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“Jests, stolne from the Temples Revels”: the Inns of Court Revels and Early Modern Drama

Michelle O’Callaghan

The repertoire of the boys’ companies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is characterised, in part, by experiments with a burlesque style and an aggressive mode of intertextuality that testifies to a sustained dialogue with the performance culture of the Inns of Court revels. A subgenre of *serio ludere*, serious play, the revels are a hybrid form that freely mixes ceremonial structures with bawdy farce and the rites of violence. By entering into a conversation with the Inns of Court revels, the boys’ companies advertised their shared pedagogic performance culture at a time when their own educational links were becoming increasingly attenuated. Borrowing jests from the revels therefore provided a means of claiming shared educational capital. The mode of fraternity promoted within these all-male pedagogic institutions relied on rites of violence, which incorporated satire and burlesque, to assert institutional privilege and to fashion elite corporate identities.

From 1599 to around 1607, a series of plays appeared on stage and in print that were characterised by an often aggressive intertextuality. In its benign and emulative form, it involved borrowing and re-staging scenes. However, particularly in the earlier plays produced around 1600, the dialogue is more combative, frequently turning into flyting. The majority of these plays – Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) and *Poetaster* (1601), Thomas Dekker’s *Satiromastix* (1601/1602), John Marston’s *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* (1600) and *What You Will* (1601), and the last of the *Parnassus* plays performed by Cambridge University in 1601 –

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are often gathered under the umbrella of the so-called “War of the Theatres.” The narrative of this war is well-rehearsed: Marston portrayed Jonson in an albeit admiring portrait in *Histriomastix* around 1599, Jonson took offence and retaliated with an attack on Marston and other playwrights he disliked, including Dekker, in *Poetaster*, Dekker responded in kind with his *Satiromastix*, and Marston satirised Jonson in *Jack Drum's Entertainment* and *What You Will*. Earlier theatre historians used this model of a “War of the Theatres” to argue for a deep structural professional rivalry between the adult and boys’ companies. Roslyn Knutson has successfully challenged intra-company rivalry as a basis for understanding how commercial relationships between playing companies were organised. Although these plays provide evidence for a “game of serial satire,” she argues this was all part of the commerce between theatres in this period, and as much sociable as it was competitive (12-14, 141-2). Knutson’s concern is to demonstrate how commercial relations between playing companies were structured by “patterns of fraternity, the roots of which were feudal hierarchies such as kinship, service, and the guild,” rather than rivalry (10).

The significance of Knutson’s revisionism for my own argument lies in her recognition that the homosocial aggression played out in the “game of serial satire” was constitutive of corporate identities, and not their negation. My interest in this essay is in the ways in which this “game” involved playing companies in a dialogue not only amongst themselves, but with another pattern of fraternity whose roots were in the pedagogic institutional cultures of the Inns of Court and the universities. The term, “War of the Theatres,” is itself a misnomer. A culture of flyting at the turn of the sixteenth century was certainly not confined to the theatres. The “game of serial satire” was being played across various institutions – the universities, the Inns, an increasingly and dangerously factional court, and the theatres – and across a range of media – manuscript, print, and performance (Clegg 198-217). Satiric fraternities, which allied themselves with particular personalities at Cambridge and the Inns of Court, were constructed in print through the books of satires published between 1597 and 1601. And one of the key participants in this bout of flyting was Marston, who also played a leading role in the “game of serial satire” on stage.

The institutional contexts of these satiric fraternities points to the ways in which aggression was constitutive of the elite modes of homosociality fostered at schools, universities and the Inns of Court. Rituals of incorporation at these institutions involved “various rites of violence” for proving manhood and fashioning a mode of homosociality

that was related to, but distinct from the chivalric models fostered at courts. Although physical violence did play a part in the formation of homosocial identities at the universities and Inns, the emphasis was on rhetorical modes of aggression, exemplified by the adversarial structure of the disputation, the cornerstone of Renaissance pedagogy (Davies 141-65). On ceremonial and festive occasions, such as at the elaborate Christmas revels at the Inns of Court and the public Act for granting degrees at Oxford, disputation took a serio-comic form and veered into the aggression of satire. The *terrae filius*, for example, who performed at the Oxford Act, as Kristine Haugen points out, was expected to make “insulting the dons the *raison d’être*” of his mock-disputation (2-3). At the turn of the sixteenth century, flyting was therefore a strategy dramatists shared with these institutions at a time when the relations between the professional theatres, especially the boys’ companies, and the Inns were particularly close.

What also characterises the plays often gathered together under the rubric of “War of the Theatres” is a conversation with the celebrated 1597/98 Middle Temple revels. Hence, Dekker’s jibe in *Satiromastix* that Jonson pads out his plays with jests stolen from the Temple revels (V.ii.295-6). It was a dialogue that included an experiment with burlesque and other forms of *serio ludere* – serious play – showcased at the revels. Burlesque, from the Italian “*burla*,” meaning mockery or ridicule, is an unstable and hybrid genre that includes parody, travesty, satire and nonsense. The most celebrated examples of this humanist tradition of *serio ludere* are Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* and Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Serious play was a vital element of Renaissance pedagogy. Lucian, one of the classical forefathers of *serio ludere*, with his playful mix of philosophy, history, comic satire and the fantastic, was the first Greek author taught in the Renaissance schoolroom (Marsh 7-12). *Serio ludere* was used to teach the arts of disputation, including mooting – the formulation and debating of a hypothetical case involving a controversial point of law. Classical *controversiae*, based on ambiguous or contradictory Roman laws, were given to students to test “adeptness at law”; yet, since these cases were often paradoxes that veered into the farcical and fantastic, they also encouraged a playful and mocking sophistry (Kinney 17-20). Mock-mooting was a key feature of the law sports during the Inns of Court revels. At the revels, the pedagogical and professional purpose of *serio ludere* coalesces with the “various rites of violence” (Davies 154) that function to incorporate the individual within the fraternity. Linguistic aggression was constitutive of the ceremonial forms of its seriocomic

“law sports,” and played out through the formation of satiric fraternities and burlesque parodies of legal and political forms and social customs.

