

## IN DEFENSE OF MASCULINITY

IN DEFENSE OF MASCULINITY: CODES OF HONOUR AND  
REPERCUSSIVE VIOLENCE IN THREE OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

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## Abstract

The longstanding relationship between honour and violence has obvious martial and chivalric overtones. The prevalence of the duel in early modern England points to the developing performativity and growing symbolic meaning of violence during the period, a codified violence that relied heavily on hierarchical guidelines. The duel helped to stabilize social notions of rank and masculinity, and became a means of culturally validating masculinity and reifying honour codes. This thesis frames a study of violence and its relationship to honour and masculine identity through analysis of dramatized scenes involving masculine honour in three of Shakespeare's plays – *Twelfth Night*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet* – with a concurrent investigation of contemporary policies and essays on civility and honour. I examine instances of public violence that directly relate to private or personal concepts of honour, as well as the ways in which honour is conceived of and transmitted both linearly, through generations, and horizontally through discourses of national or social honour to one's duty. This study contributes to a sense of honour as a dynamic and omnipresent discourse in the early modern era, one that structured and dictated the lives of the Elizabethan aristocracy.

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## Introduction

“[W]hensoever one man doth accuse another of such a crime as meriteth death, in that case the Combat ought bee graunted. The second cause of Combat is Honor, because among persons of reputation, Honor is preferred before life.” – William Segar, *The Booke of Honor and Armes* pg. 22-23

The early modern period in England, under the rule of Elizabeth Tudor, saw issues of honour and nobility come to the forefront of popular culture. As the later medieval ages faded into history, and old systems of thought merged with new, masculine honour codes from various ages and contexts converged to cause much confusion, leading to factiousness in court. Furthering this confusion, with over 2000 grants of arms between 1560 and 1589 the increasingly hostile and competitive sentiment among gentlemen gave reason for a man to concern himself with the honour and reputation of his nobility, and the nobility of his honour and reputation. Further enhancing male rivalry, during this time the number of armed courtiers with claims to nobility (founded or unfounded) became “much more numerous than the class had once been in the long past, and covered a wider spectrum. The genteel craze for heraldry of the Tudor period had little to do with war. ... [I]t had to do with status, and in particular the

concern with social identity and social recognition" (Keen 17). With a larger base of noblemen, male courtiers were forced to vie for reputation in order to situate themselves in the hierarchy of court. If not all noblemen could be equal, personal codes of honour and public recognition of reputation became the battlegrounds for comparison, and physical violence erupted as a repercussion of heightened masculine conflict. In my analysis of three of Shakespeare's plays – one comedy, *Twelfth Night*, one tragedy, *Hamlet*, and one history play, *Henry V* – compared with contemporary conduct books on honour and arms, it becomes evident that male members of the gentry were faced with a polyvalency of honour codes which structured and ordered their lives. These codes, which at times demanded opposing responses to the same events, often left men at a crossroads of indecision and strife.

The court of Elizabeth I was the stage for what was an incredibly turbulent period of change in English history. Featuring reformations in literature, education, religion, economics, concepts of nation, gender politics, and nearly every aspect of contemporary life, early modern England experienced what can only be described as a tidal wave of change. In the midst of this turbulence, it comes as no surprise to scholars that cultural norms and modes of living rapidly evolved and were



increasingly scrutinized by those experiencing the transition. At the crux of this change lies the issue of normative codes: a man had to know exactly how and when to act, and which way to perform his masculinity in order to survive and thrive during this time of change. In this volatile and increasingly competitive society, presentation and conformity became the rules of survival. The rise of an affluent middle class and decline of landed or historically noble gentry, as well as much rivalry for the queen's favour, required that a man continually enact and protect his status in the public sphere, through whatever means necessary.

Beginning in the later medieval ages, political power in England became increasingly centralized under the king. Unlike earlier periods, which saw "a class of barons bound only loosely to [the king] by ties of fuedo-vassality" (Boulton 1), the political atmosphere in England shifted in the centuries leading up to the sixteenth century. By 1520, the political landscapes of England and much of Europe featured barons who had been "reduced to a relatively docile dependence on their royal lords through judicial combination of legal and military intimidation balanced by generous inducements to loyalty and service to the state" (Boulton 1). This is not to say that uprisings did not occur – they most certainly did – but a historical contextualization of Elizabeth's court illuminates the fact that

power, at this time, was largely vested in the king. Yet Elizabeth I pushed for greater control than the monarchs before her; not only did she continue to centralize power in the throne of England, but she also took advantage of chivalric ideologies of the obligatory male service to a woman in order to uphold her status as a female lord. Elizabeth presented herself as a Prince to whom her courtiers would maintain the utmost loyalty, even to the point that “the queen’s men were expected to maintain the appearance of sexual fidelity to her” (Mallin 156), and she demanded to be the cynosure of her noblemen’s attention.

To capture and maintain the attention and loyalty of her ever-growing body of male courtiers, Elizabeth had to remain highly conscious of her political manoeuvres. Rapidly altering historical traditions, which had vested the role of King in a male body, Elizabeth’s female body caused great complications in the context of her male-dominated and extremely patriarchal court. To maintain her dominant status, the queen became incredibly selective of whom she permitted to enter her presence, developing a very powerful following composed of influential and respectable men. Headed by an increasingly competitive masculine royal administrative force, influence in the court of Elizabeth I was relegated to an honourable few, “allocations that produced an elite masculine culture

organized around the interplay of ambition and knowledge" (Hanson 18). Much has been written on Elizabeth's carefully executed consolidation of power (Boulton, Hanson, James, May, Shephard). These studies note the incredibly competitive environment that such political tactics developed. It is the demand that such a court places on the maintenance of masculine honour and reputation into which my study moves. As Elizabeth herself both required and bestowed honour – and could tarnish it should she wish – men constantly vied with one another in order to prove themselves worthy of aristocratic status and to find honour in the court of the queen. Success and advancement became the rewards of loyalty, whether veritably or falsely performed, as well as the permanent maintenance of a good reputation.

The politics of emulation are important to any study on early modern masculinity. As a method of advancement in the Elizabethan court, the goal of emulation was to "imitate your fellow courtier so completely as to make him obsolete" (Mallin 151). As a political action, this level of mimicry wrought havoc among the gentry, as one could never be sure of the truth or purpose of another's actions. If "upstart" courtiers and middle-class citizens or lower, country gentry were able to reproduce the actions and manners of courtiers possessing ancient aristocratic

lineages, and could do so with more finesse, their upward social mobility could move unchecked. Such became the fear lying behind much of the “old” nobility’s scorn for “new wealth” in the period.

The fear of social mobility, compounded with Elizabeth’s careful employment of a chivalric revival, led to an increasing emphasis on historical glory and codes of virtue in the Tudor court. The Elizabethan rebirth of chivalry aided the queen on the issue of female veneration, as men are required to venerate their King and males required to pay gallant tribute to a woman.<sup>1</sup> These older codes, however, often contrasted greatly with more modern pursuits, and this issue became a prominent theme in many Shakespearean dramas produced during the era. The tension created as older, chivalric codes of honour converged with burgeoning new discourses of masculinity, imported from Europe or descended from contemporary humanist and duello codes, created a nexus of anxiety that was virtually unavoidable, as the aspects of a man’s identity that had once been foundational to his character were altered forever. In the midst of this confusion sat Elizabeth I, compounding masculine confusion in her

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<sup>1</sup> As Mallin suggests in his article “Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry,” chivalric premises “lay behind virtually every late Tudor court formality: progresses, pageant entertainments, anniversary celebrations, diplomatic embassaries, conferrals of dignities. The enactment of the ideal in the period was, on its surface, an expression of monarchical glory and the nobles’ underlying fealty” (154).

careful bestowing of honours and application of chivalric conventions (Mallin 155). Fuelling the chaos surrounding discourses of honour and masculinity, Elizabeth did more than demand that men follow the medieval code of chivalry; rather, she required that they acknowledge these mandates yet continue to yield to her new system of bestowing honour and elevating reputation for political rather than martial rewards. As the state "claimed and obtained the sole right to validate knightly honour ... [It became] a tool of political control" (Gunn 108), and was used to bend powerful men to the queen's needs. Beyond a political motive, the "community of honour" in which noblemen lived required that all men of honour "establish the innate quality of his honourable blood by his virtuous deeds" (James 22) and led men to be personally fixated on their public reputation and performances of aristocratic honour. At this time, "traditional assumptions about honour are so intermingled with the motives and actions of all the participants that the hold these assumptions had on men's minds is indisputable" (Council 25) and heightened the tension between old and new codes of honourable behaviour.

Knighthood and its close sibling, chivalry, are rooted in martial performances. Brought to England by conquering Normans as an effective warfare technique, horsed warriors quickly dominated the battlefield.

However, with evolutions in military methodology over successive centuries, the knight gradually lost "his position of absolute dominance in the field of battle" (Boulton 10) and was replaced with far less expensive and more replaceable alternatives. Once an indispensable member of the king's arsenal, knights became extraneous; with the rising costs of armour, which had to grow thicker in response to the evolution of weaponry, and the price of horses increasing rapidly, "only princes and barons could afford to keep up the tradition of having most of their sons made knights" (Boulton 11). Yet although knighthood as a means of employment declined over the centuries, "chivalric" ideals remained tied to the aristocrats who continued to practice mounted warfare, as sport or in actuality. Coalescing around 1150, the ideology of chivalric knights, arising from Celtic legends and the romances of noble Arthur and his knights "quickly assumed a central place in the ideology of the merging knightly class" (Boulton 5), and the impetus for a man to possess the ideals of these famous knights, including prowess in arms, loyalty, generosity and courtesy, service to women<sup>2</sup>, piety and male fellowship,

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Elizabeth I sought to exploit the veneration of women to her own purposes, presenting herself so as to be conceived of as the unattainable object of chivalrous male affection. This intertwined romantic ideals of courtly love with tangible rewards for service, leading to politically-charged male-female relationships between men and their queen

was vast (Radulescu 70). A true knight received veneration and reputation based on his possession of these character traits, and at this point in the middle ages honour was considered a single (rather than the sole) trait of a knight; the chevalier loved truth and honour, and was virtuous (Radulescu 70).

As knights of non-aristocratic lineages began to disappear, knighthood – and its partner, chivalry – “became ever more associated with the highest class of Western Christian society, and even more honourable” (Boulton 11). As baronial and knightly classes amalgamated, the ideals of chivalry united the aristocracy. Yet by the early modern period, a nobleman bore little resemblance to his martial forebears, regardless of his conduct and personal sense of nobility. When Edward III won the battle of Crecy in 1436 with an army of dismounted warriors and archers, the inefficiency of mounted knights rendered them virtually extinct as a military tactic. Successive generations of noblemen, trained in physical sports and activities such as riding, fencing, hunting, and shooting, gained the skills of their mounted forebears for non-martial purposes. For the men of the early modern period, these martial skills, which had for so long been central to aristocratic employment, “are social accomplishments, not military” (Anglo xi). And since honour and

reputation had been the rewards for military prowess and adherence to chivalric codes for centuries, the noblemen of the early modern period were left bereft of historical precedence for how to gain these rewards.

In the midst of this evolution in masculine honour systems, with the definitive end of the Holy Wars the Church called for an immediate reduction of violence, requiring men to adhere to a more "Christian" code of morality. The confusion that was experienced as these no-longer-military aristocratic men were simultaneously barraged by competing value systems, codes that intermingled and amalgamated over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is evident. As reputations could no longer be forged through bloodshed and tempered on the battlefield, men of the gentry were forced to negotiate the tense and competitive atmosphere of the court in order to seek personal gain. Thus, over the course of the late medieval and early modern period the code of chivalry began to be modified into a more courtly code of conduct, which allowed the Prince to possess and enact influence over the actions and perceptions of his noblemen – useful for a centralized court. But violence was such an ingrained aspect of medieval culture that it could not simply be eradicated in the early modern period; among the gentry, "[e]ven in peace the way of honour was the way of the sword. ... In an honour society violence, or the



ever-present possibility of violence, was a way of life" (James 5) and could not be erased. In response to this standard, and in light of demands for reduced violence in many facets of their lives, the duel, an extralegal form of seeking justice for personal affronts, flourished among the gentry. As honour through battlefield engagement dwindled, duelling became the chivalric remainder in a class of men who were no longer warriors.

In the transitional periods between honour codes – from chivalric, to courtly, and now incorporating the code of the duel – it comes as no surprise that men might face confusion on issues requiring restitution and require instruction on how to proceed in their variously 'honourable' daily lives. That they did is evidenced by the proliferation of courtesy books published on topics of honour and conduct during the period.

Incorporating advice gleaned from a vast number of sources, continental, classical, and historical, "these conduct books attempted to teach gentlemen how this good opinion [of one's peers] could be obtained and maintained" (Marston 25). Books such as William Segar's *The Booke of Honor and Armes* (1590), Sir Francis Bacon's *Charge ... Touching the Duel* (1614), Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (translated 1561), and Gerard Legh's *The Accedens of Armorie* (1562)<sup>3</sup> inform the male reader

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<sup>3</sup> This is far from an exhaustive list.

on the causes of quarrel and the proper responses to various injuries upon one's honour. Segar explains that having discerned that many men are ignorant of the codes of honour and combat (A2), he has seized upon the opportunity to advise readers seeking self-advancement and to show "the order to reuenge and repulse, according vnto Christian knowledge and due respect of Honor" (A3).

Courtesy books evoke a sense of the great stress that was placed on the defense of honour in the early modern period and provide an image of the pervasive fear and doubt that suffused a gentleman's daily life. In these manuals about seeking redress for slights, proper action in various circumstances, and descriptions of which (if any) injuries require duels, Segar and other authors reveal the early modern impetus to violently preserve masculine hierarchies during a time of great change. Conduct books such as Segar's advise gentlemen that anger could be the "proper response to any misevaluations of one's worth. Such a stance was enhanced by the honour culture of the landed ranks which sensitized individuals to slights and any diminution of rights" (Pollock 570). In her thorough study of the construction of anger in the early modern period, Linda Pollock describes the convergence of allegiances and codes, the effects of these social discourses on emotional stimuli among men, and the

advice presented on the topic of anger and redress in conduct manuals. Although some texts deemed any insult as a call to arms, other conduct manuals “advocated the control and restraint of emotions” (Pollock 570) in the face of adversity. Pollock’s study illuminates another aspect of the confusion that the early modern man faced; caught in a bind between old and new constructions of socially normative actions – gentleman and parvenu, Christian and chevalier, duellist and courtier – all men experienced the blurring of distinction between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ behaviour which left them wading through social codes in an effort to find a path toward honour. And although the militaristic values of aristocracies gone by decreased in necessity, they remained ingrained in the men’s sense of being, encouraging physical responses to any threat to dominance.

In some ways, the duel became an outlet for these tensions. Carefully controlled men could let loose their legal and courtly bindings and seek solace and fame in an act which, one can speculate, felt more natural than the politically-steeped pageantry that chivalry had become in the court. Voicing a rather pessimistic outlook on the development of the duel, Sydney Anglo presents these honour-battles, which were “irrelevant to modern military needs,” as “chivalric honour gone rotten” (Anglo xiii).

In his study on chivalry in the Renaissance, Anglo ignores any theories of dynamic discourses or social evolution in his analysis of honour codes, rather proposing a theory of decay (which was, interestingly, a dominant theory for many years in the medieval and early modern period<sup>4</sup>). The problem with a theory of decay is that it suggests that there was once a 'pure' code of chivalry or honour, untouched by external influence and not susceptible to erosion over time. Anglo's depiction of chivalry in the early modern period provides a sense that it became bastardized over time into the code of the duel, yet no social code is ever static and in actuality is constantly evolving.

Anglo's propensity to trace honour as a single concept over centuries is also a feature of Mervyn James's important article, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485-1642," which follows alterations in social understandings of honour in the early modern period. This text is invaluable in that it demonstrates the challenges that the older (medieval) code of honour faced from changing values of the sixteenth century, yet

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<sup>4</sup> As Norman Council notes, both orthodox and unorthodox ideas about honour, which circulated in the early modern era, became important in Shakespeare's plays. However, the "most significant of the unorthodox attitudes toward honour regarded it ... as an innate moral capacity" (Council 27) rather than something which could be earned, and was always "coupled with the assumption that the world is in moral decay, a condition which only this private sense of what is right – i.e. honour – can alleviate" (Council 27). Similarly Sydney Anglo notes that "chivalry was always thought to be in decline" (xiv) in the medieval and early modern period. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* explores this sense of pervasive decay, as the court of Denmark faces the erasure of loyalties.

others have noted that James fails to remark on the fact that “among the aristocracy the old values lingered long and served to justify even actions that bordered on the treasonous” (Shephard 734) under the Tudor-Stewart regimes, all in the name of honour. Although James’s work reveals that early modern honour transitioned from “a traditional version defined by lineage, competitiveness, and a propensity for violence ... and a second strain more meritocratic, moralistic, and pacific” (Herrup 137), he does not take into account the simultaneity of these discourses, and the great division created among and within men as they attempted to adhere to one – or many – systems of honour. The resilient, dynamic nature of honour is what must be emphasized; it did not simply alter, just as violence did not simply disappear, in the early modern era.

What we are witnessing in the period, rather than decay or swift changes, is the way in which the duel code’s emphasis on honour and integrity filled the space left by fading martial practices among the aristocracy, while simultaneously satisfying the contemporary impulse for courtliness and grace. This argument is taken up in Jennifer Low’s *Manhood and the Duel*, which studies changing masculinity and violence in relation to early modern duelling manuals. Depicting the duel as “an overdetermined sign of masculine identity that helped to stabilize

significantly volatile notions of both rank and gender" (3), Low recognizes the social turbulence that was formational in the development and prominence of the duel in sixteenth-century England. Low comments on the duel as "a nexus for several different notions of masculinity ... [which] both indicated and shaped the gender assumptions of wealthy young men" (3) and goes on to indicate that the romantic attention garnered by the duel was "enhanced further by the stature of the noblemen who often seemed to be the combatants" (3). Thus the duel captured the popular imagination and emerged in England as an intermediary practice between the warring of mounted knights and the dancing of courtiers. Men could engage in duels and violently defend the martial prowess and aggressive honour of their forebears, without damaging ingrained concepts of masculinity.

