson saw his ability to kill Spencer despite such a handicap as a further confirmation of his prowess as a duelist.
will see the ways in which his plays repeatedly echo the anti-rapier faction's arguments about swordplay's relationship to masculinity, personal honor, and national identity.

Again and again, Shakespeare depicts the rapier as a symbol of the corrupting influences that threaten to undermine society’s established standards of male personal honor, either tragically, as in the villainous plotting of *Hamlet*’s usurping Danish king, or comically, as in the hollow rhetoric of *As You Like It*’s fashionable but cowardly courtiers.

**Past problems with reading Shakespeare's rapiers**

One might argue that no other early modern playwright left a more extensive and varied statement on the late sixteenth century changes in English swordplay than Shakespeare, and certainly no playwright's participation in that discourse has attracted such widespread critical interest. At the same time, no playwright's implicit views on the topic have been so commonly misinterpreted. In the past, discussions about Shakespeare's attitude toward different varieties of swordplay have often been clouded by a failure to differentiate dueling from a variety of other related but distinct forms of single combat. For example, Sergio Rossi observes that *Romeo and Juliet* "expresses a veiled conviction of [the duel's] uselessness," but Rossi then goes on to suggest that Shakespeare's opinion of dueling changed over the course of his career, given the evidence of "later plays such as *King Lear, Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, in which the duel is accepted without reserve, though with various nuances" (114). Charles Edelman asserts that "Romeo’s encounter with Tybalt and Posthumus’s with Giacomo both include sufficient elements of the duello to indicate that Shakespeare is not consistently
contemptuous of the dueling code per se, but of its being carried to extremes” (22).

Dover Wilson interprets Hotspur's scornful reference to the “sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales” as mockery of Hal's old-fashioned loyalty to outmoded forms of swordplay.

Building on this reading of Hotspur's insult, Wilson claims that “in his early plays Shakespeare’s sympathies are clearly with the old fashion that George Silver loved; but Hotspur’s words in 1 Henry IV mark a change, and when we get to Hamlet we find…the prince of Denmark a keen scrimer” (ix-x).

A number of problematic conflations and mischaracterizations bedevil the above generalizations about Shakespeare's views on rapier fencing. For instance, the "duels" in Macbeth and Cymbeline have far more to do with military combat than private bloodshed. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the military uselessness of the rapier was actually one of its opponents' favorite criticisms, so a number of the combats cited by Rossi and Edelman reflect not Shakespeare's views on the duel of honor but rather his views on its martial opposite. As for Hotspur, there could hardly be a more obvious champion of military traditionalism. His reference to Hal as a "sword and buckler prince" is a class insult that has little to do with the sword and much to do with the buckler, a small, cheap variety of shield carried by servingmen and highly unsuitable to an aristocrat of any era.\(^4\)

In the case of King Lear, the only fair fight in the play – the combat between Edmund and Edgar – draws not on the clandestine, sixteenth century duel, but rather on the public,

\(^4\) For his own part, Hotspur undoubtedly wields some variety of long sword, the weapon of the medieval nobility (an in depth examination of military swords likely to have been used on the English Renaissance stage appears in Edelman 25-7). Moreover, even if we ignore the obvious conclusion that a military character in a military context would carry a military sword, Hotspur describes himself after the battle as "[b]reathless and faint, leaning upon my sword" (1.3.31). The long, narrow, flexible rapier (an object likened by Falstaff to a "tailor's yard" [1 Henry IV 2.5.228]) would hardly have provided much support.
medieval trial by combat, a tradition with almost no connection at all to the Italian duel of honor.\(^5\) Indeed, the trial by combat was precisely the kind of lawful, public, traditional violence commonly praised by writers like Silver. In *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, some form of rapier combat undeniably occurs, but the outcomes in each case can hardly be characterized as an endorsement of the duello. With the pitfalls of past confusions in mind, the analysis that follows will take pains to differentiate between the many different forms of single combat portrayed by Shakespeare, and to demonstrate that Shakespeare himself was keenly aware of such differences. Moreover, it will show that Shakespeare used these differences to comment on the construction of male honor and on the dangers posed by cultural innovations that threatened to corrupt established systems for demonstrating or defending such honor.

The tendency to lump militarily or legally sanctioned swordfights in with the late sixteenth century duel of honor has led to much scholarly misinterpretation, but the former encounters can be identified with relative ease once the importance of context is recognized. In contrast, Shakespeare's use of the term "rapier" presents a thornier problem. Simply put, the word "rapier" appears in a number of Shakespeare's plays set long before the weapon actually existed. These moments of anachronism have attracted relatively little critical comment, and neither of the two possible explanations offered thus far seems wholly satisfying. One theory, suggested by Charles Edelman, contends that "Shakespeare uses the terms ‘sword’ and ‘rapier’ interchangeably" for reasons of metrical convenience (27-8), meaning that the actual sword in an actor's hand would have

\(^5\) See Peltonen 8-13.
been dictated by the period of the play's setting rather than any specific references in the text itself. Edelman bases this conclusion on his belief that actors could not have used “rapiers and other ‘modern’ swords” in scenes of martial combat, since “it is demonstrable that armour was worn for military combat on the Elizabethan stage” and “it would be obvious to any spectator that these weapons were not effective against armour” (28). Certainly the ineffectiveness of a rapier against an armored opponent might well have stood out within a culture where the most common complaint by the rapier's critics focused on the weapon's impotence on the battlefield. Nevertheless, and putting aside the objection that the metrical convenience theory would seem to imply an unlikely prosodic laziness on Shakespeare's part, Edelman's idea ignores the fact that the rapier-versus-sword distinction need only be made in one direction. Though not all swords were rapiers, rapiers themselves were simply a subset of swords, and early modern writers routinely referred to rapiers simply as "swords" in contexts where the contrast between the rapier and the short sword was irrelevant. If we look only at the instances in which Shakespeare uses the word "rapier" when the word "sword" would seem more accurate, the number of problematic examples shrinks to a relative handful, few enough in fact that Shakespeare could hardly have thought of the two terms as completely and neutrally "interchangeable."

6 A number of explicit references in the work of other playwrights demonstrate that many lesser dramatists avoided such conflation, and in fact used the well known difference between the two weapons for comic effect. In Shirley's 1631 School of Complement, Bubulcus, an absurd braggart, claims to have been in a duel in which he cut off his opponents' limbs and also ran him through. When his friend asks whether his weapon was a slashing sword or a rapier, Bubulcus responds “mine was both a sword and rapier.”
Other critics have taken the opposite of Edelman's approach to Shakespeare's use of the word "rapier," assuming that a textual reference to such a weapon strongly implies its actual use on the stage. J.D. Martinez sums up the logic behind this position:

Shakespeare was not one to confine his genius within the bounds of historic accuracy. It is generally agreed that the Elizabethan theatre practitioners often used their contemporary clothing, with added bits of fancifully historic garments, to establish the period or locale of a scene. So, too, the weapons of Elizabethan and Jacobean England were freely used in place of more historically accurate period weaponry. (240-1)

So little information remains on the actual props employed by Shakespeare's companies that it is impossible to say with any certainty whether or not rapiers were "freely used" in historically incongruous stage settings. Certainly they would have been no more anachronistic than Caesar's doublet (Julius Caesar 1.2.262), but Edelman may well be correct in assuming that the physical limitations of rapiers against body armor would have been so readily obvious (and distracting) to an early modern audience as to preclude such use. While an English doublet could perform the same physical function as a roman toga on the Renaissance stage (both cover the actor's body), a sixteenth century rapier would have looked and sounded absurd if employed in slashing at an opponent armed with a medieval shield. If thrusting techniques had been used, on the other hand, the uselessness of that shield would likewise have been immediately obvious.

Without endorsing Martinez's contention that the early modern stage employed rapiers with little or no thought given to historical accuracy, I do wish to demonstrate that Shakespeare's references to rapier fencing are far more than casual terminological substitutions. His plays, I argue, exhibit a profound distrust of rapier fencing, a form of
combat he uniformly associated with treachery, deception, lawlessness, cowardice, and buffoonery. Far from simply using "rapier" as a synonym for "sword," Shakespeare demonstrates a consistent awareness of the historical and social associations of slashing versus thrusting swordplay, and uses those associations in order to express important elements of theme and character. Shakespeare's works participate fully in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century discourses regarding the virtues of the rapier versus the short sword, and only by understanding the nature of that participation can we come to appreciate the full import of swordplay's rhetorical and physical presence on the Shakespearean stage.

**Shakespeare's awareness and use of traditional swordplay**

Before addressing Shakespeare's depictions of and references to rapier fencing and the duel, it would be useful to establish what his plays seem to say about non-rapier single combat, since such combat forms the background against which we will view his treatment of the rapier and the duello. The isolated military contest, the trial by combat, and even the informal private confrontation with explicitly traditional weapons all feature prominently in Shakespeare's work. Given that rapier fencing represented a very recent innovation in weapon design and fighting technique, and that opponents of the rapier often presented their opposition through an appeal to nostalgia and longstanding custom, it should come as no surprise that the plays taking place in pre-sixteenth century settings seem to primarily feature traditional weaponry. Although Martinez correctly points out that the term "rapier" sometimes appears in Shakespeare plays set before 1500, evidence
suggests that, for the most part, combat in these dramas would have consisted of sword and target fighting. Besides the many references to the cacophonous noise associated with theatrical swordplay in English Renaissance theaters (see Chpt. One, pages 92-4), our most important record of those theaters' material resources strongly suggests that short swords, rather than rapiers, dominated the stage in Shakespeare's period.

Henslowe's inventory of properties includes "jx eyorn targates...j copper targate...iiiij wooden targates...j buckler...[and] j shelde" (320), in addition to a separate entry elsewhere that records an outlay of forty shillings "to paye for targets" (216). His record of "xvij foyles" (320) could refer to any type of bated sword⁷, but elsewhere in the diary he uses the term rapier specifically⁸ and in the inventory he lists "j longe sorde" (318). Since Henslowe does not bother to specify what variety of "foyles" he means, we might well assume the entry refers to short swords, still England's most common weapon at the end of the sixteenth century.

In addition, the language of Shakespeare's plays themselves repeatedly demonstrates a cognizance of the physical practicalities of traditional, slashing swordplay. For instance, in the plays with the most consciously ancient settings, discussions of wounds always indicate an explicitly military armament of slashing swords and shields; the injuries sustained are always cuts, never punctures. In Antony and Cleopatra, the wounded (and appropriately named) Scarus claims to have "room for six scotches⁹ more," and as the enemy retreats he urges his compatriots to "score their backs" (4.8-7-9).

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⁷ Use of the term predated the development of the rapier. For instance, a tournament hosted by Henry VIII promised a prize to the winners of a contest of "all together of ranke at the foyle" (Nichols 333).
⁸ In his capacity as a pawnbroker, Henslowe "Lent vpon a Raper & Hangers" the sum of eight shillings in December of 1598 (61).
⁹ "An incision, a cut, esp. a long gash made in the flesh" (OED "scotch, n.1").
Coriolanus is said to have "scotched...and notched [Aufidius]" like a "carbonado" (4.5.185-6), leaving his "stripes impressed on him" (5.6.109), and the Roman general warns his own troops that any deserters "shall feel mine edge" (1.4.29). Ulysses talks of more gruesome marks inflicted by slashing weapons when he refers to Achilles's "mangled Myrmidons...noseless, handless, hack'd and chipp'd" (5.5.33-4). In order to ward off such injuries from slashing blows, the troops of Shakespeare's Roman plays are clearly equipped with shields. Aufidius talks of having intended to "hew [Coriolanus's] target from [his] brawn" (4.5.119), Marcus refers to the "foemen's marks upon [Titus Andronicus's] batter'd shield" (4.1.126), and Coriolanus urges his troops to "put your shields before your hearts, and fight / With hearts more proof than shields" (1.4.24-5). For Pandarus, the marks left on armor by slashing swordplay offer direct proof of valor and martial worth. Spying Hector in the parade of Trojan soldiers, he cries to Cressida, "Look you what hacks are on his helmet! Look you yonder, do you see? Look you there. There's no jesting. There's laying on, take't off who willy, as they say. There be hacks!" (1.2.188-91). A few moments later Troilus appears, and Pandarus gushes that his "helm [is] more hacked than Hector's" (1.2.215). Even the prospect of peace is articulated in terms of slashing swordplay when Pompey suggests to Octavius that they may depart from their meeting with "unhack'd edges, and...targes undinted" (2.6.38-9).

In the Shakespeare plays set in a post-classical but still archaic world, we find that the swordplay depicted retains the emphasis on edged military weapons, shields, and

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10 "To cut, slash, hack" (OED "carbonado, v.1")
armor. *Macbeth* opens with a description of the thane's "unseam[ing]" of Macdonwald (1.2.22), and when Macbeth and Macduff meet, they fight with "warlike shield[s]" (5.10.33). Presumably the slashing swordplay that concludes the story makes good (at least in a symbolic way) on Macbeth's earlier vow to fight on "till from [his] bones [his] flesh be hack'd" (5.3.34). The rhetoric of the history plays similarly emphasizes slashing swordplay, such as when Clarence's ghost urges the sleeping Richard III to let "fall thy edgeless sword" (5.5.89), when Joan brandishes her "keen-edged sword" (1.3.77), or when King Charles VI of France urges his troops toward battle "with spirit of honour edged / More sharper than your swords" (*Henry V* 3.5.38-9). Like Pompey, King John describes an enemy's surrender as an opportunity to leave the battlefield "[w]ith unhack'd swords and helmets all unbruised" (2.1.254). Offering a gruesome image of the very types of wounds that King John seeks to avoid, the soldier Michael Williams imagines "all those legs and arms and heads" that will be "chopped off in battle" at Agincourt (*Henry V* 4.1.129-30). Although none of these encounters or references ever explicitly identify the variety of sword in question, all of them include language that implicitly distinguishes the weapons as slashing rather than thrusting implements. Combatants in these fights are constantly notched, scotched, striped, scored, hewn, hacked, chipped, and unseamed, but almost never are they stabbed, pierced, pricked, or perforated. Shakespeare does use the latter terms, but as we will see, he reserves them for varieties of violence very different from the traditional, largely military combat discussed above.

Of course, demonstrating that Shakespeare knew the difference between thrusting and slashing swordplay does not necessarily imply that he associated either fencing
method with any particular set of values. Were Shakespeare uniformly hostile or
deprecatory to all swordplay, his references to the rapier would merit little comment. To
appreciate the striking consistency with which Shakespeare specifically links rapier
violence to either comic cowardice or murderous treachery, we need to briefly establish
the contrasting ways in which traditional weapons feature in his plays. Though
Shakespeare sometimes depicts the violence threatened or committed with slashing
weapons as humorous, perfidious, or barbaric, just as often such violence serves to assert
or defend the values most commonly championed by English opponents of the rapier: the
primacy of national (as opposed to personal) motivations, the honor of military (as
opposed to civil) combat, the importance of inborn (as opposed to learned) ability, an
emphasis on defensive (as opposed to offensive) violence, a belief in public and lawful
(as opposed to private and unlawful) swordplay, and the valorization of the traditional
"sturdy peasantry" (as opposed to the socially mobile and Italianate gentry) as an
embodiment of English national identity. Above all, Shakespeare's plays repeatedly stage
an older order's open, direct, "honest" violence as a means of combating a newer order's
debasement of established honor culture through deception, treachery, and "dishonest"
vioence. When representatives of an imperiled traditional system of masculine honor
overcome the figures who have undermined that system, they frequently do so through a
successful single combat. Invariably, however, their victories in such combat are
achieved using traditional weapons rather than rapiers.

Just as opponents of rapier fencing appealed to the necessity of traditional
weapons for the military defense of the kingdom, Shakespeare commonly stages
organized martial violence with such weapons as a means of establishing or restoring a stable and legitimate political order. When Richmond overcomes Richard III or when Macduff overcomes Macbeth, Shakespeare presents slashing swordplay as a means of addressing both murderous usurpation and tyrannical rule. In these narratives, the wrongs perpetrated through deception and assassination are righted (or at the very least punished) through further violence, but violence of a public and military nature enacted at least partially for the public good. Importantly, that violence takes the form of a fair fight between two unaided opponents, although it occurs within the context of a larger battle. Macduff explicitly presents his pursuit of Macbeth as the quest for an isolated, idealized combat untainted by the less honorable, more random killing of general warfare:

I cannot strike at wretched kerns, whose arms
Are hired to bear their staves; either thou Macbeth,
Or else my sword with an unbattered edge
I sheathe again undeeded. (5.8.4-7)

There are obviously dramaturgical reasons for this kind of metonymic staging of battle scenes, but we will see shortly that it stands in stark contrast to Shakespeare's depictions of single combat with rapiers, combat that invariably ends in either harmless farce or senseless tragedy. At the same time, single combat with traditional weapons in the midst of battle often appears not as a source or expression of warfare's needless bloodshed but rather as a means of limiting the scope of such bloodshed to a single death. Hal formally proposes such a confrontation with Hotspur in 1 Henry IV, offering to "[t]ry fortune with him in a single fight" in order to "save the blood on either side" (5.1.99-100). Though Hal's less chivalric father vetoes the offer a moment later, Shakespeare seems to take the
idea seriously elsewhere; we learn from Horatio that Hamlet's father once participated in just such a combat against the Norwegian king, a confrontation that the play’s characters recall approvingly in the language of chivalric heroism. In contrast to the earlier age's limited symbolic combat between two sovereigns, however, the military adventure of young Fortinbras promises "[t]he imminent death of twenty thousand men" (4.4.9.50). If much of Shakespeare's work expresses a similar deep ambivalence about the horrors of war, he nevertheless consistently presents the single combat on the battlefield with traditional weapons as the most appealing, least ironized form of such violence, and he treats the triumphs of Richmond, Macduff, and Old Hamlet with none of the satirical contempt that Jonson exhibits in Bobadil's plan to undertake 2,000 rapier duels "for the public Benefit of the State" and "to spare the entire Lives of [the queen's] Subjects."

Shakespeare's isolated, climactic battlefield swordfights strongly resemble another form of public violence with traditional weapons: the trial by combat. These legally sanctioned fights occur only twice in Shakespeare's work, but in both instances the outcome serves to uphold or restore the legitimacy of traditional honor systems much as the battlefield confrontations in Macbeth and Richard III do. By far the more famous of the two trials is Edgar's triumph over Edmund in King Lear, a swordfight with all the trappings and proprieties of the medieval legal ceremony it depicts.11 As the disguised

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11 Those who consider King Lear's tone unrelievedly bleak tend to dismiss the significance (and sometimes even the lawfulness) of this trial by combat. Paola Pugliatti accepts wholeheartedly Goneril's objection—after-the-fact to the fight's legitimacy, based on the Duchess's claim that Edmund has been "cozen'd and beguiled" by "[a]n unknown opposite" (sc. 24 ln. 148-9) whose challenge Edmund was not required to accept. However, Pugliatti fails to address the fact that, as Edgar explicitly asserts, he cannot make himself known precisely because his identity has been "lost... By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit" (sc. 24 ln. 118). Nevertheless, Pugliatti maintains that "it was simply too late in European culture to celebrate [the] rites [of chivalry] without resorting...to irony or to outright negation" (51). Gillian Murray Kendall comes
Edgar enters the site of the trial, he declares Edmund "a traitor, / False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father, / Conspirant 'gainst this high illustrious Prince [i.e. Albany]" (sc. 24 ln. 129-31).12 After Edgar successfully defeats and mortally wounds his brother in the formal combat that follows (almost certainly performed with traditional weaponry),13 Edmund immediately admits that "What you have charged me with, that have I done, / And more, much more" (sc. 24 ln. 157-8). 2 Henry VI stages a similar scene in which the armourer Horner, having falsely denied calling King Henry a usurper, confronts his apprentice Peter in a formal combat before the king, each using a "staff with a sand-bag fastened to it." Peter prepares to die by generously bestowing his meager possessions on his fellow apprentices, while Horner celebrates his own victory beforehand by carousing with his neighbors. In the end, the drinking proves Horner's undoing, and Peter overcomes and kills his master. Although Peter had initially feared that Horner's more extensive training would prevail (the armourer having "learnt me so much fence already" [2.3.81-2]), the apprentice's inborn skill (and a little luck) carry the day. His victory, coming in spite of rather than because of instruction in fencing technique, would have

to a similar conclusion from the opposite direction; she reads Goneril's objection not as a legitimate appeal to tradition but rather as a remark that inadvertently "threatens to lay bare the artificiality of all tradition, ritual, and law" and demonstrates the trial by combat to be "an empty and distorted assertion of order in a world that has already stripped ritual of meaning" (241). Neither Pugliatti nor Kendall address the fight's apparent success in reestablishing (at least in Edgar and Edmund's case) the values and traditions that Edmund's treachery had sought to destroy. For a corrective to Pugliatti and Kendall's perspectives on Goneril's objections to the trial by combat, see Hanna Scolnicov, who points out that "it is [Goneril] herself who has just played foul, poisoning her sister Regan." Significantly, Scolnicov finds in the trial by combat the play's only moment of successful resistance to the new social order's self-serving nihilism, since "[t]he world of the play is so corrupt that only within the space set aside for dueling can virtue win" (146).

12 This and all subsequent quotes from Lear are taken from Q1 as published in the Norton Shakespeare. 13 A case tried in the Court of Chivalry in the year 1632 suggests that even in the seventeenth century, real-life trials by combat were considered incompatible with rapier fencing. The court insisted on the traditional arms mandated by Thomas of Woodstock's original fourteenth century code (long sword, short sword, battle-axe, and shield) "in spite of a plea by the defendant...for more modern armament" (Aylward 12-3).
heartened proponents of "natural" English martial ability such as George Silver.

Although Horner's downfall springs as much from his drinking as from Peter's innate valor, Shakespeare does go to some lengths to confirm that justice has indeed been done, having the mortally wounded Horner cry out "I confess, I confess treason" with his dying breath (2.4.95). Henry pronounces that in Horner's "death we do perceive his guilt / And God in justice hath revealed to us / The truth and innocence of [Peter]" (2.4.102-4), a verdict supported by the important changes Shakespeare has made to his source material. 14 In both the Edgar/Edmund fight and the Peter/Horner fight, a formal, highly public, and lawful encounter simultaneously reveals and punishes the lies and deception of a traitorous subject while clearing the name of a loyal subject. The outcomes of these proceedings associate the violence of traditional weaponry with obedience to the crown, an association commonly trumpeted by the anti-rapier faction. In contrast to the patriotically useful skill of short sword fencing, writers like Silver repeatedly emphasize the scorn for the king's authority represented by the duello's lawless bloodshed. Although contests like that between Edgar and Edmund may resemble the duel of honor superficially (a resemblance that has caused considerable confusion about Shakespeare's views on the rapier), the trial by combat actually represents a form of violence that stands in stark legal and cultural opposition to the duello.

14 In Holinshed, the unfortunate (and somewhat more passive) armourer arrives drunk because "his neighbours came to him, and gave him wine and strong drinke," after which "he reeled as we went, and so was slaine without guilt." The apprentice, we are told, "lived not long unpunished; for being convict of felonie in court of assise, he was judged to be hanged, and so was, at Tiburne" (626). Shakespeare neatly removes any hint of guilt on the apprentice's part in adapting the incident for the stage, turning Horner into the liar and traitor instead.
While Shakespeare links public, lawful, traditional swordplay with the preservation or restoration of an honor culture corrupted by deceit, he also associates such preservation or restoration with the nation's peasantry and its claim to an authentic "Englishness" in the face of the upper-classes' vitiating Continental influences. In doing so, he echoes the tendency of the low-born Masters of Defence to present their own traditional techniques as an embodiment of the English yeoman's natural valor, techniques diametrically opposed to the gentry's effeminizing Italianate rapier fencing. In a number of plays, the only way for members of the English nobility trapped in a debased court culture to preserve their virtue and martial ability is to adopt the appearance and weaponry of the peasantry. The most striking example of this strategy is Cymbeline's Guiderius and his confrontation with the boorish Cloten. Kidnapped as a child and raised in the forest by Belarius, the young prince Guiderius's isolation from the court has allowed him to preserve a violent capacity no longer present in the corrupted English nobility, a capacity that helps him to overcome and kill the presumably better armed and trained Cloten. Martinez imagines Guiderius employing a “single edged hunting sword,” a weapon suitable to a life lived in the wilderness (240-1). Though the text offers no explicit indication of the sword used by Guiderius, something along these lines would certainly be required to accomplish the offstage decapitation following the fight, a mutilation that would have been all but impossible to perform with a rapier. Though Guiderius probably carries some sort of slashing weapon, Cloten, with his courtly pretensions, might well bear a rapier. Cloten certainly seems to believe that having "the deepest Ruffe" (as Webster puts it) indicates both social worth and capacity for violence,
and spurns Guiderius for his crude attire; when Guiderius fails to "tremble" at Cloten's threats, Cloten demands of him, "Know'st me not by my clothes?" (4.2.83). Such symbols mean little to the rustic Guiderius, however, who refuses to yield to Cloten, asking his attacker "[h]ave not I / An arm as big as thine?" (4.2.78-9). For Guiderius, an unlikely survivor of an earlier, less decayed age, a combatant's physical strength still accurately communicates his capacity for violence, as Cloten discovers all too late.

While Guiderius overcomes the treachery and corruption of court in an unwittingly acquired low-born disguise (he does not learn of his own noble birth until the play's final scene), Posthumus effects a similar victory with a more consciously borrowed peasant identity. Believing he has had Innogen killed and having come to regret the murder, Posthumus vows to atone for his actions by laying down his life in defense of Britain against the invading Roman army:

I am brought hither
Among th'Italian gentry, and to fight
Against my lady's kingdom. 'Tis enough
That, Britain, I have killed thy mistress-piece;
I'll give no wound to thee. Therefore, good heavens,
Hear patiently my purpose. I'll disrobe me
Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
As does a British peasant. So I'll fight
Against the part I come with  (5.1.17-25)

To atone in battle for the sin of assassination (a sin prompted by the deceit of the Italian Giacomo), Posthumus must shed foreign manners and high social standing, adopting instead a humble, explicitly English martial identity. The play never specifies Posthumus's weapon, though his disguise as "a British peasant" and Giacomo's description of him as a "drudge of nature" (5.2.5) would certainly suggest that he carries a
short sword, if not a cudgel. Earlier on in the play, during the discussion of the wager between Posthumus and Giacomo in Italy, the exiled Briton had demanded that if Innogen proved chaste, Giacomo would "answer me with your sword" (1.4.143). When the confrontation finally occurs in the midst of Act 5’s battle scene, however, Posthumus (who, though disguised, presumably recognizes Giacomo) merely "vanquisheth and disarmeth GIACOMO, and then leaves him" (5.2.0). Posthumus's treatment of his enemy (the play's embodiment of treacherous Italian duplicity) demonstrates a shift from the ethic of the duello to that of the Masters of Defence, a group whose oath stipulated that its students "shal be Mercifull, And Whearas you happen to have the vpper hande of your enimye That is to saie Without Weapon or vnder your feete...then you shall not kill him" (89). Just as his clothes and (presumably) his sword have undergone a redemptive transformation from those of the corrupt Italianate gentry to those of the virtuous English peasantry, his means of constructing a masculine identity through combat has also been transformed, embracing the moderated violence of the anti-rapier faction rather than the lethal absolutism of the duelist.

The triumph of the disguised Posthumus over Giacomo in Cymbeline is paralleled by the triumph of the disguised Edgar over Oswald in King Lear. In accompanying his blinded father, Edgar adopts the accent and appearance of a West Country peasant, including a cudgel. When the two travelers encounter Oswald, the social climber\textsuperscript{15} and sycophantic serving man attempts to kill Gloucester with a rapier in order to collect the reward for his head. Although Shakespeare never explicitly applies the term "rapier" to

\textsuperscript{15} Upon seeing Gloucester, Oswald remarks that "[t]hat eyeless head of thine was first framed flesh / To raise my fortunes" (sn. 20 ln. 216-7).
Oswald's sword, Edgar vows to defend himself and Gloucester "no matter vor [Oswald's] foins" (sn. 20 ln. 232-3). Despite wielding the far humbler and less dangerous weapon, Edgar overcomes the timeserving Oswald and his anachronistically foreign sword. The "peasant" Edgar's successful defense of Gloucester echoes the similar, unsuccessful defense of the Earl by Cornwall's servant earlier in the play, a defense that fails when Regan treacherously "takes a sword and runs at [the servant] behind" (sc. 14 ln. 77-8). In King Lear, as in Cymbeline, the nobility's only hope of defending its traditional honor culture seems to lie in adopting the values, appearance, and weaponry of the peasantry. In some cases, unfortunately, traditional swordplay proves incapable of coping with more modern, less forthright forms of bloodshed. While Cymbeline, Macbeth, and Richard III arguably conclude with the enactment of a violent closure that reestablishes formerly corrupted systems of personal honor and national governance, elsewhere Shakespeare depicts traditional social systems as irremediably antiquated and unable to defend themselves against the threats posed by a new order's treachery and deception. For all the formal ceremony of Edgar's trial-by-combat against Edmund, the victory of lawful tradition over criminal innovation comes too late to save Cordelia. In fact, in the very moment that Lear enters with Cordelia's body, Shakespeare reiterates the inadequacy of traditional swordplay as a response to the new regime's violence. In relating how he "killed the slave that was a-hanging" Cordelia, Lear reminisces nostalgically about having "seen the day, with my good biting falchion / I would have made him skip" (sc. 24

16 "A thrust or push with a pointed weapon" (OED "foin, v.1"). The term appears five times in Shakespeare, always as either a comically suggestive reference to sex or as a scornful dismissal of a combatant's swordplay.
17 A similar case can obviously be made for the transformation of the Earl of Kent into the lowly Caius, and even the transformation of Lear himself into a representative of "[u]naccommodated man" (scn. 11 ln.90-1).
In. 271-2), a reference to a distinctly old fashioned variety of slashing sword.\(^{18}\) As Cordelia's death indicates, however, the day of Lear's falchion has clearly passed. The elegiac tone of Lear's recollection also dominates the treatment of war in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Before embarking on the climactic battle with Caesar's army, Antony sends Octavius a challenge to single combat. Antony seeks to settle their conflict symbolically with the outcome of a solitary swordfight, just as the confrontations between Old Hamlet and Norway, Macduff and Macbeth, and Richmond and Richard are settled. The tenor and rhetoric of Antony's challenge strikingly echo the language of George Silver's *Paradoxes* and its infantilizing of the rapier duelist\(^{19}\):

His coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th' command of Caesar. I dare him therefore
To lay his gay caparisons apart
And answer me declined, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone. (3.13.21-7)

Antony's impugning of Caesar's personal courage, his likening of Caesar to a boy, and his association of Caesar with frivolous and unwarlike decoration all hearken back to charges leveled against the rapier masters by Silver and other champions of the short sword.

Ultimately, of course, the short sword was doomed to disappear, completely supplanted

\(^{18}\) James L. Jackson characterizes the falchion as an "older weapon" and thinks that the passage contains a pun in which "[t]he older slashing fight suggested by the falchion contrasts with the more modern 'crosses' of the next sentence, the parries which an older fighter might well not know" (389). This juxtaposition potentially links newer forms of swordplay such as rapier fencing with the brutal new political reality created by figures like Regan, Cornwall, Goneril, and Edmund. Regardless of whether or not Shakespeare had a swordplay pun in mind here, the curved falchion, which resembled a scimitar, was certainly the sword least suited to the rapier's thrusting technique. Hale notes that among weapons, the scimitar "is crooked, and hath a broad point that will not enter, and therin is the least dangerous of all" swords (C3r).

\(^{19}\) See Chpt. One, p. 47-8.
in peacetime by the rapier. Enobarbus can see a similarly inevitable shift occurring in Antony's Rome, and mockingly agrees that "like enough, high-battled Caesar will / Unstate his happiness, and be staged to th'show / Against a sworder" (3.13). Susan Snyder points out that the term sworder "equates Antony with a common gladiator, [and] has the same lower-class connotations as Caesar's later 'old ruffian'" (206). Nevertheless, Snyder acknowledges that while Antony is "pathetic and silly in not recognizing the new rule of the present" in which impersonal military slaughter has replaced individual combat, he is still "admirable for upholding values nobler and more personal than anything the debased new order can produce" (212-3). 20 To this assessment I would add the observation that for a seventeenth century audience at the Globe, tradition might have explicitly associated those noble martial values admired by Snyder with the very lower-class gladiators that she sees Enobarbus mocking. The Masters of Defence and their pupils, happily "staged to th'show" for the people of London, embodied a standard of straightforward, highly visible heroic masculinity that lingered in the English consciousness long after it had disappeared from England's public streets.

To assert that Shakespeare often embraces the values of the anti-rapier camp is not to say that he presents an uncomplicatedly and uniformly positive picture of violence with traditional weapons. In the internecine slaughter of the Henry VI plays, in the dubious systems of national honor motivating the bloodshed of Henry V and Troilus and Cressida, and in the apocalyptic individualism at the heart of Coriolanus, even wartime

20 Shakespeare's depiction of Octavius Caesar leaves little doubt about the future's likely code of personal honor. See, for instance, Caesar's deception of Cleopatra in an attempt to take her captive for his triumph, and also his order that Agrippa should "Plant those that have revolted [from Antony] in the van, / That Antony may seem to spend his fury / Upon himself" (4.6.8-10).
combat with short sword and shield serves to destroy rather than protect the values and traditions on which civil society depends. Nevertheless, despite Shakespeare's willingness to interrogate longstanding assumptions about the validity of violence as a means of constructing masculine identity, when the rise of deception and usurpation threaten to undermine an established honor culture, he consistently presents such traditional systems as both worth defending and defensible by the very type of public, forthright combat on which they were originally built. Even in cases where such value systems cannot be salvaged, such as in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare's loyalties clearly lie with a doomed past rather than a corrupted future. At the very least, the violence of single combat with traditional weaponry retains the potential to construct, defend, or recover a legitimate, unironized system of masculine honor. In Shakespeare's depiction of rapier fencing and duelists, however, no such potential exists, and he invariably treats the weapons and codes of the duello with a skepticism and hostility found only sporadically in his depictions of short sword combat.

**Shakespeare's thirty rapiers and their modern cultural context**

According to Marvin Spevack's *Concordance*, variations of the term "rapier" occur a total of thirty times across fourteen of Shakespeare's plays. Additionally, a number of passages unambiguously refer to such a weapon without necessarily naming it as such (for instance, through the language of thrusting swordplay). Despite the breadth of the rapier's presence in the Shakespearean canon, the analysis which follows will demonstrate that not once does Shakespeare give his audience a clear cut example of
rapier combat as a means of overcoming deception, treachery, and treason, despite the frequency with which the violence of more traditional weapons accomplishes such goals. In fact, not a single rapier is drawn in any of Shakespeare's plays without resulting in either tragedy or mockery. In ways that conspicuously echo anti-rapier writers such as Silver, the rapier in Shakespeare always proves to be either far too deadly or not nearly deadly enough.

As noted earlier, this contrast in Shakespeare's plays between rapier violence and the violence of traditional weapons has been masked by a tendency among critics to treat all instances of single combat as culturally equivalent, but it has also been obscured by a widespread modern belief in the inefficacy of slashing as opposed to thrusting swordplay. The very same revolution in fighting technique that saw the rapier completely eclipse the short sword by the middle of the seventeenth century has subsequently dominated mainstream views on the subject of sword fighting right up to the present day. As Anglo points out, "[t]he superiority of point over edge was an article of faith with the major nineteenth-century fencing historians whose views have shaped or, it would be better to say, distorted the attitude of subsequent scholars" (102). The belief that swordplay "advanced on a regular, direct path from primitive concentration on cutting with the edge to thrusting with the point" (107) has subsequently colored much of the modern scholarship on fencing in English Renaissance drama. Critics have routinely characterized thrusting swordplay as refined and dignified, in contrast to the loutish or comical nature of slashing swordplay. For example, Taylor suggests that "[t]he presentation of *Hamlet* in the early 1600s coincided with a developing vogue in rapier
fencing, which was rapidly replacing the more brutal but less lethal sword-and-buckler method of dueling” (203). Since Taylor acknowledges rapier fencing's deadliness, it is difficult to imagine precisely what aspect of sword and buckler fighting might make it more "brutal," except perhaps its associated noise. In fact, Taylor's views on swordplay seem to echo those voiced almost four hundred years earlier by writers who complained of the crude and irritating cacophony associated with the popular sword and buckler battles of the English stage, or Hale's objection to the "rude, and buffeting play" of the Masters of Defence. We can see a similar snobbery when Dover Wilson recoils at the thought that Hamlet and Laertes might exchange weapons in the midst of a "vulgar scrum." Wilson accordingly seeks to find a more genteel way for the switch to occur (xviii). It is attitudes like Wilson's that Silver objects to when he complains about the upper-class rapier's effect on the flexibility and variety of English martial arts: "There are now in these dayes no gripes, closes, wrestlings, striking with the hilts, daggers, or bucklers, vsed in Fence-schooles. Our ploughmen by nature wil do all these things with great strength & agility: but the Schooleman is altogether vnacquainted with these things" (24-5). But while the rapier's more well-mannered violence has so thoroughly replaced the sword and buckler's rough and tumble sport in the early 21st century as to have essentially erased the latter style from the modern consciousness, the dispute over these two forms of swordplay was at its height during Shakespeare's lifetime. It is in the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' debates about fencing (rather than the modern status quo that the resolution of those debates ultimately produced) that Shakespeare's plays need to be understood.
The following analysis will survey the entire range of Shakespeare's explicit and implicit references to rapiers, reading them through the lens of early modern English anti-rapier rhetoric. We will see that Shakespeare demonstrates a marked hostility to both the rapier as a weapon and the duello as a standard of personal conduct, and that his plays invariably portray rapier combat as either tragically violent or comically ineffectual. In doing so, Shakespeare depicts new modes of constructing masculine identity through violence as inherently threatening to those modes that structure an older, more valid social order. The rapier’s violence and the masculinity it underwrites are thus either uncontrollable or treacherous in tragic contexts, or empty and fraudulent in comic contexts, and in all contexts the weapon is emphatically unheroic. Furthermore, Shakespeare often contrasts the rapier duelist’s deeply flawed male identity with a more traditional male identity founded on martial valor in the service of king and country. By coming to understand this recurrent juxtaposition of value systems, we will better grasp Shakespeare’s emphasis on a variety of masculine identity that emphasizes the moderation of violence in civilian life, the cultural validity of martial rather than personal bloodshed, and the importance of self-sacrifice for a national good embodied by legitimate royal authority.
**Romeo and Juliet and the rapier as a threat to public safety**

Despite its association with rapier duels, *Romeo and Juliet* actually begins with a far more traditional brawl between two Capulet and two Montague servingmen. Act 1 scene 1's stage directions specify that Samson and Gregory enter "with swords and bucklers," and during the confrontation Samson advises Gregory to use his "washing blow" (1.1.55-6) (i.e. slashing attack). Given their weaponry, it seems that the servingmen may resemble those London roarers recalled by Stow as having "made great shew of much furie, and fought often, yet seldome any man hurt." It hardly follows, however, that Shakespeare intends the combat between the servingmen as a burlesque of their social betters' rapier dueling, as some critics have suggested. In comments that recall Wilson's aversion to the image of Hamlet and Laertes exchanging swords during a "vulgar scrum," Rossi asserts that the “servants are not persons suited for dueling but only for scuffling, so that they are armed with swords and bucklers," weaponry with which “the encounter of honour is reduced to a vulgar affray, which Tybalt futilely seeks to raise to an encounter between gentlemen. This can be deduced from the triviality of the servingmen’s blows” (115). Martinez sees a similarly dismissive contrast between upper- and lower-class weapons in this opening scene, claiming that "fighting with [sword and buckler] is a noisy affair and the technique would lend itself more easily [than rapier dueling] to comic maneuvers." He imagines such comedy contrasted with more serious violence in "[t]he juxtaposition of the clownish servants with the more deadly Tybalt/Benvolio” (112). Martinez thinks the servingmen and their fighting should appear "clumsy and cowardly," and sees the combat becoming "much more serious" with the
arrival of the rapier duelists, so that "the audience is led from the attitude that sword fighting is just a form of adolescent fun, into the realization that this kind of 'fun' all too readily escalates into dangerous violence" (111). As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, the noise of sword and buckler combat that Martinez finds so comically undignified often functioned as a legitimate demonstration of masculine physical strength, and the rapier's lethality (rather than the sword and buckler's safety) might brand its user as a boy among men. Rather than judging the opening combat of *Romeo and Juliet* by the standards of modern fencing theory, we must attempt to see it through the lens of late-sixteenth century debates over swordplay as a means of constructing masculinity. Far from associating such weapons and techniques with comedy, clumsiness, or cowardice, spectators sympathetic to the traditionalist views of men like Silver would have regarded the opening sword and buckler fight much more favorably than the rapier duels which follow it.

Just as the physical techniques of a sword and buckler fight need not have appeared comical, the less than mortal consequences of the servingmen's combat hardly imply that their blows must be "trivial," either as a theatrical entertainment or as a means of establishing gender identity. Shakespeare's original audience, accustomed to seeing

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21 Prior to the importation of rapier fencing in the late sixteenth century, sword and buckler combat carried no taint of lowborn absurdity, even for the queen herself. In 1561, Elizabeth watched a series of contests between "the masters" (presumably the Masters of Defence), contests that included the use of "longe sword...basterd sword, and sword and bokeler." The queen apparently enjoyed the combats so much that "the next [day] they playd agayne" for her entertainment (Machyn 250). It seems safe to assume that the combatants who so impressed Queen Elizabeth appeared neither "clumsy" nor "cowardly," nor should we imagine that views on sword and buckler fencing had so radically altered forty years later as to render *Romeo and Juliet*'s opening combat inherently comical.

22 Bizarrely, both Martinez and Rossi suggest elsewhere that Shakespeare treats the duel of honor ambivalently in *Romeo and Juliet*, but their disdain for more traditional weapons and martial techniques keeps either of them from seeing this opening brawl as a possible alternative to the code of the duello.
sword and buckler combat staged as a spectator sport in the theatrical amphitheaters, might well have viewed the opening fight between the servingmen as something resembling legitimate sport. In contrast, the entry of Tybalt (who actually says nothing of Rossi's "honor" but much of "death" [1.1.60] and "hate" [1.1.63-4]) serves not to elevate the combat but rather to escalate it, foolishly turning a common brawl into a matter of life and death. The Tybalt of the Theatre in 1595 thus represents not genuine, ennobling aristocratic honor (as many modern critics would seem to have it), but rather the heedless violence of a rapier-wielding child; as his own uncle observes, Tybalt is a "goodman boy" endlessly trying to "set cock-a-hoop" and "be the man" (1.5.74-8), descriptions that recall Silver's infantilizing characterizations of rapier fencers as children. From this perspective, it is Tybalt's behavior which looks "adolescent" in comparison to the more moderated violence of the servingmen, not the other way around. Indeed, not until the appearance onstage of Tybalt and his rapier does the citizenry of Verona (surely the play's closest proxy for its audience) enter "with clubs and partisans" amid shouts of "Down with the Capulets, down with the Montagues!" (1.1.67).

While Tybalt embodies the anti-rapier faction's complaints about the weapon's destabilization of male adulthood, he also fits the caricature of the linguistically bankrupt continental gallant. Mercutio in particular imagines Tybalt as an affected, foppish, Italianate duelist, "the courageous captain of complements" whose "lisping" associates

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23 After the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, the citizens are once again first on the scene, already seeking "he that killed Mercutio...Tybalt, that murderer" (3.1.31-2) The violent suppression of rapier dueling by a mob of citizens armed with clubs seems to have been a very real risk run by duelists who confronted one another too openly. In The City Madam, one duelist bids another to a secluded spot, warning him "not [to] show a foolish valor in the streets, / To make work for shopkeepers and their clubs." The bludgeons of urban citizens employed against reckless gallants represent another form of therapeutic cudgeling as a means of controlling the socially destructive violence of the rapier.
him with "these new tuners of accent" and "fashionmongers, these 'pardon-me's',' a man who is "the very butcher of a silk button" (2.3.20-1). As many anti-dueling works did, Mercutio mocks Italian rapier fencing with its own arcane terminology, associating Tybalt with "the immortal passado, the punto, reverso, the hay," taunting him with the cry of "[c]ome, sir, your passado" (3.1.79) and calling him "Alla stoccado" (3.1.69) as if it were Tybalt's very name. The cultural significance of Mercutio's insults has not gone unnoticed by critics, and Martinez speculates that both Benvolio and Mercutio should wield an "English broadsword and dagger" (113, 121) in contrast to Tybalt's Italian rapier. Martinez even goes so far as to imagine Romeo picking up Mercutio's broadsword and slaying Tybalt with this symbolically English weapon (130). The specific language used by Shakespeare would seem to rule out such an overt staging of the debate between figures like Silver and Saviolo; however, Mercutio's attitude toward public display does link him more obviously with the openness of the Masters of Defence than with the secrecy of the foreign rapier instructors. When Tybalt objects that they "talk here in the public haunt of men," and bids Mercutio to "withdraw unto some private place" if he wishes to quarrell, Mercutio's retort – that "[m]en's eyes were made to look, and let them gaze. / I will not budge for no man's pleasure, I" – aligns him with the traditions of sword and buckler brawling in opposition to Tybalt's deadly (and secretive) rapier dueling. In

Editors have identified this remark as a reference to Silver's *Paradoxes*, in which he scoffs at the Italian fencing instructor Signor Rocco for claiming to be able to "hit anie English man with a thrust, just vpon any button" (16). As seen in Chapter One, however, opponents of rapier fencing commonly drew unflattering connections between the weapon and its owners' ostentatious clothing. Falstaff and Fastidius Brisk also illustrate the idea that cowardly rapier fencers were prone to exhibit mangled clothing in lieu of scarred skin as evidence of their valor. Mercutio's "button" comment may draw on one or both of these associations in addition to the boast recorded in Silver's *Paradoxes*.