From the late 1590s, the influence of this tradition of *serio ludere* can be discerned in the drama of the period. Jonson began developing a Lucianic form of “comicall satyre,” that included a strong burlesque element, in those late Elizabethan plays which tend to be cited as part of the “Wars of the Theatres” – *Every Man Out of his Humour* (1599), *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), and *Poetaster* (1601) (Duncan 119-43). The latter two plays were performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels. Ludic experiments with burlesque characterise the repertoire of the boys' companies in this period to a marked degree. Arguably, burlesque finds a home within both the revels and the repertoire of the boys' companies because they share pedagogic traditions of *serio ludere*. Boys' companies had evolved out of grammar and choir schools, environments in which students, like those at the universities and the Inns, performed regularly as part of their education. These different student groups therefore shared a pedagogic understanding of the role of performance, which was to provide training in the arts of rhetoric, memory, bodily comportment, and audacity. One of the key differences between the adult and children's playing companies, Edel Lamb argues, was that the latter defined and promoted themselves as institutions for the training of youths (104-5). However, by the early seventeenth century, as Lucy Munro has noted, the “link between children's performance and the educational process” became increasingly attenuated (37). Arguably, because this link was in the process of disappearing in the early seventeenth century, the value in maintaining a dialogue between the repertoire of the boys' companies and elite educational institutions, such as the Inns and universities, increased. A key aspect of their shared pedagogic performance culture was the forms of *serio ludere*, hence the popularity of burlesque and satire in the repertoire of the boys' companies in this period.

The Inns of Court revels: the “law sports” and the rites of violence

The Christmas revels were a performance tradition shared between the Inns of Court and the boys' companies. Christmas princes were elected to preside over revels at the grammar schools, while choir schools appointed Boy Bishops (this tradition seems to have ended with the accession of Elizabeth I), and both performed regularly at the court's Christmas revels (Shapiro 8-11). In keeping with the forms of *serio ludere*, revels

in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century are a deliberately mixed mode that freely mixed solemn ceremony with bawdy farce and rites of violence. The Inns of Court grand revels were particularly spectacular affairs (McCoy 286-7). The progress of the Prince d’Amour to the court through the streets of London during the 1597/98 Middle Temple revels included richly armoured “knights” attended by squires and torchbearers, all dressed in cloth of gold and silver, and accompanied by masquers. Benjamin Rudyerd concluded, “Never any Prince in this Kingdom, or the like made so glorious and so rich a shew” (*REED* II, 483). Ceremonies of state proceed through a continual movement between the serious and purposeful and the irreverent and playful.

One of the critical questions posed by the revels is how to interpret these seemingly contrary impulses, particularly in relation to the corporate identity imagined by the “law sports.” If viewed through the lens of Victor Turner’s influential *Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play*, then the revels exemplify a liminal ritual, a feature of highly structured hierarchal societies. Through serious play, the structures of the institution are parodied and reconfigured in ludic form. And yet, these subversive energies, paradoxically, function to reinforce institutional structures, since misrule is predicated on the “naturalness” of the rules that are burlesqued. The revels, within this schema, function to reproduce a normative mode of *communitas* through the forms of serious play, which incorporate the individual within the fraternity and reinforce a corporate and customary institutional identity (Turner 27-60; Shapiro 40-2). Yet, one limit of this modelling of the revels is that it can confine itself to a self-confirming dialectic between the forces of subversion and containment and so flatten out the complexities of *serio ludere*. The rites of violence enacted during the revels, for example, do not necessarily function as subversive forces that are generated in order to be contained, instead their role in constituting homosocial identities is more purposeful and more fraught.

In recent studies of revels at the Inns of Court, Gerard Legh’s account of the 1561/2 Inner Temple revels in his *Accedens of Armory* is often a starting point for understanding how the Inns fashioned a corporate civic identity in the sixteenth century. For Paul Raffield, the “revels constructed a Utopian commonwealth, in which the ruler was counselled by learned advisors, or *amici principis*, whose function was to direct the polity of the idealised state in the best interest of the commonwealth” (*Images and Culture* 264). Similarly, Peter Goodrich turned to Legh’s text to illustrate how the legal profession in England established itself as a “*de facto* sovereign power” within the public sphere. Glossing

Legh's description of the feast held in the Great Hall during the revels, Goodrich writes: "The order of dining – of arrival, dress, seating, service, food, speech, argument, exposition, dance, revelry and masques – is the order of a lawful world, a symbolic order in which Justice, Rule and Law are to be understood as being expressed together through culinary measures, victuals and wine" (247-8). Through professional rituals held during commons – legal exercises, such as mootings, as well as feasting and the revels – the individual is incorporated into this sacred "community of the Law." The bibliophagic analogy between eating, reading, and learning is put into practice in the commons, all the while governed by a dietary regimen that regulated both body and mind. For Goodrich, "commoning," as an institutional practice, is the means by which the early modern legal profession inculcated a model of elite homosociality.

Yet, although they go unrecorded in Legh's account, these 1561/2 revels were not without the characteristic traits of burlesque and rites of violence. One of the entertainments at this feast, according to William Dugdale's account in *Origines Juridiciales*, was a hunt, a blood-sport which enacted the privileges of the aristocracy over the natural world they claim to govern. The Master of Game, bowing before the Lord Chancellor, was granted the privilege of entering his service. At this point, the huntsman entered with a bound fox and cat, which were then released, set upon by hounds, "and killed before the fire" (155). The hunt is both a violent assertion of the customary rites of the elite and a blood sacrifice through which social subordinates – the Master of Game and the huntsman – express the fealty that is constitutive of the hierarchies within this mock-court. Dugdale also lists the burlesquing names of the lords within the mock-court: "Sir Francis Flatterer of Fowleshurst in the County of Buckingham; Sir Randle Rackabite, of Rascall Hall, in the County of Rake Hell; Sir Morgan Mumchance, of Much Monkery, in the County of Mad Mopery; Sir Bartholmew Baldbreech, of Buttocks-bury, in the County of Breke neck" (156). Raffield argues that "Such licensed parody was a form of repressive tolerance on the part of the governing bodies of the Inns"; a form of "superficial rebellion against the formal practices and institutions of the Inns" that ultimately did not threaten the established order ("Elizabethan Revels" 165). Its origins are in the primitive, like the Lord of Misrule, "representing the repressed hatred of hierarchy and order" (177). Yet, arguably, rather than erupting from below, since parody and burlesque function within the dynamics of learned play, alongside the rites of violence, they are a purposeful

marker of elite identity, rather than embodying residual and repressed primitive forces.