Literary and dramatic references to violence and prowess were at this time still standard for definitions of masculinity, providing readers and audiences with a sense of the glory and virile strength of the hero through popular allusions. Therefore in his descriptions of the "warlike Harry," William Shakespeare casts Henry V as a Mars figure, or like the mighty Alexander (*Henry V* Prologue 5). Associating the king with a history of military heroes indicates the character's strength and capability

in battle as a warrior and ties this warrior status to the honour and reputation of greatness that is cultivated to surround Henry in the play. The public performance of masculine strength in battle affects the audience's perception of Henry V as a man and draws attention to the necessity of aggression in an enactment of male identity.

The study of various methods of signifying masculinity in the early modern period is not a new field and has been pursued by a number of scholars from a number of perspectives. The scholarship is united, however, in its identification of the heavy emphasis that was placed on public performances of manhood. Genitalia did not, in effect, 'make the man.' In the status- and performance-conscious society of Elizabethan England, it was necessary for a man to have all of the accoutrements of maleness in order to be recognized as such. This has been studied through the centrality of the beard, highly visible in public interactions (Fisher), the continued emphasis on carrying swords (Gillingham), crime (Walker), politeness (Peltonan) as well as the duel (Billacois, Low, Parker) to name a few readings, yet there still exists disagreement on the causes for the proliferation of the duel as a performance of masculinity in society. What function did the duel play in society? How did men conceive of the duel? Did it unify or further stratify masculine culture?

Low compares the theories of Francois Billacois and Brian Parker in her analysis of the duello code. Examining Billacois, she questions if the duel functioned to proclaim and realize equality “between the gentry of the commons and the Lords of the Upper House” (21), as both those of inherited noble status and the socially mobile were able to participate, or if, as Parker suggests, the duel “was used to define what a courtier’s personal place should be in the hierarchy of the elite” (Low 21 quoting Parker 56). Disappointingly, Low concludes this debate indifferently, suggesting only that “[e]ither way, it is clear that anxiety over place did prompt an increasing number of combats among members of the gentry and nobility” (Low 21). My study, however, sides with Parker’s sense of the duel. Although those members of the gentry who were seeking to emulate the ‘blue-blooded’ and historically noble certainly did participate in the same codes of honour and touchiness toward insult, the duel served as a method of distinguishing a man of reputation from his peers. Self-consciously determined to repair any insult to his honour, be it national, familial, or Christian honour, the challenger (or injured party) sought to disassociate himself from those less honourable than he by defeating them in individual combat.



Eventually, Low does acknowledge the separation among the gentry and the factiousness in Elizabeth's elitist court, although she does not return to Parker's argument: "Lacking a group ethos with which to identify early modern gentry and aristocracy also perceived that one gains status only at the expense of another" (Low 25). The highly competitive atmosphere which underlay all aristocratic relationships and fed the ongoing revolution in honour codes created external as well as internal divisions and strife. The requirement that a man be perceived by others *and* himself as Christian and virtuous, yet was also undeniably called to publicly and violently defend his honour, is at the crux of this study of masculinity. Even as humanism and religion damned violence and ancient hierarchies, aggression remained vital to the definition of what it was to be male.

The discourses of masculine honour in the early modern period can only be described as polyvalent; the codes that structured a man's existence both formed and informed his environment and his actions, and created tension and fission when they came into conflict with one another. Yet conflicts occurred so regularly that it must have been impossible to live without moments of indecision; as I discussed earlier, Christian codes of morality, which called for piety and the observation of nonviolence and

forgiveness, were often at odds with militaristic codes, which demanded that men seek restitution for grievances and prove their personal awareness of the honour required by their station; familial and patriarchal codes stressed the son's role in defending and upholding the honour and reputation of the family name by whatever means necessary, even to the point of violence; humanism called for pacifism and study; and all the while national or 'patriotic' systems of thought called men to serve their King and country against external offense through war. Operating in the midst of this, chivalric codes of masculinity retained their sway over popular memory and were reinforced by Queen Elizabeth's usage of the ideology to strengthen her position as female Prince of England.

The intersection of and competition among these codes had repercussions that were, as my study suggests, violent more often than not. Unable to follow one honour or moral code without breaking another, and caught in a transitional period, a man was forced to wade among discourses that were continually altering. Furthermore, the men of early modern England, including those presented by Shakespeare, were required to enact this personal choice publically in order to proclaim their sense of honour, reinforce public reputation, and vie for favour. A reading of Shakespearean drama for the purpose of discovering the internal strife

created by intersecting honour codes is incredibly useful; drama acts as a reflection of society, as “theatre adopts, and relies on, the same attitudes, traditions, and discourses that organize and articulate men’s day-to-date lives. It stages contemporary perceptions and, frequently, interprets the beliefs that underpin these beliefs” (Leinwand 3). The issues that Shakespeare’s characters struggle with are the same challenges faced by the men of the early modern period; that is why a reading of honour is so central to an understanding of his plays, because his work, like much artistic expression produced in the early modern period, “inevitably deals with the intricate and contradictory roles honour was presumed to play in men’s behaviour” (Council 13). Male issues of violence, injury, redress, honour, dishonour, and loyalty (to name a few) are at the heart of many of Shakespeare’s plays, as his characters, like all early modern males, are left to wade through social and personal codes in order to interpret the truth and defend their reputations.

*Hamlet, Twelfth Night, and Henry V* reveal that early modern masculinity is shaped and controlled by competing discourses of honour, and the violence that proliferates in these plays comes as a result of men seeking ‘proper’ and honourable responses to injured reputations and honour. Faced with ambiguous situations that juxtapose concepts of

honour and conscience, Hamlet, Laertes, Henry Monmouth, the Captains of King Henry's army, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew, and Viola/Cesario are each in their own ways coerced into seeing violence as the only means of redressing impugned reputations. In these plays, "honour as both motive and standard appears in every setting" (Alvis 10) and leads to public performances of violent masculinity. Structured by historical perceptions and aristocratic heroic ideals, the duels in these plays reflect contemporary competing dignities and honour codes. The proliferation of violence is not caused by the destruction or loss of historical codes (as Council, James, and Low have argued), but by the intermingling of past codes with newly-introduced standards of behaviour, and the resultant wide-spread internal strife.

In my first chapter, I examine private oaths of honour and masculine honour pedagogy, seeking internal and ingrained codes of honour in Shakespeare's male characters in *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. Honour, like any social norm, is learned and inherited vertically through generations, and this chapter will examine instances of honour pedagogy and its impact on men's internalized constructions of themselves as reputable gentlemen. As such, it includes scenes of instruction (such as Polonius's famous reminder to his son Laertes, "to thine own self be true"

(*Hamlet* 1.3.65)) as well as confusion, and vows of familial vengeance, as men are instructed to publically enact internalized codes of honour and respectability. This chapter also involves honour codes between a king and his subjects, as the construction is very similar to the patriarchy of a household, and examines calls to national defense in search of evolving constructions of honour as a national duty rather than the remnants of a vassal-retainer relationship.

Chapters two and three explore through *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Twelfth Night* the ramifications of honour pedagogy in men of the gentry, in their interactions with each other as well as the relationships that they have with their social inferiors. Chapter two furthers my investigation of the dynamic nature of honour as a discourse and its malleability based on context. This chapter examines honour as an understanding of station or rank in the period, and the ways in which men were called to perform their social status as indications of their own sense of the honour that they were due. Here I examine the closely controlled relationships between men and the intense regulation that a nobleman had to exert over himself and those around him in order to assure that reputations were upheld. The second chapter also examines the very economical use of honour, and the importance of honour as a reward or payment for service.

The third chapter takes up the issue of personal violence and studies the duel as a repercussion of internal conflict and competing honour codes. This chapter provides an analysis of violent scenes in all three plays and identifies the tension underlying male relationships, especially in relation to dominance and favour.

The extreme volatility of the period provides an interesting backdrop to a study on honour, an ideology that is itself unstable. Amid ongoing social reforms it is of no surprise that honour and reputation were continuously evolving, moving out of a man's reach as soon as he approached; as such, it provided great motivation for adventures and exploits, some of them more successful than others, and inspired generations of men to push themselves to new heights, reaching ever further in an attempt to grasp the ever-elusive status: "honourable gentleman."

## Chapter 1

### Dogma, Duels, and Debates: Codes of Honour in Times of Change

For the first section of this study, I would like to consider what types of “vertical” discourses shaped the lives of men in the early modern period, and how honour informed or was influenced by these discourses. By suggesting that some discourses are vertical and others horizontal, what I am intending to distinguish between are those discourses that stratify society by marking certain groups or individuals as superior or inferior to others, and those discourses which can be depicted as more “horizontal” and which have a diverse impact on all strata of society. For example, the vertical discourses of class and lineage situate the Prince (for this study, Queen Elizabeth) at the top of all hierarchies and place descending value on “lower” stations or family names, creating a society “composed of a series of reciprocal hierarchical relationships in which protection and care were exchanged for deference and obedience” (Amussen 4). Such discourses locate an individual in relation to others in a metaphorically vertical manner. Aside from these and other hierarchal or vertical discourses, early modern English citizens are influenced by horizontal discourses – those that affect their subjectivity regardless of

their positioning in the social hierarchy. Discourses of religion, for example, or nationhood, or friendship exist in all strata of society and also function to shape an individual's role. Horizontal discourses are undeniably influenced by an individual's unique location in the vertical discourses; a young son of a noble lineage will have a different concept of his place in the nation and the honour due to it than the son of a peasant household, and although "manliness was defined differently by those of different ranks" (Low 3) men of all strata of society were impacted by similar discourses.

Honour weaves through both vertical and horizontal discourses and varies from subject to subject; it is both influenced by and formational on an individual's sense of self, lineage, and liegship, and thus was an integral aspect of a man's understanding of his place in a national or household hierarchy. During the early modern period, when Tudor monarchs "consciously sought to break up the influence of the great dynasties ... uncertainty about the status of heredity in relation to other aspects of honour increased" (Low 96), and the battle to maintain the shaken foundations of lineage and prestige climaxed among members of the gentry. Honour, and the violent reinforcement of a family's valiant



martial past, became a tool for the aristocracy to reinforce their dominance.

The emphasis on honour and pedigree becomes very clear through an analysis of honour pedagogy, which can be found in the written guidebooks to honour that proliferated during the period and is reflected in moments of private pedagogy in Shakespeare's plays. As Gail Donagan notes in "The Web of Honour," which studies the interplay between discourses of masculinity and male honour codes, courtesy books on honour "tended to be obsessively concerned with the observances and heraldry of rank and blood, and devoted passionate attention to visible, intricately calibrated, signs of respect intended to preserve social hierarchy" (371). Although honour itself was not visual, the manifestations of honour were, and thus they became incredibly important for a man to maintain in public. The necessity of upholding the family name through honourable action is underpinned by William Segar's repeated insistence on the matter in *The Booke of Honor and Armes*. Segar asserts that all men must be honourable, but that "the more highlie he be borne, the worse reputation he meretith, if he cannot continue the honor left him by his Ancestors" ("The Third Booke" 34-35). Segar's text outlines honourable responses to injury and the types of injury or slander

that a man may face throughout his life. Although his self-stated aim is to educate the “vulgar sort (and many right noble also)” (“The The Reader” A2) on the proper causes for combat, which, for Christians, he notes, should be few, he repeatedly cites violence as the main action required for the maintenance of honour. Seeking to show “the order of reuenge and repulse” (A3), Segar’s text is conclusive on the fact that combat is required in only two situations: to arbitrate a situation in which one combatant has accused another of a crime that merits death, and to defend “Honor, because among persons of reputation, Honor is preferred before life” (“Second Booke” 22). The remainder of the text instructs the reader on proper attitudes and deference for combatants, outlining which person is the injured party in various situations and going over matters of deference in the case of differing rank; however it is the recurring theme of mandatory violence that sheds light on the importance that duels and other ritualized forms of violence had on public interpretations of a man’s honour.

The type of pedagogy evidenced in Segar’s text, which emphasizes the actions of honour rather than the internal qualities that an honourable man might possess, indicates the close interplay between reputation and honour in the early modern period. Public perceptions will either condone

or condemn a man's actions, and social favour or downfall will be the result; actions that are inferred to be dishonourable damage a man's reputation, and vice versa. Thus, "[t]he link between honour and reputation is clear and close, yet they are not identical, for there is a distinction between inner-regarding and outer-regarding honour, between honour as an internalized value ... and as an external quality attributed to [a man] by others, which may take the form of rank and status or of moral or social respect" (Donagan 366). As Segar maintains, however, the public performance of honour – and the violent upholding of it – were integral to a man's public reputation, which became an indication of his honour.

The performativity of honour and the necessity of violence in that performativity is a recurrent theme in Shakespeare's plays. His characters repeatedly return to violent episodes as the means to create an admirable reputation, honourable recourse, and proper restitution. While the pedagogy behind such actions is largely private (for example, below I consider Polonius's instruction to Laertes prior to the latter's departure to France), the enactment is always public, and I will argue is purposefully so in order to promote public recognition. The actions and combative interactions between the characters are a reflection of the desirability and volatility of an honourable status in the early modern period. The role of

public recognition in a man's honour "made its possession permanently impermanent. ... Reputation was the interpretive transaction through which discrete incidents became or did not become imbued with honour. ... It [honour] was based not on character, but on presentation" (Herrup 139), and thus Shakespeare's characters repeatedly endeavour to analyze themselves and correct the actions of themselves and others in attempt to prove that their internal character aligns with their public performance.

Private moments of honour pedagogy occur between fathers and sons throughout *Hamlet*, as the heads of households seek to convey rules that their sons are expected to follow. Such "[f]ilial obedience was not only required by honor, but by religion as well" (Marston 29) and was encouraged in order to preserve the type of honourable performativity mandatory to maintaining the family's good name. As Laertes prepares to depart from Denmark in Act I Scene iii, Polonius provides him, in effect, with a recipe for the maintenance of honour and personal integrity while abroad. Reminding his son of the importance of his teaching, Polonius requires that Laertes remain continually aware of the public nature of his contexts and consider his actions accordingly. Hoping to prevent his son from giving "any unproportioned thought his act" (1.3.66), which may cause injury or defamation, Polonius requires that his son consider his

associates and friends carefully, keeping his own council but his ears open: "Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement" (75). Polonius's insistence that Laertes take great care with his words and actions is indicative of his fear that Laertes will damage his public standing with a single slight and demonstrates the fickle nature of honour in the period.

As Polonius goes on to discuss vulgarity, judgement, and personal appearance with his son, it is evident that Laertes must take great caution with his actions while abroad, and needs to remain conscious of the honourable role that he is to perform in Paris. This type of discussion between father and son is a preventative tactic, as Polonius heads off any potentially dishonourable action on his son's part; in the early modern period "[h]eads of households fumed at the sight [or report] of feckless, profligate, and disrespectful youths" (Pollock 574). Beyond the simple affectations of a reserved manner, rich appearance, and politeness, however, Polonius is careful to guide his son on the issue of quarrels. After counselling Laertes to remain level-headed in order to avoid unnecessary conflict, Polonius emphasizes that it is his son's duty to uphold his natural superiority in battle: "Beware/ Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in,/ Bear 't that th' opposed may beware of thee" (1.3. 71-73).

Although he cautions Laertes against combat, Polonius's insistence that his son be victorious is indicative of the role that violence played in determining and reflecting the honour of the combatants in the early modern period – an issue of great debate during the era. Although many texts produced in the period condemn the use of violence for personal gain, these words of Polonius and “other texts [advise] ... that anger was a proper response to any misvaluations of one's worth” (Pollock 570). Laertes is to uphold his family's superiority – and his individual location in the vertical discourses of lineage and rank - through violent means, when necessary.

That the topic of quarrels arises in what is in effect a discussion of masculine performativity comes as no surprise. Violent displays of rank and gender had a long history in aristocratic England and were carefully performed to cement existing social hierarchies and to preserve ancient order: “The same impulse to performative violence does seem to have inspired both the duel and the joust. In both, the courtier's ideal of self-presentation involves conscious consideration of his identity and the best way to present it” (Low 17).<sup>5</sup> During this instance of masculine pedagogy

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<sup>5</sup> Low's use of the term “courtier” is here somewhat misleading –the history of aristocratic violence that I am referring to began before the recognition of “courtier” as a position. During the early- to mid- medieval period, men of the aristocracy or those

in *Hamlet*, Polonius's lecture to Laertes reflects the continuation of violence as a means for discerning masculine superiority well into the early modern period. The transition of the aristocracy from chevalier to mannerly courtier blends centuries of tradition with the newer preoccupations of a life at court rather than at war. Not only is this presented in Polonius's recurrent reminders that Laertes watch his conduct, but it is also referenced in Castiglione's vastly influential *The Book of the Courtier*. In the Italian's description of the ideal courtier, he postulates what is "still recognizably a knightly ideal: the courtier was still a warrior, and was still concerned with honour and reputation" (Anglo 3). This emphasis that the courtier was *still* a warrior is indicative of the transition taking place and the difficulties that men faced in the metamorphosis of social expectation.