During the confrontation with Tybalt, Romeo bids Mercutio to "put [his] rapier up" (3.1.78).
combining the rapier he carries with the kind of forthright, publicly performative violence typified by traditional notions of masculine physical self-assertion, however, Mercutio shows himself dangerously unprepared to cope with either Tybalt's technical abilities or his lethal seriousness. In the end, Mercutio's attempt to adapt modern weaponry to an earlier age's code of conduct proves fatally misguided.

As we saw in Chapter One, the nature of Mercutio's death exemplifies the reckless speed and deceptively small wounds that characterized rapier combat. In his dying moments, Mercutio laments the seeming triviality of his mortal wound ("Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death!" [3.1.95-6]), and the fact that a combatant could be killed so easily without a single bystander noticing the blow illustrates the very sort of capricious and casual lethality that enemies of rapier fencing objected to with such vehemence. Mercutio also echoes the objections to rapier dueling's emphasis on "learned" as opposed to "natural" swordplay when, in his death throes, he remarks on the humiliation of being slain by a "braggart...that fights by the book of arithmetic!" (3.1.96-7). Opponents of the rapier often mocked what they saw as the absurd, pseudo-mathematical precision of continental fencing techniques. This association appears, for instance, in Bobadil's plan to kill 40,000 enemies in single combat using only twenty duelists: "[T]hus would we kill, every man his twenty a day, that's twenty score; twenty score, that's two hundred; two hundred a day, five days a thousand. Forty thousand — forty times five, five times forty — two hundred days kills

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26 Limon points out that none of the witnesses actually seem to see the thrust that mortally wounds Mercutio (101-2).
them all, by computation." Jonson's joke rests on the enormous gap between the rapier duelists "computation" and the realities of genuine swordplay, but in the case of Tybalt

2.2: A geometrical diagram from the 1568 edition of Camillo Agrippa's fencing manual, Trattato di scienza d'arme.

and Mercutio, the rapier's mathematically perfected lethality is presented not as an empty pretension, but rather as an insidious threat to traditional standards of masculine violence. Certainly many in the Globe's audience would have sympathized with Mercutio's aversion to a violent capacity derived from bookish study rather than inborn ability, and in some sense Tybalt's triumph over his opponent's less scholarly fencing technique stages the realization of the anti-rapier faction's worst fears.

But if Tybalt's technical sophistication puts an end to Mercutio and his hybrid traditionalism, it does so in a decidedly un-heroic way. Although Mercutio blames his wound on Romeo's interference, ("Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm." [3.1.97-8]), the play's stage directions specify that "TYBALT under Romeo's arm thrusts MERCUTIO in" (3.1.84-5), a description that at the very least suggests the possibility of conscious intent on the part of Mercutio's killer. If Tybalt does not treacherously stab Mercutio while he is being restrained by Romeo, then we must presumably accept Limon's suggestion that Tybalt accidentally kills Mercutio, perhaps in trying not to hit the unarmed Romeo who has jumped between them.27 Whichever alternative we choose, the combat between Mercutio and Tybalt stages one of the anti-rapier faction's criticisms of the weapon: either that it is a tool of cowardly, duplicitous violence, or that its uncontrollable and unlawful lethality serves only to facilitate needless (and sometimes even accidental) bloodshed.

27 Limon identifies Tybalt's own horror at the dishonorable manner of Mercutio's killing as the reason that "he loses his head and reacts in a manner that is natural at such times – he runs away." In returning to the stage a few moments later, Tybalt seeks "to wipe away the disgrace that, in his eyes, covers the good name of his family" (104).
Regardless of how Mercutio's death occurs, the subsequent events fully realize all of the disastrous consequences that opponents of the rapier associated with the duel of honor. Mercutio's illegal killing immediately precipitates a second duel, one in which Romeo challenges and then kills Tybalt. This combat fails to meet even the standards of limited justification for personal vengeance normally found in early modern revenge tragedies such as *Hamlet* or *Titus Andronicus*: that no other means of justice are open to the revenger. Having killed Mercutio, Tybalt would presumably have suffered death at the hands of the state, as Montague points out when he observes that Romeo's killing of Tybalt "concludes but what the law should end, / The life of Tybalt" (3.1.78-9). Romeo's "victory," then, comes to look less like the just vengeance of a Macduff, an Edgar, or a Richmond, and more like the anti-rapier faction's caricature of heedless, emotionally driven bloodlust usurping the crown's monopoly on judicial violence. The justice exacted by Romeo does not restore or defend a system of socially stable personal honor, but rather plunges Verona's gentry even deeper into a blood-feud that threatens to render the functioning of normal civil society impossible.

While the social consequences of Romeo's killing of Tybalt frame the act as tragic mistake rather than a heroic revenge, the duel's physical presentation may also undermine the heroism and highlight the rashness of Romeo's violence. Though normally a fight scene of elaborate choreography and considerable length in most modern productions, the

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28 Upon Tybalt's return to the scene of the earlier fight, Romeo calls him a "villain" and vows that "[e]ither thou, or I, or both" must perish in combat with one another (3.1.120-4). Romeo's accusation and threat occur before Tybalt has spoken a single line.

29 More than a mere excuse on the part of Romeo's father, Montague's argument actually seems to elicit a reduction in Romeo's punishment.
fight might originally have been staged as a precipitous enactment of Romeo's rage.\textsuperscript{30}

After all, Benvolio's later narration describes just such an encounter:

\begin{quote}
An envious thrust from Tybalt hit the life
Of stout Mercutio, and then Tybalt fled;
But by and by comes back to Romeo,
Who had but newly entertain'd revenge,
And to 't they go like lightning, for, ere I
Could draw to part them, was stout Tybalt slain.
\end{quote}

\textit{(3.1.162-7)}

Certainly Benvolio has reason to exaggerate his helplessness to stop the fight (he is explaining himself to the Prince, after all), but we should hesitate to completely dismiss this account of the swordplay purely because we have seen the duel between Romeo and Tybalt turned into a lengthy and spectacular combat in so many recent stagings and films.

As for the play's final violent rapier duel, during which Paris dies at the door of the Capulet tomb, here too Romeo kills out of anger rather than self-defense, and in direct contravention of the law; it is in response to Paris's intention to "apprehend [Romeo] for a felon" that the fight occurs, a fight which Romeo himself begins with a shout of "have at thee, boy!" (5.3.70). In killing Paris to avoid "apprehension," Romeo once again flouts the legal authority of the state, with deadly consequences.

Romeo's rapier is not a weapon of self defense (as in the Guiderius/Cloten and Edgar/Oswald fights), a weapon of formal judicial combat (as in the Edgar/Edmund and Peter/Horner fights), or a weapon of war and political justice (as in the Richmond/Richard and Macduff/Macbeth fights). Instead, the rapier in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}

\textsuperscript{30} For parallel examples from \textit{The Jew of Malta} and \textit{Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay}, see Chapter One, p 66.
embodies all of the sword's faults as enumerated by Silver and the other anti-rapier partisans: its casual lethality, its Italianate origins, its association with childishness, rashness, wrath, and treachery, and above all its power to undermine the foundations of peaceful civil society through unlawful violence. Shakespeare does not present the rapier as a refined alternative to the traditional weapons often valorized in the military and judicial contexts of his other dramas; on the contrary, viewed in light of England's late sixteenth century debates over swordplay, *Romeo and Juliet* reveals itself as an anti-rapier polemic against the very dangers identified in works like Silver's *Paradoxes*. The "ancient grudge" between Capulet and Montague may underlie the city's discord, but it is the rapier that turns Shakespeare's Verona into a society in which "civil blood makes civil hands unclean" (Prologue 3-4).

**The rapier as a weapon of assassination**

If the rapier is linked to tainted and destructive violence in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is at least still wielded on occasion by sympathetic characters. In most of the weapon’s appearances in Shakespeare’s tragedies and histories, however, the rapier is associated with either brutal murder or shameful cowardice. The term "rapier" appears prominently in *Titus Andronicus*, where we find the weapon carried (or at least referred to) by both of Tamora's sadistic sons, Demetrius and Chiron. The play initially associates the sword with the hollow symbolism of a mere fashion accessory when Demetrius mocks his younger brother Chiron's "dancing rapier" (2.1.39). In Act 4, however, the sword takes on the sinister character of a murder weapon when Demetrius threatens to kill Aaron's
newborn son by "broach[ing] the tadpole on [his] rapier's point" (4.2.84). He does not, of course, "broach" the infant, since the brothers, despite outnumbering Aaron two-to-one, are cowed into accepting the child's birth at the point of Aaron's sword. Such hollow, vaunting threats echo Demetrius's earlier (and equally empty) vows never to put up his weapon "till I have sheathed / My rapier in [Chiron's] bosom and withal / Thrust these reproachful speeches down his throat" (2.1.53-5). If the brothers' rapiers see any use at all during the play, it is only in murdering Bassianus, an assassination during which the victim seems to offer no resistance.31

A similar combination of treachery of intent and impotence in combat also characterizes the more limited references to rapiers in Shakespeare's other tragedies. Othello's Iago, in preparing Roderigo to murder Cassio, advises him to "[w]ear [his] good rapier bare, and put it home" (5.1.2). Roderigo follows these instructions, but Cassio escapes the blow unscathed thanks to the mail shirt beneath his clothing (a decidedly military accessory),32 and instead of being murdered by Roderigo, Cassio seriously wounds his would-be assassin using a short sword.33 The term rapier also appears in Q1 King Lear's stage direction for Edmund to enter "with his rapier drawn" (sc. 7 In. 37-8), though whether or not he uses the same sword in his eventual defeat at the hands of Edgar remains unclear. As observed earlier, we can be more confident about the weapon

31 Tamora's sons also account for the only explicitly identified "poinyard" to appear onstage in a play by Shakespeare. Initially intending to murder Lavinia along with Bassianus, Tamora tells one of her sons to "give me thy poinyard" (2.3.120). Elsewhere Shakespeare pairs poniards with the "French rapiers" which Laertes wagers during Hamlet's fateful fencing match.
32 Cassio observes that "[t]hat thrust had been mine enemy indeed, / But that my coat is better than thou know'st" (5.1.24-5).
33 This assumes that Cassio wears the same weapon throughout the play, which would imply a blade appropriate to his military service in the opening acts.
used by Oswald, who clearly carries a rapier. Nevertheless, Oswald flatly refuses to draw his sword against Kent, preferring instead to allow Kent to "beat [him] into clamorous whining" (sc. 7 ln. 20). In his confrontation with the disguised Edgar, however, Oswald seems to recover his valor, presumably due to the relative harmlessness of his opponent's weapon; Edgar carries only a cudgel, which under normal circumstances would have been no match against a rapier. Seeing Gloucester accompanied by nothing more than a peasant with a staff, the armed serving man attacks, a mistake that ultimately proves fatal, and demonstrates the hollowness of Oswald's claim to a well-born masculine violent capacity. Better than any of Shakespeare's other creations, Oswald thus manages to combine the period's caricatures of the duelist as either disturbingly bloodthirsty or shamefully craven.

Among all of Shakespeare's tragedies, the least dismissive reference to rapier dueling may actually be a little remarked upon scene in *Timon of Athens*. In Act 3, Alcibiades implores the Athenian Senate to pardon a friend who has killed another man in a fight. Alcibiades first tries to excuse the killing by arguing that his friend only committed the murder "in hot blood" after "[s]eeing his reputation touch'd to death," a description that strongly suggests the duello's system of personal honor. The senators criticize Alcibiades for "labour[ing] / To bring manslaughter into form and set quarrelling.

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34 Kent's complaint "that such a slave as this should wear a sword, / Who wears no honesty" (sc. 7 ln.66) echoes the anti-rapier faction's unflattering characterizations of the sword as a mere fashion accessory. Moreover, Kent's treatment of Oswald bears a striking resemblance to Silver's story of the fight between an Englishman and an Italian fencing instructor in which the former "trode upon [the latter], and most grievously hurt him under his feet" (66). Though we receive no direct indication of the variety of sword carried by Kent, his identity as one of Shakespeare's great standard-bearers for truth-speaking and a doomed honor tradition would seem to suggest that he wears a slashing weapon. At one point Kent does threaten to "carbonado" Oswald (sn. 7 ln. 33), an image that implies slashing swordplay.
Upon the head of valour," and advise him that "[t]o revenge is no valour," a common refrain of early modern England's anti-dueling faction. Alcibiades spends the second half of the scene not excusing his friend's act as justified by his code of honor, but rather arguing that the man's "service done / At Lacedaemon and Byzantium / Were a sufficient briber for his life," and that the death sentence should be repealed because its object "has done fair service, / And slain in fight many of [Greece's] enemies." When Alcibiades finally resorts to reminding the Senate of the debt owed for his own military service, offering to "pawn [his] victories, all / [his] honours" in assurance of his friend's lawful behavior, the senators banish him (3.6.11-80). Notably, in this, Shakespeare's only real defense of the private duel of honor, neither the word "rapier," nor the word "duel," nor any references to thrusting swordplay ever appear, and the defense of the duelist's actions rests not primarily on the legitimacy of the duello as a code of behavior but rather on the mitigating significance of the combatant's military service. The condemned man's lethal defense of his personal honor in civilian life, far from being a continuation of the masculine identity achieved in wartime, stands in stark contrast to and must be-excused on the basis of that identity.

Just as they make isolated appearances in tragedies like Titus Andronicus, King Lear, and perhaps Timon of Athens, rapiers occasionally find their (anachronistic) way into Shakespeare's history plays. Despite the veritable forest of drawn swords in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, however, the term "rapier" appears only twice. In contrast, the term "sword" appears, in one form or another, 68 times in these four plays, a ratio which hardly suggests Shakespeare simply viewed the terms as interchangeable; it seems
more than likely that these two highly unusual references to rapiers are calculated choices on Shakespeare’s part. Tellingly, both of these instances associate the weapon with 3 Henry VI's Young Clifford, a figure of wrath and cruelty outdone in the history plays only by Richard III himself. Moreover, both of the mentions of Clifford's "rapier" refer to its use not in battle, but in the slaughter of the young boy, Rutland. When Rutland pleads for his life before Clifford, begging "sweet Clifford, pity me," Clifford assures him only "such pity as my rapier's point affords" (1.3.37). This isolated use of the term might conceivably represent a case of nothing more than metrical convenience, but a few scenes later, as Margaret and Clifford taunt the captured Duke of York, the queen wipes Richard's tears using a cloth stained "with the blood / That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point, / Made issue from the bosom of the boy" (1.4.80-2). Presumably the vast majority of the play's combatants carry period-appropriate slashing swords, and it seems unlikely (though not impossible) that Clifford alone carries a rapier. A more plausible explanation is that Shakespeare refers to rapiers here not because Clifford actually employs such a weapon onstage, but rather because the rapier carried sinister, anti-chivalric associations with violence against the vulnerable or the unsuspecting. In fact, Shakespeare conceivably inserted anachronistic references to the rapier at these points precisely because he intends for the audience to notice them; they may indicate that Clifford represents the coming of a brutal new age in which the values that had (theoretically) constrained the earlier period's knightly violence no longer apply.35

35 Sigurd Burckhardt makes a similar claim about the anachronistic striking of the clock in Julius Caesar, a "mistake" that he believes Shakespeare has included intentionally in order to signal that Brutus himself is out of sync with the times, committed to an obsolete, "classical style" of politics at the moment when the new and more debased "Caesarean style" is ascendant (9). If Clifford's rapier signifies a shift to a more
Regardless of what Shakespeare's reasons may have been, and regardless of what variety of sword Clifford may have carried on the sixteenth century stage, mention of the weapon in *3 Henry VI* conforms to the pattern in which Mercutio, Aaron's son, Bassianus, Cassio, the blinded Gloucester, and Rutland all suffer violence or the threat of violence at the point of a rapier (literal or rhetorical) when they are, or seem, unable to defend themselves. Whether or not the physical rapier actually appeared on the early modern stage in each of these cases matters less than Shakespeare's consistent pattern of associating the weapon with treachery, deception, and murder.

**The rapier as a seventeenth century dagger of lath**

In contrast to his first tetralogy, Shakespeare's second tetralogy contains a variety of references to rapiers and thrusting swordplay. However, here we have moved away from the image of the rapier as a weapon of perfidious villainy and toward the satirical stereotype of the rapier as a symbol of bombastic cowardice. The only non-comical mention of rapiers in the second tetralogy is a vow made by Lord Fitzwater when he challenges Aumerle by promising to "turn thy falsehood to thy heart, / Where it was forged, with my rapier's point" (*Richard II* 4.1.38-9). At the Boar's Head Tavern, however, rapiers appear on many hips. Despite references to his "target" in *1 Henry IV* fallen age of martial violence, it would accord with the idea that the first tetralogy "dramatizes the decline of [the] knightly tradition" (Tiffany 295), a decline that "trace[s] a rapid movement from the communal notion of heroism and order dominant in the Talbot episodes to the earth shattering solipsism and misanthropic individualism embodied in Richard's famous words, 'I am myself alone'" (Semenza "Sport, War" 1265).

36 Fitzwater's threat may represent Shakespeare's most neutral mention of the weapon. Fitzwater, a loyal follower of Bolingbroke (and a very minor character within the play) does not exhibit any particular treachery, though he is associated with an unusually gory variety of loyal service during his second and final appearance in the play, when he briefly enters to tell the new king that he has "from Oxford sent to London / The heads of Brocas and Sir Bennet Seely, / Two of the dangerous consorted traitors" (5.6.13-5).
Falstaff seems to have adopted the rapier in 2 Henry IV. One of the officers seeking to arrest Falstaff for debt warns that the knight "will stab," though the other claims to "care not for his thrust" (2.1.16). The foretold stabbing seems imminent when Falstaff explicitly calls for someone to "give me my rapier" before his scuffle with Pistol in Act 2, a fight during which Hostess Quickly fears that Pistol has "thrust at [Falstaff's] belly" (2.4.188). Her fears prove unfounded, however, and though we hear from Bardolph that Falstaff has wounded Pistol in the shoulder, the wound (and the fight as a whole) is not serious enough to keep Pistol from returning to Falstaff in the play's final act to deliver the good news of Henry IV's death. Pistol's alleged rapier wound thus bears a striking resemblance to Fastidius Brisk's litany of near-misses, or (for an example from the Boar's Head itself) Falstaff's claim in 1 Henry IV that the epic battle at Gadshill had left him "eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose" (2.5.152).

Falstaff makes no onstage appearance in Henry V, but the tradition of the cowardly, rapier-wielding braggart lives on in both Pistol and Nym, who draw their swords on one another no less than four separate times in one scene. Again Shakespeare goes to the trouble of explicitly indicating the presence of rapiers; at one point Nym says "I will scour you with my rapier...I would prick your guts a little," and Bardolph breaks up the fight between them by threatening to kill the man who "makes the first thrust" (2.1.89-90). Not surprisingly, the intervention proves unnecessary. Nym and Pistol, like the swordsmen of A King and No King, practice the rhetoric of the duelist without any of its accompanying swordplay. Even Falstaff's young page can tell that Pistol "hath a killing tongue and a quiet sword; by the means whereof a' breaks words, and keeps whole
weapons” (3.2.32-4). Nym eventually meets his end not in a duel but on the gallows, hung for stealing during the war, and as for Pistol, Fluellen cudgels him soundly in the play's final scene. Despite Pistol's vaunting threats, the would-be duelist fails to draw his sword during the beating. Thieves and cowards to a man, the second tetralogy's rapier duelists thoroughly refute the duello's legitimacy as a means of attaining or enforcing masculine honor.

The satire of cowardly rapier fencers among the second tetralogy's comic characters mirrors Shakespeare's treatment of the weapon in his comedies. Occasionally, references to rapiers in the comedies are simply neutral, such as the instruction for Antipholus of Syracuse to enter "with his Rapier drawn" (Comedy of Errors 4.4.138-9). Presumably this stage direction follows from the associations of the character's nationality and time period (i.e. sixteenth-century Italy), as does Prospero's instruction for Ariel to "fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell" so that the magician might appear "[a]s I was sometime Milan" (Tempest 5.1.84). In the latter case, Prospero's rapier may also represent an appropriate choice for a character who clearly wears his weapon as an element of dress rather than an implement of combat (like Chiron, Prospero carries a "dancing-rapier"). Elsewhere in the comedies, the rapier and the duel of honor sometimes take on more ominous associations, though almost always with a touch of the absurd. Although Pompey's inventory of familiar criminals populating the prison in Measure for Measure includes "Starve-lackey the rapier and dagger man," the play characterizes this figure no further than his satirical name, one which suggests comically penurious servility rather than genuinely dangerous criminal violence. The closest that
Shakespeare's comedies come to a non-comic treatment of the rapier duel is Benedick's challenging of Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Although the weapons in question are never mentioned, the rhetoric of Benedick's challenge strongly suggests the formalities of the duel of honor, so much so that Edelman cites the incident as proof of Shakespeare's conditional sympathy for the practice (20). Shakespeare certainly treats Benedick's earnestness and the justice of his cause with unusual respect, an exception to the larger pattern of contempt for or suspicion of the duello that we have seen almost everywhere else in his corpus. Just as in *Timon of Athens*, though, Shakespeare here studiously avoids using the terms "rapier" and "duel." Low points out that "the proposed combat carries neither the subversive overtones of the Elizabethan duel of honor nor the legal validity of the judicial duel," but instead combines the two and "conflates the purpose of the trial by combat with the results of the duel of honor," a strategy that allows Shakespeare "to develop the lightweight Benedick into a figure of at least arguably heroic stature." As Low notes, however, for the duel to function as a legitimate expression of heroic masculinity, "Shakespeare must also borrow from older traditions of combat, as if the duel of honor itself could not adequately represent the heroic" (*Manhood* 37-9). In the end *Much Ado About Nothing*'s combat never takes place, a pattern Low identifies as common to plays dealing with the duel of honor, and one which she attributes to the difficulty playwrights had in treating the practice with unironic seriousness.

A figure far more representative of the comedies' prominent duelists than Benedick is *As You Like It*'s Touchstone. As noted earlier, Touchstone claims to have had "four quarrels, and like to have fought one," but since he "durst go no further than the
Lie Circumstantial," while his enemy "durst not give [him] the Lie Direct," the two duelists "measured swords and parted" (5.4.41-79). Touchstone "quarrels in print, by the book" (5.4.81) much as Tybalt "fights by the book of arithmetic," and though the results in As You Like It are comical rather than tragic, the characterization of rapier fencing as "bookish" is similarly pejorative. So many writers have observed the connection between Touchstone's monologue on "the lie" and Saviolo's Practice that it would be superfluous (and perhaps impossible) to add anything to the existing critical explication of the passage. However, it may be worth pointing out that critics and directors alike tend to treat Touchstone's narrative as a purely imaginative bit of exaggerated satire rather than an account of an actual quarrel (despite the passage's fame, precious few Touchstones take the stage wearing a sword). Shakespeare's other comedies reveal the possibility that Touchstone's cowardly misuse of the code of the duello may not represent much of an exaggeration after all, though the clown unquestionably exhibits a far higher degree of self-knowledge than most of Shakespeare's pusillanimous, rapier wielding braggarts. The behavior of All's Well's Parolles, for instance, certainly implies no intentionally ironic distance between the coward and his cowardice. Like Fletcher and Massinger's La-Writ, Parolles's very name marks him as a man of language rather than action, and the specific language he uses suggests that his reading resembles Tybalt's and Touchstone's. Upon taking exception to Lafeu's suggestion that Bertram is Parolles's "master," the comically

37 In addition to being the French term for "words" ("paroles"), "parol" was in use in English as far back as the fourteenth century, at which time it meant "[s]omething said or spoken; an oral statement or declaration; an utterance; a word." (OED "parol, A.n.1"). By the mid-seventeenth century it had taken on the meaning of pledging "on word of honour, by oath" (OED "parole, n.1.a"), the definition that eventually led to its current legal usage. Parolles certainly embodies the earlier meaning of the term through his empty boasting, though his faithlessness and lack of honor may also be hinted at ironically if the later definition was already in use during Shakespeare's lifetime.
belligerent Parolles observes that such a remark is "not to be understood without bloody succeeding" (2.3.186), but quickly declines to challenge Lafeu because of his age. As with so many cowardly duelist,

Parolles expresses his valor primarily through his clothing rather than his swordplay, and just as with Fastidius and Falstaff, these clothes also offer the possibility of simulating courage without the danger and inconvenience of actual combat. In plotting to pretend that he has attempted to recover his drum, Parolles laments that he has pushed the plausibility of his alleged valor so far, wishing that "the cutting of [his] garments would serve the turn, or the breaking of [his] Spanish sword" (4.1.41-2). Spain was famous for the production of blades of all sorts, of course, but the fact that Parolles might contemplate the possibility of "breaking" his sword suggests that he wields a rapier. Here Shakespeare's comic irony draws on traditional criticisms of the rapier as un-military; that the soldier Parolles's weapon would have been useless in combat amplifies the absurdity of his military bluster.

We know that Shakespeare associated rapier fencing with Spaniards in particular by the frequency with which the weapon is mentioned by Adriano de Armado of Love's Labour's Lost. In bewailing the uselessness of his valor in the face of love, Armado defines himself entirely in the stereotyped language of the rapier duelist: "Cupid's butt-

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38 After his beating at the hands of Kent, Oswald comically tries to salvage his honor on the basis of the same lie when, in explaining himself to Cornwall, he refers to his assailant as "[t]his ancient ruffian...whose life I have spared at suit of his grey beard" (sc. 7 ln. 56-7).
39 Lafeu points out to Bertram that Parolles is an empty braggart, and that "The soul of this man is his clothes" (2.5.40).
40 Girard Thibault, a fencing master of the new school, believed that a rapier could defeat a two-handled sword in combat, but cautioned his students not to parry a slashing blow directly, lest their rapier be snapped in half (Anglo 104). In fact, breaking rapier blades was easy enough that Stow describes "Selected grave citizens" appointed by Queen Elizabeth to monitor the swords being brought through the gates of London, "break[ing] the Rapiers points, of all passengers that exceeded a yeard in length of their Rapiers" (869). In contrast, the much sturdier short sword was unlikely to break during the course of combat.
shaft is too hard for Hercules' club; and therefore too much odds for a Spaniard's rapier. The first and second cause will not serve my turn; the passado he respects not, the duello he regards not: his disgrace is to be called boy; but his glory is to subdue men. Adieu, valour! rust rapier!” (1.2.156-61). Even when facing opponents of flesh and blood, however, Armado's rapier appears more often in his rhetoric than in his hand. Though he claims to "excel [Samson] in my rapier as much as [Samson] didst me in carrying gates" (1.2.68-9), when the lowly Costard interrupts Armado's theatrical performance as Hector in the final scene, the Spaniard's enraged challenge does little to intimidate his rustic opposite, and in the end the quarrel comes to nothing. Beyond his outlandish boasts about his skill as a swordsman, Armado's language as a whole also links him to the hollow verbal affectations of the duelist's exaggerated courtesy. Having "a mint of phrases in his brain" (1.1.163), Armado embodies the majority of features associated with satirical depictions of rapier-wielding gallants: boastfulness, foreignness, and linguistic vacuity. All of the characteristics satirized in Falstaff, Pistol, Nym, Touchstone, Parolles, and Armado, however, find their most extreme embodiments in the comical cowards of The Merry Wives of Windsor and Twelfth Night.

The comic rapier in The Merry Wives of Windsor and Twelfth Night

With the possible exception of Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet, The Merry Wives of Windsor and Twelfth Night represent Shakespeare's most extensive commentary on the rapier and its associated code of conduct, a commentary that covers all of the anti-rapier faction's most common criticisms of both. Modern scholars, however, turn to these two
plays far less often than *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* when discussing Shakespeare's views on the duel, a pattern that may spring from the impossibility of interpreting his characterization of the weapon in these two plays as anything other than contemptuous. The central duelist in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the French Doctor Caius. Caius draws his weapon with even less cause than Pistol, and Shakespeare is at pains to remind us exactly what kind of weapon he draws. The doctor insists that his servant "take-a [his] rapier" (1.4.52) on their trip to the court. Later on, upon finding Simple hiding in his closet, Caius immediately calls out for "my rapier!" (1.4.60), but thinks better of it when he believes he has discovered that Simple is there to woo Anne on behalf of Sir Hugh Evans. Taking pen and paper, Caius quickly writes a note which he hands to Simple:

*CAIUS:* You, jack'nape, give-a this letter to Sir Hugh; by gar, it is a shallenge: I will cut his troat in deepark; and I will teach a scurvy jack-a-nape priest to meddle or make. You may be gone; it is not good you tarry here. By gar, I will cut all his two stones; by gar, he shall not have a stone to throw at his dog:

*MISTRESS QUICKLY:* Alas, he speaks but for his friend.

*CAIUS:* It is no matter-a ver dat: do not you tell-a me dat I shall have Anne Page for myself? By gar, I vill kill de Jack priest; and I have appointed mine host of de Jarteer to measure our weapon. By gar, I will myself have Anne Page. (1.4.94-104)

When Sir Hugh, having been tricked by the Host, misses the appointed time for his duel with the doctor, Caius rants that the priest "is dead already, if he be come...[B]y gar, de herring is no dead so as I vill kill him" (2.3.6-7). For a moment Caius even looks likely to slay his servant Rugby in place of Sir Hugh, demanding "Take your rapier, Jack. I will tell you how I vill kill him." Rugby insists "I cannot fence," but Caius rages at him to
"take your rapier" (2.3.11-4). Fortunately for Rugby, the Host, Slender, Shallow, and Master Page arrive in time to prevent any actual bloodshed. Though Page remarks at one point that he has "heard the Frenchman hath good skill in his rapier" (2.1.194),\(^{41}\) the exaggeration of Caius's belligerence reduces the danger of his swordsmanship to blustering farce; Caius has more of Pistol than of Tybalt about him, and the threat of his swordplay is constantly undermined by other characters' knowledge that the sword in question is wielded by a childish fool.

The Host mocks Caius in the typical terms of anti-rapier caricature, telling the doctor that they are there "[t]o see thee fight, to see thee foin, to see thee traverse...to see thy pass, thy punto, thy stock, thy reverse, thy distance, thy montat" (2.3.21-3). The duello's foreign terminology – comically empty of either threat or meaning – complements Caius's own humorously accented speech. The Host toys with Caius by calling him "Monsieur Mockwater" and then assuring him that "Mockwater, in our English tongue, is valour," to which Caius responds that "I have as much mockvater as de Englishman" (2.3.50-4). Here and elsewhere the foolish French doctor is deceived, of course, and eventually finds himself stripped of his sword in much the same way as his

\(^{41}\) Shallow looks down on Page's admiration for such "skill," responding "Tut, sir, I could have told you more. In these times you stand on distance — your passes, stoccados, and I know not what. 'Tis the heart, Master Page; 'tis here, 'tis here. I have seen the time, with my long sword I would have made you four tall fellows skip like rats" (2.2.195-9). Shallow's boast may well be meant satirically; Shakespeare sympathized with the values of George Silver and the anti-rapier faction, but that hardly prevented him from ridiculing their self-serving nostalgia on occasion. Nevertheless, the remarks anticipate Lear's memory of having "seen the day, with my good biting falchion / I would have made them skip," and Silver himself certainly seems to have taken seriously the idea of native English "heart" triumphing over continental technical prowess. At one point Silver describes a fight between Rocco and "Austen Bagger, a verie tall gentelman of his handes, not standing much vpon his skill, but carying the valiant hart of an Englishman" (65). Although Austen Bagger's "valiant hart" carried the day in Silver's _Paradoxes_, Shallow's "heart" looks less like a valid, alternative basis for untrained masculinity than like a more traditional variety of comical posturing.
countryman at the end of *The Little French Lawyer*. Having also disarmed Sir Hugh, the Host echoes the description of Pistol in *Henry V* when he observes that the harmless duelists can now "keep their limbs whole and hack our English" (3.1.66-7). Shakespeare not only displaces the rapier's violence with language, he displaces it with a comically nonsensical form of language that fails to perform the communicative function of honest speech in much the same way that the rapier fails to perform the violent function of a genuine weapon.

While the humorous duelists in *Twelfth Night* may not caricature the rapier's foreignness as extensively as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*’s Doctor Caius, the play presents a fuller satire of the duello's other characteristics, beginning with the "insult" offered to Sir Andrew by Viola. The affront to Andrew's honor, of course, is nothing more than Olivia's preference for the company of Viola over that of the foolish knight. Nevertheless, Toby convinces Andrew that Olivia's behavior constitutes legitimate grounds for a challenge. When Toby advises Andrew to include in his challenge "as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper, although the sheet were big enough for the bed of Ware" (3.3.38-40), Toby undoubtedly means "giving the lie" as a formal step toward the duel, but the phrasing strongly suggests the more commonplace meaning of "telling lies" as well. The letter that Andrew eventually produces exemplifies the duel's association with meaningless language and the hollow artificiality of courteous rhetoric. The challenge, characterized by Toby as "excellently ignorant" (3.4.166-7), consists of a

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42 Caius's Welsh opposite, Hugh Evans, also links the rapier to comically mangled speech, though his nationality lacks the widespread cultural associations with dueling found in English depictions of the French, Spanish, and Italians.
series of paradoxical inanities which Andrew concludes by signing "[t]hy friend, as thou
usest him, and thy sworn enemy" (3.4.151). The absurd contradictions implied by the
letter's mix of social niceties and groundless belligerence caricature the code of the
duello's lethal enforcement of both gentlemanly "honesty" and the expression of that
honesty through the language of flattering, courtly lies. We certainly need not assume
that Andrew's linguistic ineptitude implies that he lacks training in the culture of the duel,
however. Andrew might have had in mind William Segar's admonition to duelists that
"all speaches and writings of or to an Enemie, should bee in good and honorable termes;
for thereby the speaker or writer shal honor himselfe, and declare he hath to doo with a
person of reputation" (D1r). Of course Segar would presumably have recommended
separating one's "honorable termes" from one's oaths of enmity with more than just a
comma. Wherever Andrew may have acquired his knowledge of formal challenges, he
certainly seems to have had some sort of training in the use of the rapier. In lamenting
his shortcomings as a linguist, Andrew claims to have "bestowed [his] time in fencing,
dancing, and bear-baiting" (1.3.79-80) instead of the study of languages, an admission
that hardly looks like empty bragging. Viewed in the broader context of Shakespeare's
general disdain for the pusillanimity and empty rhetoric of rapier duelists, and keeping in
mind the sophistry and cowardice satirized in depictions of rapier instructors such as the
swordsmen in *A King and No King*, Andrew's ridiculous challenge and subsequent
cravenness may actually be intended as a reflection of the training he has received.

Finally, Shakespeare presents his most succinct and biting satire of rapier fencing
in the abortive duel between Viola and Sir Andrew. Initially forcing and goading them
into the fight respectively, Toby then terrifies each of the combatants with concocted tales about the other's skill as a duelist. Sir Andrew "is a knight, dubbed with unhatched rapier and on carpet consideration; but...a devil in private brawl" (3.4.209-10), a characterization that reflects the rapier's reputation as a wholly unmartial weapon useful only for civil bloodshed. Viola, on the other hand, is "a firago" and former "fencer to the Sophy" (3.4.244-8), a personal history which highlights her "tuck['s]" (3.4.199) association with effeminacy and foreignness. Both Andrew – the "thin-faced" (5.1.199) Aguecheek originally played by an actor slender enough to resemble a "distaff" (1.3.85) – and Viola – originally a boy playing a woman pretending to be a man whose appearance, despite her best efforts, is still "semblative a woman's part" (1.4.33) – present physical appearances that would normally evoke little fear in a possible opponent. However, the fact that appearance could no longer be relied upon as an accurate indicator of violent capacity was precisely what worried the critics of "boys" wielding "birdspits." In the end, the combat between Andrew and Viola reveals that the rapier duelists who look like harmless cowards turn out to be precisely that, bearing out Toby's prediction that "oxen and wain-ropes cannot hale [the fighters] together" (3.2.51-2). Shakespeare thus simultaneously stages both the emptiness of the rapier's threat and the emasculating fear that commentators like Silver imagined that threat was spreading. Viola and Andrew's duel also illustrates the degree to which rapiers and the dueling code enforce a hollow system of masculine honor through the enactment of harmless, purely symbolic combat.

43 Andrew's physical frailty is so immediately obvious that Fabian feels the need to acknowledge and excuse it. When Viola asks "what manner of man" Andrew is, Fabian describes him as "nothing of that wonderful promise to read him by his form as you are like to find him in the proof of his valour" (3.4.235-6).
Toby tells Viola that Andrew must "draw for the supportance of his vow," but reassures her that "he protests he will not hurt you," while he tells Andrew that Viola "will for his honour's sake have one bout with you, he cannot by the duello avoid it...[but] he will not hurt you" (3.4.266-74). The encounter reveals the duello as a code more concerned with the appearance of violent capacity than the performance of real violence, and the duelist's personal honor as a wholly artificial construction built upon empty ceremony rather than valorous action.

The only actual bloodshed that occurs during the play, Toby and Andrew's fight with Sebastian, appears to involve not rapiers but fists and blunt instruments. In pursuing Viola after Antonio has interrupted the duel, Toby advises Andrew to "cuff him soundly, but never draw thy sword" (3.4.356). Unfortunately, the two knights come across not Viola, but her twin brother Sebastian, a man who turns out to be "the very devil incarnate" in a brawl (5.1.176). Their first fight sees Sebastian beat Andrew soundly with the handle of his dagger, and their second encounter leaves both Andrew and Toby with "bloody coxcomb[s]" (5.1.184). Both knights walk offstage under their own power,

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44 Toby presumably advises Andrew not to draw his sword in order to limit the legal consequences of the assault, although Andrew hardly needs a legal rationale to convince him to keep his weapon sheathed. After Sebastian beats him in their first encounter, however, Andrew's response takes a decidedly legalistic turn when he vows to "have an action of battery against him if there be any law in Illyria. Though I struck him first, yet it's no matter for that" (4.1.31-3). The logic of Andrew's lawsuit follows the same pattern of foolish paradox seen in his written challenge, but it also serves to illustrate a recurring early modern caricature: the braggart rapier duelist who immediately seeks legal recourse when confronted with personal violence. The same figure appears briefly in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*. In Act 2, the stage directions call for the entry of "a Fellow with a long rapier by his side." Moll Cutpurse accosts him, recalling how he "abused [her] t'other night in a tavern," and, accusing him of having "tricks to save [his] oaths," she beats him soundly. In response, the Fellow observes that "[h]ad I brought any company along with me to have borne witness on't, 'twould ne'er have grieved me; but to be struck and nobody by, 'tis my ill fortune still" (2.1.243-58). Once again, the rapier and the lawyer's pen intersect at the point of the duelist's cowardice. For her part, Moll carries not a "long rapier" but rather a traditional short sword (as the play's frontispiece clearly illustrates). Her use of wrestling techniques in combat (2.1.366-8), her refusal to finish off an opponent during a duel (3.1.123), and her spirited defense of the nobility of soldiers (5.2.111-2) all likewise link her to the Masters of Defence and traditional swordplay.
however, suggesting wounds appropriate not to a rapier combat but rather to that most common curative treatment for cowardly, braggart duelists: the therapeutic cudgeling. For Sebastian's part, although the context of the play as a whole suggests that he too carries a rapier, he never actually employs the weapon, demonstrating his capacity for manly physical force in a more traditional but less lethal manner. It seems that as far as Shakespeare is concerned, the only way to stop a rapier from corrupting the construction of one's masculinity is to keep it safely in its scabbard.

Hamlet and the poisoned rapier

To conclude the chapter's overview of Shakespeare's use of rapiers, we will take an extended look at *Hamlet*, a play that contains what is arguably the most famous example of rapier combat in English literature. Reading the play's action and language in the context of early modern debates over swordplay will help to reveal the ways in which Shakespeare utilizes contrasting forms of violence to explore the nature of male identity, the clash between public and private obligations, and the dangers of an honor system that ignores the individual's responsibility to the state. Just as *Romeo and Juliet* opens with the more traditional sword and buckler fight of the servingmen, *Hamlet* begins with a number of references to the single combat between Old Hamlet and Norway that occurred thirty years before the action of the play. Old Hamlet's fight with Norway perfectly embodies the anti-rapier faction's idealized image of martial violence: the encounter is public, legally sanctioned,\(^{45}\) performed for national rather than private ends,

\(^{45}\) The two kings fought in the context of "a sealed compact / Well ratified by law and heraldry" (1.1.85-6)
and undertaken in full armor.\textsuperscript{46} Having taken place three decades earlier, this single combat casts the former king as a heroic figure of nationalistic, traditional military violence, a characterization emphasized in the descriptions of the ghost as having a "fair and warlike form" (1.1.45), being "armed cap-a-pie," carrying a "truncheon" (1.2.200-4), and moving "[w]ith martial stalk" (1.1.65). A representative of a now lost past in which swordplay served the needs of the kingdom rather than the individual, Old Hamlet symbolizes the very kind of martial tradition that men like George Silver saw the rapier as undermining.

In contrast to the traditional swordplay of an earlier Denmark, both the weapons and the bloodshed of the play's actual action associate the present Danish court in unflattering ways with rapier fencing. Rapiers certainly appear long before the final duel between Laertes and Hamlet; we learn from Gertrude that Hamlet commits his rash and ultimately disastrous murder of Polonius with such a weapon (Gertrude tells Claudius in Act IV that her son "[w]hip[ped] his rapier out" \textsuperscript{47} [4.1.9] in the moment before the killing), and the prince presumably wears the same sword throughout the first three acts. Despite the weapon's consistent presence onstage, however, rapier fencing seems to be held in low esteem in the Danish court. Polonius groups "fencing" with "drinking, swearing, quarreling," and "[d]rabbing" (2.1.26-7) as one of the offenses that Reynaldo

\textsuperscript{46} The Ghost appears in "the very armour he had on / When he th'ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.59-60). \textsuperscript{47} Hamlet's murder of Polonius, like Tybalt's killing of Mercutio, represents both an attack on a target unable to defend himself and perhaps a murder committed partially by accident. Before Polonius's body is revealed, Gertrude asks Hamlet "what has thou done?", to which he replies "Nay, I know not. Is it the king?" (3.4.24-5). Presumably Hamlet intends to kill someone when he stabs the arras, though not Polonius, just as Tybalt may intend to kill Mercutio during their duel, though perhaps not by stabbing under Romeo's arm. The danger posed by the rapier thus springs not only from the weapon's lethality, but also from the inability of those wielding it to exercise full control over its violence. The same problem surfaces in Hamlet's climactic duel when the two combatants "[i]n scuffling...change rapiers" (5.2.245), an unanticipated loss of control that costs Laertes his life.
might charge Laertes with, and in the very same breath that Claudius remarks on Laertes's skill with a rapier, the king observes that it is an ability "[o]f the unworthiest siege" and a mere "ribbon in the cap of youth" (4.7.66.8-10).\footnote{I.e. a frivolous decoration (less of a virtue than a modern "feather" in one's cap). For a similar association between gallants and silly personal ornamentation, see All's Well's Parolles, "[l]hat jackanapes / with scarves" (3.5.84-5).} Far from being a personal virtue, Laertes's talent with a rapier actually seems to function as a kind of contagion within Elsinore, for upon learning of it, Hamlet becomes "envenom[ed] with...envy" (4.7.85), a description that ominously foreshadows the eventual intersection between the prince's interest in rapier fencing and his death by poison. The contagion also has a decidedly foreign origin, as Hamlet tells Horatio that "[s]ince [Laertes] went into France, I have been in continual practice" (5.2.148-9). In fact, the venom is transmitted to Hamlet through the explicitly Norman horseman Lamord, the man who delivers the "masterly report" of Laertes's fame for his "art and exercise in...defence, / And for [his] rapier most especial" (4.7.80-2), and a character whose very name (pronounced "La-mort") anticipates the deadly results of the rapier's presence in the Danish court. The rapier thus carries the same taint of corrupting exoticism in Hamlet's Denmark that it did in Shakespeare's England, symbolized both by the provenance of Laertes's training and the nature of his half of the wager in Act 5's duel ("the French bet against the Danish" (5.2.120) being "six French rapiers and poniards " [5.2.109-10]). Laertes is never explicitly mocked as an affectedly alien fashionmonger, but in Osric's characterization of him as "an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing" (5.2.102.2-3), we can hear echoes of Mercutio's scornful caricature of
Tybalt as a lisping "captain of compliment." That a fool like Osric means such flattery earnestly rather than ironically hardly redounds to the honor of Laertes.