The absence of the hunt or the burlesquing lords in Legh's account of the 1561/2 revels is due to the fact that it is situated within a book of heraldry, and therefore has a different generic framework to other accounts of the revels which function primarily within a *serio ludere* tradition. This is not to argue that these other accounts of the revels are more factual, but rather to point out that they belong to a different genre with a different set of conventions. Legh's account is also unusual in that it was published soon after the 1561/2 revels; by contrast, the text of the 1594/5 Gray's Inn revels was not published until 1688, while the account of the 1597/98 Middle Temple revels was published in 1660. There have been a number of important studies of these revels in relation to contemporary Elizabethan politics, in particular, the question of the Queen's marriage (see Winston 11-34; Dunn 279-308). Yet, there is also another story to tell about the timing of these revels. The early 1560s witnessed a revival of plans to establish an academy to rival those of Europe for educating wards and children of the gentry and the nobility. In 1561, Sir Nicholas Bacon finally produced a manuscript treatise, which he presented to Elizabeth I, based on the report he had produced for Henry VIII in the late 1530s, recommending the foundation of a fifth inn along the lines of a humanist academy. Around this time, the Master of the Court of Wards, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was promoting Gray's Inn as a substitute for an academy. Given that both Cecil and Bacon were Gray's Inn men, there seems to have been a campaign to promote this inn as an alternative academy (Wienpahl 8-10, 43-6.).

The Inner Temple's decision to hold spectacular grand revels in 1561/2, presided over by the queen's favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and to sponsor Legh's published account, strongly suggests a counter-campaign by the Inner Temple to make a rival bid for academy status. Legh's *Accedence of Armory* constructs a potent fiction that harmonises the dual educational roles of the inns in both providing training in the law for an expanding professional class of lawyers and as an academy for educating the elite in the courtly arts. Hence, when Legh describes the Inner Temple as a microcosm of the commonwealth, this ideal city-state looks very like an academy, where:

. . . gentilmen of y^e whole realme, . . . repaire thither to learne to rvlle, and obay by law, to yeld their fleece to their prince & commonweale, as also to vse all other exercises of body & mind whereunto nature most aptli serueth, to adorne by speaking, countenance and gesture, & vse of app[ar]el y^e person of a gentilman, whereby amitie is obtained, & continued. (205r-v)

With *Accedence*, Legh offered the inns, and the Inner Temple, in particular, a highly polished mirror that reflected their ambitions in the 1560s to take responsibility for educating a governing class.

Legh's idealising vision of confraternity does incorporate the abstract, symbolic forms of the rites of violence through its detailed description of chivalric iconography of a militaristic knightly culture, in keeping with its status as a book of heraldry. The codes of honour that underpinned this masculine culture at the Inns generated "homosocial tensions, rivalry and competition"; the fraternal rituals of the commons were designed to mediate these tensions. Goodrich argues, via Freud, that homosociality at the Inns was therefore structured by a "sublimated conflict," "whose unconscious cause" was the "rivalrous resemblance" or "confraternal paranoia" that arose out of men living and working together in close proximity (256). However, as we shall see, sublimation is not quite the right word for the level of performativity in which rites of violence are staged during the revels in order to demonstrate good governance. To an extent, these scenes of elite homosocial conflict are produced in order to uphold the principle of *communitas*. And yet, the deliberate staging of often highly stylised aggression and other forms of disruption also plays a productive role that exceeds this regulatory intent and is part of the performance culture of the revels itself.

Rites of violence and burlesque performance seem to be a feature of revelling societies more broadly. The Basoche, a society formed by Parisian law clerks, had a very similar structure to the mock states formed during Inns of Court revels, with yearly elections of a king, a chancellor, and a High Court of Justice (Harvey 12-18). The plays performed during their revels mixed bawdy farce with sharp political and religious satire that sometimes cut very close to the bone, resulting in street fights and libel actions. Sara Beam has argued that, until the outbreak of the Wars of Religion in 1562, the satirical farces of the Basoche were tolerated by civic authorities because of the relatively high social status of the revelers, which permitted them to take risks with their mockery of those in authority, not available to those lower down the social hierarchy (7-8). Violence within elite homosocial communities, as Anna Bryson argues, arose out of the "survival of values of 'honour'" within early modern codes of civility, which meant that rites of violence, both physical and rhetorical, were a customary tool for individual and collective displays of elite masculinity (240). Moreover, violence had a particular role to play in the all-male youth cultures at the universities and Inns of Court. Education was a transitional stage, when young men were in training for

taking up public office and assuming civic identities. The rites of violence and the related forms of burlesque allowed youths to assert an elite mode of identity, which was accorded privileges unavailable to those lower down the social scale, and to articulate a privileged relationship to the law and other mechanisms of governance, which similarly was a function of their status as future members of the social and political elite (see Davies 141-65; Skoda 31-40). That said, violence was not always easily incorporated into codes of civil conduct, rather there was an uneasy balance, which could tip over into forms of unacceptable violence that threatened civic order (Bryson 240).

Rites of violence had a structural place in the revels. Skirmishes between innsmen and the followers of the Christmas prince traditionally accompanied his election on Candlemas night, despite efforts to curb the worst excesses in the late sixteenth century (Prest 97-9). Parliaments held by the Inns frequently recorded fines and other punishments meted out to students for breaking down doors, and sometimes heads, during the revels (Prest 96-7; *REED* I, 177-8, 231). The Middle Temple parliament held in February 1591 expelled a Mr. Lower, while other revelers, including Richard Martin and John Davies, who later took part in the 1597/98 revels, were fined (*REED* I, 118-9). The revels amplify the adversarial nature of the law so that it becomes an integral theatrical mode of statecraft. Rituals of combat structure the mock states formed during the revels and take ceremonial forms. Principalities are typically on a war footing. The Prince of Purpoole, who presided over the 1594/5 Gray's Inn revels, sent out orders to quell insurrections at home and to wage war abroad, in alliance with “*our Brother Russia*,” against the Tartars (*REED* II, 414-6). These revels ended with “a grand chivalric contest” that, both symbolically and in actuality, staged and mediated conflicts among the elite, in this case between the Queen's two favourites, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex and George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland (McCoy 296). The 1597/98 Middle Temple revels opened with a challenge delivered from a “strange knight” in defence of the rights of “that Lady of that Fortunate Island” against the usurper, the Prince of Love, Richard Martin (*REED* II, 441-2). Both the Gray's Inn and Middle Temple revels record diplomatic incidents disrupting the amicable relations between brother Inns: famously, during the Gray's Inn revels, their “Friends,” the Inner Templars sent an ambassador, but “there arose such a disordered Tumult” that he was forced to leave, launching an investigation into the cause of the uproar leading to the arraignment of a “sorcerer” (*REED* II, 395-9); similarly, during the 1597/98 revels, Benjamin Rudyerd reported that “the Lincolnians,” the

