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UMI
LITTLE WHITE OATHS:
THE REPRESENTATION OF THE EVOLVING CODES OF HONOUR
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

A thesis submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
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by Reta A. Terry
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ABSTRACT

Seventeenth century male honour codes, in England, were neither simple nor stable. Men and women struggled to determine what it meant to be an honourable man and what constituted an honourable act. The seventeenth century was a period in which the honour code underwent a significant metamorphosis. This study examines the use of the concepts of seventeenth-century masculine honour and how they were employed by authors to inculcate their audiences in order to instill specific values and elicit certain behaviours. This study further explores the ways in which these authors are themselves a product of a cultural context in which the masculine codes of honour are evolving.

The elements of masculine honour can be seen overlapping and interplaying in the literature of the seventeenth century. Shakespeare’s examination of oaths and promise, of revenge and ambition in Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth, overlap with Middleton’s ambitious Black House pieces in A Game at Chess. Moreover, Middleton’s exploration of the nexus between masculine honour codes and a sense of nationalism not only takes up Shakespeare’s elevation of English honour in Malcolm’s creation of Earls in Macbeth, but also anticipates the discussion of whether honour is manifest in allegiance to the monarch or the state that we have seen in the writings Davenant, Lovelace and Howell during the Civil War. Moreover, the urgent calls for Stoic control of one’s passions and the condemnation of factionalism that form the central theme of the writings of Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish are evident, also, in the writings of male authors of this period, particularly in Shakespeare’s creation of
Horatio and in Davenant’s expanded characters.

This dissertation argues that literature is one of the methods of encoding honour in this period. Moreover, these writings were produced during periods of significant political upheaval, and connections are present between those events and the evolution of masculine honour codes. The Essex Rebellion, the Spanish Match, the ascension of a new monarch and the Civil War all had a considerable impact on the shifting emphasis of masculine honour from a chivalric and violent code to a more moral and civic system.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As with any project of this magnitude, taken on by someone with so much to learn, I am deeply indebted to more institutions and individuals than can be named here. I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to both the University of Saskatchewan and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for providing the funding which has made this study possible. I would also like to thank the library staff at the University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, the British Library, and the Bibliotheque nationale.

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To my children, Crystal and Bill, who gave me a reason to get out of bed each morning; and to my partner, Wallace Fox, who arrived late in the game and gave me the encouragement I needed to complete what was a very long haul. Thank you all.
DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Elizabeth Guilbault

and

For my sisters, Lark Firth and Samantha Guilbault
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INTRODUCTION

Chaucer’s knight, in the 1387 General Prologue to his Canterbury Tales, is, we are told, a “worthy” man. In fact, this knight is so worthy that Chaucer uses the word to characterize him a total of five times in a 35-line description. What he was worthy of, of course, was the honour and respect due to a man of arms for, as Sir William Segar points out in his 1602 attempt to define knighthood, partly by tracing its history, knights

may bee they which were next about the Prince, as his Gard and servants, picked and choyse men out of the rest, being called in the Almaine tung knighthen, which is as much to say as Servants; these men being found of good servuice, the word afterward was taken for an Honor, & for a man that professeth Armes. (Honor, military and ciuill, 21)

Segar speculates that the word “knight” comes from the Latin miles which means soldier, or the Almaines who called men that followed the war, but who were not mercenaries, knighthen or milties. Knights, then, were the epitome of chivalric honour; they were hand-picked to guard the prince, they were of good service, and they possessed martial prowess. Indeed Chaucer’s knight has had a long and distinguished military career that included wars in Alexandria, Prussia, Lithuania, Grenada, Algeciras, Adalia, Turkey, and what is now Benmarin. This knight was “ful worthy... in his lordes werre,” where he had ridden farther than any man, had been seated in a place of honour at kings’ tables, and, perhaps most worthy, “At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene, /And foughten for oure feith at Tramyssene /In lystes thries, and ay

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slayn his foo" (General Prologue, 61-3). This knight was brave, loyal, and good at killing his enemies, especially in single combat or "lystes," and for that he was "evere honoured for his worthyness" (GP, 50).

That loyalty and courage were an integral part of the chivalric honour code is clear in the oath administered at knighting ceremonies. This oath, according to Segar, could be traced back to ceremonies beginning as early as 1020 AD, and it is worth quoting at length precisely because it sums up the martial and loyal aspect of chivalric honour. Prospective knights, in medieval England, were required to

sware before God and by this holie Bible, that ye shall neuer fight against this mightie and excellent Prince that bestoweth the order of Knighthood vpon you, vnlesse ye shall be occasioned so to doo in the seruice of your owne king and naturall Prince: for in that case (hauing first yeelded up the Collers, deuise, and other Ensignes of Honor now receiued) it shall bee lawfull for you to serue against him, without reproach or offence to all other companions in Armes: but otherwise dooing you shall incurre infamie, and being taken in warre, shall bee subject to the paines of death. Ye shall also sware, with all your force & power to mainteine and defend all Ladies, Gentlemen, Orfants, widowes, women distressed and abandoned. The like ye must doo for wiuues being desired, and shunne no aduenture of your person, in euerie good warre wherein ye happen to be. (Honor, military..., 8-9)¹

¹Although this document is one treatise and seems to have been published all at one time, it begins renumbering as page 7 after page 22 of the fifth book. This quotation is taken from what would be pages 24-25 but which are numbered as 8-9.
The oath demands that the knight be loyal to his "naturall Prince" even to the point of allowing him to break his oath to the one granting him knighthood (and breaking an oath is a very serious business as we shall see in Chapter One); he must be courageous, never shunning the "aduenture" of his "person" in the cause of a good war, and manly, protecting women, orphans and widows who have no men of their own. Finally, the knight must be part of a community, protecting other "gentlemen" and behaving in such a way as to provoke no reproach or offence to "all other companions in Armes."
The penalty for not meeting these demands is "infamie," or dishonour, and death.

Throughout the early modern period the medieval, chivalric codes of honour, with an emphasis on lineage, allegiance to one's lord, and, at times, violence, were evolving into honour codes that were both more moral and civic in that they emphasized the individual conscience and allegiance to the state. This evolution, in turn, gave rise to several competing discourses of honour\(^2\) in which concepts of what constituted an honourable man overlapped, interplayed and conflicted. In particular, seventeenth-century male honour codes, in England, were neither simple nor stable. The men and women of this period struggled, as we do today, to determine what it

\(^2\)Michel Foucault, in his study *The Archeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, defines discourses as the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). Discourse, according to Foucault, is a "monument" rather than a "document" (138-39). I find this definition limiting and prefer to use the term *discourse* in much the same way it would have been used in the seventeenth century; that is, I wish to return to the definition of discourse as "talk, conversation, lecture, sermon, dissertation" (*OED*). Discourses of honour in this study are the conversations, treatises, sermons, and other traces of early modern "intercourse" regarding honour systems or codes. In other words, discourses of honour codes are the conversations left to us by seventeenth-century writers and thinkers that helped to identify and construct the system that governed honour and honourable behaviour in this period; discourses of honour are both monuments and documents.
means to be an honourable man and what constitutes an honourable act. This struggle to understand honour was further complicated by the rebellion, revolution and political upheaval, typified by the accession of four kings, rule by parliament and a military coup, that mark the period between 1600 and 1660. Moreover, these discourses, complete with their conflicts, confusions and continuities, were, I believe, explored, charted, and puzzled over in the literature of seventeenth-century England.

Honour, as with other intangible and abstract terms like “love” or “faith,” is difficult both to define and to discern. In fact, the OED contains eleven definitions of the word “honour” that are applicable to the Elizabethan period. Nevertheless, research into seventeenth-century honour codes has tended to divide the male codes of honour into binary opposites, oversimplifying the subtle and complex shifts in honour codes and overlooking the importance of the process by which honour codes evolve.

Thus, Mervyn James identifies a “chivalric” honour code that comes into conflict with what he calls a “Bartolean” view of honour, a meritocratic view that emphasizes virtue, Puritanism, and civic duty. Cynthia Herrup discusses the friction between what she calls “traditional” honour which depends upon lineage and protocol and “meritocratic” honour that foregrounds service to the state and Christian piety.

Similarly, Nigel Llewellyn examines the antagonism between “aristocratic” and

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3Bartolus of Sasso-Ferrato was a fourteenth-century Italian civilian who is “reputed to be the earliest writer on heraldry” (Squibb, 178). Bartolus believed that any man could take any arms for himself, without the arms having to be granted by some governmental authority, as long as the arms did not already belong to someone else or had not been used by another man or family. According to Bartolus men did not have to be of aristocratic birth to bear a coat of arms. For a more detailed analysis of Bartolus’ views on honour cf. G.D. Squibb, The High Court of Chivalry (178-79) or Mervyn James’s Society, Politics and Culture (310).
"meritocratic" honour codes in seventeenth-century England. Felicity Heal explores the differences between what she simply calls the "old" versus the "new" kinds of honour. Essentially all these words connote the same idea, and my study uses the term "chivalric"—and related terms "medieval," "traditional" and "feudal"—to imply an honour code that emphasized violent, heroic action, allegiance to the person of an individual lord, and lineage. I also adopt the terms "modern," "civic," "moralistic," and "national" to signify a shift in the emphasis of discourses of honour that now foreground piety, Christian patience, civic duty, allegiance to the collective state, and adherence to the dictates of the individual conscience.

The term "codes," too, is not without ambiguities. In its most basic definition a "code" is simply a system or collection of ideas, and all of the definitions found in the OED are concerned with the written aspects of codification—Justinian law, for example. But honour is a behavioural code and, as such, is much harder to articulate. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, however, a period in which the need for codification gained some prominence. The process of encoding honour in this period, though nebulous, did exist. In this study, honour codes can be taken to mean a set of ideas that are circulated among a community; honour is a culturally constructed ideal, and early modern men and women attempted to create a community of honourable people through the propagation of several competing discourses of what constituted an honourable person. Discussions of honour are codified in the courtesy literature of this

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4Richard Helgerson’s excellent study, Forms of Nationhood, aptly demonstrates this concern. According to Helgerson, early modern men spent a great deal of time codifying and mapping the world around them. Helgerson explores this process in several areas, including law, religion, geography and history.
period, a genre whose purpose was, in fact, to set out the rules of honourable
behaviour. Genealogies and books of arms, too, were intended to perpetuate concepts
of honour founded on noble birth and lineage. Histories often embodied honour codes;
the consequences of prior honourable and dishonourable actions provided examples of
honourable behaviour for Renaissance men and women. Perhaps one of the most
deliberate, and most comprehensive, attempts at codifying the concepts and
behaviours associated with masculine honour was Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier.*
These works – the genealogies, histories, courtesy tracts and others – attempted to
define the rules of behaviour appropriate to gentlemen. Put simply, works of these
types existed to teach men how to be honourable.

Much of the fictional literature of this period is, I believe, also an attempt,
conscious or otherwise, to define and inculcate a system of honourable behaviour. The
works under consideration in this study fall easily into the genres of courtesy literature,
history, and didactic writings parallel to Castiglione’s idealized *Courtier.* Moreover, it is
my contention that the men and women of the seventeenth century, like men and
women today, struggled to understand what it meant to be honourable, because, to use
Stephen Greenblatt’s words, there existed an “intense and sustained struggle in the late
sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England to redefine the central values of
society” (95). Honour, I believe, was one of those societal values being redefined in this
period, and this redefinition, this struggle, is discernible in the textual traces left by the
writers of the seventeenth century.

Each of the five important studies of honour in Shakespeare to date – Charles
Barber’s *Honour in Early Modern Drama 1591-1700,* Curtis Brown Watson’s *Shakespeare*
and the Renaissance Concept of Honour, Norman Council’s When Honour’s at the Stake.

Paul Siegal’s “Shakespeare and the Neo-Chivalric Cult of Honour,” and Frances
Shirley’s Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare’s Plays — makes an important contribution
to the investigation of honour. With the exception of Barber and Shirley, all of these
scholars overlook the inseparable relationship between honour and the public
expression of honour — the word of honour or promise. Barber’s discussion is, however,
very brief and, although Shirley’s work is very good on specific instances of oaths in
Shakespearean drama, it neither extends beyond Shakespeare’s work or nor examines
the broader concepts of early modern masculine honour. Moreover, as Anita Pacheco
points out, Council and Siegal both adopt a single view of what constitutes honour,
which gives “an inadequate sense not only of the unstable connection between virtue
and honour in Shakespeare, but also of the variety of Renaissance traditions of honour
to which Shakespeare responds” (9). Watson, however, does acknowledge the
complexity of honour in the Renaissance and, perhaps more important, he
distinguishes between religious and ethical obligations.\(^5\) The study of honour needs to
be broadened to include, or perhaps accept, the idea that belief systems evolve slowly
rather than changing radically. In fact, Watson’s avowed purpose is to demonstrate the
clean break between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (15). Watson writes that

\(^5\)For Watson, religion is a belief system whereas ethics is a code of behaviour (3). Watson uses this distinction throughout his study as the frame for his discussion of the conflict between ancient classical systems of honour and a newer Christian code. Despite the usefulness of Watson’s careful distinction, he sees honour as exclusively ethical (12). In other words, for Watson honour is not a system of beliefs but rather a code of behaviour based on the conflict between Christian-humanism (2) and pagan-humanism (1). Indeed, Watson maintains that honour is, at its roots, a "pagan idea" (4) that had very little to do with morality until the Renaissance.
"the climate of moral opinion was radically different in Shakespeare's age from what it had been in the age of Dante" (15) and later, "the cultural values of the Renaissance are radically different from those of the Middle Ages" (53). These claims obfuscate the residual medieval chivalric beliefs in the Renaissance concepts of honour. Moreover, Watson's argument that there existed "two separate moral systems which were expecting him [the gentleman] to act according to diametrically opposed tenets" (5) excludes the strong continuities within an evolving honour code.

Conversely, Paul Siegal, who devotes a large part of his study to criticizing Watson, does an excellent job of identifying the residual chivalric code of honour in both the Elizabethan court and Shakespeare's plays. Further, Siegal points out that it is the "feudal chivalric tradition rather than revived classicism which is in conflict with the Christian humanist ideal of honour" (41). But, although Siegal identifies the chivalric aspects that remained within, and created conflict with, the more modern ideal of honour, further study is needed to explore the ways in which this conflict between chivalric and Christian concepts of honour manifested itself in the political, social and cultural milieux of the Tudor and Stuart periods.

Council, writing in 1973, not only points out the need to expand the study of honour to include an examination of how it was manifested in practical terms, but also identifies the relationship between honour and all aspects of a Renaissance man's life. Council identifies several aspects of honour, stemming from both classical and medieval ideals, and further elucidates the way in which these ideals came into conflict

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*AAlthough much of Siegal's argument is applicable to Shakespeare's entire canon, he specifically examines* Henry IV, Part I, Troilus and Cressida, All's Well that Ends Well, Coriolanus, and Timon of Athens.*
with Christian ideals of moral, virtuous behaviour. In doing so Council recognizes the complexity of honour. But like both Siegal and Watson, Council adopts a single view of honour which posits a polarization between two diametrically opposed systems of belief.⁷

Hence, while previous studies of honour in Shakespeare’s plays have defined the various and complex aspects of honour that existed in the Renaissance period, and while Council, Siegal and Watson have each carefully examined and elucidated a single system of honour, whether it be classical, medieval or early modern, what remains to be seen is how these views of honour overlapped, evolved and interplayed, creating tensions within and between Renaissance men. More significantly, no one has hitherto attempted to interpret Shakespearean tragedy within the general context of this evolving Renaissance honour code and within the more specific context of the political upheaval in the period, including the Essex Rebellion—a rebellion Mervyn James calls “the last honour revolt” (416).

Historians, too, have demonstrated a renewed interest in the early modern concept of honour.⁸ In fact it is an historian, Mervyn James, whose important study Society, Politics and Culture, identifies the shifting honour code in early modern

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⁷Council writes that “honour is the reward due to virtuous action” and that this is “the most widespread definition of honour in sixteenth-century England” (12). Later, Council argues that the belief that honour was the reward of virtue “was clearly the most widely-accepted norm” (22) and that this orthodox view came into conflict with a newer honour intended, by its contemporary promulgators, to alleviate the prevalent “moral decay” (27) in society.

⁸The best example of this “renewed interest” is the Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th series, volume 6 (1996) which is entirely devoted to the study of English Renaissance honour.
England, and my study is much indebted to James's work. James points out that there was an "emergence of a state-centred honour system" (375) in this period, and that the "permeation of the community of honour by humanism and religion" (375) required both a redefining of the idea of "virtue" and a reconsideration of the relationship between honour and religion (385). While James's study establishes the importance of the seventeenth-century honour codes, his work provides only one part of the theoretical framework needed to investigate the significance of honour in early modern literature as well as the importance of literature to the honour code.

Other historians have also contributed to the analysis of seventeenth-century honour. The work of both Richard Cust and Felicity Heal has aptly demonstrated the fear of, and reactions to, dishonour through their excellent studies of slander in this period. Cynthia Herrup's studies of the legal system in early modern England, especially as it pertains to slander cases, has also had, at its base, a concern with honour, and her work has served to emphasize that honour is a "touchstone for early modern people" (137). Elizabeth Foyster's and Garthine Walker's contributions to the Transactions volume clearly demonstrate the importance of male honour codes to female honour and vice versa.

According to James, the Renaissance was a period of transition in the evolution of the codes of honour. And, one of the most notable facets of this transition is the move from the external to an internal code of honour. The Tudor reign was a period in which "the sense of what honour implied underwent a change of emphasis, apparent in the early seventeenth century" (James 309). James further maintains that "the expositors of honour whose writings circulated in England and Scotland at the turn of
the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were unanimous that blood and lineage
deposited to honourable behaviour” (310). Thus, honour arose primarily from the
honourable man’s high birth rather than any action on his part and, as such, was
almost inevitable. Yet, simultaneous with, but somewhat opposed to, this view of
honour was what James chooses to call the “Bartolean view” of honour which
emphasized “the nature of honour as the reward of virtue” (310). In this concept of
honour a man became honourable by his virtuous actions. But virtue, in this period,
does not necessarily connote morality or ethics. For example, in 1590 Segar writes
unequivocally that “vertue alloweth just reuenge, and admetteth the defence of
propertie and right” (The Booke of Honour… dedication); there is no Christian turning
the other cheek for this Garter King. Moreover, Segar argues that

the true nobilitie of men, is Vertue, and that he is trulie noble that is

vertuous, bee he borne of high or of lowe Parents. And the more highie

he be borne, the worse reputation he meriteth, if he cannot continue the

honour left him by his Ancestor. (The Booke of Honour… 34-5)

He precludes “mean” men from engaging in combat and lumps anyone below the rank
of gentleman in the same group of outsiders as traitors, spies, deserters, convicts, liars
and bastards (The Book… 33). It is, however, interesting to note that bastards may
engage in private combat if they have earned martial glory, have “long serued loyallie
in their Princes Court” (The Book… 33), or are very learned (in which case they may
have someone fight in their stead; learned men are apparently not very good duellers).
In 1602 Segar was still concerned with defining virtue for his would-be knights, and in
his second treatise on the subject of honour he writes that “because the greatest number
of men, are not well informed what Vertue meaneth, it shall be expedient to say, that Vertue is a good habite, and true perfection of reason” (Honour, military... 208). Virtue can be violent, and although noble or high birth predisposes one to virtuous actions, virtue is, in the end, a habit and the result of careful logic rather than a moral trait.

In the fifteenth century, then, honour was centred mainly on the medieval, chivalric code of knightly honour. Inherent within this code was the concept of violence, since honour was based upon knightly deeds enacted in battle, often, in the defence of one’s lord. Even within the confines of Christianity honour was gained most often by violent means. Most knights believed the pursuit of Christian virtues was the primary concern of monks, not knights, or could be left to old age,

when the man of honour, now too enfeebled for deeds of arms, should devote himself to ‘ghostly chivalry and deeds of arms spiritual.’ (James, 320)

In fact, when Elizabeth’s champion and Master of the Armorie, Sir Henry Lea, gave his place on 17 November, 1590, to the young Earle of Cumberland, he had Mr. Hales sing a song which included the verse:

My helmet now shall make an hiue for Bees,

And louers songs shall turne to holy Psalmes:

A man at Armes must now sit on his knees,

And feed on pray’rs, that are old ages almes.

And so from Court to Cottage I depart,

My Saint is sure of mine vnspotted hart.

Lea promises that Elizabeth’s champion will “be your Beadsman now, that was your Knight” (qtd. in Segar, Honor, military....198-99). The overriding result of this belief was
that “the warrior values of ancient Germanic society continued to flourish as a corporate way of life in a setting whose dominant tone was Christian” (James, 320).

As the sixteenth century approached, however, the demarcation of the estates—clergy, nobility, commoners—became less clear in terms of honour. What had formerly been conceived of as a corporate code of honour that existed through the combination of noble birth and virtuous action now broadened, placing an emphasis on honourable behaviour binding both to the monarchy and to all its subjects. In other words, the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century saw the expansion of honour to include not only knights, but clergy and commoners as well, for the code of honour became less centred on public noble behaviour and more centred on religious morality, moral virtue, and the personal allegiance owed by every man to the state.

Thus, in 1630, Richard Braithwaite could write a tract, entitled *The English Gentleman*, exhorting all men who aspired to honour to live a virtuous life. Braithwaite warned that “Vertue the greatest Signall and Symbol of Gentry: is rather expressed by goodness of Person, than by greatnesse of Place” (2). Braithwaite further points out that lineage and ancestral honour can easily be lost in this modern world where merit outweighs descent:

what is it that moveth thee to this contempt of others? Is it thy descent? Alas, that is none of thine; thou derivest glory from thine Ancestors, whose honour by thy vertues as it liveth, so obscured by thy ignoble life, dieth. (8)

Finally, Braithwaite metes out the killing blow to honour by lineage when he asks “whats Beautie worth, when thou must die to day? Nor honour; for that shall lye in the
dust, and sleepe in the bed of earth” (21). By 1630, then, the honour gained by lineage and violent deeds was no longer enough; the true gentleman had to concern himself with “honour grounded on vertue” (Braithwaite 69), acceptable to God who judged the immortal soul and not the body committed to “the bed of earth.”

The fact that Braithwaite could so clearly articulate, by 1630, an honour grounded on vertue as opposed to one based upon lineage and brutal action indicates that a change in the honour code had been in evidence for some time. In 1609, Barnaby Rich writes to his “gentleman” readers that “whilst we doe hunt after a phantasticall glory, we doe abandon the true; for the ground of honour consisteth in vertue” (8). William Perkins laments in his treatise How to Live (1609) that some obey God’s word not because they have faith in it, but rather “in respect of honour, profit, or pleasure, which they looke to reape thereby” (11) and exhorts his readers to a more moral sense of honour by asking “what greater honour can there bee then this, that the creature should give testimony to the Creator?” (15).

The pursuit of honour, however, did not only become a moral issue, it also became a highly civic one. Castiglione’s courtier was endowed by his creators with “civic vertue,” but the courtier’s vertue, indeed the “ende therefore of a perfect Courtier” (261) was to “purchase him...the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies conforme him franckly of the truth of every matter meeete for him to understand, without fear or perill to displease him” (261). Moreover, the courtier seeks this “good will” by being obedient, and he does it because it is his responsibility, as a servant to the prince, to “set [his prince] in the way of vertue” (261) so that the prince himself may maintain a
reputation for "goodnesse." Braithwaite's work, however, includes the highly politicized idea that absolute obedience to the monarchy is no longer necessarily required:

as you receiveth your birth and breeding from your Countery; so are you to stand for her, even to the sacrifice of your dearest lives; provided that the cause which you entertaine in her defence be honest, without purpose of intrusion into anothers right, or labouring to enlarge her boundiers by unlawfull force. (145)

Hence, for Braithwaite, honour as an indication of virtue not only extended to the "gentlemen," but also to the monarchy itself, and honourable causes could be identified by their accordance with the law. Honourable men are encouraged to consider the cause before taking action, and tacit in this encouragement is the notion that the fight, presumably the Prince's war, could, and should, be rejected if the cause is not just or the intent is expansionist; the honourable man can refuse to fight in an unjust war. Perhaps more important, honour is a matter of conscience and of choice, and honourable deeds in battle are dependent upon the gentleman's moral consideration of the cause of the fight.

Braithwaite goes on to point out the laws enacted against duelling, and here, too, he couches his argument against duelling in terms of civic duty:

how many, even upon trifling occasion have gone into the field, and in their heat of bloud have fallen? Sure, I am, their deare Countery hath felt their losse, to who in all due respect they should have tendred both love and life and not have made prodigall expence of that, which
might have been a means to strengthen and support her state. (106)

Defending one's honour by violent battle is not honourable at all. Rather, it is an act of
defiance against the state by wasting what could have otherwise been a life of true
honour gained in preserving the state.

It should be noted here that Braithwaite's argument is presented in terms of
allegiance to the collective state or "Country," even to the point of including a
provision for disobeying the monarch. These terms indicate the shift in the code of
honour from the ancient code of absolute obedience to the person of one's lord to the
perception of honour as deriving from the state. The state, then, by 1630, had become
an entity unto itself which included, but was not necessarily exclusive to, the monarchy
itself. The existence of this entity can be discerned in the treatises of the period such as
John Norden's 1597 *The Mirror of Honour*, which includes a warning that the ungodly
general, "be he never so politicke and warlike," will have his honour "vsurped" and
"taken from him againe with ignominie" (6) should he not approach the act of battle
with a will to fight first for "the Lords cause," then "for his Princes state, his countries
good" and lastly "his owne honour" (5). Norden's ordering is significant; even in
military matters—the ancient fount of honour—motives must be prioritized to include
first moral and political considerations, and then individual or private fame and
reputation. The process by which honour came to be more civic and moral is
perceptible in the literature of seventeenth-century England.