The play's concluding duel, in which a supposedly harmless sword ultimately kills both combatants, strongly echoes complaints by figures like Silver that rapier fencing was inherently unsafe. Just as Saviolo himself warns, a friendly bout with rapiers can turn into a life and death struggle almost instantaneously. Indeed, rapier fencing is hazardous enough, even as a sport, that Claudius believes Hamlet's murder can be passed off as a simple mishap so easily that "even his mother shall uncharge the practice / And call it accident" (4.7.65-6). Although ostensibly public and legally sanctioned, the real intention of the play's combat (known only by Claudius and Laertes, though suspected by Hamlet) is hidden and murderous; it is a duel of honor masquerading as an athletic event. Claudius, perhaps inadvertently, introduces the language of the duello into the fencing match when he suggests to Laertes that "this project [i.e. the poisoned sword] / Should have a back or second that might hold / If this did blast in proof" (4.7.124-6). Even in the context of the fight's surface meaning as a harmless demonstration of swordsmanship, the rapier exhibits a troubling ability to obscure the signs of its own violent capacity. That the fight should require multiple judges to determine whether or not a blow has connected, and that the combatants might even argue the point, contrasts markedly with the kind of traditional sword and buckler fighting that provided immediate aural evidence of its reality and efficacy.

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49 Laertes flatly denies suffering the first hit of the match (though Osric overrules him) and must "confess" to the second hit (5.2.229).
Regardless of whether or not the rapier's cultural connotations are taken into account, the critical consensus on the results of Hamlet's concluding duel seems, at best, ambivalent. As Lisa Hopkins puts it, "the multiple layers of acting and of irony in this scene cohere to make the apparent clarity and closure generated by the play's main foray into action no less problematic than the more obviously perplexing existential and ontological conundrums highlighted in its words" (133). Low sees the play's narrative closure "short-circuited" by the need for Horatio to retell the story's events for the justice of Hamlet's actions to become legible to the onstage audience. As she points out, such closure is "more clearly indicated in Shakespearean works such as *Macbeth* (*Manhood* 126). Of course to the degree that the combat in *Macbeth* offers such closure, it does so in a climactic battle with traditional weapons; implicit in Low's observation is the fact that rapier duels in Shakespeare remain opaque to their onstage audiences. Even more importantly, the political repercussions of Hamlet's rapier combat underline the weapon's destabilizing effect on Denmark's national power and security. With the entire royal family and Laertes\(^{50}\) dead, the succession passes to Fortinbras, the very foreign invader whose threat to Denmark's peace and safety represented a "strange eruption to [the] state" (1.1.67) in the play's first act. In effect, the concluding rapier duel deprives the Danish state of the leaders who should shield the nation from such calamities. Shakespeare stages the very sort of martial depopulation that James Cleland foresees when he warns duelists that "there is no Valour, or great Courage to be euery day swagring, and running

\(^{50}\) Laertes might have plausibly succeeded to the throne in the absence of Hamlet, given that on his return from France in the wake of his father's death "[t]he rabble call him lord" and cry "Laertes shall be king, Laertes king" (4.5.98-104).
to the field, with little or no regard of your life, which is the Kings, and which you should preserve carefully, to hazard it onlie for his cause" (234). Just as Cleland imagines an England deprived by the duel of the able-bodied men needed to protect it from foreign invasion, Shakespeare presents a Denmark in which the royal court has succumbed entirely to the corruption of rapier violence, leaving the nation vulnerable to Norwegian ambitions. The pairing of Hamlet and Fortinbras with their respective fathers gives the geopolitical repercussions of the play's opening and concluding swordfights a striking symmetry: just as Old Hamlet's lawful, legitimate single combat against the Norwegian king with traditional weapons ensured his nation's security and the expansion of its borders, the junior Hamlet's participation in the play's tainted rapier duel dooms Denmark to fall under the rule of Fortinbras and Norway. The pursuit of personal vengeance by both Hamlet and Laertes thus ends Denmark's sovereignty, and in the play's penultimate line the destructive violence of the duel is implicitly juxtaposed with the more productive violence of Old Hamlet's earlier single combat, as Fortinbras observes that "such a sight as this / Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss" (5.2.345-6).

In fact, the play's entire action can be read as an illustration of the national good's destruction by the pursuit of private ends, and that action often echoes the language of the duello. Laertes expresses common assumptions about a monarch's responsibility to his nation when he observes early in the play that Hamlet's "will is not his own" and that "[h]e may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself, for on his choice depends the

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51 As if to signal the end of one form of masculine violence and the beginning of another, Shakespeare explicitly locates the birth date of young Hamlet on the very day that his father overcame the Norwegian king (5.1.132-6).
Sanity and health of the whole state" (1.3.17-21). In reality, however, the prince focuses on the private to the almost total exclusion of the public. When soliloquizing on Claudius's usurpation of the throne, he casts the wrong in the intensely personal language of the duello, likening it to the offense to being "give[n]...the lie i'th' throat / As deep as to the lungs" (2.2.551-2). In watching Fortinbras's army march toward Poland, the prince embraces the idea that his thoughts should "be bloody or be nothing worth" (4.4.9.56), and that "[r]ightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honor's at the stake" (4.4.9.43-6). Such bloody-mindedness and a tendency to initiate deadly fights over insignificant slights to one's honor were both major criticisms leveled at rapier duelists in early modern England. Laertes, the play's other duelist, exemplifies different complaints regarding the duello's code, such as its indifference to the sanctity of any other kind of honor. Upon embarking on his own revenge, Laertes swears "[v]ows to the blackest devil! / Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!" (4.5.127-9), an oath he offers to make good even if it means "cut[ting] [Hamlet's] throat i'th' church" (4.7.99). In contrast to his earlier description of the crown prince's obligations, Laertes recognizes no duties except to his own personal honor and revenge; when asked by Claudius "Who shall stay you" from that revenge, Laertes replies, "My will, not all the world" (4.5.134). The will of Laertes, like the will of Hamlet, would seem to be emphatically his own in a way profoundly dangerous to the good of the state. These two duelists – both intent on the uncontrollable violence of their revenge and both

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52 Interestingly, the same speech sees Hamlet remark in anger at his own tendency to "unpack [his] heart with words" (2.2.563) rather than act on the violence he promises, an accusation also leveled against rapier duelists by those who thought their threats of violence little more than empty rhetoric.
indifferent to the repercussions of that violence beyond the satisfaction of their personal honor – ultimately doom Denmark to its own loss of control, bringing to an end the sovereignty from which the Danish court drew both its power and its purpose.

Even to the very limited, personal extent that Hamlet's actions in the final scene can at least be characterized as a successful revenge, the physical means by which he achieves that revenge tend to undermine the heroism of those actions. Allan Dessen, in an analysis focusing on the visual prominence of Hamlet's sword(s) during the play, characterizes the prince's eventual triumph as both literally and figuratively tainted:

[T]he instrument used in his final action is the poisoned sword of his enemies – a weapon forced upon him by necessity, a weapon that does prove successful, but nonetheless a weapon that symbolically expresses what the tragic hero has unwittingly (with Laertes) and knowingly (with Claudius) become – a poisoner. The Hamlet who is "most generous and free from all contriving" cannot achieve his ends in a corrupt world without himself partaking of the corruption. To set the time back in joint, a fatally infected Hamlet must himself be the final wielder of the poisoned sword. (67)

That Hamlet's corruption by the culture of "contriving" should come in the form of a rapier fits nicely with the weapon's reputation among opponents of the duello. For men like George Silver, the rapier's lethality and its associations with secrecy and deception made it a serious threat to, rather than a tool of, heroic masculinity. Culturally speaking, the sword that kills Hamlet was poisoned long before Laertes lay hands on it.
CHAPTER 3
DANGEROUS ANIMALS AND THEIR DANGEROUS ABSENCE:
THE WILD BOAR AND THE ENGLISH HUNT

Rosalind and the boar-spear

In Act 1 of *As You Like It*, the banished Rosalind and her cousin Celia discuss how to safely seek Duke Senior in the Forest of Arden. Celia suggests that they begrime themselves and dress as peasants in order to avoid the attention of possible assailants, but Rosalind has a more appealing proposition:

> Were it not better,
> Because that I am more than common tall,
> That I did suit me all points like a man?
> A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
> A boar-spear in my hand; and – in my heart
> Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will –
> We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
> As many other mannish cowards have
> That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3.108-16)

Though critics have spilled much ink on the elaborate layers of gendered "semblances" that Rosalind's plan draws on and produces, the specific details of the "martial outside" that she mentions in passing have drawn less interest. Her "curtle-axe" certainly represents a straightforward symbol of masculinity, suitable both for warfare and hunting, but what of her boar-spear? The forest of the play contains lions, but no boars appear, nor were any likely to have roamed Arden's real-life Warwickshire counterpart in 1600; most sources agree that the last native wild boar in England was killed in the 13th century (Rackham 36, Yalden 168, Albarella 64). Shakespeare's audience would nevertheless have immediately recognized the boar-spear as a uniquely potent sign of violent,
courageous masculinity. Edward Berry points out that "in both medieval and Elizabethan hunting manuals the boar is treated as the most dangerous animal hunted," and thus “hunting the boar... is a supreme test of manhood" (45).¹ No wonder then that Rosalind would choose such a weapon to symbolize her re-gendered exterior. As she immediately observes, however, more genuinely "mannish" imposters could resort to the very same kind of posturing to "outface" their cowardice with "semblance." Of course, Rosalind's "semblance" is never really tested (at least not by a boar), but her passing observation glances at the widespread suspicion in early modern England that the symbolism and the reality of the hunt were often at odds with one another. Though the spear's intended emblematic meaning would have been unmistakable, the status and significance of dangerous game hunting in early modern England would have positioned Rosalind's spear within a web of highly contested values and beliefs. Before we can understand the associations of Rosalind's chosen weapon, we must first map out the complex ways in which the hunt served to construct masculinity and sovereignty, constructions negotiated in both the real forests controlled by the English nobility and the imagined forests found in London's playhouses.

¹ If Rosalind's boar-spear actually appeared onstage, it would have been easily identified by the crossbar just behind its head. The bar was intended as a defense against the animal's ferocity, since contemporary authorities believed that "[w]hen [the boar] feeleth himself thus wounded that he cannot live, if it were not for the crosses and forks upon the Boar-spear, he would prese in upon the vanquisher to take revenge for his death: For so great is the fervent wrath of this beast, that he spareth not to kill and wound, although he feel upon him the pangs of death" (Topsell 542). For an illustration of a surviving fifteenth century boar-spear, see Cummins fig. 30.
The tenuous cultural status of the early modern English hunt

Shakespeare produced As You Like It during a period of major shifts in English hunting culture. The nature and status of the hunt were undergoing radical changes all over Europe during the late sixteenth century, changes that had begun hundreds of years earlier and which in England's case would help to precipitate a broader political crisis by the mid-seventeenth century. First and foremost among these changes was the disappearance of the hunt's most important justification: its utility as a training ground for war. The English upper-classes had long maintained that their pastime represented nothing less than an indispensable form of military preparation for the nation's armored cavalry. At the beginning of the 15th century Edward of Norwich defended the subject matter of his hunting manual, The Master of Game, by observing that if a man who never hunted "had need to go to war he would not know what war is, for he would not be accustomed to travail" (13). This sentiment (actually translated by Edward from Gaston Phoebus's Livre de Chasse) reappeared in one form or another in nearly every hunting text printed in England over the next two centuries. If the claim of martial necessity retained some limited truth in 1400, though, it had become something far closer to empty rhetoric by 1600. During the intervening 200 years, heavy cavalry had suffered the final stages of its marginalization in the face of improved firearms and a growing emphasis on infantry, undermining the aristocracy's customary military role and with it the most commonly cited rationale for the hunt. While traditionally-minded writers might still cite hunting's usefulness for habituating the nobility to the "travail" of battle, the military utility of such travail by the social elite was clearly waning.
At the very moment that the sport was looking less like a matter of the nation's defense and more like a matter of an individual's personal pleasure, hunting practices were shifting to make the activity less physically taxing. Though par force hunting maintained its position as the most highly regarded and demanding form of the hunt,² the rising popularity of coursing with greyhounds and shooting at animals from blinds in enclosed parks threatened to remove most of the physical hardship and danger associated with the sport. Both Thomas Elyot and James I objected to the relative ease of such recreations and their uselessness as training for war (Berry 53), but the general trend toward less and less hazardous forms of the pastime continued, and even hunting manuals which made direct reference to the hunt's hardship might find themselves inadvertently (or perhaps ironically) undermining their own subject's rationale. *The Noble Arte of Venerie*, the most important English hunting manual of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,³ contains a lengthy poem describing a royal hunt during which the king's butler (champion of wine) and cook (champion of food) join in mock-heroic combat, complete with militarily gustatory imagery. The "war," essentially a contest between different varieties of gluttony, serves as a performance for the entertainment of the hunters, as the "King or comely Queene, then Lorde and Lady looke, / To see which side will beare the bell, the Butler or the Cooke" (91-2).⁴ The feast, not the kill, has become the central locus of violence and interest within the text's hunt.

² Par force hunting involved the tracking by bloodhounds of a single adult male deer over open ground, without the use of bows, guns, or nets.
³ As with almost all English hunting manuals, Gascoigne's *Noble Art* is largely a translation, taken in this case from Frenchman Jaques Du Fouilloux's *La Venerie*.
⁴ All quotes from Gascoigne's *Noble Arte of Venerie* are taken from the 1575 edition unless otherwise noted.
Just as the poem's nobility passively "looke, to see" the outcome of the pseudo-military struggle enacted by their servants, the hunt itself could often seem more like a staged entertainment than a form of physical trial, particularly in the widely popular (and primarily English) sport of coursing with greyhounds, in which dogs were released upon a hare or deer within a closed park.\(^5\) Gascoigne adds his own chapter on the pastime (finding the subject missing from his source text) and assures any skeptical readers that "[i]t is a gallant sport to see how the Hare will turne and winde to saue hyr selfe out of the dogges mouth." (248). In fact, far from seeking to excuse the inherent passivity of what amounts to little more than a spectator sport, Gascoigne actually turns the traditional justification of the hunt on its head, presenting it instead as simply an impediment to pleasure:

I haue thought meete of my self to adde concernyng coursing with Greyhoundes, the which is doubtlesse a noble pastime, and as meete for Nobilities and Gentlemen, as any of the other kyndes of Venerie before declared: Especially the course at the Hare whiche is a sporte continually in sight, and made without any great travaule: so that recreation is therein to be founde without vnmeasurable toyle and payne: Whereas in hunting with houndes, although the pastyme be great, yet many tymes the toyle and payne is also exceedyng great: And then it may well be called, eyther a paynefull pastyme, or a pleasant payne. (250)

Aside from Gascoigne's slightly defensive assertion that coursing with greyhounds is "doubtlesse a noble pastime" and as valid a pursuit for the gentry as any other form of hunting, his reversal of the hunt's centuries old rationales is surprisingly frank. Gascoigne's description of the sport's rules also makes it clear that the actual killing has retreated well into the background of the activity's significance:

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\(^5\) For a more extensive description of coursing with greyhounds, see Gascoigne 246-50 and Berry 17-8.
In coursing at the Hare it is not material which dogge killeth hyr...but he that giueth most Cotes, or most turnnes, winneth the wager...if neyther of your Greyhoundes be able to turne the Hare untill the ende of the course, then he which went foremost throughout the course must winne the wager. And for the better decidyng of all these questions, if it be at a solemnpne assembly, they vse to appoynt Iudges whiche are expert in coursing, and shall stande on the hilles sides whether they perceyue the Hare will bende, to mark which dogge doeth best, and to giue iudgement thereof accordingly. (248-9)

Even more striking than coursing's de-emphasizing of the kill is its complete elimination of human participation in the "hunt," during which the only non-bestial role that the spectator can fill is that of gambler, or at the very most a judge whose decisions facilitate such gambling.

The pattern of decreased involvement in any actual violence and an increased role for spectating during the hunt has been described by Norbert Elias as the "sportization" of hunting, an element of the "civilizing process." This trend, which Elias identifies in a variety of physical pastimes, involved an increasing focus on the adherence to rules in ways that "ensure a balance between the possible attainment of a high combat-tension and a reasonable protection against physical injury" for those participating (151). Elias cites fox hunting and its "delegation by the humans to the hounds of the major part of the pursuit and also of the killing function" (151) as the prime example of hunting's utilitarian and martial pleasures being transformed into the primarily recreational pleasures of sport:

In earlier forms of hunting, the main sources of pleasure had tended to lie in the killing and subsequent eating of the hunted animal. It was characteristic of the English form of fox-hunting that the pleasure of eating as a motive for hunting had disappeared and that the pleasure of killing, though by no means negligible, had become attenuated...the pleasure of the pursuit itself had become, as it were, the principle source
of entertainment and the central part of the exercise... Killing foxes was easy. All the rules of the hunt were designed to make it less easy, to prolong the contest, to postpone victory for a while - not because it was felt to be immoral or unfair to kill foxes outright, but because the excitement of the hunt itself had increasingly become the main source of enjoyment. (166)

Elias seems largely unaware of the pre-18th century traditions and rules associated with different forms of English hunting, but the sportization of the hunt had actually begun well before the English Civil War's decimation of the deer population drove hunters to elevate the formerly "verminous" fox. In the case of coursing with greyhounds inside a closed park, sportization appears in Gascoigne's injunction that "When a Hare is put vp, you muste giue her grounde (whiche is called lawe) xij. score yeardes or more, according to the grounde and countrie where she sitteth: and then let slippe your Greyhoundes" (248). Similarly, a large percentage of every English hunting manual in the period covered the importance of and methods for singling out a specific deer (usually the most challenging to catch) and pursuing it exclusively, ignoring any other animals that the dogs might happen upon. By the sixteenth century the primary purpose of hunting among the nobility had long ceased to be the venison gained, and even the killing itself was of diminished significance. While actually dispatching a wild animal with one's own hand was not (and had never been) the only means of constructing masculinity through

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6 The process of sportization taking place during the sixteenth century, though not a shift of moral sensibilities per se, sometimes interacted in strange ways with longstanding moral objections to the hunt. It tended to foster an appreciation of the chase's less violent elements, but without actually eliminating the sport's traditional violence. For example, Montaigne observes in "On cruelty" that "I cannot bear to hear a hare squealing when my hounds get their teeth into it, even though I enjoy the hunt enormously" (481).

7 Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will refer primarily to "deer," a general term familiar to all modern readers and one which takes in the hart, the hind, the roebuck, the stag, and the rest of early modern hunting culture's numerous terms for deer of different species, genders, and ages. For a brief explanation of the most commonly encountered categories of deer, see Berry xii.
the hunt, the hunter's increasing distance from the act of killing threatened to undermine
the logic of the activity's symbolic significance.

Though the hunting traditions of other nations in Europe also dealt (to differing
degrees) with changes such as the sport's declining physical demands and its decreased
relevance for military training, England's natural environment presented an additional,
uniquely destabilizing challenge to the hunt's literal and symbolic functions; alone among
sizeable European kingdoms in the sixteenth century, England suffered from (or,
depending on one's perspective, enjoyed) a complete lack of physically dangerous
wildlife. Large cats had not lived in England for millennia (MacPhee 265), and even
bears had been driven to extinction at least 500 years before the Tudor period. Much
more recently, England had finished eradicating its populations of wolves and wild boars,
two species that still survived in the vast majority of Renaissance Europe's woodlands.
The English generally viewed the destruction of their native wolf population as an
admirable achievement and an enviable element of their national identity, one which
Keith Thomas describes as "the occasion of much self-congratulation" (273). The Noble
Arte of Venerie's chapter on the wolf observes that it is "a beast sufficiently knowne in

8 Yalden cites 500 years as the traditional number, but suggests that archeological evidence makes 1000 or
2000 years a more likely figure (112).
8 Given the economic and cultural centrality of the wool industry in England, its lack of wolves obviously
had important implications for the everyday life of wide swaths of the nation's population. England's wolf-
free countryside also served as a ready metaphor for those seeking to promote the nation's Protestant
exceptionalism. For instance, lupine Catholics (or at least the predators that Catholicism promotes) stalk
the wilderness beyond the borders of Spenser's pastoral paradise in the “September” chapter of The
Shepheardes Calendar. Diggon, having traveled with his flock to "forrein costes" in search of wealth,
returns home alone, repenting his wanderings. He describes to Hobbinoll how the flocks in foreign lands
are "of rauenous Wolues yrent." Hobbinoll responds that "sith the Saxon king, / Neuer was Woolfe seene
many nor some, / Nor in all Kent, nor in Christendome" (157). The same association between wolves and
Catholics seems to have been current almost a hundred years later, when Milton's archangel Michael warns
Adam about the coming of the Catholic church and the day when "Wolves shall succeed for teachers,
grevious Wolves" (12.508).
France and other Countries where he is bred: but here in England they be not to be found in any place." Gascoigne retains Fouilloux 's chapter on wolves, however, since in "Ireland...there are great store of [wolves]: and bycause many Noble men and Gentelmen haue a desire to bring that Countrie to be inhabitied and ciuilly gouerned (and would God there were more of the same mind) therefore I haue thought good to set downe the nature and maner of hunting at the Wolfe according to mine Author" (205). William Harrison, often an enemy of the hunt, brags that "[i]t is none of the least blessings wherewith God hath endued this island that it is void of noisome beasts, as lions, bears, tigers, pards, wolves, and suchlike, by means whereof our countrymen may travel in safety and our herds and flocks remain for the most part abroad in the field without any herdman or keeper" (324). Harrison's reaction to more ecologically benighted nations, though less openly scornful than Gascoigne's, echoes its general sentiment. For English writers, the absence of wild canines symbolized a certain kind of national virtue, threatened only when overcome by sin. Harrison laments that, despite England's lack of naturally occurring "noisome beasts," "there have been divers [wolves] brought over from beyond the seas for greediness of gain to make money only by the gazing and gaping of our people upon them, who covet oft to see them, being strange beasts in their eyes and seldom known...in England" (324-5).

Although the reaction to England's lack of wolves (the occasional traveling menagerie aside) was one of more or less universal pride, the reaction to the nation's lack of boars and bears was more ambivalent. Traditionally, the hunting of these animals was associated with heroic masculinity, as illustrated by Chaucer's description of Troilus, who
"[i]n tyme of trewe, on haukyng wolde...ride, / Or elles honte boor, beer, or lyoun; / The smale bestes leet he gon biside (537). While Sir Thomas Elyot seems to present the absence of dangerous game as an unalloyed good when he writes "all myghty god be thanked in this realme be no...cruel bestis to be pursued" (192), the balance of his writing on the hunt complicates his assertion of gratitude. Ever the proselytizing classicist, Elyot observes that the hunting of dangerous game as described by Xenophon is "the very imitation of batayle, for...it dothe shewe the courage and strength as well of the horse as of him that rydeth...encountringe and ouerthrowyng great and mighty beestes." He tells his readers, "[t]he chiefe hunting of the valiaunt Grekes was at the lyon, the lybarde, the tigre, the wilde swyne, and the beare, and somtyme the wolfe and the harte," (189); that the hart comes last (after even the wolf) is no accident. Unfortunately, all bears and wild boars had long since disappeared from England's forests by the mid-sixteenth century, leaving behind a state of affairs that created potentially uncomfortable contrasts between the hunting culture of England and the more genuinely dangerous hunting culture of the Continent.

However, a shift from the hunting of boars to the coursing of greyhounds threatened to do more damage to England's hunting culture than merely amplifying the existing objections related to military relevance. By eradicating the species which could physically threaten human beings, English hunters had inadvertently strengthened the

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10 Chaucer's example may seem purely fictional to modern readers, but the categories of classical myth and modern reality were not nearly as thoroughly differentiated then as they are today. For instance, John Bossewell's *Workes of Armorie* gives elaborate histories for a wide variety of heraldic devices, freely mixing examples from the contemporary aristocracy with more fanciful creations such as the twelve crests awarded to Hercules for the completion of his labors. When Bossewell writes that "diuers noble persons haue atteined the greatest part of their renown for fighting with wilde beastes" (130r), he offers no indication that such feats were a path to renown only in a bygone age.
sentimental argument against the killing of any animal for sport. Thomas observes that “as the threat from wild beasts receded, so man’s right to eliminate wild creatures from whom he had nothing to fear was increasingly disputed” (287). While the boar, the bear, and the wolf might all (theoretically) pose a real enough threat to the hunter to justify the animals' destruction, the deer was a byword for timidity and flight from danger. Renaissance emblem books often depicted a deer fleeing from a snake as the representation of "cowardice" and "irrational fear," and the term "stag-hearted" was sometimes used in France as a pejorative antonym for "lion-hearted" (Bath 282-6). Not only were deer harmless cowards, they were even considered semi-domesticated by some authors. William Harrison cites classical authorities in grouping deer with bees as the two species of animals neither wholly wild nor wholly tame (254-5), and even suggests that "[i]n divers foreign countries they cause their red and fallow deer to draw the plow, as we do our oxen and horses. In some places, also, they milk their hinds as we do here our kine and goats" (329).

Although explicit condemnations of the hunt based on the sentimental argument were still relatively rare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, morally troubling acknowledgments of the deer's harmlessness had begun to find their way more and more often into discussions of the sport. The most familiar examples come from Shakespeare's depictions of the deer hunt, a pastime that his hunters themselves often express

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11 I use here Berry's categorization of anti-hunting ideologies. He divides the arguments against the hunt into the humanist, the sentimental, and the puritan (24-5). Humanists were primarily concerned with the ways in which the hunt reflected and facilitated warfare, sentimentalists expressed sympathy for the suffering of the animals themselves, and puritans objected to the hunt because of its interference with the Sabbath and (less often) its destruction of God's creations.

12 For a discussion of the increasing prominence of such arguments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see Thomas pp. 174-6.
ambivalence toward. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the Princess seems to embark on a royal hunt with more reluctance than relish, describing her role as "play[ing] the murderer" (4.1.8) and observing that the innocence of the quarry serves to undermine the glory of the sport:

Thus will I save my credit in the shoot:  
If wounding, then it was to show my skill,  
That more for praise than purpose meant to kill.  
And, out of question, so it is sometimes,  
Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,  
When, for fame's sake, for praise, an outward part,  
As I for praise alone now seek to spill  
The poor deer's blood, that my heart means no ill. (4.1.26-35)

The same sentiment appears in *As You Like It*, particularly in Jaques's lament for the wounded stag. One of Duke Senior's followers describes seeing the melancholy Jaques sitting by a brook, "weeping and commenting / Upon the sobbing deer" (2.1.65-6), an animal which "heaved forth such groans / That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat / Almost to bursting, and the big round tears / Coursed one another down his innocent nose / In piteous chase" (2.1.36-40). Jaques not only pities the animal, he also condemns the hunter who has wounded it, and in his lament "most invectively he pierceth through" the lifestyle of Duke Senior's men, "swearing that [they] / Are mere usurpers, tyrants and what's worse, / To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and native dwelling-place" (2.1.58-63). Even if we discount the seriousness of such empathic expressions by Jaques (a man who, after all, "can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs" [2.5.10-1]), the Duke and his men exhibit a similar consciousness of the hunted deer's innocence. It is the anonymous lord, not Jaques, who describes the "big round tears" of the wounded deer with such pathos, and Duke Senior
himself, in the very moment that he calls his men to the hunt, admits that "it irks me the poor dappled fools, / Being native burghers of this desert city, / Should in their own confines with forked heads / Have their round haunches gored" (2.1.21-4). Neither here nor in Love's Labour's Lost, however, does the sentimental argument succeed in overcoming the violence of the hunt: the Princess ultimately kills a deer and gains the praise she had sought with such ambivalence (4.2.43-4), while Jaques eventually welcomes home the successful hunters to the tune of a bawdy song (4.3.113).

Such expressions of enthusiasm tempered by qualms regarding the deer's innocence were not confined to the complexities of Shakespearean characterization; even English hunting manuals themselves acknowledged the contrast between the deer's harmlessness and the hunter's bloody pursuit. The Noble Art of Venerie contains a well known first-person poem in which the deer, calling itself a "harmless Hart," laments its destruction at the hands of the cruel hunter and asks if he or she "Canst...in death take suche delight." The deer goes so far as to suggest that the reader pursue "some other beastes...[w]ho worke thy harme by sundrie meanes" (139). Not satisfied with simply

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13 Laurie Shannon quotes a similar poetic lament entitled "Complaint of the Birds to Luther against Wolfgang." Written by Martin Luther in 1534, the songbirds decry their brutal killing at the hands of the hunter, and they too go on to recommend that their human persecutor, Wolfgang, direct his "wrath and industry against sparrows, swallows, crows, ravens, mice and rats...[who] do [people] much harm, rob and steal corn, oats, barley" (64). Shannon treats both Luther's "Complaint of the Birds" and the deer's complaint in The Noble Art as evidence of a persistent early modern awareness and acknowledgement of the natural rights possessed by animals as subjects. However, in viewing the entire animal world as a single undifferentiated, monolithic assemblage, all of whose members possess comparably valid claims to the right of existence, Shannon must carefully ignore the passages of each lament in which the "speaker" recommends more appropriate bestial victims to its human audience. The hart and the songbirds demand mercy from human beings not because of the rights bestowed upon all living elements of God's creation, but specifically because they themselves are harmless to humankind. Shannon's reading of these laments has more to do with 21st century conservationism than sixteenth century concepts of the moral status of animals, and her anachronistic perspective illustrates one of the persistent problems with ecocritical responses to Renaissance texts.
translating du Fouilloux's single poem, however, Gascoigne's original additions actually intensify the discomfiting juxtaposition of the perspectives of hunter and hunted, giving poetic voice to the hare, the otter, and the fox as well.¹⁴ A country populated by deer but not bears and hare but not boars was also a country that could no longer use physically dangerous wild animals as a justification for the hunt more generally. Formerly, the hunting of dangerous game had conferred upon the sport an additional, non-military variety of legitimacy related to protecting the public from ravenous beasts. Even an avowed enemy of the hunt such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa concedes that some ancient philosophers "commended [hunting] for the ende, or for the necessitie or honestie of the enterprise, not for the pleasure: as Meleager slew the Boare which spoiled Calidonia, not for his pleasure, but for the profit of the common wealth, deliuering his cauntrie of a beaste, that destroyed it" (122). However, when Thomas Cokayne, the English author of *A Short Treatise of Hunting* (1591), tries to draw on such a justification, the required fudging visibly interferes:

> I could say here much more in praise of this notable exercise of hunting; by which in many other Countries men haue been and yet are often deliuered from the raune & spoile of many wild beasts; as namely of Lyons, of Beares, of Woolues, and of other such beasts of pray; and here in England from the hurt of Foxes and of other reuenous vermine. But the disport [is] of itselfe sufficiently commendable and able to say for itself, against all the carping speaches of the enemies thereof. (A3v-A4r)

Hunting in England must "say for itself" precisely because the contrast with which Cokayne is confronted – the pursuit of lions and bears versus the pursuit of "Foxes

¹⁴ Berry argues that Venus's failure to convince Adonis to hunt the hare rather than the boar springs largely from the goddess's similar inability to sustain a meditation on the killing of a harmless beast without being overwhelmed by sympathy for its plight. Venus is "unexpectedly moved to pity the very animal she has been recommending as prey." (54), a reaction that echoes Gascoigne's difficulty in comfortably reconciling the hunter's violence with the hunted animal's harmlessness.
and...other reuenous vermine" – cannot bear extended examination, especially when the hunting of such "reuenous vermine" was almost universally eschewed by the gentry.

But what Cokayne chose to ignore, other writers confronted. Commentators on both sides of the English Channel recognized the contrast between nations which still contained dangerous animals and those which did not, and also recognized the potential problems such an absence might pose for the hunt's ability to contribute to the construction of masculine identity. The most explicit statement of such an awareness may be the dialogue between the French *Debat des heraulx d'armes* and the English *Debate betwene the Heraldes*. *Le Debat des heraulx d'armes*, written by Charles, Duke of Orleans, between 1458 and 1461, presents a dispute between two heralds, one French and one English, each vying to prove his nation the "most worthy to be advanced to honor" (5). After the English herald's brief (and rude) assertion of preeminence in all noble pursuits, the courtly French herald rebuts his English counterpart's points at length and ultimately wins the contest, which is judged by the figure of Prudence. In 1550, the Englishman John Coke wrote a rebuttal entitled *The Debate Between the Heralds of England and France*, in which (predictably) an English herald bests a boorish French herald. Both dialogues address the subject of hunting in England versus France, offering a rare example of direct comparison between English and Continental hunting cultures. Charles begins by having his English herald assert that "[w]ith regard to fair chases, the kingdom of England is well provided and adorned with them, for it is a fine thing to see what a great number of parks there are, wonderfully full of venison – as of stags, roes, and deer; so that when the ladies go out to divert themselves, they draw their bows and
kill these animals, which is a very exquisite pleasure” (6-7). The French herald soon responds to his opposite's characterization of the English hunt and its association with five different un-martial variations of the sport: hunting with bows, hunting in parks, hunting for food, hunting with women,¹⁵ and hunting purely as a diversion or for pleasure:

[T]o catch an animal in a park is no chase... since they are caught because they are in the park. It is no wonder, then, if the ladies of England kill them with their bows, since the poor animals must, of necessity, come where they are wanted, and they can only move backwards and forwards within their parks, so that this ought not to be called a chase. (10-11)

Not only are the wild animals of France genuinely wild, the French herald claims, but his country also has "all the wild animals which [England has], as stags, roes, and deer, but...many other animals for the chase besides these; for [France has] wild boars, or wild black swine, and...also wolves and foxes, while [England has] none. And...these are bloodthirsty animals, so that it requires persons of great courage to overcome them” (12). It will come as no surprise that, given such reasoning, Charles's Prudence awards the victory to France. Over a century would pass before Coke’s rebuttal, but the vigor with which he contests each point made by Charles suggests that the scorn heaped on the English in Le Debat des heraulx d'armes still stung. Coke's French herald begins by claiming that the forests of France are "full of venery, as hartes, hyndes, falow dere, wylde bores, and wolves for noble men to course," to which the English herald responds that "we have al maner of bestes salvages that you have, and more plente of them to chase; as hartes, hyndes, buckes, does, robuckes, and wylde bores. And as touchynge wolves wherof you have plentie, God be thanked, we have none" (59-60). Coke tries to

¹⁵ The way in which Charles phrases his English herald's description actually makes it sound as if only women hunt in England.
defend the "great courage" of English hunters by attaching "wylde bores" to the end of his list of "bestes salvages" (the other five animals are all merely different varieties of deer), but his claim is at best misinformed and at worst an outright lie. Nevertheless, Coke's lie hints at the boar's singularly liminal position in English hunting culture. As we will see later on, that position made the boar a uniquely appealing means of salvaging the English hunt's traditional function as a demonstration of courage and masculinity.

**The royal hunt and the enactment of sovereign power**

While the early modern English hunt's crisis of meaning threatened its usefulness as a method of constructing personal identity for all participants, there existed a single hunter for whom the activity's symbolic validity took on an even more complex and profound significance: the monarch. English kings and queens of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had to reconcile the sport's relatively recent changes with its ancient function as a means of enacting their sovereignty over their realm's environment. Certainly figures such as James I hunted because they enjoyed the sport for its own sake (enjoyed to the point of excess, James's critics claimed), but a king or queen's time spent in the chase was inevitably a mixture of business and pleasure. As James himself observes in *Basilikon Doron*, "a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gesture, all the people gazingly doe behold." Fittingly, this warning introduces "Of a Kings Behavior in Indifferent Things," the chapter in which James deals at length with the royal hunt (49). For the monarch, the pursuit of the hart (or even, for that matter, the coursing of a hare with greyhounds) was not simply a pleasurable pastime, it was a
performance in which all of the complicating considerations discussed above had to be viewed through the lens of the king or queen's unique political and social position.

As in most times and places in the western world where the royal hunt was practiced, the activity's cultural significance in early modern Europe rested primarily on the sport's ability to demonstrate the monarch's power over his or her environment through the personal enactment of violence. Berry describes the royal hunt as "a ritualistic expression of socially pervasive royal power" (ix), and observes that "[d]uring the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, every English monarch except Edward VI and Queen Mary hunted throughout his or her reign, either regularly or obsessively" (3).

Robert Pogue Harrison, speaking of the royal hunt's symbolism more broadly, claims that "[t]he hunt ritualizes and reaffirms the king's ancient nature as civilizer and conqueror of the land. His forests are sanctuaries where the royal chase may reenact, in a purely symbolic way, the historical conquest of the wilderness" (74). Of course the hunt was not, in fact, purely symbolic, as demonstrated by the completely literal death that marked its conclusion. Though no Renaissance monarch ever rid his nation of a wild beast that was terrorizing his subjects, killing a boar or a bear served as a passable modern reenactment of the mythical feats of violence performed by legendary kings. Possibly for this reason, the boar and the bear "ranked...much higher than the deer, as beast[s] worthy of the attention of royal hunters" in some parts of Europe, especially the Iberian peninsula (Cummins 121).

John Cummins describes in detail the bear hunt narratives of King

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16 Commenting on Cummins's observations, Umberto Albarella suggests that the rarity of the wild boar in medieval English forests explains "why their hunting did not receive the status or popularity that it had in other European countries such as Germany, Spain...or France" (64). I would argue that while the wild boar's scarcity and eventual extinction inevitably rendered the animal a less "popular" quarry for English
Alfonso XI of Castile, narratives which he thinks make "the deer-hunting of Northern Europe" seem "dilettante and effete" in comparison (121). Even if Cummins's assessment fails to take into account English hunting culture's great respect for the mature stag's physical power, the characterization still identifies a fundamental difference between the royal hunt as practiced in England as opposed to the Continent, a difference that early modern observers could not help but have been aware of.

For a period of forty-five years in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, such considerations slipped into the background as the royal hunt experienced a waning of symbolic importance. In constructing her wildly successful public persona, Elizabeth seldom drew on the imagery of the pastime that had so occupied and defined her father, and while she did in fact hunt with regularity, descriptions of her as Diana the huntress (as opposed to the moon goddess) remained relatively rare during her reign (Berry 31-2). Nor, it seems, did Elizabeth scrupulously maintain the exclusivity of the sovereign's right to hunt game in the crown's forests. Arthur MacGregor observes that "many...royal privileges [relating to the hunt] fell into abeyance, for the queen's modest sporting appetites were easily satisfied from her own estates and from those of her courtiers who she favored with visits in the course of progresses through the realm" (305). John Manwood appears to have concurred with this assessment, writing in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign that those who violated forest law usually did so unwittingly because the old traditions had fallen out of use (*3r). Certainly the surviving descriptions of hunters, the boar hunt's status was in no way diminished, and in some sense may actually have been enhanced, by its absence from the English countryside. The prestige of lion hunting among early modern English writers seems to have suffered little from the nation's lack of lions, and in many ways the wild boar occupied a similar (though somewhat more ambivalent) space in England's cultural imagination.
Elizabeth's "hunts," especially those from the end of the sixteenth century, indicate that her use of the pastime's symbolic potential differed markedly from the traditional emphasis on hardship and martial preparation. Visiting Cowdray in 1591, the queen "rode into the Parke: where was a delicate Bowre prepared, under the which were her Highnesse musicians placed, and a crossbowe by a Nymph, with a sweet song, delivered to her hands." The nymph's song makes clear that the ceremony cast Elizabeth in the role of a god, but the god of love rather than the god of the hunt. It spends two stanzas in praise of the queen's beauty before finally presenting her with the crossbow:

\[
\text{Goddesse and Monarch of (t)his happie Ile,} \\
\text{vouchesafe this bow which is an huntresse part:} \\
\text{Your eies are arrows though they seeme to smile} \\
\text{which neuer glanst but gald the stateliest hart,} \\
\text{Strike one, strike all, for none at all can flie,} \\
\text{They gaze you in the face although they die. (Wilson 89)}
\]

After accepting the weapon, Elizabeth proceeded "to shoote at the deere, about some thirtie in number, put into a paddock, of which number she killed three or four, and the Countesse of Kildare one." (Wilson 89). The queen and her hosts participated in an even less taxing form of hunting that evening, when they "from a Turret sawe sixteene

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17 The hunt's value as a means of asserting an explicitly masculine martial identity had been undermined for some time by the widespread participation of noblewomen. Gregory M. Colón Semenza argues that the presence of women in the hunt "was believed to demean it," and specifically points to the less physically taxing forms of hunting in which Elizabeth engaged as examples of the broader pernicious influence of feminine physical delicacy on the rigors of a quintessentially masculine pastime (51). As we will see, the less physically vigorous forms of hunting that seem to have suited Elizabeth politically and personally would prove more problematic for her successor.

18 Berry contends that the influence of Elizabeth's hunting practices can be seen in the central conflict of Venus and Adonis, arguing that Venus "positions herself not merely on the side of love but on the side of the debased kinds of hunting that transform a heroic and martial activity, and initiation into manhood, into an ignoble and effeminizing kind of entertainment...the coursing of hares, the shooting of tame deer in parks – these are activities that blur the distinctions between martial values and courtly eroticism" (55).

19 The Princess in Love's Labour's Lost participates in a similarly sedentary (though slightly more sporting) variety of the hunt, shooting from a stationary "stand" (4.1.10) as the deer are driven past her position.
Buckes (all having fayre lawe) pulled downe with Greyhoundes" (Wilson 90). Though one may detect a twinge of defensiveness in the parenthetical insistence that the sixteen bucks benefited from "fayre lawe" (i.e. they were given the requisite head start dictated by the rules of coursing), the account's anonymous author clearly thinks the sport an appropriate pastime for the sovereign. Nor do the surviving records seem to give any obvious indication that anyone else disapproved of the queen's participation in less demanding forms of the hunt. The occasional traditionalist (such as Manwood) might long for the good old days, but for the most part Elizabeth's explicity female public personae - virgin queen, national mother figure, captivating moon goddess - obviated the need for the public enactment of violent subjugation that had once been the primary cultural function of the royal hunt.

While Elizabeth's image as a monarch suffered little from her "feminized" transformations of the sport, those transformations would eventually pose serious challenges to the tradition of royal hunting as a means of masculine self-fashioning, challenges James I discovered upon his accession in 1603. James could hardly adopt the role of the serene love goddess slaying the "harts" of his courtiers with the arrows of his gaze, and as both an avid par force hunter and a devout believer in the absolute authority of the crown, he would have been acutely aware of the need to reaffirm the exclusivity of the royal hunt and its status as a demonstration of royal authority and masculine vigor. The difficulties raised by such a reversion after forty-five years of Elizabeth's less physically taxing pastimes can be discerned in the two different editions of Gascoigne's *Noble Arte of Venerie*, the first published in 1575 and the second published in 1611. The
1575 edition contains two illustrations of Elizabeth. In the first image, she stands at the edge of an elaborately constructed, railed platform as she receives "the report...vpon the shift of an Hart" from a huntsman kneeling before her (95). In the second image, the queen stands before a dead hart, again with a huntsman kneeling before her, this time offering her a knife in order to "take assaye of the Deare" (133). In the 1611 edition, the first image, in which the queen participates in a hunt without even setting foot on the forest floor, has disappeared completely, although the reasons for its disappearance remain obscure. The second image has been retained, and the same illustration block from 1575 has even been reused for the new edition. However, the lower right hand quadrant of the original block has been carefully cut away and replaced by a newly carved substitute that shows James I accepting the huntsman's knife (133). That the publisher could insert the image of James so easily into Elizabeth's relatively passive role as mere "assayer" (rather than courageous hunter) reveals the symbolic hazards James would have faced when inheriting decades old Elizabethan assumptions about the royal hunt, and the king's emphasis on a more vigorous style of chase may perhaps explain the total absence of the "report...vpon the shift of an Hart" illustration in the 1611 edition.  

James's writings on the royal hunt demonstrate his cognizance of the symbolic liabilities that accompanied passive "hunting" such as coursing in parks, and one reason for the "blooding" of his favorites after a lengthy chase may have been an interest in

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20 It is not clear whether the "report...vpon the shift of a Hart" illustration was removed because its imagery failed to match James's more physically demanding style of hunting, or because the figure of the queen was too fully integrated into the composition of the image to be easily excised (she is more visually isolated in the second image). The book does make certain minimal alterations to the text in an attempt to tailor the 1611 reprint to England's male monarch (for example, "queen" becomes "king"), but for the most part its content remains unchanged.
reestablisshing the sport as a demonstration of masculine courage, with the blood serving as a highly visible marker of the sport's violence. In Basilikon Doron, he explicitly recommends par force hunting as a variety of the pastime befitting royalty:

I cannot omit here the hunting, namely with running hounds; which is the most honourable and noblest sort thereof: for it is a theeuish form of hunting to shoot with gunnes and bowes; and greyhound hunting is not so martiall a game...As for hawking I condemne it not, but I must praise it more sparingly, because it [does not] resembleth the warres so neere as hunting doeth, in making a man hardie, and skilfully ridden in all grounds.

But even if James's blood rituals and disparagement of hunting with greyhounds succeeded to a degree in reviving the traditional association between warfare and the hunt, they did little to address the objections articulated by William Harrison several decades earlier:

[T]he stag is accounted for the most noble game, the fallow deer is the next, then the roe...and last of all the hare...All which (notwithstanding our custom) are pastimes more meet for ladies and gentlewomen to exercise...than for men of courage to follow, whose hunting should

21 Berry quotes from a report by the Venetian ambassador which describes James's habit of using the deer's blood to anoint the foreheads of those favorites who had performed especially well in the hunt, a mark which those who received it would leave in place as a badge of royal favor (40-1).
22 James's dismissal of greyhound coursing adheres to a longstanding characterization of the sport as an explicitly "un-martial" activity. Elyot had advised seventy years earlier that "[h]untyng of the hare with grehoundes is a righte good solace for men that be studiouse, or them to whom nature hath nat gyuen personage or courage apte for the warres. And also for gentilwomen, which fere neither sonne nor wynde for appairing their beutie" (195). Understandably, cowardly men and sunburnt women were hardly the company James hoped to associate himself with in the public's imagination.
23 James's instructions to his son often struggle to reconcile modern reality with the practices of previous ages. In the warfare that par force hunting was allegedly intended to prepare Prince Henry for, James cautions him to "once or twice in your owne person hazard your selfe fairly; but, hauing acquired so the fame of courage and magnanimity, make not a daily soldier of your selfe, exposing rashly your person to euery perill: but conserve your selfe thereafter for the weale of your people" (33). In considering exercises other than hunting, James forbids "all rough and violent exercises, as the footeball; meeter for laming, then making able the vsers thereof," but characterizes "games on horse-backe, as may teach you to handle your armes thereon, such as the tilt, the ring, and low-riding for handling your sword" as "the honourablest and most commendable games" (56). Certainly football carried class associations that made it an unsuitable pastime for a young prince, but it is telling that James describes football as "rough and violent" in direct contrast to the pastimes that were traditionally seen as an aristocrat's training for military service.