Middle Temple's brother inn, "intended to see the Princes Court, and so did all the Town; which bred such disorder that the Prince could not receive them according to their worthiness" (484).

Such playful breaches of ceremony had their rhetorical counterpart in the seriocomic forms of learned play which structure the revels and similarly counterpoint elaborate ritual with low, and often crude literary forms. The revels, as I have argued elsewhere, set in place "a ritualised space of play in which the ceremonial structures of the institution are parodied" from within, but not dismantled or overturned by external forces (24). Parody, in this context, was a mode of *sprezzatura* that signalled the revellers' easy mastery of the rituals of their profession. Moreover, the shared laughter occasioned by bawdy farce aggressively reinforces the homosociality of the group. Not surprisingly, the ceremonial structures typically open to burlesque during the revels were the orders and articles contractually binding the knights to the Christmas Prince. For example, the articles of service in the Gray's Inn revels recorded in the *Gesta Grayorum* are a series of often bawdy jests: "Every Knight of this Order is bound to perform all requisite and Manly Service, be it Night-service, or otherwise, as the Case requireth, to all Ladies and Gentlewomen," and so it continues (REED II, 402). Bawdiness is even more pronounced in the later Middle Temple revels: item 2 stipulates

that every Knight of this Order shall . . . have those things in readiness which Ladies desire, as the Launce for the Ring, and such like; and shall twice a week at the least Tilt and Turine [sic] for Ladies, shewing them all their cunning in Arms when they lust or command. (II, 459)

These revels staged a contest between the erotic politics promoted by "the Lady of that fortunate Island" (REED II, 442), Queen Elizabeth, and the revels' Prince of Love. The bawdy libertinism of his court signifies an unruly elite masculinity, which, within the framework of the revels, usurps the authority of the Petrarchan politics of Elizabeth's court. Libertinism travesties codes of civility, and constitutes a specifically elite mode of lawlessness, that, in turn, is an aspect of the licence gentlemen were privileged to enjoy in their recreations (Bryson 243-9). It is a mode of burlesque that is not carnivalesque in a Bakhtinian sense, nor does its violence necessarily borrow from lower-class modes of rebellion. Rather, it functions as a particularly elite mode of violence that asserts social privilege; like the Basoche and university students, Inns of Court revellers could afford to take risks because of their comparatively high social status.

In keeping with Inns’ self-fashioning as academies for educating gentlemen for courtly service, disputes over honour were one of the set performances during the revels and were played out within the chivalric structure of the mock-court. By the late sixteenth century, these chivalric codes operated within a context in which the traditional definitions of gentility on which they were based – land and blood – were giving way to looser comparatively meritocratic models, fostered in part by the Inns of Court and universities (James 375-86). Attendance at these institutions conferred gentle status. George Buc complained in his history of the Inns, it was a commonly held “error to thinke that the sonnes of Graziers, Farmers, Marchants, Tradesmen, and artificers can bee made Gentlemen, by their admittance or Matriculation in the Buttrie Hole, or in the Stewards Booke, of such a house or Inne of court” (968). The gentleman lawyer was therefore a character in flux. Gentility was increasingly defined by a set of social codes, including the company one kept and one’s “manners,” which signified good breeding; thus loosened from its traditional moorings in “three descents,” gentility was both highly unstable and energetically policed (Bryson 146-50).

Rather than displaying a consensus about how a civic society is formed, the revels were far more fraught performances that often staged conflicts about who was entitled to membership of the community. Shared modes of laughter and bawdy farce have an aggressive “commoning” function, in which satire and other modes of admonition could also turn inward. Notions of breeding and civility, at the core of the Inns’ self-promotion as an alternative academy, provided the terms for the organised flyting of key revellers in the 1590s. “A libel against some Greys Inn gentlemen and Reuellers” mocks the poor performances of members of the Prince of Purpoole’s court during the 1594/95 revels:

How happens it of purpose or by chaunce
that ffiletwood goes the formost in *yo~~ur~~* daunce
bycause he in his nose doth beare a light
*wh*ich all the ffayries in their daunce did light
but blame not him, alas that comes by kind
his fathers nose although his eyes were blind
would serve him in his countinghouse to see
ten in the hundred come in merily
*per*haps it is his gould chaines bright reflexio~~n~~
that makes his nose of such a braue complexio~~n~~
a poxe on him and his chaines, for by his chaines
and bondes & vsury comes in his gaines. (Rosenbach MS 1083/15, 64)

Henry Fleetwood is ridiculed both for his red nose and his father's money (Thomas Fleetwood was Master of the Royal Mint under Henry VIII); others are mocked for their dress, speech and bodily comportment during the revels. These conventional outward signifiers of civility are not themselves travestied. Instead, ridicule is directed at the bodies of the revellers in order to exclude them from this field of distinction; their grotesque performances and physical coarseness signify a lack of breeding and their failure to make the grade socially. The compiler of the miscellany (Rosenbach MS 1083/15) in which the Gray's Inn libel is copied, given his access to John Davies's verse and very rare epigrams by Rudyard, must have had close connections with the Middle Temple in the 1590s (Eckhardt 25). It is therefore possible that the Gray's Inn libel was produced by Middle Templars. If so, it testifies to the combative rivalry between Inns in their efforts to secure comparative institutional prestige. Intra-institutional rivalry was similarly very pronounced at Oxford University, where colleges were the primary focus for group loyalty (Skoda 30).