This study will examine the complex and unstable labyrinth of seventeenth-
century competing discourses of honour. Specifically, it will explore how the literature
of the period, in various genres and by several authors, enters, influences, and is
influenced by the seventeenth-century honour codes. This goal may be accomplished, in part, by exploring the connections between developments in the masculine honour codes and the significant political events of the early seventeenth century. Chapter One explores the use of oaths in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and demonstrates how Shakespeare’s use of oaths is informed by the fall of the great men of his own time. Specifically, this chapter examines the very different styles of courtiership exhibited by men like Essex, Raleigh, Bacon and Sidney and analyzes Shakespeare’s exploration of the kinds of courtly honour, and their consequences, that were available to his contemporaries.

Chapters Two and Three look at the importance of the accession of the Stuart kings, James I and Charles I, and the ways in which the accession of a new monarch influences an unstable concept of honour. Chapter Two examines the competing discourses of honour in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* is the Shakespeare play most influenced by James I’s concepts of honour and kingship, and this chapter investigates the parallels between James’s political writings, contemporary ideas and ideals of political allegiance and obedience, and Shakespeare’s Scottish play. An investigation of the impending accession of Charles I, the events of the Spanish Match, and the connections between these events and the performance of honour in Middleton’s *A Game At Chess* constitutes Chapter Three.

In Chapter Four what are perhaps the most important political events of the century are analysed: the Civil War and the execution of Charles I. The Civil War epitomizes the conflicts of honour under investigation throughout this study precisely because civil war breaks and redefines both political and familial bonds, which are
themselves an integral part of the male honour codes. Moreover, the execution of the king contravenes the chivalric honour code that demands personal allegiance to one’s lord. Chapter Four examines the way these events helped to redefine honour codes as they are expressed in the work of defeated Royalists such as Lovelace, Howell and Davenant.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the period’s evolving honour code from the perspective of the women who lived and wrote through these political upheavals. It explores the previously unexamined relationship between the male honour code and female expectations of men in Elizabeth Carey’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* and Margaret Cavendish’s *Poems and Fancies*. While there is still much work to be done in this area, this chapter argues that male and female honour codes were separate, but interrelated codes, and that men and women were both acutely aware of (and influences on) the honour codes of the opposite gender. This chapter is concerned with the way in which women’s expectations helped to shape and redefine seventeenth-century male honour codes. It further explores the ways in which women responded to the so-called heroic deeds of the soldiers and rebels, and how their response influenced male ideas and ideals of what it meant to be honourable.

The Renaissance, then, was a period in which the honour code underwent a significant metamorphosis. The chivalric codes of honour, with an emphasis on loyalty to the king, violent action and lineage, were evolving into honour codes that were more moralistic, civic and national. Despite this evolution, the concept of promise did not diminish, and the word of honour remained an integral part of the seventeenth-century discourse of honour. It is this concept that we will examine in Chapter One.
CHAPTER ONE

Real Fictional Heroes: *Hamlet, Othello* and the Fall of Great Men

While there exist volumes of scholarly analysis of Shakespeare’s language, relatively little attention has been paid to his use of promise in his tragedies, particularly in *Hamlet* and *Othello*. In fact, few critics working in this area have considered the significance and function of promise: oaths, vows, curses, blessings, and the invocation of higher powers—swearing—in Shakespearean tragedy. Yet, both *Hamlet* and *Othello* are replete with these elements, and their very frequency implies an important function.⁹ Despite the scarcity of critical attention, Elena Glazov-Corrigan makes the important point that there exists a “long-standing association of oath and tragedy” (140); oaths in Shakespeare possess “an unconditional power to bind characters to events and to divest them of power” (Glazov-Corrigan 133). Moreover, William Slights writes that “oaths function dramatically either to delineate a character or to structure dramatic action” (“‘Swear by thy’” 147). For Shakespeare, then, oaths are structural tools that both develop characterization and move the action toward its climax. These diverse concepts are both explored in, and informed by, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Oaths, however, also serve as a measure of a man’s honour: men must keep their word, once given, and give their word only when the conscience allows. In both *Hamlet* and *Othello* Shakespeare explores several competing discourses and codes of honour available to seventeenth-century men. In doing so, Shakespeare

⁹The material on *Hamlet* has been previously published under the title “Vows to the Blackest Devil”: *Hamlet* and the Evolving Codes of Honor in Early Modern England.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (1999). 1070-86.
also sets his work within a genre of literature that examines the fall of great men and overlaps his work with the many genres that attempt to codify a masculine honour code. Indeed, Shakespeare’s milieu, both literary and political, was filled with examples of men of great honour who had fallen from favour—men like Essex and Raleigh. Othello and Hamlet are, I believe, Shakespeare’s own attempts, conscious or otherwise, to examine the ways in which men rise to honour and the ways in which they fall. These plays enter the discourse of seventeenth-century masculine honour through their examinations of the unstable labyrinth of masculine honour codes, and in so doing, both influence that discourse and are influenced by it.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated a renewed interest in both Renaissance concepts of honour and the historical context that surrounds these concepts. In practical terms, this means that critics attempting to understand a literary text by placing it within the context of its creation must cross the constructed boundaries that exist between literary texts and historical “documents,” whether they be sermons, tracts, government papers, private letters, published or unpublished works. The study of honour in Shakespeare’s drama, then, must include an examination of the way that honour was referred to in a multiplicity of texts. This is not to say that an historical context can be entirely recreated and thus provide a definitive “meaning” or interpretation that is ascribable to Shakespeare’s plays. The recognition that history cannot be completely knowable is, in part, what separates New Historicism from former historical approaches to literature. But, an examination of the way honour was written about in other texts of the period allows for some general conclusions regarding the evolution of honour codes and Shakespeare’s role in representing and
defining those codes. Moreover, analysis of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and in particular their characters’ use of promise, provides new and revealing insights into evolving Renaissance codes of honour.¹ The heretofore unexplored relationship between honour and promise in *Hamlet* and *Othello* deserves attention for it is through the use of promise that Shakespeare’s characters define rival and evolving conceptions of what it meant to be an honourable man.

Integral to the codes of honour was, and is, the word, and Shakespeare’s use of the word of honour—of promise—can be examined in order to discern the shifting concept of honour itself. Specifically, according to Mervyn James, “the importance of ‘promise’ was that this gave the essence of honour, will and intention” (340); Shakespeare’s characters’ concepts of honour can be perceived in the ways in which they use, and respond to, promise. Thus, a close examination of Shakespeare’s use of promise in both *Hamlet* and *Othello* yields some valuable conclusions regarding the honour codes that both shape Shakespeare’s works and are shaped by them.

One of the most complex changes in the code of honour was a move from an external code to an internalized concept of what it is to be an honourable man. Men

¹Of the three most comprehensive studies of *Hamlet*—William Kerrigan’s *Hamlet’s Perfection*, Bert O. States’ *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* and R.A. Foakes’ *Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics in Shakespeare’s Art*—only Foakes discusses the Renaissance concepts of honour apparent in this play, and none considers the importance of the use of promise in this tragedy. Foakes’s discussion, however, is couched in terms of Hamlet’s association of his father and an heroic ideal of martial honour. Foakes argues that Hamlet distances himself from this ideal through the use of pre-Christian classical images to describe his father, thus both separating himself from this heroic ideal and aligning himself more closely with a Christian neo-Stoic concept of patient suffering. Foakes concludes that the play demonstrates the horrible nature of both revenge and military rule; he therefore overlooks the more positive aspects of the residual medieval honour code that can be found in the play.
were no longer considered honourable simply by right of birth, nor were they able to claim to be men of honour by producing a long list of heroic deeds. Rather, honour was becoming, by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, 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. That is not to say that there did not exist a residual chivalric sense of honour which emphasized the importance of blood and lineage as well as martial prowess. Rather, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this medieval concept of honour both co-existed and overlapped with a more modern code of honour which simultaneously emphasized both godliness and political allegiance to the collective state. This new code, in turn, created tensions of its own precisely because of its demand that men act in accordance with both the dictates of their conscience and their duty to the state. Put simply, Renaissance men had to cope with both an old, medieval code of honour and the tensions of a new one, tensions that were created, to a large degree, by the contemporary insistence on the importance of the individual conscience.

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2Bert O. States, in his important study *Hamlet and the Concept of Character*, persuasively argues that at the centre of *Hamlet* lies a complex relationship between the world of value and the characters of the play. States links these values to both political and moral concerns in the Renaissance, but he describes this world as a set of binary opposites—sanguine vs. melancholy, reason vs. madness, etc.—which does not address the interplaying and overlapping context of Renaissance values, including honour codes.

3Richard Cust, in his article “Honour and Politics in Early Stuart England: The Case of Beaumont vs. Hastings,” identifies these three aspects of honour in a slightly different way. He postulates that there were two opposed concepts of honour, that is, blood and lineage vs. Godliness and wisdom, and that loyalty to the monarch, service to the commonwealth, and obedience to the law overlapped both of these opposed ideas of what constitutes an honourable man (91).
In 1599, the anonymous writer of a pamphlet entitled *Fancies Ague-fittes, or Beauties Nettle-bed* finds it necessary to aver that “Honour is nothing els but populare reputation, it is no parte of the conscience” (16). This enters a Renaissance discourse of the conscience, and it enters against the proliferation of courtesy literature that urged men to examine their consciences before taking any act, or to act in consultation with God’s “counsell.” For example, William Perkins writes that “whatsoever is not done of a setled perswasion in judgement and conscience out of Gods word, howsoever men judge of it, is sinne” (*A Discourse*... 537). In particular, by 1597 John Norden was urging in his address to the reader that

all militaire men ought to haue continuall counsell and consultation with

the God of armies [the Christian God], dislayming their owne wisdomes,

judgements and valore, and to followe what is commanded in, or agreeeth

with his word. (2)

For Norden, as for many writers of this period, all men, even military men, should examine their conscience to ensure their actions, even in battle, coincide with the Word of God. Medieval soldiers and chivalric knights, too, were unconcerned with virtue. But, according to Maurice Keen, “it is as an essentially secular figure that the chivalrous

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The Short Title Catalogue contains many examples of this courtesy literature indicating that “how-to” books were both common and popular in this period, Barnaby Rich’s Roome for a Gentleman, Richard Braithwaite’s *The English Gentleman*, William Perkins’s *How to Live*, and an anonymous tract entitled *Instruction of a Gentleman*, for example.

For more on the Renaissance concept of conscience, and particularly on the way in which women’s consciences were perceived by contemporaries, see Lowell Gallagher, *Medusa’s Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance*. 
knight steps onto the stage of history" (43). By 1630, as Richard Braithwaite notes, the exhortations concerning honour and conscience had transformed the notion, for some, of honourable behaviour:

we have in these declining dayes, among so many proud Symeons, many humble Josephs, whose chiefest honour they make it to abase themselves on earth, to add to their complement of glory in heaven, so much slighting the applause of men, as their only aime is to have a sincere and blamelesse conscience in them. (63-4)

That the Elizabethan concept of honour came to encompass the internal conscience is well-documented. For the importance of the conscience in Renaissance religious and political matters, see Camille Wells Slichts’s The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton. Slichts points out that casuistry was a phenomenon in this period which arose in response to a crisis of both conscience and authority in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Slichts, the prevalence of this branch of theology was an attempt to aid contemporaries in reconciling religious faith with the demands of particular human situations that may create a crisis of the individual conscience. As early as 1957 Charles Barber pointed out that there existed the “beginnings of a tendency for honor to mean an inner conscience rather than external reward” (103) in the drama of this period. Robert Weimann concurs when he argues that “in late Elizabethan Puritan circles Puritan divines began to promulgate the elevation of human conscience over law” (88). Sir Keith Thomas, in his study Religion and the Decline of Magic, relates this Elizabethan emphasis on the individual conscience to the use of promise when he writes that “the Protestant emphasis upon the individual conscience inevitably shifted the ultimate sanction for truthfulness from the external fear of divine punishment to the godly man’s internal sense of responsibility. A man should keep his word simply because he had given it” (76-77).
and society, forced men to balance obedience to the state with adherence to Christian virtues of patience and forgiveness that could be found within God's word. In other words, there exists in this period a conflict of conscience between obedience to God and to the state which often required violent military action, and adherence to an honour code that demanded Christian patience, long-suffering, and non-violent resolutions to conflict. It is this attempt both to please the state and God and to remain honourable that leads to Hamlet's crisis of conscience and, ultimately, to his tragic death. Yet, one's "word" remained inherent in the codes of honour precisely because honour as a political and moral consideration required, even more than before, a public statement of intent. It is the essence of honour, manifest in promise, that Shakespeare questions when he creates the characters in Hamlet.

In fact, a close examination of the concepts of promise and honour in Hamlet reveals that the major characters in this play represent different stages in the evolution of a changing code of honour. Similarly, the characters Shakespeare creates in Othello represent not only different stages of honour, but also a different perspective on what it means to be honourable and the ways in which honour can be lost. Like Hamlet, it is, in part, Othello's difficulty in meeting the demands of a changing honour code that ultimately leads to his death. But the world of honour in Othello is almost opposite

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8While William Kerrigan, in Hamlet's Perfection, does not specifically discuss honour, he does argue that Hamlet learns, particularly in the graveyard scene, that revenge (an important component of the honour codes) need not be bloody and violent because the decay and deterioration of the body after death is itself more horrible than any human vengeance. Kerrigan concludes that in this play Christianity and revenge become compatible. The Renaissance was, however, marked by intense debate about what it was to be noble and honourable as well as the by ferocious controversy regarding one's right to duel and/or commit violent revenge.
from the world of honour that Shakespeare depicts in *Hamlet* as it is Cassio the politician, and not Iago and Othello the soldiers, who maintains his honour in the play. That is not to say that Shakespeare has suddenly changed his mind or indeed that we can know what his opinion regarding honour was. Rather, in *Othello* Shakespeare explores the seventeenth-century honour codes from another perspective as he examines, charts, and puzzles over what it means to be honourable in his time.

Although Shakespeare’s later tragedies, especially *Othello*, demonstrate a clear demarcation between several types of promise (oaths and swearing for example) in *Hamlet* these two terms can be taken to mean what Frances Shirley defines as “the calling to witness something, divine or otherwise, to seal vows of allegiance and promises of love or to attest the truth of a statement” (xi). An oath in *Hamlet*, then, is simply an invocation of a higher power to bear witness to the truth of a statement.

Moreover, Shakespeare’s representations of masculine honour would not have been missed by a typical Shakespearean audience for “to a conscientious Christian living in late sixteenth-century England, the formal oath was an especially powerful form of utterance” (William Slights, “‘Swear by thy’” 147). There exists in this period a plethora of texts that emphasized the difference between careful and casual swearing in an attempt to elucidate the dishonour involved in the casual use of promise. As early as 1579 Edmond Bicknoll was indigantly asking his parishioners if there “was ever any age so outrageous in Othes? So blasphemous in railing? So rooted in perjury?” (3). In 1583 Philip Stubbes advises that the “blessed word of God, is to be handled reverently, gravely, and sagely with veneration to the glorious majestie of God” (1). Gervase Babington, also in 1583, points out that “In the Newe Testament we are
forbidden to sweare at all, not because all swearing is a sinne, but because forswearing is an horrible sinne" (131). Babington was not entirely against swearing. Rather, he wanted to caution his readers about the casual use of swearing, for

the thing wee sweare by, wee make it the greatest of all other, wee make it the witnesse and discerner of our trueth wee meane, and the revenger of falsehoode and our fault if we doe not as wee sweare, all which to bee given to the Lorde by swearing onley by Him, is a glory to him, and contraiwise a dishonour to him to ascribe them elsewhere, since indeede they are not incident to anie creature. (133)

William Perkins, writing in 1593, concurs with Babington when he advises that “Gods name should only be uttered upon a weightie and just occasion, so we may plainly see that glory will redound to him thereby” (A Direction… 6). This elucidation of casual and careful swearing, in turn, underscores the metamorphosis in the honour code since it demonstrates the change in the use of the word. Put simply, the discourse of honour prevalent in these texts clearly argues that promise, and thus honour, was changing, for man’s word was no longer either trustworthy or honourable.

In Hamlet, Horatio represents the chivalric, medieval concept of honour.

Horatio is utterly loyal and obedient to the man he addresses as his “honoured lord” (1.2.221), Hamlet. All five of Horatio’s oaths (all in Act 1) are made in relation to Hamlet himself. More important, Horatio keeps his word to Hamlet throughout the play. Horatio uses two oaths following his encounter with the ghost. First, he attempts to force the ghost to articulate its nature and purpose in Denmark: “By heaven I charge thee speak” (1.1.49). After the ghost exits, Horatio, pale and frightened by his
experience, insists that “Before my God, I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes” (1.1.56-58). While this oath does not seem, at first, to be related to Hamlet, it is important to note that Horatio’s two oaths are immediately followed by a discussion of Fortinbras’s advance on Denmark and the danger the country faces as a result of his incursion. After sighting the ghost a second time, Horatio determines that Hamlet must be told of the apparition immediately, and Horatio’s decision leads him to the use of a third oath: “Upon my life / This spirit dumb to us, will speak to him [Hamlet]” (1.1.170-71).

Significantly, Horatio’s next, and last, two oaths are uttered directly to Hamlet and at the prince’s request. Following Hamlet’s own encounter with the ghost, Horatio begs Hamlet to divulge what the ghost has said. Hamlet refuses, fearing Horatio will make the conversation public. Horatio quickly swears secrecy: “Not I my lord, by heaven” (1.5.118). Hamlet does not agree to tell Horatio what the spirit has said, but asks Horatio once more if he can be trusted, to which Horatio again swears, “Ay, by heaven, my lord” (1.5. 123). Finally, although Horatio never takes an oath of secrecy on Hamlet’s sword within the text, it is clear that the stage action calls for such an oath, for

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9Michael D. Bristol, in Big-Time Shakespeare, argues that Fortinbras’s actions—his preparations to make war against Denmark—are representative of a gift culture in which the gift of Old Fortinbras’s life must be repaid. This code, which Bristol calls the “law of reciprocity,” requires that gifts be repaid, that grievances be redressed, and that social continuity be maintained. According to Bristol, the law of reciprocity cannot be reproduced in Hamlet since there is no one, at the end of the play, to reciprocate or retaliate on Hamlet’s behalf. Hamlet is the last of his line. Although Bristol’s argument does not focus on honour specifically, implicit in his study is the medieval or feudal idea of comitatus that we see in Beowulf. But, extrapolating from Bristol, this medieval code gives way to a more modern one when the complexity of reciprocity is ironed out at the end of the play. Hamlet has avenged his father; Fortinbras and Laertes have done the same, and these three childless men have broken the cycle, since all the violent deaths—beginning with Old Fortinbras and ending with Hamlet—have been repaid.
after the repeated requests of both Hamlet and the ghost itself Horatio expresses his willingness to swear when he invites Hamlet to “Propose the oath my lord” (1.5.153).

The medieval code of honour was based on loyalty and allegiance to one’s lord. In fact, according to Maurice Keen, “to betray one’s lord has from the earliest days of chivalry and before been held the darkest of all crimes with which the knight or warrior could be charged” (175). 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 until Hamlet himself withdraws the request, but Horatio also expresses a willingness to die with Hamlet after the prince is wounded by Laertes’ poisoned rapier. More important, Horatio makes absolutely clear the notion that the code of honour is changing and that he himself is representative of the old code when he attempts to drink the poisoned wine after it becomes obvious that Hamlet’s wounds are fatal: “I am more antique Roman than a Dane. / Here’s yet some liquor yet” (5.2.341). Horatio emphasizes that he is an “antique” Roman; he lives by an older or “Roman” code of honour that requires the ultimate allegiance and obedience to his lord. Moreover, he recognizes that this code is changing when he makes the distinction between the “antique” Roman and the more modern Dane, but nevertheless strongly adheres to the ancient code, even ending his own attempt to commit suicide on Hamlet’s behalf when Hamlet utters an oath of his own: “As th’art a man/ Give me the cup. Let go, by heaven I’ll ha’it” (5.2.342-43).

Hamlet orders Horatio to relinquish the cup and, significantly, bases Horatio’s obedience upon masculinity, for honour in this period was exclusively a male domain. Women’s honour almost entirely consisted of their chastity or, if they were unmarried,
their virginity which, in turn, was merely a manifestation of male honour itself as a woman’s chastity brought honour to her husband or father by demonstrating his ability to command her obedience. Or, in Mark Breitenberg’s words, “women are a transacted property, or their chastity is a badge of honour for their husbands, validated only when other men desire to steal it” (71). Thus, when Hamlet charges Horatio, upon his manhood, to give up the cup, he is, in effect, challenging Horatio’s masculinity; if Horatio wants to be seen as masculine, he must obey his master’s command.

Shakespeare, in Othello, emphasizes the more modern codes of honour, for it is Cassio, the statesman whom Iago describes as having “never set a squadron in the field / Nor the division of battle knows” (1.1.22-23) who is depicted as honourable, trustworthy, and capable of governing the isle of Cyprus. Whereas in Hamlet the emphasis is on a masculine concept of honour that includes revenge and exalts blind loyalty and military prowess, in Othello the emphasis is on a political and moral code in that Cassio is more honourable than Iago, and even than Othello himself. Horatio and Cassio both stand as the epitome of honour in Shakespeare’s representations. Yet, these two characters are very different men, with dissimilar notions of what it means to be honourable. Horatio is the faithful follower and the “antique Roman.” Cassio, on the other hand, is a leader, a modern politician. Whereas Horatio’s only concern seems to be with Hamlet’s safety and happiness, Cassio is concerned with moral virtue and politics. He has courtly manners (2.1.167-78), he prays for Othello’s safety when the Moor is lost at sea (2.1.77-81), he remarks on a soldier’s crude behaviour when he tells Desdemona to enjoy Iago “more in the soldier than in the scholar” (2.1.166). Cassio is, in fact, named “Lord Governor” of Cyprus after Othello’s death (5.2.367). Thus, while it
is clear that Cassio is, like Iago, a soldier, and, like Horatio, an educated man, it is equally clear that he is a different kind of soldier and scholar. Cassio is concerned with Christian virtue and courtly manners. He is not rough, accustomed to drinking or familiar with the camaraderie of soldierly songs and the manners of other countries and races as Iago and Montano are (2.3.67-99), nor is he an "antique Roman," determined to follow his master to death.

Cassio is not, like Othello, a commanding military figure. More important, Cassio is a statesman, a man worthy to become the "Lord Governor" (5.2.367) of Cyprus and to be responsible for the state's affairs in a Venetian protectorate. In fact, Shakespeare has, in the case of Cassio, altered his source to elevate Cassio from an unnamed corporal in the Moor's army to the polished and educated lieutenant he becomes in Shakespeare's play. Consequently, Cassio emerges as a man of honour who is moral, political, and trustworthy.

Cassio's morality can be discerned in his remorse after the fight with Roderigo. Significantly, Cassio swears only when he is drunk, while Iago and Othello swear prolifically. Although the honour code had been evolving throughout the Elizabethan period, the word of honour remained an essential component of the honourable man. Cassio, like Othello, mourns the loss of his reputation, and thus his honour, when he realizes what he has done. Yet, although he was defending his honour against Roderigo's insulting behaviour—Roderigo, a man of lesser rank, had attempted to "teach" Cassio "his duty" (2.3.147)—Cassio repents his drunken behaviour and

10A brief discussion of Shakespeare's source for this play, Giambattista Cinzio Giraldi's collection of linked tales entitled *The Hundred Tales*, is included in the introduction to Othello in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford).
believes his reputation and honour are lost due to his own immoral or sinful acts:

Drunk and speak parrot, and squabble? Swagger,

swear and discourse fustian with one’s own

shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou

hast no name to be known by, let us call thee

devil. (2.3.279-83)

In evoking the devil, Shakespeare makes the association between dishonour and the
sins of drunkenness and swearing clear. In other words, dishonour comes with sinning.

Laertes also struggles with the changing concept of what constitutes male
honour, but his notion of honour is neither like Horatio’s nor like Cassio’s. Laertes,
unlike Horatio, swears only once in the entire text of the play; he swears revenge for
Ophelia’s madness when he tells her: “By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with
weight / Till our scale turn the beam” (4.5.157-58). Nor does he, as in Cassio’s case,
regret his swearing of revenge though both his attack on Hamlet and Cassio’s violent
assault on Roderigo are prompted by a loss of control over their own emotions.

Laertes’s father, like Hamlet’s, has been murdered, and Laertes’s instant and violent
reaction bespeaks the old chivalric code of honour. According to Watson, Laertes’s vow
reflects “the quick sensitivity to affront which the Renaissance period had acquired
from Aristotle through his numerous Renaissance disciples” (362). Likewise, Council
labels Laertes’s reaction a “single-minded commitment to honorable revenge” (93). Yet
Laertes, like Horatio, is aware that the honour code is changing. In fact, he consciously
rejects the more modern, moralized codes of honour in his angry response to the news
of Polonius’s death:
To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!

Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!

I dare damnation. To this point I stand,

That both the worlds I give to negligence,

Let come what comes. Only I'll be revenged

Most throughly for my father. (4.5.132-36)

Laertes is willing to ignore his conscience and to burn in hell (the consequence of murder) in order to avenge (an act of honour in the old code) his father's death.