The consideration of this evolution in social performance and expectations of aristocratic men is taken up rather pessimistically by Sidney Anglo in his text *Chivalry in the Renaissance*. Anglo's reading of what he terms the "transmutation of knight into courtier or gentleman" (xi) between the medieval period and the early modern period in England

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fighting for the King would have been recognized by rank or as knights. Life and participation at court did not become central to the ambitions and power of the aristocracy until the late middle ages.

is characterized by a sense of loss or erosion of honour and seriousness among the English elite. Depicting the medieval role of the knight as a warrior to have been “entirely practical and serious” (xi), Anglo sees the knights of the early modern period as little more than shallow reflections of their forebears; “It is true that he is expected to ride, fence, swim, hunt and shoot: but these skills have assumed an independent importance, and are scarcely related to war. They are social accomplishments, not military” (xi). With an overarching sense of decay, his introduction displays the aristocratic duel of the early modern period as irrelevant, and having “nothing to do with loyalty, service or battle” (xiii). In fact, Anglo goes so far as to strongly state: “The duelling craze was chivalric honour gone rotten” (xiii). However, when read in conjunction with Polonius’s careful speech to Laertes, it is clear that the aristocratic honour code of the early modern period is not decayed, but rather has altered from that of the medieval elite. Anglo’s text depicts only a single type of honour – that of the chevalier of the Middle Ages – and disregards the new codes which erupt in later periods. An expectation of stasis is what leads to Anglo’s pervasive sense of decay and likely caused great confusion and pressure among the more traditional and long-standing gentry of the early modern



period, as they struggled to fill new codes of masculinity brought up alongside newcomers to the social elite.

Because Anglo's text does not embrace newer codes of honour, his text falls short of recognizing the implications of what he terms "trivial" errors on the part of men. Thus Polonius's careful cautioning that Laertes dress himself as costly "as thy purse can buy, / But not expressed in fancy (rich, not gaudy)" (*Hamlet* 1.3. 76-77) would likely seem irrelevant. In Anglo's reading, during the early modern period there is "a highly developed concern with appearances, with matters of personal affront and vindication; and, all too often, with the trivial dictates of wounded vanity" (3), all of which are topics that arise in Polonius's doctrinal speech to his son. However their very inclusion is suggestive that each element of Polonius's dictates about the clothing, insult, quarrel, and actions of his son are of incredible importance. For, as Anglo fails to realize, the wounded reputation, which occurred so easily in the period, had very real consequences on a man's life and fortune. Even a hint of dishonour could be enough to destroy a family forever.

Thus Polonius is careful to check up on Laertes after his son has been away. He sends his man Reynaldo to Paris to ensure that his son has not strayed from an honourable path. Instructing the man to lay false

claims of misdemeanours against Laertes in order to flush out a true picture of his son, Polonius is ever mindful of his son's reputation and emphasizes that Reynaldo not go too far with his implications:

And there put on him  
 What forgeries you please - marry, none so rank  
 As may dishonour him, take heed of that,  
 But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips  
 As are companions noted and most known  
 To youth and liberty. (*Hamlet* 2.1.21-26)

Going on to list the potential misdemeanours that are tied to youth, including gaming, drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling and drabbing, Polonius again insists that Reynaldo stop short of accusing Laertes of a scandal. The term "rank," with its associated meanings of rotten or loathsome – appropriate for Polonius's discussion of rumours of dishonour and ill reputation - comes up often in *Hamlet*,<sup>6</sup> and functions well to indicate the difficulty of erasing or eliminating the forgeries or actualities of dishonour. Once the seed of dishonour is planted, it can

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Hamlet's introductory soliloquy in which he envisions the world as "an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely" (1.2.139-141), or Marcellus' statement that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.5.100)

grow to encompass the whole of the man in the eyes of society, reflecting that honour is easily lost and hard to regain. Reputation and honour must therefore be tended to regularly, as Polonius sends Reynaldo to ensure his son is doing.

Another father who regularly returns to monitor the actions of his son in *Hamlet* is the Ghost. The spectre haunts Hamlet throughout the enactment of Hamlet's oath to avenge his deceased father, King Hamlet, usurped by his brother both in the court and the marriage bed. The Ghost of the king calls upon his son's filial honour, inciting him to vengeance upon the new King Claudius, and monitors his son's progress in what Hamlet terms "Th' important acting of [his] dread command" (3.4.124).<sup>7</sup> Appearing before his son in the bedchamber of Queen Gertrude, who remains oblivious to his presence but for Hamlet's apparent ravings, the Ghost reminds Hamlet of the duty he has to his father and the action required by honour. King Claudius has murdered Hamlet's father, bedded Hamlet's mother, and blocked Hamlet from his rightful inheritance, and thus the Ghost comes "to whet [Hamlet's] almost blunted

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<sup>7</sup> The Ghost of King Hamlet calls his son to act not only out of personal affront and a sense of honour but also out of love. He begins the narrative of his murder with a filial appeal, saying "If thou didst ever thy dear father love" (1.5.29), and goes on to appeal to Hamlet's nobility to encourage his son to revenge: "But know, thou noble youth,/ The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown" (1.5.45-47). Hamlet is called to protect his father's honour, and also that of himself, his mother, and his country.

purpose" (3.4.127) when Hamlet has refrained from action. The sinister application of metaphor, as the Ghost depicts Hamlet as the knife which must be used for the active defence of his family's honour, reflects the centrality of violence to the maintenance of honour in the early modern period. As the Ghost's visitation sharpens his son, the weapon for his mortal revenge, he is also teaching his son that violence is the appropriate response to injury. Although the religious and humanist codes of the early modern period voice restraint and peaceful reconciliation, "[a]ny prohibition of exhibiting anger would also run up against the stronger ethos of the necessity of protecting rights ... [T]here were occasions when *not* expressing anger was the inappropriate response, and this was especially true in relation to reputation, property, and money" (Pollock 582, emphasis original). Thus the Ghost appears to spur Hamlet to action, instructing as a father would when his son falls short of protecting family and individual rights.

The Ghost's call to his son is not an unusual instruction; indeed "[t]hose of landed status in early modern England were meant to seek redress for injury, and would be thought less by their peers if they did not. ... Fiery reactions advertised that individuals were well informed of all that was due to them, and that they intended to keep it" (Pollock 582).

Hamlet's inaction is thus dishonourable in itself, as he fails to call attention to slights against himself and his family. The violent retaliation that the Ghost expects of him, as indicated by the violent metaphor and the ongoing monitoring of his son, "was used by the English elite to call attention to limits which had been broken or boundaries which had been transgressed" (Pollock 588), certainly issues which are apparent in the court of Denmark. The action called for by the Ghost was required universally by the aristocracy in response to any injury; violence and anger "aimed above all to bring another's conduct back into line and to secure redress for a grievance" (Pollock 582). Thus Hamlet, like Laertes, receives instruction from his father on the maintenance and protection of his social position, and both instances of pedagogy – inescapably, it seems – reinforce the need for violence in situations of redress.

Both Hamlet and Laertes are presented with the multi-faceted requirements of early modern masculine honour: self-presentation, (violent) redress for injury, maintenance of the family name and fulfillment of filial requirements. Honour pervades *Hamlet*, it is the driving motive of many if not all of the play's male characters, and it results in the tragic downfall of the ruling house of Denmark. The young sons of Denmark's aristocracy, Hamlet and Laertes, are men stricken by

conflicting codes. For Hamlet, the confusion created by the interplay of ancient and new requirements for honour causes moments of inaction, those for which the Ghost has returned to rebuke him. As Reta Terry argues in her analysis of honour codes in *Hamlet*, Hamlet's oath to the Ghost is representative of the transitioning meaning of honour in the early modern period: "Although Hamlet's initial oath swears revenge based upon lineage and familial loyalty, a violent act, he still maintains the moral and Christian image demanded by a more modern view of honour by invoking Christ to bear witness" (1081). Hamlet's apparent fumbles for honourable action throughout the play are interpreted differently by John Alvis, whose analysis of the play in *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* may leave the reader considering whether Hamlet is so confused that he cannot comprehend any honourable action at all. Alvis suggests that "the play causes us to suspect that Hamlet cannot conceive the particular virtuous action he is called upon to perform. ... He holds the word cheap and he holds himself cheaper than he ought because he refuses to honor limited goods" (79). Alvis perceives this refusal in Hamlet because he believes that the prince is "[n]o longer confident of the choiceworthiness of love, or honor, or country" (81) nearing the end of the play, finding them all to fall subject to desires of the flesh and the will to dominate.

What Alvis refers to is Hamlet's vexation with the society of Denmark, with his uncle-turned-father and his mother-turned-whore, as he curses out against the decay that he sees running throughout the land that should be his.

I disagree with Alvis and would suggest that such vexations, cries against the "too sullied flesh" (1.2.133), are very indicative of Hamlet's sense of honour and dishonour, and that the confusion in Hamlet created by evolving honour codes actually allows him time to debate between several honourable paths and to negotiate honourable subjectivities.

Although Hamlet "derides himself for not being able to act when he has a motive" (Council 102), Shakespeare presents his delays as the appropriate and honourable route. Violent revenge against Claudius, Hamlet's King, is a weighty matter that must be judged appropriately; thus the playwright "turns [Hamlet] back to his careful and reasonable plan to test Claudius' guilt; he knows, however clear his motives for action might seem, that things are not always as they seem" (Council 103). Thus Prince Hamlet lurks in the corners of the play, waiting, watching, and debating until the opportunity for redress arises.

Both Polonius and King Hamlet's Ghost encourage their sons to take up quarrel when necessary to uphold familial and individual

aristocratic honour, and neither permits his son any slippage in situations that may injure the family name. Sons are raised to maintain their father's honour without question. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the causes for this become apparent. When the Bishop of Ely speaks to Henry, inciting the young king to war, it is clear that Henry is more than the son of his forefathers – he is their rebirth. Inviting Henry to “Awake remembrance of these valiant dead/ And with your puissant arm renew their feats” (1.2.120-121), the Bishop evokes a traditional mode of thinking of each male as the rebirth of his lineage; Henry *is* all of the Kings before him. Bishop Ely uses this metaphor to spur Henry to action, inciting in him the glory of his fathers as he tells his King “You are their heir, you sit upon their throne, / The blood and courage that renownèd them/ Runs in your veins” (1.2.123-125). He speaks of Henry V as the reincarnation of a lineage of heroes and places the King on a pedestal in rank as in lineage. Thus the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely recruit Henry's sense of filial, individual and hereditary honour in order to encourage him to war with France over a disputed lordship, and although “Shakespeare's Henry probably knows that the church has its own interests in encouraging his involvement in foreign wars” (Meron 10), Henry concedes to the pressure of history and prepares his country for battle.



The ancestry of Henry V is referenced frequently throughout the drama, both for its glory and infamy. It is venerated by his friends and enemies alike and provokes Henry to moments of contemplation as well as action. In Act II Scene iv, the King of France reminds the French lords of Henry's might and the history of his strong forebears. Saying to them, "Think we King Harry strong, / And, princes, look you strongly arm to meet him" (2.4.51-52), the King of France composes an image of Henry V as a man bred to battle with France. As a King whose kindred "hath been fleshed upon us" (2.4.53) as dogs are to become bloodthirsty, Henry has been "bred out of that bloody strain/ That haunted us [French] in our familiar paths" (54-55). The French King remembers past wars with the English in order to evoke a sense of the vast strength of the English Kings in his audience – somewhat fanciful of the English playwright to include as a part of the French army's battle preparations – and envisages King Henry as a return of his forebears. After reviewing the French defeat at Cressy, the French King concludes that Henry V "is a stem/ Of that victorious stock, and let us fear/ The native mightiness and fate of him" (2.4.65-67). By his enemies as well as the members of his own court, Henry is depicted as a reproduction of his father, his father's father, and his

ancestors, and is driven by this honourable history to continue on the path that the English kings have laid before him.

However, Henry's depiction as a recreation of his father also serves to give the young King pause. In his desire to be a true, honourable King of England, Henry must actually seek to restore honour to his family name as well as encompass the glory of kingship. For although the young Hal was born to rule, his father was not, and actually deposed his cousin Richard II in order to rule himself. And just as Henry V draws his honour from his forebears, so he fears that the dishonour of his father will echo throughout his reign. On the eve of battle, Henry removes himself from his company and privately voices these fears in prayer, saying "Not today, O Lord,/ O, not today, think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown" (4.1.303-306). The anxiety of Henry's plea reveals that the "[k]nowledge that his own source of power was derived from his father's willingness and ability to exceed the law haunts Henry throughout his career on stage" (Spencer 168), and Henry fears for the honour of both his person and his nation if they are being ruled by an unnatural King. His prayer that God overlook the slight reflects Henry's piety and his knowledge that such a great dishonour as his father's could

have ramifications beyond the realm of the family and may in fact destroy an entire nation.

Having stepped into the seat of power in England Henry V finds himself, similarly to Prince Hamlet, at the junction of several conflicts and honour codes and is forced to make his way through obstacles and distraction in order to determine an honourable route. "As young Prince Hal and as Henry V, this Englishman must take a stand on the question of honor's consistency with piety, must distinguish between what does and does not deserve to be honoured, [and] must discover how to restore honour to a throne the dignity of which has suffered by his father's usurpation" (Alvis 197). However King Henry V is faced with yet another set of vertical honour codes, greater than the confusion regarding issues of filial honour and obligation – those between King and Nation. For Henry is more than just the son of his forefathers; he is also the father of his people.

In early modern England, the King was the fountainhead of both power and honour. As the King was situated metaphorically as the head of every household, a gentleman's "[o]bligations to the King paralleled those to the family. The general obligations of loyalty and obedience one owed to the family as the immediate source of one's honour extended also

to the King" (Marston 22). The formal bonds and demands of honour, including duty and reverence alongside any services that might be requested, were reinforced "by the manner in which men thought of the King. ... [T]he most widely used metaphor attempted to tie the gentleman to the King as a son is bound to his father" (Marston 36-37). Thus the same ties of honour that are derived from a man's heredity bound a man to his King and were to be upheld with the same strength – and violence – that a son would use in order to uphold the honour of his father and any oaths that he might give.

Therefore as Henry V sets his sight on battle with France, he calls his entire nation to war with the weight of filial instruction. The Chorus of *Henry V* presents the King's call to war as a fire kindled in the hearts of Englishmen, one that burns with a sense of national honour and pride and whose smoke cloaks the dangers of warfare in fantasies of glory and fame. Just as young sons leap to gain the pride of their fathers, "Now all the youth of England are on fire ... Now thrive the armorers, and honor's thought/ Reigns solely in the breast of every man" (2.Chorus.1, 3-4). The men of England rush to gather under Henry, "Following the mirror of all Christian kings/ With wingèd heels, as English Mercurys" (6-7). Yet beyond the rush and excitement of the men, the Chorus here gives a sense

of the instability and volatility of this quest for honour and glory. A close reading of the emblem cast by the Chorus reveals the ominous undertones to these summonings for war:

For now sits Expectation in the air  
And hides a sword, from hilts unto the point,  
With crowns imperial, crowns, and coronets  
Promised to Harry and his followers. (8-11)

The Chorus rhetorically constructs a sense of the dangers that can be hidden by calls to honour and nation. Although the men prepare for battle with France, it is not an awareness of death and the potential for defeat that reigns in their breast, but dreams of honour and glory. Going further than promoting a sense of the national pride of the English, the emblematic image of a sword completely hidden from view with the jewels of glory contains what can be read throughout *Henry V* as “a recurrent critique of militarist behaviour” (Marx 65). That the seemingly idealistic choral voice is what delivers this critique is actually referencing contemporary issues; such “romantic nostalgia for a vanished past was intended in part as a means of excoriating the contemporary gentry for their failures” (Heal 66). Therefore while Shakespeare may not be criticizing the court of Henry V and the role that honourable discourses

played in inciting the naïve to war, he may be pointing to more contemporary deployments of chivalry administered with a similar purpose. The pangs of honour brought about by a national call to war occlude the dangers that lie ahead, but they cannot erase them. Therefore, the men of England, who become microcosms of their State and "Like little body with a mighty heart" (2.Chorus.18) march together into France are, in effect, going to war blinded by their own hopes and ambitions.

It comes as no surprise then that King Henry has reservations about the war with France and seeks to reassure his company after recurrent defeat. Not only was Henry cautious prior to committing England to battle, ensuring that the claim to the French throne is, indeed, within his rights as King, but he continues to monitor his men closely throughout their campaign and remains aware that it is his order that has sent the men to battle, and many to their death. Such responsibility weighs on the young King, and thus after battle the audience finds "The royal captain of this ruined band/ Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent" (4.Chorus.30-31). The knowledge that each of the men is under his direction and care must strike King Henry here most clearly; while at court he, like any ruler, is separated from his subjects by many barriers, yet on the battlefield there is little to distinguish the men from their

cloaked lord. As he wanders through his men, "And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen" (4.Chorus.35), Henry binds the army closer to him than previous ties of liegeship would permit. His language and actions make the English company into a community, one bound by honour and nation and now by blood, strengthening their relationships and inciting courage.

Yet Henry, too, is faced with a confusion of directives, as old and new codes of honour diverge and he attempts to lead a nation to glory. His actions both on and off the battlefield demonstrate King Henry's fulfillment of medieval codes of aristocracy; not only does he display prowess in battle, one of the key tenets of chivalry, but he is also kind, pious, and generous. The Chorus of Act IV presents Henry V as possessing "A largesse universal, like the sun" (44), a term predominant in describing the ideal medieval aristocrat. The image of the generous lord, part of the small minority with "the resources in food and money to display great generosity was reinforced by the belief in an intimate connection between gentility and good housekeeping. The virtue of largesse, which has been identified as the queen of medieval virtues, remained a prime characteristic of the lord or knight long after it had lost much of its early political significance" (Heal 69-70). The dramatic

presentation of King Henry V as the ideal medieval King thus requires that he possess this quality, and that he, "like the sun" – a pun playing on both solar and Christian inferences – spread the wealth of his strength and courage to all, giving each "A little touch of Harry in the night" (4.Chorus.48).