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practice their arms in tasting of their manhood and dealing with such beasts as eftsoons will turn again and offer them the hardest rather than their horses' feet, which many times may carry them with dishonor from the field. (327-8).

Harrison prudently concludes his discussion of deer hunting by assuring his readers that he "den[ies] not but rather grant[s] willingly that the hunting of the red deer is a right princely pastime" (329), but despite his hedging, the substance of his initial criticism remained as true in 1603 as it had in 1577. Exert and begore himself as he might, James still hunted within the borders of a nation that contained not a single wild animal that would "turn again and offer [him] the hardest," dooming the king to hunt only beasts "more meet for ladies and gentlewomen" to pursue.

Even the limited enactment of masculine violence at the conclusion of James's par force deer hunting had become largely a spectator sport for the monarch, who found himself at a significant remove from direct and lethal confrontation with the prey. Renaissance English hunting manuals make clear that the task of actually killing the deer fell to the lead huntsman, and that the king or queen served more as audience than as actor. In fact, the tendency for the monarch to fill the role of mere viewer threatened to invade all stages of the chase. For example, in the midst of his chapter on the tracking of the hind, Gascoigne inserts a short original poem of his own composition, in which a huntsman urges the monarch to hurry to the hunt since "golde time, (my liege) doth neuer stay." The queen (or in the 1611 edition the king) has apparently halted in the midst of the chase, perhaps, Gascoigne suggests, because a "fight...betweene, these ouerbragging bluddes [i.e. the hunting dogs]" has "[a]mazed [the queen's] mynde, and for a whyle...draw[n] / [Her] noble eyes." But though the monarch has been momentarily
arrested by the fight between the hounds (an oversensitivity to violence that seemingly threatens to end the entire hunt), Gascoigne offers her instead, not the opportunity to pursue a stag herself, but simply another, grander form of spectating:

Behold vs here, your true and trustie men,
Your huntes, your hyndes, your swaynes at all assayes
Which ouerthrow them [i.e. the fighting dogs], (being three to tenne)
And now are prest, with bloudhounds and relayes,
Which houndes of crye, and houndes well worthy prayse,
To rowze, to runne, to hunt and hale to death,
As great a Hart as euer yet bare breath.
This may be seene, (a Princes sport in deede)
And this your grace shall see when pleaseth you:
So that vouchsafe, (O Noble Queene) with speede,
To mount on horse, that others may ensue,
Vntill this Hart be rowzde and brought to view.   (93-4).

That the chase may "be seene" and that the queen "shall see" speaks to the role of the monarch as watcher rather than doer in the sixteenth century English royal hunt.

Gascoigne's is "a Princes sport" not "in deede" after all, but only in spectatorship.

Perhaps to counteract the impression of passivity that such a hunt must inevitably have left, and perhaps also to regain some flavor of the heroic that had been lost with the extinction of dangerous game, the English royal hunt incorporated certain symbolically violent rituals after the death of the stag. In his description of these rituals, Gascoigne points out that although he has thus far "obserued the duetie of a faythfull translator," he finds the French ceremonies "diferrent from our order in some poyntes" and thus "thought it good here to set downe such obseruations of difference as I have noted therein" (134). In Gascoigne's French source, the hind's foot is simply cut off and offered to the monarch, but in the English tradition,
the Prince or chiefe (if so please them) doe alight and take assaye of the deare with a sharpe knyfe...[by] cut[ting] a slyt draw[n] alongst the brysket of the deare...This is done to see the goodnesse of the flesh, and howe thicke it is. This being done, we use to cute off the Deares heades. And that is commonly done also by the chiefe personage. For they take delight to cut off his heade with their woodknyues, skaynes, or swordes, to trye their edge, and the goodnesse or strength of their arme. (134)

The probing of the thickness of the flesh (and thus the demonstration of the physical might of the deer), the symbolic beheading of the defeated foe, and most of all the testing of the monarch's own strength all serve to recover for the sovereign certain elements of the hunt's physicality and violence that had long since passed to dogs and huntsmen. It seems that in England, even more so than on the continent, it was crucial to incorporate a ritual demonstration of the sovereign's courage and physical power.24

A few scholars have taken note of the movement away from participation by the king or queen in the actual violence of the hunt, but such analyses tend to ignore the potential for cultural disruption that this trend represented. Berry analyzes a 1603 painting which shows the nine year-old Henry Prince of Wales in the act of "sheath[ing] his sword after executing a symbolic coup de grace to a fallen deer," an image Berry describes as "one of the most powerful Jacobean representations of the hunt" (1). Berry does acknowledge in passing that "[t]he beast hunted is...the deer, the noblest of animals routinely pursued as game in a land unhappily deprived of lions, wolves, or, for the most part boar," and also admits that the "climactic action" of the English royal hunt was "no

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24 The par force hunt did pose certain dangers to its participants, not the least of which were the hazards associated with riding a horse swiftly over uneven ground. However, the risk of accidental injury or death due to a fall from horseback was hardly the sort of danger that lent itself to demonstrations of royal puissance and courage. Hunting manuals and contemporary accounts indicate that the actual killing of the deer could also pose genuine risks, especially when the animal was brought to bay in a marshy area (see Gascoigne 126-7), but the killing itself was inevitably performed by the head huntsman, not the monarch.
longer a stab through the chest but a ceremonial assault upon an animal already dead" (1). Though Berry fails to remark on the similarity, Prince Henry's act strikingly resembles the cowardly Falstaff delivering a "new wound" in the leg of Hotspur's corpse so that he might later claim that he had killed Percy and swear "on my death I gave him this wound in the thigh" (5.4.124-144). Nevertheless, Berry asserts that the painting successfully "celebrates royal power...over wild nature" and illustrates "a right of initiation" for the young prince (1, 3). Though such aims no doubt motivated the artist, the extreme youth of the painting's central figure and the purely superfluous nature of the posthumously delivered wound actually serve to highlight the increasing divergence between the symbolic and the literal meaning of the royal hunt in early modern England. As with the hunt's sportization more generally, "the pleasure derived from doing had been transformed into the pleasure of seeing it done" (Elias 162) for the sovereign. The royal hunt, however, had always been both a source of entertainment and a symbolic performance. The monarch might derive much the same pleasure from "seeing" as from "doing," but the transformation from actor to spectator rendered the king or queen merely one among many viewers rather than the single object of his or her subjects' gazes.

If the symbolism of the hunt as the triumph of “royal power over wild nature” (Berry 1) was measurably weakened by the monarch's distance from any genuine physical confrontation with a threatening animal, it was weakened far more by the need for the conservation of forested land and the game it contained. Well before the sixteenth century the wilderness areas within England's borders had been so thoroughly exploited that the crown was forced to actively protect forests if royal hunting was to continue. As
large animals such as deer became rarer, the nobility who enjoyed hunting them were obligated to begin managing them in the manner of domesticated animals, turning much of the nation's remaining natural areas into game preserves (Thomas 276). Obviously such exigencies created awkward contradictions for the hunt's symbolism (how could the king be taming a wilderness that he himself had preserved?), but these contradictions only take on their full significance when we grasp how drastically the sixteenth and early seventeenth century English relationship with nature differed from our own. Keith Thomas, author of the most thorough reconstruction of early modern English views on areas of uncultivated wilderness, concludes that "[i]n the Tudor and Stuart age the characteristic attitude [toward nature] was one of exaltation in hard-won human dominance" (28-9). Up until the Restoration, the English generally thought that "to cut down trees was to strike a blow for progress" (197-9), that the forest symbolized “a deformed chaos,” and that “agricultural improvement and exploitation were...moral imperatives" (254-5). England's non-landed classes took an especially dim view of the legal preservation of unproductive woodlands (referred to as "emparkment") for the maintenance of the aristocracy's hunting traditions, a view most forcefully articulated by the hunt's great enemy, William Harrison:

Other pernicious beasts we have not, except you repute the great plenty of red and fallow deer...and store of conies amongst the hurtful sort. Which, although that of themselves they are not offensive at all, yet their great numbers are thought to be very prejudicial and therefore justly reproved of the many, as are in like sort our huge flocks of sheep, whereon the greatest part of our soil is employed almost in every place. (326-7)\(^25\)

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\(^{25}\) For an extensive treatment of the social conflict engendered by emparkment, see Beaver's *Hunting and the Politics of Violence Before the English Civil War*. For a summary of the specific forest laws prohibiting "asarts" (turning forests into arable land) and "purprestures" (building houses and other structures within forests), see Manwood 47v-60v.
It wasn't until the mid-seventeenth century, with increasing timber shortages affecting shipbuilding and with the publication of John Evelyn's *Silva*, that the English began thinking of their forests as something more than "obstacles to progress or havens for thieves and other degenerates" (R. Harrison 100). 26

Beyond simply being unproductive, the woods also harbored dangers; a list of epithets associated with forests in a 1650 poetical dictionary included not only "dreadful, gloomy, wild," but also "beast-haunted" (Thomas 194). English culture's strong aversion to uncultivated environments and the wild animals they contained resulted in a strict (though often problematic) distinction between "wild" and "tame" beasts. Thomas notes that "the encroachment of wild creatures into the human domain was always alarming," even when the same animals might be regarded as appealing in a wild habitat (e.g. songbirds in a meadow versus songbirds in a house) (Thomas 77). If such aversions seem strange to modern sensibilities, we should keep in mind Thomas's reminder that "[i]t is easy now to forget just how much human effort went into warring against species which competed with man for the earth's resources" (274). Despite having successfully eradicated all of their dangerous wildlife (and much of their harmless wildlife as well),

26 To understand just how alien the moral and aesthetic preferences of the period would appear to us today, we should remember that "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was always the fruitful and cultivated scenery that travelers admired" (Thomas 255). In comparison, the modern "ability to derive pleasure from scenes of relative desolation represented a major change in human perception" (Thomas 264). If transported to 21st century California, it would be the Central Valley, not Yosemite, that a seventeenth century playgoer would experience as an idyllic landscape. Even in early modern literary themes and genres that celebrate an idealized "natural" world (such as pastoral literature or the country house poem), that world's wilderness is depicted as appealing only insofar as it serves the needs and desires of its human inhabitants.
Englishmen like Manwood certainly still remembered their former competitors, and not with fondness:

This realme, at the first being a wildernes ful of great huge woods, the same was also full of wild beasts of al sorts that are commonly knowne in England, & after the same began to be inhabited with people, they did daily more and more destroy the woods and great thickets, that were neere unto the places where thye did inhabit, so that still as the land increased & flourished with people, whose nature could not indure the aboundance of Savage beastes, so cruelly to annoy them as they then did, they sought by all means possible how to destroy such great woods & covverts, as were any way neere unto their places of habitacion, thereby to drive the wild beasts further from them. And so by that means the wild beast were al driven to resort to those places, where the woods were left remaining, to make their abode. (12r)

Those "woods [which] were left remaining" eventually became the forests and parks of early modern England, but the seemingly inevitable march of logging and cultivation (and the associated extermination of wildlife) was not quite so uncomplicatedly unidirectional as Manwood's description might suggest. Even the most fearsome of those "savage beasts" which had been driven to extinction might rise from the dead under the right circumstances. As it happened, the imaginary populations of "wylde bores" which John Cokes had attributed to England's forests in 1550 underwent a number of isolated resurrections during the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, resurrections that have a great deal to tell us about England's attempts to preserve the symbolic value of its hunting culture during the sport's great crisis of meaning.
The return of England's wild boars

At the time of Coke's *Debate* it had already been centuries since the last truly wild swine had roamed England's woodlands, but even if the English boar had disappeared, the nation's cultural imagination could draw on a long historical (and if need be mythical) tradition of rampaging native boars and the valiant Englishmen who had killed them. Surviving altars from Roman Britain thanked the gods for delivery from particularly dangerous wild boars, and Boethius claims that the location called Boar's Chase had been named after an enormous feral swine that had once terrorized the area (Harting 79-80, 23). From the less distant past came stories such as that commemorated on Christmas Day in Queen's College, Oxford. Each year, students carrying a boar's head would lead a great procession into the college's hall, supposedly in memory of a Queen's College scholar who had once slain a rampaging boar by shoving a volume of Aristotle down its throat (Harting 111). Boars' heads on the family crests of the gentry also attested to traditional associations between personal valor and the killing of wild boars. The Gordon family's crest included three boar's heads, supposedly as a reward from the king after a Gordon had killed an especially dangerous boar in 1057 (Harting 24).

While the ceremony at Oxford and the Gordon family heraldic emblem hearken back to a distant past when wild boars still populated England's wilderness, the boar's symbolic ubiquity in Renaissance England tended to bleed into claims of a more literal presence, with many sixteenth century English writers implying (though rarely stating outright) that the boar continued to live and be hunted in the nation's forests. English authors and translators discussing the hunt almost invariably refer to the boar without
acknowledging its absence from the local wilderness, even where other non-indigenous species are clearly identified as such. John Manwood, in cataloging the range of different names used for each animal of the forest, excludes the wolf from consideration: ”because we haue none heer in England, nor I think we neuer shall haue in any of our forests, I will not speak any thing of their different names” (25v). Gascoigne inserts similar observations regarding foreign species in his translation of La Venerie; in his chapter on ”rayndeare” he acknowledges that ”I do not remember that I euer heard of any in this our Realme of England: it may be that there be some in Ireland: And therefore I thought not amisse thus to place him amongst the beastes of Venerie, although he is not here in vse” (145). Of ”the wild goate” Gascoigne writes that ”although I haue not heard or redde that there be any of them in England, orr at least any that be hunted, yet bycause it may be well ynough that there are some in Wales or in other Mountaynes, I haue thought good to set down the nature of him” (145). Neither Manwood nor Gascoigne include such comments regarding the wild boar, writing instead as if it were a common native species such as the deer or the hare.

While the imagined boar apparently still roamed England's forests freely, his flesh and blood counterpart could be found a mere twenty miles across the channel in France, and the animal appears with some regularity in correspondences from abroad. A number of sources report that Queen Mary I was ”fond of wild boar,” but was sadly ”unable to procure any [in England]” (Tyler).27 Despite Coke's contemporary claims to the contrary,

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27 In these letters and in other sixteenth century sources the wild boar's meat is referred to as ”venison.” The OED notes that while the term is now applied specifically to deer meat, it originally referred to ”the flesh of an animal killed in the chase or by hunting and used as food,” including ”the deer, boar, hare, rabbit, or other game animal” (”venison” 1a).
wild boar was so rare in England by 1553 that the queen ultimately had to import the meat from the Low Countries for her coronation (Tyler). The hunt itself, of course, was more difficult to import, and English gentlemen traveling abroad sometimes seem to have sought out wild boar hunting as a compelling and novel foreign pastime. In 1606 Sir George Carew, the English ambassador in Paris, wrote to a friend in England regarding a recent visit with King Henry IV. Carew notes with pride that the king showed him "many favours," including taking him "with him ahunting of the wild boar...bycause it is a sporte we haue not in England and a fauour...here to Ambassadours" (1r). In such cases it was clearly the "sporte," not the venison, that primarily attracted English hunters. In 1536 the prominent courtier Sir Thomas Palmer sent a French boar he had killed to Thomas Cromwell, his patron at court. The letter (written by a servant) which accompanied the boar explicitly foregrounds the danger of the hunt, assuring Cromwell that Palmer "sends his Lordship a wild boar he has killed in Picardy by force of English hand. In takinge he put two Picards in danger of their lives, and Palmer thinks one of them will die" (Gairdner). That it was an "English" hand which killed the boar merits special mention precisely because most Englishmen would never have the opportunity to prove themselves against such game. The crowning detail of the two seriously wounded Frenchmen who had accompanied the (apparently unscathed) Englishman authenticates Palmer's bravery in a subtly nationalistic way of which Coke would no doubt have approved. Edward Herbert, another ambassador to the French crown, relates in greater

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28 Another letter regarding the queen's taste for wild boar notes the animal's absence from the royal larder by observing that "this kind of venison [is] scarce in England" (Tyler). In the kitchen, as in the forest, the early modern English boar seems to have always lurked just out of sight, despite its probable extinction over 250 years earlier.
detail just what an Englishman hunting the wild boar in France could expect to experience:

One time also it was my fortune to kill a wild boar in this manner. The boar being roused from his den, fled before our dogs for a good space; but finding them press him hard, turned his head against our dogs, and hurt three or four of them very dangerously: I came on horseback up to him, and with my sword thrust him twice or thrice without entering his skin, the blade being not so stiff as it should be. The boar here upon turned upon me, and much endangered my horse; which I perceiving, rid a little out of the way, and leaving my horse with my lacquey, returned with my sword against the boar, who by this time had hurt more dogs. And here happened a pretty kind of fight; for, when I thrust at the boar sometimes with my sword, which in some places I made enter, the boar would run at me, whose tusks yet by stepping a little out of the way I avoided, but he then turning upon me, the dogs came in, and drew him off, so that he fell upon them, which I perceiving, ran at the boar with my sword again, which made him turn upon me, but then the dogs pulled him from me again, while so relieving one another by turns, we killed the boar. (53-4)

Obviously even the strongest and most spirited stag in England could hardly hope to offer the kind of serious danger and test of physical might that Herbert encountered during the boar hunt in France.

But if the majority of English gentlemen could not expect to experience the wild boar's ferocity in a forest, they might nevertheless learn of it in a hunting manual. Almost all English hunting texts consisted of translations from Continental sources, most of which had sizeable chapters on the hunting of wild boars, and these chapters invariably dwelled at length on the boar's ferocity. Edward of Norwich claims that the boar "is the beast of this world that is strongest armed, and can sooner slay a man than any other. Neither is there any beast that he could not slay if they were alone sooner than that other beast could slay him, be they lion or leopard...[a]nd there is neither lion nor leopard that slayeth a man at one stroke as a boar doth" (46). Gascoigne likewise believes that the
boar "is the only beast which can dispatch a hounde at one blow" (149), while Edward Topsell contends that even "[t]he beare dareth not to enter upon the wilde Boar, except behind him, and unawares" (540).²⁹

English literature was similarly saturated by descriptions of the boar's ferocity, although its appearances in poetry, prose romance, and on the popular stage often owed

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²⁹ As far removed as most of us now are from the sources of our bacon and pork chops, it is easy to forget that even domesticated swine were once a serious physical hazard of everyday life. In early modern England, hogs wandering loose in towns bit and sometimes even killed small children (Thomas 94-5).
more to classical tradition and poetic license than to the realities of hunting in contemporary Europe. In Fletcher and Massinger's *The Prophetess*, the cowardly jester Geta flees a wild boar's butchered carcass because he believes he has seen it move. When his companions point out that "[h]is throat is cut, and his bowles out," Geta retorts that "That's all one, / I am sure his teeth are in" (239). Before another boar hunt in Henry Shirley’s *The Martyr'd Soldier*, the Clown spins fantastic lies about their quarry, telling his companion that the animal is "big as an Elephant...[with] two stones so bigge...thy head is but a Cherry-stone to the least of 'em," with bristles sturdy enough to be used as shoemaker's nails, tusks "as long as a Mowers sith...And when he whets his Tuskes, you would sweare there were a sea in's belly, and that his chops were the shore, to which the Foame was beaten" (D4v-E1r). A few lines later, however, we hear that a member of the hunting party has almost been killed by the boar, a reminder that the Clown's hyperbole functions comedically only because the wild boar really did serve as a byword for dangerous ferocity within English culture. In fact, the Clown's description never wanders far from medieval illustrations of the boar, or from the descriptions of more earnest fictional boar hunts, such as in William Alexander's 1604 closet drama *Croesvs*:

> In *Misia* neare the celebrated rounds  
> Of great *Olympus* which the world admires,  
> There haunts a Boare the horror of these bounds:  
> His body bigge, and hideous is his forme,  
> Whose foamie jaw with tusks like javelins strikes,  
> And in deformity all parts conforme,  
> His backe hath bristles like to iron pikes. (23)

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30 For a selection of manuscript illustrations, see Cummins pl. 16, 20, and 53.
Fletcher and Massinger, Shirley, and Alexander all echo a passage which was almost certainly Renaissance England’s most famous description of a boar (at least until the arrival of *Venus and Adonis*): the Calydonian Boar hunt as described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

> His Eies did glister blud and fire: right dreadfull was to see
> His brawned necke, right dredfull was his haire which grew as thicke
> With pricking points as one of them could well by other sticke.
> And like a front of armed Pikes set close in battell ray
> The sturdie bristles on his back stoode staring vp alway.
> The scalding fome with gnashing hoarse which he did cast aside,
> Upon his large and brawned shield did white as Curdes abide.
> Among the greatest Oliphants in all the land of Inde,
> A greater tush than had this Boare, ye shall not lightly finde. (100)

The influence of classical literature and its "oliphant"-sized boars undoubtedly contributed to the animal's fearsome reputation everywhere in Europe, but the effect was likely to have been even stronger in England, a nation where the (unacknowledged) absence of the animal allowed legend to bleed freely into reality. The boar was neither a wholly mythical nor a wholly concrete presence in sixteenth century English life, occupying instead a uniquely liminal position which actually served to enhance its status as the most dangerous of wild beasts and the ultimate test of heroic strength and courage.

In addition to the obvious physical dangers posed by the wild boar, the boar hunter also faced a more metaphysical hazard: the threat of corrupting his humanity in the hunting of dangerous game. Although pursuing a "harmless hart" might open the hunter

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31 This and all following quotations from the *Metamorphoses* are taken from Golding's 1567 translation. Given the ubiquity of Ovid in England's grammar school curricula, we might well imagine that his description was not merely a single stereotyped example of a standard classical image of the boar (great size, foaming mouth, tusks, bristles, etc.) but rather the prototypical image that shaped how sixteenth and seventeenth century English writers inevitably imagined the animal.
to charges that he or she victimized the weak (charges that carried their own unique dangers, as we will see shortly), hunting the boar necessitated an aggression and fearlessness on the part of the hunter that could ultimately lead him to resemble the very prey he pursued. As Cummins observes, medieval and early modern commentators saw the boar as "the archetype of unrelenting ferocity," an animal that was "able to draw on extremes of bravery and pride or orgueil in its own nature, and demand[ed] a like response from the hunter in the single combat in which its pursuit end[ed]" (96). In Edward Topsell's *History of Four-footed Beasts*, seventeenth century England's most popular work of descriptive zoology, the boar is described as "brutish, stubborn, and yet courageous; wrathfull, and furious " (540), characteristics that made it an ideal test of the hunter's own resolve and fearlessness. However, the very inseparability of the animal's virtues and vices also made it a dangerous model to emulate. That danger was amplified in the case of the royal hunt, in which the central personage's ferocity and wrath might well take the form of tyranny and misrule. If we accept Robert Pogue Harrison's assertion that "while [t]he king embodies and represents in his person the civilizing force of history," and can only fill this role by "harbor[ing] in his sovereignty a savagery that is greater and more powerful than the wilderness itself" (74), the wild boar called for a very savage royal antagonist indeed.

Modern commentators are not alone in observing the hunt's dangerous potential for bestializing the hunter; one of the early modern anti-hunting faction's most common objections was that people who treated animals with cruelty and violence became inhumanly (and, often, animalistically) cruel and violent toward human beings as well.
Agrippa, one of the most vociferous and widely read humanist opponents of the hunt in the early sixteenth century, calls hunting "[a] cruell Arte, and altogeather tragicall," condemning its "pleasure...in deathe, and bloude, whiche oure humanitie ought to eschewe" and warning that it causes its participants to "become saluage beastes" (121r-v). Agrippa's concerns were still current 150 years later, as demonstrated by a 1686 pamphlet in which the pamphleteer warns his fellow hunters they must only enjoy their sport in moderation, lest "[we] ourselves grow wild, haunting the woods till we resemble the beasts which are citizens of them, and by continual conversation with dogs, become altogether addicted to slaughter and carnage" (qtd. in Thomas 162). Of course such warning hardly put an end to the hunt, or even to the adoption of animals like the wild boar as personal heraldic devices; the desire to assert masculine virtues such as courage and strength was simply too overwhelming to resist. Nevertheless, likening oneself to dangerous game such as the wild boar carried certain negative connotations that could never be fully ignored.

Despite the boar hunt's very real dangers (both physical and metaphysical), and despite widespread hostility toward areas of uncultivated wilderness, especially those which contained hazardous or destructive wildlife, the potential prestige of dangerous game hunting (or, perhaps, the symbolic risks posed by its absence) occasionally

32 For a discussion of similar objections voiced by Agrippa's contemporary and fellow humanist Erasmus, see Berry 78-9, in which Berry reads Titus Andronicus through the lens of In Praise of Folly.
33 For modern readers, the most familiar examples of this danger are the references to Richard of Gloucester's boar emblem in Richard III. Although the origin of the device remains obscure, the historical Richard seems to have associated the animal with physical valor: one of his favorite war-horses was named Blanc Sanglier (Friar 68). In the mouths of Richard's enemies in Shakespeare's play, however, the boar takes on very different associations. Margaret refers to Richard as a "rooting hog" (1.3.227), Stanley dreams of the murderous Richard as a "boar [that] had razed his helm" (3.2.10), and Richmond describes Richard as a "bloody and usurping boar" that "makes his trough" in the "embowelled bosoms" of his countrymen (5.2.8-11). The image of Richard-as-boar will be examined at greater length below.
motivated English kings and noblemen to attempt the importation and breeding of wild boars. Letters from the English ambassador to France in 1521 contain instructions from Francis I to Henry VIII concerning the construction of a park to house imported wild boars, as well as assurances that Henry would receive a regular supply of live boars from across the channel (Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior* 112). Rackham identifies records suggesting that the Earl of Oxford undertook a similar project around 1500, though his boar preserve was ultimately destroyed because "the Inhabitaunts thereabouts sustained by [the boars] very greate losse and damage" (36). Perhaps due to the violent reaction of the countryside's population against such schemes, two generations passed before another attempt was made to foster a population of wild boars in England. With the accession of James I, however, England once again had a monarch whose public and private identities were both inextricably tied to an emphatically masculine and physically vigorous ideal of the royal hunt. In furtherance of this ideal, James seems to have made multiple attempts

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34 Extant references to the ultimate fate of this project are scarce, but there does exist one well known account of a hunting trip in Sutton Park during which Henry VIII narrowly escaped being gored by a wild boar. The likely source of that boar, King Francis I of France, offers a useful illustration of the ways in which Continental monarchs employed dangerous game hunting as a means of self-fashioning. Francis I had a well documented passion for the boar hunt, and especially for the public presentation of his valor therein. In 1515 he even attempted to release a captured boar at one of his royal residences for the purpose of immediately confronting and killing it before the assembled court. In the end the king "was dissuaded from fighting a duel with [the animal] only by the combined entreaties of his queen and mother." When the boar was "pitted instead against dummies in the courtyard," however, it promptly broke through a door into the surrounding chateau, presenting Francis with a perfect opportunity to demonstrate his valor by chasing it down and slaying it with his sword (Knecht, *Francis I* 86). A more typical encounter with a wild boar can be found in the letter excerpted by Knecht in which an English courtier describes to Henry VIII the nature of the French royal boar hunt. After the dogs had "plucked down" the boar, "the king, with divers others, being afoot, with their boar-spears...dispatched him shortly" (*Renaissance Warrior* 111). Even providing for a certain degree of embellishment in one or both of these accounts, the incidents underline the importance of the boar hunt as an opportunity for the public display of the king's strength and courage, personal characteristics that, at least symbolically, served to underwrite the legitimacy of his rule. The fact that hunting dangerous game and other demonstrations of royal masculine virtues carried genuine risk is precisely what made them convincing, but those risks could sometimes prove disastrous. While Henry VIII escaped unscathed from his encounter with the boar in Sutton Park, Francis's son and successor, Henry II, was less fortunate; he was fatally wounded during a celebratory joust in 1559.
to reestablish the wild boar within royal parks during the early years of the sixteenth century. Extant documents record isolated references to James I's importation of live wild boars from France in 1608 and Germany in 1611, and wild boars were certainly being raised for the royal hunt in Windsor Forest by 1613. On at least one occasion in 1617 James I and the 17-year-old Prince Charles are known to have engaged in boar hunting in Windsor (Macgregor 311). Such projects ultimately came to an end, however, for the very reason that they had been begun in the first place: the boar's reputation for violence and ferocity. John Aubrey's *Natural History* reports that the last population of wild boars, contained in New Forest, was slaughtered following the Civil War because they had been "terrible to travellers" (Harting 94-5). That purge marked the end of the English crown's attempts to revive boar hunting on British soil, and also signaled the final extinction of the wild boar in England until the late 20th century.  

Although attempts to reintroduce the wild boar to England appear to have been rare enough to have left relatively few traces, the likely response to such schemes by non-aristocrats can be gleaned from works which discuss the conflicting interests of hunters and farmers more generally. For instance, Topsell offers a revealing description of the

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35 The very use of the term "extinction" highlights the gulf separating sixteenth century and 21st century perspectives on the natural world. The word itself was not applied to animal species until the advent of evolutionary biology in the late 19th century, though early modern writers certainly refer to the complete eradication of a specific type of wild animal from a single geographical region. The real problem is not primarily one of terminology, but rather of moral connotation. For example, compare the pride that sixteenth century English writers exhibit at the destruction of their native wolf populations with modern archaeologist Umberto Albarella's lament for the extinction of the English wild boar. In commenting on the (unintentional) reintroduction of the wild boar to English forests in the late 20th century, he observes that "[t]hey cannot replace what we have sadly and irremediably lost, but they still remain an interesting and rather majestic addition to our countryside" (67). Majestic and interesting would not have been the adjectives chosen by a writer like William Harrison (or, for that matter, the majority of his countrymen) to describe James I's imported boars.
two different motivations for boar hunting in those nations where the animals remained plentiful:

We will proceed to talk concerning the hunting of Boars, which is not only a pastime for Lords and Princes, but also a necessary labour for meaner men; for as the harm that cometh by Boars is exceeding great, and so much the greater by how much he is poorer that doth sustain it, so the utility to learn the means of destroying thies beast is more commodious, because the common proverb is more true in this then in the vulgar Swine, that they never do good till they are dead. (541)

While Topsell observes the stark difference in perspective between "Lord and Princes" and "meaner men" dispassionately, the always opinionated William Harrison leaves little doubt as to his personal views on the motives and ramifications associated with the conservation of potentially destructive wildlife:

Certes if I may freely say what I think, I suppose that these two kinds (I mean foxes and badgers) are rather preserved by gentlemen to hunt and have pastime withal at their own pleasures than otherwise suffered to live as not able to be destroyed because of their great numbers. For such is the scanty of them here in England in comparison of the plenty that is to be seen in other countries, and so earnestly are the inhabitants bent to root them out that, except it had been to bear thus with the recreations of their superiors in this behalf, it could not otherwise have been chosen but that they should have been utterly destroyed by many years ago. (326)36

The conflict between Harrison's "inhabitants" (i.e. the vast majority of England's population) and the "superiors" who enjoyed the hunt was the central fracture in the nation's attitudes toward wild animals, and it echoed larger conflicts between high- and

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36 After a group of escaped pigs established themselves in south-east England during the 1990s, the local community almost immediately became "polarized between those who [found] them a serious pest, not only of wheat crops but also killing lambs, and those who, contrarily, [thought] they [could] let the taking for a profit" (Yalden 269). Though the owner of the land and the hunter doing the "taking" are no longer the same individual, and though the profit in question is monetary rather than symbolic, the basic outlines of the quarrel between farmers and the hunters over the wild boar seem to have changed very little in 400 years.
low-born over how the nation's land ought to be employed. Harrison uses the same rhetoric and objections against emparkment that many (including Harrison himself) used elsewhere against enclosure:

Where in times past many large and wealthy occupiers were dwelling within the compass of some one park, and thereby great plenty of corn and cattle seen and to be had among them, beside a more copious procreation of human issue, whereby the realm was always better furnished with able men to serve the prince in his affairs, now there is almost nothing kept but a sort of wild and savage beasts, cherished for pleasure and delight...Certes if it be not one curse of the Lord to have our country converted in such sort, from the furniture of mankind into the walks and shrouds of wild beasts, I know not what is any. How many families also these great and small game...have eaten up and are likely hereafter to devour, some men may conjecture. (256)

Here Harrison has turned the typical social meaning of the hunt and its justifications on their heads. Instead of training the aristocracy for war, hunting depopulates the nation, depriving it of "able men" and rendering it militarily vulnerable. Far from reenacting a royal subjugation of wild nature and the establishment of civilization, the hunt now desolates formerly fruitful landscapes, turning "the furniture of mankind into the walks and shrouds of wild beasts." The king no longer destroys the threatening wilderness in order to save his subjects: he destroys his subjects in order to save the wilderness.  

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37 Harrison actually attributes the introduction of parks to England's Norman conquerors, claiming that "We had no parks left in England at the coming of the Normans, who added this calamity to the servitude of our nation...and daily overthrew towns, villages, and an infinite sort of families for the maintenance of their venery" (258). For Harrison, the pre-Norman golden age was an era of universal, fruitful cultivation. The wilderness, not civilization, was the pernicious modern innovation.

38 For seventeenth century complaints about the trampling of farmland during the hunt itself, see Vale pp.29-35.

39 The royal hunt's transformation from a display of the monarch-as-civilizer to the monarch-as-ravager-of-civilization finally culminated in the reign of Charles I. Charles Carlton describes Charles I withdrawing more and more fully from public life, "devot[ing] an increasing amount of his time to private pursuits, such as hunting. The royal party seemed to pass over the land like a swarm of locusts in pursuit of game, moving on once an area had been swept clean, going from house to house, palace to hunting lodge, with the minimum of display" (129). The hunt for Charles became purely a means of personal pleasure and escape.
Harrison's major complaint – that an expanding wilderness had wiped out large areas of agriculturally productive land – also happens to correspond to a central characteristic of one of the very animals populating that wilderness. Aside from violent attacks on human beings, the most common crime of rampaging boars in the period's literature was their seemingly malicious destruction of cultivated areas. The boar

"[d]evasts the fertill plaines of Thessaly" in *The Silver Age* (Heywood 132), "[d]estroyes the fruit of our Vtopian fields" in *The Woman in the Moone* (Lyly C3r), and has "spoyld the pleasant fields of Polonie" in *The Nine Worthies of London* (Johnson F1v). Again, Golding's Ovid and his Calydonian Boar provide the preeminent (and perhaps prototypical) example:

Now trampled he the spindling corne to ground where he did passe
Now ramping vp their riped hope he made the Plowmen weepe.
And chankt the kernell in the eare. In vaine their floores they sweepe:
In vaine their Barnes for Haruest long, the likely store they keepe.
The spreaded Uines with clustred Grapes to ground he rudely sent,
And full of Berries laden boughes from Olife trees he rent. (100)

More explicitly than any of the preceding examples, Golding's translation emphasizes the threat the wild boar poses to the "plowman" and other members of society's farming classes. But the destruction wrought by Ovid's Calydonian Boar is no *natural* disaster. Meleager's father Oeneus, sacrificing to every god but Diana, enraged the goddess, and thus the Calydonian Boar was "thither as [Diana's] seruant sent the countrie for to waast." (99). It is difficult to ignore the parallels between Ovid's Diana and enormously powerful Englishmen such as Henry VIII and the de Veres in the sixteenth century or James I and

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*with no greater symbolic significance, and Carlton's description fittingly imagines the king and his retinue as an un-heroic force of nature's violence (not unlike the boar), one which the parliamentarians would soon sweep aside in their own grand "civilizing" project.*
Charles I in the seventeenth. In visiting the boar upon their previously peaceful countryside, these men may well have succeeded in claiming for themselves certain characteristics of figures from classical mythology: they simply may not have been the characteristics to which they aspired.

Even more dangerously for members of the English nobility considering a revival of wild boar populations, those who threatened the peace of the nation could themselves be transformed (at least rhetorically) into the beast itself. The most famous literary example of such a bestializing occurs in Shakespeare's Richard III. The historical Richard had embraced the white boar as his personal heraldic badge, and a century later Shakespeare was to use the association to vivid effect in his caricature of the last Plantagenet king. Margaret, Stanley, Derby, Richmond, and others all liken Richard to his bestial symbol: a force of uncontrollable, malicious violence. Richmond draws specifically on the poetic tradition of rampaging boars in the speech to his troops before the Battle of Bosworth Field, during which he describes Richard III as a boarish destroyer-of-cropland:

The wretched, bloody and usurping boar,
That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines,
Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough
In your embowelled bosoms, this foul swine
Is now even in the centre of this isle,
Near to the town of Leicester, as we learn.
From Tamworth thither is but one day's march.
In God's name, cheerly on, courageous friends,
To reap the harvest of perpetual peace
By this one bloody trial of sharp war. (5.2.7-16)
3.2: A gilt badge in the form of a wild boar, found at the site of the Battle of Bosworth Field and presumably dropped by one of the doomed king's followers ("In Pictures").

While the wild boar Richard is the enemy of "summer fields and fruitful vines," the boar hunting Richmond promises to restore the nation to its natural state of agricultural plenty by "reap[ing] the harvest of perpetual peace." The power of Richmond's rhetoric springs from the traditional symbolism of the royal hunt as an enactment of the monarch's defense of human society against the threats posed by a violent and hostile natural world. Intentionally reintroducing a threatening and destructive species like the wild boar, of course, would have completely undermined the logic of any such symbolism.

Changes in Christian theology also worked against attempts to preserve dangerous animals for the purpose of hunting. Medieval scholars had typically described the existence of threatening beasts in terms of a world created solely for the service of humankind; animals like the lion, bear, and boar were created by God as a means of
testing men's valor and preparing them for war. The sixteenth century saw a shift away from explanations of nature's destructive power in terms of anthropocentric utility and towards a belief in original sin as the source of all forms of violence, including violence in the non-human realm (Thomas 17-20). Dangerous animals such as wild boars thus came to represent not a divinely intended test of valor, but rather a direct product of human weakness and sin. Such a point of view had obvious utility for the opponents of hunting. Agrippa tells us that "[i]n olde time...when men liued in innocencie, no liuing creaturs flew from them, none hated them, none hurted them," but that "together with sinne, the anoyauce, the persecution, and the flighte of liuinge creatures entred in, and the Artes of Huntinge were deuised." When the animals "became noysome and vnfriendly," the change "came to passe according to Goddes judgement for a punishment of vniust rebellion of the first parentes" (123). By linking hunting with original sin rather than demonstrations of heroism, Agrippa takes advantage of what Laurie Shannon refers to as the "justice problem" created by such explanations for the existence of dangerous animals. "[T]he mismatch between human transgression and the wider sweep of its consequences" (i.e. God's punishment of the animal world) identified by Shannon (51) helps Agrippa position the hunt as a further "persecution" of already unjustly punished and sinless beasts, a reading of the natural world that renders even frightening creatures such as the wild boar innocent of the harm they cause.

Why, then, did the English monarchy take such a risk, repeatedly importing a widely reviled and threatening creature into a nation with a history of nationalistic pride.

40 Such ideas nevertheless persisted well into the seventeenth century. See, for example, Topsell's defense of "hurtful, venomous, ravening, and destroying Beasts" (vii).
at the eradication of dangerous animals? Certainly the need to bolster the royal hunt's traditional symbolism in the face of feminized and non-martial forms of hunting exerted some pressure. The most important motivating factor, however, may have been the rhetorical space which an absence of dangerous game opened up for social critique and criticism of the crown. Without the wolf, the bear, or the boar, the only emblematic macrofauna remaining in England's royal forests was the deer, and the deer in isolation placed the monarch who hunted it in an unenviable symbolic position. As Robert Pogue Harrison points out, in the forests of a nation such as sixteenth century England there can be "only one ravenous beast left: the king himself. All the other wolves are gone. The surviving beasts of pleasure, once hunted by other ravenous beasts, are now hunted solely by the lupine monarch within the protected confines of his forests" (75). Although Harrison seems satisfied with the emblematic efficacy of such a royal hunt (the "lupine monarch" does, after all, reign unchallenged in the forest), his wolf metaphor unintentionally foregrounds the inevitable weakness inherent in the image of the royal-hunter-as-sole-beast-of-prey. Adopting the savagery and aggression of a carnivorous animal in order to protect civilization from a threat such as the wild boar represents a dangerous but ultimately necessary compromise, one which retains a compelling logic when enacted symbolically by the king; trying to justify the same savagery and aggression solely in the pursuit of "beasts of pleasure" threatens the most basic underpinnings upon which the hunt's socially useful symbolism is based. In fact, while the royal boar hunter risked taking on the boar's savagery, the royal deer hunter risked an even more perilous bestializing transformation, not of him or herself, but of the crown's
human enemies, allowing them to be cast as "harmless harts." Recent research by Shannon has demonstrated strong rhetorical links between the brutality of the hunter towards the hunted animal and the brutality of the tyrant towards his or her subjects, with the hunted beasts’ "apparently remediless situation echo[ing] sixteenth century human subjects' own general lack of a clearly licit remedy against tyrannical kings" (52). The English royal hunt, restricted as it was to pursuing harmless deer, threatened to unite both varieties of violent subjugation in a politically dangerous way. For instance, in railing against the kingdom's proliferation of emparked forests, Agrippa complains that

the husbandmen are driuen from their fermes: the countrie men are put out of theire tenementes: the heardsmen are shut out of the woodes, and meadowes, & the pastures may be stoared with Veneson, to feede & delite noble men, who are allowed to eate it: wherof, if any countrie man, or husbandman doth tast, he is accused of treason against the Kinge, and is made a praye to the Hunter, togeather with ye beastes.

Agrippa's rhetoric likens the wronged "husbandman" to the harmless deer specifically in protest of emparkment, but once established, the association could prove difficult to contain within discussions of the hunt itself. Even the normally obsequious Gascoigne seems to slip, almost unintentionally, into a similar, though far more sweeping, social critique. Ironically, the slippage occurs as part of a passage in which he seeks to redeem the symbolism of England's royal hunt by demonstrating that even deer hunting can prove dangerous "[w]hen a Hart is at Baye":

[A]n Emperor named Basill which had overcome his enimies in many battels, and had done great deeds of Chiualrie in his Countrie...was yet

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41 Although her analysis contains much interesting material on the parallels between human tyranny over animals and royal tyranny over human beings (see 29-81), Shannon's primary concern is actually "the vitality of animals as political subjects in themselves and not just didactic fables for humans." She maintains that in early modern texts "the terms and conditions of human sovereignty over real animals operate as an example of tyranny - not just an emblem for it" (68).
neuerthelesse slayne with an Harte in breaking of bay...A prince...which had peaceably defended his people, and courageously assaulted such as sought to subuerst his dominion, was at the last in the pryde of his pleasure, in the pursue of his pastime, and in the vnxpected day of his destenie, vanquished, slayne, and gored with the hornes of a brute Beast: yea (that more is) by a fearful beast, and such a one as durst not many dayes nor houres before haue beheld the countenance of the weakest man in his kingdome: A Beast that fledde from him, and a beast whom he constreyned (in his own defense) to do this detestable murder. This example may serue as a mirrour to al Princes and Potentates, yea and generally to all estates, that they brydle their mindes from proferyng of undeserued iniuries, and do not constrayne the simple sakelesse man to stand in his owne defence (124-5)

Though Gascoigne is careful to assure his reader that he does not mean to argue against killing deer, since to do so would "speake agaynst the purpose which I haue taken in hande" (124-5), the deer's natural association with harmlessness leads to the story's far more radical moral, a warning to "Princes and Potentates" not to mistreat the weak lest the weak violently "stand in [their] owne defence." The moral actually asserts itself despite the fact that Gascoigne's story concerns a virtuous king who "had peaceably defended his people," and despite the fact that Gascoigne initially seems to deploy the tale in order to portray the violence of the hunter, not the violence of the hunted, as a legitimate form of self defense (or at the very least mutual offense). In the end, Gascoigne proves unable to overcome the contradictions inherent in his subject matter.