But, unlike Horatio, Laertes does not make public promises. Rather, although he tells Claudius that he would be willing to "cut" his father's murderer's "throat i'th'church" (4.7.126), he never actually swears to revenge Polonius's murder. Thus, Laertes's immediate desire for violence, coupled with his obvious loyalty to the memory of his father and his conscious rejection of an honour code that includes moral behaviour, distances him from Cassio's ideas of honour and places him close to the medieval code of honour that motivates Horatio. His refusal to make his oath of vengeance publicly and his willingness to be ruled by the head of the body politic, however, sets his idea of honour further along the continuum of change than Horatio's.

Hamlet's perception of honour is neither like his friend Horatio's nor his countryman Laertes's. Rather, Hamlet's use of promise, though certainly problematic and complex, explicitly identifies him as a transitional character in the changing code of honour. In fact, both the medieval chivalric code of honour and the more modern and political and moral code are seemingly embodied in this one character. Hamlet is, like Iago, a man wronged by someone in authority. Hamlet, again like Iago, has been
deprived of what should have been his rightful place in the hierarchy. Although
Hamlet's and Iago's responses to this deprivation bear some similarities, since both
characters use deception and manipulation to wreak revenge for their wrongs.
Hamlet's revenge encompasses a transition from a medieval code of honour to a more
modern and political one. Moreover, as a transitional character Hamlet must meet the
requirements of both codes. This attempt to find a balance in a changing code
eventually leads to Hamlet's tragic death.

Although Hamlet can, of course, withdraw from his oath of vengeance without
a threat to his honour should he discover that the ghost is, in fact, not truthful, when he
swears that the ghost's commandment to seek revenge "all alone shall live / Within the
book and volume of my brain / Unmixed with baser matter! Yes, by heaven" (1.5.
102-4), the prince is, in effect, stripped of his power to stop the events. He is a man of
honour, a noble man, and now that the vow is spoken he has no choice but to carry it
through. Keith Thomas points out that "Protestant teaching seems to have been
remarkably firm" (702) when it came to denying the existence of the ghosts of dead
men, but after the play within the play Hamlet is committed. The evidence of
Claudius's guilt that Hamlet perceives in the king's reaction, which causes Hamlet to
publicly exclaim, "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound"
(3.2.286-87), removes the possibility that Hamlet can be dishonoured by his belief in
ghosts. In fact, the "Mousetrap" scene in Hamlet is an example of the knightly and
chivalric honourable tradition whereby a man's honour can be either lost or won by
surviving an ordeal designed to determine his guilt. As Thomas explains, the "ordeal is
not usually invoked until the suspect has already been identified. It is merely an
additional test of his guilt, not the initial means of discovering the criminal” (260). Hamlet cleverly devises an ordeal for Claudius, the already-discovered criminal, in order to prove Claudius’s guilt without having to depend on the ghost’s word. In so doing, Hamlet unwittingly brings together both the chivalric code of honour and the more modern moralized versions; Shakespeare exempts Hamlet from being dependent upon the word of a ghost, which, in Protestant theology, would define him as dishonourable, by using the chivalric concept of the ordeal. Ironically, then, Hamlet uses the chivalric code to make him honourable in the more modern concept of honour. Moreover, Hamlet’s use of aspects of both an older idea of honour and a new one demonstrates the way in which these codes overlap in an evolving honour code.

In investing Hamlet with a concern to meet the demands of this evolving honour code, Shakespeare foreshadows the events of the drama while simultaneously divesting his main character of power. Shakespeare’s careful delineation of Hamlet as Horatio’s “honoured lord” (1.2.221), as a man who inspires “Our duty to your honour” (1.2.253), and a lover who has approached Ophelia “with love / In honourable fashion” (1.3.111) makes clear that if Hamlet swears revenge against his father’s murderer, then as a man of honour in the chivalric tradition, he must carry out that revenge no matter the cost. But, as Anita Pacheco notes, “Shakespeare’s treatment of honor develops not out of a unified perspective, but out of the cultural diversity generated by rival ethical legacies” (93). Hamlet is forced to attempt to balance these “rival ethical legacies” as he struggles to remain honourable.

It is significant that Hamlet swears revenge in soliloquy; his oath is not public, nor does it ever become so. According to William Slichts, oaths express a “desire to
transform a private emotion into a public bond” (“Swear by thy” 151). Moreover, James points out that honour is a public commitment through the “freely given word” (339), and that the significance of a given honourable situation arises “out of the nature of honor as a public code, the public status distinguishing it from a private morality.”

By keeping his oath to gain revenge upon Claudius private, by refusing to enter the public arena of oath and honour, Hamlet’s honour is seemingly not dependent upon his ability to slay his father’s murderer precisely because honour is a public code. But, his swearing of revenge in a soliloquy—a dramatic element that uniquely combines both the public and the private—does not necessarily imply that his honour is not at stake, because the Renaissance concept of honour was evolving into a more internal code; Hamlet’s honour has become as much a matter of his own conscience as of public recognition. Hamlet’s soliloquy underscores the tension that exists between public and private honour. His oath, known to the audience but not to the other characters, exemplifies Shakespeare’s entrance into the discourse of honour precisely because it allows the audience to discern Hamlet’s crisis of conscience while simultaneously publicly committing the prince to revenge; since the audience hears the promise they may expect Hamlet, a nobleman, to keep his word.

According to Shirley, in tragedy, and particularly in both Hamlet and Othello, “oaths are among the most telling signs of changes in attitude in very fully developed

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11James further notes that “consistency in standing by a position once taken was basic to the honour code. But since the latter [code] was a public one, that of a society of honourable men, there was a need to define the position to which honour was committed as a public gesture. This took the form of promise and oath, the giving of one’s word, the ‘word of honour.’ Once this had been done the man of honour could withdraw only at the expense of the diminishment involved in dishonour.” (339)
characters” (100). A careful examination of Hamlet’s use of oaths reveals the change in his attitude towards what is honourable as he struggles to find a code he can use in his tragic situation.

Hamlet begins by swearing to avenge his father’s murder. Since his oath is private, it places Hamlet’s honour closer to Laertes’s in the changing code. Hamlet, however, soon converts to a public form of oath when Horatio becomes confused by Hamlet’s words regarding his meeting with the ghost:

HORATIO: These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET: I’m sorry they offend you, heartily, Yes, faith, heartily.

HORATIO: There’s no offense, my lord.

HAMLET: Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio, and much offense too.

(1.5.137-41)

Hamlet, burdened with the revenge of his father’s murder, attempts to use the violent, medieval code of honour as he begins to make public oaths. He swears by Saint Patrick, and although his words are confusing to Horatio (and thus Hamlet is not yet publicly committed to action) it is clear to the reader that it is the ghost’s words that Hamlet finds offensive, and that he realizes that he must avenge his father.

Hamlet does not swear another oath until Act 2: in this oath Hamlet swears by his faith, a faith which must have been considerably shaken by the appearance of his mighty and virtuous father, who should have been resting in peace, but who must decline to tell his tale of purgatory whose lightest word

Would harrow up the soul, freeze thy young blood.
Make the two eyes like stars start from their sphere,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

(1.5.15-20)

Hamlet hears that the late king, by all accounts an honourable man in the medieval sense of the word, has been sentenced to a “prison” in which he must burn until his sins are purged away. Yet, Hamlet chooses to swear in terms of Christian images; he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that “by my fay I cannot reason” (2.2.265), and later swears by “Sblood” (2.2.366, 3.2.369), “God’s bodkin” (2.2.529), “swounds” (2.2.576, 5.1.274), and “i’faith” (3.2.93). 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 to his oaths.

The complexity of Hamlet’s dilemma, of his attempt to satisfy all the demands of a changing honour code, is informed by what Weimann terms “the humanist search for possible areas of interaction between the verbal and the political” (110). Put simply, Renaissance men could no longer claim to be honourable by asserting the chivalric emphasis on violence and lineage as the authoritative account of what it is to be honourable. This shifting basis prompted some “stimulating dramatic interrogations and revisions” (110), and Shakespeare’s text illustrates that the authorization of honour was one of the things being interrogated and revised. Interrogation and revision, in turn, led to what Weimann identifies as a “new fiction” (105) in which “early modern
drama and prose narrative were bound to assume a more volatile and divisive space for authorization. In assimilating some heterogeneous and divisive material, the new fiction sought to explore areas of friction and conflict among competing sites of authority" (110). In Hamlet Shakespeare introduces tension or "friction and conflict" among the various and "competing" ways in which honour is authorized. The complexity of Hamlet's situation imposes upon him the need to find an adequate system of honour with which to resolve his dilemma; Hamlet's attempt to carve out a place of honour for himself leads to a crisis of conscience.

Hamlet is the only son of a murdered king. As such he, in medieval terms, is honour-bound to avenge his father's death. But, the murderer is the new king. Hamlet is thus confronted with the taboos of Christian hierarchical order – to exact revenge he must slay a king who is, of course, God's anointed ruler. Moreover, he cannot be completely sure of his countrymen's support as Claudius is an elected king. Further, Claudius is accepted by the people who have "freely gone" (1.2.15) along with Claudius's hasty marriage to the king's widow, and who give "twenty, forty, and hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little" (2.2.365-66). Perhaps more important, Hamlet's anguish of indecision over whether or not to kill Claudius, particularly after the evidence offered by Claudius's reaction to the "Mousetrap,"\(^\text{12}\) reflects a changing code of honour in which "the community of honour came to be that which centered on the crown, its structure that of the court and city, its service that of the state, and its

\(^{12}\) In his introduction to Hamlet in The Norton Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt offers various other reasons for Claudius's reaction to "The Mousetrap." I would argue, however, that Hamlet himself does not consider these alternatives, and that the prince believes that Claudius's panic is concrete proof of his guilt.
mark the nobility of virtue, and the dignities which this conferred” (James 381). Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius throughout the play. While several factors contribute to this delay, it is significant that Hamlet exacts revenge for his father’s murder only after Claudius’s treachery has been publicly revealed by both Gertrude and Laertes. Hamlet’s original oath of vengeance is fulfilled, but in such a way as to allow him to remain honourable in a new code that requires not only honour, but also acknowledgment of the political hierarchy and morality as well. Hamlet, then, stands as a transitional character who has, on the one hand, the medieval code of honour which requires him to kill a king to avenge his father’s murder and, on the other hand, a new code of honour that requires both absolute obedience to the state and adherence to moral virtue. It is in meeting these codes that Hamlet is identified as both a transitional character and a tragic hero.

Iago, on the other hand, is clearly not a transitional character nor a hero, tragic or otherwise; he is a manipulator. Othello recognizes that Iago “knows all qualities with a learned spirit / Of human dealings” (3.3.259-60). Ironically, Othello admires the very quality that Iago will use to destroy him. Iago is an expert on human nature, and that he uses this knowledge maliciously to manipulate others is apparent in his own rumination:

Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,

Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,

But, with a little act upon the blood,

Burn like the mines of sulphur. (3.3.326-29)

Beneath this level of irony lies a deeper and more important one. Othello’s “dangerous
conceit" is his own sense of honour, and it is this that will "burn like the mines of sulphur" in his blood when Iago deceives Othello into believing that Desdemona has dishonoured him by her adultery. Ironically, it is Iago's failure to receive the rewards which he believed to be his due according to the ancient honour code which leads him to seek revenge against Othello. The general has denied Iago the honour that (in the old code) comes with military rank and title by promoting Cassio instead of Iago.

Furthermore, Iago claims to believe that Othello has dishonoured him by making love to Emelia for he does "suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leap'd into my seat" (2.1.295-96). And, while it is dangerous to believe Iago when he states this motivation, it is important to note that Iago makes this claim in soliloquy where he demonstrates a capability for honesty, and, at times a great insight into his own character. The real irony, then, is that Iago's attempt to avenge what he sees as his own dishonouring, even if he is dishonoured only by the thwarting of his ambitions for increased rank and title, leads not only to Othello's downfall but to Iago's as well for he, in the end, is left to suffer "the time, the place, the torture" that Lodovico orders Cassio to enforce (5.2.369). Thus, although Iago is like Hamlet in that both see themselves as having had their honour affronted, the fact that Hamlet is motivated by the need to put things right in Denmark and Iago by a perceived need for revenge serves to heighten the evolution of the masculine honour codes as well as the association between the ancient honour

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13 For example, in his first soliloquy Iago admits that he does not know whether Othello has slept with Emelia and undermines his own motives when he resolves to carry out his revenge against the Moor anyway (2.1.297-302). Later, Iago demonstrates astute insight when he concludes that Cassio "hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me [lago] ugly" (5.1.19-20) and thus strengthens his resolve to have Roderigo kill Cassio.
code and the evil behaviour of Shakespeare's most malevolent villain.

Othello's vow of revenge, like both Hamlet's and Iago's, has to do with damage to his reputation, and thus to his honour, as well as the disillusionment of love. In the early seventeenth century the unbreakable bond between jealousy and honour was acknowledged, and the 1599 treatise of one anonymous writer is typical of the period:14

"jealousie is much more hurtfull in a man, then woman[..] he feeles withall a shame and infamie, with such a blemish and dishonour, as in no way or at any tyme, repayreable agayne" (Fancies 15). The writer reiterates this point when he concludes that

"Jealousie... is as irksome to bear in a man as a woman, and so much more in a man, because thereby he looseth his honour" (16). A wife's fidelity, therefore, was an important component of a man's honour; his ability to command the obedience and loyalty of his wife, and thus to achieve a sense of security, identified him as a honourable man. Cuckoldry was, for some, the ultimate shame. Othello accuses Desdemona of adultery in an attempt to appear in control of the situation and thereby to retain his honour.

Despite Othello's seemingly single focus on his reputation, which equates him with a medieval code of honour, he is, like Hamlet, a transitional character. Othello is a warrior, a violent and "valiant" (1.3.48) soldier, but he is also both a Christian and a man who has pledged allegiance to the city-state of Venice. As such, Othello must embody both the chivalric honour code that requires a military man to be commanding and unafraid, and a moralized and politicized code that prohibits murder, even for

14 Many other examples of the contemporary literature that expounds this connection are reproduced throughout Breitenberg's Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England.
revenge, and demands that the best interests of the state be paramount in all undertakings, personal and public. His traditional sense of honour extends beyond the importance placed on his public reputation: he is a soldier, a general of martial greatness whom even the duke addresses as “valiant Othello” (1.3.48). The most significant factor that identifies Othello with the chivalric honour code is his violent reaction to crises. Othello uses the threat of violence to control his men during the fray involving Roderigo, Cassio, and Montano (2.3.165), he threatens Iago with violent “waked wrath” (3.3.363) should Iago fail to “prove” Desdemona “a whore” (3.3.359), and when he wishes for “nine years a-killing” (4.1.178) to draw out Cassio’s death, he is yearning for the opportunity to wreak violence on his subordinate. Finally, Othello envisions the most violent resolution to his cuckoldry when he determines first to “hang” (4.1.187) Desdemona, then to “chop her into messes” (4.1.200), then to “poison” her (4.1.204) before he finally takes Iago’s advice to “strangle her in her bed” (4.1.207).

Despite Othello’s adherence to a chivalric honour code, he is also representative of a more moral and political system of honour. One’s word, like honour itself, had become irrevocably linked to the state, for as Nathaniel Crouch explains: “fidelity (consisting in the verity and constant performance of words, promises, and covenants) is the foundation of justice, which preserveth a Common-wealth” (8). Othello is capable of using peace and politics to resolve less extreme conflicts. In fact, he admonishes his men to “Keep up your bright swords” (1.2.59) when Brabantio comes to apprehend him, and demonstrates his respect for the senator when he tells Brabantio that he “shall more command with years / Than with [his] weapons” (1.2.60-61). Othello similarly condemns the violent actions of Cassio and seems not to care about
the affront to Cassio’s honour (2.3.241-249). More significantly, Othello couches his displeasure at this disturbance in moral and political terms: “are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl” (2.3.170-72). The Moor appeals to his men’s conscience and morality when he intimates that even heathens know better. He also displays a sense of political awareness as he worries about the citizens of Cyprus being frightened by representatives of the State sent to protect them:

What, in a town of war

Yet wild, the people’s hearts brimful of fear,

To manage private and domestic quarrel

In night and on the court and guard of safety!

’Tis monstrous. (2.3.213-17)

Finally, Othello is free of kinship, lineage, and loyalty ties. Othello is a mercenary, under contract to the Venetian state as a military commander. He is, therefore, by definition unable to participate in an ancient honour code that admitted only nobility and was based upon lineage and birth. Yet, his violent actions and military prowess link him with the chivalric aspects of honour. Shakespeare, whether consciously or not, could not have chosen a better transitional character to represent an honour system that had moved away from lineage in an age in which “loyalty toward a person, family, or dynasty, formerly accepted as a duty, came to be adapted as a newly abstract, contractual, or pragmatic mode of legitimation” (Weimann 55). Othello’s position in the Venetian state identifies loyalty as a choice rather than a duty, and as a Christian man who has voluntarily pledged allegiance to the state, Othello is clearly
forced to balance a new code of honour with his adherence to the medieval, chivalric tradition.

Claudius is, like Othello, a politician and a leader; yet he is not a soldier-king as his brother and predecessor clearly was. Claudius, indeed, bears similarities to both Othello and Iago. His notion of honour, however, is again somewhat different than those of Shakespeare's other male characters in these two tragedies. While it is true that Claudius does not utter a single oath throughout the play, "the cynical manipulation of oaths by a character...is a gauge of his deficient humanity" (William Slichts "'Swear by thy" 148). Claudius stands as the epitome of the way in which a system of honour that is entirely politicized can be perverted. His Machiavellian view of monarchy is apparent in the way he manipulates those around him into promises that suit only his purposes. Hence, he plays on the honour of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he requests that they spy on Hamlet for him. Rosencrantz responds to this request with words that express his understanding of the politics of honour:

Both your majesties
Might by the sovereign power you have of us
Put your dread pleasure more into command
Than to entreaty. (2.2.26-28)

This courtier understands that within the new code being honourable means acting in complete obedience to the state. Guildenstern, likewise, pledges his loyalty to the sovereigns:

But we both obey,

And here give up ourselves in full bent
To lay our service freely at your feet

To be commanded. (2.2.29-33)

Although Gertrude assures the courtiers that they will be rewarded for their obedience (2.2.25-26), and notwithstanding the use of language that has Rosencrantz and Guildenstern offer their loyalty to the persons of the king and queen, Shakespeare makes it clear that these men are not mere court dandies attempting to curry favour with the monarch:

HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself king of indefinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN: Which dreams are indeed ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely a shadow of a dream.

HAMLET: A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSECRANTZ: Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow’s shadow. (2.2.254-62)

While it is true that these two courtiers may simply be spouting court rhetoric in this passage, it is significant to note that Hamlet himself speaks for their honesty when he remarks that they have “a kind of confession in their looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour” (2.2.279-80). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not good liars; they lack the “craft” to cover their deception. Rather, Claudius is able to manipulate both their loyalty to the state and their loyalty to their childhood friend to gain their cooperation in his attempt to spy on Hamlet.

Similarly, Claudius manipulates Polonius’s sense of honour in an attempt to garner aid in dealing with Hamlet. Polonius’s speeches are replete with oaths; he
prefaces many of his comments with an invocation to God or Heaven. Claudius, a skilled politician, uses Polonius’s need to appear honourable to the public to enlist his services. Thus, when Polonius reveals the love letter Hamlet wrote to Ophelia, Polonius questions the king: “What do you think of me?” (2.2.129). Claudius, knowing that Polonius is attempting to appear honourable, replies: “As a man faithful and honourable” (2.2.130); Polonius gains honour through the questionable means of betraying both Hamlet and Ophelia but, in his mind, doing what is best for the state by helping to determine the cause of the prince’s “madness.”

Finally, Claudius overtly appeals to Laertes’s sense of chivalric honour as the king manipulates Laertes into killing Hamlet. Laertes reacts with hotheaded violence upon discovering that Hamlet is responsible for Polonius’s death. Claudius, however, uses Laertes’s chivalric sense of honour in much the same way as he used Polonius’s more modern concept. Claudius, attempting to use Laertes to rid the kingdom of Hamlet, appeals to the chivalric honour code that rests upon loyalty to kin: “Laertes, was your father dear to you? / Or are you like the painting of sorrow, / A face without a heart?” (4.7.106-8). Although Claudius seems to have no honour system of his own, he is aware of the various forms that honour takes in a changing world and skilfully uses them to accomplish his purposes.

Shakespeare, then, creates seven well-developed masculine characters in his two tragedies written in the very early years of the seventeenth century. These characters bear many similarities; they overlap with each other in their methods of interacting with their contemporaries, in their responses to crisis, and, in particular, in their desire to appear honourable within male communities. Yet each character’s
notions of what it means to be honourable, and of how honour can be gained and lost, are remarkably dissimilar. History, here, can be useful in understanding this dissimilarity and, consequently, in understanding the literature of this period.

The Essex Rebellion, on 8 February, 1601, is significant precisely because it helps to illuminate the evolution from medieval, chivalric codes of knightly honour to more moralized and civic codes. Essex, employing feudal concepts of honour, with their emphasis on violence, believed he was able to justify rebellion based on the medieval concept of honour which included uncompromising allegiance to one's lord (or in this case lady); Essex was rescuing Elizabeth from the evil influence of her base-born councillors, the Cecils. In fact, according to Richard McCoy, Essex thought of himself as both "defender of the honour code" and the protector of the nobility (The Rites of Knighthood 100). Essex may have even believed that as Earl Marshall (a post which he had carefully researched to determine the full extent of its rights and duties) he had the right to negotiate the succession (McCoy 100). The fact that the revolt failed to generate public support and culminated in Essex's complete disgrace and eventual execution indicates that this concept of honour was less acceptable in English society than in the medieval period; seventeenth-century honour had come to encompass a more moralized and civic concept of honour as a social policy that included complete allegiance to the state, itself a social entity.

The association between Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, and honour is hardly debatable. Contemporary writings about Essex make it clear that he entered the discourse of honour as the epitome of the chivalric code. Essex's popularity among the people, gained primarily through his military success, coupled with his power as
both Elizabeth's favourite and Earl Marshall, created concern in the Elizabethan court that Essex was becoming too powerful, too popular, and too concerned with his own chivalric image. Essex's behaviour, his decisions (including the fatal decision to rebel), his friendships, and especially his words, extant in his correspondence and other papers, all clearly indicate that Essex aspired to gain an honour that corresponded to a medieval, chivalric code. His portraits, too, bespeak a desire to been seen as a chivalric knight and military leader; Essex constantly and consistently has himself depicted in armour, on horseback, or in a military pose, his hand on his sword. His early portrait (c. 1587), for example, depicts Devereux in elaborate armour, on which his impressa is embroidered with the motto "Dum formas minuis" (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, Elizabeth was forced to suppress an image of Essex, in full armour and on horseback, because his military success depicted in the engraving was making Essex too popular among the English people for the Queen's liking.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{essex_image}
\caption{Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{15}The portrait is a miniature on vellum and its authorship has been the cause of much scholarly debate. The most likely artist is Nicholas Hillard.
Essex’s notion of honour, then, was grounded in military prowess and acts of chivalry. In this, he was patterning himself upon the legend and image of Sir Philip Sidney, himself a chivalric model. In fact, in his book *Tudor England* John Guy argues that

Essex took the chivalric model of Sir Philip Sidney to excess, fighting duels, cultivating a military clientele, and posturing as a hero. He overstepped the mark when he deliberately courted public opinion—a fatal trait that fed his ambition, as well as his illusions and the queen’s mistrust. (440)

It is important to note that Essex’s idea of what constituted an honourable man was modelled upon, but dissimilar to, Sidney’s; Essex’s behaviour was “to excess,” taking the ideas of chivalry too far in an attempt both to emulate and surpass his predecessor.

The Elizabethan age was, nonetheless, one in which Francis Drake could acquire a knighthood, in Essex’s nineteenth year, for what amounted to piracy. The Earl of Leicester, Essex’s own step-father, was consistently rewarded for his military exploits for, despite the flux in the honour system, military success was not without benefits. Nevertheless, despite the rewards afforded to men of military success, military acumen was no longer lauded as the sure sign of honour. Rather, in the words of Essex’s friend and advisor Francis Bacon, “honour is, or should be, the place of virtue; and as in nature things move violently to their place and calmly in their place,

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16 There are many accounts of Sidney’s chivalry in battle, including a widely disseminated rumour that upon being wounded in battle Sidney, thirsty and dying, asked for water and then, upon seeing another dying soldier being carried by, asked that the water be given to the other man for the poor soldier needed it more (cf. Fulke Greville, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney* 129–130).
so virtue in ambition is violent, in authority settled and calm” (“Of Great Place” 32-33).

Bacon further maintained that “the winning of Honour is but the revealing of a man’s virtue and worth without disadvantage,” and that “a man is an ill-husband of his honour that entereth into any action the failing wherein may disgrace him more than the carrying it through can honour him” (“Of Honour and Reputation” 153).

Bacon’s ideals of honour, then, were certainly different than Essex’s and Sidney’s. For him, honour was a virtue that did not include violence and glory-seeking. This belief is evident not only in the advice he gives to monarchs and counsellors, but also in the advice he delivers to Essex himself:

her Majesty loveth peace. Next she loveth not change. Thirdly, that kind of [military] dependence maketh a suspected greatness. Therefore, quod instat agamus. Let that be a sleeping honour awhile, and cure the queen’s mind in that point. (109)\(^{17}\)

Bacon’s advice to Essex becomes more specific when he urges Essex to stop seeking the office of Earl Marshall and instead to attempt to gain the position of Lord Privy Seal.

Bacon offers several reasons for this advice, among them his “chief reason” which he describes as “to divert her Majesty from this impression of martial greatness” (109).