Yet *Henry V* is not written for a medieval audience and must accommodate the value system of a later period. Although early modern audiences perceived the great strength of the warlike Harry, likely stirring a sense of national pride, his character also had to be shaped to more contemporary virtues. Thus Shakespeare reinforces Henry's great piety, his reservations against warfare, and his humanistic determination to speak to his soldiers as a fellow Englishman. That the play both holds up both the martial values of the medieval period and explores early modern humanist and religious virtues confirms its status as a play written during a great transition. Shakespeare must encompass a full spectrum of honour codes in order to ensure that Henry V is a man who appeals to audiences with a range of expectations about honourable behaviour.

This crossroads of ideology is touched upon by John S. Mebane in his study on warfare in *Henry V*. Mebane proposes that the Henry plays "dramatize the discrepancy between the pacifism grounded upon key



elements of the New Testament, on one hand, and the devotion of the aristocratic warrior classes to an ideology of warfare, on the other. That ideology is a compound of codes of chivalry, traditional Judeo-Christian 'just war' doctrine, and pagan heroic tradition" (252). Mebane's suggestion that the ideology of warfare in *Henry V* is a *compound* of several codes is an interesting presentation of the evolution of honour discourses in the early modern era; no code, not chivalric, or courtly, or humanist exists on its own – they overlap and interplay to create a multifarious sense of honour and honourable action, confusing men as they search for the proper path to take and often resulting in a violent outburst. Thus the generous and caring Harry is the same man whose personal sense of honour is so affronted by the Dauphin's gift of tennis balls that war becomes the only route, and all the while his increasingly irate response to the insult "is surrounded, with excruciating irony, by references to 'God's grace' and the claim that 'this lies all within the will of God'" (Mebane 258). And this is the same man who "has bound his subjects to him with oaths and has sworn victory in France ... [yet] fears his father's 'fault' will mar all and he seeks assurance [from God]" (Lenz 11). Yet Henry is a King, and his "personal honor is intricately tied to national honor" (Lenz 8) in ways that

cause conflict in the King as an individual, a trial likely faced by any man required to lead.

The conflict caused by Henry's position becomes apparent in his discussion with Pistol, Bates, and Williams in Act IV. King Henry comes upon the men while he wanders amid the camps, disguised as a common soldier. Not recognizing to whom he speaks, Pistol describes the King in a manner now become familiar throughout the text. Henry, the young ruler who as a boy gained the love of his men, is referred to as "a heart of gold, a lad/ Of life, an imp of fame, of parents good, of fist most/ valiant" (4.1.8-10). Pistol references the King's youthfulness, his goodness and piety, and his proud parentage; what's more, he indicates that King Henry V is a great warrior, and therefore is a man worth following into battle. As a result of his chivalric qualities, Pistol says, "from heartstring I/ love the lovely bully" that is Henry (4.1.10-11). This type of relationship is indicative of the fraternity that King Henry, like other English Princes, would have sought to foster among his company. Pistol's sense of companionship reveals an underlying loyalty that hinges upon the recognition of King Henry's great strength in battle, one of the greatest traits of the chevalier, typical of battlefield honour in which "[w]ith the stress on the vertical and horizontal bonds of knighthood went an

expectation that prowess should earn recognition and reward" (Gunn 122). Henry employs this prestige to his advantage, amplifying the courage and the loyalty of his army on the feast of Saint Crispin by referencing such battlefield honour and presenting that honour as the only true method of determining masculinity. Thus he forges viciousness and fearlessness in battle as indications of true masculine honour for his audience, both within the play and outside of it.

In this speech, arguably one of the most definitive of *Henry V*, King Henry pulls together his army as a single band of true men, a "band of brothers" (4.3.62) who will be renowned for their bravery on the field of battle. He rouses his men by envisioning the future of this day, on which each survivor will "stand o' tiptoe" (45) and tell the tales of battle, and will "strip his sleeve and show his scars" (50) in pride. Just as in the emblem of "Expectation" in the Chorus of Act II, this speech presents a male fascination with glory and honour that shrouds and nearly occludes the violence and probable fatality of the actions required to gain it. Each man is not directed to meditate on the events of the upcoming battle, which are likely to be blood-soaked, but instead is called to think on that future moment when "he'll remember with advantages/ What feats he did that day" (52-53). King Henry promises survivors of the battle honour for life

and an irreversible kinship with those beside whom they fight, and suggests that the battle that is to be fought will become one whose "story shall the good man teach his son" (58). This entire passage eloquently presents the upcoming battle as the path to lifelong honour, and one that will be upheld as an example for generations to come. Henry affectively and effectively casts his men as the heroes of the future, manipulating their sense of honour in a way that causes them to forget the dangers which they may face. Here, on the battlefield of Saint Crispin's day as in the book of William Segar, honour is preferred before life.

Yet Henry's speech goes even further than presenting the battle as a means of honour – he constructs the experience of battle as the only way to become fully masculine, tying together honour, masculinity, and violence with firm conviction for his audiences. Not only does the King say that the upcoming battle will make each soldier the brother of the King, but he states that "This day shall gentle his condition" (4.3.65), making each of them worthy of a gentleman's honour, a sense of which had until then been bound by blood lineage. Furthermore the King dictates that those "gentlemen in England now abed/ Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,/ And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks/ That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day" (66-69).

More than making each of his soldiers worthy of the same honour due to any aristocrat on English soil, Henry raises the most common soldier above any of his gentry that remain at home. He emasculates those who do not participate in battle, an ancient male-centric practice that for centuries has dictated the status and quality of men in England. Ferocity and courage in battle, then, become indicators both of true aristocratic honour and masculinity. Performative violence becomes both the route and response to gaining access to the ever-shifting honour codes of the early modern period.

That both *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, two dramatically different plays, similarly present the apparently inevitable link between violent behaviour, masculinity, and intersecting honour codes is no coincidence. Shakespeare uses both of these plays to elucidate and respond to contemporary shifts in social opinion, and to expose the internal dramas of every-day individuals, thus making both *Henry V* and *Hamlet* so heart-rending. Although the two plays are set historically, one not even based in England, they both expose the debates of Shakespeare's world as the male characters question and debate their actions, and seek to find honourable routes in seemingly impossible situations. The same instabilities faced by the peers of Elizabeth's court have been dramatized here for history and

reveal the deep-seated confusion and anxiety of the men of the early modern period in England.

## Chapter 2

### “Prickly Honour” and “Trivial Vanities”: The Necessity of Controlling Public Reputation

In my first chapter I followed how the transition from warrior elite to gentleman of the court that occurred throughout the early modern period required a man to spend nearly all of his life learning, modifying, and defending his sense of honour and place. Here I continue to demonstrate that throughout the period there was no stagnant sense of what “honour” was; multifaceted and flexible, honour persisted as the shifting ground upon which a good name was built. In my exploration of public performances of honour, I intend to demonstrate that what did remain present in the mindset of the early modern aristocracy was the importance of violence in relation to honour. The martial mindset of the medieval elite retained a place of importance among Elizabeth’s courtiers, as men continued to define themselves as the authorities over those below them in rank. Just as the gentry nurtured their sons with a sense of the honour due to them from birth, they bequeathed the violent requirements of this place, making “[v]iolent punishment ... an important component of the exercise of power in early modern England” (Amussen 10). The use of

violence to emphasize place was, however, based upon transitioning honour codes. It thus occurred in various legal or extralegal circumstances and was more or less acceptable at differing times or circumstances. The confusion that resulted is an obvious consequence, as changing honour codes were murky territory even for those born to the oldest families in England. There was no clear shift from martial code to courtly, either; in the early modern period, "on the subject of honour, what comes through most strongly is not transition, but multi-vocality, even self-contradiction. Tracing the workings of honour in particular circumstances, what seems most striking is not transparency, but plasticity" (Herrup 138). A lack of structure in a society that so valued order and rule inevitably led to confusion and argument, and at this time arguments among the gentry could be deadly.

In life as in court, a man had to fight for his station. Increasing competition during the reign of Elizabeth I heated this tension to a boil, and throughout the period and into the following century as the call for knights decreased the violence that could result from this competition began to replace the violence that had once been delivered on the field of battle. Alleys and courts replaced the war fields of France or Jerusalem, and the great swords and heavy weaponry of mounted knights were



discarded in favour of courtly dress and rapier. Still waged in a public arena, the battle for honour was as integral to a gentleman's survival as loyal service during times of war, and both had ramifications in terms of public opinion. The use of violence to defend masculine honour was thus integral to a man's life, yet was an issue of delicacy as it could lead to the downfall of a man and his family. The precariousness of any station that is based on public opinion led to tension among the English gentry and is represented by the men of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night* as they seek to control public opinion by requiring and, when necessary, forcing public deference and respect. The search for control and fumbings at honour that Shakespeare stages are dramatized realities and expose the difficulties faced by the men of the early modern period.

The precariousness of honour required that it be enacted publicly, lest a man lose the opinion of his peers. These performances varied by context, but were always meant to reinforce the nobility, masculinity, and honourable reputation of a gentleman. Performances of honour included the adherence to strict codes of public deference and respect, as a man expected those of lower social standing than he to demonstrate their respect for his status. Men were also called to maintain control, both of themselves and others – excessive emotional displays or a failure to

control his friends and servingmen were indications that a man did not uphold the honour of his ancestry. Gentlemen were also expected to publicly defend their honourable status when insulted, which could result in violent outbursts. Further performances of honour included a man's adherence to his word and aversion to perjury, and – not to be neglected – victory in battle or argument. In order to appear as the ideal courtier, a man followed such strict guidelines regardless of the confusion of overlapping honour codes; no longer a knight yet called to defend his martial history, the courtier was still held to a chivalric ideal. As I made note of in my previous chapter, Sydney Anglo's overview of honour codes in the early modern era characterizes Elizabethan courtiers as possessing "a highly developed concern with appearances, with matters of personal affront and vindication; and, all too often, with the trivial dictates of wounded vanity" (Anglo 3). My reading of Shakespeare's plays, by contrast, reveals that the "trivial dictates" of injured pride had serious consequences in the early modern world; a man who did not uphold his honour at all costs lost it, and a wounded reputation had very real social repercussions.

The secret conversations between Prince Hamlet and his men Horatio and Marcellus about the apparition of the deceased King reveal

one aspect of honour performance that remained commonplace in the early modern period. As Hamlet has no desire for the Ghost's appearances to become public knowledge, he forces his men to swear to their secrecy on the issue. This type of contractual relationship stems from a history of fidelity based on hierarchy and is reflective of the "medieval code of honour [which] was based on loyalty and allegiance to one's lord. ... Not only does Horatio repeatedly refer to Hamlet as his lord, and not only does he keep his word by not divulging Hamlet's secret ... but Horatio also expresses a willingness to die with Hamlet" (Terry 1078). The Prince is clear that he does not demand an oath merely by their word or honour, for this, Marcellus indicates, "We have sworn, my lord, already" (*Hamlet* 1.5.166); rather, Hamlet demands that his men "Consent to swear ... Never to speak of this that you have seen, / Swear by my sword" (172, 174-175). In this pledge, Hamlet reinforces the relationship between his men and himself; not only is Hamlet their Prince and thus deserving of their honesty and oaths, but he is their overlord and thus the oath carries the threat of violence as well as Christian overlays. By swearing on the sword Marcellus and Horatio indicate their willingness to die if they forsake their oaths; the crucifix-shape of Prince Hamlet's hilt indicates that the men are also directing their vows through Hamlet to God, thus forswearing hope

of salvation if they break their oath. The extreme solemnity of this scene is an echo of contemporary Elizabethan politics; to increase the solidarity of the state campaigns were conducted to “justify oath-taking and cement loyalty” while damning perjury (Lenz 3). Thus, as Hamlet calls for his men to swear to him again and again, even the Ghostly apparition intones the importance of the oath from below-stage, ghoulishly instructing Marcellus and Horatio to “Swear” (1.5.168). This is a small aspect of the scene involving the Ghost’s appearance and has little significance to the plot other than ensuring that Hamlet’s secret is kept; however, from a historical vantage it indicates the integration of Christianity and violence in masculine performances of honour and deference.

The control that Hamlet seeks to retain over his men is also required of a man in his own daily life, and he must regulate his own actions with the same rigour with which he demanded the obedience of Horatio and Marcellus. His excessive emotional displays throughout *Hamlet* are commented upon by many characters and are proposed (and feigned) as a sign of madness. Hamlet’s grief for his father’s death is permitted for only a short period, and King Claudius notes that his extended sorrow is “sweet and commendable” (1.2.90) in the prince. However Hamlet’s extended mourning darkens the mood of the Danish

court and for the sake of a festive nation – and a celebratory nation, which covers Claudius's hasty marriage to Queen Gertrude – his grief is something that the new King cannot permit to continue. Claudius calls on Hamlet's sensibility, religion, and gender in order to chide the prince into recovery, calling his present depression "unmanly grief" (97).

Furthermore, King Claudius states that Hamlet's attitude "shows a will most incorrect to heaven, / A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschooled" (98-100). The King challenges Hamlet's upbringing, his piety, and, in reality, his suitability to rule if he cannot recover from loss. All men lose their fathers eventually, and Hamlet's inability to accept this is indicative, Claudius suggests, of effeminacy. Although on one level Claudius must have his stepson appear to accept the union between himself and Hamlet's mother in order to maintain stability at court, it is true that Hamlet must learn to control his emotions if he is to be taken as a strong male. Although anger or lamentation was suitable in moderation and in reaction to circumstance, in men the presentation of "[c]onstant, diffuse anger as opposed to a specific, grounded manifestation of the emotion was linked to madness" (Pollock 586). This brings another layer to the interactions between Claudius and Hamlet; not only is Claudius wary of his newly-acquired status as King,

having seized the occasion for kingship from Prince Hamlet, it is true that "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (3.1.203) and that control of all situations and peoples, including himself, was mandatory for a man of the nobility.

The necessity that a gentleman control the actions of those around him, including his own men and that of the wider court, meant that he always had to be wary of any threats to his dominance and had to act against threats immediately in order to ensure that his status was retained. Proof of such heated interactions over reputation and honour can be found in *Twelfth Night*, where Shakespeare satirically presents a knight's search for recompense to appease his affronted sense of honour. When Viola comes to Lady Olivia's court as Duke Orsino's "man," Cesario, she is initially greeted by Sir Toby Belch as well as Sir Andrew Aguecheek. The quick interaction between the three in Act 3 Scene 1 identifies the underlying competitiveness in the relationships between men of the court, especially the court of a woman. Although Sir Andrew greets Cesario with all of the mannerisms of the court, and the two salute each other respectfully, when Sir Andrew hears Cesario's courtly language toward the Lady Olivia he reveals his true feelings. At Viola's hailing of Lady Olivia: "Most excellent accomplished lady, the heavens rain / odors on

you!" (87-88), Sir Andrew remarks that "That youth's a rare courtier" (89) and recognizes his rival for Lady Olivia's attention. Sir Andrew's asides throughout Cesario's conversation with the Lady make it clear that he perceives a threat in the youth, and the challenge comes through the boy's apparent gentility.

What is interesting about this interplay is that Sir Andrew senses that his dominance is threatened by Cesario's application of a courtly code of masculinity and honour. The youth's obvious sense of discretion and gentleness as he tells Lady Olivia that "My matter hath no voice, lady, but to your own / most pregnant and vouchsafed ear" (91-92) stirs Sir Andrew into a fit of envy without any threat of violence. In the comic atmosphere of *Twelfth Night*, Cesario's disguised gender and his apparent youth permits the boy to act beyond the boundaries of standard masculine behaviour, so his quasi-feminine care for the Lady Olivia goes without comment. However Sir Andrew responds to Viola/Cesario as if she were a male, and although the boy poses no physical threat to Sir Andrew, the knight perceives him as such and sets up Cesario as his competitor, repeating the boy's words to Olivia in an aside: "'Odors,' 'pregnant,' and 'vouch- / safed.' I'll get 'em all three all ready" (93-94) as if in preparation to combat Cesario's courtly language with repetition of the same.

Although initially the two men interact in a friendly manner, once they vie for the attention of the lady of the household their relationship is tinged with competitiveness and jealousy. This scene can easily be translated into a microcosm of the relationships between men at Elizabeth's court; similar surface-friendships were tinged with the tension of competitiveness for a woman's favour. The same threat that Sir Andrew perceives in Cesario was magnified off-stage and resulted in factionalism and competitive showmanship.

As courtiers vied for the attention of Elizabeth – both as a woman and as a Prince – the emulation of one's peers became “a method of advancement: imitate your fellow courtier so completely as to make him obsolete” (Mallin 151). This type of “poetics of success through imitative conduct ... as the nobility enacts an increasingly hostile drama of imitative gesture and stratagem” (Mallin 152) is presented on the Shakespearean stage between Sir Andrew and Viola/Cesario, and as we can see both in historical reality and in drama, competition between males leads almost inevitably to violent outbursts. The manners of the court were useful in the wooing of women and to display finesse and nobility against one's peers; however private quarrels between men could easily be pushed to violence. The fission created by “[t]he pervasive insecurity and edginess



felt by courtiers was due to many factors: the high stakes being played for, the constant challenge and response of interaction at Court, and the many precedents of sudden falls and devious betrayals" (Shephard 740). That this unease spread like a miasma and infected the male population of the court is no surprise, and the false friendships and easily overturned loyalties of the period did little to solidify relationships and strengthen the fragility of any man's position in the hierarchy under Elizabeth.<sup>8</sup>

As Elizabeth I manipulated competition between her courtiers in order to control their behaviour, she could not prevent a history of martial honour from seeping into rivalry at court.<sup>9</sup> Although the men were pressured at court to display courtly honours – the language of servitude

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<sup>8</sup> In his analysis of court factions in the early modern era, Robert Shephard notes that factions "appear to be the dominant form of political organization in this [Elizabethan] era" (721). He relates the rise of court factions to the rapidly altering political environment in England, as the monarch's Court was gradually elevated and came to exert more influence over territorial factions, and access to the monarch became central to political power and advancement Shephard suggests that in the increasingly competitive court, developing friendships and mutual loyalty with other members of the gentry became a method for advancement, as "the friends at the center of a faction were engaged in a continuing process of mutual aid and support" (734). However Shephard notes that equally important to the process was the possibility of defection, as any courtier who had more to gain by switching sides was likely to do so, to avoid the risks of staying loyal (735). Friendships and loyalty were not assured even among the closest allies of the period, heightening the tension and competition between courtiers.