Aggression also structures homosocial relations within these peer groups. Rudyard's account of the 1597/98 revels takes particular delight in describing the humiliation of one "Stradilax," thought to be John Davies, who appears to have been the victim of a libelling campaign. Stradilax, according to Rudyard, made a great feast, as part of his bid to become Christmas prince, "and instead of Grace after it, there was a Libel set up against him in al famous places of the City, as Queen-hithe, Newgate, the Stock, Pillory, Pissing Conduit" (*REED* II, 480). Davies took his revenge after the revels, striding into the commons and hitting Richard Martin, the Prince of Love, over the head with a bastinado until it broke. Stradilax's wit is derided by Rudyard as too coarse. However, given the notoriously bawdy punning of these revels, Stradilax's vulgarity is not markedly out-of-place. Rudyard's derision is indicative of the finely-tuned set of social discriminations at work in the definition of wit. Stradilax is ritually humiliated within Rudyard's account for trying to play the game, to take a prominent role in the law sports, but is repeatedly identified as lacking the wit to do so:

Milorsius Stradilax made three Confessions; for a Souldier, a Traveller, and a Country Gentleman; but two so bad, that the meanest Wit would not undertake to bring them in; and the souldier's speech in the stile of a Taylors Bill, or a Memorandum, with imprimis and Items: yet did disclaim in the nights devise, because it wanted Applause.

Milorsius Stradilax usurped upon the commendation of all tolerable speeches; insomuch that one praising the Heralds Coat, he reported that he penned it

.....

Here Milorsius Stradilax, scorning the soberness of the company, fell drunk without a Rival; he made a festival Oration, and in his new Drunkennes repeated his old comparison of Pork, to the dispraise of the noble women there present. (REED II, 482, 483-4)

Wit is understood in terms of both bodily comportment and verbal and intellectual dexterity. As a signifier of educational capital, wit should be worn lightly, natural and extemporized, rather than studied and laboured. This type of internecine conflict functions to establish the collective cultural capital of the group at the expense of those who, while nominally members of the community, are set up as negative exemplars that, in turn, function to police boundaries – who is “in,” and who is “out.”

Lynne Magnusson, in her discussion of the Inns of Court, has called this phenomenon, “scoff power” – a communicative practice in which aggression functions assertively to claim cultural capital in competition with other groups (196-208). It is a model of commoning that contrasts markedly with the civic utopianism of the revels described by Raffield. The revels do adhere “to a traditional code of manner or honour as the basis of ideal governance,” as Raffield contends (*Images and Cultures* 93). However, this code operates within elaborate travesties during the revels, which means that it not only functions to incorporate individuals into a civic body, but also to exclude others through derision. The revels do promote a social contract founded on a notion of the public good. That said, the aggressive, satiric commoning practised during the revels draws attention to the role of elite violence in constituting and policing the hierarchies on which the “homosociality of professional relation” (Goodrich 254) and model of governance promoted by the Inns depend.

“that terrible Poetomachia”: Satiric Fraternities at the turn of the sixteenth century

Flyting, or the game of serial satire, had long been a feature of sixteenth-century print culture. The Harvey-Nashe pamphlet war of the early 1590s, for instance, drew much of its energy, strategies, and participants from the earlier Marprelate controversy. Another pamphlet skirmish

began in the late 1590s, this time between self-proclaimed satirists, all of whom were associated with either the Inns or Cambridge, or both: Joseph Hall, a recent graduate of Cambridge, Marston, a Middle Templar, Everard Guilpin, at Gray's Inn after graduating from Cambridge, and John Weever, also a Cambridge graduate. This game of serial satire ran from 1597 to 1601 and made innovative use of print. Hall's *Virgidemiarum* (1597) opened by challenging others to follow him in print to "be the second English Satyrists" ("Prologue" 3-4), and ended by prophesying that "the timely publication of these my concealed Satyres" would incite a print war between the satirists ("Postscript" 6-8). Marston announced he was taking up the gauntlet in his *Certaine Satyres*, published with *Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image* in 1598, while his friend and kinsman, Guilpin in his *Skialetheia* (1598) imagined contemporary literary culture consumed by "ciuill warres" between the satirists, "Englands wits" (1.9, 12-13). Marston was similarly keen to advertise these pamphlet wars. He drew attention to Hall's inventive use of the printed book by including an epigram in the second 1599 edition of *Scourge of Villanie*, explaining its "Author, *Vergidemiarum*" (Hall), had it "pasted to the latter page" of every copy of his book "that came to the stacioners of Cambridge" (10.47-9). Weever's epyllion, *Faunus and Melliflora* (1600), metamorphoses into a satire on the satirists that praises the "sharp quills" of Hall's "Satire Academicall" (F3r) and accuses Marston of hypocrisy, of practising the vices he condemns (I4v). Weever is probably the "W.I." of *The Whipping of the Satyre* (1601), which scourges Marston, the satirist, and Guilpin, the epigrammatist.

What is notable about this poets' war, which sees Cambridge men, the "pure fraternitie" (*Scourge* 2.9.40), as Marston calls them, lining up on one side and Inns of Court men on the other, is the role played by institutional affiliations and, relatedly, intra-institutional rivalry, in the words of Goodrich, the "homosociality of professional relations" (255). The turn of the sixteenth century witnessed the formation of satiric fraternities at both the Inns and Cambridge which engaged in intra-institutional aggression, one attacking the credibility of the other. The Cambridge play, *Second Part of the Return from Parnassus*, performed around 1601/2, is often discussed from the perspective of its participation in the "War of the Theatres" (Bednarz 45-52, 257-64). Yet, when it takes the part of the Cambridge man, Hall, against Marston, an Inns man, there is a strong institutional bias to its satire. The last of the *Parnassus* plays it is the first to incorporate an attack on the lawyers and the Inns of Court through three set pieces: a satire on the openness of the common law to corruption, a mock-mooting in which practices of disputation result in "hotch