Bacon’s lesson is clear. Essex should abandon his pursuit of honour through military greatness; he should let martial honour be “a sleeping honour” and instead act on what is coming—quod instat agamus—and be prepared for a time in which civil office is “a fine honour” (Bacon 109). This was, however, a lesson Essex was not to learn, and his

\(^{17}\)In “Of Ambition” Bacon warns the government to “choose such ministers as are more sensible of duty than of rising, and such as love business rather upon conscience than upon bravery” (110).
failure to absorb Bacon's advice and, in all fairness, Elizabeth's mixed signals with regard to what constituted an honourable subject, eventually led Essex to the fatal decision to rebel.

Yet another notion of what constituted an honourable man can be found in the political aspirations of Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh did, like Essex, gain honour and popularity as a result of military successes. In fact, according to Steven May, upon resuming his duties in Ireland, Raleigh's conduct was honourable to the point of heroism. He faced down an ambush by Irish forces much superior to his own, and he captured and led back to Munster the rebel Lord Roche and his Lady by deftly infiltrating their well-defended castle and marching them through miles of hostile countryside. (4)

Despite this similarity, the rivalry between Essex and Raleigh in the late 1590s was, according to May, "one of the bitterest and longest court rivalries of the Tudor age" (17). Raleigh's honour was not grounded on martial glory, nor did he seem to wish it to be. Raleigh was a politician; his interests leaned towards the expansion of the state and the acquisition of both personal and national wealth by that expansion. Raleigh certainly had an honourable reputation; he is still thought of today as "the last Elizabethan courtier." But, at least as early as his appointment to the Queen's Guard in 1587, Raleigh, unlike Essex and Sidney, did not attempt to persuade his Queen to send him into battle. Rather, he became "a manager, devising and financing his various enterprises, while leaving their execution to others" (May 7). Perhaps the differences in the extremes of the concept of honour exhibited by Essex and Raleigh are most discernible in the way they chose to have themselves portrayed. As we have seen,
Essex’s portraits frequently depict him in armour or in military poses and contexts. Raleigh, however, chooses to have himself painted in court clothes, a large ruff at his throat and fine robes and gloves on his person. Rather than a sword or dagger, Raleigh’s hand holds a document, emphasizing, I believe, his role as politician rather than that of military commander (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Sir Walter Raleigh

Essex, Sidney, Raleigh and Bacon, like Shakespeare’s characters in both Hamlet and Othello, were attempting to function within a changing honour code. The Elizabethan reign was filled with at least outward symbols that the chivalric honour system was still acceptable. Beneath this chivalric discourse, however, the honour code was becoming more national and moral; good statesmanship and Christian patience were challenging violence and military prowess as elements of the honourable man.

All four of these men, among others, suffered both frustration and, in the case of Essex, Raleigh and Bacon, a fall from power at the hands of their monarch. These downfalls, which for Essex and Raleigh ended in execution, set a sobering example for Shakespeare and his contemporaries that demonstrated that the Renaissance concept of
honour was both highly unstable and undergoing a significant transformation. The
discourse of honour had come to encompass a set of values that challenged the
chivalric code by emphasizing both moral rectitude and the best interests of the state.
And, it is this concept of honour, with its emphasis on moral virtue and political
allegiance, that we see in Shakespeare’s Othello. Above all, this transition is brought to
life in Shakespeare’s treatment of promise in this plays.

The plethora of sermons, tracts, pamphlets, ballads, and entire books that warn
against the sin of swearing are an undeniable attestation to the fact that while keeping
one’s word was indeed honourable, giving one’s word at every instance was quite the
opposite. For contemporaries, prolific swearing and the prefacing of trivial matters
with an oath were a sure way to a dishonourable reputation. These works range in the
broadest spectrum from dire warnings that “Examples of Gods iust and visible
punishment upon blasphemers, periuers, and suche as haue procured Gods wrath by
cursing and banning which we cal execration” (Bicknoll 1)\(^8\) to complicated
explanations of good and bad swearing, Babington’s A Very Fruitfall Exposition of the
Commandements for example. Treatises against casual swearing could also take the
form of poetry, such as Philip Stubbes’s:

Which sayd youngman inclyned he was, vnto a thing
not good:
As for to sweare by Christ his flesh, and by his
precious blood.

\(^8\)This sermon, entitled A Sword Against Swearing, is often misattributed to
Alexander Nowell for his name appears on the title page. It is, however, Bicknoll’s
work and was dedicated to Nowell.
So musted vp herein he was, that leave it he ne
could:

But at each word, which he should speake, by Gods
blood, sweare he would.

Wherefore, our Lord commaunded death at him to shoote
his darte. (1)

Swearing, then, had become, from the 1580s on, a thing to be avoided. Rather
than bringing honour, the swearing of oaths attested to a man’s lack of honesty as well
as his carelessness with both his own honour and God’s. Hence, the fact that Othello
and Iago consistently swear while Cassio swears only when he is under the influence
of the “devil” alcohol is significant. Unlike Cassio, Othello and Iago are dishonoured
by the keeping of their oaths: Othello swears “by yon marble heaven” (3.3.460-61) that
“a capable and wide revenge” shall “swallow” both Cassio and Desdemona (3.3.459-
60) while Iago swears by the “ever-burning lights above” (3.3.463) that he shall carry
out Othello’s “bloody business” (3.3.469). And, while Othello swears in ignorance of
the truth and Iago swears simply to serve his own purposes, both men keep their word
with disastrous consequences.

For Iago this consequence is damnation. In fact, in having Othello examine
Iago’s feet for the cloven hooves of the devil, Shakespeare emphasizes Iago’s damned
state; he is the “hellish villain” (5.2.368) who, in carrying out his own vow of revenge,
has lost his soul. Likewise, Shakespeare leaves no doubt that Othello has committed a
“murder, which [he] thought a sacrifice” (5.2.65). While Othello may have believed he
could save Desdemona’s soul by killing her—he would get her to repent and then send
her soul to heaven— readers understand that she is innocent, and thus he will be
damned for the sin of murder. Shakespeare reiterates his point when he has Othello
evoke a vision of hell as he addresses Desdemona’s lifeless body:

When we shall meet at count

This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,

And fiends will snatch at it

...

Whip me, ye devils,

From the possession of this heavenly sight.

Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,

Wash me in steep-down guls of liquid fire!

O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!

(5.2.273-82)

Finally, Othello is clearly damned when he commits the ultimate sin of suicide and
although he has repented the murder, his soul cannot be saved for “All that is spoke is
marred” (5.2.358); his repentant words are “marred” by his final, sinful act.

The character of Othello, like the real Elizabeth courtiers and the fictional
Hamlet, is a transitional figure in the evolving concept of honour. Othello is
determined upon the ancient honour code which included both violence and revenge.

The consequences of keeping his vow of revenge are death and damnation. Similarly,

Essex’s futile attempt to gain honour under an ancient code eventually led him to
violent treason; he died a dishonoured man—a traitor. While Essex failed in his
attempt to alter the governing body of England, his example demonstrated the dangers
of an honour system based upon violence, loyalty to a single lord, and advancement based on lineage as opposed to merit. This event helps to elucidate the significant metamorphosis in the Renaissance concept of honour apparent in *Othello*. Othello is, in the medieval, chivalric tradition, indeed an honourable man. He commands with authority, he avenges the supposed attack on his reputation, and, above all, he keeps his word even when it is given in error. But, it is precisely the fulfilment of Othello's vow that leads to his downfall and, more important, to his eternal damnation. Othello is, in fact, "an honourable murderer" (5.2.294), but Shakespeare makes it indisputably clear that the consequences of being honourable in terms of a chivalric system are severe. Conversely, Cassio, the new man of honour, remains to create a new world of the "chaos" that has "come again" (3.3.92) as a result of an adherence to an honour code that is violent, dangerous, and (at least in Essex's case) treasonous.

Shakespeare creates characters in *Hamlet* who represent various stages in the evolution of a changing system of honour. Horatio, Laertes, and Hamlet all indicate, by their use of promise, different concepts of honour that range from an antique system of kinship and violence to a more modern idea of Christian morality, virtue, and allegiance to the state. Claudius, who makes no promises, illustrates the way in which systems of honour can be used, and perverted, in the political arena. Moreover, Shakespeare delineates these characters, their concepts of honour, and their functions in moving the dramatic action toward its climax by a careful use of each character's "freely given word." In doing so, Shakespeare also takes a conventional stance in a period of change. Horatio, the character most representative of an old system of honour, is portrayed as worthy, honest, and likable. On the other end of the scale
stands Claudius, a man who is seemingly without honour but who is capable of manipulating the honour code in the most heinous ways. Between these two extremes lies Hamlet himself. Hamlet represents a middle point in the changing honour system, and it is his attempt to gain an antique honour in a new system that contributes not only to his own tragic death, but to the deaths of several others as well. One must not forget that if Hamlet had taken revenge immediately, as required by the medieval code of honour, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, and perhaps even Hamlet himself would have survived the events of the drama. But, Hamlet is caught in a changing system of honour, and it is his effort to incorporate these changes which leads, in part, to the deaths of many characters. Hamlet’s difficulty in meeting the requirements of disparate honour codes further leads to the delay that allows Claudius to become a politicized manipulator of promise, leaving one to wonder whom Laertes is addressing when he angrily exclaims “Vows to the blackest devil!” (4.5.132).

Shakespeare, then, explores and, through his characters, articulates the complexities of seventeenth-century male honour codes, and in doing so he enters the discourse of honour as both an observer, and, in some ways, a cartographer of masculine honour. His exploration of military and civic honour will continue in his later plays, especially Macbeth, where he explores the link between honour and English nationalism that was a burgeoning concern in the early modern period.
CHAPTER TWO

"All Hail the King of Scotland": Macbeth, King James, and Anglo-Scottish Honour

The action in Shakespeare's Macbeth, like that in Hamlet and Othello, is predicated on the notion of promise and oaths. The prophecy of the Weird Sisters is repeatedly referred to by Macbeth and his wife as a promise, and Macbeth writes to his lady that he wishes her to be aware of "what greatness is promis'd thee" (1.5.13). Moreover, Lady Macbeth, when sensing that her husband has lost the nerve to carry out his planned regicide, reminds him of his vow to kill Duncan in what is undoubtedly her most heinous speech in the play:

... I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

Lady Macbeth uses the concept of promise to spur her husband to action; she indicates, through her gruesome analogy, that once an action has been sworn to, it must be carried out no matter how awful.

Shakespeare not only predicates Duncan's murder on promises of both the witches and Macbeth himself, he also creates, through the wit of the porter and of MacDuff's young son, a discussion of swearing that enters the seventeenth-century discourse linking swearing and perjury to the dictates of conscience. In fact,
seventeenth-century writings teem with warnings against the evils of perjury, casual swearing, and those who equivocate by creating what was perceived as a false, and particularly Catholic, distinction between word and deed. These warnings escalated sharply in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605—a plot which, as Sir Thomas Smith writes to Sir Thomas Edmondes, was wrought by those “so monstrous and barbarous” that they “under the pretence of conscience do harbour such evil affection to the State” (12 February, 1605). Conscience, then, could be pretended, and Shakespeare includes a discussion of this pretense in his exploration of seventeenth-century masculine honour codes.

Equivocators are, according to the porter, those men who “could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven” (2.3.8-11). Shakespeare reiterates, and expands upon, this tripart link among swearing, conscience and treason in the exchange between Lady Macduff and her young son:

SON: Was my father a traitor, mother?
L. MACD: Ay, that he was.
SON: What is a traitor?
L. MACD: Why, one that swears and lies.
SON: And be all traitors that do so?
L. MACD: Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hang’d.
SON: And must they all be hang’d that swear and lie?
L. MACD: Every one. (4.2.44-53)

Perjury, then, equals treason, and Shakespeare emphasizes the complex relationship
between masculine honour and oaths in a world where "there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them" (4.2.57-8). Macduff has sworn both his marriage vows and his allegiance to the rightful king. He has been forced to make choices, for, in a culture based upon oaths and honour, in a world in which honour pervades every aspect of life, conflicts of honour are bound to occur. He has chosen to flee to England in defence of his king and country, and in doing so he has contravened his marriage vow to protect his wife and family. Here Shakespeare underscores the complexity of the masculine honour code and the relationship between honour, oaths and the individual conscience that demands one keep ones promises.

This relationship is one that concerns James I as well, and he devotes several passages in Basilikon Doron to the discussion of swearing, perjury and the conscience. While these concepts pervade James's entire "royal gift," and indeed his other writings, the king addresses this relationship directly when he advises his son to especially beware to offend your conscience, with the use of swearing or lieng, suppose but in jest, for oathes are but an use [vice?] and a sinne cloathed, with no delite nor gaine, and therefore the more inexcusable even in the sight of men. (Basilikon Doron 111)

For James, the swearing of casual oaths does not bring honour. Rather, they are a "sinne cloathed" that is likely to bring both punishment by God, for they are a vice and sin, and dishonour in the "sight of men." This notion is aptly demonstrated in Henry Peacham's illustration of James's work. Peacham depicts this advice as God's law, written in what appears to be the Bible and descending over the land, supported by the flaming wings associated with the Holy Spirit which, in turn, brings God's gift of the
conscience (Figure 3).

Figure 3: “and especially beware to offend your conscience, with the use of swearing or lieng”

Shakespeare, his monarch, and his contemporaries were concerned with exploring and elucidating the complex relationship between oaths and honour, and Shakespeare works this relationship out very carefully in *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. The codes and discourses of masculine honour were, however, far more diverse and inclusive than an understanding, no matter how complex, of the vagaries of swearing and perjury. The masculine codes of honour were vast and pervasive, and in *Macbeth* Shakespeare broadens his investigation of masculine honour to include an exploration of what was, and is, an extremely important aspect of the honour codes, for this play takes ideas of obedience as one of its major themes.

The diverse concepts of obedience are both explored in, and informed by, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. More specifically, this play is a product of a particular historical and cultural moment in which ideas of honour were being investigated. This exploration arose not only from the change of the monarch in 1603, but also from the
difference in nationality, religion and ideas of kingship that came with the accession of James I and VI of Scotland. According to Gary Taylor, Shakespeare’s company entered into a “special relationship with their sovereign” after 1603, and “Macbeth is the play that most clearly reflects this relationship” (975). Similarly, in his Riverside introduction to Macbeth, Frank Kermode writes that Macbeth is “a play shaped as none of the others seems to be by the interests of the reigning monarch” (1355). Hence, a close examination of honour in Macbeth will help to reveal both Jacobean concepts of honour and how these concepts were “shaped” by the accession of a Scottish king to the English throne.

This Renaissance context included a discourse of male honour that was complex and pervaded every aspect of the Renaissance man’s life. Honour crossed class boundaries and blurred the lines constructed by Renaissance ideas about gender roles. More important, the code of honour was evolving and changing: Renaissance honour was in a period of transition. One of the most notable facets of this transition was the move from an external honour (stemming from the classical concepts of honour) to an internal code.¹ As the seventeenth century approached in England, however, the demarcation of the estates became less clear in terms of honour. What had formerly been conceived of as a corporate code of honour that existed through the combination of noble birth and heroic action now broadened, placing an emphasis on honourable behaviour binding both to the Prince and to all his British subjects. This code of honour

¹As Gary Miles points out, in the Roman codes of honour that formed the basis of medieval or chivalric honour, “the emphasis is not on an inner character or personal quality, but rather on how one is seen from the outside and in political context” (276). Miles further maintains that “the ancient world knew no such emphasis” on personal integrity (272).
became less centred on public noble behaviour, and more centred on religious morality, virtue and the personal allegiance owed by every man to the State—a collective lord.

More significantly, the code of honour became, to a large degree, centred on the individual conscience and each man’s adherence to its dictates.\(^2\) This debate was exacerbated by the accession of a new and foreign king and perhaps even more so by James’s insistence on the unification of England and Scotland.

James had declared the Union of these two kingdoms less that two months after ascending the English throne on May 19, 1603. The House of Commons, however, was less enthusiastic, and they debated the issue for five years.\(^3\) In fact, according to Marie Axton,

between 1604 and 1608 the House argued the vexed questions of England’s supremacy over Scotland, of subjects born out of the allegiance of the English king, and most momentous of all: was the object of allegiance king or soil? (134)

The Instrument of Union was read in the House of Commons in November, 1606 and, as Axton points out, this reading led to the reopening of the “well-worn cases of succession” in order to

\(^2\)For an excellent discussion of the Renaissance distinction between what should be private and what should be public see Brian Cummings’s article, “Swearing in Public: More and Shakespeare.” Cummings argues that there was a growing insistance, manifest in the linguistic developments of the words “private” and “public,” upon each man’s right to “private” thoughts and, especially, an increasing demand that each man be allowed to keep the “secrets” of his conscience private.

\(^3\)For a complete transcription of this reading, and for more on the debates that followed, see the Journals of the House of Commons, volume I. particularly pages 1024-1050.
determine whether allegiance had been due to a monarch before he was
crowned or after; whether a subject swore allegiance to the body politic
symbolized by the diadem, or to the man who wore the diadem. (143)

This question formed the basis of the discourses of masculine honour in the
seventeenth century, and the debate regarding allegiance was inextricably linked to the
evolution of the masculine honour codes that were concerned with questions of
obedience. Early modern men and women struggled with the question of where to
place their obedience and allegiance; they were being inculcated, by James himself,
with the underlying principles of allegiance to the person of the king and with the idea
that the king is himself the fount of all honour. On the other hand, there existed many
works that argued obedience to the conscience as the way to win true honour, even
when the dictates of the conscience contradicted the wishes of the reigning monarch.

This dilemma is reflected in Malcolm and, particularly, in Macduff.

The idea that honour could be gained by following one’s conscience was widely
disseminated in the early seventeenth century, and among the propagators of this idea
were both Shakespeare and James the VI and I himself. 4 In fact, James begins his
treatise on kingship with a detailed explanation of the relationship between the private
conscience and public exposure. According to James, Scripture

should move all godly and honest men to be very wary in all their secretest
actions and whatsoever midresses they use for attaining to their most

4As Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier point out in their introduction to James I:
The True Law of Monarchies and Basilikon Doron, "one of the distinguishing features of
Basilikon Doron in its relation to James’s other works...is that it marks...the intersection
between private and public notions of monarchic self-representation” (27).
wished ends, lest, otherwise how avowable soever the mark be whereat they aim, the midresses being discovered to be shameful where by they climb, it may turn to the disgrace both of the good work itself and of the author thereof, since the deepest of our secrets cannot be hid from that all-seeing eye and penetrating light, piercing through the bowels of the very darkness itself. (89)

But James is not content with this dire warning, and he later provides a definition of the conscience and a further elucidation of the danger of not obeying its dictates when he writes that the conscience is nothing else but the light of knowledge that God hath planted in man which, ever watching over all of his action, as it beareth him a joyful testimony when he does right, so choppeth it him with a feeling that he hath done wrong whenever he committeth any sin. And surely, although the conscience be a great torture to the wicked, yet it is a great comfort to the godly, if we will consider it rightly. (109)

For James, then, honour consisted of a clear conscience, and dishonour, disgrace and “great torture” would surely follow any action not based upon the dictates of conscience. James, in fact, grants preeminence to a “sound” conscience when he writes, “Above all then (my Sonne) labour to keepe sound this Conscience which many prattle of but few feele” (109-10). This edict is depicted, by Peacham, as an ermine—an animal which provided fur worn only by royalty. The ermine moves toward its den, indicating that it seeks privacy and solitude, that it is by examining the conscience that true royalty is achieved (cf. Figure 4).
Figure 4: “Above all then (my Sonne) labour to keepe sound this Conscience which many prattle of but over few feele.”

It is this emphasis on the relationship between honour and the individual conscience that is articulated in the tragedy of Macbeth.

That Macbeth is about the effects of a guilty or “sinning” conscience is hardly debatable, but that the play also explores the concepts of honour has often been overlooked. Yet, the word “honour” appears eight times in Act 1 alone. Moreover, Macbeth is very carefully characterized as an honourable man. Macbeth is the kind of man that “well deserves” the name of “brave Macbeth” (1.2.16); he is “Valor’s minion” (1.2.20) whom Duncan describes as his “Valiant cousin” (1.2.24) and “peerless kinsman” (1.4.58). Macbeth had, with “valor arm’d” (1.2.29) routed the advancing Norwegian army and, though the enemy rallied its forces, “noble Macbeth hath won” the battle (1.2.67). Macbeth is rewarded for his military valour with “a greater honour” when Duncan confers upon him the title of Thane of Cawdor (1.3.105-106). Macbeth, then, is clearly, and somewhat excessively, depicted as worthy, noble, valiant—in short, as honourable—in the opening act of the play.
Banquo, too, is an honourable man. In fact, Macbeth and Banquo begin the play as “noble partn[s]” (1.3.54) who are equally brave in the sergeant’s report of the battle:

...I must report they were as cannons overcharg’d with double cracks so they Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe. (1.2.36-38)

Macbeth and Banquo are “doubled” again when the weird sisters promise them both great honours and hail them as rulers:

3 WITCH: So all hail Macbeth and Banquo!
1 WITCH: Banquo and Macbeth all hail!

(1.3.68-69)

The witches’ language and their reversing of the men’s names makes the two men almost interchangeable.

Despite the men’s similarity in terms of honourable reputation, there exists one significant difference: Banquo follows his conscience while Macbeth attempts to ignore his.⁵ They are both noble and brave, but only Macbeth is “Valor’s minion” (1.2.19), and, in this period the word “minion” took on a pejorative meaning. According to the OED a minion is someone who is willing to resort to base ends to accomplish his goals, and therein lies the difference between Macbeth and Banquo. In demonstrating this

⁵Robert Watson, in his study *Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition*, works out the crucial differences between Banquo and Macbeth in detail. Watson concludes, quite rightly, that “though Macbeth and Banquo are kept awake on the murder night by the same ambitious fantasy, the differences are crucial. Macbeth remains awake to overcome his political limitations...Banquo remains awake to overcome his moral limitations” (94).
difference Shakespeare articulates the relationship between honour and conscience that James explains in his "royal gift," for Macbeth promises Banquo, when he asks Banquo to find some time to discuss the weird sisters' prophesies, that if Banquo will "cleave to my consent.../ It shall make honour for you" (2.1.27). Banquo's response is crucial, for in it he marks the difference between himself and Macbeth that will form the basis of the rest of the discussion of conscience in the play. Banquo tells Macbeth that he will accept those honours

So I lose none

In seeking to augment it, but still keep

My bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear

I shall be counsell'd. (2.1.26-29)

Banquo, unlike Macbeth, is willing to have honour made for him if, and only if, he can gain those honours with a clear conscience or a "bosom franchis'd." Moreover, five of the eight main definitions of the word "franchise" contained in the OED define the word as a type of freedom, and, more specifically, as "moral freedom." Banquo, then, must have the freedom to act upon his conscience; his bosom (the seat of the conscience) must be allowed the liberty to determine the morally appropriate action in the circumstances surrounding this offer of a gain in honour. Further, of the remaining three main definitions found in the OED, two deal with the idea of privilege granted by the established authority (which in this period would undeniably be the king himself). Hence, Banquo's concern about his "franchis'd" bosom underscores his allegiance to Duncan, the rightful king from whom, according to James I, all honour comes. Shakespeare's choice of this word underscores the tension and the paradox faced by
both Banquo and Macbeth; Banquo weighs, as Macbeth does not, his knowledge that he is bound to the king by oath against the desire for freedom to act in his own interests. The final definition of "franchise" current in this period is simply "nobility of mind; liberality, generosity, magnanimity." Since these traits are all integral to the concept of honour in this period Banquo’s need to keep his bosom "franchis'd" implies his need to keep his honour intact; unlike Macbeth, Banquo will not risk honour in an attempt to gain honour. Although Banquo dies for his conscience he dies an honourable man, fighting to protect his son, while Macbeth, conversely, dies a traitor, a usurper who has suffered the "great torture" of his conscience which has "choppe[d]" him into the madness that James warns against in Basilikon Doron.

That is not to say that Macbeth is simply a dramatized version of James’s advice to his son. Rather, both James and Shakespeare were participants in the tensions inherent in an evolving honour code. Put simply, Renaissance men had to cope with both a residual Roman and Medieval code of honour that "knew no emphasis" on personal integrity (Miles 272) and the more modern honour code with its contemporary insistence on the importance of individual conscience. And, while both James and Shakespeare promulgate the need to keep a clear conscience, this need is also apparent in the sermons, tracts, pamphlets and courtesy literature of the period.

Contemporary emphasis on the conscience led to yet another internal/external tension in the honour code—the conflict between violent and non-violent means of resolving conflict. Men were forced to balance both external allegiance to the State, which often required violent military action, and internal allegiance to God’s word, which demanded Christian patience, long-suffering and non-violent resolutions to
conflict. This dichotomy between violence and non-violence is also explored and examined in *Macbeth*.

*Macbeth* is clearly rewarded for his violent actions on behalf of his country and his king, and Duncan makes clear his approval of violent and bloody acts. Duncan is, in fact, extremely pleased with the sergeant’s violence in battle, and the king enunciates the relationship between violence and manly honour when he tells the sergeant that “so well thy words become thee as thy wounds, / They smack of honour both” (1.2.42-43). Duncan is also favourably impressed by reports of Macbeth’s extreme violence, and the king proclaims Macbeth as his “valiant cousin, worthy gentleman” upon hearing that Macbeth has “unseam’d” Macdonwald “from the nave to th’ chops, / And fix’d his head upon our battlements” (1.2.22-23). Macbeth’s sword, in battle, had “smok’d with bloody execution” which had made him “Valor’s minion” (1.2.18-19), and both he and Banquo had fought as though “they meant to bathe in reeking wounds” (1.2.38) during the fight. The result of this violence is that Macbeth is honoured by his king, and he has “bought golden opinions from all sorts of people” (1.7.31-32).