<sup>9</sup> Queen Elizabeth I employed chivalry as a contractual relationship between herself and members of the gentry, which "was an agreement and commodity as much as a style of service; it had incalculable exchange value as a means to favor, priority, and place. In turn, bestowing honor and honors for opulent, ostentatious service, the queen deployed chivalric conventions to maintain the order of the court" (Mallin 155). Although the Queen deployed these conventions as a political tool, she could not control the violent repercussions and internal conflict caused by mixing martial honour codes with more the contemporary courtly codes of honour.

and genteel manners that Sir Andrew exchanges with Cesario – they responded to the competition with their peers in the same manner that their martial forebears had dealt with conflict for centuries, causing “violent imitation in the Elizabethan court [to wreak] havoc upon cultural templates such as honor, nobility, and distinction” (Mallin 152). The disorder caused by manipulated honour codes and dynamic systems of determining dominance among men off-stage results in the confusion and argument among men that Shakespeare comically presents between Sir Andrew and Cesario in *Twelfth Night*. The tension between the two leaves space for further analysis of the imitative – and thus highly performative – courtier in my next chapter, as Sir Andrew attempts to set himself up as Lady Olivia’s suitor and is continually met with the failure of such an endeavour.

Beyond ensuring that a man fosters and guards his reputation while among his peers, it was also necessary that a gentleman reinforce the obedience of his men, and as a father must punish a disobedient child a lord punishes those who disobey him. The oath of secrecy that Hamlet calls for Horatio and Marcellus to swear, with the threat of violence and Christian damnation for perjury, is similar to any oath of allegiance to a lord; men were bound to maintain their word, and insurgence was

punishable both by the lord and by God. This punishment is staged in *Henry V*, as the King finds betrayal amongst some of his men who have plotted to murder him for the French King. Henry calls the traitors before his court, mocking their manhood and honour. Upholding one's oaths was central to a man's nobility, and thus these men, who have "for a few light crowns, lightly conspired / And sworn unto the practices of France" (2.2.96-97) are named by the King as "cruel, / Ingrateful, savage, and inhuman" (101-102). King Henry shames Lord Scroop before the court, not only reducing his nobility but even going so far as to degrade his humanity.

Broken oaths lead to suspicion, duplicity, and evil in the court, and thus King Henry feels unable to trust any of his men after the actions of Lord Scroop and his co-conspirators. The relationship between Henry and his courtiers has become tainted, as a woman might have "with jealousy infected / The sweetness of affiance" (133-134). Just as a woman is bound to honour and be loyal to her husband, so had Henry's men been bound to their King, and the treason that he discovers becomes a permanent stain of dishonour for his entire court. Henry casts this disobedience as another fall of man, after which God was forever suspicious of humanity; he says to all his men that this discovered revolt "hath left a kind of blot / To mark

the full-fraught man and best endued / With some suspicion" (2.2.145-147). The shaming of the traitors and all of Henry's gentry is not the extent of the punishment that must be administered, and with all justice therefore Henry tells his men to take the conspirators, "Arrest them to the answer of the law, / And God acquit them of their practices" (150-151). In their inability to stay true to their rightful King, ordained by God, Lord Scroop and his fellow traitors have offended the realm, their lord and the Lord of Heaven, and therefore must face a traitor's death. Violence was a likely cost for any disobedience, no matter how small, but the price for perjury and treason was death and damnation. As a rightful lord Henry must uphold the standard of his men's behaviour lest he lose his dominance over them; although he is not acting violently out of personal competitiveness, his impugned honour requires that he respond violently.

King Henry has to do more than maintain control over the men of his court; as Prince, he is responsible for the actions and the honour of all Englishmen. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the King was depicted as a father to his people and thus required of them the honour due to a patriarch. However Shakespeare's *Henry V* reveals that the King could call upon more than filial bonds to spur his men to honourable action. Henry also appeals to his army's sense of English pride and rhetorically constructs

England as a nation of noble warriors, "like so many Alexanders" (3.2.20) who will stop at nothing to maintain the honour of their nation and their King. The men of Henry's country are expected to uphold their reputation of violent warfare when the King calls as if this violence were a trait of the country. Thus as Henry's army rides out to war he spurs them: "On, on, you noblest English" (3.2.18), calling out to remind them that they "Dishonor not your mothers" (23). This emotional speech reinforces the notion that the men of a country *are* the country, and that if those men, these English, possess honour, then their country too will be honourable. Henry presents his soldiers as possessing a heritage of greatness, like tempered steel, suggesting that to win against the French comes naturally to the English as if it were preordained. Henry's application of a militaristic honour code, which he uses to increase his men's drive for battle, is an indication of what Elizabeth I also used medieval honour codes for – as a means of control. In *Henry V*, as in the realm of the early modern period, "honour as both motive and standard appears in every setting" (Alvis 10), and Henry manipulates his soldiers' sense of national honour in order to strengthen their ferocity as they head into battle.

The speeches that King Henry V makes to his men before leading them into battle however generate more than an atmosphere of ferocity,

and it would be short-sighted to believe that the monologues surrounding the feast of Saint Crispian are only present to indoctrinate soldiers. The most obvious reason why this cannot be is that Shakespeare did not write these for the purpose of encouraging the true soldiers of Henry V, as these plays were written for an audience well after Henry's reign (which ended in 1422 AD). The "Speeches of Saint Crispin," as they might be referred to, are actually some of many historiographic moments in *Henry V*, instances where Shakespeare's present is imprinted on his presentation of the past and where the past functions to shape "memory, feeling, sense perception, or artefact" (Hendrick 471) in the play's "present." Thus, as Henry prepares his troops to ride to war the scene is imbued with a sense of *advantage* – the English troops, although outnumbered, are presented as far too honourable to be defeated by the French. Such "[i]deas of tactical military advantage naturally dominate a play about war, but the concept accrues economic and affective dimensions too" (Hendrick 471) as the audience members prepare themselves to be immersed in a past already tinged with knowledge of the present, thus increasing the sense of historic pride in the English as they defeat age-old enemies.

Although we cannot surmise a "purpose" for Shakespeare's plays while avoiding arguments of authorial intention, the play can definitely be

said to historicize a certain set of “English” values that are present in the early modern period and functions to create, on some level, a sense of timelessness and magnitude to the structure of English society under Elizabeth I. That is why a reading of nobility and masculinity in a play set more than a century before its publication is still relevant in an early modern reading – because the “noble luster” (*Henry V* 3.2.33) that Henry sees in the eyes of his Englishmen is cast as still present among the valiant English of Elizabeth’s day, and in winning the battle against the French the Britons of Henry’s army definitely prove what they swore to their King that they would, “That [they] are worth [their] breeding” (3.2.30). The violence that this play ties to nobility – the fact that the men gain honour through warfare under King Henry V – is evidence that this type of value system remained present in the early modern period; audience members are called to recognize the standard of masculinity that is being promoted as Henry invites his men to charge into battle and to cry “God for Harry, England, and Saint George” (3.2.37).

The speeches that King Henry gives throughout his military campaign against the Dauphin of France foster the audience’s pride in the masculinity and strength of Henry’s troops at the same time as they tighten the bonds connecting masculinity and honour to violence. Physical

violence, although not explicitly present in most of the play's scenes,<sup>10</sup> is a key element not only of the plot of *Henry V* but also of any attempt to discern characters' roles and station in the play. This is true of early modern life outside the realm of the play, as in fact "violence in early modern London served to reinforce men's social and gender identity" (Shoemaker 191) and offered men a route to reinforce their social position whenever they felt their dominance threatened.

Violent encounters offered early modern men far more than a means of retribution or gain; they actively worked to "demonstrate their courage, strength, and independence by their willingness to fight" (194). For a man to be assured of himself during a violent conflict indicated not only his courage and strength, but also his training, experience, and honour, since "demonstrated ability in skilled pasttimes such as fencing ... not only distinguished courtiers from their country cousins and from wealthy merchants but also distinguished between aristocrats, offering a way to define and assess people's standing in this already-elite social scale" (Low 55). Violence played multifarious roles in early modern society, especially in relation to honour. On the eve of Saint Crispin, in another historiographical moment, the King eloquently reaffirms his faith

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<sup>10</sup> The only confrontation that is included in the play is the interaction between Fluellen and Williams in Scene 4.



in his army by stating that he would not allow a single extra troop to join their cause, for to do so would diminish the honour that they are to gain from the upcoming fight. The vantage of Shakespeare's present on this historical moment is undeniable, as "[i]n stirring rhetoric of imagined community, Henry pictures Agincourt's battle already done, from the future perspective of the victory's anniversary, now familiar to a Shakespearean audience reflecting this community" (Hendrick 472). Not only does Henry's vehement wish not to gain another soldier romantically envisage the glory to come, of which Shakespeare's audiences are already aware, but it also reveals the very commodified manner in which honour could be perceived. Henry is suggesting that honour is the true spoil of war, and that to share it with another is to lose some of the glory.

Adamantly, Henry states that he would deny the help of any extra man: "God's peace, I would not lose so great an honor / As one man more, methinks, would share from me, / For the best hope I have" (34-36). The honour that comes from winning a battle such as this, the last between the French and the English on this campaign, is not something that Henry desires to share with any more men than are already present on those fields. Although this speech does seem counter-intuitive, as it is obvious from the playwright's descriptions of the English army that his ranks

sorely needed reinforcements, Henry's sentimentality surrounding the honour that stands to be won the next day is a reflective of one early modern perception, which sees "honor, not as an intangible quality, but rather as a commodity to be gained or lost" (Marton 24). Henry's speech distinctly commodifies honour, turning it into something far more precious than the spoils of war; indeed, he says, "I am not covetous for gold, / Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost ... But if it be a sin to covet honor, / I am the most offending soul alive" (27-28, 30-31). For England's King, nothing is worth coveting after but honour; more than gold or ornamentation honour is presented by King Henry as all that a man needs to possess in order for him to be decorated. And, without fail, it is to be won through violence on the field of battle.

The sense of honour as something of infinite value that is presented in *Henry V* is reflective of Shakespeare's presentation of an orthodox Aristotelian ideal, which assumes that "honour is something external to a man which may be gained only by virtuously performing appropriate deeds" (Council 27). Thus as Henry's men demonstrate their strength and English honour in battle, they do so in the belief that their actions will yield tangible rewards. The stress on the bonds of knighthood, both vertical – with those of higher and lower ranks – and horizontal, those of

companionship – and the importance and ceremony surrounding these relationships created “an expectation [among the men] that prowess should earn recognition and reward” (Gunn 122) when the battle had been won. This expectancy is evident in the comments of *Henry V*'s Chorus, who reminds the audience that the expectation of spoils and glory in war can occlude danger.<sup>11</sup> However the drive to gain glory and honour is central to an understanding of the practical reasons for an early modern man to go to war; there were true gains to be won.

But what of the other half, the losing team – for as many as there were who won wars, there were similar numbers who lost them, defeated on the field of battle, sometimes even at home. Both *Hamlet* and *Henry V* present “losers”; however the two plays present vastly different methods for accepting defeat. Fortinbras of Norway, son of the old King Fortinbras, enemy to King Hamlet of Denmark, is one of the many defeated and displaced sons presented by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. This play sets Fortinbras, Laertes, and Hamlet in similar situations, in which “similar demands are made on them to accept conventional modes of behaviour, and each loses his father through violent and unnatural means” (Council

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<sup>11</sup> The comments to which I refer are found in the Chorus of Act II, in which the emblem of Expectation is presented (8-11). This emblem is analyzed in my first chapter on pages 39 and 40.

89). Fortinbras is the inheritor of a piece of land which was fought over by his father, the old King Fortinbras and King Hamlet; the two battled years ago, "pricked on by a most emulate pride" (*Hamlet* 1.1.95), and King Hamlet "Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact, / Well ratified by law and heraldry, / Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands / Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror" (98-101). This was a battle waged honourably, in which the defeated surrendered what was owed to the conqueror by contract. Furthermore, acknowledging the honour of Fortinbras Sr., King Hamlet "returned / To the inheritance of Fortinbras" (103-104) a moiety of land suitable for his son, as the two had agreed that the vanquisher would.

The dishonour of this defeat gives Prince Fortinbras great impetus throughout the play to wage war against Denmark in attempt to regain "by strong hand / And terms compulsory, those foresaid lands / So by his father lost" (114-116), and the threat of Norway looms over the outskirts of the play. Although young Fortinbras is intercepted and sent by his uncle, the sitting King, to fight against Poland instead, the Norwegian Prince is never stagnated by the defeat of his father, and his "mettle hot and full" (1.1.108) drives him ever forward. Indeed in the end it can be argued that Fortinbras is the true victor, for as he arrives in

Denmark to a court in its death throes Hamlet names Fortinbras successor to the crown. Prince Fortinbras is never, in a sense, "defeated" by the defeat of his father and the loss of his crown and lands, and seeks honour on the battlefield as in society "regardless of the cause of the war" (Council 89). In spite of his father's overthrow, Fortinbras is still mentioned honourably and as a formidable enemy in the Danish court.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Fortinbras treats those who had defeated him with honour; thus with true nobility he declares that his Norwegian soldiers carry the deceased Prince Hamlet, and bear him like a soldier and a Prince so that "The soldier's music and the rite of war / Speak loudly for him" (5.2.445-446). Fortinbras is one figure in *Hamlet* who has learned to find true honour and whose actions speak for his intentions. Although at first the men of Denmark cast him as an untempered boy "of unimproved mettle hot and full" (1.1.108), challenging their state wrongly and going against the treaty devised by his father and King Hamlet, throughout the play Fortinbras is increasingly admired as a man fulfilling who he is destined to be and doing so for the right reasons; he is never confused about how to

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<sup>12</sup> In Act 1 Scene 1 Horatio believes that the walls of the castle are being armed against a potential invasion by Prince Fortinbras, revealing the threat that King Claudius perceives in the young Prince's determination to find recompense.

earn back what his father had lost and discovers the means to do so while still acting honourably.

Opposite to *Hamlet's* portrayal of the honourable vanquished soldier is Shakespeare's presentation of the defeated French captains in *Henry V*. Lacking the poise and determination instilled in Fortinbras after defeat, the Dauphin can perceive no path back to honour as his force loses to the English army on the Feast of Saint Crispin. Rather than return to the French Court in the light of this defeat, the Dauphin cries out "O perdurable shame! Let's stab ourselves" (4.6.9) and can see no escape from the dishonour caused by his loss. It is not only the Dauphin who feels this way; all his captains bewail their state, with Bourbon exclaiming that he feels "Shame, and eternal shame, nothing but shame! / Let us die" (12-13). Although there are still French living and fighting on the field against the English – as Orleans indicates there are enough of them "yet living in the field / To smother up the English in our throng" (22-23) the captains are too taken with the dishonour of defeat to be able to reorganize and win the battle by sheer numbers.

Bourbon thus exclaims "The devil take order now! I'll go to the throng. / Let life be short, else shame will be too long" (24-25). The French captains throw their lives away rather than outliving their honour, for as

the battle passes their opportunity to gain glory does as well, and just as the English covet honour these courtiers would rather die than face a life without it. However their unwillingness to reunite their force and turn the tide of battle is a further indication of their lack of honour. Fortinbras, too, was defeated yet he drew together a loyal army and fought against his conquerors. Doubtlessly this scene complements the theme of the dishonourable French which runs throughout *Henry V*, yet it also indicates exactly what constituted dishonour on the battlefield. Here as in court “Honour could be easily lost. Defeat was not in itself dishonourable, but broken faith, cowardice in battle, premature surrender ... display of physical fear, suspected betrayal, side-changing, undue attention to profit ... all impugned honour” (Donagan 381). Thus it is not the actual defeat that creates the perdurable shame felt by the French captains, but their actions afterward as they fail to gather themselves and unify their army, and do not actively seek redress for the actions which cause them to feel shamed.

Much of this chapter has explored the control required by and of men in various aristocratic stations and the very rigid structures that guided their actions. It is evident that to stray too far from the path that has been determined as “honourable” – one that is active rather than

passive, powerful, loyal, attentive, and firm (many of those qualities hailed in the romances of the chivalric medieval knights) – is to face severe dishonour, even destruction. The considerable reliance upon traditional knightly traits in order to identify “good” and “honourable” men is argument on its own that medieval honour codes continued to permeate early modern understandings of what it meant to be an honourable man, a good soldier, and a suitable King. The very public requirements of masculinity have important ramifications for scholarly work on the public realm of men in comparison to the more “private” or domestic realm of women – to be masculine was, indeed, a public affair, but it is not a choice that a man could make if he wished to thrive, or even to survive, in early modern England. Public appearance was incredibly important to the endurance of a man and his family in the early modern period and was not an optional aspect of daily living; indeed, it can certainly not be listed as primarily a means of excluding women from political affairs, for it was a woman – Elizabeth – who controlled her courtiers through incredibly calculated re-enactments of the contractual relationship between medieval knights and Princes. In this way, Queen Elizabeth I’s application of “[t]he chivalric mode was an agreement and commodity as much as a style of service; it had incalculable exchange value as a means of favor, priority,



and place. In turn, bestowing honor and honors for opulent, ostentatious service, the queen deployed chivalric conventions to maintain the order of the court" (Mallin 155). As the Queen activated chivalric codes in order to control her courtiers, so the courtiers adopted this mode to differentiate themselves from one another.