potch,” and a scene deriding the Inns’ construction of their corporate identity as the third university, which is itself framed in terms of the quarrel between the civil law taught at the universities and the common law. Ingenioso sneers, “I pray you *Monseieur Ploidon*, of what Vniuersitie was the first common Lawyer. Of none forsooth” (IV.ii.1672-3). Amoretto, the venial Inns of Court student, as his name suggests, is a character drawn from the 1597/98 Middle Temple revels presided over by the Prince d’Amour. His characterisation is a patchwork of quotes from these revels that are recast in an often lower register to mock both the pretensions of the gentleman lawyer and the style of burlesque play showcased at these law sports. Hence, the jest that it is the role of the Archflamen to canonise acts of supererogation by the Knights of the Quiver, “such as kiss[ing] the stool whereon their Mistris sate” (REED II, 449), is given a much cruder scatological rendering in the Cambridge play: Ingenioso claims that Amoretto is “good for nothing but to commend in a sette speach, the colour and quantitie of your Mistresses stoole, and sweare it is most sweete Ciuet” (1684-6). The “community of the law” in the play – Sir Raderick, his son, Amoretto, and the Recorder – is remorselessly derided and then purged in the final act by the vituperative Cambridge scholars, Ingenioso and Furor. Of course, many common lawyers were university men – as is Amoretto – and training in rhetoric and disputation was part of the curriculum at both institutions. But this is precisely the point. These skirmishes were generated, in part, by “rivalrous resemblance,” in which the stakes were relative institutional prestige. Communal aggression is thereby bound up with the process of fashioning elite homosocial professional identities which, in turn, rely on constructing, refining and policing complex sets of distinctions.

Thomas Dekker was therefore rehearsing a very well-established trope when he wrote in the 1602 preface to *Satiromastix*:

. . . of that terrible *Poetomachia*, lately commenc’d betweene *Horace the second*, and a band of leane-witted *Poetasters*. They haue bin at high wordes, and so high, that the ground could not serue them, but (for want of *Chopins*) haue stalk’ vpon Stages.

Horace hal’d his Poetasters to the Barre, the Poetasters vntruss’d Horace: how worthily eyther, or how wrongfully, (World) leaue it to the Iurie . . . (“To the World” 7-14)

Dekker draws on the dialogic language of flyting familiar from the vituperative conversations between satirists across the 1590s. His key trope – the arraignment – is very distinctive and is borrowed, very loudly,

from Jonson's *Poetaster or The Arraignment*, which ends with Horace, the lawyer-poet, arraigning the poetasters at the bar. By "stealing" this figure, Dekker particularises the quarrel, setting up a combative dialogue with Jonson in print (Knutson 140-2). As a dramatic metaphor, the arraignment aligns satire with the combative, adversarial structure of the law. *Poetaster* follows through the logic of this simultaneously civic and satiric modelling of the law. Jonson's play is concerned with issues of counsel and who can justly claim the right to participate in its processes. Via Horace, the play dignifies a certain mode of satire and type of satirist. His Horace is a version of the *parrhesiastes*, who delivers healthy admonition in the form of invective. Caesar praises Horace for his "free and wholesome sharpness,/Which pleaseth Caesar more than servile fawns" (V.i.95-6). Satire, delivered by orator-poets, ensures the health of public dialogue, partly by discovering those individuals who would abuse its liberties. The law, embodied in the adversarial topos of the arraignment, is, to use Raffield's phrase, "immanently involved" in how the cultural and political place of the theatre is imagined (*Shakespeare's Imaginary* 8). And yet, while the public good is an ideal in Jonson's play and secured through a juridical framework of counsel, its mechanisms are adversarial and their favoured genre is satire in all its vituperative violence. Helen Ostovich in her edition of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, which relies on a similar legal imaginary to *Poetaster*, describes how this play shares a mode of satiric "commoning" with Inns of Court revels that functions to reinforce "group intimacy and shared amusement by provoking and indulging the aggressiveness of a particularly assertive audience" (33).

Dekker was suspicious of the equation between satiric comedy and the law that Jonson pioneered in his plays and draws out its divisive, exclusionary tactics. At the end of *Satiromastix*, he too arraigns Horace/Jonson at the bar, ordering him not "to fling Epigrams, Embleames, or Play-speeches about you (lyke Hayle-stones) to keepe you out of the terrible daunger of the Shot, vpon payne to sit at the vpper ende of the Table, a't the left hand of Carlo Buffon" (5.2.330-2). Dekker lampoons Jonson through imitation, throwing back at him bits and pieces of Jonson's own plays, in particular, the character of Carlo Buffone from *Every Man Out*. The image of texts – "Play-speeches" – written on leaves of paper and rolled up into balls or "Shot" is a lively figure for the particularly aggressive mode of intertextuality used not only by Dekker, but by others involved in flying. It aptly describes the combative and innovative uses of texts in all their materiality in this game of serial satire.

When Dekker used the term, *poetomachia*, in the preface to his *Satiromastix*, he entered into a dialogue with the satiric fraternities at the Inns and universities. A deliberately classicising term, it gives the game of serial satire literary credibility, perhaps also mocking the classical pretensions of Jonson along the way, and brings the stage into conversation with performance cultures at the Inns and universities by sharing their vocabulary and satiric practices of commoning – their “scoff power.” The games of serial satire played at the turn of the sixteenth century speak to the “sociable commerce” not just between playing companies, but between these companies and other institutional theatrical cultures at the Inns and at the universities.

“Jests, stolne from the Temples Revels”: the Inns of Court and the Boys’ Companies

Dekker jibed during the arraignment in *Satiromastix* that Jonson/Horace must “swear not to bumbast out a new Play, with the olde lynings of Jests, stolne from the Temples Revels” (5.2.295-6). Borrowing from the revels, especially the Middle Temple revels, was not just confined to Jonson, but is a feature of a series of plays, particularly those produced by Middle Templars for the boys’ companies – Marston’s *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* (c.1600), *The Fawne* (1604/5), and *What You Will* and Edward Sharpham’s *The Fleer* (c. 1607) and *Cupid’s Whirligig* (c.1606/7). Given these shared affiliations, it is not surprising that the dialogue between the Middle Temple and the boys’ companies was so pronounced in this period. Borrowed, “stolne” jests act as a set of signifiers for the distinct theatrical culture of the Inns of Court. The jests borrowed most often were the articles binding the Knights of the Quiver, who take their oath on Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, and the statutes and charges delivered during the arraignment of the discontented lover. Edward Pudsey, whose commonplace book is often cited as a source for playgoing in the period, listed a number of these orders and articles, with a note referring to their performance at the 1602 Middle Temple revels (Bod. MS. Poet.d.3, 87r). In 1602, either Martin reprised his earlier role as the Prince of Love, or the performance was repeated by a new mock-court. In either case, it suggests that a text of these revels was available in some form prior to its eventual publication in the 1660 miscellany, *Le Prince d’Amour*. As Pudsey’s commonplace book indicates, these revels were collectable, most likely because they encapsulated a certain style of wit.