But the conflict inherent in rewarding military violence, indeed in the creation of military heroism, is that the government must then reward men for operating outside the government’s and society’s own ideas of what is acceptable behaviour. In other words, military honour is the reward for doing in war precisely what society forbids its members to do in times of peace—take the lives of others. As Derek Cohen points out, “this, of course, is why violence is called good only when it is directed outward from the social unit and evil when it is turned inward” (133). Inherent in
Duncan's sanctioning of violence—in fact in his delight in violent military acts—is the risk that the violence will turn inward as its perpetrator quests for honour. Thus, in *Macbeth*, "the haunting and terrible beauty that violence can be is pursued to its dreadful but rational conclusions" (Cohen 127). Macbeth is "in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should [he] wade no more / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.135-137); the blood on his hands will "the multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Make the green one red" (2.2.59-60). More important, all the blood that Macbeth has shed will take from him the honour he has won by shedding blood. Macbeth has, throughout the course of the play and its excessive bloodshed, gone from "noble Macbeth" (1.2.67) to "black Macbeth" (4.3.52) and "Devilish Macbeth" (4.3.117) and, finally, to a man whose name people are "afraid to hear" (5.7.5). Macbeth is no longer "noble," and his name has become so blackened that "the devil himself could not pronounce a title more hateful" (5.7.7-8). Macbeth's honour is gone; his bloody and violent deeds have left him with "Curses not loud but deep, mouth honor" (5.3.28) rather than the "honor, love, obedience" and "troops of friends" he thought kingship would bring (5.3.25).

*Macbeth*, then, is influenced by the specific Renaissance discourse of honour that sought to minimize violent responses to conflict. This discourse is, in turn, influenced by James's political agenda and his vision of himself as the orchestrator of peace.6 Moreover, James is a product of the cultural context of the shifting honour code. A never-ending reciprocity is created between text and context, and both society and the drama it produces influence, and are influenced by, the discourse of honour. Thus,

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6According to Gordon Donaldson, James was "by temperament as well as by policy a peacemaker and constantly exerted his own influence in favour of conciliation, with a view to extinguishing feuds and preventing duels and assaults" (222).
when James actively and vigorously creates the image of himself as patriarch/father of the country he also actively participates in the evolution of the honour code and influences society's notion of an honourable man, for "the means of promoting the pursuit of success without endangering the social formation is encoded within the politics of patriarchy which protects itself from itself by the valorization of a complex moral system" (Cohen 129). By remaking himself in the image of a father to his subjects James incorporates both the medieval honour code that centres upon kinship and the more modern, moral and political code that forbids civil violence and centres instead on the conscience that would never allow an act of parricide. In doing so James makes parricide a political act and regicide a breach of the powerful familial bond. It is in this image of the king as father to his subjects/children that James's Scottish origins are most apparent and Shakespeare's exploration of his Scottish king's beliefs most complicated.

According to Maurice Lee, Scotland was, at the beginning of James's personal rule in 1585, "a quasi-medieval kingdom" filled with violent feuding. Keith Brown concurs when he writes that "though the feudal age may have passed" in Scotland by the 1580s, "many of its values, particularly those associated with manliness and prowess, continued to dominate the attitudes of young men" (21). James, however, busied himself with ending the feuds because, as he explains to his son, feuding among his subjects amounted to a usurpation of his kingly honour, and it disturbed the commonwealth:

and above all, let the measure of your love to everyone be the measure of his virtue, letting your favour to be no longer tied to any than the
continuance of his virtuous disposition shall deserve, not admitting the excuse upon a just revenge to procure oversight to an injury. For the 1st injury is committed against the party; but the party’s revenging thereof at his own hand is a wrong committed against you in usurping your office, whom to only the sword belongeth for revenging all injuries committed against any of your people. (Basilikon Doron 175)

Encoded or tacit in this advice are three very important aspects of James’s concept of honour. First, he implies that it is the king’s duty, like a father, to settle disputes among his children and that anyone who assumes that duty in his stead dishonours him. Second, it is also the king’s duty, again like a father, to reward his subjects for good and virtuous behaviour. James states this idea more openly when he writes that Henry must reward his virtuous subjects so “as may make the greatest of them to think that the chiefest point of their honour standeth in striving with the meanest of the land in humility towards you and obedience to your laws” (125-26). Finally, James’s advice implies that the good of the commonwealth is paramount in all honourable undertakings, for much of the advice he gives, which culminates in this passage, is designed to alleviate the strife and disturbed peace caused by the feuding. It is, then, to James’s credit that, “by 1607 the Scottish Council was making great strides in their efforts to stop feuding in Scotland” (Lee 71), and that the Scottish Privy Council was, at least in 1609, promulgating James’ opposition to feuding: “in nothing more wronged than by the presumption of any private subject in pressing to tak revenge of injureis done to thame at their awne handis as gif the authoritie of a magistrate were to no purpois” (RPC viii, 343). Hence, the need to minimize violence within the honour code
is inextricably linked to the politics of patriarchy. One does not need to take violent revenge if one has a kind and impartial father to arbitrate disputes. More important, one cannot justify two opposing (and feuding) sets of kin if one lives in a country where all subjects are siblings; each subject shares the same father in a patriarchal society.

Therefore, when things go so terribly wrong in Macbeth, when the honour code breaks down so that even the smallest sign of honour—the seating arrangements at a king’s banquet—is abandoned as it is in 3.5.118, then it is because the familial bond has broken down.7 Moreover, Lady Macbeth is unable to kill Duncan, not because it is regicide, but because he “resembled / [her] father as he slept” (2.2.12-13); though she was willing to kill a king, she was loathe to commit parricide. Macbeth, too, wrestles with his conscience and his honour when he realizes that killing Duncan would be wrong because he, Macbeth, is his “kinsmen and his subject” (1.7.13), which has led Duncan to a false sense of “double-trust” (1.7.12).

Perhaps more important to this civil honour, inherent in the patriarchal political system which collapses the boundaries between the commonwealth and kinship ties, is the lengthy discussion between Malcolm and Macduff. Here the family bond is emphasized by echoing a common Scottish image: Scotland is Dame Scotia, a woman and mother who has been dishonoured, persecuted and attacked. Macduff and Malcolm, as Scotia’s sons, are obligated to rescue their mother, thereby restoring peace to the commonwealth. This image of Scotland, though evident in many Scottish texts of

7Or, to use Jonathan Goldberg’s words, “the play is largely womanless and family relationships are disturbed; Duncan and Banquo both have heirs, but no wives; Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have no surviving children” (259).
this period, is most clearly articulated in a 1549 political tract entitled *The Complaynt of Scotland* in which the anonymous author "cast his work after the fashion of the age" (Murray xvi) by using an allegorical form in which Dame Scotia exhorts her three sons, representative of the three estates, to restore the good of the commonwealth. It is important to note that the speech of Dame Scotia opens with a commentary on the significance of honour:

> O ignorant, abusit, ande dissaitful pepil, gone by the path vaye of verteous knaulage, beand of ane effement courage, degradit fra honor.... O quhat vanhap, quhat dyabolic temtatione, quhat misire, quhat maledictione, or quhat vengeance is this that hes succumbit zour honor? (72)

Dame Scotia knows that the problem with Scotland is that its honour has "succumbit"; she, as emblematic of the country itself, is dishonoured. In fact, Scotia declares she can tell that her sons are without honour because they "haue nocht pytie of me zour natural mother, or quhy haue ze no pytie of zour selfis" (72). Scotia exhorts her sons to defend the public weal, and she presents herself as a persecuted woman when she laments that "My ald enemeis hes persecutit me outuartly in cruel veyris be fyr and sourde" (73).

Although *The Complaynt of Scotland* is clearly an anti-English tract, "the real and earnest business of the book is resumed with the complaint of 'Dame Scotia'.....the burden of that complaint is that the divisions and dissensions among the estates weaken the realm as a whole" (Burns 112). Scotia spends a significant amount of her time castigating her sons for allowing civil and internal strife to bring disorder to the commonwealth. In doing so, she again equates the country with the image of the dishonoured female as she warns her sons not to be like the "herand damsel" who
"gifs eyris to the amourus persuasions of desolut zong men" and thus "sal be eysile persuadit to brac hyr chistine" (108). Scotia complains that the factions that arise in Scotland are causing men to listen to the persuasive words of the English which, in turn, leaves Scotland the dishonoured maid who has yielded her chastity too easily.

Shakespeare's scene between Macduff and Malcolm is rife with the image of a feminized Scotland and with the sentiment that Macbeth must be removed from the throne so that the patriarchal familial bond can be restored and the good of the commonweal preserved. And, although the gendering of a country is unique neither to Scotland nor to the early modern period, Scotia is not simply a female allegorical figure; she is a dishonoured and persecuted female. Whereas England's Britannia is a figure who represents both the nurturing mother and the chaste female needing the protection of her male subjects, Scotia is both an unchaste maid and one of the "widows" and "orphans" (4.3.5) whose family is torn apart. Macduff's and Malcolm's country is their mother, but "cannot be call'd our mother" (4.3.166) because of the unnatural state of her sons being "banish'd" by Macbeth's tyranny (4.3.113). This unnatural state is further compounded by the circumstances surrounding Macbeth's unlawful kingship since as subject/son in a patriarchal society Macbeth has murdered his father (theoretically Scotia's husband), and cast the blame for the regicide/patricide on Malcolm, Duncan's natural son and the rightful king. Yet, like dutiful sons, Macduff and Malcolm will rescue their "mother" from the usurping Macbeth; they will restore the familial bond that will ensure the country's peace. Moreover, they will do so by relying on Malcolm's familial bond with his English uncle, who has provided him with troops.
Ironically, Macduff has sacrificed his own family in order to restore his patriarchal kin. The "dishonour" that he endures in abandoning his wife and children (4.3.29), and which has long puzzled scholars, dissolves in his heroic act of restoring his mother to her natural familial bond by reuniting her with her sons. Therefore, Macduff is not dishonoured at all; he has done exactly what the patriarchal concept of honour and the highly specific circumstances demand of him—foregone his kin and pledged his familial bond to his country. Shakespeare underscores this honourable act precisely by forcing Macduff to abandon his family in order to save his country. Moreover, Shakespeare heightens Macduff's honour by making him a product of his country; Macduff is Scotland's son as he is "not of woman born" (5.8.15). He is ripped from his mother's womb in an untimely fashion, much the same way as he arises out of the torn country as Scotland's son. It is in Macduff that the more modern code of honour coalesces. Macduff's violence is turned against the "other," a man so black that even the devil fears to name him. Macduff further gives Macbeth a chance to repent before he kills him; he will let Macbeth live if he subjugates himself to the new and rightful king. Finally, Macduff's conscience is clear since he rights the wrong that is done by both restoring the familial bond and restoring the rightful ruler to the throne. Macduff

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Shakespeare's portrayal of Macduff, then, coincides with the English Protestants' casuistry, outlined in Camille Wells Slichts's study *The Casuistical Tradition*, that attempted to harmonize universal moral law with particular circumstance. According to Slichts, in *Macbeth* the "harmony is a blending of potentially discordant forces, and the order is the just but precarious subordination of passion to reason, of self to the common good" (112). Macduff is excused, in highly unusual circumstances, of the universal law "Thou shalt not kill," and he restores order and the good of the commonwealth by subjugating his passionate grief and anger at the death of his family to the rational necessity of restoring the rightful king. Thus, Macduff may retain his honour because, like Banquo, he keeps his "bosom franchis'd."
is the epitome of patriarchal Renaissance honour.

It is in the political ideology of patriarchy that the text and context most clearly intersect. Shakespeare makes several direct references to James I and VI in the play. James claims to be a direct descendant in Banquo’s line; he is, in fact, the descendant who is reflected in the mirror that the witches’ apparition holds up to Macbeth (4.5.119-121). The reciprocity between text and context brings us to the chronic tradition of writing history.

Shakespeare lives under the rule of a king and patron who propagates patriarchy, emphasizes the individual conscience, and who has very specific ideas about what constitutes an honourable man. Shakespeare is patronized and protected, as a member of The King’s Men, by a king who is Scottish. The playwright, then, must create a play that does not offend his monarch, and in order to do so he must make significant alterations in his source material. Hence, Shakespeare, in Macbeth, neglects to mention that, according to Holinshed, Macbeth rules peaceably for ten years and is supported fully by Banquo. Moreover, Shakespeare imbues Banquo, as the king’s ancestor, with a conscience that Holinshed gives no indication of in his Chronicles. In attempting to support the patriarchal idea of his lord, Shakespeare creates the entire scene in which Lady Macduff is killed and in so doing heightens the metaphor of country and family. Finally, Shakespeare leaves out Holinshed’s portrayal of the Scots as a barbarous people who are caught in a never-ending cycle of regicide and tyranny that, according to Holinshed, is created by Malcolm’s elevating of his thanes to the position of earl, thereby creating differences among his formerly equal subjects. Rather, Malcolm’s decision to create the title of earl both echoes James’s excessive creation of
new nobility and glorifies the union of England and Scotland, the cooperation and
similarity of the two countries, that James so desperately hoped to achieve.

*Macbeth*, then, is both a product of and an influence on an historically and
culturally specific moment. The play enters the discourse of honour both as an attempt
to promulgate James’s political ideals and, significantly, his goal of achieving a union
of the Scottish and English crowns. But the exploration of the complexities of the
Jacobean male honour code that is embedded in the play is as much a product of the
discourse of honour as it is a participant in it; the play and its author(s) are influenced
by contemporary concepts of honour and honourable behaviour. Thus, *Macbeth* is an
attempt both to please a king and to expose a king’s political ideologies and intentions;
the play tries to understand honour, and to shape what constitutes an honourable man.

This depiction of honourable behaviour and of civil war will gain even greater
currency in the period between 1640-1660. In fact, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* will be
revived and rewritten in an attempt to demonstrate both the horror, and the necessity,
of civil war and to justify the honour of disobedience to the reigning authority. But
Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s works were not the only ones to concern themselves
with the discourses of masculine honour. These discourses can be discerned in nearly
every text—dramatic and non-dramatic, fiction and non-fiction—of the period. Much
of this discourse takes place around political upheaval and, as we shall see in the next
chapter, attempts to understand and influence masculine honour codes within the
context of specific political events. While Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello* reflect the
crisis of the Essex Rebellion and the fall of several of Elizabeth’s great courtiers, and
*Macbeth* is linked to the accession of James I, Middleton is concerned with foreign, not
domestic, policy, and the discussion of honour in *A Game At Chess* can be best understood in the context of James's Spanish policy and, specifically, in the context of the Spanish Match.
CHAPTER THREE

National Unity and English (Dis)Honour: A Game At Chess and the Spanish Match

The 1620s, in England, was a decade characterized by division, political upheaval and despair. Negotiations between the Spanish and King James I led to an intense, and I think realistic, fear of a liaison with Spain which, in turn, fed the anti-papist, and particularly, the anti-Jesuit sentiments of the period. In fact, many of the extant documents of this decade reveal the fear that the Spanish would take over England by duping James, or worse, his son and heir Prince Charles, into conversion to Catholicism, thereby reducing England herself to a Catholic state. In an age when religion was inextricably linked to both politics and a sense of nationalism—Englishness itself did, in part, originate in the idea that a Protestant England was God’s elect nation—the fear of life under a Catholic king led to not only a perceived need for national unity, but also an effort among the writers of the period to inspire a sense of nationalism in all English people. Moreover, this budding nationalism is clearly reflected in the evolution of the seventeenth-century honour code, and writers of the 1620s found, intentionally or not, that the evolving codes of masculine honour were useful as a unifying force that identified the English as, well, English. An idealized uniquely national code of honour is itself a sub-text of Thomas Middleton’s intensely nationalistic play A Game At Chess, for Middleton first constructs, and then deconstructs, a dichotomy of honour which assigns shame and dishonour to the

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1This chapter is, in its entirety, forthcoming in English Studies in Canada under the current title.
Spanish and honour to the English.

There exists in the scholarly community much debate regarding exactly when English men and women developed a sense of themselves as a distinct nation. Benedict Anderson argued in 1991 that one can see the “appearance of nationalism towards the end of the eighteenth century” (11-12). Richard Helgerson, in his influential study *Forms of Nationhood*, locates this development in the late sixteenth century. According to Helgerson, “to men born in the 1550s and 1560s, things English came to matter with special intensity” (3). Helgerson argues that by the time of the publication of Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* in 1607, not only English but British nationalism is discernible in the textual traces of the early seventeenth century: “as the cult of Elizabeth had replaced the cult of the Virgin, so the cult of Britain now assumes power in its turn” (120). Helgerson and Anderson do concur, however, on the cause of this rise in nationalism in England. For Anderson, the appearance of national unity can be linked to the erosion of religion and dynasty as cultural systems (11-12), and Helgerson agrees that nationalism exists “both because England itself mattered more than it had and because other sources of identity and cultural authority mattered less” (3).

Nevertheless, scholars cannot agree on what a nation actually is. For Anderson, a nation can be defined as “an imagined political community” that must be imagined simply because we cannot know everyone in the community in even the smallest nation (6). Anderson explains that a nation is imagined as a community because “regardless of actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Helgerson, however, believes that the community of Britain becomes less imagined with the mapping of the
nation that takes place in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in texts such as Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* and in Saxton’s maps; if people can “see” their nation spread out before them they do not need quite so much imagination to conceive of a unified British realm. David Baker, in his 1997 study *Between Nations*, breaks Anderson’s argument down even further. For Baker, nation can be defined in many ways including geographical, political and cultural identities. Baker argues that while political communities may be imagined and geographical ones may be mapped, cultural nations are more imaginary than imagined since Englishness itself is highly uncertain (24-29). And, while Helgerson does admit that the idea of nation in the early modern period was unstable in terms of name, territory and political systems (8), Baker argues throughout his book that previous scholars, including Helgerson and Anderson, focus too narrowly on English nationhood and thus ignore what has become known as the “British problem.” For Baker, studies of what constitutes and constituted the English nation must be broadened to include an examination of England’s relative positions, politically and culturally, to the three other “nations” which share its islands. My study will draw on Baker’s work in that underlying my examination of Middleton’s play is the assumption that English nationalism is more imaginary than imagined, more idealized than possible, particularly the community of honourable Englishmen that cannot be mapped in the way that Helgerson sees the English nation being articulated and exposed. Though I take Baker’s point that no study of English nationhood can be conducted without an examination of the ways in which the three other British countries acted upon that nationhood, I wish to narrow the focus of inquiry rather than broaden it; in order to understand Middleton’s, and his
contemporaries', entrance into the discourse of national unity and to gain some insight into the ways in which these writers manipulate the codes of masculine honour to influence those discourses, we must first examine the divisions that existed within England and among Englishmen. It is this division that Middleton critiques in his play. For Middleton, among others, Englishmen, and particularly the king and those who surrounded him, were in their negotiations with Spain dangerously close to destroying the English nation, and Middleton creates an idealized community of honourable Englishmen in order to articulate that danger. In doing so, this dramatist employs notions of masculine honour to enter the discourse of nationhood that is, as Helgerson, Anderson and others have demonstrated, nascent in the early modern period.

The division that existed in the 1620s has been pointed out by historians and critics alike. Walter Cohen states that after 1614 "the struggle between crown and parliament became increasingly intractable in England" (123), and, because of that struggle which eventually led to civil war, Cohen labels the period extending from 1608 to 1614 as "politically and culturally...the last, embattled moment of national unity" in England (123). While Cohen's assertion may be a little too strident, given James's (mostly unsuccessful) attempts to unify England and Scotland, Winston's Churchill's call for a unification of Englishmen against Nazi Germany, and the struggles for Welsh, Irish, and Scottish independence that are in today's headlines, Cohen's point that there was political and cultural division in England in this period is important. In his study The Blessed Revolution Thomas Cogswell, taking a somewhat less extreme stance than Cohen, points out that James's Direction to Preachers (1622), his order that the gentry should leave London and return to their estates (1622), his 8 March, 1623, proclamation
which stated that English subjects should not “use any insolence, misbehaviour, inculcations, disgrace, or affront” towards any [Spanish] ambassador (which included the codicil that those who were caught doing so would be “punished to the terror and example of others”) all served to exacerbate the rumours that James was about to convert to Catholicism (41). Cogswell further argues that such a conversion would threaten the entire English way of life: in matters of religion there would be toleration for Roman Catholics, or worse, foreign policy would alter as peace with the perpetrators of the Armada superseded England’s long-standing Dutch alliance, and domestic policy would be threatened by the Spanish example of government without parliament. In addition, the dowry offered by the Spanish Infanta Maria would further reduce James’s need to raise money through Parliament which, in turn, would negate what little leverage Parliament had.

Perhaps more important than the views of modern historians is an examination of the contemporary documents themselves. This analysis illustrates that fear of a Spanish influence, with its attendant anti-popery and anti-Jesuit connotations, was cause for both division and despair in the English 1620s. This fear was intensified by James’s attempt to marry his son and heir, Prince Charles, to the Spanish Infanta Maria in an event that has become known as the Spanish Match. Panic increased after February, 1623, when Charles and his father’s favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, secretly left England to attend the Spanish court and conclude the marriage negotiations (cf. Figure 5). Simonds D’Ewes, a young law student in London, writes daily of his experiences and observations in a diary he kept for posterity. On 20 February, 1623, he writes that he did not want to believe Prince Charles and the Duke
of Buckingham had departed for Madrid. D’Ewes, like many of his contemporaries, feared the Spanish influence that would result from such a match, especially in matters of religion. After expressing his disbelief D’Ewes remarks, “everye man talked freelye and sorrowfullye” of the Prince’s absence. On 17 July of that same year D’Ewes records that “everye mans mouth was full of discourse of the articles concluded betweene Spaine and us, and everye mans heart of feare” of an ensuing toleration.

Figure 5: Title page from Michael Du Val’s *Rosa Hispani-Angelica* (1623) depicting Charles and Infanta Maria

In addition to the singular observations of D’Ewes are the plethora of tracts that appeared in the early seventeenth century. Among these tracts is one that is particularly critical of the king’s policies written by an anonymous author under the pseudonym of Tom Tell-Troath. In this thirty-page diatribe, the author takes the guise

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2 All references to D’Ewes’s are taken from *The Diary of Sir Simonds D’Ewes*, London, 1926.
of a patriotic informer responding to James I’s proclamations concerning the censorship of both speech and printed matter; James had demanded that all subjects use their “uttermost powers” to prevent the spread of royal criticism. Tell-Troath notes that a “generall torrent of discontent...raigns with such seditious noyse over [James’s] whole kingdome” (5). Later, Tell-Troath states that “our greatest comforts are changed into equall despaire, and our most reputed blessings into most apparent curses” (7).

Thomas Scott, a contemporary minister who became one of the most outspoken (and popular) pamphleteers of this decade, authored several tracts that pertained to the Spanish issues and the fear that resulted from them. The first, written in 1620, entitled *Vox Populi, or News From Spain*, would become the primary source for Middleton’s *A Game At Chess*. Scott adopts the persona of the Spanish Ambassador Seignior Gondomar and outlines the Spanish intentions toward England. Scott, using Gondomar’s voice, warns that

all our [Spain’s] peace, warre, our treatises, mariages, and whatsoever intendement else ours, aims at this principall end, to get the whole possession of the world, and to reduce all to unitie under one temporall head, that our king may truly be what he is stiled, the catholic and universall king. (Sig. A4')

Scott followed this tract with several others, and among the most important of these was his 1624 effort, *Vox Coeli, or News from Heaven*. In this work, a fictitious conversation unfolds among Henry VIII, Queen Mary, Edward VI, Elizabeth I, Prince Henry, and Queen Anne. In the course of the discussion Mary laments the childless state of her marriage to Spain’s King Phillip, and in so doing outlines the English
people's greatest fear: "if we had had any males, England had beene long since a province to Spain" (33). Later, Mary rejoices at the decay of the English fleet because this decay will provide "a step for King Phillip to mount the throne of estate, to pluck off King James his crown, and to place and settle it on his owne head" (36). In fact, the title page of *Vox Dei* illustrates Christ's concern for the kingdom of England; Charles, Buckingham and Frederick stand as guards, protecting James and the royal family against Spaniards and Catholics (cf. Figure 6). Scott's tracts, and their unprecedented popularity, clearly indicate that many contemporaries subscribed to an almost irrational fear of a Spanish takeover and a Catholic king.

The tracts of Thomas Scott, Tom Tell-Troath, and others like them not only reflected the fear and despair of this decade; they also communicated the need for national unity. Many pamphlets and tracts argued that a concerted and collective effort to fight the Spanish influence was necessary to stave off the threat of Catholicism. Peter Lake, in his study of Scott's opposition to the Spanish Match, concludes that Scott "opposed to his vision of a nation undermined by Spanish influence and popery an equally vivid image of a nation purged of its corruptions and united by the struggle against Antichrist" (821). Lake further contends that

the existence of and need for an anti-popish consensus was asserted and
then invoked to legitimate the process of struggle against and expulsion
of popish elements which it was argued [by Scott] was essential to
strenthen and maintain that consensus. (822)

In *Vox Coeli*, Queen Mary can remark from Heaven that "when England hath lost herself, she can lose no more" (30), which can easily be interpreted as Scott's attempt
both to underscore the danger of a Spanish liaison and to summon the English people
to a unified anti-Catholic stance that will fight against the Antichrist/Pope and, hence,
against England’s perceived loss of national identity.