The same association between the harmless, hunted deer and the helpless human victims of brutalization also occurs repeatedly in Shakespeare's plays, although his references to the hunt are far too numerous and varied to be adequately characterized in terms of a single theme or tone; sometimes the hunt is a playful metaphor for love (as in the opening of Twelfth Night), sometimes it is a sign of a morally pure rusticity (as in
Cymbeline), and sometimes it serves primarily as a marker of noble rank (as in A Midsummer Night's Dream). At least as often as it appears in any of these forms in Shakespeare, however, the hunt, and especially the deer hunt, functions as a metaphor for the violence of the cruel and powerful visited on the innocent and powerless. When Ross describes Macduff's "wife and babes / Savagely slaughter'd," he speaks of "the quarry of these murder'd deer" (4.3.205-7); when Innogen berates Pisanio for hesitating to murder her, she asks him why he "hast...gone so far, / To be unbent when thou hast ta'en thy stand, / The elected deer before thee?" (3.4.106-8); in King Lear, the unjustly accused Edgar flees his persecution by hiding in the hollow of a tree to "[e]scap[e] the hunt" (2.3.2-3); and Henry V describes the Massacre of the Innocents committed by "Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen" (3.3.118). Most horrible of all Shakespeare's hunting analogies, however, is the attack on Lavinia in Titus Andronicus, an attack which is permeated by the language of hunting and which even occurs during a literal royal hunt. Both the "hunters" themselves (Demetrius and Chiron) and the family of the "hunted" (Lavinia's Father Titus and her uncle Marcus) describe Lavinia as a deer and her rape and mutilation as the culminating violence of the huntsman's chase. Before committing the crime, Demetrius reminds his brother that "we hunt not, we, with horse nor hound, / But hope to pluck a dainty doe to ground" (2.3.25-6), and the forged letter that frames Quintus and Martius for the deed refers to one murderer as "sweet huntsman" (2.3.269).

When Marcus comes upon Lavinia after the attack, he finds her "straying in the park, /
Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer / That hath received some unrecuring wound" (3.1.88-90). The language of hunting occurs again on one final occasion as Titus plans to revenge himself on Tamora's sons, but tellingly, the hunted animal in this case is no longer a deer. Instead, Titus talks of how to "hunt these bear-whelps" (4.1.95), imagining the brothers as a pair of dangerous beasts inherently incapable of embodying harmless victimhood. In contrast, Macduff's wife and children, Innogen, the first born of Bethlehem, and Lavinia all find their innocence and helplessness given figurative expression in the image of the slaughtered deer, the very animal at the center of England's hunting culture and the means by which its noblemen still attempted to signal their status and personal courage.

Unfortunately, as the primary representative of a wilderness that could no longer plausibly threaten its human neighbors, the deer simply could not provide the necessary symbolic justification for the royal hunt's violent traditions, especially when the maintenance of those traditions also required the exploitation of the harmless hart's metaphoric counterpart, the helpless royal subject and "sakelesse man." While the wild boar's reputation for destructive ferocity may seemingly have offered a solution to such problems for a time, the English boar hunt also succumbed to the incongruity of its symbolic logic. England's population simply would not tolerate the crown's importation of formerly eradicated dangerous animals for the purpose of enacting an emblematic triumph of the monarch's civilizing power over the natural world's violence, a violence that the monarch himself had intentionally allowed to return in the first place.
Although boar hunting was never successfully revived in England, the rhetorical associations of the wild boar managed to outlive the Tudor and Stuart hunting cultures which had sought to reintroduce the animals. The following poem by Francis Quarles, a royalist lamenting the coming of the Commonwealth, serves as an ironic epilogue to the story of the wild boar's strange afterlife in early modern England:

Know'st thou Britannus, what, in daies of old,
Our great God Pan, by Oracle foretold
Of that brave City (whose proud buildings stood
As firme as earth, till stain'd with Shepheards blood)
That there's a time should come, wherein not one
Should live to see a stone upon a stone?
And is not, now, that prophecy made good?
Growes not grasse there, where these proud buildings stood?
Nay, my Britannus, what concerns us more,
Did not that Oracle, in times of yore,
Threaten to send his Foxes from their Holds,
Into our Vines? and Wolves into our Folds?
To breake our Fences, and to make a way
For the wilde Boare to ramble, and to prey
Where ere he pleas'd? O gentle Shepheard, thus,
Thus that prophetick evill's made good in us:
Our Hedge is broken, and our Pastures yeeld
But slender profit: All's turn'd Common-field.

Quarles turns the language of anti-hunting rhetoric against the Commonwealth government in much the same way that William Harrison had turned military rationalizations in defense of the hunt against the aristocracy seventy years earlier. As usual, the golden age being mourned was an age of pastoralism ("Shepheards blood"), not an age of wilderness, though now the wild animals threatening the nation's peace are released by the parliamentarians rather than by the crown. The author's enemies are the traditional villains of the natural world: foxes, wolves, and wild boars. A few short years before the poem's composition, of course, Charles I had "made way" for his personal
stock of wild boars to "ramble" in a kingdom long devoid of them, and a few years after its composition Quarles's royalist allies would help enshrine the English fox as a sacred and protected element of the aristocracy's identity. In 1646, however, such ironies were presumably lost on the poet.

The royal hunt and the king of beasts

We might well ask, if boars were bestializing and too threatening to reintroduce into the countryside, and deer were symbolically problematic in their harmlessness, what then was a monarch such as James I to hunt? The answer was as obvious as it was impractical: the king's prey should be the lion, the only animal both noble and valiant enough to serve as a fitting opponent for a king. Bossewell dwells at length on the lion's virtues in his Workes of Armorie, citing the animal's "excellencie far passinge other beastes" (41v), though the litany of noble qualities he lists must have strained credulity even in 1572. Bossewell believes that "If a man shoote at him, the Lyon chasseth him, and throweth him downe, but neither woundeth him, ne hurteth him" (42v); that the lion "neauer slea a man, but in greate hunger" (44r); that the lion "seketh not the death of any creature that yeldeth its selfe unto him" (107r); and that in general temperament the lion

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43 The nobility's shift from hunting dangerous game such as the wild boar to hunting deer foreshadowed an even more drastic change that was to take place in the wake of the destruction wrought by the Civil War. After the conflict ended, the Parliamentarian forces systematically destroyed the vast majority of deer in England's royal hunting grounds, leading to a need for new aristocratic game with the coming of the Restoration. The once lowly fox ultimately became the quarry of choice, despite the fact that "for most hunters of the sixteenth century, foxes were vermin, to be hunted without ennobling ceremony" (Berry 15). Unlike the fox, the deer had never been considered vermin, even in Renaissance cultures with access to dangerous game. However, the deer's medieval elevation to the pinnacle of English hunting culture sprang from the same pattern of extinction and substitution that was to bring the fox to aristocratic attention hundreds of years later; in an England deprived of wild boars, deer became the noblest game, and in an England deprived even of deer, that dubious distinction fell to the fox.
is "gentle, and not lightlie angrye" (113r). In all the elements of its bearing and behavior, the lion represented the "king of beasts," a royal pride of place in the European bestiary that it had enjoyed since the early thirteenth century (Pastoureau 143). There exists no surer sign of the lion's unique cultural prestige during the period than its absolute ubiquity on heraldic crests. As Arthur Charles Fox-Davies puts it, "[h]eraldic art without the lion would not amount to very much" (172). For instance, the kings and queens of England had made use of the lion on their royal shields since the days of William the Conqueror, and the animal featured prominently on the heraldic insignias of both Elizabeth and James.

![Image of heraldic crests](image_url)

3.3: The royal crests of Elizabeth (left) and James, first as king of Scotland (center), then as ruler of both Scotland and England (right). Note the combination of England's multiple lions passant guardant and Scotland's single lion rampant in the quartered arms of James after 1603 (Bouteill 259-60)

That the lion was thus the most fitting prey for a monarch was obvious, at least in theory. In practice, of course, lions were in short supply in the English countryside, though their physical absence (like that of the wild boar) hardly prevented writers from referring to a long tradition of kings battling lions in single combat. Although the original models for

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44 In the case of William the Conqueror, who predated the advent of formal heraldry, the crest bearing two lions passant was in all likelihood assigned to the king retroactively at a later date (Bouteill 18).
such confrontations were probably mythical figures like Hercules or biblical figures like Samson, examples involving historical individuals abounded. In discussing the lion adorning the crest of Alexander, Bossewell explains that in a single park in northern India, the king had "killed foure thousand wild beastes...amonge the whiche there was a Lyon of a rare bignesse, that came running towards him, whom he did not onely receiue, but killed him with one stroke" (94r). William Harrison also links Alexander to the lion hunt, implicitly contrasting it with the Elizabethan deer hunt, an activity which he had criticized for effeminacy elsewhere in his Description:

[T]his noble kind of hunting [i.e. of dangerous animals] only did great princes frequent in times past, as it may yet appear by the histories of their times, especially of Alexander, who at vacant times hunted the tiger, the pard, the boar, and the bear, but most willingly lions, becuase of the honorable estimation of that beast, insomuch that at one time he caused an odd or chosen lion (for force and beauty) to be let forth unto him hand to hand, with whome he had much busyness, albeit that in the end he overthrew and killed the beast. (328).

Harrison offers more recent (and explicitly English) examples as well. Believing that lions had once populated northern Scotland (325), he records the following historical example of a royal English lion hunt:

King Henry the First of England, who, disdaining (As he termed them) to follow or pursue cowards, cherished of set purpose sundry kinds of wild beasts, as bears, libards, ounces, lions, at Woodstock and one or two other places in England, which he walled about with hard stone, an. 1120, and where he would often fight with some one of them hand to hand when they did turn again and make any reise upon him; but chiefly he loved to hunt the lion and the boar, which are both very dangerous exerciese. (328)

In narratives such as Harrison's fanciful stories of hand-to-hand combat, the figure of a monarch proving himself in direct physical confrontation with a lion remained a powerful and pervasive image in early modern England. It made little difference to the appeal of
the image's symbolism that such a confrontation could no longer occur (and, in all likelihood, had never occurred) anywhere in Europe.

There were, of course, no lions in James I's England, save those in the Tower of London,\(^\text{45}\) and in fact no lion had ever roamed as far north as the British Isles during the age of recorded history. James would never be an English Hercules.\(^\text{46}\) Nor was he content to dispense with the hunt's longstanding associations with masculinity and martial prowess, as Elizabeth had in embracing the pastime's more physically passive variations. Trapped between forms of the hunt which were considered either inadequately dangerous to perform the royal hunt's necessary symbolic work, or excessively destructive and needlessly hazardous to the surrounding population, in the end James was forced to pursue a variety of half-measures and minor reforms to the hunting culture, none of which succeeded in reestablishing the activity's emblematic power as an accepted measure of masculinity and royal authority. The contradictions inherent in nurturing a dangerous animal simply to demonstrate one's valor by slaying it finally proved unsustainable, and even after the monarchy's restoration imported populations of boars make no further appearances in the surviving records. The wild boar within early modern English culture ultimately finds its most fitting representation (or lack thereof) in the

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\(^{45}\) James did at one point attempt to bait the tower's lions with other beasts, including dogs and a bear, but the results proved anticlimactic (Chambers II.259). We can presumably conclude by the absence of any evidence to the contrary that James prudently declined to emulate the "historical" examples of monarchs fighting lions enumerated by authors like William Harrison.

\(^{46}\) The pacific James I's preferred model of virtuous power was actually Solomon rather than Hercules. Nevertheless, Cosimo II de Medici thought the Greek hero's twelve labors an appropriate subject for a series of sculptures he commissioned as a gift to King James. Sculpted and cast by Ferdinando and Pietro Tacca, the works (including Hercules wrestling the Erymanthian Boar) were never actually presented to the English king. Pietro Tacca would go on to sculpt Florence's famous II Porcellino (Radcliffe 100), a life-size bronze boar. Modern visitors rub the animal's snout to assure that they will one day return to Florence, a ritual that indicates just how little remains of the fearsome associations the animal carried at the time of the sculpture's creation.
imaginary target of Rosalind's boar-spear. A woman disguised as a man, she carries a hyper-masculine weapon designed to confront a kind of dangerous animal which no longer existed in England by the time of the play's composition. Rosalind's spear reminds her audience that, as with so many other forms of masculine display, the hunt and its violence were always in danger of being reduced to completely empty "semblances."

The intersections that Rosalind represents - of killing and harmlessness, real and symbolic violence, true and false representations of masculinity and power - all contributed to the strange "off-stage" presence of the wild boar in the early modern English theater and in the nation's culture at large.

**Heywood's Age plays and the hunt**

As a coda to the preceding discussion of early modern English hunting discourses underlying Rosalind's mention of the boar-spear, I would like to examine one of the wild boar's more extensive literary appearances. Early modern England's most famous fictional boar, of course, was the slayer of Adonis in Shakespeare's wildly popular narrative poem. However, here the boar itself is seen primarily through the lens of a neo-Ovidian love story, a beast presented by Shakespeare more as allegorical symbol than wild animal. For a more representative depiction of a boar hunt, and in fact the only extended staging of such a hunt in Elizabethan or Jacobean drama, we must turn to Thomas Heywood's *The Brazen Age*. Heywood wrote the play as the third in a sequence
of three plays based on Greco-Roman mythology\textsuperscript{47} (\textit{The Brazen Age} follows \textit{The Golden Age} and \textit{The Silver Age}), each play presenting an ever more fallen vision of the world as it declines from its initial perfection. All three of the plays (and their collective trajectory of moral decay) participate extensively in the discourses surrounding the hunt in Renaissance England, culminating in \textit{The Brazen Age}'s staging of the famous Calydonian Boar hunt, which Heywood transforms into the tragic product of a tainted hunting culture. Taken as a whole, the trilogy provides the early modern English stage's most extensive and varied depiction of hunting.

Each play is introduced by Homer himself, a figure who Heywood uses to foreground the moral descent of his narrative's setting. At the opening of \textit{The Golden Age}, Homer asks the audience to "suffer me, / You that are in the worlds decrepit Age, / When it is neere his vnieuersall graue, / To sing an old song; and in this Iron Age / Shew you the state of the first golden world" (6). More often than not, Heywood seems to forget his intent to demonstrate the unfallen nature of this "first golden world," staging incidents such as the deception and rape of Calisto and Jupiter's wars against his uncle Tytan and his father Saturn. \textit{The Golden Age} does offer one completely pure and innocent figure, however, in the demigod Diana:\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} The series may also include Heywood's two \textit{Iron Age} plays, but Arlene W. Weiner observes that these texts lack the other \textit{Age} plays' common features: "Homer as a presenter, a concentration upon sexual love, the presence of the gods upon the stage, and considerable masque-like spectacle." Weiner suggests that despite their titles, Heywood may not originally have conceived of the two \textit{Iron Age} plays as part of the \textit{Golden, Silver and Brazen Age} sequence (xix).

\textsuperscript{48} Homer explains in the play's prefatory monologue that he himself was responsible for the deification of "[t]he gods of Greece, whose deities [he] rais'd / Out of the earth, gave them divinity." "I am he," Homer tells the audience, "[t]hat by my pen gave heaven to Jupiter" (5). Heywood does not stage the actual achievement of divine power until \textit{The Silver Age}, however, meaning that figures such as Diana, Jupiter, and Saturn remain mere mortals throughout \textit{The Golden Age}. This state of affairs does produce some
She is the daughter of an ancient King,  
That swaid the Atticke scepter, who being tempted  
By many suiteres, first began this vow:  
And leaving Court betooke her to the forrests.  
Her beauteous traine are virgins of best ranke,  
Daughters of Kings, and Princes, all devoted  
To abandon men, and chuse virginity.  
All these being first to her strict orders sworne,  
Acknoledge her their Queene and Empresse. (27)

During her only appearance onstage, Diana is preceded by six satyrs singing a song in praise of her and of their pastoral recreations:

Come to the Forrest let us goe  
And trip it like the barren Doe,  
The Fawnes and Satirs still do so,  
And freelie thus they may do.  
The Fairies daunce, and Satirs sing,  
And on the grasse tread manie a ring,  
And to their caves their ven'son bring,  
And we will do as they do. (27-8).

For the satyrs (already semi-bestial figures) to "trip it like the barren Doe" might suit the vanguard of Diana and her fellow virgin-huntresses, but to then retire to their caves with "ven'son" would appear almost cannibalistic were the actual violence of the hunt not so thoroughly elided. The lines suggest that the venison on which Diana and her followers feed simply appears without any action on their part, much as elsewhere in the song the satyrs sing that "Our food is honie from the Bees, / And mellow fruits that drop from trees" (28). Diana does embody the hunt (her satyrs and nymphs enter with "javelings in their hands, their Bowes and Quivers" [27]), but she embodies an unusually bloodless variety of such pastimes. She assures Calisto that "Here is no City-craft. / Here's no bizarre moments, such as Jupiter leading his troops into battle with the cry "Jove and his fortunes guide us in our way" (73).

49 Jupiter finds the Golden Age's animals equally accommodating, having spent his infancy "in a cave, / Where from their voluntary charity, / Bees fed [him] with their hony" (21).
Court-flattery: simplessesse and sooth / The harmlesse Chace, and strict Virginity / Is all our practise" (28). In this golden world, the steps between "harmlesse Chase" and daily venison are best left unspoken. While the remainder of The Golden Age concerns itself with the deeds (and misdeeds) of Jupiter, Saturn, Tytan, and a series of other dubiously gilded figures, Diana departs in innocence from her single scene to the accompaniment of hunting horns, calling for "[a] generall hunting in Dianaes name" (29), and returns once again to the purity of her "harmless Chase."

The Golden Age imagined here harkens back not only to a mythical past as envisioned by the ancients, but also to the more recent past of Elizabeth's reign, a period that had already begun to take on the incorruptibility of a nostalgically remembered yesteryear. The hunt, as embodied by Diana and her followers, bears a certain resemblance to the entertainments enjoyed by Elizabeth at Cowdray in 1591. There, too, the hunt had been accompanied by a song in praise of the hunting party's female leader, and if the actual killing of the deer in the paddock and of the stags seen from the turret was not quite obscured, its significance certainly seems to have faded into the background among the day's festivities. For both Diana and Elizabeth, the deer's

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50 Diana and her virginal followers echo the similarly virtuous isolation of Duke Senior and his men in As You Like It's Forest of Arden. The wrestler Charles describes how "many young gentlemen flock to [the Duke] every day and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world” (1.1.111-3), and Duke Senior himself asserts that the "woods [are] / More free from peril than the envious court” (2.1.3-4). The Duke's "golden world," however, contains hints of hardship and violence unknown in the daily existence of Heywood's Diana and her band. Duke Senior expresses a striking asceticism in telling his followers that when the "icy fang...of the winter's wind...bites and blowes upon my body...I smile and say: / 'This is no flattery. These are counsellors / That feelingly persuade me what I am” (2.1.6-11), and we have already seen the ambivalence expressed by Jaques and others toward the hunting of innocent deer. In Arden, as in Heywood's golden world, the forest's human residents subsist on venison, but in Shakespeare's play the hunters must "go and kill...venison" (2.1.21) to ensure that subsistence.

51 Berry notes that "Queen Elizabeth’s palace of Nonsuch included a grove of Diana with a fountain depicting Acteon turned into a stag” (4).
innocence never impinges on a form of the hunt focused primarily on poetic ceremony and celebratory spectatorship. The violence of the pastime seems to remain untroubling so long as it also remains unspoken.

Heywood begins *The Silver Age* with another reminder of his cycle's moral trajectory, observing in his note to the reader that he "hope[s] the declining Titles shall no whit blemish the reputation of the Workes" (83). Appropriately, the cycle's second play and its depiction of the hunt largely revolve around Hercules, a figure half-mortal and half-divine. Enraged at Hercules for being the illegitimate son of Jupiter and Alcmena, Juno tells the audience that she has "rouz'd / A monstrous Lyon " (127) in order to kill Hercules and revenge herself on Jupiter. In contrast to the harmless doe of *The Golden Age*, the Nemean Lion "keeps the forrests and the woods in awe...[and] [u]npeoples townes," threatening to ultimately "make all Greece a wilderness" (129). Far from representing a region of innocence and an escape from the "city-craft" of mankind, the forests of Heywood's *Silver Age* have become antithetical to civilization. To make Greece a wilderness would be to destroy the bedrock of the culture within which Heywood lived and wrote. However, though the Nemean Lion may be "dreadful," it still represents a worthy foe and, in some sense, a peer for the Greek hero. Hercules vows that he will "Dare him to single warre" since "[i]t fits Joves sonne / Wrastle with Lyons," and sets off to "hunt to day / Yon fierce Nemean terror, as a game / Becomming Hercules" (129-30). Though the moment of confrontation between Hercules and the Nemean Lion occurs offstage, we learn from the fight's spectators that Hercules "gave the monstrous Lyon such a fall, / As if a mountaine should ore-whelme withall." (130). In
deploying the language of wrestling, Heywood associates the combat with a sport which, though by no means exclusively aristocratic, was recommended to young gentlemen as a suitably ennobling martial pastime (Vale 120).\textsuperscript{52} Returning to the stage as the victor of this single-combat, Hercules tells the audience that "The horrid beast I have torne out of his skin, / And the Nemean terror naked lyes, / Despoyl'd of his invinced coat of Armes."

The lion's "coat of Armes," of course, becomes the heraldry of Hercules himself, as the hero thereafter "arme[s] [his] body with th'unvulner'd skin" (131). Hercules wears the lion's skin not simply as evidence of his triumph over a dangerous monster, but also as proof of his victory in single combat with a worthy and noble adversary whose throne and "coat" he has now claimed for himself.

The similarities between Hercules and the lion go beyond simply the possession of strength or courage, including also the precise nature of their shared nobility. In \textit{The Brazen Age}, Hercules kills Nessus with an arrow as the centaur attempts to abduct Hercules's wife Deianeira. Upon reaching the body, Hercules laments that "the luxurious slave" is no longer "sensible / Of torture," but disdains to mutilate the corpse, claiming that "the dead / Wee hate to touch, as cowardly and base, / And vengeance not becoming Hercules" (182). Hercules's behavior echoes that of the lion, whose supposed refusal to feed as a scavenger was one of its most admired and oft reported characteristics during the early modern period. For example, in \textit{As You Like It}'s Forest of Arden, Oliver is only spared initially by the "suck'd and hungry lioness" because "'tis / The royal disposition of that beast / To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead" (4.3.115-25). Compare these

\textsuperscript{52} Even James I recommends wrestling, "although but moderately," as physical exercise befitting his son, Henry Prince of Wales (56).
descriptions of the lion and Hercules to the role of an early modern king or queen in the English royal hunt, figures who performed violence *exclusively* against the corpses of their prey. At most, virile monarchs such as James I might hack off the dead animal's head in order "to trye their [sword's] edge, and the goodnesse or strength of their arme."

By the time of Hercules and the Nemean Lion, the harmless deer in the forests of Diana's unsullied Golden Age have given way to a threatening wilderness populated by "dreadfull beasts," but the natural world's dangers may at least still be confronted in honorable single combat, and victory over these dangers bestows virtuous martial glory. Once we reach Heywood's *The Brazen Age*, however, heroic violence gives way to far more destructive forms of bloodshed, and even the most virtuous motives can lead to disaster. As in the first two plays, the third play begins with Homer, though here the prologue's tone is decidedly darker:

As the world growes in yeares ('tis the Hevens curse)
Mens sinnes increase; the pristinee times were best:
The ages in their growth wax worse and worse.
The first was pretious, full of golden rest.
Silver succeeded; good, but not so pure:
Then love and harmlesse lusts might currant passe:
The third that followes we finde more obdure,
And that we title by the Age of Brasse.
In this more grosse and courser mettal'd Age,
Tyrants and fierce oppressors we present.
Nephews that 'gainst their Uncles wreake their rage,
Mothers against their children discontent,
A sister with her brother at fierce warre,
(Things in our former times not seene or knowne)
But vice with vertue now begins to jarre,
And sinnes (though not at height) yet great are growne. (171)

If Heywood's *Age* plays do not always follow this pattern of growing degeneracy in every detail, *The Brazen Age* does at least portray the culmination of the increasingly explicit
violence and peril (both physical and moral) of the hunt. Gone are the bloodless festivity
of the *The Golden Age*’s deer chase and the unambiguously heroic single combat of *The
Silver Age*; Heywood focuses his depiction of the hunt in *The Brazen Age* on the killing
of the Calydonian Boar, a conflict destined to end in tragedy and dishonor for many of its
participants.

Not satisfied with presenting the story of a single legendary boar, Heywood
actually conflates the tales of the death of Adonis and the Calydonian Boar hunt. The
former's elements, unsurprisingly, echo Shakespeare's popular narrative poem, including
Venus's admonition to Adonis against pursuing dangerous game:

> Hunt thou the beasts that flye,
> The wanton Squirrel, or the trembling Hare,
> The crafty Fox: these pastimes fearlesse are.
> The greedy Wolves, and fierce Beares arm'd with clawes,
> Rough shouldered Lyons, such as glut their jowes
> With herds at once, Fell Boares, let them passe by,
> Adon, these looke not with thy Venus eye. (186)

Adonis is not to be persuaded, of course, and meets the very end feared by Venus, but
even those hunters who escape the boar's tusks seem to fall victim to the corrupting
violence of the encounter. Having killed the boar offstage, the remaining hunters enter
with the beast's head to relate the story of its death. Meleager observes that the boar now
lies "[w]allowing and weltering in his native bloud," killed by Meleager himself and his
"bold uncles, al [their] bore-speares stain'd / And gory hands lau'd in his reeking bloud."
(194). The description's graphic details strikingly illustrate the final step in the
deterioration of the hunt's moral purity; over the course of Heywood's three plays the
pastime devolves from "harmlesse Chase" to regal wrestling match to brutal mutual
butchery. Having killed and dismembered their prey, the gore spattered hunting party votes to give credit for finally felling the beast to Meleager, but unlike the victory of Hercules over the Nemean Lion (an act akin to a nobly dispassionate triumph in the lists), Meleager's victory over the boar is described by Castor as primarily an act of vengeance:

> The spoile is thine, the yong Adonis death,
> Anceus slaughter, and the massacre
> Of Archas, Pelagon, Eupateinon
> And all the Grecian Princes lost this day,
> Thou hast reveng'd, therefore be thine the fame. (195)

Tragically, Meleager makes the mistake of trying to grant the fame bestowed on him to Atlanta, a huntress with whom he has fallen in love and who had been the first to draw blood from the boar. His uncles fly into a rage, insulted that such an honor should be granted to a woman and a foreigner, but Meleager refuses to reverse his decision and quickly turns on his uncles with the very ferocity that has just allowed him to kill the fearsome boar. He accuses his uncles of being "[m]onsters more savadge then Dianaes swine," and warns that "the same hand / By which the Caledonian terror fell, / Shall him that frownes or murmurs lanch to hell" (195). The confrontation culminates in what the stage directions describe as "[a] strange confused fray" in which Meleager slays his two uncles. Too late Meleager sees the root of the killing in his own ungoverned passion:

> "[I]mpious fury, / How boundless is thy power: uncircumscribed / By thought or reason, th'art all violence, / Thy end repentence, sorrow and distaste" (196). When told of the killings, Meleager's father, King Oeneus, greets it with a resignation that explicitly

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53 When compared to Meleager's boar hunt, Hercules's triumph over the Nemean Lion seems almost as bloodless as Diana's pursuit of the deer. Confronted with the problem of the lion's unpierceable skin, Hercules ultimately strangles his adversary (130).
equates his son and the boar, observing that the kingdom must "beare the Gods vindication / With patience, as wee did Dianaes wrath" (197).54

In succumbing to his rage and aggression, Meleager exhibits the bestial "like response" that Cummins identifies as necessary for successfully hunting the wild boar. Tragically, Meleager proves unable to contain these characteristics within the boundaries of the hunt itself, and he emerges as victor over the Calydonian Boar only to discover that he has been tainted by the very violence they had sought to prevent. The rash slaughter committed by Meleager after the hunt closely mirrors early modern zoology's ideas about the wild boar's character. Topsell believes that boars gnash their teeth together in order to sharpen them so that they may "take revenge upon those which pursue and follow them" (546). In fact, he maintains that the vengeful wrath of the boar is so great that the animal is hot to the touch, "whereby the ardent and fiery nature of this beast is manifest" (539), and "what place soever he biteth either upon Dog or man, the heat of his teeth inflicteth a dangerous inflaming wound" (542). Meleager may not have been wounded in the hunt, but he has, nevertheless, become inflamed. Courageous yet wrathfull, motivated by vengeance, preeminent in the extremity of his unheeding violence, the prince thoroughly resembles the animal he has killed. The very characteristics of physically assertive masculinity that allow him to overcome the boar also turn Meleager

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54 Meleager's mother, Althea, proves less forgiving, and chooses to revenge her brothers by murdering her son, after which she kills herself with the very sword Meleager had used to slay the boar. Meleager's weapon ultimately bears far more of his own family's blood than it does the blood of his original enemy.
into a boar himself, a transformation he explicitly recognizes in his "impious fury...uncircumscribed / By thought or reason," fury which is "all violence."55

During the fateful confrontation with his uncles, Meleager's physical presence onstage seems calculated to emphasize the hunter's imitation of his former prey. Even Heywood's very limited direction for the actors to stage a "strange confused fray" (in which a lone Meleager charges amongst his numerous adversaries)56 echoes The Noble Arte of Venerie's description of a boar brought to bay and encircled by hunting dogs:

I have once a Bore chased and hunted with fiftie good houndes at the least, and when he sawe that they were all in full crie, and helde in rounde together, he turned heade upon them, and thrust amiddest the thickest of them. In suche sorte that he slewe sometimes sixe or seven (in manner) with twinklyng of an eye (149).

We need not assume that Heywood actually drew the inspiration for his violently enraged, boar-like Meleager from Gascoigne, or indeed from any one source. By undergoing a bestial transformation in the immediate aftermath of killing the Calydonian Boar, Meleager simply illustrates a common refrain of opponents of the hunt such as Agrippa: those who hunt savage beasts may, in their violence, "become salvage beastes." To call Heywood himself an enemy of the hunt might be an exaggeration, but the Age plays certainly demonstrate his sensitivity to the array of complications and difficulties facing any attempt to employ the early modern English hunt symbolically or as a means of

55 The Meleager of Golding's translation even confronts his uncles while "gnashing with his teeth for anger that did boyle / Within," a choice of words which strikingly echoes Topsell's inflamed, tusk-gnashing beast (546). Not surprisingly, Ovid was one of Heywood's most important sources for The Brazen Age.
56 Meleager presumably fights Toxeus, Plexippus, Nestor, Atreus, Pollux, and Castor. All six of these characters voice opposition to Meleager's actions, and all six seem likely to be implicated in the "All" who vow that they "will try" Meleager's warning. Jason and Tellamon, though they do speak in support of Meleager, presumably do not fight on his behalf in the fray that follows, since the stage directions indicate that the fight ends only when "Jason and Tellamon stand betweene the two factions" (196).
masculine self-fashioning. For would-be hunters in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, the real challenge lay not in the physical enactment of the sport's violence, but rather in controlling the complex cultural work that such violence performed.
Baited bears and royal entertainments in 1606

The summer of 1606 found both England and its king in an unusually festive state of mind. Only six months earlier, a group of recusant Catholics led by Robert Catesby had nearly succeeded in wiping out much of England's government by blowing up the House of Lords during the opening of Parliament. Alleged conspirators were still being rounded up in late January, and the unfortunate Henry Garnet, the last man executed in connection with the plot, did not hang until May 3rd (Parkinson 114-5). The nation as a whole and James I in particular were doubtless in need of a cheerful distraction, and on the 17th of July just such a distraction arrived in the person of James's brother-in-law, Christian IV of Denmark. A contemporary account records (perhaps a bit optimistically) that "King James...so entertained this puissant King his Brother, in person accompanying him, in all Royall pleasure delighting him, and most plentifully feasting him, as shall never be rased out of memory, so long as the world shall have any being." (Nichols II.60).1 The variety of lavish entertainments featured a seemingly endless stream of adulatory pageants, spectacles, and speeches addressed to the kings, proclaiming them "the world's prime honours" (II.70), "salut[ing] them and pray[ing] for their happiness" (Nichols II.62). Not all of the entertainers present could articulate their adoration in such

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1 The visit is perhaps most famous today for John Harrington's remarkable description of a drunken royal masque which ended with the actresses playing "Hope and Faith...both sick and spewing in the lower hall" (Nichols II.73).
terms, however; "on the 5th of August," H. Roberts tells us, "for [the kings'] delight, were the beares and bulls brought, in which sport some time was spent" (Nichols II.80).

Coming hard upon the heels of the bears and bulls were the players; the unusually high demand for "Royall pleasure" meant that rather than touring the provinces that July, Shakespeare's company found themselves performing three plays for their patron and his Danish guests. Scholars have long suspected that the last of these three plays, performed at Hampton Court on August 7th (Kernan 72), could well have been Macbeth.² With its sinister witches, its Scottish setting, and its prophetic "show of kings," Macbeth may have been staged as a vastly subtler and more oblique echo of the personal flattery heaped on James in the many public speeches and pageants of the preceding weeks. If the king was attending closely to the language of the play, however, he might also have noticed a fleeting reference to another of the spectacles that he and Christian had witnessed. As the forces of Malcolm close in and Macbeth finds his allies have fled, the doomed king wheels about, cornered but defiant, and compares himself to the very animal that his royal audience had seen baited only two days before:

² The 1606 performance of Macbeth before James I was famously posited by Henry Paul in 1950's The Royal Play of Macbeth: When, Why, and How it Was Written by Shakespeare. In the years immediately following the publication of Paul's work, scholarly acceptance of his theory was sufficiently widespread for G.K. Hunter to write in 1967 that "[i]t is usually supposed today that Macbeth was first performed before James I and his royal guest, King Christian IV of Denmark, some time during the latter's visit to England" (29). Kenneth Muir likewise remarks in the 1966 Second Series Arden edition of the play that "almost all critics believe that one 1606 performance was at court" (xiii). Recently, however, scholars have exercised more caution about the likelihood of such a performance, with A.R. Braunmuller pointing out that the claim "lacks any proof" (8) and Nicholas Brooke suggesting that "there is no evidence whatever that [a performance of Macbeth] was given before the King of Denmark on 7 August 1606" (61). Sandra Clark, Muir's successor in the Arden series, simply writes that "[n]o clear evidence supports this view" (19). Nevertheless, Paul's claim remains plausible enough (or perhaps appealing enough) for Jonathan Bate and Eric  Rasmussen to confidently assert that "Macbeth was almost certainly performed in the king's presence, possibly in the summer of 1606 during a visit from the Danish king" (xii). Like Shakespeare poaching deer or Queen Elizabeth requesting a play about Falstaff, the performance of Macbeth before James I and Christian IV may be too intriguing as a possibility for its fame to suffer from not being a fact.
They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course.

(5.7.1-2)

James and his guests are likely to have thought little of the passing reference; bearbaiting analogies were common enough in early modern English drama. If they noticed the line at all they might have thought the baited bear an apt image for Macbeth: isolated, surrounded by enemies, but vicious and still very dangerous, even if ultimately doomed. It was an image at the heart of early modern English ideas about bears, and one which will form the central focus of the following analysis.

On December 26th, four months after the (possible) Hampton Court performance of Macbeth and long after Christian IV and his retinue had been bid a fond (and of course lavish) farewell, King James encountered a second, nearly identical bearbaiting reference during a play staged for that season's Christmas revels. Toward the midpoint of the play, an old man, tied to a chair, aggressively questioned and accused of treason, characterizes himself in terms almost identical to those used by Macbeth:

I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course.

(3.7.53)

The play James watched that December 26th was King Lear, and the character comparing himself to a baited bear was the Duke of Gloucester. The horrendous act of onstage

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3 All quotations from Shakespeare plays other than King Lear refer to The Norton Shakespeare.
4 All quotations from King Lear refer to the Arden Third Series edition of the play, edited by R.A. Foakes. The Foakes edition is conflated, with passages unique to either Q or F indicated by superscript bracketing. Foakes notes that "where the texts differ, I have generally preferred Folio readings" (149). Act 3 scene 7, the scene on which this chapter focuses, is largely identical in Q and F, with the differences between the two editions consisting primarily of single, isolated words, none of them greatly relevant to the analysis that follows. For a comparison of deviations between the two texts, see King Lear: a Parallel Text Edition, p.234-43.
violence that immediately followed Gloucester's baiting reference undoubtedly made for a shocking start to the Christmas holidays, but hundreds of years later it also seems to have almost completely obscured the meaning of the metaphor that preceded it. In the chapter that follows, I would like to try to recover that meaning, to explain the potentially puzzling similarity between Gloucester's line and the parallel remark by Macbeth, and to situate both self-characterizations within the context of the sport to which they refer.

**Literary criticism and baited bears in 2015**

Drawing connections between bearbaiting and stage plays in early modern England is hardly innovative. A sizeable body of evidence long ago demonstrated that the two pastimes were linked in both the period's legal regulations of potentially unlawful entertainments\(^5\) and in the imaginings of the Puritan anti-theatricalists who objected to most entertainments (lawful or unlawful) under any circumstances. Moreover, the activities had intimate material links to one another, sometimes occurring in the same spectator venues on different days. The best known example of this sort of dual-residency was the Hope Theater, a space purposely built as a home for both players and bears from the very beginning, complete with removable stage (Bentley IV.201-8). It seems likely that bearbaitings were also held (or at least planned for) at the Rose (Wickham 57-8, Gurr "Bears and Players" 32-4) and may have occurred at other London amphitheaters as well. These linkages have not gone unnoticed by scholars of early modern drama. In fact, the modern critical consensus sees the two entertainments as not

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\(^5\) See especially the "Documents of Control" chapter in Wickham's *English Professional Theatre*. 

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merely related, but inextricably intertwined. Critics have characterized the two activities as "culturally isomorphic events" (Dickey 255) that "occupied homologous social positions" (Scott-Warren 64); the "staging of one performance [was] always framed by, always grounded in, an awareness of the other" (Höfele "Humanity" 120); their proximity “exerted a significant influence upon the way in which these juxtaossed pastimes, and their performers, could be understood” (Boehr 143); and the "audiences of the time considered baiting and playing as kindred entertainments, and that the experience of attending the one closely resembled the experience of attending the other” (Dickey 262).

Again and again, scholars describe baiting and stage plays as barely differentiated pastimes, with the player's simulated death echoed visually and thematically by the bear's death in earnest, sometimes in the very same performance venue on the very next day. Both literally and figuratively, bearbaiting and drama bled into one another's playing spaces.

If critics are unanimous in their belief that the baiting ring's proximity to English Renaissance theater should shape the way we read the period's plays, they are nearly as unanimous in their revulsion at what occurred in that baiting ring. While the cultural prestige of early modern English drama has improved immeasurably in the last 400 years, the prestige of animal baiting has declined to a nearly identical extent. Scholars routinely describe bearbaiting as not only "cruel" (Dickey 256, Höfele Stake 209, Fudge "Saying Nothing" 81, Scott-Warren 69), but actually a form of "torture" (Höfele 120, Bach 25, Willson "Gloucester" 110, Fudge Perceiving 15), and generally write about the sport with an unabashedly twenty-first century perspective on animal welfare that makes no
distinction between violence against harmless animals and violence against dangerous animals. Unsurprisingly, critics have not been entirely successful in keeping their visceral horror at the realities of bearbaiting from shaping their interpretations of both the sport itself and the ways in which that sport should inform our reading of English Renaissance plays. Throughout the critical literature there appears a consistent impulse to rescue the playwrights and their audiences from the bears, an impulse that has warped our understanding of how the two kinds of entertainment related to one another, and how the image of the bear in the broader culture was appropriated for the purposes of asserting a masculine capacity for violent self-assertion.

This rescue attempt tends to quarantine bearbaiting as merely a pastime of the illiterate masses. While in the past scholars of early modern drama have often been at pains to emphasize (and occasionally even overemphasize) the socioeconomic diversity of play-going audiences, those discussing the intersection between playing and bearbaiting have often gone to considerable trouble to elide a similar diversity among aficionados of the baiting ring. Alexander Leggatt assures us that while baiting "was originally a sport for aristocrats...by Shakespeare's time it appears to have descended socially and become mostly (though not exclusively) a sport for the common people" (43). Jason Scott-Warren calls bearbaiting (in contrast to drama) "a low form of entertainment," and thinks that early seventeenth century English playwrights feared that commercial pressures to produce more and more comedies of humors would turn their work into "the equal of a freak-show or a bearbaiting" (79-81). Robert Willson impartially assures his readers that "[w]hether or not Shakespeare regarded [bearbaiting]
as fit only for the 'common rabble' does not appear to be relevant here" ("Gloucester" 110), but also includes an endnote quoting Dodgson Hamilton Madden's claim that "Shakespeare believed the sport was fitting only for the underworld" ("Gloucester" 111). At its most extreme, this kind of tendency leads Bruce Boehrer to assert that "bearbaiting...coexisted with the early theater as its marginalized and disreputable double" (39), a characterization he supports with the claim that bearbaiting and other animal entertainments were "often derided by early English writers as base and contemptible" (136). Boehrer even goes so far as to sweepingly declare that "bearbaiting is a guilty pleasure" (141), akin to “pornography in postmodern Europe and America,” a form of entertainment “uneasily tolerated" at the same time that it is "openly disparaged within the circles of polite, informed society” (136). Boehrer acknowledges that the activity elicited both opposition and delight, but claims that the opposition sprang from the ranks of “professionals, literary intellectuals, and religious activists, while the delight was more typical of apprentices, laborers, and country dwellers” (142). Above all, “early English dramatists…took some pains to distance themselves from the very animal entertainments with which they shared the Bankside” and there was a general “theatrical opposition to bear-baiting” (145).

There can be no doubt that the players and the bears were in competition with one another to a certain degree, but the suggestion that there existed a generalized "theatrical opposition to bear-baiting" would have come as quite a surprise to Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn. Henslowe and Alleyn spent years petitioning first Elizabeth and then James to name them "Masters of the Royal Game of Bears, Bulls and Mastiff Dogs," an
appointment they finally achieved in 1604. Henslowe had already operated the Bear Garden since 1594 under license from the former Master of the Bears, Jacob Meade (Gurr "Bears and Players" 35), and as the newly appointed Masters of the Royal Game he and Alleyn were responsible for the baiting that took place during Christian IV’s 1606 visit. As for playwrights, the immense range of non-pejorative references to bearbaiting in early modern drama (the sport was routinely used as a metaphor) vastly outnumber the relative handful of critical comments on the sport. Perhaps most importantly, the historical record directly contradicts claims about the low birth of bearbaiting’s primary audience, which included not only Boehrer’s "apprentices, laborers, and country dwellers" but also the royal court, much of the English nobility, and a great many wealthy and influential foreign visitors. We have already seen that James I thought bearbaiting a fit pastime with which to entertain and impress his brother-in-law and fellow king, Christian IV of Denmark, and the festivities of 1606 were hardly an isolated case. References to bearbaiting occur repeatedly in the records of the Jacobean court, with James continuing to entertain important visitors with elaborate animal baitings right up until his death. Records of a 1623 embassy from Spain record that "the Spanish Ambassador is much delighted in bear-baiting. He was the last week at Paris-garden, where they showed him all the pleasure they could...and then turned a white bear into the

6 The surviving documents suggest that Henslowe conducted his bearbaiting enterprise with the same hardnosed business acumen that he exhibited as a theater manager. In 1607 James I received a "humble petition of phillipe Henslow And Edward alleyn" in which they request further reimbursement for "the losse of diuers of thes Beastes as before the kinge of denmarke we loste a goodlye beare called gorge stone and at our laste beinge before your majestie weare kylled iiij of our beaste bears..." (Henslowe Papers 104-5). George Stone was an extremely well known bear (the Edward Alleyn of the baiting world), and Henslowe no doubt reacted to the financial consequences of the animal's loss much as he would have reacted to the loss of a star actor.
Thames, where the dogs bated him swimming; which was the best sport of all" (Nichols IV.879). In 1618, an Italian visitor describing the Bear Garden even mistook it for "a place belonging to the king, where he keeps a quantity of bears and other wild beasts" ("Venice"). If bearbaiting was a "guilty pleasure" for James, he seems to have done little to conceal his embarrassment.

Nor were baiting spectacles an innovation of the sometimes libertine Scottish king. His predecessor seems to have enjoyed animal blood sports just as much as her successor. In fact, the most famous account of an early modern bearbaiting comes from one of Elizabeth's royal progresses. From July 9th to July 27th in 1575, Elizabeth visited the Kenilworth estate of her favorite, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester (Laneham x). We have an unusually complete and detailed picture of the festivities, as recorded by Robert Laneham, a servant in Leicester's household. Among the many other lavish entertainments that the Earl thought the Queen might enjoy, Leicester staged a veritable orgy of bearbaiting, with "thyrteen bearz" baited on a single day. "It waz a sport very pleazaunt," Laneham tells us, and he waxes poetic about watching the bitten bear "shake hiz earz twyse or thr ys wyth the blud & the slauer about hiz fiznamy." All in all, he concludes, the baiting "waz a matter of goodly releef" (17). Although the Laneham account details a visit to the estate of Leicester, Elizabeth also arranged for the sport at her own residence. In 1559 she brought the French ambassadors to court for a lavish feast, "and after dener to b[ear] and bull baytyng, and the Quen('s) grace and the

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7 The visit to Paris Garden may or may not have involved a royal escort of some kind, but the unusual baiting of a polar bear in the Thames was unquestionably a sign of favor bestowed upon the Spanish ambassador by the crown. For several of the more extensive descriptions of James I’s baiting of exotic animals, such as lions and polar bears, see Nichols I.516, II.259, II.307-8.
embassadurs stod in the galere lokyng of the pastym tyll vj at nyght." Their appetite for blood sport apparently unsated, the French ambassadors also spent the following day at "Parys garden, for ther was both bare and bull baytyng, and the capten with a C. of the gard to kepe rowm for them to see the baytyng" (Machyn 198).