Finkelpearl, many years ago, listed in detail the pattern of borrowings from the Middle Temple revels in Marston's *The Fawn*, performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels at Blackfairs around 1604/5, and then later at Paul's ("The Fawne" 199-209). The play concludes with "Cupids parliament" in session, in which Cupid "survay[s] our old lawes," listing transgressions against the laws of love, concluding: "Let us therefore be severe in our justice: And if any of what degree soever have approvedly offended, let him be instantly unpartially arrested and punished, read our statutes" (V, p. 216). The structure of this scene clearly recalls the arraignment of the discontented lover in the Middle Temple revels, which legislates against "divers most horrible and notorious Treasons" committed against the Prince of Love (*REED* II, 476-8); a borrowing that is made audible through the series of statutes announced by Cupid which mimic the procedures set in place for enforcing the Laws of Love at the revels. The pattern of borrowing is looser but still audible in Sharpham's *Fleer*, also performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels around 1607. In Act I, scene iii of *The Fleer*, Susan has Master Ruff swear to a series of conditions that mimic the articles binding the Knights of the Quiver, but on a tobacco pipe, rather than the copy of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* used in the 1597/8 Middle Temple revels. Throughout this play and Sharpham's other play, *Cupids Whirligig*, it is possible to hear the echo of tropes and phrases from these revels (Sharpham 24-30).

Through borrowed jests, these plays privilege an audience and readership that can recognise the frequently bawdy learned play of the revels both in terms of tone and detail – it rewards those with a taste for and detailed knowledge of this material. These shared jokes not only appeal to the Inns as an audience, as consumers of plays, but also acknowledge their status as producers of theatre. The revels, after all, were elaborate theatrical performances, with memorable virtuoso performances by leading revellers. Moreover, the line between those who were performers and those who made up the audience was porous during the revels – all were revellers (Rhatigan 154). The re-staging of jests borrowed from the revels in these plays similarly asks the Inns of Court audience to recognise themselves in the play as active producers of the entertainment, not simply as passive consumers. The consciously borrowed mode of laughter in these plays produced by the boys' companies interpellates the Inns as a brother institution, a companionate theatrical culture, thereby claiming the fraternal right to join in their privileged games and to share their institutional prestige.

Even the borrowing of jests from the revels had a competitive edge in this period. One game from the Middle Temple revels that was re-staged by both Jonson and Marston is John Hoskins’s “Fustian Answer to a Tufftaffetta Speech,” the latter delivered by Charles Best, the Prince’s orator. It was one of the most celebrated performances during the 1597/8 Middle Temple revels and highly collectable, circulating widely in manuscript miscellanies. Hoskins’ oration belongs to a learned seriocomic tradition. It is significant in literary terms because it is the earliest example of English nonsense that draws on European traditions (Malcolm 4-5). Hoskins’ mock-oration is a virtuoso display of rhetorical prowess. As he advised in his rhetoric manual, *Directions for Speech and Style*: “you will find most of the figures of Rhetorick there, meaning neither harme, nor good, but as idle as your selfe, when yow are most at leisure” (165). Nonsense aims for a radical dissociation of style and meaning within the forms of rhetoric:

For even as the Snow advanced upon the points vertical of cacuminous Mountains, dissolveth and discoagulateth it self into humorous liquidity; even so by the frothy volubility of your words, the Prince is perswaded to depose himself from his Royal Seat and Dignity, and to follow your counsel with all contradiction and reluctance. (REED II, 456)

This is affected and pleonastic speech, stuffed full of newfangled Latinate words, a rhetorical vice that Puttenham calls “Fond Affectation” and closely related to “*Soraismus*, or the Mingle-Mangle,” the affected use of foreign words in place of the vernacular (337-8). Here, the aim of oratory is not to persuade but to use rhetorical figures with a wit that purposefully confounds sense and delights through its incongruity. Nonsense is a cultivated mode of learned play, appreciated by those with the requisite educational capital to understand this metarhetorical game and the leisure profitably to spend their time idly.

Jonson’s *Every Man Out*, performed soon after the revels in 1599, recalls this performance in the scene where Clove and Orange “talk fustian a little, and gull them; [to] make them [the onstage audience] believe we are great scholars.” Clove’s stream of nonsense is bombasted “Mingle Mangle,” mimicking Hoskins’ mock-oration:

whereas the ingenuity of the time and the soul’s *synderisis* are but *embryons* in nature, added to the paunch of Esquiline, and the *intervallum* of the zodiac, besides the ecliptic line being optic and not mental, but by the contemplative and theoric part thereof, doth demonstrate to us the vegetable circumference, and the ventosity of the tropics; and whereas our intellectual, or

mincing capriole (according to the *Metaphysics*) as you may read in Plato's *Histriomastix*. (III.i.183-91)

Even Orange's responses – "O Lord, sir!" (171), "It pleases you to say so, sir" (174), "O God, sir!" (180) – are in dialogue with these revels, and echo the tenth article of the Knights of the Quiver against empty vain rhetoric: "That no Knight reply to another mans speech, O good Sir, you have reason, Sir, You say well Sir, It pleaseth you to say so Sir, or any such like answerless answers" (*REED* II, 460). It is a highly stylised performance of nonsense that continues the game set in motion by Hoskins, thus entering into a creative dialogue with these revels, and advertising *Every Man Out* as part of shared literary experiment. Mimicry also takes a more aggressive form in this speech. Clove's fustian is peppered with phrases from Marston's *Scourge of Villanie* – "paunch of Esquiline" and "mincing capriole" – and cites *Histriomastix*. By mockingly quoting textual scraps of Marston and others, Jonson's play stigmatises their performances, setting in place distinctions between his mode of learned play and that of others. This derisory mimicry speaks to "confraternal paranoia"; such ridiculing requires the dramatist to take his rival's part, echoing his words through a process of intertextuality which is aggressively dialogic and sociable.