Scott was not, however, the only contemporary to perceive this need for
national unity and to attempt to produce a sense of nationalism. Tom Tell-Troath,
stating that the Spanish Match was no more than “the nett St. Peter’s successors hope
to catch England with” (20), calls throughout his tract for a war against Spain in which
England would not “contribute to this warre so much to regain the Palatinate as to
redeem the credit of our nation” (12). Tell-Troath sees war against the Spanish
Catholics and its true leader, the Antichrist/Pope, as a way not only to unify the
subjects of England, but also to create a broader sense of nationalism that would be
uniquely British. Tell-Troath appeals to James’s desire to “unite the people as well as
the countries of England and Scotland” (28) and suggests that the only possible way to
achieve this national British unity is to effect

there friendshoppe at armes in some fortunate warre, where honour and
danger may be equally devided…one victory obtayned by the joynt
valour of English and Scots, will more indelibly Christen your Majesties
Empire, Great Brittaine, than any act of Parliament, or artifice of State.

(28)

Tell-Troath seemingly believed that the call to British people to unite against a common
enemy would be necessary to battle the Pope and “his fiercer beasts the Jesuits” (14).

Political tracts were not the only way to express fear and a call for unity. The
sermons of this decade were also ideological tracts. Such is the case with John Donne’s
sermon, preached on the fifth of November, 1622, upon the anniversary of the
Gunpowder Plot. 3 Donne takes as his text Lamentations 4:20: “The breath of our
nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits.” According to Donne, the
Book of Lamentations provided an appropriate text because

it is both Historicall, and Propheticall, for, they, from whom, God, in his
mercy, gave us Deliuerance, this day, are our Historical Enemies, and
our Prophetical Enemies; historically wee know, they have attempted to
ruin heretofore, and prophetically wee may bee sure, they will doe so
againe, whensoever any new occasion provokes them, or sufficient
power enables them. (238)

The historical enemies Donne speaks of are the Catholic conspirators of the
Gunpowder Plot, and his warning that they will attempt England’s “ruine” again,
given the opportunity, was undoubtedly meant to evoke the Spanish Match and its
attendant dangers of providing “sufficient power” to the Catholic Spanish. Like Scott,
Donne also calls for a unified kingdom, and for him this unity can be effected by a
strong allegiance to the church and king. Josiah of the Bible triumphed because he
refused to turn from God: “That is, (if we apply it to the Josiah of our times), neither to
the fugitive, that leaves our church, and goes to the Roman, nor to the Separatist, that
leaves our Church, and goes to none” (247).

Moreover, the call to unity propagated by the writers of this period was replete

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3For an extensive discussion of the discovery of this manuscript see Jeanne
Shami’s “Donne’s 1622 Sermon on the Gunpowder Plot His Original Presentation
Manuscript Discovered.” Shami also discusses the political and cultural ramifications
of this sermon in her article “The Stars in Their Order Fought against Sisera: John
Donne and the Pulpit Crisis of 1622.”
with images of, and calls to, national honour. Within this same sermon Donne calls for
unity with the king, and in doing so he calls upon the concepts of kinship, an integral
part of the honour codes, for English subjects are the king’s very “bretheren, his bone,
his flesh, and so reputed by him” (250). Donne reminds his listeners that unity is the
only way to save England, and again he relies upon the notions of the loyalty due to
one’s kin demanded by the seventeenth-century honour codes:

Cities are built of families, and so are Churches too; Every man keeps his
owne family, and then every Pastor shall keep his flock, and so the
Church shall be free from schisme, and the State from sedition, and our
Josiah preserved. (263)

The Church and the country will be preserved from losing their identity if Englishmen
begin to behave, in a larger, national sense, with the loyalty and duty that they would
show towards their kindred.

Tell-Troath, too, uses the evolving masculine honour codes to call all
Englishmen to a united stand.4 In fact, Tell-Troath makes it perfectly clear that war
with Spain is one of honour when he advises the king that “There is no way to recover
your losses and vindicate your honour but with fighting with him that hath cozened
you” (3). For Tell-Troath the issue is clear; James has been “cozened” by the Spanish; he
has been made to look the fool, but he can recover his honour by beating the Spanish in
the age-old field of honour—the battlefield. Moreover, Tell-Troath demonstrates that

4Mervyn James points out that there was an “emergence of a state-centred
honour system” (375) in this period, and that the “permeation of the community of
honour by humanism and religion” (375) required both a redefining of the idea of
“virtue” and a reconsideration of the relationship between honour and religion (385).
the disunity apparent in England is a direct result of dishonourable behaviour perpetrated by both the Ministers of State and by James himself:

Some subjects who speculate upon the Mysteries of the Court doe apparently perceive that the Councell of Gondonar hath taught some of your active Ministers to juggle only to make them passively capable of his owne Conjuring, and that by the penetrating faculty of a yellow Indian Demon hee hath at his command and is maister of your Cabinett without a ken & knowes your secrets before the greatest part & most faithfull of your councell and which is worse they saye your Majestie knowes it; and therefore suspect that your selfe is bribed against your selfe. (4)

According to Tell-Troath, England's now vulnerable position is a result of the disloyalty of his "active Ministers" who have contravened the codes of honour by revealing James's secrets. What is worse, James himself, although not disloyal but rather led astray by Catholic black magic, has also been revealing state secrets to the evil Gondonar. Tell-Troath goes on to complain that the "olde compass of honour is quite forgott: and our Pilotts now adais knowe no other route then that of their owne fowrtunes: according to which they tacke and untacke all publicke affairs" (6). The end result of this misguided (and, as we shall see, for Middleton very Spanish) idea of honour is that "wee see your Godly vessels of this state misguided and shamefully exposed to all manner of Danger" (6). England is in danger precisely because Englishmen have forgotten how to behave honourably and loyally and instead they care only for their own advancement (misguided honour) and breach their duty by
revealing state secrets.

Tell-Troath’s rhetoric, and his strategy, is to use the masculine honour codes to force James into an act of war against Spain. The pamphleteer points out that “cryes so loud for reparation in all voyces and in all hearts” exist because of “a just resentment of the Decayes of our Countreys honour” (6). He warns James that the English must not “prostitute as we doe to the great whore master of Babylon and for a fewe clods of earth give up the honour of our countrey and violate the love which we owe to Religion” (11). Tell-Troath reverts once more to the metaphor of kinship when he pleads with James to “let it be no longer heard: that the Spaniard hath more witt then the English eye sight: or the King of Spaines Cozen Germanes removed are neerer a kinne to him then your Majesties owne children are to you” (13). Finally, James’s own sense of honour comes under direct attack when Tell-Troath writes that England is mocked as “the land of promise” because of James’s willingness to make promises, but not to keep them (21).

Although Thomas Scott also uses the notions and discourses of honour to create a sense of national unity in both the king and his subjects, Scott’s strategy, which will later be emulated, and deconstructed, by Middleton, is to set up two distinct concepts of honour and to ally one with Spain and the other with England. In 1 Vox Populi Scott explains that the Pope’s Nuntio and Spain’s Duke of Lerma are at odds and that the Nuntio “strove as competitor for Pompe and Glorie” with the Duke (sig. A2”). Like Tell-Troath’s “active Ministers” and Middleton’s black chess pieces, Scott’s Spaniards favour personal “Glorie” and thus have a misguided sense of what it means to be honourable. Scott points out that the Spanish king himself holds it “more honourable to
doe than to discourse" (sig. A3'); the Spanish king subscribes to an older idea of masculine honour that relies on violent action and does not recognize the honourable nature of a political discourse that may work for the betterment of the country. In fact, speaking through Gondomar, Scott makes it plain that Spanish notions of honour are outdated, a throw-back to antiquated Roman ideas:

This most laudable custome of our Kings in bringing all officers to such an account where a review and notice is taken of good and bad services upon the determination of their implantment, resembles those Romane triumphs appointed for the souldiers; and as in them it provided courage, so in us it stirres up to diligence. (sig. A4')

Helgerson has, quite rightly, argued that under Elizabeth,

The way to an acceptable national self led through self-alienation. They had to know themselves as the barbarous or inferior other, know themselves from the viewpoint of the more refined or more successful cultures of Greece, Rome, and contemporary Europe, before they could undertake the project of national self-making. (236)

I would argue, however, that by James's reign this position was beginning to reverse. Instead of seeing themselves as barbarous, Englishmen began to associate Rome, Spain, and other Catholic European cultures not with refinement and success, but rather with dissembling and dishonour. Roman ideas are no longer acceptable in political circles. Moreover, the bloody and violent tragedies, such as Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus and Coriolanus, as well as Jonson's Sejanus, would have demonstrated to seventeenth-century Englishmen the dangers inherent in an ancient Roman model of honour.
Despite Scott's criticism of the Spanish concepts of masculine honour, English
honour itself is neither what it should be nor immune to misguided ideas. The crucial
difference, however, lies in Scott's depiction of Englishmen's quest for glory as
dishonour rather than the acceptable (as it is in Spain) paradigm of honourable
behaviour. Scott, like Tell-Troath before him and Middleton after him, represents the
English as unable to obey the dictates of an honour code that demands unconditional
allegiance to the state:

by a key of gold by intelligence, or by way of confession my master [the
Pope] is able to unlock the secrets of euery Prince, and to withdraw their
subjects allegiance, as if they knewe themselves rather my master his
subjects indeed, then theirs whome their birthes have taught to miscall
Soveraignes. (sig. A4v)

Scott, via the Pope's Nuntio, goes on to say that "we see this in Fraunce and England
especially" (sig. A4v). Here, Scott plays on the idea of the self, the subjectivity, as well as
the subject, belonging not to him/herself but rather to the king and country.

Englishmen do not know themselves, and the result of this lack of subjectivity is a
misplaced sense of how to be a loyal English subject. In a well-wrought twist of irony
Scott depicts his contemporaries as confused about who they really are and
demonstrates that the Catholic sacrament of Confession, the epitome of revealing the
self, is nothing more than a Spanish and Popish tool to manipulate the subject in both
its senses.

Gondomar later assures the Spanish council that, in Spanish terms at least, the
English are certainly a less than honourable nation:
I haue certain knowledge that the commons generally are so effeminate and cowardly, as that they at their musters (which are seldom and slight, onely for the benefit of their muster-master) of a thousand soldiers, scarce one hundred dare discharge a musket, and of that hundred, scarce one can use it like a soldier. (sig. C1")

Gondomar goes on at length regarding the poorly equipped nature of the English forces and finally concludes that “thus stands the state of that poore miserable country, which had neuer more people and fewer men” (sig. C1”). In Spanish eyes, according to Scott, the English are unequipped, cowardly and effeminate.

It is important to note that this summons to unity was not issued by the educated to the elite, but rather it was an effort to build a sense of nationalism in all English people and at all social levels. Sermons were, of course, accessible to all social planes and, in fact, attendance at church was mandatory. Furthermore, Cogswell makes the point that all levels of people were well-informed and hungry for news:

- in taverns, cross-roads, markets, at dinner tables, and even in one Northamptonshire parish meetings of the church-wardens – the greeting, “What’s the news?” offered ample occasion for exchange and discussion of the latest information. (The Blessed 22)

Likewise, Jerzy Limon, in his book Dangerous Matter, asserts his belief that England experienced “a revolution in the dissemination of news,” especially after 1620 when newsletters, published in the Netherlands, appeared in England in the vernacular. Those who could read often read these newsletters, as well as political tracts, aloud to those who were illiterate. Consequently, any ideology was not as difficult to propagate
as one might assume, and the popularity of both the anti-papist ideology and the need for unity is evident in the demand for four separate editions of Scott’s *Vox Populi* in 1620. Nothing, however, was as popular as Middleton’s play, reaching a vast audience both through its nine-day run to packed houses and the extraordinary commentary that followed it.5

An intense fear, real or imagined, of Catholic influence, which in turn gave rise to a perceived need for national unity and an effort to achieve that unity through a sense of national honour, existed in the political tracts and sermons of the 1620s. And, even though a sermon’s ideology was often disguised in its choice of texts, and tracts were often published anonymously or under a pseudonym, there were yet more subtle indications of this ideology and need for unity being expounded by the writers of the 1620s. In fact, the effort to attain a sense of nationalism by defining a distinctly English sense of honour and by criticizing those Englishmen who are “but half black” (3.1.282) — presumably those who supported the Spanish alliance and thus were not totally loyal to the “white” house — is reflected in Thomas Middleton’s most popular play, *A Game At Chess*.

The sedan chair that was used as a stage prop in the performance of *A Game At Chess*, custom designed to accommodate Gondomar’s unfortunate fistula, effectively removes any doubt that Middleton’s play is an allegorical representation of the events of the Spanish Match and, more generally, James’s negotiations with Spain. But

5T.H. Howard-Hill points out that this play is unprecedented in that there exist “a long eye-witness account of a performance, fourteen other accounts of performances and the events surrounding them, and ten other documents that show official responses to the play’s performances” (“Political Interpretations” 274).
Middleton's allegory is much more complex than direct representation, for it is a multivalent form of rhetoric that allows its user to create not only layers of meaning, but also simultaneous meanings, regarding diverse and constantly changing topics and ideas. It is a shape-shifter, in some ways a trickster, and most important, a plurality. Moreover, if one accepts that this plurality is what allegory is, then one must also expand the definition of what allegory does. This expansion, in turn, refutes the notion that allegory, especially historical allegory, somehow restricts or confines the reader, imbuing the text with a topical significance that limits its ability to hold meaning over time.

Allegory is a rich and diverse rhetorical tool. It is a mental activity simultaneously synonymous with the subjective imagination and the objective perception.6 It appeals to the mind's eye; it invites the reader to "see" something that is not immediately visible and in so doing makes the invisible visible. But, the opposite is also true; allegory also makes the visible invisible. Allegory can make visible an intangible idea—temperance, for example—by embodying it in an allegorical figure such as Spenser's Sir Guyon, but it can also make the visible invisible by hiding, so to speak, real historical experience beneath a layer of fantasy. But, even this explanation breaks down when we consider that "hiding" something is often the best way to bring it into focus. One could say that allegory also makes the visible more visible; it brings what the audience already knows into sharp relief by directing attention to itself, as in the case of allegorizing Gondomar's chair. Finally, allegory also allows the invisible to

6For an excellent discussion of the subject/object dichotomy in allegory, see Isabel MacCaffrey's Spenser's Allegory.
remain invisible for, to borrow Angus Fletcher’s words, allegories are “monuments to our ideals” (360); an actual, historical figure can be allegorically represented, as the White Knight is in A Game, as the epitome of truth and honour to demonstrate not what Charles is, but rather what he should be. In this way the invisible traits of truth and honour remain invisible as they are embodied in a fictitious and allegorical representation of a chess piece created by Middleton himself.

Hence, in A Game at Chess, Middleton can protect himself against authority by hiding the history of the Spanish Match and its aftermath under the fantasy of “the noblest game of all, a game at chess” (Prologue 43) and can simultaneously instruct his contemporaries by making the intangible and invisible “honourable” qualities visible.7 Further, in creating this multivalent and complex allegory Middleton enters the seventeenth-century discourse of honour both by calling for national unity and by using the concepts of masculine honour as a strategy to facilitate that unity. Middleton skilfully combines these seemingly paradoxical functions of allegory to represent the ideal of a united England, to draw attention to the honour codes as a way to unite England, and to criticize the England in which he lives.

According to Margot Heinemann,

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7Much of the previous scholarship regarding A Game at Chess is taken up with attempting to identify a powerful protector and sponsor for the play. Louis B. Wright was among the first to argue that Middleton’s drama was commissioned by Buckingham and Charles themselves (“A Game At Chess”). Margot Heinemann refutes that claim and argues instead for William Herbert, Lord Chamberlain (Puritanism and Theatre). Thomas Cogswell (“Puritanism and the Court, 1624”) and Jerzy Limon (Dangerous Matter) both believe that the play was sponsored by a coalition of people with anti-Spanish attitudes in common, and Paul Yachnin, along with T.H. Howard-Hill (“Political Interpretations”), argues that the play is not an instrument of anyone and has little political power at all.
when _A Game At Chess_ was conceived and staged, it was not intended merely to cash in commercially on the euphoria that had followed the collapse of the Spanish negotiations. The main political and religious issues between Crown and Parliament were still undecided, the tension once again rising. ("Middleton's _A Game At Chess_" 235)

Heinemann wishes to establish, in this article and elsewhere, that drama plays a political role, mediating between the ideologies of a specific culture and time and its people and government.⁸ Paul Yachnin, on the other hand, argues for a politically ineffectual theatre, one that “seems to have been quite unable to influence public attitudes in any radical or decisive way” (112). According to Yachnin, “the theatre was not employed by the ruling class—or by any segment of the ruling class—to influence the attitudes of the public” (111). Howard-Hill, like Yachnin, concludes that “the play itself and the manner of its composition gives no support to those who would see in it an instrument of state policy” ("Political Interpretations" 285). Yachnin argues that Middleton needed no sponsor for his play—it was his own brilliant satire that saved him from the punishment of censorship—and in fact writes that Renaissance theatre was free to try to please its paying and varied audiences “just so long as it did not violate the complex and mostly unwritten laws of Jacobean censorship” (111). Yachnin, however, never really addresses why there existed a need for censorship against a

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⁸In her article, “Drama and Opinion in the 1620s: Middleton and Massinger,” Heinemann argues that “drama often articulated and reinforced these feelings [of opposition and discontent] making ideological conflicts over prerogative and property, local justice and foreign policy visible and understandable for those outside as well as within the ‘political nation’” (238-39). Her work, and particularly this article, argues for the rise of “something like an informed and articulate public opinion” in this period.
theatre that did not possess any political power. Moreover, Howard-Hill likewise concludes, within the same paragraph as his quotation above, that “A Game at Chess was allowed and performed because it suited the temper of the age in a brief halcyon period of national unity” (285), raising the questions: whose temper and whose notion of halcyon?

Middleton’s play, then, even in some ways to those who argue against its political and cultural power, seems to have participated in the discourse of national unity and the tensions in this decade that arose out of James’s foreign policy. These tensions further exacerbated the division already apparent in the 1620s, and Middleton’s chess pieces are, in part, designed to make visible the dangers of factionalism, for it is the Spanish who fight one against the other, beginning with Ignatius Loyola’s assertion that

Pawns argue but poor spirits, and slight preferments,

Not worthy of the name of my disciples.

If I had stood so nigh, I would have cut

That Bishop’s throat but I’d have had his place,

And told the Queen a love-tale in her ear

Would make her pulse dance. (Prologue 62-66)

The Jesuits’ founding father, like Scott’s Spanish characters, is concerned only with his own preferment and with slaking his lust, but this concern encourages factionalism, and Ignatius is, ironically, rebuked by Error: “Why, would you have ‘em play against themselves? / That’s quite against the rule of the game, Ignatius” (Prologue 69-70). When Ignatius continues in his ignorance, Error warns him that he would “play a game
all by [him]self” (Prologue 72) if he continued to fight against his own house. In this exchange Middleton subtly issues a warning to his fellow Englishmen and to his sovereign: those who create, or participate in, factions end up without friends, a warning that is particularly apt in a period where “friendship,” or patronage, is extremely important. Implicit in this warning is a call for national unity; factions are seen as defeating the purpose, leaving the participants without support and playing by themselves. Moreover, factions are seen as the province of the founding father of the Society of Jesus; according to Middleton, encouraging division could turn even an Englishman into the worst of all things—a Catholic and a Spaniard.

As if the threat of becoming like the Jesuits were not enough, Middleton works out his representation of the dangers of national disunity more fully in the text of the play: of the three black pieces to be taken before the final discovery, two fall as a direct result of machinations by one of their own house. The Fat Bishop, though he had spent some time with the White House, is clearly a black piece who mocks the White King’s Pawn for being only “but half black” (3.1.282) and describes himself as “One that’s all black where there’s no hope at all” (3.1.285). This extra black piece, who has no function in the game and whose moves contravene the rules of chess, is the object of the Black Knight’s wrath and revenge when the Black Knight resolves to win the Fat Bishop back to the Black side and then

...damn him

Into the bag for ever, or expose him

Against the adverse part which he now feeds upon,

And that would double damn him. (2.2.59-62).
The Black Knight makes it clear that the reason he wishes to cause the capture of one of his own pieces is that his “revenge has prompted [him] already” (2.2.62-63) to damn the Fat Bishop—revenge for a joke the Bishop had played earlier when he offered to cure the Black Knight’s fistula by having him hanged. Significantly, the Fat Bishop’s impetus for the joke was the discovery, by the Black Knight, that the Fat Bishop had been stealing from the White House, and hence the uneasy truce between the two black pieces is due to their complicity in each other’s dishonourable behaviour (2.2.50-51).

Likewise, the second piece into the bag is the Black Bishop’s Pawn, and his capture, too, was brought about by one of his own house. The Black Bishop’s Pawn spends most of the play attempting to rape the White Queen’s Pawn which, undoubtably, serves to underscore his dishonour in the play. Yet it is not his attempt to rape that brings about his capture, but rather, as in the case of the Fat Bishop, the revenge of another black player. From the onset the Black Queen’s Pawn admits that her actions are “For mine own turn, which end is all I work for” (2.1.156), but it is not until the Black Bishop’s Pawn is taken that readers understand it is his downfall that she is after, and that her motive, like the Black Knight’s, is revenge (5.3.90-95). The end result of this revenge is that the Black Bishop’s Pawn is “taken in [his] own toils” (5.3.107). The lament of the Black Bishop’s Pawn is ambiguous; his capture has happened in the middle of his attempt to rape the White Queen’s Pawn, but his “own toils” also refers to his efforts to not only become the lover, in times past, of the Black Queen’s Pawn but also to impregnate her niece and to rob the “ladies’ daughters” that he was transporting to nunneries of their “worldly cares” by embezzling their money (5.2.97-100).
Implicit in Middleton’s warning regarding the dangers of disunity, factionalism and working against one another, is the call for unity that was so prevalent in this period. Middleton, however, also provides a plan for bringing about unity; he constructs a dichotomy of Spanish and English honour that illustrates one of the ways in which Englishmen can carve out a unique sense of national identity and unity. According to Fletcher, there exists a "dualism of good and evil" that has been a "defining characteristic" of the allegorical mode from "the earliest period of Occidental literature" (7). But Middleton’s exposition of masculine honour is not simple; the playwright breaks down his dichotomy of good versus bad, black versus white, in order to admonish Englishmen and to promulgate a more modern sense of honour. Although each of the characters of the White House seemingly displays desirable aspects of masculine honour, and each of the black pieces illustrates an equal and opposite dishonour, the discussion of what constitutes an honourable man centres mainly on the allegorical representation of Gondomar and Prince Charles, or the Black Knight and the White Knight respectively.

The Black Knight, from his very entrance into the game, displays his position as the epitome of dishonour. He is filled with the worst of the seven deadly sins, and his pride is in his dishonourable doings and treachery. The Black Knight brags, though he has “bragged less,” but his notion of what he has to brag about resides in his ability to “cozen” and to “abuse.” He is proud of his “mischiefs,” and in exhibiting this pride he demonstrates that he is not simply led astray (1.1.253-267); the Black Knight’s language identifies him as one who knows what he is doing is wrong and takes pride in it anyway. He is one in whom it is “a victory / To make him understand he does amiss /
When he knows in his own clear understanding / That he does nothing else” (3.1.193-96). The Black Knight’s dishonour is made clear when he greets the Black Bishop’s Pawn with the strange blessing, “Honour’s dissimulation be your due, sir” (1.1.272). The Black Knight, though proud, believes that honour is simply a façade, a “dissimulation” used to abuse his victims.

The Black Knight has evidently used this “honour’s dissimulation” to convert the White King’s Pawn, and Middleton makes it apparent that the Black Knight has no true belief in Catholicism or in honour, for the Black Knight has “fooled” the White King’s Pawn “out of [his] faith” and “drawn” him “from [his] allegiance,” leaving the White King’s Pawn a mere “Jesuit-ridden soul” (1.1.326-27). Here, too, the Black Knight mocks his own religion, referring to recent converts as “Jesuit-ridden.” More significantly, in terms of the honour codes, he has used his talents at deception to draw the White King’s Pawn from his allegiance. In having that particular pawn “cozened” by the Black Knight, Middleton shows the Black Knight breaking the most important rule of honour, teaching the English to be disloyal to their country and to the king they have vowed to protect. Moreover, Middleton uses the half-black pawn to throw a carefully aimed jibe at those in the King’s court who would support a Spanish alliance; Middleton reminds his audience that there are men who, to return to Scott’s words, are “as if they knewe themselves” to be the Pope’s subjects rather than James’s “whome their birthes have taught to miscall sovereign” (1 Vox Populi sig. A4*).