While most audience members at Paris Garden no doubt arrived without an armed escort, the very presence of the ambassadors and their expectation of replicating the entertainment they had witnessed the night before at court demonstrates just how continuous the experience and appeal of bearbaiting was across the entire socioeconomic spectrum of early modern English society. If the "king's game" (as it was sometimes called)\(^8\) did carry associations with any specific class, those associations were with the educated elite, not the poor and illiterate. In a 1639 personal letter to Baron Francis Cottington (Charles I's future lord treasurer [Pogson]), Thomas Violet notes that he is "much delighted to hear that [Cottington] had recently visited the bear garden," and casually observes that there may be "some men who do not endure to see the bears, but they are generally rustics, and of little judgment, who do not know how to regard this business, nor do they approve of recreation" ("Charles I"). Violet associates anti-bearbaiting sentiment not with "professionals" and "literary intellectuals," but rather with the very "country dwellers" to whom Boehrer would prefer to see the modern stigma of animal cruelty attached.

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\(^8\) Though hawking and hunting were more frequently characterized as quintessentially "royal" sports, bearbaiting seems to have occasionally borne a similar appellation. See, for example, Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Augures* and Richard Brome's *The Antipodes*. 

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The association of animal baiting with rusticity and ignorance did not begin until after the interregnum. Keith Thomas notes that, a few isolated iconoclasts aside, the idea that animals were fellow creatures and worthy of respect did not take widespread hold until "the later seventeenth century onward" (174-5). We can actually observe this shift occurring in the successive editions of John Stow's *Survey of London*. In the 1603 edition's description of Southwark, Stow mentions quite neutrally that "there be two Beare gardens, the olde and new places, wherein be kept Beares, Buls and other beasts to be bayted...These Beares and other Beasts are there bayted in plottes of ground, scaffolded about for the Beholders to stand safe" (II.54). When John Strype revised and greatly expanded Stow's text in 1720, however, he wrote that while the baiting arenas had once been located north of the Thames, they had been "removed to the other side of the water; which is more convenient for the butchers and such like, who are taken with such rustic sports as the baiting of bears and bulls" (Strype). Entertainment which had carried no class connotations in 1603 had become a "rustic sport" by 1720, a revisionist diminution of its early sixteenth century status that would remain the dominant characterization of bearbaiting's past up to the present day and would warp the ways in which modern literary scholars imagine bearbaiting audiences.

In cases where quarantining the history of bearbaiting within the least literate or least urban elements of the theatergoing audience has seemed impossible or undesirable, critics have tried instead to save the audience from themselves by associating them with the highly vocal minority of individuals who vociferously opposed animal baiting, thereby attributing to the audience an antagonism toward the very entertainment they
routinely attended. We can immediately detect a sign of this strategy's contradictions in the transformation that the anti-theatricalists undergo in Boehrer's analysis. He refers specifically to Philip Stubbes (perhaps the period's most infamous enemy of stage plays), and Boehrer is not alone in singling Stubbes out for attention; the Puritan author known primarily for vitriolic attacks on everything from hats (Anatomie 1583 ed. D6v-D7r) to pleasant smells (Anatomie 1583 ed. G1r) and for suggesting that swearing be punishable by death (Anatomie 1584 ed. M2r-M2v) appears over and over as one of the primary voices in opposition to bearbaiting (Dickey 262, Thomas 175, Höfele "Place" 58, Boehrer 39, Fudge Perceiving 173), and not only a voice in opposition, but a voice which speaks the moral truths of our modern age. Leggatt observes that "[m]oralists like Phillip Stubbes denounced [bearbaiting] in terms that most of us would now agree with" (43-4), and Hawkes concurs that "there were protests against the practice, often expressed in terms with which we, in the twenty-first century, would readily sympathize. Most vocal were Puritans and Protestants." Hawkes goes so far as to attribute the sentiments of figures like Stubbes to the population as a whole, claiming that "there is no doubt that [the Puritans' and Protestants'] objections expressed a broader and long-standing revulsion" to bearbaiting (84). It speaks volumes that, within this apparently silent mass of early modern opponents of bearbaiting, modern critics can find no more appealing figure than Philip Stubbes.9

On the whole, the views expressed by Stubbes occupy a position of such extreme hostility to entertainments and pastimes of any kind (no matter how universally

9 Thomas Dekker, the other figure invariably cited as the voice of widespread sympathy for baited bears, presents a more complex interpretive problem, and will be dealt with at length later in the chapter.
pursued) that we should maintain a healthy skepticism whenever *The Anatomie of Abuses* is cited as evidence for the probable values of any sizable segment of early modern English society. Most of the time, of course, that is exactly how Stubbes's writing is treated. Few critics would ever dream, for instance, of attributing a lurking sense of guilt or sin to the audiences or playwrights of the English Renaissance stage on the basis of Stubbes's claim that "[a]ll Stage-playes, Enterluds, and Commedies, are...sucked out of the Deuills teates, to nourish us in ydolatrie hethenrie, and sinne" (*Anatomie* 1583 ed. L5r-L6r). The absurdity of such anti-theatricalist rants had long ago earned Stubbes the scorn of most modern readers of Renaissance drama, and his image as the enemy of all manner of enjoyment prompted Thomas Macaulay's well known quip that "[t]he Puritan hated bearbaiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators" (129). Stubbes's writing on bearbaiting does often seem to have relatively little to do with a concern for suffering, animal or otherwise. Writing of the 1583 collapse of Paris Garden which occurred during a Sunday bearbaiting, Stubbes takes a ghoulish pleasure in detailing the carnage among the impious attendees:

> [T]wo or three hundred, men, wemen and children (by estimation) [were hurt] wherof seven were killed dead, some were wounded, some lamed, and othersome brused and crushed, almost to death. Some had their braines basht out, some their heads all to squasht, some their legges broken, some their arms, some their backs, some their shoulders, some one hurt, some another. (P3r)

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10 To take one of a great many examples, Stubbes condemns almost all dancing and music, especially for women, warning parents that "if you would haue your daughter whoorish, bawdie, and uncleane, and a filthie speaker, and such like, bring her up in musick and dauncing, and my life for youres, you haue wun the goale" (O5r-O5v).
For Stubbes, the collapse represents "a fearfull example of God his judgement" (P2v), but a judgment motivated less by the suffering of the bears than by the sacrilegious timing of the entertainment. "This wofull spectacle and heauie iudgement," Stubbes tells us,"did the Lord send down from Heauen to shew unto the whole World how greevously he is offended with those that spend his Sabaoth in such wicked exercises" (P3r). Though Macaulay may dismiss Stubbes's views on animal cruelty a bit too flippantly, rehabilitating Stubbes as a "religious activist" and the voice of a nascent (but already influential) animal rights movement simply redoubles Macaulay's error in the opposite direction.

The implausible generalizations made by Boehrer, Hawkes, and others about widespread attitudes toward bearbaiting would matter little were it not for the profound influence they have exerted on interpretations of the sport's appearance in early modern English drama. As one would expect given the physical and cultural proximity of the two activities, rhetorical and even visual references to bearbaiting litter the drama of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Seen through the lens of Stubbes and one or two other highly vocal opponents of bearbaiting, however, modern interpretations of these theatrical references almost invariably read them as a means of evoking pity and (even more improbably) guilt in the plays' audience members. Ralph Berry's essay "Twelfth Night: The Experience of the Audience" has been particularly influential in this regard. Berry interprets the final scene of the play as a symbolic bearbaiting in which the unjustly tormented Malvolio is cruelly taunted by the other characters onstage: "It is theatre as blood sport, theatre that celebrates its own dark origins...What the audience makes of its
emotions is its own affair. I surmise that the ultimate effect of *Twelfth Night* is to make the audience ashamed of itself” (119). Hawkes pushes the analogy even further, not only describing Malvolio as "a whipped, tortured bear, beset by baiting dogs," but identifying him as merely one of a series of similarly tortured bears whose mistreatment Shakespeare intends his audience to feel ashamed of and complicit in. In such moments of symbolic baiting, the audience "disconcertingly experiences itself as part of that hounding pack" (Hawkes 94). Skura likewise sees Malvolio as merely one of many mistreated bears, and accepts Berry's reading of the steward as a baited animal whose torment "make[s] spectators feel guilty about the blood" (207). Lumping together bear figures as diverse as Malvolio, Falstaff, and Gloucester, Skura suggests that we watch their "ritual punishment" with “curiosity despite our horror,” so that “we are made to feel the de facto cruelty of our detached participation in theatrical 'sport'” (208).

Gloucester's inclusion on Skura's list arises from the line referred to at the beginning of the chapter: "I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course." Having been tied to a chair by Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall, Gloucester is undergoing an interrogation regarding an impending invasion or rebellion that seeks to place Lear back on the throne. The Earl speaks the line in question (perhaps merely to himself, perhaps half to his captors) just before he lashes out at Lear's elder daughters for tormenting their father, prophesying that he will "see / The winged vengeance overtake such children" (3.7.64-5). In punishment for this recalcitrance, Cornwall gouges out both of

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11 Dickey points out that Malvolio's threat to be "revenged on the whole pack" of his tormentors may not even refer to bear baiting at all, since the *OED* suggests the word did not come to refer to a group of animals until fifty years after the play's composition (266).
Gloucester's eyes in full view of the theater audience. This act of torture, probably the most shocking violence in the Shakespeare canon, has framed almost all critical responses to Gloucester's bearbaiting reference. Willson's claim that "Gloucester's blinding functions as a perfect parallel with bearbaiting" (Shakespeare's 141) has met with essentially no objections or reassessments since it was first published nearly forty years ago, and indeed, it accurately encapsulates the current critical consensus on the function of bearbaiting in the scene. Typically, these readings focus on the "helplessness" of both figures as the central element of the Gloucester/bear parallel.

Edward Berry describes the Gloucester-as-bear tableau as the "image of a helpless animal surrounded by attacking predators" (218), and Skura sees Gloucester as a baited animal "exposed helpless before a hostile mob" (207). In a number of cases, scholars have specifically identified Gloucester with the figure of Harry Hunks, a blind bear whose "performance" at the Bear Garden was recorded in a famous and much quoted passage by Thomas Dekker:

At length a blinde Beare was tyed to the stake, and in stead of baiting him with dogges, a company of creatures that had the shapes of men, & faces of christians (being either Colliers, Carters, or watermen) tooke the office of Beadles upon them, and whipt monsieur Hunkes, till the blood ran downe his old shoulders. (B2r)

In Höfele's reading of Dekker's description, Harry Hunks "becomes something like an animal version of the tormented Gloucester, just as the theatrical performance of Gloucester's human ordeal draws on, and gains emotive force from, the performance of the unfeigned torment suffered by his animal counterpart in the neighboring bear-pit"
Höfele and others identify the specific "emotive force" in question as pity, going so far as to describe the Hunks of Dekker's description as a figure of "Aristotelian...terror and pity" (Höfele "Sackerson" 167). Willson agrees that "in Act III, scene vii...we are meant to feel special pity for Gloucester...because Cornwall and Regan inflict on him the kind of suffering commonly practiced on bears and bulls," and moreover that "[t]he actual blinding of Gloucester, effected with the 'cruel nails' of Cornwall and Regan [sic], was probably meant to evoke the fate of one of the most famous of the Elizabethan and Jacobean bears, Harry Hunks" ("Gloucester" 108-9). For critics like Willson and Höfele, the theater and the baiting ring draw on a moral and visual congruence that mutually amplifies the emotional impact of both, and, as Höfele puts it, "[j]ust as blind 'monsieur Hunkes', blood running down 'his old shoulders', assumes the tragic pathos of a Gloucester, Shakespeare's Gloucester becomes a baited bear" ("Man" 129). Willson even imagines the parallel continuing beyond the infamous torture scene, as the blinded Gloucester "like his animal counterpart, travels the countryside as an object of curiosity and pity" ("Gloucester"110).

This emphasis on the centrality of pity to Shakespeare's bearbaiting references simply represents a continuation of the attempt to rescue the theater audience from the bears. If, as seems probable and as many have suggested, the two entertainments largely shared the same pool of audience members, then the only way to redeem the spectators at Shakespeare's plays is to suggest that those same spectators felt (or could be made to feel) deep ambivalence about their attendance at the baiting ring. Höfele demonstrates how
this imagined ambivalence quickly becomes the central point of Shakespeare's references to bearbaiting:

Invoking the violence of the Bear-Garden, Shakespeare's stage colludes with and profits from the raw savagery of baiting. But catering to the bloodthirsty tastes of an audience accustomed to the spectacle of 'live' maiming and killing is only one side of the theatre's engagement with the cruelty of its animal double. The other is its capacity for mobilizing resistance to the very cruelty it exhibits. It is no accident that the affective force of the Bear-Garden is co-opted in a scene that marks the nadir of human debasement but also releases a counterforce in the intervention of the servant, who refuses to stand by and watch. (208)

Thus the blinding of Gloucester does more than simply mirror the baiting ring's gory cruelty (perhaps, as Höfele suggests, as a means of "profiting" from the "bloodthirsty tastes" of its shared audience); it "elicits the counter-forces of pity, of humaneness, of anti-violence" (Höfele Sackerson 170-1). Just as Stubbes is transformed into a "religious activist" by the need for a prominent sixteenth century opponent to animal cruelty, Shakespeare becomes a political organizer, symbolically "co-opting" the wrongs done onstage and "mobilizing" a moral resistance to mirror the pity and horror inevitably felt by the audience (an audience that might have been cheering on a genuine animal baiting only a day or two before). Höfele locates the endpoint of such activism in Edward Bond's Bingo, a 1973 play that depicts "an ageing, corrupt, conscience-stricken and suicidal Shakespeare [who] express[es] his horror at the cruelty of bear-baiting...the perfect theatrum mundi, the perfect indictment of brutish humanity." Höfele's conclusion explicitly spells out the relationship between Shakespeare and Bond, and by extension
between early modern theatrical references to bearbaiting and modern views on animal cruelty:

We have no way of knowing if such 'presentist' imaginings of how Shakespeare felt about the creatures in the Bear Garden are anywhere near the 'truth.' But what we may venture to propose, I think, with some assurance, is that early modern plays such as *King Lear* and *Macbeth* have contributed substantially to the development of the moral sensibility which we find eventually voiced in a late modern play like *Bingo*.

(Höfele "Sackerson" 174-5).

In spite of Höfele's apparent caution about whether or not Shakespeare "truly" felt anything at all on the topic, his thesis is fairly straightforward: Shakespeare employs visual and rhetorical references to bearbaiting as a means of generating sympathy for certain characters by drawing on the audience's sympathy for the baited bears those characters resemble, a sympathy Shakespeare himself actually helps to elicit and foster in the first place. The critical consensus around this central idea (as represented by Hawkes, Skura, Ralph Berry, Willson, and especially Höfele) rests on a single (usually unstated) assumption: that the audience attending *King Lear* would in fact have felt pity for Harry Hunks and baited animals generally, and revulsion at the entire practice, or at the very least that Shakespeare considered it appropriate and worthwhile to suggest that they should feel such pity. We will return to the second possibility and Shakespeare's views on the sport at the end of the chapter, but since most critics seem to treat the first half of this assumption as a given, it might be worth examining the evidentiary basis for such a view.
In the industrialized world of the twenty-first century, the physical threat to human beings posed by the animal world has disappeared almost completely, while at the same time industrialized societies have developed a visceral and widespread aversion to witnessing the suffering of animals, regardless of species. In early modern England's agrarian society, however, the human world's dominance over nature was not (or at the very least was not seen to be) complete, and firsthand experience of the suffering of animals was an unavoidable everyday occurrence. In a culture that still saw itself as struggling against a hostile and powerful natural world, different species were treated differently according to their presumed effect on and relationship to the human sphere; violence that might elicit pity when directed at a songbird would elicit no such emotion when directed at a fox. As we will see shortly, the tendency of modern ecocriticism to treat all violence toward animals as morally comparable, regardless of species, has obscured this important distinction in ways that have limited our understanding of early modern bearbaiting and its relationship to the theater.

**Thomas Dekker at the Bear Garden**

We have already observed how willingly critics cite the views of Philip Stubbes as representative of what an audience attending the Globe, or at least a playwright producing scripts for the theater, might have thought about bearbaiting. Not all early modern opponents to the sport were saddled with such extremist anti-theatrical prejudices, however. The one figure who features even more prominently in the scholarly search for pity at the baiting ring than Stubbes actually does happen to be a playwright: Thomas
Dekker. Without question, Dekker's satirical *Worke for Armorours* has represented the single most important document for recent attempts to demonstrate that baited bears elicited widespread sympathy in early modern English society. In the passage of interest, Dekker recounts and comments upon a visit to the Bear Garden during which he witnesses a traditional bearbaiting, as well as the whipping of Harry Hunks and the chasing of a horse and monkey by hounds.\(^{12}\) Dekker's text has exerted such influence on modern scholarly approaches to the relationship between theater and bear baiting that it deserves to be reproduced in its entirety:

No sooner was I entred but the very noyse of the place put me in mind of Hel: the beare (dragd to the stake) shewed like a black rugged soule, that was Damned, and newly committed to the infernall Charle\(^{13}\), the Dogges like so many Diuels, inflicting torments upon it. But when I called to mind, that al their tugging together was but to make sport to the beholders, I held a better and not so damnable an opinion of their beastly doing: for the Beares, or the buls fighting with the dogs, was a liuely representation (me thought) of poore men going to lawe with the rich and mightie. The dogs (in whom I figured the poore creatures) and fitly may I doe so, because when they stand at the dore of Diues, they haue nothing (if they hue them but bare bones throwne unto them, might now & then pinch the great ones, & perhaps vex them a little by drawing a few drops of blood from them: but in the end, they commonly were crushed, & either were carried away with ribs broken, or their skins torne & hanging about their eares, or else (how great so euer their hearts were at the first encounter) they (stood at the last) whining and barking at their strong Aduersaries, when they durst not, or could not bite them. At length a blinde Beare was tyed to the stake, and in stead of baiting him with dogges, a company of creatures that had the shapes of men, & faces of christians (being either Colliers, Carters, or watermen) tooke the office of Beadles upon them, and whipt monsieur Hunkes, till the blood ran downe his old shoulders: It was some sport to see Innocence triumph ouer Tyranny, by beholding those unnecessary tormentors go away with scratchd hands or torne legs from a

\(^{12}\) These three events seem to have constituted a consistent trio of related entertainments, both at the Bear Garden and at court.

\(^{13}\) Probably a variant of "churl."
poore Beast, arm'd only by nature to defend himself against Violence: yet me thought this whipping of the blinde Beare, mowed as much pittie in my breast towards him, as the leading of povere starued wretches to the whipping posts in London (when they had more neede to be releued with foode) ought to move the hearts of Citizens, though it be the fashion now to laugh at the punishment. (B1v-B2r)

In Dekker's description we find the "pittie" that figures so prominently in modern readings of bearbaiting's place in English Renaissance drama, but we also discover a number of important elements that routinely fail to appear in recent references to the passage. The most immediately striking complication is the fact that Dekker imagines bears not just as overpowered victims of aggression, but also as overpowering perpetrators of aggression themselves. The bear in his second analogy represents "the rich and mightie" who "commonly crushed" the ineffectually violent dogs. Here the baited bear embodies not merely desperate isolation, but also unassailable physical might. As we will see shortly, the bear's terrifying strength made it an appealing (though problematic) point of reference for the construction of masculine identity. The bear's shifting character in the above passage demonstrates Dekker's willingness to focus on whichever aspect of bearbaiting suits his underlying objective: forcing the reader to confront the suffering of the (human) poor. *Worke for Armorours* subtitle explicitly communicates its intention to advocate for the brutalized and ignored poor of England even before the reader has opened the book ("Open warres likely to happin this yeare 1609: God helpe the Poore, The rich can shift" [A2r]), and that advocacy drives every bearbaiting metaphor deployed by Dekker. We need not question the sincerity of the "pittie" Dekker feels for Harry Hunks, but the description of the blind bear's torment
serves primarily as a means of drawing attention to the plight of "poore starued wretches" undergoing an unjust punishment at "the whipping posts in London." Moreover, Dekker bitterly acknowledges that even in the case of human beings enduring a brutal and unmerited whipping, "it be the fashion now to laugh at the punishment," suggesting that he found few in the England of 1609 who shared his own sympathy for the whippings' victims. Thirty years later Thomas Violet would express a similarly analogical characterization of the Bear Garden in his letter to Baron Cottington, but Violet's far more culturally typical analogy merely serves to confirm the self-acknowledged atypicality of Dekker's views on both bearbaiting and society. Where Dekker had seen the brutality and degradation of England's culture writ small in the fight between dogs and bear, Violet sees an invigorating embodiment of energetic striving and competitive human activity that leads him to declare that "all the world's a bear baiting" ("Charles I"). No doubt Dekker would have agreed, though in a very different sense.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a fuller reading of Dekker's description demonstrates that, in stark contrast to humanity's "poore starued wretches," even a blind bear such as Harry Hunks did not helplessly suffer the violence of his tormentors as a passive victim.\textsuperscript{14} The human participants apparently departed with "scratchd hands or torne legs" with sufficient regularity for Dekker to characterize at least some portion of the entertainment as an image of "Innocence['s] triumph ouer Tyranny." In fact, the blind bear's capacity for self-defense also figures prominently in the description of the pastime

\textsuperscript{14} A culture that produced John Foxe's \textit{Actes and Monuments} undoubtedly knew the difference between passive martyrdom and violent resistance. Modern critics, however, have typically characterized bearbaiting as the former rather than the latter.
recorded by the visiting German Paul Hentzner in his 1612 account of a trip to England. Hentzner briefly describes the "whipping [of] a blinded bear, which is performed by five or six men, standing circularly with whips," noting that while "he cannot escape from them because of his chain; he defends himself with all his force and skill, throwing down all who come within his reach, and are not active enough to get out of it, and tearing the whips out of their hands, and breaking them" (42). Clearly the blind bear exercised a greater degree of violent autonomy than modern literary critics tend to give him credit for, and on at least one occasion when the chain holding him failed, the supposedly helpless animal immediately demonstrated the capacity to inflict far more than scratched limbs and broken whips. An account from 1554 records that "the grett blnd bere broke losse, and in ronnyng away he chakt a serving man by the calff of the lege, and bytt a gret pesse away, and after by the hokyll-bone, that within iiJ days after he ded" (qtd. in Chambers II.460). The incident of 1554 begins to reveal just what makes the modern critical preoccupation with the pity supposedly aroused by bearbaiting so misleading. Stephen Dickey, essentially alone among recent scholars in rejecting the centrality of pity as a widespread response to the sport, underlines the disconnect between the baiting audience's well documented enthusiasm and their supposed ambivalence about the sport's morality: “barring a conspiracy of ironists, then, to judge from the handful of contemporary eyewitness accounts of baiting matches, again and again the audience was pleased by what it saw” (Dickey 259). As a more complete survey of early modern

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15 Harry Hunks was actually only one in a series of blind bears used in London's baiting pits between 1550 and 1650.
16 Responding to Berry's interpretation of Twelfth Night, Dickey writes:
references to the animal will demonstrate, the audience's pleased reaction to the violence inflicted on the bear was entirely in keeping with the bear's place in the society's collective imagination, for the emotion most commonly associated with the animal in early modern culture was not compassion: it was fear.

The fear of bears in early modern England

Although bears had not existed as dangerous wild animals in the forests of England for at least 500 years, records indicate that their presence as captive "entertainers" still entailed very real risks to both handlers and audience members. A year after the blind bear had mauled a bystander to death in 1554, another bear killed a

Berry’s conclusion fairly accurately registers my experience of the play. But in light of the evident popularity of bearbaiting with all classes of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, which audience might feel this way is a real question. An Elizabethan audience’s sudden awareness that it has seen, in Twelfth Night, something like a bearbaiting may not have produced an introspective complication of sympathies in quite the way Berry describes. (268)

17 Historians and naturalists usually date the last native brown bear in Britain to the 10th century, though Yalden suggests they may have disappeared much earlier, perhaps just after the period of Roman Britain (112). Harting believes that, even given such great lengths of time since wild bears roamed the British Isles, the "shadow of their memory" can be seen in remote locations in Scotland such as "Monster's Slope," a name he imagines "to have been derived from the mysterious and exaggerated recollection of the last solitary Bear which lingered in the deep recesses of the forest, the terror of the hunter and the herdsman" (23). Such a possibility strikingly illustrates the way in which the increasing rarity of dangerous wild animals can actually intensify the terror they elicited, turning the few remaining flesh and blood animals into semi-mythical monsters.

18 The bears of early modern London's baiting rings were brown bears (Ursus arctos), a species whose distribution once stretched from the Iberian peninsula to the American Great Plains. Modern brown bears vary considerably in size, with Alaskan Grizzlies weighing in at 780 kgs (1,720 lbs). European brown bears are considerably smaller, but still grow to be 150-250 kgs as adults (330-550 lbs) (Nowak II.1089). There is some evidence to suggest that the brown bears of early modern Europe were even larger than their present-day counterparts. Elisabeth Iregren, comparing the remains of Swedish bears from the 10th through the 18th centuries with measurements from modern Swedish bears, concludes that a "significant difference in size" exists between the two groups. Iregren posits that the European brown bear may have experienced a reduction in average size over the past two and a half centuries due to "hunting pressure creating small breeding populations surviving in less suitable biotopes" (165). In other words, human encroachment has not only shrunk the brown bear's habitat, it has actually shrunk the bear itself as well. The bears that shared London's amphitheaters with Shakespeare and his peers, however, lived well before this physical diminishment of Europe's apex predator.
child (Hotson 286), and a recent survey of sixteenth century coroners’ records discovered that between 1563 and 1570 alone bears were responsible for the deaths of at least three people ("Deadly Beasts" 47). While such incidents may not have always occurred with comparable frequency, fatal encounters appear to have happened often enough to keep audience members from forgetting the danger posed by bears. Apparently bearbaiting (and theater) audiences still retained a healthy respect for the bear's violence as late as 1635; when the comic soldier Slicer in William Cartwright's's *The Ordinary* agrees to teach the gambler Have-at-all swordplay, he promises to "make / Thy name become a terour, and to say / That Have-at-all is comming, shall make roome / As when the Bears are in Procession."

Even Stubbes cites the potential hazard to spectators as an argument against bearbaiting, calling it a "daungerous & perilous exercyse: wherein a man is in daunger of his life euery minut of an houre" (P2r). In fact, the well known danger of fatal bear attacks may have ultimately resulted in (or at least served as a convenient rationale for) the eventual prohibition against bearbaiting during the interregnum. Ravelhofer suggests that while the baiting rings weren't initially closed along with the theaters, "in the end several incidents of bears killing spectators provided a welcome excuse for the authorities to get rid of the loathed institution" (Ravelhofer 292). One 1655 newsbook suggests that bearbaiting had been "put down" specifically "because Ned of Canterbury had flung a Man quite from the stake into the upper Gallery, and broake the shoulder of the huckle-bone of his left Buttock" (qtd. in Hotson 285). Ostensibly, then, bearbaiting may have disappeared neither because it gave "pleasure to the spectators" nor because it gave "pain
to the bear," but because the bear was a dangerous wild animal that posed a very real risk of grievous bodily harm to any human being it encountered.

While death tolls and passing references to the fatal danger posed by bears indicate why fear, not pity, defined early modern reactions to the animal, two sixteenth century accounts of bear attacks offer a fuller picture of the specific characteristics that made the bear so terrifying. The first, a 1642 pamphlet entitled "Strange and Horrible News," promises to describe the "terrible murther committed by one of Sir Sander
Duncomes' beares on the body of his gardner...with what strange means and manner they used to make him loose his savage hold by muskets, pikes, and mastive dogs, which could not be, till he had tore his bowells (the man lying on his belly) thorow his back" (A1r). The pamphlet itself elaborates on the gory events of the title page, recounting how the bear "layd hold upon [the keeper's] leg," how it stood on and "grievously crusht" the keeper, how the man's "shreeks" brought the neighbors, and how Duncomes himself arrived at the scene to discover "the bloudy ruinous object of his untimely murther'd servant" (A2v-A3v). Those on the scene found themselves unable to kill the bear with any weapons immediately at hand (one man's rapier failed to even penetrate the animal's thick coat and tough hide), and the actions required to stop Duncomes's bear gives us some idea of just how helpless a human being, or even a sizeable crowd of human beings, would have been when facing a bear in sixteenth century London:

To Islington were pikes and musquets sent for: meane time the barres butchers having brought some mastive dogs, set on the beare, but all the violence in shaking, tugging and tearing of the beare, could no more remove him from the man whose blood hee was sucking, and whose flesh tearing, than with our hands wee could or might remove strong buildings. At last came from Islington the pikes and shot; yet all the wounds they spent both upon him not destroyed him, but he tooke the water, and there they gained the victorie with his death. (A3v-A4v)

The animal in "Strange and Horrible News" exhibits an almost supernatural imperviousness, even an indifference to the deadliest weapons that its human opponents

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19 Duncomes had acquired the bears with the intention of establishing a bearbaiting arena, though he had not yet found a suitable venue.
20 Ironically, rapiers were notorious in seventeenth century England for their deadliness in private duels.
can muster. In fact, the unshackled bear threatens not only to kill those unfortunate individuals within its immediate reach, but to actually overturn the very supremacy of human beings over nature, even in the very heart of London:

The ravenous and devouring Beare according to the cruelty and nature of their kind, having formerly seiz'd on [its keeper], as what baeast more insulting over man the Prince of creatures than that mercylesse kind inhumane to all men, who having had a lick or tast of humane bloud, grew so into his savage wildnes, that nothing could stave him off. (A3r)

A terrifying example of a natural world still very much capable of imposing its implacable will on helpless human beings from time to time, the bear's eventual death in the Thames does little to diminish the almost mythic physical power attributed to the animal in the pamphlet's narrative.21

We might reasonably expect the anonymous author of "Strange and Horrible News" to embellish his material (seventeenth century news pamphlets are not known for their high standards of accuracy), but a far less breathless, more dispassionate account of

21 For a fuller discussion of early modern English fears of the untamed and uncontrollable natural world, see Chapter Three, p.188-90. Even among radical theologians with an interest in the rights of animals, large carnivores such as the bear were often excluded from the scope of man's pity. In the 1612 printing of his sermon Mercy to a Beast, John Rawlinson explains why dangerous animals should expect no sympathy from human beings:

A righteous man is mercifull to the life...of his beast, because it is a helpfull creature...not of wilde, or savage beasts...For the fewer of them, the better: because though some of them, after their death, by skilfull Physitions may be made medicinable...yet, in their life time, they are not helpfull, but hurtfull to man. Herodotus...delivers it as an argument of the providence, and mercy of God to mankinde, that...those [beasts] which are of savage, and malignant nature, hee hath made...to haue but few at a birth, lest by their number they should get the maistership of man, and consume him. It is therefore, rather crueltie, than mercy to spare them, because they are so cruell, as not to spare man. (F4v-G1r)

The brief rampage of Duncomes's bear and the anonymous author's interpretation of those events in "Strange and Horrible News" gives us a glimpse of the ever-present threat that nature might "get the maistership of man, and consume him," with the bear "insulting over man the Prince of creatures."
a bear attack from a book published three decades earlier exhibits a marked similarity to the description of the incident in "Strange and Horrible News." In his 1609 travelogue *The Three Voyages of William Barents to the Arctic Regions*, the Dutch sailor Gerrit de Veer describes an encounter on the northern coast of Russia in which two of the ship's crew were fatally mauled after being surprised by a polar bear:

> The beare at the first faling vpon the man, bit his head in sunder, and suckt out his blood, wherewith the rest of the men that were on land, being about 20 in number, ran presently thither...and hauing charged their peeces and bent their pikes, set vpon her, that still was deuouring the man, but perceiuing them to come toward her, fiercely and cruelly ran at them, and gat another of them out from the companie, which she tare in peeces, wherewith all the rest ran away. (63)

Those observing from the ship rowed to shore to help their crewmates, only to find "the cruell spectacle of our two dead men, that had beene so cruelly killed and torne in pieces by the beare." Initially most of the remaining men would not agree to approach the bear in order to retrieve the bodies, since it was such "a cruell, fierce and rauenous beast."

With the bear still "deuouring her prey, not once fearing the number of our men, and yet they were thirtie at the least," the group finally attacked, but despite shooting the animal "and str[iking] at her so hard that their courtlaxes burst...she would not leue the man. At last William Geyesen...stroke the beare upon the snowt with his peece, at which time the

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22 The work's original title offers both a thorough summary of the text's subject matter and an indication of the elements that readers were expected to find especially intriguing: its accuracy, its exoticism, and its focus on physical peril:

*The true and perfect description of three voyages so strange and woonderfull, that the like hath neuer been heard of before...on the north sides of Norway, Muscouia, and Tartaria, towards the kingdomes of Cathaia & China...with the cruell beares, and other monsters of the sea, and the vnsupportable and extreame cold that is found to be in those places.*
beare fell to the ground, making a great noyse, and William Geyson leaping vpon her cut her throat (64).²³

4.2: A detail from the illustration of the bear attack found in 1598's Diarium nauticum, seu vera descriptio trium navigationum, the Latin edition of de Veer's Three Voyages

The incident in which the two men were killed is merely the most dramatic of over a dozen encounters with polar bears detailed in de Veer's log. On another occasion, having spotted a bear swimming nearby, the crew rowed out to the animal, "thinking to cast a roape about her necke; but when we were neere her, shee was so great that we durst not doe it, but rowed backe againe to our shippe to fetch more men and our armes, and so made to her againe with muskets, hargubushes, halbertes, and hatchets." It seems that even this sizeable arsenal was barely up to the task, and the men "fought with her while

²³ J.H.P. Pafford suggests that de Veer's text may have inspired the deadly bear attack in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale, and notes that the Dutch and German editions of The Three Voyages even included the violent illustration reproduced above (69).
foure glasses were runne out, for our weapons could doe her little hurt; and amongst the
rest of the blowes that wee gaue her, one of our men stroke her into the backe with an axe,
which stucke fast in her backe, and yet she swomme away with it." When the crew did
finally succeed in overcoming the bear, they "found her skinne to bee twelue foote long"
(75-6). Sometimes, as in the case described above, the crew sought out the bears, hoping
to gain the animals' pelts as well as precious food and fuel. Just as often, however, the
bears seem (at least from de Veer's point of view) to have attacked the crew of their own
accord, and the log is full of encounters in which the humans' participation is described in
terms of a desperate self-defense (95, 118, 169).

Despite its very different literary genre, De Veer’s quasi-scientific account
corresponds almost point for point with the sensationalistic “Strange and Horrible News.
Like Duncomes's bear, the animals confronted by the crew in de Veer's Three Voyages
are aggressive, often attacking with no apparent provocation; they are lethally powerful,
capable of quickly dispatching a human being with minimal effort; they treat their human
victims as prey, not simply killing them but devouring their bodies; they are large, to the
point of being physically immovable even by a sizeable group of people; they are
practically impervious (at least in the short term) to many weapons, continuing to fight or
flee long after they have been repeatedly shot or stabbed; and finally, they are completely
unintimidated by large crowds of human beings.

If, instead of Stubbes and Dekker, we use de Veer's travelogue, "Strange and
Horrible News," and the numerous accounts of fatal bear attacks as the lenses through

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24 Koolemans Beynen, the work's modern editor, glosses "foure glasses" as roughly two hours.
which to read bearbaiting's intersection with the theater, a very different picture begins to emerge. Far from being "helpless" victims subjugated by humanity's unquestioned dominion over conquered nature, the bear in early modern England was a terrifying embodiment of the natural world's superhuman power, a power that forever threatened to overwhelm the human sphere's attempts to harness or constrain it. The baited bear's chain notwithstanding, bearbaiting both literally and symbolically enacted the continuing struggle of the human world to keep the more innately powerful natural world at bay.25

Lurid accounts of bear attacks merely represent the most viscerally arresting examples of English Renaissance conceptions of and attitudes toward the bear. As usual, Edward Topsell's *History of Four-footed Beasts* gives an authoritative and representative description of the bear's intrinsic character: "The attributes of this beast are many among Authors, both Greek and Latin...armed, filthy, cruel, dreadful, fierce...blody...menacing...head-long, ravening, rigid and terrible Bear; all which serve to set forth the nature hereof" (28). Fittingly for a country with such regular deaths related to bearbaiting, Topsell warns that "it is certain that [bears] are very hardly tamed, and not to be trusted though they seem never so tame" (32), precisely the claim he makes elsewhere about the tiger (549) and that Edward of Norwich makes about the wolf (63).26 In addition to

25 In a telling moment of overlap between the world of the baiting ring and the world of the forest, when the French ambassadors who had spent two days of their visit in 1559 attending bearbaiting departed for home, they "cared money [sic] mastiffs [with] them for the wolf" (Machyn 199), an animal not yet fully eradicated from the forests of France. For a discussion of the wolf as the ultimate early modern symbol of hostile nature, see Chpt. -, p. -.

26 Edward of Norwich's description of the untamable wolf explains in greater detail the source of the problem: "[a wolf] will always do harm, if he hath time and place for to do it...he knoweth well and woteth well that he doth evil...[a]nd yet for all that he may not leave his evil nature" (63). The bear maintained a similar capacity for regression toward untamed, malicious violence. "Strange and Horrible News" emphasizes the inherent threat posed by such a capacity, noting that the victim of the attack had been hired
Topsell, English Renaissance readers seeking information on the bear could turn to a number of hunting manuals. Though no wild bears survived in the British Isles, many English language manuals of the period merely translated works from the continent, where bears remained an important and prestigious game in some regions.\(^{27}\) In *The Noble Art of Venerie*, perhaps the period's most popular English language work of its kind, George Gascoigne emphasizes the danger of bear hunting, warning his readers that bears are "naturally very cruel and harmefull vnto all tame beastes" (216), since they are maruelous strong in their pawes, wherewith thy coll\(^ {28}\) in a Man or Dogge, in suche sorte, that many times they kill and smoother them, or breake their bulckes with the force...with their whole pawe they pull a dogge vnto their mouth, and then they teare him maruelously, for they byte sore, insomuch that if they get holde of a mans heade, they will byte him into the braines: and as for an arme or a leg, they would crushie it in peeces like glasse....[i]f you strike at [a bear] with a sword, they wil breake and beare off a great blow with their pawes. (217-8)

Topsell and Gascoigne confirm in generalized terms what "Strange and Horrible News" and de Veer's logbook demonstrate in specific examples: that bears are powerful, that bears are dangerous, and that bears invariably threaten to overwhelm human attempts to control or conquer them. Regardless of the validity of these claims, some part of the audience at an early modern bearbaiting is likely to have accepted their truth.\(^ {29}\)

\(^{27}\) Gascoigne explains his inclusion of the bear by noting that although "they be not in use heere with vs in Englande," his sources describe them as "noble chases, and much esteemed in other countries" (220).

\(^{28}\) The OED defines "coll" as "an embrace round the neck"

\(^{29}\) Though early modern claims about the bear's ferocity predated by a century the birth of biology as a scientific discipline, present day zoology reaches strikingly similar conclusions on the subject. *Walker's Mammals of the World*, the standard work of descriptive taxonomy on mammals and the modern, scientific descendant of texts like Topsell's *History of Four-footed Beasts*, has the following to say regarding the brown bear: "The brown bear has the reputation of being the most dangerous animal in North America. If
In fact, Dolf Zillmann's explanation for the persistent and widespread attractiveness of violent entertainment across time periods and cultures suggests that the nature of bearbaiting's violence actually served to underwrite its own moral legitimacy. Zillmann argues that viewing violence seems to lead to greater fears of that violence, "fears that are pronounced enough to foster an acute need for, and a ready acceptance of, established authority and militant protection." That protection is then staged as retributive violence against the original threat, and the resultant "promise of safety in a just and orderly world, manifest in the good forces’ ultimate triumph over the evil ones… defines an essential element of the appeal of violent drama" (186-7). In the case of bearbaiting, the threat and the promise of its neutralization were enacted simultaneously. The bear, staged in such a way as to demonstrate its "innate" ferocity and violence against the dogs, embodies the threat of a dangerous natural world, confirming the picture of the animal painted in works like de Veer, Topsell, and Gascoigne. Staked at the center of the baiting ring, this representative of the natural world's hostility can then be subdued, and perhaps even killed, by the mastiffs under the control of human handlers. Sometimes the bear maims or kills the dogs, and indeed, it is the threat of just such a victory by the bear that makes the event a sport rather than simply a ritual, while at the same time serving to confirm the reality of the threat that legitimizes that sport. Regardless of the fight's outcome, however, the bear always leaves the ring having demonstrated its own capacity for violence against the human world and having suffered the dogs' retributive

we disregard venomous insects, disease-spreading rodents, domestic animals, and people themselves, this may be true" (Nowak II.1091).
violence in return. And of course, except for the relatively rare moments noted above when the animal genuinely throws off human control, the bear inevitably exits the event at the end of a chain, led or dragged according to its success or failure in the ring. In the end, human society always reasserts its control, and thus its victory over nature.

The early modern bear and its capacity for sin

Whatever the underlying social function of bearbaiting, we should note that, with the exceptions of Stubbes and Dekker, nowhere in any of the sources cited so far does an author express even a hint of pity for the cruelty inflicted on bears, either within the baiting ring or as objects of the hunt, though cruelty does figure in these writers’ attitudes toward bears. De Veer's shipmates are "cruelly killed and torne in pieces by the beare," Topsell lists "cruel" as one of the "attributes" that "set[s] forth the nature" of the animal, and Gascoigne warns readers that bears are "naturally very cruel and harmefull." In all these cases, however, the bears are the perpetrators rather than the victims of cruelty. 30 Of course, bears and other animals were thought to lack souls, rendering them incapable of sinning in the same manner as humans. The dominance (or at least the prevalence) of

30 The word actually had a wider range of possible meanings in sixteenth and seventeenth English than it does today. While the OED confirms that it could mean "Disposed to inflict suffering; indifferent to or taking pleasure in another's pain or distress; destitute of kindness or compassion; merciless, pitiless, hard-hearted" (1.a), it might also mean "Of men, wild beasts, etc.: Fierce, savage" (2.a), "Severe, strict, rigorous" (3), "Of conditions, circumstances, etc.: Causing or characterized by great suffering; extremely painful or distressing" (4), or even, as an adverb, "Crueilly, distressingly; hence as a mere intensive = exceedingly, very" (5). Of primary interest to us is definition 2.a, one which certainly dominates, for example, when de Veer writes of how a bear "fiercely and cruelly ran at" the crew. This meaning undoubtedly underlies many of the other instances in which writers describe bears as "cruel," but early modern views of the natural world tended to allow definitions 1.a and 2.a to blend seamlessly into one another. For an animal (or human being) to act with "savagery" or "fierceness" almost always implied a degree of "mercilessness"; by definition, savage, untamed nature was "indifferent to" the suffering of human beings, and in the case of large carnivores, it seemed actively "disposed to inflict suffering" ("cruel").
such views in early modern English theological writings has led many modern ecocritics to the conclusion that the period's culture conceived of the animal world as a realm of enviable innocence. As Laurie Shannon puts it, the "unique possession of an immortal soul...exposes humans to the unique risk of the possibility of sin...Beasts, then, are immune to sin; they can be seen to possess a certain 'integrity,' even a 'white' integrity, that 'we' lack, to our harm" ("Poor Bare Forked" 175-6). The nature of non-human morality in early modern English culture, I believe, was more complicated, and not only allowed for the possibility of animal sinfulness, but at times even conceived of certain species as innately and immutably sinful. The idea that beasts lacked the ability to choose between good and evil could endow them with a "white integrity," but it could also rob them of the uniquely human capacity for moral redemption.

To begin with, while theologians were free to declare the logical impossibility of non-human sinfulness, the culture as a whole was awash in daily references to animals as symbolic moral exempla. In some cases animals embodied virtues, such as the innocence of the lamb or the nobility of the lion, but more often they represented vices. The wolf certainly held the first rank in the English Renaissance bestiary of sin, rivaled perhaps only by the serpent, but the bear figured prominently as well. In fact, a recent study by Michel Pastoureau has demonstrated that the bear's associations with sin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sprang from a concerted campaign of vilification by the medieval church. Within the world of pagan Europe, the bear had been "[s]tronger than any animal...the king of the forest and of all the animals," leading pre-Christian "[w]arriors...to imitate it and to imbue themselves with its powers," while "[c]lan chiefs
and kings adopted the bear as their primary symbol and attempted to seize hold of its powers through the use of weapons and emblems." In response to the bear's prominence as a pagan symbol of supreme physical power, the medieval church waged a war against the animal, a war that "lasted for nearly a millennium...coming to an end only in the thirteenth century when the last traces of the ancient ursine cults disappeared and throughout Europe an exotic animal from eastern tradition, the lion, definitively seized the title of king of the animals, until then held by the bear" (1-3). As part of the medieval church's centuries-long attack on the bear, "theologians and preachers made the animal the embodiment of numerous vices and gave it a privileged place in the satanic bestiary" (Pastoureau 90). Focusing on a number of unflattering comments and episodes in Pliny and the Bible, religious writers such as Saint Augustine singled the bear out for particular opprobrium (Pastoureau 113). Sometimes the bear was made to represent individual vices, such as craft or the violence of brute force (Rowland 33), but at other times it represented the devil himself, who often took on the form of a bear to punish sinful men (Rowland 34, Pastoureau 90). In the entire bestiary of medieval Europe, no animal form was assumed by the devil more often than that of a bear (Pastoureau 124), an association that still appears from time to time in early modern references to the

31 Pastoureau devotes only half-a-page to bearbaiting (174). The question of whether or not the sport was perhaps less popular in France and Germany (the primary focus of Pastoureau's study) than in England lies outside the scope of the present chapter, but Pastoureau's neglect of the subject seems to spring partly from a basic misunderstanding of the activity itself. He describes bearbaiting as a pastime involving "a captive bear chained to a solid post, his head enclosed in a muzzle, who is attacked by several dogs who wound him, sometimes mortally, with their repeated biting" (174). No wonder, given the passivity of the bear in such a description, that Pastoureau can imagine the bear as so culturally weakened by the thirteenth century that "dogs no longer feared it, and even children could come close to defy, touch, and tease it" (171).