Since honour was so central among both medieval and early modern aristocracy, the difficulty lay in discovering the means of gaining honour that suited the lifestyle of the early modern period rather than the crusades of the early medieval ages. Hence the force behind the sixteenth-century quest for honour "is the pragmatic way in which its ethical implications are applied to the details of public and professional life. ... [E]ach member can engage in the effort to perform his appropriate role in the expectation of appropriate honourable rewards both tangible and intangible" (Council 18). The centrality of honour to survival, and the undeniable link between violence, valour, nobility, and honour make it no surprise that these are the main traits of many of Shakespeare's heroes; "[l]ike Castiglione's courtiers, Shakespeare's politically prominent characters identify greatness with glory. For them the equation seems natural first, because they see no need to question the reliability of public opinion and, second, because their careers consist in making their will

prevail over competitors, an endeavour in which the measure of success, and hence of supposed merit, is public approval" (Alvis 10). The inescapably public nature of masculinity, and the necessity of violence between men as a means for differentiation and the creation of hierarchies reveal the incredible importance of control in the life of a man and those around him. A loss of control could mean disaster. The intense need to discover balance and the fearful results of failure make it obvious why many men succumbed to the "prickly honour" that so many warn against, and why, as I explore in my next chapter, men of honour could be so easily misled by those with less-than-honourable intentions.

### Chapter 3

#### A Villain or Craven Else: Violent Responses to Injured Honour

The “touchiness” of those upstarts to honour that William Segar warns about in *The Booke of Honour and Armes* can, on the one hand, be perceived as a ridiculous falsehood: young men possessing such a heightened awareness of their own presentation and perception that they fall victim to over-analysis of small slights or imputations against their reputation and are driven to fight with little or no reason. On the other hand, in the second chapter I explored the importance of this touchiness, as a man certainly *did* need to enact constant vigilance over the public's perception of himself and his family in relation to others at court. To lose face was to lose station, honour, and welcome in the court – to lose face because one was not careful enough with one's actions, words, or challengers could be fatal.

Yet this same touchiness, which was useful to stay secure in one's position, could also lead a man to danger. Such constant edginess left a man easily open to manipulation by others, as popular opinion – or even the opinion of a single dominant male – would be enough to sway a man to action, whether it were to his benefit or not. Shakespeare presents this

error, which could be made so easily, in *Hamlet*, as King Claudius uses his influence both as ruler and as father figure in order to direct Laertes's anger over his father's death toward Prince Hamlet. Claudius attacks Laertes from many sides, and his duplicity is apparent, moving from mention of Hamlet's desire to test Laertes's fighting skill into the deeper question that nettles the youth: "Laertes, was your father dear to you?" (4.7.122). King Claudius challenges Laertes's filial grief – "are you like the painting of sorrow, / A face without a heart?" (123-124) – and rhetorically corners him until Laertes cannot answer the question "what would you undertake / To show yourself indeed your father's son" (140-141) with anything except an oath to "cut his [Hamlet's] throat i' th' church" (143). An analysis of the dialogue indicates how greatly Claudius overwhelms Laertes in this scene, not only in his very clear steering of the conversation but also in sheer volume as the King appeals to Laertes's sense of filial honour and duty in order to convince Laertes that his only means of recovering the honour lost by his father's murder is through violent action against Polonius's slayer – Hamlet. Laertes is left with no options as he is barraged by Claudius: either he will take Hamlet's life, going so far as to throw away his hope of heaven by killing him in sanctuary, or he is an unnatural son with no sense of filial obligation and family honour.

Claudius works to convince Laertes that “Revenge should have no bounds” (4.7.146), manipulating him into conceding that Hamlet must die in order to remove any direct blame from the King. As Laertes agrees to the King’s plan, yielding to the influence of the older and more powerful man, he is in effect reacting in the precise way that the Ghost demands of Hamlet. With the King’s prompting, Laertes is forced into perceiving “that honour demands that he revenge his father, and he is prepared to go to any lengths to execute that revenge” (Council 92).<sup>13</sup> Thus King Claudius influences Laertes into acting against his friend, and his “honourable commitment to revenge his father’s death [leads] him into the most dishonourable of schemes, an irony compounded by his belated awareness that the honour which he so dutifully serves might have misled him” (Council 95). Claudius, the mastermind behind the decay in Denmark, appeals to Laertes’s sense of honour in order to manipulate him

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<sup>13</sup> I use Council’s work here with some apprehension. Although the aspect of his passage that I quote agrees with my research, in his study Council seems to suggest that Laertes is operating under his own direction rather than primarily under the influence of the King. The result, Laertes’s actions, and the difficult situation that Laertes finds himself in are not up for debate; however, Council’s work presents Laertes as strictly obedient to his own inclinations as the son of a murdered man, one who “chooses to pursue his revenge on the grounds that the natural relationship between son and father demands that the son revenge his father’s unnatural death” (Council 93). I wish to take Council’s perception of Laertes’s situation and the resultant drive to act against Prince Hamlet while turning our attention to the King’s manipulation of Laertes’s sense of filial duty and also duty to the King. While Council does note that Laertes’s “single-minded commitment to honourable revenge” (93) permits him to be manipulated by Claudius, I contend that Claudius manipulates Laertes into the single-mindedness with which he pursues revenge for the remainder of the play.

precisely because it is the most easily affronted and thus easily influenced aspect of a man's sense of identity. And in this scene, as elsewhere throughout the play, honour cannot be repaired without violent recompense.

We thus find Hamlet and Laertes driven to battle one another by the dishonourable circumstances in which they find themselves. Laertes has, unwittingly, come to stand in for Claudius as Hamlet faces off to fight the damning influence of the corrupt King, in order to prevent "this canker of our nature [coming] / In further evil" (5.2.79-80). Hamlet is mired in the decay of the State, as the King – the fountainhead of all goodness<sup>14</sup> - is, to the Prince, "He that hath had killed my king and whored my mother, / Popped in between th' election any my hopes, / Thrown out his angle for my proper life" (5.2.72-74) and done all that he could to destroy Hamlet's very existence. At this point Hamlet is prepared to seek any avenue remaining in order to denounce his uncle and in return regain his honour and that of his family. Similarly, Laertes finds himself driven by his conversation with Claudius to see no other path to resolution but to fight Hamlet; for the sake of his deceased father, Laertes

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<sup>14</sup> This is borrowing from a metaphor found in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which the Prince is figured as the fountain that supplies the State with water; a poisoned fountain, therefore, destroys all who drink from it.

swears that he will dare damnation, that “both the worlds I give to negligence, / Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged / Most thoroughly for my father” (4.5.152-154). The push for honourable resolution leaves no option but violence for the two aristocratic men, yet although he has worked up to this point, it is not the endgame of Claudius’s attack on his nephew.

Although Claudius has his man Osric lay down a duel code between Hamlet and Laertes, indicating that three hits are all that are required for the win (5.2.180), Claudius cannot be ensured of his position at court if Hamlet leaves the duel alive; the poisoned rapier and wine goblet are the final reaches of Claudius’s extreme manipulation of his court. The duel scene between Hamlet and Laertes resonates as a highly “ritualized form of violence” (Low 3), and Osric’s organization of the upcoming duel is an indication of how highly codified violence between aristocratic men became. He instructs Hamlet that the duel, like a game of chess or a dance, is to occur “in a dozen / passes between yourself and him [Laertes]” (5.2.178-179). With the consent of both parties, the foils are brought and the two prepare for combat. The solemnity and ceremony surrounding this scene is indicative of the true purpose of the duel. Although it is not Claudius himself who faces Hamlet – to do so would

place himself in danger, too great a risk for the deceptive King – the duel is used here for its ultimate purpose. “The art of fencing, as conceived by the great Renaissance masters, was a skill devised solely for the efficient killing of a man in a private quarrel” (Anglo 11), and thus Claudius orchestrates the duel between Laertes and Hamlet, ensuring Hamlet’s death and the safety of his position as King with the poisoned rapier.

Hamlet attempts to ease the tension between himself and Laertes, asking his pardon as Hamlet recognizes that he has done Laertes wrong. Referring to the events leading to the duel as his “punishment,” Hamlet apologizes from the vantage of insanity. He seems to suggest that he has been caught up in the madness of the situation in Denmark and recognizes that he has hurt others in the same way as he himself has been wronged, deprived of his personal honour through the untimely death of his father at the hand of another. Therefore he speaks to Laertes, saying that what has been done “That might your [Laertes’] nature, honor, and exception / Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness. / Was ‘t Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet” (5.2.245-247). Hamlet denies his role in the death of Polonius, attempting to communicate to Laertes the challenges of the position in which Hamlet found himself. From the moment that Hamlet swore an oath to avenge the Ghost he is, “in effect,



stripped of his power to stop the events [that follow]. He is a man of honor, a noble man, and now that the vow is spoken he has no chance but to carry it through" (Terry 1074). What Hamlet tries to tell Laertes is that he has been trapped, "punished" (243) by his own father's death and the revenge that he has struggled to equate with his internal sense of right and wrong.

However the situation has gone too far; although, as he notes, Laertes is himself "satisfied in nature" (259), his sense of honour cannot be appeased. It is so ingrained in him that violence is the only path to surcease that Laertes "will no reconciliation / Till by some elder masters of known honor / I have a voice and precedent of peace / To keep my name ungor'd" (262-265). In the state of Denmark, as in the early modern period in England, violence often became the only option available for a man to retrieve lost honour. Although Laertes accepts Hamlet's offered love, he cannot renege on the duel unless honour codes can be changed. His suggestion that only an "elder master" of honour codes could persuade him against the duel reflects how codified and entrenched violence had become in any argument over masculinity and honour. This duel between Laertes and Hamlet, which from Laertes's perspective can only be configured as a duel of honour, "embodied a masculine code that

shored up the faltering sense of masculinity among young male aristocrats and members of the gentry" (Low 5), and thus Laertes finds the situation inescapable. He is not in himself capable of forging a new honour code to suit the specific situation that he finds himself in, and thus Laertes strikes Hamlet with the poisoned rapier, although noting "it is almost against my conscience" (5.2.324).

The duel scene in *Hamlet* is particularly interesting when read in conjunction with William Segar's *Booke of Honor and Armes*, which clearly defines the many situations in which a man may find himself seeking redress for injury through a duel. Segar situates himself as one of these "masters of honour" to which Laertes refers, and Segar, like Laertes, confirms that although the cause for any quarrel is injury and reproach, the matter will always be "Iustice and Honor. For loue whereof, we shun no care of minde, losse of wealth, nor aduenture of life" ("To The Reader" A2). Segar explains throughout his text that a man loses honour through individual reproach or personal or familial injury – exactly the position that Laertes finds himself in in the final scenes of *Hamlet*. In his "To The Reader," Segar insists that this type of situation can only be repaired through the taking up of arms, and that although "the Christian lawe willeth men to be of so perfect patience not onlie to indure iniurious

words, but also quietly to suffer" (A2), Segar advises that no man wishing to maintain his honour do so. Rather Segar points to the history of trials by combat, and the long-held belief that "GOD ... would giue victorie to him that justlie aduentured his life, for truth, Honor, and Iustice" (A2). In relation to Laertes's situation, then, Segar's text advises that the men continue with their quarrel in order to achieve an honourable end, in the belief that God recognizes the ancient justice of trial by combat, and that He would not permit a faultless man to lose the battle.

Managing to walk the fine line between more contemporary Christian values and early medieval perceptions of combat, *The Booke of Honor and Armes* strengthens Laertes's position as the righteous and honourable response of a man who has lost his father to violence. That Shakespeare employs this type of traditional thinking in *Hamlet* is evident: through the play's medieval setting; Horatio's positioning of himself as "more antique Roman than a Dane" (5.2.374), a statement of loyalty upon Hamlet's death; and the ubiquitous classical allusions throughout the text. All these elements function to situate the audience within a liminal, historical setting into which "Shakespeare introduces tension of 'friction and conflict' among the various and 'competing' ways in which honor is authorized" (Terry 1081) by intersecting old and new discourses of honour

and justice. That this conflict leads inevitably to a duel is the point of my argument, as the ancient masters of honour and the manipulations of a corrupt King both leave no leeway on the subject of conflict resolution between two young aristocrats. That the duel scene is featured as the climax of *Hamlet* relates, I believe, to Low's finding that the duel is, to the early modern perception, inevitably tied to the history of judicial duels and the joust, and therefore chivalry. Within this medieval Danish court, as in the early modern period, the duel between Hamlet and Laertes is (ignoring Claudius's orchestrations and Laertes's less-than-honourable participation in the King's plot) beyond reproach; "[t]he cultural connotations of the duel were structured by the aristocratic perception of the heroic ideal, deriving from jousts, from late medieval romances, and from classical antecedents" (Low 5). Thus as Fortinbras comes upon the slain court, he bears Hamlet as a hero off the stage, and has the guns and his men speak loudly and proudly of the Prince, "For he was likely ... / To have proved most royal" (5.2.443-444), and is deserving, in this context, of all the honour of the slain hero.

The complex shifts in the discourses of honour presented in *Hamlet*, from the medieval values of courage and loyalty based on the vassal system to those later values, "which may be called either 'aristocratic' or

'courtly'" and included courtliness, generosity, and frankness, those "considered a sign of aristocratic breeding and virtue" (Boulton 8-9), are indications of the interplay of old and new values that was part of early modern living for men of the gentry. Although militaristic values were no longer required on the basis of knighthood, men had to remain aware of the older codes in order to be perceived as honourable, which was the ultimate goal and worthy of all effort required. As many scholars have noted, *Hamlet* "subtly comments on the Elizabethan political scene" (Keller 55) and is reflective of and responsive to the society in which the play was written and performed. *Hamlet* presents a sombre reality, a glimpse of the true dangers that could result from the pursuit of honour; on the one hand, as in *Henry V*, "chivalry might lead the nation into a series of gung-ho foreign adventures" (Gunn 125), yet on the other hand an adherence to medieval discourses of honour could, quite realistically, lead a man to his death and destroy a family.

On a lighter side, we see quite a different performance of honour discourses in *Twelfth Night*, this time through the lens of satire. Here we are presented with two pretenders to masculine honour, Cesario/Viola being one and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the primed gull – one whom Anglo might refer to as a man concerned with "trivial vanities" – the

other. Both have come in order to woo the Lady Olivia, both with their own purposes, yet it is not the knight who captures the title of true courtier. Sir Andrew is in a uniquely disadvantaged situation throughout the entire play; both the audience and the other characters are quite aware that he has no chance of winning Lady Olivia (and thus he is continually dishonoured both on- and off-stage), yet he remains oblivious to her dislike. Sir Toby ensures this as, “[i]n order to have a constant source of ready money to sponge on, Sir Toby Belch keeps the simple Sir Andrew Aguecheek near him by priming him with ridiculous hopes of one day winning the hand of Sir Toby’s niece, Olivia” (Curry 122), yet in the end Sir Andrew has no choice but to concede defeat and dishonour.

Even at the start of the play Sir Andrew is demeaned, as Maria, Lady Olivia’s woman, complains about the knight after he is presented in court by Lady Olivia’s uncle, Sir Toby Belch. Maria and Sir Toby sit together and run over the qualifications of Sir Andrew, the “foolish / knight that you [Sir Toby] brought in one night here to be her [Lady Olivia’s] / wooer” (*Twelfth Night* 1.3.15-17). Sir Toby argues with Maria’s analysis; to him it appears that Sir Andrew possesses all the qualities required of a gentleman. Not only is he “as tall a man as any ‘s in Illyria” (20), but Sir Andrew also collects “three thousand ducats a year” (22).

Furthermore, Sir Andrew appears to be well-trained in courtly arts; according to Sir Toby, he “plays o’ the’ viol-de- / gamboys, and speaks three or four languages word / for word without book, and hath all the good gifts of / nature” (25-28). Not only is the knight wealthy and tall, but also he is good-looking and educated – Sir Toby does not see what else any woman would desire. Yet Maria is not swayed by Sir Andrew’s appearance and qualifications. Calling him “almost natural” (29), idiotic, she insists that Sir Andrew is more than a fool, he is “a great quarreler, and, but that / he hath the gift of a coward to allay the gust he hath / in quarrelling” (30-32) he would lose the fights and quickly find a grave. What Maria points to is Sir Andrew’s excessive concern with his status and the type of “prickly honour” that William Segar speaks negatively of in *The Booke of Honor and Armes*. That Sir Andrew is a realistic representation of some courtiers of the period is undeniable; Segar himself warns against this type, the “vulgar sort (and many right noble also)” who are ignorant of the right causes for quarrel (“To The Reader” A2) and, as Maria claims Sir Andrew does, seek out any purpose to fight. This, according to Segar, is the most shameful and dishonourable type of man, “for no man wanteth power to refraine a wicked action” (“Second Booke”

21), and control and temperance are incredibly important aspects of gentility and honour.

This scene with Sir Andrew satirizes the drive among members of the gentry for unnecessary duels and false knights without any of the seriousness of the duelling that occurs in *Henry V* or *Hamlet*. Not only does Shakespeare's satire surrounding the duel in *Twelfth Night* reveal the different perceptions of honour duels, as some perceived them to be necessary and righteous while others believed them to be proof of the degradation of ancient honour codes, but it also identifies the usefulness of genre as employed by Shakespeare. In *Hamlet*, we see the utmost solemnity surrounding the duel, and the consideration that is given before violent action – Hamlet carefully considers his options prior to violence, and even in the end seeks to appease Laertes. On the other hand, *Twelfth Night* presents a knight who jumps to violence with little consideration and is easily influenced by public opinion, one who as a result is labelled as a cowardly idiot rather than a hero. What is at play here is more than mere comedy; the opposing duel scenes in *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night* identify the turbulence of an early modern understanding of masculine honour, as none of the men are free from reproach. As we will see in my upcoming section on *Henry V*, what comes across most strongly when



contrasting fight scenes is that the two Princes – Henry V and Hamlet – reflect on-stage about the weight of their actions, and their decision process is clear.<sup>15</sup> Sir Andrew, however, leaps to his decision to fight Cesario after being egged on by Sir Toby Belch, and his conscience has little involvement. What is interesting to consider in this comparison is that in early modern England, “[o]ne of the most complex changes in the code of honor was a move from an external code to an internalized concept of what it is to be an honourable man. Men were no longer considered honourable simply by right of birth. ... Rather, honor was becoming, by the seventeenth century, a matter of conscience; honourable men needed to seek, in every situation, to behave in such a way as to please both their state and their God” (Terry 1071). That Sir Andrew does not carefully consider the ramifications of a potential duel prior to making the decision to fight Cesario heavily reinforces the presentation of the knight as “almost natural” – not only is he easily swayed by the opinions of others and offended when the Lady Olivia is more drawn to a (disguised) woman than he, but he takes little time to consider the weight of his actions and disregards the honour that is due to his status as knight.