The Black Knight, as we have seen, subscribes to what was becoming, by the seventeenth-century, outmoded notions of revenge as a way to recover lost honour. In so doing, he participates in an older, chivalric concept of honour that was being written
against in this period; he uses his power to wreak revenge against one of his own
house. This lack of loyalty is underscored by the Black Knight’s reaction to the
accusations of the White Queen’s Pawn against the Black Bishop’s Pawn, for when the
White King questions the Black Bishop, the Black Knight wishes that he “stood farther
off” from the Black Bishop, arguing that it would be “no impeachment / To my honour
or the game” (2.2.160-61) if he were to move away. But the Black Knight is confined by
the rules of chess; his support of the Black Bishop, in this scene, is not given freely, and
his only desire is to distance himself from one of his own players. Moreover, the Black
Knight’s dishonourable methods are revealed in this scene when he demonstrates his
familiarity with deception as he encourages the White Queen’s Pawn to plead insanity
(2.2.167-74). The Black Knight seems, on the surface, to be simply uttering “all loud
threats” (2.2.180), as the White Queen’s Pawn points out, but beneath the bluster is the
Black Knight’s skill at deception; he tries to teach her how to get herself out of the
situation by faking and lying. The White Queen’s Pawn recognizes and rejects his
lesson when she responds that

Spite of sin’s glorious ostentation
And all loud threats, those thunder-cracks of pride
Ush’ring a storm of malice, House of impudence
Craft and equivocation. (2.2.179-82)

The White Queen’s Pawn upbraids the Black Knight for his “threats,” his “pride,” his
“malice” and his “impudence,” an appropriate reaction to his threat to “take thee in the
end” (2.2.178), but she goes on to rebuke him for “Craft and equivocation”; she
recognizes the deviousness in his advice.
The Black Knight's dishonour, however, can be best seen in his notion of what it means to be a master, and the language Middleton assigns to the Black Knight is filled with misguided ideas of masculine honour. The Knight is certainly not without a sense of honour. He clearly wants to be the best, but he erroneously believes that his excellence in deception and craftiness will win honour for him. As the Black Knight begins to enact his vengeance upon the Fat Bishop, he prepares to practice the "master-trick" that will get the Fat Bishop taken (3.1.19). In the highly comic exchange between the Black Knight and his pawn, who comes to tell him that the plot to antedate the Black Bishop's Pawn's letter has been discovered, the Black Knight brags that even a "master-politician" will be unable to decipher the maze of plots in his brain (3.1.137). As we have seen, the Black Knight applauds the Black Queen's Pawn's "masterprize of roguery" when she flatters the White Queen's Pawn (1.3.213), and he brags that he has created "a masterpiece of play" that will entrap and capture both the White Knight and the White Duke (4.2.77). In fact, the Black Knight even promises the White Knight that they have, in Spain, a "master-cook" who will prepare any dish to satisfy the White Knight's feigned gluttony. The Black Knight then, like Shakespeare's Iago, seeks mastery through treachery; he identifies himself in his conversation with others in the play as a master. What he is master of, however, is dishonesty, and while it is true that this wins him honour within the Black House, his pride in this mastery demonstrates, for Middleton's English audience, his misguided sense of honour. In fact, the Black Knight makes the point clear when, after he and the Black Bishop have fooled the White House into believing the White Queen's Pawn has made a false accusation of rape, he happily asks the Black Bishop, "Was not this brought about well for our
honours?" (2.2.242). Middleton underscores this point in the final scene, after the White Knight has achieved checkmate by discovery: the White King unites the concepts of mastery and honour when he describes the White Knight as "Truth's glorious masterpiece," and his "assistant" in delivering the checkmate, the White Duke, as "this fair structure / Of comely honour" (5.3.168-70). The White House players are the true masters in this game, and their mastery is not of deceit, but rather of truth and honour.

The White Knight, and more generally the White House, is on the surface the epitome of honourable behaviour. The white pieces do not subscribe to a medieval, chivalric concept of honour that includes revenge, violence or even allegiance to the person of the king. Rather, members of the White House depend, for their honour, on adherence to their individual consciences and on the performance of their duty to save the state. Scott's next "Voice" pamphlet, The Second Part of Vox Populi (1624), however, demonstrates that the Spanish had seriously underestimated the English sense of honour. The "effeminate" and "cowardly" Englishmen of The First Part of Vox Populi had somehow caused the Duke of Braganza to complain,

I am sorry that I liue to see the day, that the Honor of Spaine which was wont to daze the eye of Europe with the unsufferable splendor of its brightnesse, should now be ouer cast with the blacke cloud of disgrace, and the name of Spaniarde so redoubted ouer the world, become branded with the infamous attributes and epithets of false, ambitious, proud, and cruell, and those Nations who were wont to adore vs for our faith, contemne, and scorne vs now for treachery and falsehood. (4)
The cause of this "blacke cloud of disgrace," according to Braganza, is that
private men at home (perhaps our Ambassadors in Forraine parts) haue throwne this aspersion vpon us, hauing either giuen abroad to many ouerties of our designs, or attempted their ends with ouermuch hast and violence, which in time and by gentle hand might haue been easier won. (5)

The Spanish, it seems, have been hoist with their own petards as they, like the English of 1620, were subject to dishonour when their secrets became known abroad. The discussion, perhaps unwittingly, turns to an exploration of alternative concepts of honour, and in so doing it mirrors the discourse of honour in seventeenth-century England. Gondomar, the once ambitiously over-active Ambassador, had engineered the Spanish Match and had worked “a dislike betwixt the King and the lower house” (1 Vox Populi, sig. B3'). Gondomar had further, along with English greed, “kept [the

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Figure 7: Title page of the second Part of Vox Populi.
English] from furnishing their Navy” (1 Vox Populi, sig. B4'), and had “underwrought that admirable Engine Raleigh” (1 Vox Populi, sig. C1'). But, the Spanish ambassador was now content to view the English rejection of the Spanish quietly as “suffering for our Catholique King, and in the Catholique cause wee ought to take such approby rather as an Honor vnro vs then otherwise” (2 Vox Populi, 7). Gondomar’s neo-Stoicism echoes the seventeenth-century English discourse of honour that advocated Christian long-suffering and patience, and Scott’s appropriation of Gondomar’s voice demonstrates that it was, in part, Spain’s ideals of honour grounded in ambition that caused their downfall.

Significantly, the real cause of the Spanish failure to set up its universal monarchy was neither a lack of trying on Gondomar’s part nor a defeat at the hands of the British army. Rather, it was a political, and non-violent, move by the Duke of Buckingham and Prince Charles that saved England. Gondomar explains that though he had been busy sowing sedition and dissent in England the Spanish Match was his “maine plot,” but it did not succeed because the “comming ouer of Prince Charles in Person into Spaine, with the Duke of Buckingham spoyled all” (2 Vox Populi, 20). The Spanish Duke of Escalona confirms that

The Prince of Wales by comming in Person discovered our plot, and how faire so euer wee pretended, wee meant nothing lesse, when he thinking (as also did the King of Great Brittaine his father) nothing had beene wanting to the absolute consumation of the marriage, but the Rites of Church, he found all as Raw and as backward, as hee had beene all this while in a Dreame, and no such matter euer thought of: So that hee
found the Honor of our glorious entertainment to be but as a delicate
sawce to helpe digestion.” (2 Vox Populi, 22-23)

Charles’s diplomatic trip to Spain, then, is the cause of both Spain’s shame and
England’s honour, and James, significantly referred to as the “King of Great Brittaine”
in Scott’s second pamphlet, has had his honour restored by the loyalty and “kinship”
or allegiance advocated by Donne and without the violent battle advocated by Tom
Tell-Troath. And, although pamphleteers like Scott and Tell-Troath oppose the king’s
policies, while Donne, officially at least, upholds them, the call of these men is one and
the same; each in his own way calls for a united England, and each writer uses the
(admittedly unstable) masculine honour codes to support that call. Middleton, too, will
enter the discourse of seventeenth-century honour when he emulates (quite
consciously in the case of Thomas Scott) the call for national unity and when he adopts
the complicated concepts of masculine honour as his strategy.

The White King is, at first glance, the quintessence of integrity. When readers
first meet the White King, the White Queen’s Pawn refers to him simply as “King of
integrity” (2.2.104), and the White Duke echoes her sentiment when he lauds the White
King as one who has expressed himself “as well to be / King of munificence as
integrity” (3.1.172). The king himself claims, when he discovers his pawn’s treachery,
that

Integrity of life is so dear to me
Where I find falsehood or a crying trespass,
Be it in any whom our grace shines most on,
I’d tear ’em from my heart. (3.1.272-75)
Moreover, the White King makes perfectly clear his version of honour when he asserts that even when “we find desperate sins in ill men’s companies” he finds it in his Christian heart to “place a charitable sorrow there” (2.2.127-28), and only when faced with hypocrisy is he grieved that “my knowledge must be tainted / With his infested name” (2.2.142-43). The king, though he discovers that he was wrong in disbelieving the White Queen’s Pawn, attempts to make things right when he demands that the Black House “Set free that virtuous pawn from all her wrongs: / Let her be brought with honour to the face / Of her malicious adversary” (3.1.155-57). The king redeems himself by restoring the White Queen’s Pawn to her honour and by recognizing that honour is, in fact, her due. Finally, the White King himself defines honour as Christian patience and loyalty when he first praises the White Knight and the White Duke for bringing the truth of the matter to light, even stating that “we embrace as partner of that honour / This worthy Duke” (3.1.165-66).

The White Knight, more than any other character, seems to understand true honour, and he makes Middleton’s audience understand it as well. According to Edwin Honig, “in addition to serving the expression of ideological aims, allegory is a fundamental device of hypothetical construction” (179). In creating the character of the White Knight Middleton not only allegorizes Prince Charles, but represents an idealized version of a prince which, as we have seen, is one of the functions of allegory. Middleton, I think, both draws attention to the play as an allegory and underscores this very function of the mode when he has the White King address his son as “Zeal and fidelity” (3.1.174); the naming of abstracts is, of course, one of the primary indicators of allegory itself. The White Knight is the knight rescuing the damsel in distress when he
assures the White Queen's Pawn, "No, thou art not lost; / Let 'em put on their 
bloodyest resolutions / If the fair policy I aim at prospers" (2.2.236-39). This knight 
plans to search out the truth with "fair policy," and his choice of the word "policy" sets 
his non-violent and political actions against the "bloodyest resolutions" of the Black 
House. In revealing his plan to deliver checkmate to the Black House, he states his 
concept of honour succinctly:

    True noble Duke, fair virtue's most endeared one,
    Let us prevent their rank insinuation
    With truth of cause and courage, meet their plots
    With confident goodness that shall strike 'em grovelling. (4.4.1-4)

For the White Knight, true nobility, the underlying concern with the discourse of 
honour, lies in virtue, truth, courage and goodness. It is important to note, however, 
that the confidence and courage the White Knight speaks of, as evidenced by the plan 
he unveils, is not military courage, nor is it violent revenge. Rather, he unfolds a 
political manoeuvre that will, in effect, beat the Black House at its own game. Likewise, 
the White Knight, along with the White Duke, defines dishonour after he has attained 
checkmate by discovery: "Ambitious, covetous, luxurious falsehood" he exclaims, to 
which the White Duke adds "Dissembler includes all" (5.3.163-64).

    The differences in the black/white conceptions of honour are best revealed in 
the exchange that takes place between the black pieces and the White Knight and Duke 
in the Black House. The Black King, who believes that leading the white pieces to 
become traitors to their king is "noble work" (3.1.291), begins with what he thinks will 
be effective in bringing the White Knight over to the black side; he promises "What
honours, pleasures, rarities, delights / Your noble thought can think” (5.1.22-23). As
the scene plays out both the Black Queen and the Black Knight add their voices to the
promises of honour to be heaped upon the white pieces, and the Black Knight begins,
again mistakenly, to flatter:

Hark, to enlarge your welcome, from all parts
Is heard sweet sounding airs, abstruse things open
Of voluntary freeness, and yond altar,
The seat of adoration, seems to adore
The virtues you bring with you. (5.1.30-34).

The wrong-headedness of the Black House’s concept of honour is summed up in the
White Knight’s aside to the White Duke; the promise of Black honour, of Spanish
honour, is simply “erroneous relish” (5.1.35).

The White House, then, demonstrates an idealized honour grounded on truth
(the White Knight), Christian patience (the White Queen’s Pawn), and loyalty (the
White Duke). Even the emasculated White Bishop’s Pawn can be honourable in an
honour code that does not depend on “masculine” feats of arms when he asks the
White Knight to “Let it be my honour, sir; / Make me that flight that owes her my life’s
service” (2.2.240-41). The White Bishop’s Pawn wants to be the one to find the evidence
that will unveil the Black Bishop’s Pawn’s treachery. And, although the White Knight
and Duke, like Shakespeare’s Malcolm who must tell a few “white” lies in order to
wipe the “black scruples” from his soul (4.3.115-16), must dissemble to win the victory,
they are doing only what is necessary to save their country from the evil influence of
the Black House. Nevertheless, even with the stakes so high the White Knight laments,
"What a pain it is for truth to feign a little" (4.4.17).

The White House's honour is not, however, perfect. The White King's naivety makes him blind to the truth of the White Queen's Pawn and to the treachery of his own pawn. The White Queen's Pawn, in turn, is fooled by the Black Queen's Pawn, despite the overwhelming confession of the Black Queen's Pawn that the Jesuits and their disciples are maintained in many courts and places,
And are induced by noble personages
Into great princes' services, and prove
Some councillors of state, some secretaries,
All serving in notes of intelligence,
As parish clerks their mortuary bills,
To the Father General; so are designs
Oft times prevented, and important secrets
Of states discovered, yet no author found
But those suspected oft that are most sound.

(1.1.53-62)

All the members of the White House fail to recognize the knowledge of, and skill at, deception that the Black Knight exhibits in his advice to the White Queen's Pawn (2.2.167-174). Moreover, the White Queen's Pawn tells us herself that "Good men may err sometimes" (2.1.72), and the White Pawn, about to take the Black Jesting Pawn, ruminates that "white quickly soils" (3.2.12). Similarly, the White Bishop's Pawn warns that "No truth, or peace of that Black House protested / Is to be trusted" (1.1.237-38),
and concludes that forewarned is forearmed where the Black House is concerned.

Middleton injects an implicit warning, and an allegorical criticism, in each of these scenes, and his criticism becomes more explicit when he has the White Duke express nearly the same idea in describing both the Black and White Kings. The White Duke, responding to the White King’s praise, replies, “Most blessed of kings, throned in all royal graces! / Every good deed sends back its own reward / Into the bosom of the enterpriser” (3.1.168-70). The Duke will later respond to the Black King’s offer of honours and delights: “They are favours / That equally enrich the royal giver / As the receiver in free donation” (5.1.27-30). Middleton creates a parallel between the White and Black Kings, and in so doing he criticizes the English king’s conception of honour that is grounded in bestowing honours, and in James’s case knighthoods specifically, on all his favourites.

Middleton, then, creates an allegory which is capable of both subtly criticizing his government by concealing the events of the Spanish Match behind a layer of fiction and of entering the seventeenth-century discourse of honour that explored political solutions as opposed to violent ones, Christian conscience as opposed to Machiavellian politics. While this interpretation is made problematical by the prologue, which depicts the entire play as Errors’ dream, it is important to note that Middleton takes great pains to demonstrate Ignatius Loyola’s confusion and inaccuracy. Ignatius begins with an erroneous notion of what constitutes honour when he complains that it has taken the Catholic Church too long to canonize him and is offended that his honour has “slept” so long (Prologue 16). For him honour is public display, and he has not received what he perceives is his “just reward” for what, in the view of English Protestants, amounts
to leading souls into Hell, or, as Ignatius himself puts it, deflowering “truth and
goodness” (Prologue 10-12). Ignatius’s confusion is illustrated by his jumbled senses;
like a latter-day Nick Bottom, he cannot “taste” the footsteps of his disciples with his
“refined nostrils” (Prologue 3). The founding father of the Society of Jesus is also just
plain wrong in terms of both the rules of chess and political strategy promulgated by
seventeenth-century authors; he believes that the game pieces should attack one
another (Prologue 65) and that dukes should be called rooks (Prologue 54). Loyola is
corrected by Error, and in this correction the tone is set for the play—Spanish Catholics
are even more erroneous than Error itself. Ignatius’s desire to let power “show a
mastery” in Error (Prologue 48) is fulfilled since Jesuits are a “masterpiece of darkness,
sheltered / Under a robe of sanctity” (2.2.132-33). The end result of this “darkness” is
“perdition” (5.3.176), and in the end the play’s didacticism comes down to the
dichotomy between honour (White/English/Protestant) and shame
(Black/Spanish/Catholic). The Black House pieces, vanquished by the “confident
goodness” of the White House, have “lost their fame” and must “put their heads into
the bag for shame” (5.3.176-77).

Middleton’s work explores the relationship between masculine honour codes
and a sense of English nationalism. The English Civil War, however, made
Middleton’s, and his contemporaries’, call for a united English honour unsustainable.
The writings of the Royalists during the Rebellion and Revolution are the direct
opposite of Middleton’s nationalism; these writers examine the ways in which
masculine honour codes are torn apart when a country is at war with itself.
CHAPTER FOUR

The English Civil Wars and the Honourable Self in Royalist Writing

Implicit in my research thus far has been the notion of a developing sense of political virtue in the early modern period. Othello's loss of identity, Hamlet's crisis of conscience, Macbeth's guilt, and Middleton's satiric examination of foreign policy have all underscored a developing political discourse that enters into, and circulates through, the unstable discourse of masculine honour; the honour code was becoming more focussed on the good of the collective state as well as on adherence to the individual conscience. The outbreak of rebellion and civil war in the middle of the seventeenth century considerably raised the level of tension in the honour code and in the political discourse, particularly the discourse of political obedience and allegiance; civil war, like any other war, calls upon men to prove their valour and honour through heroic deeds in battle. At the same time, civil war destroys the bonds of loyalty and kinship that both underpin the chivalric code of honour and help to determine individual integrity.

It is then, perhaps, not surprising that the writing of the men and women who were trying to cope with the horrors of civil war should depict complex conflicts and competing discourses, particularly in the concept of honour which is itself closely tied to civil and military actions. For Royalists the attempt to carve out a place of honour for themselves was particularly difficult; those who supported Charles I needed to find a way to maintain integrity—to create an honourable self—in the context of crushing defeat and, after the execution of the king, a context of collaboration with those who
had been his enemies. The English Civil Wars were, I believe, a defining moment in the evolution of the honour code, and Royalist literature—of men like Lovelace, Howell and Davenant and women such as the Countess of Denbigh and Queen Henrietta Maria herself—both helped to define that code and were defined by it. Royalist writing, manifested in letters, pamphlets, poems, plays and even a dream vision, entered the seventeenth-century discourse of honour as both an attempt to articulate (and perhaps reinvigorate) the legacy of medieval, chivalric honour and as an exploration of a newer, more modern political code of honour that had been evolving throughout the seventeenth century and that required obedience to the dictates of the individual conscience as well as allegiance to the collective State rather than to the person of the king. Although Royalist rhetoric was rife with the language of chivalry during the period from 1640-1649, after Charles’s trial and execution in 1649 Royalists were forced to turn from chivalry, and they turned to a notion of honour that was defined by a version of neo-Stoicism. And, like the notions of honour we have discussed in the literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, neo-Stoicism was a way for Royalists both to maintain integrity and to participate in the political discourses of their time.

According to Earl Miner, after the wars, retreat replaces fighting for the Cavaliers, and this retreat is made bearable by the belief that the good times will return, that this period of darkness is a winter which will surely be followed by spring (189). During this “winter” Cavaliers manifest a heightened interest in neo-Stoicism, by which they meant “a self-sufficiency involving self-knowledge and wisdom, living a life relying on oneself, and refusing to be distracted by the baubles of the world” (90).
Miner’s “retreat,” however, includes a refusal to be distracted by politics, yet neither
the ancient Roman ideals of neo-Stoicism nor the seventeenth-century version,
propagated primarily by Justus Lipsius, specifically denied neo-Stoics participation in
politics. Indeed, Lipsius’s (and his followers’ including Raleigh, Bacon and Jonson)
juxtaposition of the neo-Stoic writings of Seneca with the more political treatises of
Tacitus is underpinned by the question of how one combines neo-Stoicism with
appropriate political behaviours. Although Miner’s identification of the Cavalier retreat
following the dissolution of the monarchy is both astute and detailed, his study is not
concerned with the political aspects of the Royalist writings produced during this
“Cavalier winter.” In short, the literature of the defeated Royalists that longs for the
return of the monarchy, that stoically awaits the return of the “sun,” is in itself a
profound political statement, and it is this aspect of the work of Lovelace, Howell and
Davenant that I wish to examine.

The Great Rebellion and Civil War added a pragmatic and, to use the term
favoured by the neo-Stoics, prudent, element to a masculine honour code that was
already evolving to include aspects of allegiance to the state and adherence to the
individual conscience.¹ Civil war forces people to make difficult choices that they may
not otherwise have to make, for only in civil war are the bonds of family breached as

¹Barbara Donagan, in her study of the English Civil War, expands Mervyn
James’s concept of a civil and moral honour code to include pragmatism and utility
when she writes that “the attributes and practices of honour that the seventeenth
century shared with the middle ages had in nearly all cases a practical value” (4).
According to Donagan, by the mid-seventeenth century only the outward appearance
of chivalric honour remained, while the honour code had become, in practice, a matter
of the pragmatic concerns of warfare. Donagan writes of the utility of parole in an era
when trust between individuals was necessary; the lack of banks, bail bondsmen, and
other institutions forced seventeenth-century men to rely on one another’s word.
brothers take arms against one another and a country risks being destroyed by its own citizens. It was indeed "a world turned upside down" to borrow the title of Christopher Hill's study, and this *topos* is reflected in much of the literature of the time. John Taylor, the Royalist "water-poet," provides an excellent example of this *topos* in his poem "Mad Fashions, Od Fashions, All out of Fashions." The poem goes on at length about the many ways in which the proper order of things has been reversed in the mid-seventeenth century, and for Taylor, it is the lack of honour in some men that has caused all the trouble:

> When execrations pierce the firmament,
> And oaths doe batter 'gainst Heavens Battlement:
> When Imprecations, and damn'd Blasphemies,
> In sundry cursed volleys scale the Skies,
> When men more Brutish than the Horse or Mule,
> Who know not to obey, presume to Rule,
> Thus Church and Common-Wealth, and men all are,
> (Much like the picture) out of frame or square. (A3')

For Taylor, it is the "Brutish" men who do not know how to "obey" that cause civil strife. The chivalric code of honour that demands obedience to a lord and honesty has been contravened for men who "know not to obey" presume to rule in the monarch's stead, surely a reference to parliament. These men are dishonourable; they utter many untrue oaths and blasphemies that batter Heaven, putting "all out of fashions." Taylor includes a detailed woodcut to visually demonstrate this madness (Figure 8). In it fish fly, candles burn upside down, men walk on their hands and horses drive carriages
rather than pull them. The woodcut is meant to represent the effects of the
dishonourable behaviour outlined in the poem; these effects depict the topsy-turvy
world of the illustration and are, in Taylor's subtitle, "the Emblems of these Distracted
times."

For many, the Civil War was indeed a madness turned inwards. An anonymous
tract, A True Copy of A Petition Promoted in the Army (1648), consistently refers to the
civil fighting as “these intestinal wars” (4), underscoring the interiority of the strife in
England and equating it with disease that is causing internal illness. In David
Underdown’s words,

the Civil War had released forces destructive of the very foundations of
order: destructive of paternal authority in the family, of neighbourly co-
operation in the community, of hierarchical authority in the state. Sons
had fought against fathers, tenants against landlords, the people against their king. There were, many feared, renewed signs of female resistance to male dominance. (211)

Daniel Woolfe also sees the Civil War in England as a crisis that breaks the bonds of kinship. Woolfe enlarges upon Underdown’s argument by including the idea of the individual self in the terrible divisiveness caused by internal civil strife:

the English Civil War divided far more than the three kingdoms through which it raged. It also divided men and women, brothers and sisters, fathers and sons, from each other and, in some cases from themselves.

(243)

These difficult choices were integrally tied to the individual’s conception of honour, itself a product of the private and individual conscience. John Mowdy of Upton, Wiltshire sent his son to fight for Charles I when war broke out. But when the “Parliament began to prevail” the son switched sides and Mowdy threatened to disinherit, and thereby “dishonour” him (BL. Add. ms. 22084 fo. 140). The link that the Civil War forged between honour and the difficult choices that seventeenth-century men and women had to make is perhaps most poignantly stated in a letter written by the Royalist Countess of Denbigh to her Parliamentarian son. The Countess, anxious that her son has made the wrong choice of allegiance, uses the concept of an honourable self to try to persuade him to change sides:

I can not refrone frome righting to you and with all to beg of you to have a care of your selfe and of your honner...as you have ever professed to me and all your friends that you would not be against the person of the
king...go to the King to gane the reputation you have loust.

(Historical Manuscripts Commission, 4th report, p. 259)

For the Countess, her son's self is inextricably tied to his "honner" and to his reputation. He has, like Othello, lost himself when he lost his honourable reputation (cf. Chapter One, above). The Countess, like many Royalists, calls upon a more chivalric notion of honour that includes kinship ties and, significantly, a former oath of allegiance to the person of the king. In order for her son to maintain his honour and his self, he must keep his word, given to his mother and his friends, and in so doing can win back the reputation (an important aspect of the masculine honour codes) he has lost by taking arms against his monarch.

The connection between the Cavaliers and chivalry is well documented. Earl Miner points out that cavalier poets "inherit the social mode from the Elizabethans" and that this social mode is essentially the chivalric cult of Elizabeth (14). Similarly, Barbara Donagan notes that during the English Civil War it was "chiefly royalists" who proposed that battles could be decided by single combat between commanders in the older, chivalric method (4). Ann Hughes, too, links the Royalist forces with a chivalric code of honour when she argues that "individual loyalty to a personal monarchy" was "an important element in royalist allegiance" (265). P.R. Newman takes these arguments to the level of the individual when he writes that

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Miner, among others, describes the "cult of Elizabeth" as a social form in which Elizabeth's courtiers, mostly due to the reality of being faced with a female monarch, use the language and ideas of chivalric romance to communicate with their queen. Elizabeth's beauty is often praised, and her courtiers represent themselves as lovers or as knights whose job it is to protect her honour. Literary examples of this "cult" are many, particularly Spenser's *Fairie Queene* and Sidney's *Arcadia*.
Principle, wherever we find evidence of the attitudes of individual
Royalists, did dominate conscience if it was not in itself an expression of
conscience. Sacrifice, personal and material, was for many a logical
consequence of adhesion to principle, something towards which many
royalists were inexorably moving; something, even, which some of them
embraced as their cause suffered eclipse. (226)

For Newman, the "principle" that Royalists find when they examine their consciences
is the "principle of honourable obligation" (230), and Newman argues that "those
Royalists who left behind them any record of their thinking clearly demonstrated that
they regarded themselves as servants of their royal master" (227).