32 For a thirteenth century depiction of the devil in the form of a bear, see Plate XX in Pastoureau's The Bear: History of a Fallen King.
animal. By the early modern period the bear's natural capacity for violence toward human beings had become linked to an image of the animal as not simply savage and aggressive, but motivated by and embodying a sinful and even a demonic hostility toward mankind.

In addition to the bear's innate moral pollution, it was also subject to the more general tendency of early modern society to attribute to animals a capacity for right and wrong action. Despite the supposed theological impossibility of such a view, many men and women in early modern England seem to have exhibited a striking faith in the ability of animals to actively sin. At times, this bestial moral capacity even found pseudo-legal expression, such as when "dogs caught poaching or killing sheep were...hanged in a grotesque imitation of Tyburn" (Shannon 98). We can see a similar line of thinking in the title page of "Strange and Horrible News," which refers to the "terrible murther committed by one of Sir Sander Duncomes Beares." More than merely a sensationalist embellishment by the pamphlet's author, the idea that Duncomes's bear had knowingly committed "murther" seems to have guided the human response to the "crime."

Duncomes himself, addressing the crowd that had assembled to rescue the doomed keeper, "bade them with all his heart destroy [the guilty bear]: Likewise the other Beare..."

Regardless of Dekker's opinions on bearbaiting, his suggestion that the bear "shewed like a black rugged soule, that was Damned" may draw on this longstanding connection between bears and sin.

On the continent (though almost never in England), such trials sometimes occurred in the formal legal system. See Thomas 97-8 and Shannon's *Accommodated Animal* 237 for examples.

It was not until after the interregnum that animals were fully stripped (or relieved) of their ability to act virtuously or sinfully, usually on the grounds that they could not reason and thus lacked the capacity for moral choice (Thomas 68). Even then, of course, the moral associations of certain creatures continued to shape human behavior toward them. For instance, centuries after deer and hare hunting had been banished from England on the grounds that the sports were "cruel," fox hunting persisted, largely because of society's moral associations with the fox. As Thomas puts it, the fox was seen as a "subtle, pilfering foe....a conscious villain," and that characterization of the animal's nature made fox hunting "half battle, half morality-play" (163).
in the place or Den appoynted for his keeping, and for the others offence being done, the other should suffer with him" (A3v). Though the bear that attacked its keeper was eventually killed by the mob, the pamphlet records that "the other Beare [was] baited to death, and both cut in quarters" (A3v-A4v), a posthumous mutilation that recalls the judicially sanctioned punishment of human criminals. The bear that killed a child in 1655 seems likewise to have been baited to death (Hotson 286), and in 1609 no less a personage than King James journeyed to the Tower "to see a triall of the Lyon's single valour against a great fierce Beare, which had kild a child that was negligently left in the beare-house." Unfortunately, none of the numerous lions released into the baiting yard would willingly approach the bear to exact justice. Two weeks after this abortive execution-by-baiting, "according to the King's commandement, this Beare was bayted to death upon a stage" (qtd. in Chambers II.259). In all of these cases the typical punishment for the killing of a human being - being "bayted to death" - simply amplifies the intrinsically sinful bear's normal "punishment." Early modern bearbaiting was certainly a form of entertainment, but it was also a means of reenacting, again and again, the just sentence that every living bear merited by its very nature, those uniquely ursine characteristics that justified all violence toward the animal: its cruelty, its innate sinfulness, and its threat to a human world incapable of reliably controlling its physical violence. If bears were simply baited over and over until the day that they inevitably succumbed to the dogs (as seems likely), then on a timescale of years, all bearbaitings were executions. Though a bear might be temporarily "acquitted" by virtue of its individual valor on any given day, another trial always awaited, and sooner or later, the
animal would pay for the innate sin it embodied. For bears found guilty of "murther," the process was simply expedited.

The courage of the bear and other ursine virtues

To say that the bear simply represented a hated symbol of vice and the dangers of an untamed wilderness, however, would be a misleading oversimplification. The very same texts that warn of the bear's danger and cruelty also remark on a far more admirable characteristic exemplified by the animal: dauntless courage. Topsell observes that in the "Helvetic Alpine region" the bears "are so strong and full of courage, that they can tear in pieces both Oxen and Horses" (29). Gascoigne admiringly remarks that bears "fight very valiantly in their own defence. Sometime they stand upon their hinder feetes...but being upon all four they fight bothe the more strongly and the more stoutely: for then they declare that they will be revenged, and flee no longer" (218). If audiences went to the baiting ring to see the enemy of human civilization violently contained, they also went expecting to see that same enemy demonstrate its valor. Moreover, for male

The enactment and punishment of innate sinfulness was not the only form that the baiting arena's morally educative value could take. On June 3 1605, King James, accompanied by a duke and seven earls, visited the lions in the tower, and after watching the animals fed (first with sides of mutton and then with live chickens),

the Kinge caused a live lambe to be easily let downe unto them by a rope, and being come to the ground, the lambe lay upon his knees, and both the Lyons stood in their former places, and only beheld the lamb, but presently the lambe rose up and went unto the Lyons, who very gently looked upon him and smelled on him without signe of any further hurt; then the lambe was very softly drawne up againe in as good plight as he was let downe. (Nichols I.516)

While we will never know for certain James's expectations upon ordering this bizarre experiment, the event's recorded narrative strongly implies that some combination of the lion's innate nobility and the lamb's innate (and perhaps symbolically Christ-like) innocence produced the unusually bloodless resolution, thus demonstrating the animals' respective moral natures in much the same way that bearbaiting made visible the bear's innate savagery.
members of the baiting ring's audience, the valiant baited bear demonstrated the successful performance of a vital masculine virtue. The poet John Taylor makes this element of bearbaiting's didactic potential explicit when he defends the sport as "'not for Boyes, or fooles effeminate, / For whoso'ere comes thither, most and least, / May see and learne some courage from a Beast" (D7r). The sentiment strikingly recalls Nashe's defense of stage plays as a site for the modeling of martial masculinity. Scott-Warren points out that both forms of entertainment depended on a compelling presentation of their protagonists' deepest intrinsic "nature":

[B]earpits and cockpits enabled animals to become objects of knowledge, exposing their inner natures to outward view. For this reason, the anthropomorphism implicit in baiting did not necessarily lead to sympathy; rather, where comic detachment was lacking, a quasi-scientific objectivity could come to dominate. The arena became a kind of psychological anatomy theater, revealing the courage, nobility, and artistry, the "peculiar or proper" character of the animals that were exposed to the public gaze. This is also the key to baiting's kinship with the public theater of Shakespeare and Jonson. (74)

That the bear's characteristic courage and awesome capacity for violence appealed to audiences explains much of bearbaiting's lasting interest. While the bear may always have carried an intrinsic moral taint, it also always embodied a superhuman power and resolution in the face of danger that could serve as models for human power and

\[37 \text{Nashe specifically praises history plays in which "our forefathers' valiant acts, that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived...than which, what can be a sharper reproof to these degenerate effeminate days of ours?" (Pierce Penniless 113). Emulating the violence of a bear, of course, was a trickier proposition than aspiring to the martial feats of Henry V. After all, Harrison locates the original impetus for bearbaiting in the need to produce vicious, aggressive attack dogs: "Our Englishmen, to the intent that these dogs [i.e. mastiffs] may be more cruel and fierce, assist nature with some art, use, and custom...by teaching them to bait the bear, the bull, the lion, and other suchlike cruel and bloody beasts" (343). Fercity might have its place, even in the human world, but by modeling the ferocity of a bear, human beings risked taking on that ferocity's attendant "cruel[ty]."}
resolution, especially in the construction of a physically assertive masculine identity. In this way, the bear's attraction sprang from what Laurie Shannon describes as the "negative-exceptionalist" view of human beings, a perspective that emphasizes "abject humanity's underprovisioning in the face of the environment" ("Poor Bare Forked" 196). As Shannon demonstrates, an awareness of human physical frailty in the face of a hostile natural world often formed the contrary subtext to claims of human exceptionalism and dominion over nature. At the same moment that the bear's ferocity and cruelty might be characterized as inhuman, its valor and strength could be seen as superhuman, an exemplar of courage and physical resistance in the face of danger and isolation.

This image of the baited bear - fearless, surrounded by enemies but still a menacing physical threat, capable of great (though perhaps doomed) violence in its own defense - is the dominant image of the animal in the English Renaissance cultural imagination. In fact, the image was so central to assumptions about bears in early modern England that incidents which undermined it tended to elicit highly unusual expressions of sympathy for the bears in question. When the Commonwealth military commander Colonel Thomas Pride had the bears of the Bear Garden put to death in 1656, Henry Townshend scornfully observed that Pride "caused all the bears to be fast tied up by the noses and then valiantly brought some files of musketeers, drew up and gave fire and killed six or more bears in the place" (qtd. in Hotson 286). Blind Bess, one of the

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38 Shannon's reassessment of early modern attitudes toward the animal world comes as a necessary corrective to the tendency to see all animal comparisons as merely a means of "repositioning the disparaged other within the animal world" (Boehrer 18). The above quotations actually come from an essay concerned with King Lear specifically, but Shannon never makes any mention of the play's bear imagery, or, for that matter, any of the references to threatening, carnivorous animals.
bears shot that day by Pride's men, was later immortalized in an epitaph published in the 1660 news pamphlet *The Man in the Moon*. The anonymous author describes Bess as "[a] valiant Champion" who was "condemn'd without a Judg or Jury" (32). These are not the protestations of the incipient animal rights movement supposedly represented by Stubbes and Dekker; *The Man in the Moon's* author presents himself as an aficionado of bearbaiting as a sport. The crime in question is not the killing of bears, but the killing of completely helpless bears. Townshend mocks the ironic "valiance" of Pride and his men because the bears could offer no resistance, and *The Man in the Moon* objects to the pseudo-legal "condemnation" of Blind Bess because she died without being allowed to defend herself before her natural judge and jury: the dogs. Tellingly, the poet of Bess's affectionate epitaph also makes reference to her blindness, the very characteristic that supposedly links baited bears to the torment of Gloucester in *King Lear*. Far from lamenting her blinding as an example of the "tortures" she has undergone, however, the author tells us that "her eyes / She lost in service" (32), and even attributes that loss to a kind of autonomous valor; Bess was "a noble Champion who had ventered himself" in many a bloody fray against all the Butchers Dogs in Great Bedlam, even to the loss of both his eyes" (31). Regardless of what we think of such a fanciful perspective on the bear's willing participation in the violence of the baiting ring, it is clear that at least for some who attended bearbaitings, the blinding of a bear merely represented another hazard

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39 Bess seems to have been a male bear.
of the sport, and a bear's blindness might actually be read as a mark of its courage, just as
a man's scars could serve as proof of his past valiant conduct on the battlefield.\footnote{For a discussion of scars as indicators of masculine identity, see Chpt. One, p.63.}

The most remarkable illustration of the way in which bearbaiting's appeal and moral legitimacy depended on the bear's continued capacity for violence appears in Thomas Nashe's \textit{The Unfortunate Traveller}. Early in the narrative, Nashe's protagonist and narrator Jack Wilton describes the complete destruction of John Leiden's Anabaptist army in Munster. Wilton demonstrates little fellow feeling for the Anabaptists, whom he characterizes as only superficially Christian; rather than following the actual teachings of Christ, the Anabaptists are driven by "their own desires for revenge and innovation...[and] their expectation of the spoil of their enemies," making their defeat a "well-deserved confusion" (284-5). Regardless of their sins and no matter how just their punishment, however, the narrator reacts with visceral disgust to their wholesale slaughter, a disgust that takes the form of a fascinating comparison to the baited bear:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Pitiful and lamentable was their unpitied and well-performed slaughter. To see even a bear, which is the most cruelest of all beasts, too too bloodily overmatched and deformedly rent in pieces by an unconscionable number of curs, it would move compassion against kind, and make those that, beholding him at the stake yet uncoped with, wish him a suitable death to his ugly shape, now to re-call their hard-hearted wishes and moan him suffering as a mild beast, in comparison of the foul-mouthed mastiffs, his butchers. Even such comparison did those overmatched ungracious Munsterians obtain of many indifferent eyes, who now thought them, suffering, to be sheep brought innocent to the shambles, whenas before they deemed them as a number of wolves up in arms against the shepherds.} (285)
\end{quote}
Nashe's comparison seems primarily intended to highlight the utter brutality of the Munsterians' slaughter, and perhaps secondarily to mock the anti-rational and vacillating extremities to which human hatred and pity tend. Embedded in his analogy, however, we can also detect an outline of the complicated status of bears within early modern English culture. On the one hand the bear, like the Munsterians, is an inherently sinful figure, fully deserving of punishment, perhaps even lethal punishment (the narrator certainly gives no indication that he would have cheered a Munsterian victory). On the other hand, for those conducting the baiting to release too many dogs upon the bear leaves him "too too bloodily overmatched," and what had been a legitimate fight turns into an "unconscionable" kind of butchery. It is entirely right and proper to hate bears, to tie them to stakes and bait them with dogs, and even to kill them in the course of such sport, but it must still be a sport (or at least pretend to be one) to retain its moral legitimacy. The bear may suffer death, but it must be a "suitable death."

We have arrived at a complex, even contradictory picture of an animal that figured prominently in both the symbolic vocabulary and the leisure activities of early modern England. The bear's capacity for violence served as a dangerous vice associated with the fear and vilification of the animal, but also as a virtue displayed for the approval of audience members at the baiting rings. The church had largely succeeded in its long fight against the high esteem in which pre-Christian Europe held the bear, but that fight had not managed to completely eliminate the public's admiration for the bear's strength and courage. The bear need not win against the dogs; its moral taint suggested that in the end it ought not to win against them, and the financial realities of the baiting ring ensured
that sooner or later the day would come when it could not win against them (there exists no evidence that aging bears were ever "put out to pasture"). The idea that human beings should afford this former king of beasts the honor of dying in combat, however, permeates the writings of even those who would normally "wish him a suitable death to his ugly shape." To simply tie a bear up and shoot it failed to show the animal's great physical strength its due respect. The lingering view of the bear as a figure of violent self-assertion and admirable courage in the face of overwhelming odds kept alive the older reverence for the animal, a reverence that occasionally led those wishing to lay claim to these qualities to invoke the bear in acts of symbolic self-bestializing. Most often, such acts were undertaken by men who wished to appropriate the bear's well known valor and capacity for violence, two characteristics central to the construction of early modern masculine identity. As we will see, however, appropriating the bear's power also entailed appropriating its vices, a tradeoff that could lead to unanticipated consequences for those who sought to emulate an ursine nature.

**Invoking the bear in lineage and heraldry**

One of the most complex examples of such invocations was the bear's presence in heraldry, a system just old enough to predate some of the church's later triumphs over the

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41 We should note that not all dangerous carnivores were afforded such consideration. In the fifteenth century hunting manual *The Master of Game*, Edward of Norwich observes that though wolves can be hunted, they are normally destroyed by any means necessary, including "the venomous powders that men give them in flesh" (61). Taking into account the intense negative associations with using poison in early modern England, such methods of eradication indicate an unalloyed enmity toward the wolf unequalled by the culture's hostility toward any other animal. Unlike the bear, the purely villainous wolf embodied no admirable characteristics whatsoever (at least in England), and was therefore to be hounded to a fully deserved extinction.
animal. For a time at the beginning of the thirteenth century, bears were popular heraldic emblems in Germany, although they were soon supplanted by the lion (Pastoureau 143). The initial appearance of bears as heraldic symbols reflects the much older tradition of bears as the literal progenitors of prominent noble families. From a very early period the mythology surrounding bears in medieval Europe described them as sexually attracted to human women. Sometimes the bears "carried [women] off and raped them, whereupon the women gave birth to creatures that were half man and half bear, who were always indomitable warriors and even the founders of prestigious family lines" (Pastoureau 3).

Many of these semi-ursine offspring existed only as characters in myths by the Tudor period (as was the case with Beowulf [Rowland 31]), but a few were historical figures alive recently enough to impinge on the world of the present. Siward, the eleventh century Earl of Northumbria, was allegedly "descended from the union of a white bear and a noblewoman" (Aird). Ironically, today the Earl may be best known as the "warlike Siward" (3.6.31) of Macbeth who helps Malcolm and Macduff overcome the bloody usurper. In Shakespeare's play it is Macbeth, of course, not Siward, who compares himself to a bear. By the sixteenth century, the bear's declining prestige seems to have rendered claims of direct interspecies descent less popular. The animal itself had not completely disappeared from heraldic crests, however. In John Boswell's Workes of Armorie, an encyclopedia of heraldic devices, he explicates the symbolism of a shield with a bear impaled by a spear as follows: "Here is descried in the fielde of thyse cote Armour a Beare vulned with a troncheon of a speare, whosoever did this acte to the Beaste, was a man of a rare and mervelous strength" (3r). If the bear, now morally
tainted, could no longer serve as a mythic ancestor, its widely acknowledged physical strength still allowed it to serve as a mythic opponent, and the man who killed such an animal inherited its reputation for power and courage, both important elements of masculine identity. Even this application may have raised some eyebrows, however, and as we will see, invoking the bear as a personal symbol in any capacity was not without risks.

At the time of Elizabeth's accession in 1558, the bear played a relatively minor role in heraldic symbology. Her ascension to the throne, however, soon led to the rise of Robert Dudley (after 1563 the Duke of Leicester), a man who embraced the bear as his heraldic device with such vigor that "[w]henever the bear occurs as an obvious political reference" in the Elizabethan period, "it is safe to assume that Leicester is intended" (Petti 76). As a young man, Robert came perilously close to losing his head for his part in the attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the English throne. Once Mary had successfully solidified her position as queen, Robert, his four brothers, and their father were sent to the Tower of London, attainted, convicted of treason, and sentenced to death. Ultimately only Guildford Dudley's death sentence was carried out, but when Robert emerged from the tower in 1554, he had lost all rights to his father's lands and peerage. The radical improvement in Robert's prospects did not occur until four years later, by which point he

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42 In John Ferne's *Blazon of Gentry*, another sixteenth century guide to heraldry, the author's explanations are delivered in the form of a dialog between the herald Paradanus and the knight Torquatus. At one point Paradanus refers to a coat of arms bearing a wolf's head, to which the knight Torquatus responds "Is a Wolfes head good Armory? he is a beast of all other most hurtfull." Paradanus reassures him that wolf devices are "both auintient and honorable," and notes that "[i]f...a noble man, can by force and strength roote so euil a member from out his common wealth (which cannot be better brought to passe, then by the seuering of his head from the shoulders) he may very aptly in memory of so noble an acte, beare on his targe the head of such a beast" (ii.40-1). Ferne makes no mention of the bear, but it seems likely that the heraldic application of an animal that Gascoigne calls "very cruell and harmefull" might raise questions similar to those raised by the wolf.
had developed such an intimacy with the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth that contemporaries merely referred to him as "the favorite." His elder brother Ambrose received a title first, being created Earl of Warwick in 1561. Robert Dudley had to wait a little longer, but was finally granted the estate of Kenilworth in 1563 and created Earl of Leicester in 1564. At that point both he and his brother Ambrose had already spent the last two years using their father's heraldic emblem: the bear and ragged staff (Adams).

The Dudley brothers (and their father before them) claimed descent from the Beauchamp earls of Warwick, a lineage from which they took the bear and ragged staff device. The Warwicks, in turn, used the bear emblem as a reference to the deeds of two mythical ancestors: Arthgal, who strangled a bear to death with only his hands, and Morvidius, who defeated a different bear using a club fashioned from a young tree (hence the ragged staff) (Rowland 32). Although Ambrose and Robert's father had used the bear and ragged staff as his emblem earlier, after their attainder the brothers were not technically entitled to employ the image as their heraldic device until Ambrose became Earl of Warwick in 1561. However, a striking bit of evidence left behind by the brothers suggests that even in their darkest hour they clung to the bear as a symbol of their birth. While imprisoned in the Tower during 1553-4, Robert, Ambrose, Guilford, and John passed the time while awaiting word on their death sentences by carving a large, elaborate image of their heraldic device into the wall of their cell. The carving centered on a depiction of two standing bears flanking a ragged staff (Adams). More than simply an assertion of the social status that their attainder had supposedly stripped them of, the sizeable carving was an act of defiance in the face of the crown's death sentences. The
Dudleys, bears to the last, were staging a final, symbolic resistance. Mary could chain them, but to quote Topsell, she would find them "very hardly tamed."

Emphasizing the defiant nature of the heraldic carving, Robert added to it a translation of Psalm 94, the only surviving verse he ever set down (Adams). The psalm (as translated in a 1549 psalter) begins as a lament by one of the persecuted righteous, a litany of wrongs that asks heaven "how long shall the ungodly triumph...They smite dounge thy people, O lord...They murther the widdowe, and the stranger: & put the fatherles to death." By the psalm's close, however, the tone turns from doleful to threatening:
They gather them together against the soule of the righteous: and condempneth innocent bloud.
But the lorde is my refuge: yea, & my God is the strength of my confidence.
He shall recompence them their wyckednes and destroy them in their owne malice: yea, the lorde our God shall destroy them.

(psalter M8v)\textsuperscript{43}

In the event, of course, Robert narrowly avoided shedding his own "innocent bloud," and his intimacy with Elizabeth meant that for much of his life he would be one of the most powerful men in England. Nevertheless, his commitment to international Protestantism (Wilson 66) may have contributed to a sense of ideological vulnerability and isolation, a sense apparently amplified by the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (Gristwood 217).\textsuperscript{44} It is tempting to see his unusually strong attachment to the bear and ragged staff device as an expression of how Leicester viewed himself: a figure of immense power, perhaps, but also a figure perpetually ringed about by enemies. One imagines that the experience of living in the Tower as a condemned traitor and heretic for a year must inevitably have left its mark.

Whatever the reason may have been, Leicester's affection for the bear and ragged staff symbol was extreme. Arriving at Kenilworth for the famous festivities of 1575 (the very celebration during which thirteen bears would be baited on a single day),\textsuperscript{45} Elizabeth would have found the garden decorated with "white bearz, all of stone, vpon theyr

\textsuperscript{43}Robert Dudley's steadfast defiance in the face of his death sentence was by no means inevitable. His father, John Dudley, swayed by the false promises of Mary's interrogators, publicly recanted his Protestant faith and took the sacrament in a Catholic mass that all four of his sons were forced to attend (Wilson 60).

\textsuperscript{44}As Wilson puts it, Leicester thought it was England's duty "to lead Protestant Europe in opposition to the monolithic Hapsburg alliance" (105).

\textsuperscript{45}Chambers suggests that these were not “London bears,” since Leicester's wealth and his intense interest in his own heraldic device meant that he "doubtless kept his own ursine establishment" (II.453).
curious basez" (Laneham 49), along with bear devices marking many of the buildings. Once inside, she would have discovered the bear and ragged staff emblazoned on "beds, sheets, pillowcases, blankets, chairs, cushions, a chess board, and a Bible" (Goldring *John Nichols's* 178). It should come as no surprise that Elizabeth, always fond of nicknames, referred to Leicester as "her bear," an appellation he seems to have encouraged; a year before the Kenilworth visit he had presented her with a jewel encrusted fan that in addition to being "fully garnished with Dyamondes and Rubyes" also had "on eche syde a white Beare; and...a Lyon ramping with a white moseled Beare at his foote" (Goldring *John Nichols's* 126).

While Leicester's bear might kneel before Elizabeth's ramping lion, not all of the earl's uses of the bear device were quite so pacific. For example, the bear figured prominently on the elaborate tilting armor that Leicester had intended to wear during a symbolic mock battle before the Queen. The entertainment, which was supposed to take place during Elizabeth's 1575 visit to Kenilworth, never occurred (the Queen may have vetoed it as too politically sensitive), but the battle was originally to depict an allegorical plea for international Protestant military unity against Spain in the low countries; Leicester himself was to have played the Captain who triumphs over Sir Bruse, the symbolic representation of Catholic Spain's tyranny (Goldring "Portraiture" 177-8). In a more concretely militaristic vein, Leicester's emblem also seems to have inspired the name of one of Elizabethan England's largest warships. In 1563, only a year before Elizabeth would make Robert Dudley's fortune by creating him Earl of Leicester, the crown commissioned a 730 ton, 50 gun galleon, and christened it the *White Bear*. It
seems almost certain that the vessel's name was a token of Elizabeth's affection for her favorite. As a significant element of the Elizabethan navy, the White Bear served the English protestant cause in the nation's long conflict with Catholic Spain, and in 1588 it participated in the improbable defeat of the invading Spanish armada, aided by a storm that English protestants widely attributed to divine intervention (Childs 291). The defiant bear who had awaited his death in the Tower of London had lived to see the heavenly retribution with which he had threatened his captors. God had "recompence[d] them their wyckednes and destroy[ed] them in their owne malice," all under the guns of the White Bear.  

Clearly the bear could still serve as a useful emblem of violent self assertion, especially in contexts where that violence was framed as an act of resistance against superior numbers. Since steadfastness and a capacity for violent self-defense in the face of unfavorable odds was also one of the culture's central images of masculine courage, the bear represented an especially attractive model of male virtue for early modern Englishmen at all levels of society. However, while the bear functioned symbolically as a standing threat (or at least a promise of defiance) toward one's enemies, the animal's

46 The White Bear ultimately sailed in England's navy for over 60 years (Childs 291), and was still imposing enough in 1606 to serve as one of the three vessels on which James I feasted his Danish visitors the day of their arrival (Nichols II.91). During its long career, the White Bear was joined on the open seas by several other vessels named with Leicester's heraldic device in mind. In 1575 Leicester backed two privateering barques intended to raid shipping on the Spanish Main. Although no record exists of his contribution, it was sizeable enough to ensure that the vessels bore the names the Bear and the Ragged Staff (Wilson 165–6). Even after his death the Earl's urines surrogates continued to harass Catholic merchantmen. When the Earl's illegitimate son Robert fitted out a fleet of four vessels to plunder Spanish shipping in the West Indies in 1594, the largest ship was named the Bear and the next largest the Bear's Whelp (Warner xix).

47 Leicester's personal identification with the bear based on a pair of mythical ancestors reputed to have killed bears highlights the strange ways in which destroying and becoming a bear were potentially simultaneous acts, a fact that obviously has interesting implications for audience members at the baiting ring.
complex cultural associations also posed a different kind of threat to the very people who chose to deploy its symbolism. To lay claim to the bear's strength was also to lay claim to its vices, and the capacity for violence which represented the animal's most enviable characteristic could quickly become the clearest indication of its moral corruption. One example of how slippery the bear's symbolism could be comes from the period of Elizabeth's courtship by the Duke of Anjou. After Leicester was rumored to have been behind an assassination attempt on Jean Simier, the Duke of Anjou's agent in marriage negotiations with Elizabeth, Simier revealed that Leicester had secretly married Lettice Knollys. The revelation cost Leicester his favor with the Queen (at least temporarily) and obviously did nothing to endear Simier to the Earl; a few months later Simier wrote Elizabeth a letter in which he "begs Elizabeth to protect him from the fury of the bear: "qu'il vous playse le conserver de la pate de l'ours" (Greenlaw 542). In one sense, Simier merely employs Elizabeth's own pet name for Leicester, but at the same time, referring to the "fury of the bear" subtly suggests an uncontrolled, bestial irrationality. Simier, who no doubt knew that Leicester had fallen out of favor at court, cleverly turns the device's allusion to violent capacity against its owner.

Several years after the revelation of Leicester's secret marriage, his ideological enemies made more explicitly pejorative use of his heraldic device with the publication of an anonymous pro-Catholic attack on Leicester and Elizabeth that would eventually become known as Leicester's Commonwealth. In this text, Leicester's bear symbology

48 The work's original (less concise) title was The copie of a letter, wryten by a Master of Arte of Cambrige, to his friend in London concerning some talke past of late betwen two worshipful and grave men, about the present state, and some procedinges of the Erle of Leycester and his friendes in England.
provided the author with a ready means of condemning the Earl's outsized influence at court and the physical danger he allegedly posed toward any Englishman who ran afoul of Leicester's political goals. One incident described in the book relates an encounter in which Queen Elizabeth warns the Lord Treasurer about an ingratiating letter sent to him by Leicester. "[M]y L.," Elizabeth cautions the Lord Treasurer, "believe him not, for if he had you in like case he would plaie the Beare wyth you, though, at this present he fawne vpon you neuer so fast" (170). Elsewhere the author reveals just what "playing the bear" entails when he describes the misery of the Earl of Arundel, who, having been put in the Tower through Leicester's influence, is "somewhat sad and afflicted with his present state (as I maruaile not, seing him self in prison and wythin the compas of so fearce a Bears paws)" (167). In a related private letter that may eventually have served as the basis for *Leicester's Commonwealth*, the writer warns his friend that disparaging Leicester publicly is dangerous, since "though he seems chained to a ragged staff and muzzled (for such the allusion is to his cognizance of a bear chained to a ragged staff), he has claws that pierce, and his bite is cureless" ("Addenda"). Though both of these texts function primarily as propaganda, they probably contain a grain of truth about the danger Leicester posed to his enemies at court. Indeed, it seems that for some, his bite really may have been cureless; after a decade of imprisonment, the Earl of Arundel died in the Tower in 1595 (Elzinga).

The references to Leicester-as-bear in these works certainly emphasize what their authors see as the Earl's dangerous animal ferocity, but the pejorative bestializing remains subtle. The bear device comes in for a far more damning repurposing in Nashe's *Pierce*
Penniless. Though a broadly satirical work that attacks wickedness in a variety of forms, Pierce Penniless contains certain passages that seem to take aim (under cover of animal fable) at certain puritans and puritan sympathizers, including Leicester. Naturally enough, Nashe chooses the bear as Leicester's allegorical stand-in. Nashe's depiction of the animal draws heavily on the association of the bear with sin and hell, though the figure also clearly echoes the violent bully of Leicester's Commonwealth. Speaking to Pierce, the Knight of the Post describes the bear as "chief burgomaster of all the beasts under the lion." The fable follows the bear's murderous and underhanded exploits in the forest, including his decision to "surfeit in pleasure" by beginning "to pry and to smell through every corner of the forest for prey." The bear starts by consuming "whole herds of sheep...fat oxen, heifers, swine, calves, and young kids." Afterwards, in revenge for a past injury, the bear traps the camel in a pit and "feeds on his captive and is gorged with his blood." Nothing can sate the bear's hunger, though, since "as avarice and cruelty are evermore thirsty, so fared it with this hungry usurper." The narrator describes how "this savage blood-hunter" poisons the virtuous forester, how he "assailed the unicorn as he slept in his den, and tore the heart out of his breast ere he could awake," and how in the end, "consumed with an inward grief in himself that he might not have his will of a fat hind that outran him, he went into the woods all melancholy and there died for pure anger." Having concluded his fable, the Knight of the Post asks Pierce, "Have I not described a right earthly devil unto thee in the discourse of this bloody-minded bear?"

(123-7)

49 For a full explanation of Nashe's animal symbolism, see Donald J. McGinn's "The Allegory of the 'Beare' and the 'Foxe' in Nashe's Pierce Penniless."
The satire's intended targets were apparently obvious enough to require a denial on the part of Nashe. In his *Lenten Stuff*, Nashe complains of "a number of God's fools...[who] out of some discourses of mine...have fished out such a deep politic state meaning...Talk I of a bear, 'Oh it is such a man that emblazons him in his arms'" (444). Nashe's excuses notwithstanding, *Pierce Penniless* represents a prime example of what made invoking the bear as a personal symbol so dangerous. The satire completely strips the bear of those enviable qualities that lead men like Leicester and his ancestors to associate themselves with the animal in the first place. Its great strength and capacity for violence have been reduced to a repellent bloodthirstiness, and the animals it consumes are invariably harmless herbivores, successfully transforming the bear's courage into mere "cruelty." Moreover, the emotional correlative of that violence, the "fury of the bear" identified by Simier, becomes so all-consuming that the animal literally dies of its own rage. Nashe turns the bear's association with dangerously violent anger - symbolically a means of warning away one's enemies - into a lethally self-destructive expression of impotence and failure. Finally, in having the demonic Knight of the Post conclude his story by referring to the bear as a "right earthly devil," Nashe ends with a reference to the satanic associations that the church had spent so many centuries attaching to the bear. For all their vicious exaggeration, however, the characteristics of Nashe's bear are really no less representative of the animal's image in early modern England than the characteristics which lead the Dudley brothers to carve two bears onto the wall of

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50 The only animal in the tale that we might expect to pose a threat to the bear is the regal lion, under whom he is "chief burgomaster of all the beasts." Of course in this case, the bear has nothing to fear from the lion (i.e. Elizabeth), "whose eyes he could blind as he list" (123).
their cell in 1553. That bears could fill such different symbolic roles is precisely what made them usefully flexible elements of the early modern symbolic lexicon.

**Figurative and literal bears in the English Renaissance playhouse**

While the bear might have served as an effective (albeit risky) emblem for those politically powerful individuals "set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gesture, all the people gazingly d[id] behold” (James 49), it also did similar service on more literal stages; few animals appeared with such regularity in the language of early modern England's theaters, and none created such a sensation when they occasionally appeared in the (perhaps simulated) flesh. As with so many facets of the broader culture, however, the bear's presence in those theaters is embodied for modern critics almost entirely by the works of Shakespeare, primarily in the bear's onstage appearance in *The Winter's Tale* and secondarily in its application as a figurative reference point in *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and a handful of other plays. For theatergoers in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England, however, none of these works likely came to mind at the mention of bears on the playhouse stage. For the better part of a century, that association belonged almost entirely to a drama now completely forgotten outside a small circle of scholars: the anonymous *Mucedorus*.51

Most commonly dated to roughly 1590 (Harbage 54-5, Jupin 3, Bate 507), though not published until 1598, *Mucedorus* has been described as "the most popular drama of

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51 The most famous fictional bear in early modern England may not have appeared on the stage at all, since that distinction arguably belongs to the animal that bursts in upon the protagonists in Book 1 of Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. Its appearance does not last long though; Dorus quickly dispatches the "foul, horrible bear" (179).
the age" and "a snapshot of theatrical taste in Shakespeare's time" (Bate 503). The issue of "taste" lies at the center of many unresolved questions about the play; we do know, however, that *Mucedorus* saw stagings before at least two monarchs, with a performance for Elizabeth, mostly likely in 1597-8, and another for James sometime before 1610.\(^{52}\)

The work survived the closing of London's theaters, with a performance recorded near Oxford in 1653 (Jupin 16-8), and it was "one of the few pre-Restoration plays to remain steadily on any stage through the eighteenth century" (Jupin 28).\(^{53}\) Allusions to the play abound, and Arvin H. Jupin points out that "references to *Mucedorus* are casual, unexplained, indicating a reliance upon immediate audience recognition" (29-30).\(^{54}\)

Above all, the play's longstanding popularity is indicated by the seventeen quarto editions printed between 1598 and 1668, a total that dwarfs even hits such as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *1 Henry IV* (Jupin 28).\(^{55}\)

Despite its unparalleled success before English Renaissance audiences, *Mucedorus* has been the subject of relatively little modern critical or theatrical interest.\(^{56}\)

As Peter Kirwan points out, "[t]here are few good modern editions of the play, and its

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\(^{52}\) The evidence for these performances comes from title pages and epilogues.

\(^{53}\) *Mucedorus* even seems to have made an early seventeenth century trip to the continent, perhaps having been performed in Dresden in 1626 (Harbage 206).

\(^{54}\) Among other examples, Jupin cites the following lines from Nathan Field's 1610 *Amends for Ladies*: "Look how the old ass, my father, stands: he looks like the bear in the play; he has killed the lady with his very sight." Jupin notes that "[t]hough Field may have some other play in mind, the allusion most likely points to the bear's pursuit of Amadine and Segasto" (29). If so, this would mean that *Mucedorus* was not simply a play with a bear, but rather the play with the bear.

\(^{55}\) Richard Proudfoot argues that the correct number is actually eighteen (18), and some have suggested that it could be even higher. Jupin points out that the 1598 edition's promise of a text "newly set forth" may well suggest earlier printing, though "none earlier than 1598 has been discovered" (1).

\(^{56}\) A search of the MLA International Bibliography shows that publications on *Mucedorus* are outnumbered by publications on *The Winter's Tale* by more than thirty three to one. This is precisely the reverse of the situation in the sixteenth century, when *Mucedorus* had already appeared in no fewer than eight quarto editions by the time *The Winter's Tale* first saw publication in the 1623 First Folio.
stage history over the last 200 years is negligible" (227). Part of this neglect may relate
to the play's anonymous authorship, but it stems primarily from current assessments of its
worth as a work of art. To put the scholarly consensus bluntly, *Mucedorus* is simply a
bad play, one "routinely dismissed as a crude, folksy or rough entertainment. Its
popularity is often discussed in the form of embarrassment at the poor taste of our
ancestors" (Kirwan 227). Even Jupin, who is at some pains to defend the text against its
detractors, admits that it is essentially a pastiche of earlier pastoral romances, "a
compendium of conventional techniques, character types, sentiments, and situations"
(Jupin 54). He also reminds us, however, that "if we react negatively to many of the
play's conventions, that is largely because they no longer mean anything to us. To
Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences, many of the conventions still had ethical and artistic
values that have long since been lost” (58).\(^57\)

One of those now meaningless conventions was the play's bear, a creature which
appears onstage in dismembered form before 1610, then also as a living "actor" in a scene
added to all editions published thereafter. More than merely a forgettable gimmick, the
bear seems to have loomed large in the memories of seventeenth century audiences, the
many references to it suggesting to Jupin that the creature must have been one of "the
most noteworthy parts of the play" (32). Most modern attention to the bear has centered
on the still unresolved question of whether the figure seen by audiences after the play's

\(^57\) Jupin points out that *Pericles*, the most popular of Shakespeare’s later plays during his lifetime, is also
the Shakespearean play closest in style and content to *Mucedorus* (74). It might be added that like
*Mucedorus*, *Pericles* has not been met with widespread affection among modern readers or theater
audiences.
revision was a trained animal or merely an actor in a bear suit. 58 After a century of inconclusive debate the issue looks to be irresolvable, though opinion currently seems to favor the human actor. 59 To a certain extent, the controversy over how the bear was staged has been couched in terms of genre and tone. Unless we assume that actors in animal costumes are inherently comic, however, determining what species filled out the bearskin onstage won't tell us how the audience was expected to experience the animal's appearance; a competent actor in a bear costume might well have elicited fear, while a genuine but thoroughly docile animal could conceivably have elicited laughter. Instead, the text itself must serve as our primary evidence for the scene's tone. The analysis which follows will focus first on the original 1598 text before turning its attention to the additions made to quartos printed after 1610.

The play begins with an induction during which Comedy (who has come to introduce her work) finds herself challenged by Envy (who has come to undermine Comedy's efforts). Envy promises to "cross the first steps of [the characters] tread, / Making them fear the very dart of death," and Comedy foreshadows the furry form that dart will take when she characterizes Envy as a

bloody, envious disdainer of men's joy,  
Whose name is fraught with bloody stratagems,

58 Not surprisingly, this single bright spot of scholarly interest focuses on precisely the part of Mucedorus which overlaps directly with a famous element of Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. We will come to the significance of this intersection shortly. 59 Among modern editors Bate unequivocally endorses the artificial rather than the genuine bear (504), and though Jupin does not commit himself completely, he clearly leans in the same direction (32). Even if a live, trained bear had been available for one or two performances in London during the early 1600's, a play produced all over England for over half-a-century, and one that seems to have been especially well suited to touring (Jupin 34-5), must inevitably have relied on a human rather than an animal actor in most cases. It seems safe to assume that, regardless of who or what King James may have seen chasing Amadine, the vast majority of audiences would have had to make do with a man in a bear suit.
Delights in nothing but in spoil and death,  
Where thou mayst trample in their lukewarm blood,  
And grasp their hearts within thy cursed paws. (78)

If Envy's "paws" are metaphorical (for the moment), the "lukewarm blood" is not; the stage directions explicitly indicate that Envy enters "his arms naked, besmeared with blood." Both Envy's weaponry and his rhetoric are blood-soaked, echoing not a comic medieval Vice figure but a ghastly Senecan villain. When Envy leaves the stage with a vow to honor Comedy's request for forbearance by "[d]renching thy methods in a sea of blood " (77-80), the author offers no ironic distancing to undermine the promised horror.

The most striking aspect of the play's original opening is the abruptness with which that horror appears after the conclusion of the induction, and the identical speed with which the horror is vanquished. In fact, the entire sequence occurs so quickly that it can easily be reproduced here in its entirety:

Enter Segasto running and Amadine after him, being pursued with a bear.

Se. O, fly, madam, fly, else we are but dead!

Ama. Help, Segasto, help! Help, sweet Segasto, or else I die!

[Se.] Alas, madam, there is no way but flight;  
Then haste and save yourself.

Ama. Why then I die; ah, help me in distress!

Enter Mucedorus like a shepherd, with a sword drawn and a bear's head in his hand.

Mu. Stay, lady, stay, and be no more dismayed.  
That cruel beast, most merciless and fell,  
Which hath bereaved thousands of their lives,  
Affrighted many with his hard pursues,
Prying from place to place to find his prey,
Prolonging thus his life by others' death,
His carcass now lies headless, void of breath. (1.1.1-12)

Over the course of merely a dozen lines, and without even using the word "bear," the anonymous author has taken advantage of the audience's instant associations with the animal to lay the narrative and moral foundation for the entire play. The bear seeks to kill, just as it has "thousands" of times before, not in self defense, or even out of hunger, but because it is "cruel...merciless and fell"; its ferocity and violence are the very essence of its nature. In fleeing from the bear and leaving the female Amadine to her fate, Segasto (who is to serve as Mucedorus's antagonist for the rest of the play) demonstrates his unmanly cowardice, just as Mucedorus, in slaying the bear, demonstrates his manly valor. In a way, the bear is a test of masculine identity. As Segasto flies from the beast and Mucedorus confronts it, the bear's ferocity quite literally separates the play's men from its boys, or rather its representation of successful masculinity from its representation of failed masculinity. If these characterizations seem like stilted caricatures to us, we may be looking in vain for Shakespearean psychological and thematic nuance in the midst of straightforward folkloric romance convention. The decidedly un-nuanced elements of Mucedorus, including and perhaps especially the bear and what the bear reveals about the other characters, embody those "ethical and artistic values" that Jupin warns us not to dismiss.

The appearance of the freshly severed head, physically preceding Mucedorus himself (assuming that he carries it before him), was undoubtedly intended to shock and momentarily frighten the audience, and presumably the animal's visage conveys the
former violence of what Mucedorus describes as "[t]hat cruel beast, most merciless and fell." Mucedorus bestows the bear's head upon Amadine, which she accepts with "thanks a thousand times," assuring him that his "gift...contents [her] more, / Than greatest bounty of a mighty prince, / Although he were the monarch of the world." (I.i.17-20). The bear's head serves as more than simply a present, however; Amadine, intending to introduce Mucedorus at court, insists that he "[b]ear...the head of this most monstrous beast / In open sight to every courtier's view," so that his "courage may be better known" (I.i.64-6). The animal's head, recalling Boswell's explication of the impaled bear in Workes of Armorie, functions as a sort of literalized heraldic device, direct physical evidence of its owner's heroism and strength.  

The head does indeed reappear later in the play when Amadine herself enters the stage accompanied by "a boy with a bear's head." Amadine, in turn, formally presents the head to her father, the King. The King agrees that "[t]he slaughter of this bear deserves great fame," and Amadine emphasizes that Mucedorus's act "hath saved thousand" (2.4.55-66) from the bear's bottomless maw. In recompense, the King pardons

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60 The bear's head in Mucedorus was not the only dangerous animal's head to appear on the English Renaissance stage. Philip Henslowe's diary lists "j bores heade," "j bulles head," and not one but "ij lyon heads," as well as "j beares skyne" (319-20).

61 The ceremony strongly resembles the final stage of a successful royal hunt. In The Noble Art of Venerie, Gascoigne specifies that after carving up the dead stag, the attendants should “carry the head home before the Lord” (74-5). Of course, not just any head could serve such a function. When Captain Thomas Lee sought to ingratiate himself with Elizabeth by sending the severed head of Irish rebel Fiach McHugh to her in London, Cecil observed acridly that "Her majesty is surely not well contented that the head of such a base Robin Hood is brought so solemnly to England" (qtd in Rowse 131). To present the head of a vanquished enemy was, in a certain sense, to valorize that enemy, or at least the significance of the enemy's defeat. Mucedorus kills a bear precisely because the bear is a foe worthy of public killing. For similar symbolic uses of the wild boar's head, see Chapter Three, p.191. For a satirical inversion of the animal's-head-as-symbol-of-valor, see Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour, in which the social climber Sogliardo's crest, a "boar without a head, rampant," aptly symbolizes its owner, "a swine without a head, without a brain, wit, anything, indeed, ramping to gentility" (3.1.220-5).
Mucedorus for a murder that he had been wrongly accused of committing, thus initiating his rise toward a marriage with Amadine and confirmation as the heir apparent with which the play concludes. Mucedorus's trajectory - from killer of the bear to crown prince of Aragon - draws on more than just the clichés of pastoral romance; it also hearkens back to much older and more widespread folkloric traditions. Pastoureau notes that in stories from Iceland to the Levant, "chronicles and literary works tell the tale of a hero who, after defeating a bear, takes the fate of his people or his lineage in hand and finds glory," with the "victory over the wild animal...foreshadow[ing]...the victor a future as chief or king" (40). Almost invariably, these heroes are male, and the manly virtues they demonstrate in defeating the bears – courage and strength – are the very virtues which (at least symbolically) enable them to achieve the larger political and military victories identified by Pastoureau. In the case of Mucedorus, the killing of the bear in single combat also foreshadows the similar killings of the would-be assassin Tremelio and the wildman Bremo, two more intractable opponents of civilization and enemies to the crown of Aragon. The bear's symbolic importance as a dangerous and powerful foe thus serves as the model for all of the play's episodic encounters, immediately establishing Mucedorus's heroic nature and setting the tone for his subsequent adventures.