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<sup>15</sup> In “battle scenes,” I am referring to more than the duel scene in *Hamlet* and the false duel in *Henry V* but also the scenes prior to battle in *Henry V* in which the King contemplates the upcoming events with great unease.

Sir Andrew is presented as a man quick to draw but without a sense of the honourable purpose of the duel.

Sir Andrew's decision to fight Cesario does not come to him at once, but takes prompting on the part of Sir Toby and Fabian in Act 3 Scene 2. The two men manipulate Sir Andrew's offended sense of honour in order to drive the foolish knight to duel after Lady Olivia has paid attention to Cesario over Sir Andrew in the orchard. This lack of regard irritates the touchy knight, and he decides to leave Olivia's court rather than face further dishonours. Sir Toby and Fabian, however, turn the situation on its head and encourage Sir Andrew to perceive Lady Olivia's actions as "a great argument of love in her toward / you" (3.2.10-11). They gull the knight into believing that Olivia is attempting to frustrate his love for her and raise the temperature of his blood, "to exasperate you, to awake your dormouse / valor, to put fire in your heart and brimstone in / your liver" (18-20). This flow of masculine humors, as the two men propose, is meant to drive Sir Andrew into a choleric temper in which he will be ignited to valour and prowess. In this case, Toby and Fabian continue, Sir Andrew "should have then accosted her, and / you should have banged the youth into dumbness" (20-21). The men insist that Lady Olivia meant to encourage Sir Andrew into a display of masculine

strength, in which he would have taken control of her and fought Cesario for her hand – a true performance of honour. This, of course, is not what Lady Olivia desires; Sir Andrew is a fool and he is being tricked here, yet the two men comically play on Sir Andrew's penchant for argument and encourage him to see that he must act rapidly in order to redeem favour with Olivia.

Sir Andrew's sense of wounded honour, which comes across as an indication of his foolishness, satirizes older orders of chivalry and knighthood. In the medieval era and continuing into the early modern period in England, "[n]obility of birth and martial dedication were twinned key elements in the aristocratic ethic of chivalry, of knighthood as the dominant estate in the secular world" (Keen 12). Thus as a nobleman, Sir Andrew Aguecheek is driven to respond to Cesario as a lesser challenger for Lady Olivia's favours. Initially he feels slighted by her lack of attention, and thus momentarily sets his mind to leaving Olivia's court; however during his discussion with Sir Toby Belch and Fabian he is convinced that the young courtier is the cause of his injury, and Sir Andrew must therefore seek revenge against Cesario in order to uphold his position of dominance – earned first by aristocratic blood and soon through violence – in the presence of the Lady Olivia. He decides that he

will woo Olivia with a display of valour and is encouraged to send Sir Toby with a challenge to fight the Count's youth, and to "Hurt him in eleven places" (3.2.34). If Sir Andrew takes the violent path rather than peacefully leaving, Sir Toby explains to the knight, "My niece shall / take note of it, and assure thyself, there is no / love-broker in the world can more prevail in man's / commendation with woman than report of valor" (35-37). This scene strongly evidences the extremely performative nature of violence in any situation involving honour; here, Sir Andrew decides to fight Cesario in order to elicit a public response, hoping for a favourable reaction by Olivia. He does not fight to defend himself nor for revenge, but desires to "bang the youth" (21) in order to reinforce his superior nature. Matters of hierarchy are typical causes for duels in the early modern period; indeed the most probable cause for a private fight is "a dispute over social precedence" (Low 2), so although Sir Toby and Fabian apparently gull Sir Andrew into this dispute, his cause is not irregular and the particulars of the duel are in compliance with duel standards from the period. The comedy present in these scenes is for a man who is pricked to fight easily and does so with little reflection or conscience as he utilizes the duello code, revealing the easy manipulation of those with such a high sense of personal pride.

With Fabian's added insistence that there is no way to win the love of Olivia other than through this fight, Sir Andrew sets himself on a course for battle. After ascertaining that Sir Toby will carry his challenge to Cesario, the knight receives further prompting on the quality of the letter that must be sent. With ridicule that goes unnoticed by Sir Andrew, Sir Toby prompts him to write the note "in a martial hand. Be curst and / brief" (3.2.40-41). Derisively Sir Toby also encourages that Sir Andrew "Taunt him [Cesario] with the license of / ink ... [with] as many lies as will lie in thy sheet / of paper" (41-43). That Sir Andrew makes no note of the irregularities in the advice he receives only cements his status as a gull, yet he is no fool when it comes to the stages of the duel.

In *Twelfth Night* as in *The Booke of Honor and Armes*, the causes and responses required for an honourable duel are incredibly formulaic and heavily ritualized. Instructing his reader how to recognize the cause for and initiate a duel, Segar details that if a man "seeketh my slaunder, hereby he offereth me Iniurie, and the Burthen he laieth vpon me, is, for that I stand bound to repulse ... and consequentlie I am forced to answer, *He lieth*, where by I am disburthened & lay the burthen on him ... and binde him vnto the prooffe and maintaining of his words, which is to mainteine and be a Challenger" ("Second Booke 19). Segar dedicates his

work to instructing men on the proper construction of challenges and honourable resolutions, and in reading Sir Andrew's challenge to Cesario it is apparent that, at least to some degree, this instruction influenced men and their understanding of a proper and honourable duel. When Sir Andrew returns to Sir Toby and Fabian and produces the challenge that he means to have presented to Cesario, the knight attempts to reinforce its strength and fiery nature, saying that "there's vinegar and pepper in 't" (153), but again the note becomes farcical as Fabian calls it "saucy" (154) rather than strong. As Sir Toby reads the note aloud, Sir Andrew's foolishness is emphasized yet the men continue to encourage his valour. Calling Cesario a "scurvy fellow" (157) and "a rogue and a villain" (170), the letter makes Sir Andrew into little more than a foolish bully, yet Fabian calls it "Good, and valiant" (157), and Sir Andrew does not notice as Fabian states that the challenge is "Very brief, and to exceeding good sense – less" (166).

Even though Sir Andrew is again presented as a fool, his challenge as a response to Cesario's actions follows the outline provided by Segar in *The Booke of Honor and Armes*.<sup>16</sup> Even in satire, Shakespeare recognizes the rigid construction of honour duels and reflects that, as a member of the

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<sup>16</sup> Although to say so probably has Sir William Segar turning in his grave

gentry, Sir Andrew would definitely have followed these codes regardless of his personal incapability of perceiving his own humiliation as a result. In regards to honour combats, each duel consists of the same elements: “a challenge, oral or written; a challenger; a defendant; and a combat” (Low 11). Thus Sir Andrew identifies himself as the challenger in response to the injury against him caused by Cesario’s intrusion on his plan to woo Lady Olivia. Sir Andrew then devises a written challenge which charges the boy with the insult and places him as the defendant, and outlines the occasion and location for the fight. Although, as Low acknowledges, “[t]he staged duel did not mirror the duel in society unproblematically” (9), Shakespeare closely follows the guidelines of the Renaissance masters as *Twelfth Night* comes to a climax, even as his characters botch its seriousness.

It is plain to the audience that Sir Toby and Fabian mock Sir Andrew and his idiocy, yet the knight’s determination to fight Cesario stems from the issue of reputation, one that is held so dear in the hearts of early modern noblemen. The necessity of reinforcing his station is plain, for a man who acted in a manner that did not benefit his station was publicly, and sometimes permanently, degraded. Yet this seriousness is of no import here, and Shakespeare’s presentation of the courtier makes it

plain that his actions are to be perceived as foolish. Sir Toby directs Sir Andrew to prepare for the fight and, once the challenge is delivered and Cesario spotted, to draw, "and as thou draw'st, swear / horrible, for it comes to pass off that a terrible oath, / with a swaggering accent sharply twanged off, / gives manhood more approbation than ever proof itself / would have earned him" (185-189). The swagger and bravado that Sir Toby recommends the knight enact further emphasize the performativity of the forthcoming duel, as he hopes to make Sir Andrew appear fierce and powerful before Cesario. Yet it is still important to recognize that in the preparation of a duel the appearance of martiality, true or false, could make the man and sway public opinion in his favour.

Although Sir Toby and Fabian work to incite Sir Andrew to duel, it is obvious that the two do not truly support his actions. They are, however, eager to continue spending the knight's money and thus pretend to work in his best interests, enjoying playing Sir Andrew as a fool. Having complimented Sir Andrew on the strength and valour of his challenge, stating that "If this letter move him [Cesario] not, his legs cannot" (178), Sir Toby reinforces the knight's plan to incite Cesario to battle. This challenge, as Sir Toby indicates, calls the Duke's servant out for his behaviour, and therefore if he has any sense of honour at all



Cesario will respond affirmatively to the challenge. However, after Sir Andrew has left Sir Toby mentions his true thoughts to Maria and Fabian. Sir Toby recognizes that Cesario, unlike Sir Andrew, does appear to be a true gentleman – as far as he can tell, “the behaviour / of the young gentleman gives him out to be of good / capacity and breeding” (191-193). Although initially Sir Toby had cited Sir Andrew’s wealth, skills, and looks as the foundations for recognition as a gentleman, he points to Cesario’s actions as indication of good breeding over the foolishness that Sir Andrew demonstrates. As it turns out, although both Viola and Sir Andrew are attempting to perform versions of masculinity, it is Viola/Cesario’s performance that the others respond to with respect. This irony not only heightens the comedy of *Twelfth Night*, but it also functions to emasculate Sir Andrew even further, as a female ousts him as the preferred or dominant male.<sup>17</sup>

This recognition is evident when Sir Toby decides that he will not deliver Sir Andrew’s challenge to Cesario. Having determined that the boy must be of good breeding, Sir Toby recognizes that Sir Andrew’s letter, “being so excellently ignorant, will breed / no terror in the youth”

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<sup>17</sup> Another point that works against Sir Andrew is that although he believes his challenge is righteous even he is aware that it is a youth, not an adult male, whom he challenges. To do so should have been below him as a knight; this merely adds to the dishonor and the comedy of the situation.

(195-196). Not only is the letter too rude to present to a true gentleman, but Sir Toby recognizes that any nobleman would find the challenge ridiculous and undeserving of his attention. As it is Sir Toby's intention to stir the two men into a duel for his amusement, he cannot risk Cesario finding that the challenge "comes from a / clodpoll" (196-197). Rather, Sir Toby will instead deliver the challenge orally, setting "upon Aguecheek [such] a notable / report of valor" (198-199) that Cesario will be unable to disregard the challenge and maintain his masculinity. The draw of an honourable fight and the opportunity to demonstrate oneself as the mightier warrior will be, in Sir Toby's opinion, too great to miss; thus he relies on the two men's desire to gain honour through violence as a means to bring the duel to a climax, "that they will kill one / another by the look, like cockatrices" (202-203). That Sir Toby compares the two men to fighting basilisks plays on the presentation of young men as deadly and quick to strike, often engaging in battle without proper consideration and pause. It is also revelatory of the fact that usually the original causes for a duel became lost in the action and excitement, as the adrenaline of battle overtakes the duellists. Oftentimes by the time the battle had truly begun, the "[c]ombatants intended not to prove another man wrong but to prove themselves the 'better' man – a broadly ambiguous concept that involved

honesty, rank, and fencing skill. Neither righteousness nor fact was of much concern to the duellist; *what mattered was public opinion*" (Low 17, emphasis mine). Hence Sir Toby knows that to push the men to battle he need do little more than exaggerate their prowess, until the two are unable to focus on anything but the duel.

Yet eagerness to fight is not what Sir Toby finds when he confronts Cesario. Expecting to drive the youth into a frenzy as he tells the boy of his "interceptor, full of despite, bloody as / the hunter" (3.4.231-232) who awaits Cesario in the orchard, Sir Toby comically finds himself faced with a reaction more suited to a woman. The opposite of Sir Andrew, who could be incited to fight by the mere mention of a duel, Viola/Cesario assures Lady Olivia's uncle that she has caused no man any insult or injury, and thus is not prepared to fight anyone. The irregularity of such a response by a man is evidenced by the accounts of London duels and homicides during the period, in which "violence was prompted by perceived threats to male honour. Men, as the superior gender, were expected to confirm their status by physically defending their integrity and reputation against all challenges" (Shoemaker 194). Cesario's effeminate response, as she asks Fabian to make peace and states that she "had rather go with Sir Priest than Sir Knight" (3.4.282) is completely

unexpected in a male courtier. Generally, in fact, it is unexpected throughout Shakespeare's plays, and gives clues to Cesario's hidden gender: according to one analysis of his works, the philosophy "that we now refer to as pacifism is espoused by not a single admirable character in Shakespeare" (Marx 60), and its appearance here confounds the plot cooked up by Sir Toby Belch.

Aside from complicating Sir Andrew's lust for battle, as Sir Toby exaggerates the knight's chivalric and courtly qualities to Cesario the scene reveals what qualities the two recognize as those belonging to a strong, honourable warrior. In his farcical description of Sir Andrew, Sir Toby says that the man "is a knight dubbed with unhatched rapier and / on carpet consideration, but he is a devil in private / brawl. Souls and bodies hath he divorced three, and / his incensement at this moment is so implacable / that satisfaction can be none but by pangs of death" (243-247). Sir Andrew is presented as a true gentleman, obviously one of breeding, who is courtly when called upon yet deadly in a fight, possessing the prowess of his forebears and the manners of his peers. It is this statement that drives Cesario to fear the forthcoming duel, the reaction that Sir Toby wished for, yet does not stir Cesario to duel as anticipated.

Part of Sir Andrew's positioning in the play as a gull relates to his easy manipulation by the less-than-reputable characters, Fabian and Sir Toby Belch. Neither of the two is what could be referred to as honourable, both apparently are scheming drunks and are (outside of Sir Andrew's perception) not dominant male figures in the court of Lady Olivia; they have very little, if any, sway in how the lady manages her affairs. In comparison to Laertes's misleading by King Claudius in *Hamlet*, Sir Andrew reflects a very different reading of early modern honour codes. A contrast between the two plays makes it apparent that *Twelfth Night* takes a very satirical view of aristocratic honour and harkens more to Sir Francis Bacon's assessment of the duelling courtier than to Sir William Segar's analysis of the honourable duellist. In Bacon's *Charge... Touching the Duel* he derides the duel as a ridiculous display, a "false disguise or puppetry of honor" (Bacon 34) that has no place among the English elite. Indeed throughout Bacon's text he "compares honor to a puppet show – a performance manipulated by a showman. ... Throughout the 'Charge,' Bacon attempts to construct the combat as both low and foreign" (Low 100). Part of this stance relates to Bacon's positioning of himself as a staunch humanist, yet his analysis of the easy malleability of self-titled "honourable" men comes strikingly close to my analysis of both Laertes

and Sir Andrew. That these two plays portray the dangers of overlapping honour codes differently – in one, the man is merely shamed and in the other all are killed – relates distinctly to genre yet also evidences competing understandings of honour and the importance of honour as a way of life in the early modern period.

The satire surrounding this staged duel works to interpret and perhaps to alter the cultural perception of duels and those that guide them. One conclusion that can be reached through an analysis of these scenes of *Twelfth Night*, 3.2 and 3.4, is mentioned by Anglo in his analysis of early modern honour. Anglo suggests that “it is in this duelling ethic and duelling craze that we see the most dramatic transformation of chivalry in the Renaissance: with courage, honour and individual deeds of arms metamorphosed into bullying, dishonour, and psychopathological egoism” (12). Anglo’s disdain for Elizabethan honour codes is evident; in fact, it is questionable whether or not he finds any true honour to be present at all. Yet he is only focusing on a single type of honour performances, the false swaggering and bravado that we see epitomized in Sir Andrew. His (Anglo’s) is a very surface view of the matter of transitioning honour codes – of course in Sir Andrew we see the courtier that William Segar’s *Booke of Honor and Armes* warns against, he that leaps

to the fight without proper cause or argument – but the suggestion that early modern chivalry was a bastardization of medieval honour codes does not allow for a recognition of the dynamic nature of social discourses. The early modern period did not see a complete replacement of courage by cowardice, nor honour by dishonour, but was a site for an alteration in the way that these social discourses were thought about and enacted. Although Sir Andrew certainly does portray the foolish and cowardly courtier in this play, it was a sense of honour that compelled him to respond to Lady Olivia's disfavour in the orchard. Although initially he did not desire conflict, it was a sense of honour – not dishonour – that led him to that conclusion. Although Sir Andrew cannot be upheld as the epitome for early modern honour, his character cannot be held as evidence for an endemic social system of dishonour.