Marston's *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, performed by the Children of Paul's around 1600, both restages Clove's performance of fustian and includes a further device – onstage smoking – that draws the scene into direct conversation with the original performance of Hoskins's fustian oration, which was itself delivered while its addressee, Charles Best, took tobacco onstage. *Jack Drum's Entertainment* includes quotes from Hoskins's mock-oration elsewhere in the play. One character repeats Hoskins's nonsensical *antimetabole*: "Truly as a Mill-horse, is not a horse Mill, and as a Cart Jade, is not a Jade Cart, even so will I go hang my selfe" (IV, 225; *REED* II, 457). Puffe's performance of fustian, like that of Clove, is cast not simply as a set-piece performance, but as a consciously borrowed performance. Hence, when Puffe begins to speak, Planet, as a cue to the audience, recognises the distinctive bombasted nonsensical style, announcing: "By the Lord fustian, now I understand it: complement is as much as fustian" (III, p. 209). Once again, Marston borrows from Hoskins, in this instance his *Directions of Speech and Style* which describes "compliment" as a "performance of affected ceremonies in words, lookes, or gesture" (158; Finkelpearl, *John Marston* 130-1). At the end of the performance, Puffe marks his departure from the stage and from the plot by falling "to the Lawe" (210). The easy passage

between the stage and the law tropes the commercial and creative traffic between the playing companies, especially the boys' companies, and the Inns in this period.

Possibly one reason why these Middle Temple revels had jests stolen so frequently by dramatists is because its mode of burlesque was understood to be particularly innovative. Other Inns turned their hands to producing nonsense for their revels. Francis Beaumont and Heneage Finch produced pedagogic mock-orations for the 1605 Inner Temple revels – the “Grammar Lecture” and the “Arithmetic Lecture” – that are also nonsense. Beaumont’s “Grammar Lecture” divides the Prince of Templaria’s subjects rhetorically into three – “young students, Revelers, and plodders.” These principles of syntaxis are translated into the principles of social manners, thus playing on “vain rhetoric” as empty ornament in a very physical sense: “there is another arthography fitt for A Reveller to witt the right writing of a sinkapace,” or galliard, “avoiding all playerly dashes which beget exceedingly false orthography in dancing” (REED II, 659-60). The lecture is a study of the grammar of manners, so highly mannered it is purposeless, providing instead a study of idleness. Finch’s “Arithmetic Lecture” lists uses of maths that seem to make sense, but actually make none at all:

I could here number innumerable inconveniences that through the want of this numbring art have befallen a number of ignorant sowles And I could open many misteryes that by this art you might easaly compass, as for example:

To knowe howe long a man might be a clyming vp to the *primum mobile* and when he were there vnluckely missing some footstep or other howe long he might be falling, which some long studied Astromers have thought would be a hundred years. (REED II, 652).

The principle of measurement makes sense, but not the example, which is fantastical. Like the articles of the Middle Temple revels, these mock-orations are made up of quips, set-pieces that are readily available for appropriation and recasting. The Middle Temple revels pioneer a mode of burlesque that mixes mock-heroic with displays of mock-rhetoric, forms of urban satire, parody, travesty, and invective (O’Callaghan 23-30). Key to this mode of burlesque is a knowing incongruity, a witty self-consciousness that marks it out as an elite and learned mode, which should not be to everyone’s taste. Girardus Listrius’ letter before Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* made “unpopularity” one of the defining features of *serio ludere*: “there are truly many things in it which cannot be understood

except by the learned and attentive . . . For there is nothing requiring more talent than to joke learnedly" (cited in Elton 167-8).

Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels around 1607, is a similarly highly self-conscious experiment with burlesque. One of the marketing strategies of its publisher, Walter Burre, as Zachary Lesser has noted, was to focus on its unpopularity when first performed, and "*the wide world . . . for want of judgement, or not understanding the privy marke of Ironie about it (which shewed it was no of-spring of any vulgar braine) utterly rejected it*" (52-4, 74-9). The "*privy marke of Ironie*" is a generic marker shared with Beaumont's "Grammar Lecture," performed at the 1605 revels. It is simultaneously a signifier for distinction and for a burlesque style. Burlesque, a pungent mix of parody, travesty, and topical satire, was a hybrid genre that the boys' companies arguably cultivated as one of their signature styles – many of the plays that I have referred to were part of the repertoire of the boys' companies. Obviously, burlesque was not confined to Inns of Court dramatists or to the boys' companies – Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, for example is, in part, a sustained dialogue with the mode of burlesque showcased at the Middle Temple revels (see Elton). Yet, tellingly, the jesting epistle to the 1609 printed quarto of *Troilus and Cressida*, "A never writer to an ever reader: news," echoes Burre's epistle before *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, using a similar trope of exclusive unpopularity, announcing it as "a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical" (73).

Burlesque is one of the generic signs of the commerce, the creative dialogue in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries between the boys' companies, the Inns and the universities. Fostering this type of creative and sociable commerce may have been to the advantage of the boys' companies because it foregrounded the elite pedagogic performance culture they shared with these educational institutions at a point when their links with the grammar and choir schools was becoming weaker. The Inns of Court revels are significant not just for their production of civic fictions, but also, particularly in the late 1590s, as performance cultures developing innovative modes of burlesque and satire. When dramatists borrowed from these forms of learned play they also took with them sets of associations that, in turn, helped to shape the corporate identity of the playing companies. The way that burlesque coincides with satiric fraternities and other aggressive modes of commoning in the revels and in these plays testifies to the formative role of rites of violence within modes of learned play and within elite corporate

identities. Subversion is not perhaps the most useful critical model for defining this phenomenon. As Hannah Skoda points out in relation to student violence, it “was not aberrant or irrational,” but rather structured and controlled; individuals and communities had an interest in these rites of violence because they offered a compelling expression of identity (40). The fraternal “games of serial satire” that were played at the turn of the sixteenth century functioned to bring a range of different, albeit often closely related, performance cultures into dialogue, each with their own particular set of investments in establishing and perpetuating a corporate identity.

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