There remains, however, the question of what the audience understood that tone to be after 1610. The Q3 edition has presented those embarrassed critics mentioned by

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62 Rooney speculates that the bear may actually have been doubled by the actor who played Envy, Tremelio, and Bremo, since "all three speaking parts are linked thematically (i.e. all are violent) and both Tremelio and Bremo are killed onstage by Mucedorus. Since the bear meets the same fate - albeit in the tiring house - it would have been natural for the part to also have been 'plaid' by the same actor" (262). We know with certainty that Tremelio, Bremo, and Envy were doubled thanks to the nearly unique inclusion of a complete doubling list in the published editions of *Mucedorus.*
Kirwan with a golden opportunity to both explain (or, perhaps we should say, explain away) the play's popularity, and to settle the question of the bear's authenticity once and for all. The reasoning that facilitates such a sweeping solution to the play's most enduring puzzles depends on the fact that *Mucedorus* only seems to have achieved its popularity belatedly. Although the work was most likely written around 1590, Kirwan points out that "the publication record of *Mucedorus* is primarily Jacobean," giving the impression that "this popular Elizabethan play" became "an even more popular Jacobean book" (228). For a scholar more deeply invested in the significance of that shift, however, the same data can show that "the change in its fortune came with the performances in London by the King's Men, and the publication of the B text. Before these events the play was a badly worn antique; after them it became a unique success" (Reynolds 257).

And what was the significance of the newly revised Q3 text and the performance before James I? To begin with, we are told, it signaled a newly "ironic" appreciation for the play. Rather than enjoying the play for its folkloric elements and its use of the popular tropes of pastoral romance, the Q3 audience (especially the royal audience) supposedly laughed at the very scenes that earlier audiences (including another royal audience) had accepted with perfect earnestness only a few years before. John Pitcher sums up the "tongue in cheek" school of thought on Q3's reception when he suggests that *Mucedorus's* "revival was probably intended to amuse and flatter the sophisticated court audience by showing them a popular play which looked so old-fashioned, and artless, and

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63 The royal performance is the earliest production of the revised text for which any record survives.  
64 Presumably the readers whose demand warranted a second quarto edition in 1606 did not yet find the unrevised play "a badly worn antique."
clichéd, that they would be charmed by its naivety, and prompted to laugh at it
generously" (51). Fitzroy Pyle imagines the play "presented to James I" in a "spirit of
combined delight and mockery" (183). Jupin admits that "a burlesque presentation does
not necessarily do violence to the play's conception of itself" (37), and George F.
Reynolds leaves open the possibility that while James and his court appreciated
*Mucedorus* only ironically, its popularity elsewhere sprang from a less elevated
earnestness lingering on in certain rustic quarters:

> Even if the Blackfriars and court audience would find it mainly laughable, we may well believe that the country taste and that of even some Londoners continued to take its serious parts seriously and so helped to warrant its humbler performances and its continued publication. Considerable external evidence suggest that this success was mainly with what Brooke called the 'vulgar audience.' (166)

And thus, in a maneuver not unlike the attempts to quarantine bearbaiting's history within the less literate elements of society and to inoculate its audiences with an unspoken sense of guilt, we are saved from the "poor taste of our ancestors."

A second, potentially related innovation occurred not among Q3's audience but rather on its stage, where one of the newly added scenes raised the possibility of a live bear taking part in the action. The new scene, inserted just before the entry of Segasto and Amadine in Q1, stars Mouse, the play's clown. Mouse enters alone to cries of "O horrible terrible! Was ever poor Gentleman so feared out of his seven senses? A bear? Nay sure it cannot be a bear, but some devil in a bear's doublet" (153). Having recounted his terrifying escape from the man-eating beast, Mouse resolves to return, home: "this way she followed me, therefore I'll take the other path, and because I'll be sure to have an
eye on her, I will take hands with some foolish Creditor, and make every step backward."
With Mouse backing toward the exit without looking behind him, comedy inevitably ensues: "As [Mouse] goes backwards the bear comes in, and he tumbles over her, and runs away" (154). The play then picks up right where it had originally begun in 1598, with the frantic entrance of Segasto and Amadine.

For a number of critics, the newly added scene with the (now living) bear accounts for the play's popularity, and that popularity in turn confirms that the bear itself must have been the genuine article rather than an actor in a bear suit. Ravelhofer believes that a live bear would help explain "why such a creaking, old romance should suddenly receive a court performance before James" (300), even suggesting that "[t]he presence of a polar bear in the 1610 revival of Mucedorus offers the best explanation for the lasting popularity of this play" (317). Reynolds agrees that a live bear would explain "a sudden change in the demand for the quartos of Mucedorus" (Reynolds 264). Combined with the largely comic nature of the added scene, however, the newly ironic reading of Q3's romance conventions turns the bear's entire presence in the play into a knowing wink at the audience regardless of whether the animal onstage was real. Pitcher, for instance, sees in the 1610 quarto's presentation of the animal a drastic shift in the meaning of onstage bears in the English Renaissance theater generally. Pitcher analyzes Mucedorus in the context of the lost 1599 play Cox of Collumpton, another work that featured a prominent onstage bear. But, Pitcher believes, while the bear in Cox of Collumpton "was surely played straight, as a vision of awfulness...five or ten years later, in Mucedorus, the matter of the bear appears to have dwindled into some sort of joke." Pitcher's reading of
the bear in *Mucedorus* grows directly out of recent attempts to explain the play's popularity in terms of an ironic audience reception of its tropes; the idea that over the course of a single decade the staged bear had been transformed from "an avenging demon in a murder play" to "a witty fiction...for a clever and literate audience" (Pitcher 51) fits perfectly with the assumption that after 1610 audiences treated *Mucedorus* as nothing more than a parody of romantic conventions. Critics, unable to take the bear seriously themselves, have decided that the Jacobean could never have taken it seriously either.

A closer look at Q1, however, demonstrates that we need imagine no fundamental change in the tone of the play, or even the tone of the bear itself, to account for the animal's presence in Q3. Mouse's first appearance in Q1 closely resembles his somewhat earlier entrance in Q3. Coming onstage to cries of "Clubs, prongs, pitchforks, bills! O, help! / A bear, a bear, a bear!" (I.ii.33-5), Mouse soon reveals that his alarm about the "bear" may actually refer to a milkmaid from whom he has accidentally fled in terror (subsequent remarks about her "white head and white belly" [I.ii.38] may be bawdy jokes). The comedy arises not from the nature of the bear but from Mouse's own cowardice, a cowardice explicable only in the context of the animal's reputation for violent savagery. Mouse's retelling of the encounter between the (actual) bear and Mucedorus later on in Q1 presents another opportunity to use the contrast between the bear's ferocity and the clown's timidity:

[T]oward them comes running a great bear. Now, [Segasto], he played the man and run away, and Amadine crying after him. Now, sir, comes me a shepherd and strikes off the bear's head. Now whether the bear were dead before or no I cannot tell, for bring twenty bears before me and bind their hands and feet and I'll kill them all. (4.1.39-45)
Mouse's swaggering promise to kill any number of suitably helpless bears recall's Townshend's scornful account of the slaughter committed by Colonel Pride at Paris Garden, where he "valiantly" shot six bears who were "fast tied up by the noses." The comedy here (like the contempt in Townshend's account) arises not from some trivialization of the bear's power, but rather from a refusal by the parties in question to confront that power in a "fair fight." Q3's initial encounter between Mouse and the bear occurs at the same intersection of humorous cowardice and genuine physical threat that we see in Q1, with no need for ironic distancing from the frightening spectacle of an onstage bear, either real or simulated.

Moreover, it seems improbable that audiences in 1668 were laughing at *Mucedorus* as a parody of popular drama from three-quarters of a century earlier. Even in 1607 such a parody seems to have struggled to find an audience. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, in every way a more obviously satiric send up of the very clichés embodied by *Mucedorus*, was a notable flop. *Mucedorus* actually makes a brief appearance in Francis Beaumont's play, when the Citizen's Wife proudly remarks that her son Rafe "hath played...Mucedorus, before the wardens of our company" (21). In the end, of course, the joke was on Beaumont. As his dedication to the 1613 quarto of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* ruefully remarks, the play was "exposed to the wide world, who for want to judgment, or not understanding the privy mark of Irony about it (which showed it was no offspring of any vulgar brain) utterly rejected it" (17). There seems little reason to think that audiences perplexed by the clearly parodic *Knight of the Burning Pestle*
would have taken it upon themselves two or three years later to suddenly embrace an ironically distanced reinterpretation of *Mucedorus*. In the end, Kirwan's concluding remarks on the subject of *Mucedorus*'s popularity seem to strike the right balance: "The popularity of *Mucedorus*...ultimately becomes an effect of the play's success in both elite and popular spheres. Its success cannot be attributed to a specific group or historical moment, for it is its versatility and appeal to all levels of society that perpetuated its appearances at court and in print" (234). The passage's frustrating vagueness reflects our continuing inability to recover the lost "ethical and artistic values" that made the play such a success, but perhaps our focus on that success is the wrong approach in any case. After all, scholars seem less urgently concerned with explaining the continuing popularity, even at court, of other "antique" plays (see, for example, the royal performances of *The Spanish Tragedy* in 1620 [Gurr *Spanish Tragedy* xviii] or *The Jew of Malta* in 1633 [Bevington 1]). Whatever the explanation for the work's decades of uninterrupted popularity may be, there is little reason to think that Q3’s additions turn the work's bear into an unthreatening figure of fun, or, as Jupin puts it, that the 1610 "revisions have encapsulated the bear's threat within a joke" (38-9). If anything, it seems more likely that the bear's onstage presence was meant to thrill and shock the audience, appealing to the animal's longstanding cultural prominence as a figure of genuinely terrifying, awe-inspiring physical violence. This is not to suggest that the author of *Mucedorus* has not mixed genres within the play; the work's induction, with Envy and Comedy vying to control the tone of the performance, explicitly foregrounds such a mixing. I simply wish to suggest that during the moments of comedy with Mouse, the bear itself retains its
culturally typical air of menace and violent capacity. Even when we reach the play's epilogue, Envy remains Envy, and in the scenes where Mouse's antics elicit laughter, the bear remains a bear.  

The wild bear in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

The tone of the bear's presentation in *Mucedorus* has ramifications beyond just our reading of this seldom produced play. Because of certain similarities in their mixing of genres, and because both of their bears first set foot onstage in roughly the same year, *Mucedorus* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* often appear side by side in discussions of the animal's presence in the early modern theater. Even more crucially, since *The Winter's Tale* is the only play in which Shakespeare actually places a bear directly on the stage, our interpretation of its function in this work has serious implications for how we read Shakespeare's references to bears elsewhere. The issues of generic mixing and tone, so prominent in discussions of the bear in *Mucedorus*, also loom large in parallel discussions of the bear in *The Winter's Tale*. Jupin conveys the gist of most comparisons between the plays' bears when he observes that in both *Mucedorus* and *The Winter's Tale*, "the effect [of the bear is] first frightening then comic" (24).  

Andrew Gurr offers a

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65 For a discussion of the specific ways in which English Renaissance drama may have drawn on the generically mixed bears of Italian tragicomedy, see Louise G. Clubb's "The Tragicomic Bear." Note that while Clubb's Italian examples sometimes contain comic parodies of ursine traits (such as buffoonish human characters with bear-like characteristics) or tragicomic resolutions dependent on the bear as a plot device (such as mistaken reports of characters eaten by bears), the terror of an actual bear in the flesh is never significantly diminished.

66 Even critics who see the bear in *Mucedorus* as essentially comical tend to acknowledge that the audience experiences a brief moment of shock when it first appears onstage, subsiding into amusement when it becomes clear that the bear represents no threat to Mouse.
useful description of the way the bear effects this transformation in the case of The Winter's Tale:

The unexpected appearance of a bear on stage, even a man dressed in a bearskin, has a drastic effect on the audience, in two phases, like a double-take. First, and probably more emphatically to Elizabethans than to us, is the fear reaction, the automatic release of adrenalin that accompanies the sudden appearance of danger in a feral beast loose in front of us. That automatic reaction is then quickly followed by a return to reality. Even a real bear, we recognize, cannot be real except in stage terms, or the players would have to find a new Antigonus for every performance. A man in a bearskin — the more likely Elizabethan device — would defuse the situation even more quickly. Suddenly the realistic, tragic train of events has turned farcical. This double-take thus marks the play's transition from tragedy to comedy... In this way tragic realism is transformed into comedy through the exploitation of theatrical illusion, and the tragic half of the play gives over to the comic half. (423-4)

Gurr's analysis certainly reflects the current scholarly thinking of the tone of the scene, but I would like to suggest that the "return to reality" may not occur quite so quickly as he suggests. After all, we would not assume that an audience which witnesses Desdemona's murder immediately returns to a state of Brechtian detachment from the dead character lying onstage; the lingering horror of the event and the visible presence of Desdemona's body underline and intensify the terrible realizations that follow, and that horror suffers no diminishment simply because we know that the actress onstage is

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67 The critical agreement on this point is striking. Pitcher sums up the scene's tone as "strangely horrible and severe...as well as darkly funny" (52). For Williams, the scene is "the fulcrum on which the play balances. In the past lies the tragic part of this play of mixed genre; in the future lies the comic part" (106). Nevill Coghill agrees that "the terrible and the grotesque come near to each other in a frisson of horror instantly succeeded by a shout of laughter...it is the transformation of tragedy into comedy" (35). Unfortunately, the uniformity of scholarly opinion on the scene's tone hasn't translated into agreement on the authenticity of the bear. J.L Styan believes it a real bear, since "only the actuality of this bear could touch both horror and farce at the same time" (34), while Williams, using an identical interpretation of the scene's generic shift, comes to the opposite conclusion, arguing that the use of a live bear would "inhibit the ability...to regard the creature as farcical" (109).
merely feigning death. Certainly the entrance of the clown signals a profound generic shift, but situating that shift in the very moment after the bear's appearance tends to trivialize both Antigonus's death and readings of the play that take that death seriously. For instance, Pitcher intriguingly posits a longstanding association between onstage bears and vengeful, demonic spirits, an association that links Antigonus's death to his participation in Perdita's abandonment.68 Michael Steffes imagines the bear in The Winter's Tale as a similarly supernatural (if somewhat less sinister) agent of justice, suggesting that it may represent a spirit of female revenge, perhaps as a representative or even an embodiment of Artemis (36-40). Reducing the bear to little more than a sight-gag undermines such interpretations and flattens the narrative richness of the scene.

As an alternative, Steffes offers a compelling argument for locating The Winter's Tale's generic shift after the exit of the bear, suggesting that the bear serves as a necessary conclusion to the tragic events that precede the death of Antigonus. Without the death of Antigonus,

the evil that Leontes has done will seem negligible because it appears to be forgiven and his life is renewed. Thus it is appropriate that Antigonus, his agent, carrying out one of Leontes' final mistaken actions...die in his place. That Antigonus is the only character in the play who expresses agreement with Leontes' belief that Perdita is Polixenes' child...links him even more strongly to Leontes, and makes his death all the more

68 Pitcher focuses primarily on the lost play Cox of Collumpton, in which two younger brothers, Peter and John, murder their elder brother in order to steal his estate. A surviving summary of the action records the murderers' fates: "on St Markes dai a year after peter & Jhon both slue them sellues for peter be / ing fronted wth the sight of a bear viz a sprite apering to Jhon & him when they sate vpon deuision of the landes in likenes of a bere & ther wth peter fell out of his wites and way lyed in a darkehouse & beat out his braines against a post & Jhon stabed him self" (qtd. in Pitcher 48). Pitcher interprets the "sprite" which scared the brothers to death as a devil sent from hell to exact retribution for their crime (50). At the very least, it seems that the brothers (and presumably the audience) reacted to the bear's ferocity in perfect earnestness.
appropriate...Antigonus' death provides closure for the tragic pattern and an outward sign of the purging of Leontes' evil from the world of the play, while allowing Leontes himself to repent so that he can be forgiven at the end. (35)

Steffes's reading treats the bear's deadliness with complete seriousness, and the scene can certainly be staged that way, even for a twenty-first century audience with little of the early modern Londoner's visceral fear of bears. Although Antigonus's death occurs onstage, for instance, a modern production (or, for that matter, a seventeenth century production) could certainly allow the audience to hear the gruesome noises associated with that death. In fact, the Clown's comically absurd retelling of the encounter explicitlyforegrounds the scene's death cries, both those of Antigonus and of the drowning sailors. Over and over the clown's story returns to "the most piteous cry of the poor souls" on the ship, the recollection of "how [Antigonus] cried to me for help," and in a final, culminating wail, "how the poor souls roared, and the sea mocked them, and how the poor gentleman roared, and the bear mocked him, both roaring louder than the sea or weather" (3.3.84-94). When the Clown talks of "how the bear tore out [Antigonus's] shoulder-bone" (3.3.88-9), moreover, we can hear distinct echoes of the wholly serious early modern maulings noted earlier, as when the blind bear of 1554 "chakt a serving man by the calff of the lege, and bytt a gret pesse away, and after by the hokyll-bone"; when Duncomes's bear "tor[e] [the keeper's] Bowells...thorow his back"; and when the bear in the lethal attack on de Veer's shipmates fell first on one man and "bit his head in

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69 A recent Yale repertory theater production of the play seems to have successfully revived this approach to the scene with a bear that was "huge and terrifying" even for a modern audience (Rizzo), and a the bear in a 2011 Royal Shakespeare Company staging was an "imposing presence" (Isherwood).
sunder, and suckt out his blood," then on a second man who the bear "tare in peeces."

Though the semi-mythical bear that attacks Antigonus does not have to be imagined in quite such starkly realist terms (the play is a "winter's tale" after all), we should at least try to avoid the assumption that the animal devolves into a figure of comic absurdity almost as soon as it sets foot onstage. Instead, we might well locate the play's generic shift in the moment of the Shepherd's entrance, and even more strikingly in the entrance and monologue of his son the Clown. After all, the speech describing the deaths of Antigonus and the crew of his ship explicitly mixes the comic and the tragic, with a tone both "grisly and ludicrous, mocking and condoling, from one sentence to another" (Coghill 35). We need not theorize about the limits and standards of suspended disbelief in the Jacobean theater audience to identify the generic mixing here.

**Baited bears in Shakespeare's plays**

Accepting the initial seriousness and genuine menace of the bear in *The Winter's Tale* allows that play's interpretation of the animal to harmonize with the dozens of other ursine references that dot Shakespeare's works, only a tiny handful of which seem to be calculated to elicit laughter. Some bear references have little relevance to the present chapter's subject matter (such as comments on the animal's proverbial ugliness70), but many take on a deeper significance when read in light of the bear's complex symbolic associations. Two or three do demonstrate that, for all the fearsomeness of its star, a

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70 The rejected Helena laments that she is "as ugly as a bear, / For beasts that meet me run away for fear” (*Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.2.100-1) while Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later to become Richard III) rages against a fate that has "disproportion[ed] me in every part, / Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp / That carries no impression like the dam" (*3 Henry VI* 3.2.160-2). Bear cubs were said to be born incompletely formed and licked into the proper shape by their mothers.
bearbaiting's audience could sometimes lend the event comic undertones. Sir Andrew wishes that "I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting" (Twelfth Night 1.3.78-80), and the Clown in The Winter's Tale observes that the thief Autolycus "haunts wakes, fairs and bear-baitings" (4.3.92-3). Certainly Merry Wives' Slender's "love [of] the sport" does nothing to support the pastime's gravity, and his claim to "have seen Sackerson" loose twenty time, and have taken him by the chain" gives us one of our most enduringly comical images of the sport. However, seen through the lens of the bear's proverbial ferocity and its importance as a means of constructing heroic masculinity for figures such as Mucedorus, Slender's remark becomes the comical attempt of a fool to emulate a widely recognized act of symbolic bravery. The absurdity, of course, belongs to Slender, not Sackerson. Anne Page, whom Slender attempts (unsuccessfully) to impress with his vaunting lies, has far more sense. When Slender asks her if she is "afraid if you see the bear loose," she readily admits to such fear: "Ay, indeed, sir" (1.1.243-8). To claim fearlessness in the face of a bear must be the mark of either a hero or a liar; Slender attempts to play the former for Anne's benefit, but the audience has no trouble seeing him for the latter.

The comic business of Slender's tamed Sackerson is only humorous because it plays on the animal's reputation for great physical power and a capacity for violence, the very characteristics that shape the majority of Shakespeare's references to bears. In fact, Shakespeare refers explicitly to the bear's proverbial ferocity and dangerousness so often

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71 Sackerson, like Harry Hunks, was one of the most famous bears of early modern London's baiting rings.
72 In contrast, on only one occasion does Shakespeare use an image of the bear itself for comedic effect: Falstaff at one point claims to be "as melancholy as a...lugged bear" (1 Henry IV 1.2.64-5).
that a detailed analysis of each example is beyond the scope of this chapter, though I have collected all relevant instances in Appendix A. In many cases the bear appears as an emblem for a savage wilderness utterly inimical to human civilization. More often, though, it simply serves as a rhetorical example of something fearful, something from which any human being would normally flee. Shakespeare's references to bearbaiting are rarer and generally less formulaic than his mentions of wild bears. In some cases they draw explicitly on the association of bears with sin. In an inversion of Dekker's description of the baited bear as "a black rugged soule, that was Damned," Shakespeare's characters repeatedly think of their own questioned honor as a baited bear. Olivia, having sent Viola her ring under false pretences, worries that the object of her affection must already have "set mine honour at the stake / And baited it with all th'unmuzzled thoughts / That tyrannous heart can think" (Twelfth Night 3.1.110-2), while Achilles invokes a baited bear when he imagines his diminished esteem in the eyes of the Greeks if Ajax (rather than he himself) fights with Hector: "I see my reputation is at stake / My fame is shrewdly gored" (Troilus and Cressida 3.3.220-1). The King of France, confronted with Bertram's refusal to obey his command to marry Helen, justifies his attempt to effect the marriage forcibly by declaring "My honour's at the stake, which to defeat / I must produce my power" (All's Well That Ends Well 2.3.145-6). In all of these cases the speaker intends to defend his or her questioned honor, and the bear serves as a ready metaphor for a desperate, powerfully executed self-defense. At the same time, all three characters seem to acknowledge that their behavior (at least as perceived by others) has

73 There is the possibility that the King of France employs the language of gambling rather than bearbaiting, though "at the stake" typically refers to the physical object used in bearbaitings and executions.
failed to live up to the moral standards they would normally hold themselves to. They, like the bear, have sinned, and their honor's baiting by the opinions of others will be their punishment.\(^7^4\)

When we consider cases in which a character compares him or herself in toto to a baited bear, however, a somewhat different pattern emerges. In *Julius Caesar*, Octavius warns Mark Antony that though they hold Rome after the flight of the conspirators, "we are at the stake /And bayed about with many enemies; / And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, / Million of mischiefs" (4.1.48-51). For all of their political vulnerability, of course, Antony and Octavius remain dangerous animals; after all, the bearbaiting remark comes during a meeting of the triumvirate to decide who will be "pricked" (4.1.1) for execution. Shakespeare uses baited bear imagery more extensively in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, plays in which the house of York's Warwickshire peerages lead to a series of references to the bear as a heraldic emblem.\(^7^5\) In the moment after York has openly rejected Henry's legitimacy and declared himself king, Clifford suggests that they take him "to the tower, / And chop away that factious pate of his" (5.1.132-3), but York, refusing to obey his enemies' commands, calls in his two sons to defend him:

\textit{York:} Call hither to the stake my two brave bears, That with the very shaking of their chains,

\(^7^4\) Although not a reference to baiting specifically, Orsino may be nodding at the bear's associations with sin when he accuses Viola (as Cesario) of being a "dissembling cub" (5.1.106) in Act V of *Twelfth Night*. Of course Orsino's own name also suggests an ursine connection, and before the confusions of the final scene are resolved, the Duke's anger threatens to make good on his name's associations; on learning of Olivia's love for Cesario he briefly contemplates indulging in a "savage jealousy" (5.1.115) by killing either Olivia for spurning him or Cesario in order to remove the object of Olivia's affection.

\(^7^5\) Warwick identifies himself with the bear when he swears "by my father's badge, old Neville's crest, / The rampant bear chained to the ragged staff" (*2 Henry VI* 5.1.200-1), and elsewhere refers to himself directly as "the bear" (*2 Henry VI* 5.3.2).
They may astonish these fell-lurking curs.
Bid Salisbury and Warwick come to me.

Enter the Earls of Warwick and Salisbury with [a] drum[mer] and soldiers

Clifford: Are these thy bears? We'll bait thy bears to death, 
And manacle the bearherd in their chains, 
If thou dar'st bring them to the baiting place.

Richard: Oft have I seen a hot o'erweening cur 
Run back and bite, because he was withheld; 
Who, being suffered with the bear's fell paw, 
Hath clapped his tail between his legs and cried; 
And such a piece of service will you do, 
If you oppose yourselves to match Lord Warwick. 
(5.1.142-54)

In this particular baiting match the house of York prevails, but when the imagery recurs in 3 Henry VI, the bears are not so lucky. Following their loss at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward wonders aloud to his brother Richard "how our princely father scaped, / Or whether he be scaped away or no / From Clifford and Northumberland's pursuit" (2.1.1-3), Richard paints a rather optimistic picture:

Methought he bore him in the thickest troop, 
As doth a lion in a herd of neat; 
Or as a bear encompassed round with dogs, 
Who having pinched a few and made them cry, 
The rest stand all aloof and bark at him. 
So fared our father with his enemies; 
So fled his enemies my warlike father. (2.1.13-9)

As Richard speaks these lines, of course, his father lies dead, murdered before the audience's eyes only a few moments earlier. By the end of the play, Warwick and Montague have suffered a similar fate, having switched sides and suffered defeat and
death fighting for the Lancastrians. The newly crowned Edward IV, boasting of the
"valiant foemen" he has overcome to take the throne, refers to "the two brave bears,
Warwick and Montague, / That in their chains fettered the kingly lion / And made the
forest tremble when they roared" (5.7.3-12). In all of these instances of baiting imagery,
the parties being compared or comparing themselves to bears are or were facing
considerable danger and unfavorable odds: York and his sons as newly proclaimed
traitors defying the sitting king and his armed retainers, York alone as a completely
isolated figured "encompassed round" with enemy soldiers, and Warwick and Montague
as brave but ultimately doomed warriors fighting a losing battle against a superior force.
In addition to being vulnerable, however, these figures also invariably assert (or have
asserted) their capacity for violent self-defense: York and his sons in order to intimidate
their foes, York as described by Richard in deluded hope for his father's safety, and
Warwick and Montague as described by Edward in order to make his own martial
triumph appear all the more impressive. This juxtaposition of contrasting characteristics
– a defensive military position of considerable disadvantage combined with a dauntless
courage and a continued capacity to inflict injury on their enemies – is the essence of the
baited bear in Shakespeare.

The most famous example of this simultaneous embodiment of doomed
vulnerability and violent capacity, of course, is Macbeth. As described at the beginning
of the chapter, the Scottish usurper's desperate physical resistance toward the end of the
play leads to a rhetorical self-bestializing very similar to the examples from earlier plays.
Including the lines that immediately follow his ursine invocation better captures the spirit of Macbeth’s bear reference:

They have tied me to a stake. I cannot fly,  
But bear-like I must fight the course.  
What’s he that was not born of woman? Such a one 
Am I to fear, or none. (5.7.1-4)

Macbeth's characterization of himself as a bear is perhaps the most richly layered of Shakespeare's baiting references. To an even greater extent than the figures cited above, Macbeth faces his trial in complete isolation. Abandoned by his allies, his queen dead, the stage directions suggest (and most productions depict) a Macbeth who literally fights alone. At the same time, none of Shakespeare's other bear figures so fully capture the animal's seemingly supernatural invulnerability. Just like the beasts of "Strange and Horrible News" and de Veer's Three Voyages, Macbeth treats his opponents arms with utter disdain. "[S]words I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn" he vaunts over the dead body of Young Siward, though with the fatal caveat that those swords and weapons must be "[b]randishe'd by man that's of a woman born" (5.7.13-4). Macbeth's emphasis on his invincibility against those tainted by the parentage of a woman also serves to echo the play's theme of destructive, exaggerated masculinity. By the time Macbeth must fight "bear-like" he has long ago done more than "may become a man," but rather than becoming "so much more the man" (1.7.46-51), as Lady Macbeth76 promises, he has transformed into a bloodthirsty bear, an embodiment of irresistible but potentially

76 Lady Macbeth's bloodmindedness also seems to spring from the same kind of violent masculine identity. In addition to asking the spirits to "unsex" her and take her "milk for gall" (1.5.39-46), her husband notes that she should "[b]ring forth men-children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.73-5).
corrupting and sinful masculine violence. When Macduff appears to reveal exactly how the "juggling fiends" have "palter[ed] with [him] in a double sense," it is too late. Macbeth has sinned, has in fact become the embodiment of sin, much like the medieval church’s image of the bear, and, like that bear, he must be punished. Still, even in the very moment before his death, with all his hopes for victory dashed, Macbeth refuses to submit:

Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,  
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,  
Yet I will try the last. Before my body  
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,  
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' (5.10.30-4)

As Leggatt points out, "[i]n the end the fighting courage of the bear is all he has" (45), and he clings desperately to that courage, the last remaining virtue of a demonic bear. Driven back and slaughtered offstage, *Macbeth* finally ends as *Mucedorus* begins: with the dead bear's head presented as a gift to royalty.

**King Lear's Gloucester as a failed bear**

The image of the bloody usurper's severed head brings us back, perhaps a little unexpectedly, to Gloucester. As already noted, it was in August of 1606 that James I could have seen the villainous, bear-like Macbeth's head paraded onstage, presumably to jubilant cheers. After all, the play was at some pains to make clear that Macbeth had assassinated James's own distant ancestor (and prophesied link to the thrones of Scotland and England).

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77 “Devilish Macbeth” (4.3.118) is, by Malcolm's account, "bloody, / Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, / Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin / That has a name" (4.3.59-61)  
78 A mere four months later, the king and his court watched Gloucester...
deliver almost precisely the same line that they had heard from the cornered Macbeth (Gloucester: "I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course."). If James or members of his court remembered Macbeth well enough, they might have asked themselves why two characters with such different natures confronted their moments of adversity with precisely the same words. After all, the baited bear seems like an apt symbol for the brutally violent and morally corrupted Macbeth, but what does such an animal have to do with the earnest, compassionate, conciliatory Earl of Gloucester?

Modern attempts to answer this question have generally approached the problem from one of two directions: either the lines have completely different meanings because their speakers are completely different, or the lines are nearly identical because they are spoken by characters who meet similarly brutal fates immediately thereafter. Höfele, deeply invested in Gloucester's status as a passive victim of torture, presents them as diametrically opposed rhetorical acts, claiming that "[t]he words of Gloucester the victim are almost the same as those of the cornered tyrant, Macbeth...The one scene bestializes the attackers, the other bestializes the speaker himself" (129). John Holloway takes the opposite approach, noting that "Gloucester is like Macbeth in that his fate is more of an execution than anything else" (96). The shortcomings inherent in Höfele's reading of the "victim" bear are presumably apparent at this point; the problems with Holloway's analogy are more difficult to pin down. Certainly it seems to strip Macbeth of his physical autonomy, an autonomy that he manages to express to lethal effect immediately following his bearbaiting remark. Still, there may well be a note of resignation about his fate in Macbeth's reference to being "tied to the stake." He has suspected since the show
of kings (and perhaps even before) that the witches have deceived him and that their
promises will prove empty in the end, so perhaps Holloway strikes the right tone with
talk of Macbeth's expectation of an "execution." Counterintuitively, Holloway's
reference to passive victimization may actually be in greater error with regard to
Gloucester. To understand why, we must try to accomplish an almost impossible task for
most scholarly readers of King Lear: we must try to forget that we already know what
will happen in the play.

The main problem with modern critical readings of Gloucester's bearbaiting
reference stems from the simple fact that his subsequent blinding eclipses everything else
that occurs immediately before it and colors the way in which we read the entire scene.
Act III scene 7 is invariably described as "unendurable" (Goldberg 82), "probably the
crueldest scene in Elizabethan drama" (Charney 264), "a scene widely regarded as the
most brutal and disagreeable Shakespeare ever wrote" (Peat 103), and "arguably the most
horrendous scene of violence in English Renaissance drama" (Höfele Stage 208). In an
age before aesthetic judgments had fallen out of fashion in serious criticism, a similar
repugnance prompted Samuel Johnson to characterize the blinding as "an act too horrid to
be endured in dramatick exhibition" (qtd. in Furness 418), while Samuel Taylor
Coleridge was "reluctan[t] to think Shakespeare wrong, and yet — " (qtd. in Furness 224).
As recently as 1904, A.C. Bradley could claim that "[t]he blinding of Gloster on the stage
has been condemned almost universally; and surely with justice"; Bradley himself judged
the scene in performance nothing less than "a blot upon King Lear as a stage play" (251).
This all-consuming horror elicited by Gloucester's blinding tends to produce readings of his bearbaiting reference that see it primarily in the context of what we know will happen rather than what has happened and what is happening. Thus Holloway can see the remark as a prophetic expression of the fact that Gloucester's "fate" (which has yet to occur) will be "more of an execution than anything else." Certainly the line could be explained as simply Shakespeare's foreshadowing of a character's impending doom, but then we would have to believe that Shakespeare put the line in Gloucester's mouth for that reason alone with no interest in whether or not it made sense as spoken by that particular character at that particular moment. Willson offers an even more elaborate proleptic interpretation of the scene: in explaining the significance of the bearbaiting metaphor, he suggests that "Shakespeare expects his audience to react with particular horror to the torturers' perception of their vile actions as sport" ("Gloucester" 109). It is of course Gloucester, not his torturers, who invokes the sport of bearbaiting, and he does so before any real torture has begun.

We must try, then, to forget the unforgettable and imagine watching the play with no prior knowledge of Gloucester's imminent blinding. Certainly this is how the play's original audiences would most likely have encountered it. In 1606 Shakespeare was nothing more than a playwright. King Lear, far from being hailed as the greatest achievement of the language's greatest author, would have been merely another play, one of over a dozen put on for James by the King's Men that year (Kernan 205-6). Hardly an established masterpiece, it would not even see publication for a further two years. The story of Lear himself had appeared elsewhere, including the anonymously authored and
recently printed play *King Leir*, but the Gloucester subplot appeared for the first time in Shakespeare's work. Although the subplot's source, Sidney's *Arcadia*, was unquestionably famous, the tale of the King of Paphlagonia takes up only nine of 732 pages in the 1590 edition, and in those nine pages the blinding is mentioned only twice, both times briefly. The chance that James I or any other audience member in 1606 would have recognized the source for Gloucester's character and anticipated his blinding seems vanishingly small. Moreover, in contrast to a number of his contemporaries, Shakespeare tended to push the torture and mutilation in his plays offstage, as with the amputation of Lavinia's hands and the cutting out of her tongue. To the extent that the audience might have known Shakespeare's previous work, they would hardly have expected a gruesome, drawn out act of torture to occur before their eyes.

What, then, does the scene suggest is coming, and what does Gloucester himself seem to expect? With his "corky arms" tied to the chair he is physically helpless, but in the moments immediately preceding the blinding he finds himself subjected to no greater violence than the plucking of his beard. He remains (or at least he thinks he remains) one of the half-dozen most powerful men in the country. He has certain rights and privileges that cannot safely be violated, even by the kingdom's new rulers, a fact Cornwall himself

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79 The blind man's son tells us that "This old man (whom I leade) was lately rightfull Prince of this countrie of Paphlagonia, by the hard-harted vngrateurfulnes of a sonne of his, depreiued, not onely of his kingdome (whereof no forraine forces were euer able to spoyle him) but of his sight, the riches which Nature graunts to the poorest creatures" (T7r); the former king himself simply remarks that the bastard son "threw me out of my seat and put out my eies" (T8r).

80 A few of the more gruesome barbarities enacted onstage in Shakespeare's period include Barabas slowly boiling to death in *The Jew of Malta* (111-2), a cutpurse's ear being cropp'd in *The Massacre at Paris* (129-30), the Duke's teeth being eaten away by poison and his tongue being nailed to the floor in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1342), and the torturing of two senators with both fire and cutting implements in *The Roman Actor*, an onstage act so brutal that one of the play's characters remarks that his "synnewes shrinke / The spectacle is so horrid" (57-8).
acknowledges when he admits that "we may not pass upon [Gloucester's] life / Without the form of justice" (3.7.24-5). As his interrogation progresses, however, it becomes more and more obvious that Gloucester's evasions are useless. Violent self-assertion, he seems to decide, may be the safest course:

**Cornwall:** Where has thou sent the King?

**Gloucester:** To Dover.

**Regan:** Wherefore to Dover? Wast though not charged at peril -

**Cornwall:** Wherefore to Dover? Let him first answer that.

**Gloucester:** I am tied to the stake and I must stand the course.

**Regan:** Wherefore to Dover, sir?

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Ironically, the most astute analysis of Gloucester-as-bear makes no mention of the animal whatsoever. In "On the Blinding of Gloucester," Edward Pechter presents an emphatically demythologized picture of the Earl. Rejecting the idea of a "heroic" Gloucester who willingly risks his life to rescue the king, Pechter describes such a reading as "a sentimentalization...typical of critical responses to Gloucester." Instead, Pechter sees a character keenly aware of his own self-interest: "Gloucester has chosen the side he assumes will ultimately conquer" (195). He also observes that Gloucester's prediction (or perhaps even threat) that Lear's injuries will be "revenged home" by the newly landed French army "evokes a profoundly disturbing resonance and reaches out to establish a relationship between Gloucester and Lear himself, whose own need for vengeance is at the source of his own torture" (194). Above all, Pechter's Gloucester is no meek symbol of passive victimhood:

As Gloucester evokes retribution, the intense images in his speech of Regan's physical cruelty assume another dimension of significance, not just a measure of Gloucester's compassion, his ability to feel sufferingly with, but also of his own active violence, his desire to inflict upon...Do we not sense that he would raise his fist at this point, but that his corky arms are fast bound; that he would do such things, what they are he knows, and they would be the terrors of the earth? (196-7).

Even after both of his eyes have been put out, Pechter observes, "Gloucester is still demanding vengeance, calling upon Edmund to 'enkindle all the sparks of nature / To quit this horrid act.'" (198). It would be difficult to imagine a more emphatic rejection of the mainstream interpretation of 3.7, but if Pechter's perspective seems bleak even by the standards of Lear criticism, the logic of his close reading is difficult to ignore, and his analysis serves as a much needed corrective to the numerous readings of the Earl as an almost Christ-like figure of passive suffering. Unfortunately, Pechter's article, published only a year before Willson declared Gloucester's blinding "a perfect parallel with bearbaiting," seems to have exerted little influence on subsequent scholarship.
Gloucester: Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes; nor thy fierce sister
In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs.
The sea, with such a storm as his bare head
In hell-black night endured, would have buoyed up
And quenched the stelled fires.
Yet, poor old heart, he holp the heavens to rain.
If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time,
Thou shouldst have said, 'Good porter, turn the key,
All cruels else subscribed'; but I shall see
The winged vengeance overtake such children

Cornwall: See't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair;
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.

Gloucester: He that will think to live till he be old,
Give me some help! - O cruel! O you gods! (3.7.50-69)

First and foremost, Gloucester's invocation of an ursine defiance is a miscalculation. His conviction that a "winged vengeance" will smite his tormentors is destroyed as surely as his sight, and he seems to have lost his faith in divine justice even before he loses his second eye ("O cruel! O you gods!"). Gloucester is not Octavius or Mark Antony; he is not Warwick, or Salisbury, or Richard of York; he is not even Macbeth. In all of these cases the "bear," though surrounded by enemies, still retains the capacity to unleash serious violence against those who attack him. In Gloucester's case, the belief that he still retains such power springs from his faith in traditional systems of loyalty and duty.

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82 Leggatt, in a passing remark on Gloucester's bearbaiting reference, seems to be the only critic to recognize the link between the earl's outburst and the proverbial courage of a cornered bear: "The repetition of 'Wherefore to Dover' three times in four lines finally triggers Gloucester's awareness of himself as a bear tied to a stake, and provokes his counterattack....The feeling this triggers is sheer excitement at Gloucester's courage, followed by horror at what that courage provokes. Surely at this point any analogy with sport breaks down. The arena has become a torture chamber" (50). As we've seen, the trouble with most interpretations of Gloucester-as-bear is that the analogy begins, rather than ends, with the horror of his torture.

83 Gloucester's appeals to the mutual responsibilities of guest and host illustrate his continuing belief in the efficacy of such systems. In the initial response to his mistreatment, he reminds the interrogators that "You
systems that Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall have largely succeeded in destroying well
before they tie the Earl to a chair. The fact that Gloucester does not yet recognize the
totality of this destruction leads to his outburst, and, ultimately, to his blinding.

If Gloucester resembles another bear figure we have seen, it is Robert Dudley,
sitting in the Tower of London and awaiting word on his execution. He too lamented the
"innocent bloud" spilled by his enemies, and he too clung to his belief that a divine judge
would "recompence them their wyckednes and destroy them in their owne malice." In
Dudley's case, the old systems of power and influence were sufficient to save his life.
Even attainted and convicted of treason, Robert Dudley was too fierce a bear to kill
lightly. Unfortunately for Gloucester, Cornwall is less cautious in exacting violent
revenge on his enemies. At the moment when Gloucester makes his fatal ursine
comparison, however, the immediate physical danger represented by Cornwall's rage is
not yet apparent, and a desperate reassertion of Gloucester's traditional rights as an earl
and master of the household seems to represent his last, best chance to keep his enemies
at bay. He imagines himself a Harry Hunks, perhaps, but a very different Harry Hunks
from the tormented, victimized animal imagined by modern critics. Gloucester's fateful
attempt to "plaie the bear" with his captors swiftly brings on an act of vicious brutality
that he can hardly have anticipated, but his assertion of an ursine determination to "stand
the course" is no plea for pity. It is a roar of defiance.

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are my guests," soon after reiterating that "I am your host: / With robbers' hands my hospitable favors / You
should not ruffle thus" (3.7.30-41).
APPENDIX:  
SHAKESPEARE'S BEAR REFERENCES

The following quotations represent the vast majority of Shakespeare’s references to the bear not explicitly treated in Chapter Four.

"As from a bear a man would run for life, / So fly I from her that would be my wife" (Comedy of Errors 3.2.152-3)

"As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him" (Coriolanus 1.3.28)

"He's a lamb indeed that baas like a bear" (Coriolanus 2.1.10)

"Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear, and have their heads crushed like rotten apples" (Henry V 3.7.129-30)

"then our arms, like to a muzzled bear, / Save in aspect, hath all offence sealed up" (King John 2.1.249-50)

"This night wherein the cub-drawn bear would couch, / The lion and the belly-pinched wolf / Keep their furys dry, unbonneted he runs" (King Lear 3.1.12-4)

"Thou'dst shun a bear, / But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea, / Thou'dst meet the bear i'the mouth" (King Lear 3.4.9-11)

"What man dare, I dare. / Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear, / The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcan tiger" (Macbeth 3.4.98-100)

"I would o'erstare the sternest eyes that look, / Outbrave the heart most daring on the earth, / Pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-bear" (Merchant of Venice 2.1.27-9)

"in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush supposed a bear" (Midsummer Night's Dream 5.1.21-2)

"Hero and Margaret have by this played their parts with Beatrice, and then the two bears will not bite one another when they meet" (Much Ado About Nothing 3.2.63-5).

"an admirable musician. O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear" (Othello 4.1.180-1)

"bid me lurk / Where serpents are. Chain me with roaring bears, / Or hide me nightly in a charnel house" (Romeo and Juliet 4.1.79-81)
"Thy groans / Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts / Of ever-angry bears"
(Tempest 1.2.289-91)

"Most smiling, smooth, detested parasites, / Courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears"
(Timon of Athens 3.7.86-7)

"Let it no more bring out ingrateful man. / Go great with tigers, dragons, wolves, and bears; / Teem with new monsters" 
(Timon of Athens 4.3.188-90)

"he is valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant" 
(Troilus and Cressida 1.2.19-20)

"He is as horribly conceited of him, and pants and looks pale as if a bear were at his heels" 
(Twelfth Night 3.4.261-2)

"for our crowned heads we have no roof, / Save this, which is the lion's and the bear's, / And vault to everything" 
(Two Noble Kinsmen 1.1.52-4)

"Wolves and bears, they say, / Casting their savageness aside, have done / Like offices of pity" 
(Winter's Tale 2.3.187-9)
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