Finally, I wish to analyze the ongoing occasion of personal arguments found in *Henry V* and the influence of honour discourses on the violence present throughout much of the play. After receiving the Dauphin's gift of the tennis balls and the comments that the French Prince directs toward his youthful misdemeanours, King Henry V is sent into such a fit of rage that he cannot think of recompense without violence. The Dauphin has not only offended the King on a personal level but, through

him, insults all of England. This puts King Henry in a very precarious position, in which aggression toward France is the only way for him to retain the honour of his person and country. The Dauphin's insult cancels out any doubt that Henry had about "France being ours" (1.2.232), and as Henry has already sworn to "break it [France] all to pieces" (233) before his court, the King is bound to respond to the Dauphin with aggression in order to save face. His response is indicative of his character; as King and as an individual, "[i]t is only natural that Henry, the man who covets honor, should keep his oaths. A Renaissance commonplace ... is that a man's word is the foundation of his principles of honor" (Lenz 1), and thus Henry angrily takes up the Dauphin's inference that he is more suited to tennis games than to ruling and warfare and promises to match "our rackets to these balls" (1.2.269) in the upcoming war. Furthermore, Henry swears that this will be no friendly volley; the insult of France will be met with great aggression and, maintaining the tennis metaphor, Henry tells the French ambassadors that he means to "strike his [the Dauphin's] father's crown into the hazard / Tell him he hath made a match with such a wrangler / That all the courts of France will be disturbed / With chases" (271-275). Although initially Henry had considered the weight of a decision to war with France, questioning the



Bishops on their surety of his right to rule there, in the face of the Dauphin's insult he does not show any tentativeness and sets his sight on war with France.

This strength in rulership and determination is reflective of war policy in Shakespeare's contemporary period; although Elizabeth avoided war for humanitarian and economic reasons, "she didn't hesitate to take a militarist posture to confront the aggressive conduct of foreign rivals or strengthen her standing with her subjects" (Marx 63). So although Henry wavers when he is alone throughout the play, the insult to his country and person by the French is met with great aggression, and he swears to violent recompense before his court in order to avoid any damage done to his honour or that of his nation. The metaphor of the tennis match is maintained throughout Henry's speech to his court and the French ambassadors, and is jointed with more traditional metaphors about the nobility of the English princes to identify the unwavering strength and honour of Henry V. Assuring the ambassadors that in France he will "rise there with so full a glory / That I will dazzle all the eyes of France" (1.2.287-288), Henry references the traditional image of the English kings as the sun, indicating that he will come to rule over the French with all the power and the righteousness of his status as a Christian king, appointed

by God to rule from his birth. Furthermore, Henry swears that he will turn the Dauphin's "balls to gun-stones, and his soul / Shall stand sore charged for the wasteful vengeance" (291-292). Henry means to take these tennis balls and send them back as a volley of arms, and he charges the Dauphin with the responsibility for the deaths that will surely follow.

That King Henry is incensed by the Dauphin's insult is evident. To be mocked and reminded of past transgressions, as the Dauphin "comes o'er us with our wilder days" (1.2.276) before Henry's entire court, is an injury that must seek recompense. Thus the King makes an oath, "To venge me as I may and to put forth / My rightful hand in a well-hallowed cause" (302-303) in seeking the crown of France, and he is honour-bound to follow that promise through. No amount of personal hesitation can stop King Henry after this exchange; far more than a personal argument, this war has become an oath to his country, "a solemn, formal calling upon God to witness the truth of what one says" (Lenz 3), and by his position as an honourable, Christian King Henry cannot withdraw. And indeed he does not, holding true to his promise and defeating the French with such ferocity that the Queen regards him as having borne against the French "The fatal balls of murdering basilisks" (5.2.17), which acted to destroy the

Dauphin's army and defeat them righteously, restoring any honour that Henry lost through the initial insult.

The final quarrel that I wish to examine in *Henry V* comes between the disguised King and Williams, a Captain of his army, while they are on campaign. Cloaked and unrecognized, Henry insists to his Captain that the King would never be ransomed and give up his quarrel, and that if he did so Henry would "never trust his word after" (4.1.202-203), a suggestion that Williams scoffs at, for no poor man's "private displeasure can do against a monarch" (205-206). Finding himself labelled as a fool, Henry's ire is sparked and he responds with anger toward Williams, a response that the soldier accepts and recognizes, suggesting "it be a quarrel between us, if you live" (213). The two agree to quarrel at a later date, and to recognize one another they exchange gloves. That they do so is presented sarcastically, yet Henry's anger at Captain Williams' rebuke is provoked by an affronted sense of personal honour; to doubt a man as Williams has done to his disguised King "is to throw down the gage, literally, in challenge" (Lenz 1). That they follow through with this challenge is the formulaic response to injury. Determining that each will wear the other's glove, the symbol of their challenge, in his caps, the two swear to the quarrel and separate.

After the battle, the no-longer-disguised King happens upon Williams with his glove in his hat. Calling the soldier to him, Henry questions the man on why he wears the glove and with whom he means to quarrel, maintaining the ruse that he knows nothing of the challenge. Fluellen, another captain present when Henry met Williams in the night, insists to the King that regardless what station Williams's challenger holds, gentleman or devil, "it is necessary, look your Grace, that he keep his vow and his oath. If he be perjured, see you now, his reputation is as arrant as a villain" (4.7.145-148.). Fluellen's awareness of and insistence on the proper code for personal challenges and his note that perjury is the ultimate dishonour are reflective of the heightened chivalric fashion in the early modern period, "[t]he delight in personal combat, and in acquiring the special skills it demanded ... [which] gained increasing status from the late fifteenth century onwards" (Anglo 9). His adherence to the punctilio of individual combat marks Fluellen's awareness of aristocratic duello codes, and the resonances that these codes had on members of lower classes "as princes set an example which their courtiers were only too eager to follow" (Anglo 9) and which were echoed down the ranks to the lowest soldiers. Although members of the lower classes were informed by different discourses than the upper class, the desire to emulate the gentry

influenced perceptions of personal quarrels, and thus Fluellen maintains that he who does not respond to the challenge he has sworn to "is a craven and a villain" (4.7. 140).

To King Henry, however, this quarrel lacks the ceremony and seriousness which Fluellen and Williams attach to it, and thus he places the gage in Fluellen's cap and has him meet his companion under the belief that the challenger to the glove is actually an enemy of England. The disdain with which King Henry seems to treat his soldiers' sense of honour in these playful scenes reflects the ability of the upper classes to stir the affairs of commoners with little thought, yet for Fluellen the chance to serve the King in any matter is of great import. The captain gives his word to the King that he will fight any who challenge him, and thus on the strength of his oath he quarrels with Williams and charges his friend as a traitor. Fluellen, unknowingly caught in the King's jest, maintains his word as "[t]he reliability of the given word was ... part of civilian honour. ... The integrity of his 'faith' was central to a soldier's, as to a gentleman's, sense of himself as honourable" (Donagan 376).

Presenting Williams to the King as "a villain and a traitor, that, / look your Grace, has struck the glove" (4.8.26-27), Fluellen has kept his oath to the King. As all unfolds and King Henry allows that it was he whom Williams

charged that night, returning the glove to Williams filled with crowns and instructing him to "Keep it, fellow, / And wear it for an honor in thy cap" (58-59), the King reverses this seemingly endless quarrel into an exchange of honour and financial reward, a visible sign of the King's favour. In this comical scene, the playwright explores various levels of honour codes and the interaction between upper and lower classes in relation to quarrels and conflict. Although Henry seems to demean the honour of his soldiers, in the end he recognizes the loyalty of the two men who were willing to fight one another on the basis of the King's word although they had been companions on campaign and gives them his favour.

Yet again in these quarrel scenes we see men who are eager for honour becoming easily manipulated by a dominant male. While the immediate agreement that Fluellen gives to any request of the King is expected in this type of class-structured relationship, it is important to note that Fluellen challenges his friend on the basis of the King's honour, just as Laertes meets the challenge of his friend based on the word of his King. Honour does, indeed, seem to make puppets of men. Laertes becomes the hand of Claudius in the battle with Hamlet, Hamlet is made slave to the promise of vengeance that he gives the Ghost, Sir Andrew Aguecheek is tricked into challenging Cesario when he had initially

desired to leave Olivia's court, and Henry manipulates his captains to battle over a quarrel that was begun by neither of them. In the light of this, it comes as no surprise that Segar, Bacon, and Castiglione, among countless other authors who wrote to instruct the gentry, went to great lengths in their attempts to rigidly structure a courtier's life that he might not be lead astray.

And it is within this rigidity, within the tension, friction and conflict of an early modern man's life, that the problem lay: for who, within such confines, could find freedom, solidity, or assurance? This very structure cast discord amongst the nobility, and faced with shifting discourses of what it meant to be an honourable man and how to act in order to perform nobility, it is no wonder that "most social historians more broadly attribute the popularity of the duel of honor to the instability of the social institution of aristocracy. ... When the aristocracy ceased to be defined as a military elite, male aristocrats lost the warlike tradition that had structured their way of proving themselves, their way of serving their sovereign, and their way of employing their time" (Low 3), leaving the men with a vacuum in their sense of identity that was filled with courtesy texts, ancient and medieval pedagogy, and the influence of other males until the only route that seemed to offer a likely path toward

public honour and nobility became personal battles, vendettas and factions that influenced court life and public perception and left little space for a conflict-free existence.



## Conclusion

Tension over place and the repercussive “touchiness” over honour rose to a new high among men of the gentry in the court of Elizabeth I, as ever greater numbers of men flooded the ranks of the educated with the rise in middle-class wealth and education. These “new” men, or *parvenus*, were met with great opposition by those who considered themselves of older, far more prestigious, lineages, and thus were constantly required to defend their places at court. The anxiety at court was pushed to a new height, and in defence of their honour, both personal and familial, men turned to the one option that seems to have always been a standard for conflict resolution: violence. The duel amid the gentry and nobility, then, became a method of “asserting [gentlemen’s] distinctiveness against their increasingly prosperous middle-class social inferiors” (Shoemaker 197) and of defending their position in the court’s hierarchy. Not only did the duel offer a route to satisfy personal grievances and to punish, in effect, any social inferior that laid claim to a dominant man’s territory, but it also offered those of an elder lineage a chance to demonstrate “that they were above the law. Still another method of asserting difference was to subscribe to a particularly demanding code of honour, in which a wide

range of insults was deemed so offensive that 'satisfaction,' either in the form of an apology or a fight, was required" (Shoemaker 197). The heightened vigilance over reputation, the constant threat of male violence, and the manipulation of masculine honours by the Queen herself "stirred the pot" and brought competition between courtiers to the center of court life and intrigue.

Queen Elizabeth's intentional revival of medieval chivalry had distinct social and political ramifications. Beyond the recreation of a mostly fictional environment in which men pledged undying love and devotion to an unreachable woman, which had obvious utility in ensuring that the Queen's courtiers at the very least appeared ultimately faithful to her, the Tudor state "claimed and obtained the sole right to validate knightly honour, and with it the monopoly of the violence used to assert and defend that honour" (Gunn 108). Queen Elizabeth's ability to take control of the single most defining characteristic of aristocratic masculinity, honour, is reflective of the extent to which she went to maintain a grasp on her courtiers. In their service to the Queen, the only actions that would permit a man to gain honour were those that aided her purpose, thus turning honour into "a tool of political control" (Gunn 108), as any masculine display of "[h]onour that opposed the crown [or the

Queen's will] became dishonour, with shifting political consequences" (108). The great importance placed by men on their honour permitted Elizabeth to control them, manipulating their actions just as the men are manipulated in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night* as they seek the honourable course. The shifting ground on which honour was based, and the incredible drive that men felt to find and preserve honour, regardless of the consequences, made it a very useful tool in political control or vengeful manipulation.

Honour was so incredibly useful as a means of control because it is an incredibly dynamic discourse and has diverse meanings depending on an individual's gender, station, age, rank, and inclination. On the one hand, it had been tied for centuries to the chivalric military culture of the English elite. On the other hand, "beyond the martial aspect, ... 'chivalry' was an entire way of life. It was more than fair play between men in battle and a generous treatment of noncombattants, such as women; it was a distinct class culture, even becoming, at times, dangerously close to a counter-culture" (Nickel 59), especially when Elizabeth and rulers after her sought to control the violent acquisition of honour among peers of the realm. Indeed, beyond the political sphere, masculine aristocratic honour and chivalry ran against the teachings of the Church as the centuries

progressed. Although “[t]he worship of the demigod prowess – with all the ideas and practices of the quasi-religion of honour – was merged with medieval Christianity” (Radulescu 73) during the Holy Wars, with the end of Christian orders of fighting knights and increasing calls for a reduction in violence in the early modern period many of the motifs of chivalry proved to “run contrary to Christian ethics: warlike exploits, preoccupation with personal honor, and courtly love have more in common with the Seven Deadly Sins than with the Ten Commandments” (Nickel 60). Regardless of the historical relationship between service to the State and the Church through martial action, the early modern era saw a change in how men were called to serve God and their Prince. This period witnessed a shift wherein men were obliged to determine between acting for themselves or the State, which could “[require] violent military action, and adherence to an honour code that demanded Christian patience, long-suffering, and non-violent resolutions to conscience” (Terry 1073). These fundamental alterations in the ways that the Church and the Crown perceived honour and the pursuit of honour changed the nature of honour itself, and as both the political and the religious spheres faced great changes themselves over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these perceptions continued to change.

These were not the only changes that influenced understandings of honour in the period. Throughout the sixteenth century there was increasing disagreement among the educated classes as the more medieval “honour cult of lineage and violence declined in the face of increasing opposition” (Gillingham 286) from humanism. The humanists at court and in the field of education disagreed with chivalric standards of violence and honour, and as humanism grew in strength over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it offered increasing resistance to the martial codes of an earlier era, pushing for a more temperate and Christian sense of personal honour. From this grew the early modern “concern with war and peace [which] arose from Humanism’s defining traits. ... [I]ts emphasis on human dignity and freedom, its pursuit of secular knowledge in history and psychology, and its political commitment to improving the quality of institutional and personal life” (Marx 49) were often at odds with the martial qualities of medieval chivalry and masculinity and caused internal conflict in the men who strove so hard to be perceived as honourable.

I am certainly not the first to study the overlapping and conflicting codes of honour that structured early modern masculinity, yet the relationships among conflicting and highly dynamic honour codes, internal conflict within the aristocracy, and the proliferation of extralegal

violence and manipulation have not been studied in great detail. Yet how could they not be related? If “Augustinian Christians deprecate honor as an impure motive even when it serves virtue, [while] Machiavelli commends glory so ardently that one doubts he much cares how it is acquired” (Alvis 11), Christian aristocrats must have faced internal division and conflict among members of competing ideologies, all of which was manipulated and further exploited by their Queen. The period between 1580 and 1630 witnessed such a “proliferation of comment and advice” (Heal 68) on the topics of honour, courtliness, duels, and nobility that it is evident that men were unable to determine which discourses to adhere to and which to change. The courtesy literature available in the early modern era “is not confined to one literary genre but spreads through much of the writing addressed to social problems. It is in these decades that men seem to be most sharply aware of the threat to traditional values, and most eager to counter that threat with prescriptive advice” (Heal 68) in order to stay afloat in a turbulent sea of advice, treachery, and intrigue.

The usefulness of the duel to a male member of the gentry in this era is incalculable. As a performance of masculinity, it indicated strength, training, wealth, and courage. Furthermore it functioned to repel

challengers in dominance and harkened back to the honour codes of the ancient aristocracy, reassuring in the early modern period, which was a time of great change. Although, as many have pointed out, the duel was “irrelevant to modern military needs” (Anglo xiii), it offered men a route toward self-determination. Here flourished individualism, finesse, and *fierte*, and although some scholars, including Anglo, have pointed out this action seems to have little “to do with loyalty, service, or battle” (xiii) I have sought to prove in this study that the duel had everything to do with these values, which were central to both medieval and early modern discourses of masculinity.

My readings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Twelfth Night* have sought to prove that far from a bastardization of earlier greatness, early modern masculine honour codes took the values of an older system and adopted them to a new regime without degrading them in quality. The duel offered a man the opportunity to fight for what he believed in, to serve his family and his name, and to battle those who opposed him, just as the wars of the medieval era or any previous challenges may have done. The trap of believing that honour is a stagnant discourse is what can lead to an assessment of early modern masculinity as a decayed form of medieval glory; however, in light of the alterations that honour codes

were undergoing, and the many facets and factions to honour, the grounds on which masculine honour was based were ever-shifting, taking in new forms, rather than eroding. That violence was a repercussion of the search for honour in the early modern period has been the point of this study, yet the dangers of this search and the manipulation that aristocratic males became open to in the pursuit of honour are also central to an understanding of these repercussions.

Honour is far more than a theme in Shakespeare's plays. Rather, honour is a way of thinking and behaving that so structured the lives of early modern men and women that it cannot be removed from any encounter. Although I have only included three Shakespearean plays, the great role that honour played in Elizabethan and Jacobean society makes it a feature of all of his works, and those of his peers. Genre allows the playwright to modify his vantage on the situations, and thus Shakespeare employs comedy or tragedy to reveal facets of the honour system that would not seem to coexist – we see that the devastated Laertes, fighting to murder his once-friend Hamlet, is being informed by the same discourses as Sir Andrew as he faces off against Cesario, yet the two scenes would hardly be comparable without an understanding of the underlying honour code of the early modern aristocracy.



Honour is a dynamic discourse, which is why it makes for such a compelling study. It wove through all relationships and all strata in Elizabethan society and continued to inform the actions of individuals for centuries. The view that in the early modern period “the landscape of honour was slowly eroded” (James 59) and that gentlemen were forced to seek new ways to express their masculinity and authority does not take the malleability of social discourses into serious consideration. Such studies lack the important recognition of early modern volatility and the unending push for change and sense of newness that permeated the era, perhaps not among those of the ancient aristocracy but for the parvenus, who sought to alter the political landscape of their country forever. The Arthurian legends and epic poetry which inspired a society to dream of greatness and chivalry ultimately led them on a quest to discover honourable selves, something of immeasurable value among all levels of society, and continued to provide a stimulus for change throughout the era.

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