Moreover, stories of chivalric heroism often centred on the men close to the
king. An anonymous tract entitled *Sir Kenelme Digbies Honour maintained*, published in
1641, recounts the story of the French Lord Mount Le Ros who had twice called the
King of England a coward in the presence of Sir Kenelme. Digby is reported to have
responded by challenging the Frenchman to combat and to have said that
twice he had reviled the best king in the world in the hearing of mee
which am his faithfull subject, wherefore for satisfaction, I require single
combat of you, where either you shall pay your life for your sawcinesse,
or I will sacrifice mine in the behalfe of my King. (A3')

The anonymous writer uses the story of Digby's challenge to demonstrate the "morall
vertue" of "Fortitude" which can be found, not in "rashnesse," but in "temperate
Valour" evident in those men who "will neither give occasion to make abuse, neither
will they take abuse, but are ready at all points to defend their king, Countrey, and
their owne persons, which is only true Valour” (A2'). Digby's challenge to the French lord was not rash, but "true Valour," and the tract concludes with the verse:

    Now I conclude, commanding fame to show
    Brave Digbi's worthy deed, that all may know
    He lov'd his king, may all so loyal prove,
    And like this Digby to their king shew love. (A4')

Chivalric single combat, then, was a "worthy deed" that should be emulated by all men in order to prove their "loyalty" and "love" to Charles.

This chivalry was also a part of the personal relationships among Royalist nobles, and between those nobles and Charles himself. On 25 February, 1642, Lord Antrim, stationed in Ireland, writes to the Earl of Rutland that "It is a great sorrow to me, my name and honour should be so much defamed and scandalized by false and slanderous reports, nay permitted to be published in print, that I have revolt'd from my king and turned Rebell" (1). Antrim protests that he is "so farre from such imaginations that I will rather perish at his Majesties feet, and suffer any punishment what ever shall be thought requisite to bring a period to my life and fortunes, then live stained with such a horrid denomination as Traytor" (2). Antrim, it seems, is concerned for his honour, not the life he is willing to sacrifice so long as he is not labelled a "Traytor" or "Rebell." His vows of fidelity come only after his complaint that his honour has been publicly "stained" by these false rumours, and his willingness to die in the King’s service or at the King’s pleasure is a common part of the chivalric rhetoric practised even by the Newark Commissioners of the North who write, on 24 April, 1644, that "Diligence and faithfullness shall not be wanting in his Majesties
service, and if wee had more to offer then lives and fortunes, wee would be to the
death constant in our allegiance to his Majesty” (BL. Add. ms. 18981 fo. 161-62).

Protestations of loyalty and affection to the person of the monarch were
common in the correspondence between Royalists, even when they were not defending
their reputations, and those closest to the king were the greatest practitioners of
chivalric rhetoric. Another of the Digby family, George Digby, writes to the Queen on
21 January, 1641 that

if I cannot serve you by my actions, that I may doe it in some kinde by
my sufferings for your sake, having (I protest to God) no measure of
happinesse or misfortune in this world, but what I derive from your
Majesties value of my affection and fidelity. (4)

Digby later writes to Charles himself, on 12 February, 1643, that he wishes to “assure
your Highnesse of that faithfullnesse which I have professed to your service,” and that
“noe man living shall bring more industry or more affection to the execution of all your
commaunds, then I shal doe, when ever you shall honour [me] with them” (BL. Add.
ms. 18981 fo. 32). Digby’s correspondence is rife with the language of chivalry. He
professes to be concerned only with his service to the King, not his own happiness or
fortune, and he repeatedly pledges his fidelity, considering it an honour to do Charles’s
bidding.

Charles, too, envisioned his cause as one of honour, and his own language
contained many images of the chivalric honour code. In 1642, while at York, Charles
issued a Proclamation that begins with the complaint that “we being very sensible of
this extream dishonour to us” must punish anyone who aids the rebels. On 22 March,
1643, Charles issues another Proclamation from his stronghold in Oxford commanding all his subjects and servants who have "office, Place, or Fee, of his Gift or Graunt" to attend upon his person at Oxford. Charles complains that these subjects have neglected their attendance in the time of this Rebellion, when We have been engaged in the Warre in Our owne Person; some upon pretence of leave, or dispensation from Us, and some upon other pretences, which We shall no longer permit, as well in regard of our Honour, as Our safety, being resolved to goe in Person, for the subduing and repressing of the Rebells in Armes against us.

Charles, here, plays the honour card in order to spur his subjects to action. Although appeals to subjects' duty and to royal honour were common in the proclamations of this period, Charles significantly couches his Proclamation in the language of a chivalric or feudal conception of honour. He does not call upon his subjects to examine their consciences nor to defend the State. Rather, he reiterates and emphasizes the fact that he has chosen to go into battle in person and uses this as the main reason why he "shall no longer permit" his subjects' absence from Oxford. The King makes the point absolutely clear when he proclaims that he cannot allow his subjects to make excuses not to defend his person; their "pretences" are a slur against his honour, which is at least as important as his personal safety.

Royalist women, too, used the ideas of chivalric honour to advise men to take action, and female expectations of men helped to develop and define the chivalric masculine honour code favoured by Royalists (cf. Chapter Five, below). As we have seen, the Countess of Denbigh relies upon the ideas of chivalric honour, of oaths made
and allegiances given, in her attempt to persuade her son to be loyal to the King. The letters Henrietta Maria, not only a Royalist but royal herself and indeed the object of much Royalist chivalry, writes to her husband and King urging him to action by invoking chivalric notions of honour. In March, 1642, the Queen writes to Charles from the Hague, concerned that he is planning to go to London to parley with Parliament. Henrietta Maria believes she must pray to God, for assuredly you will never change my resolution to retire into a convent, for I can never trust myself to those persons who would be your directors, nor to you, since you would have broken your promise to me. (56)

For the Queen, Charles’s promise has been given and must be kept if he is to expect her trust. On 31 August of that same year Henrietta attacks Charles’s masculinity by subtly accusing him of cowardliness when she writes that I never in my life did anything from fear, and I hope I shall not begin by the loss of a crown; as to you, you know well that there have been persons who have said that you were of that temper [i.e. fearful]; if that be true, I have never recognised it in you, but I still hope, even if it has been true, that you will shew the contrary, and that no fear will make you submit to your own ruin and that of your own posterity. (108)

Henrietta calls upon Charles to demonstrate his fearlessness; she intimates that he has a reputation as a coward, and further questions his masculinity when she points out that she, a woman, is not afraid. Finally, the Queen reminds her husband that he has more than his own honour to worry about; he must not dishonour himself by treating with
Parliament not only for his own sake, but for his children's. On 11 October, 1642, Henrietta explains this resistance to a treaty with Parliament, and again she uses the notions of honour:

I am thought to be against accommodation. I confess that I am against a dishonourable one, such as they would wish to make you enter into; otherwise, you know that when I believed there could be one without dishonour, I have laboured [as much] as I could for it, as I do at this time, in conjuring you to continue in your constant resolution to die rather than submit basely. (128-29)

Charles's honour is more important than his life, and she makes that absolutely clear when she writes on 30 December, 1644, that Charles must "take care of your honour, which is to remain constant in the resolutions that you have taken, and in comparison of that, think of nobody" (277). Inconstancy it would seem, and the attendant loss of honour, is all that is important in Henrietta Maria's opinion, and in this she articulates an older, chivalric idea of honour that does not include doing what is best for the State nor obeying the dictates of conscience. Rather, she advises Charles to remain firm in his oath to not treat with Parliament, even if that means his death and the lives of many of those who follow him.

Despite the chivalric overtones of the Royalist cause, the seventeenth century was a period in which the male honour code was evolving and changing. The chivalric notions of honour promulgated by the Cavaliers entered a discourse of honour that was both unstable and complicated, and other notions of what constituted an honourable man conflicted and competed with the Royalist chivalric rhetoric, even
among Royalists themselves. Moreover, the chivalric code of honour itself was not
without its paradoxes and contradictions. This chivalric notion of honour was,
however, not only evolving into something more moral and civic, it was also, as we
shall see, impossible to maintain in the context of the civil wars and particularly in the
context of a Royalist defeat.

The inextricable link between the need to make choices in the context of civil
war and the honour those choices will win or lose for the maker is summed up in a
letter written to Ralph Hopton, Commander of the Royalist Western Army, from Sir
William Waller, the Parliamentary Major-General. Waller writes, from the Battle of
Roundway Down in 1643, that

My affections to you are so unchangeable that hostility itself cannot
violate my friendship to your person, but I must be true to the cause I
serve. The Great God, who is a searcher of my heart knows... with what
perfect hatred I look upon this war without an enemy. We are both upon
the stage and we must act the parts assigned to us in this tragedy. Let us
do it in a way of honour and without personal animosities. (qtd. in S. R.
Gardiner 1: 168)

For Waller, as for the other participants in this “war without an enemy,” men must be
to their consciences, for God will know if they are not, and the dishonour involved
in ignoring the dictates of one’s own conscience clashes with, and it seems is greater
than, the dishonour incurred by breaking bonds of friendship. Moreover, Waller’s
expression of friendship begins to demonstrate the conjunction of neo-Stoicism and
honour as early as 1643. Waller wants Hopton to understand that his adherence to the
Parliamentary cause is an act of constancy, probably the most important tenet described by classical writers as Stoical. The Major-General further relies upon the Stoical trope that one “must act the part” he or she is assigned. Finally, Waller overtly connects the idea of honour with the neo-Stoical discourse prevalent in the seventeenth century when he points out that these parts can be acted with honour if both he and Hopton participate without “personal animosities.” In other words, Waller wishes to preclude emotions from this exchange, and in doing so he articulates the neo-Stoic need for control over the passions.

The broad tenets of classical Stoicism had long been available to seventeenth-century men and women. J.H.M. Salmon points out that “Stoicism comes to England more through Seneca than its original third century founders” (169), and Seneca’s Epistles were, in fact, standard reading in most English grammar schools in our period. What is new in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, is the conflation of the Stoicism of Seneca with the politics of Tacitus; Tacitus confirms the politics that Seneca rejects and together they form a brand of neo-Stoicism that makes itself available to early modern men, predominantly through the writings of Justus Lipsius. Adriana McCrea’s 1997 study, Constant Minds, builds upon Salmon’s work for McCrea demonstrates, in stunning detail, the way in which the Lipsian paradigm of neo-Stoicism works as well as the way the ideals of neo-Stoicism are transmitted through the writings of several early seventeenth-century men. According to McCrea, Lipsius’s emphasis on action is used and propagated by men who wish to be active in politics—men such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon. McCrea concurs with Salmon that the “catastrophe of the Essex Rebellion” proved to be a turning point in
the development of the neo-Stoic movement in England (Salmon 173). According to McCrea, Essex’s circle, including Fulke Greville and both Bacon brothers, was instrumental in promoting Tacitus’s teaching in England (36) and the Tacitus they were promoting was available to them, in part, through Lipsius’s translations. McCrea postulates that the Lipsian paradigm—his amalgam of political participation and neo-Stoicism—“put constancy into action and recognized the need for political prudence”; Lipsius’s version of neo-Stoicism allowed seventeenth-century men who were ambitiously seeking court favour to manifest a kind of honourable constancy that did not require them to retreat from the political world of the court. For McCrea, one of Lipsius’s major contributions to neo-Stoic thought in the late sixteenth-century was to transform classical ideas of constancy—such as the one we see in the letters of Waller and Henrietta Maria—into a concept of constancy which is less rigorous and less permanent. In other words, classical Stoicism advocated consistency while seventeenth-century neo-Stoicism promulgated a slightly different idea of constancy. Thus, in Lipsius’s terms, and in his own life, constancy could be exhibited by a strict support of the reigning regime. To be constant did not, then, necessarily require allegiance to the person of the king or to a particular ruler. Rather, neo-Stoic constancy allowed early modern men to maintain integrity by claiming that they are constant in their support of the government without having to pledge personal allegiance to

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3Lipsius has often been criticized, by contemporaries and by twentieth-century scholars, for his inconstancy of religion. Throughout his life Lipsius was at various times Catholic, Protestant and Calvinist. This prompted contemporaries such as James I and VI to label Lipsius inconstant, and has further prompted modern scholars, such as Rudolph Kirk, to devote much of his Introduction to Lipsius’s *Two Books of Constancie* to justifying Lipsius’s apparent lack of consistency.
Charles or, for those who had, to maintain honour while collaborating with the current regime.

Both Salmon and McCrea, however, are interested primarily in the neo-Stoical discourse that surrounded the court in the early part of the seventeenth-century. Previous scholarship that examines the neo-Stoicism of the mid-seventeenth century concerns itself with either Cromwell’s desire for Republicanism or with the so-called Cavalier retreat from politics. Salmon acknowledges that Lipsius’s “ambiguity between private and public prudence” (171) allowed for a more malleable Stoicism than that which could be found in Seneca, and thus made neo-Stoicism appealing to both sides in the Civil War; McCrea points out that “Royalists, in defeat and despair, sought political oblivion and argued political retreat” (211). An examination of Royalist writings, particularly after 1649, however, demonstrates that Royalists were attracted to neo-Stoicism, and that their turn towards neo-Stoical concepts was not a retreat from politics but rather a way to participate in the political climate of this period of intense civil strife while maintaining both some measure of safety and a sense of integrity. Royalists, in effect, adopted the tenets of neo-Stoicism, available to them through the writings of Lipsius, Bacon, Raleigh, and Jonson among others, in order to carve out a place of honour for themselves and to allow them to continue to participate in what can best be described as passive opposition to the current regime.

For Lipsius, and, as we have seen, for many early seventeenth-century writers including Shakespeare, Henrietta Maria and Waller, constancy was one of the primary indicators of an honourable man. This idea of honour as the ability to remain constant is presented in the midst of the English Civil Wars by Lovelace, the Cavalier poet. In
his “To Lucasta, Going to the Warres” Lovelace represents going to battle, presumably on behalf of his King, as a difficult choice to be made between his love of honour and his love for Lucasta. Lovelace uses the idea of inconstancy, the epitome of dishonour in Henrietta Maria’s opinion, to describe his decision to leave his love:

Yet this Inconstancy is such,

As you too shall adore;

I could not love thee (Deare) so much,

Lov’d I not Honour more. (9-12)

Lovelace’s speaker has made the choice to pursue honour rather than Lucasta, and in doing so he has demonstrated his “Inconstancy.” But the idea of inconstancy as dishonour is not as simple as it may seem, for his inconstancy is not really inconstant, but rather inconsistent; he has chosen the king over his love, and Lucasta should “adore” this inconstancy because it is, like Waller’s decision to fight against his personal friend Hopton, a constant honourable action itself.

Constancy, according to Lipsius, is to be manifest in every action of the true neo-Stoic, and one of the most important ways that men can maintain constancy is by keeping their word. Lipsius underscores the importance of promise in his Two Bookes of Constancie since for Lipsius, “Regulus was unworthily put to death by torments; but his worthy example of keeping promise liueth yet” (150).4 Royalist writers took oaths

4Lipsius, in fact, includes a direct reference to the ancient story of Regulus, a Roman who had given his word to the Carthaginians that he would either persuade the Romans to exchange prisoners on terms unfavourable to the Romans or return to his captors to be tortured to death. Regulus was released, and instantly warned the Romans not to treat with the Carthaginians. When he had persuaded the Romans he returned to the Carthaginians to be tortured and executed. Probably the most famous re-telling of this story can be found in Horace’s Odes, 3.5.
seriously; they were a part of an honour code that required men to be absolutely
bound, like Hamlet to avenge his father, to keep their word. Roundheads, however,
were not so sure, and the Parliamentarian journal, *The Moderate Intelligencer*, reports on
6 February, 1653, that oaths given during times of crisis were simply not dependable:

At last there is an agreement made between this Crown [i.e., Cromwell's
Protectorate] and the *Tartars* and the *Cosacks*, the business is doubtfull,
in regard there is no security for the performance of the same, there
being no deeds passed between the two parties, onely verbal promises;
which doth make many fear this to be but a plain dissimulation. (3323)

Similarly, Sir Robert Cotton writes in his *A Treatise Against Recusants in defence of the
Oath of Allegiance* (1641) that stronger measures are required against recusancy since
forcing Recusants to take the Oath of Allegiance is meaningless: “An Oath is but a
weake bond to hold him, that will for pretended conscience sake, hold no faith with
Heretiques, or by absolution of a Priest, thinkes himself at liberty to flie from any
promise, or protestation whatsoever” (18-19). Cotton, it seems, recognized something
that the Royalists were unwilling to acknowledge: consciences, as part of the private,
interior self, could be faked. It was, however, a lesson they would learn as the Civil
War ran its course, and that lesson was brought home to them first by the infamous
“&c.” oath demanded by Laud’s Sixth Canon in 1640.

The Sixth Canon demanded an oath of all Englishmen of any status in 1640.
This oath included the notorious phrase “&c.” and gave rise to a proliferation of tracts,
ballads and satires that anticipated the differences in Civil War notions of honour. The
oath, most likely conceived by Laud himself, required each Englishman to swear that he "would not endeavour by myself or any other, either directly or indirectly, to bring in Popish doctrine contrary to that which is so established, nor will I ever give my consent to alter the government of this Church by archbishops, bishops, deans, and archdeacons, &c., as it stands now established..." (qtd. in S.R. Gardiner 9:146).

Swearers were also required to swear that they had taken the oath voluntarily. Popular reaction against the oath was swift and harsh. Almost immediately after the Canon was announced, an anonymous tract appeared entitled The Anatomy of Et Cetera. Or the unfolding of that dangerous Oath in the Close of the Sicte Canon. The author of this tract calls the et cetera "a vile misshapen monster" and "a Limbe of the Devill" (2) that is meant to trap men. The pamphleteer points out that "whosoever swears by Et cetera, swears more Oaths at once, than ever came barks from triple-headed Cerebus" (3).

Another anonymous tract, this one simply entitled A Satyre, creates a dialogue between "2 Zealots" named Sir Roger (a priest) and "a brother of the cloth." The two men "fall to cudgells over an oath" and eventually they settle on the oath "Et cetera" which the speaker calls "a liquid oath" (56). The men end by drinking to the oath, and the narrator tells us that,

His brother pledg'd him and the bloody wine

He sweares shall seal that Synod Catiline

Thus they drinke or not offering to part

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5For more information regarding this oath and Laud's part in creating it see S.R. Gardiner's History of England (9: 146). Gardiner argues that the oath is a result of Laud's astute observation of the Covenant in Scotland. The effectiveness of this Covenant, according to Gardiner, did "not escape Laud's eye" (9: 146), and Charles's archbishop was trying to recreate the unity that the Covenant had brought about among Scotsmen.
Till they had sworne out the eleventh quart

While all that saw or heard them jointly pray

They and their tribe were all Et cetera. (56)

For this author the Canon was a dishonour, and he equates the oath with the stereotype of Cavalier, drinking and swearing false and foolish oaths. ⁶

Not all opposition to the oath came in the form of ballads and satires. On 7 November, 1640, one Mr. Bagshaw gave a speech in Parliament that defined oaths as "rack and torture" and explains that "to make a People rich they must have Ease and Justice: ease in their consciences from the bane of superstition, from the intolerable burthen of Innovation in Religion, and from the racks and tortures of strange new-fangled Oathes" (1). Even Digby, on 9 November, 1640, spoke eloquently against the oath, and in his speech he lays out the problem inherent in enforced oaths:

What good Christian can think with patience on such an insnaring Oath,
as that which is by the new Canons enjoyned to be taken by all
Miristers, Lawyers, Physicians, and Graduates in the Universities?

where, besides the swearing such an impertinence, as that thing

⁶David Underdown, in Revel, Riot and Rebellion, provides a detailed analysis of the stereotypes that developed during the Civil War to denote the "Cavaliers" and the "Roundheads." According to Underdown, stereotypes are "the inevitable product of deep-seated political divisions" (142). Underdown argues further that the stereotype of the Cavalier was one based upon a chivalric notion of honour for the "swordsmen figure" attributed to Charles's supporters was one of "irresponsible, swaggering soldiers, intent on destroying English liberties and taking bloody aristocratic revenge for the plebeian slighte heaped upon the King, Queen, and Court" (142). Underdown points out that by at least 1642 "papist," "malignant" and "Cavalier" were interchangeable terms used by Parliament to describe Charles's followers. This, I think, helps to explain the backlash against the "&c." oath; as the brain-child of Laud it was too "cavalier" for the Parliament to accept.
necessary to salvation are contained in Discipline; besides the swearing
those to be of Divine Right, which amongst the learned, never pretended
to it, as the Arch things in our Hierarchy. Besides, the swearing not to
consent to the change of that, which the State may upon great reason
think fit to alter; besides the bottomlesse perjury of an &c. Besides, all
this Mr. Speaker, men must sweare that they sweare freely and
voluntarily what they are compelled unto; and lastly, that they sweare
that Oath in the literall sense, whereof no two of the makers themselves,
that I have heard of, could ever agree in the understanding. (5)

Digby's speech is worth quoting at length both because it demonstrates the importance
placed upon the taking of oaths in this period and because it articulates the political
theory and religious doctrine held by Royalists. As one who would become a staunch
Royalist, Digby is concerned both by the content of the oath that grants Divine Right to
anyone other than the King, and by the idea that "swearing...that thing[s] necessary to
salvation are contained in Discipline." Moreover, Digby points out that this oath will,
by its very nature, create perjurers. For those required to take the oath it is a no-win
situation, and Digby's strenuous objection to the Canon underscores the power that the
taking of oaths held for the Royalists, and that the resistance to swearing it is born of
the belief that they would be bound by it. This belief would be shown to be
unsustainable, particularly after the 13 December, 1648, Act of Parliament that declared
all previous oaths void. If the Bishops could demand a non-specific oath, if Parliament
could "void" oaths given in the past, then the chivalric honour code, as Shakespeare
had intimated forty years before in his exploration of honour and promise, had indeed
become impracticable.

Chivalric honour was by no means the only, or even the dominant, discourse of male honour in the seventeenth century. This instability of the chivalric honour system, a system already conflicting with more modern concepts of honour, was exacerbated by the very nature of Civil War itself since as Nathaniel Crouch points out in his 1740 biography of Cromwell, Civil War is a place "wherein fathers fought against sones, and brothers gave death to each other, all obligations of kindred and friendship being laid aside occasioned by that unnatural spirit of division, which Heaven for our crimes had sent amongst us" (17). Civil War is, by its very nature, the breaking down of kinship relations and, thus, of the feudal or chivalric honour codes. Moreover, as Joseph Summers argues, revolutionary periods are "likely to give rise to the most interesting poetry" since "such times prevent [the poet's] relapsing thoughtlessly into the formulae of conventional wisdom. He must re-examine his inheritance and the present and create an image of order which, however much it owes to the past, is something new" (177). Royalist writers, caught in a revolution where they became the vanquished, were forced to re-define the "social mode" they had inherited from their Elizabethan ancestors, and one of the social constructs that they had to "re-examine" was the chivalric code of honour and the ideas of what constituted an honourable self. Royalist writing, after the King's execution in January, 1649, takes on an introspective and neo-Stoic tone. While defeated Royalists do not withdraw from politics altogether, and their writings are themselves criticisms of the new regime, Cavalier writers do adopt Lipsius's neo-Stoic concern that the truly virtuous man have a "wholesome withdrawing place from the cares and troubles of the world" (135) where he can "bring
in subiection this broken and distressed mind...to RIGHT REASON and GOD, and subdue all humaine and earthly things to [his] MIND” (137).

For Royalists, the Civil War raged on long after the fighting had stopped. Placed in a context of crushing defeat, Charles’s supporters were forced to collaborate with, or at least obey, the dictates of the men who had murdered their king; many of them had already been imprisoned, sequestered or banished, and the result of open defiance after Charles’s execution would most assuredly have been death. No longer able to pledge personal allegiance to an absent king, indeed an absent monarchy, Royalists were forced to find ways to maintain integrity while simultaneously keeping themselves safe from the wrath of Cromwell and his followers. One Royalist writer, F.O. Huit, felt the need to publish a book of prayers entitled *Prayers of Intercession for those Use who Mourn in Secret, for the Publick Calamities of this Nation* (1659). Those who lamented the loss of the monarchy were forced to do so “in secret” for their own safety. The book is intended as both a guide to releasing that grief in private and as a warning against public expressions of mourning and against the behaviour that led to these “calamities” to begin with. Huit advises that Royalists use the prayers of King David to show their grief and their remorse, but points out that the “first lesson proper for this Occasion” is Samuel 15— the story of Absalom (31). The author includes a prayer that makes the situation of Royalists clear and underscores their need for secrecy:

Look down, O Lord, in the Bowels of thy Pity, and lend a tender Ear to the Voice of our Lamentation; Our Adversaries are the chief, our Enemies prosper, for thou hast afflicted us, for the Multitude of our Transgressions, the Crown is fallen from the head, woe unto us, we have
sinned! (24)

Royalists are suffering the effects of God's plan, and therefore must patiently and stoically appeal to God for mercy and pity. In the meantime, they are in a dangerous position where their "Adversaries are the chief" and their "Enemies prosper" and thus are forced to mourn "in secret" and to express their Royalism only in private prayer.

According to William Slights,

at the heart of the representation of self on the seventeenth-century English stage lies a secret, or rather, a series of secrets....The self is conceived of in plays such as Sejanus and The Changeling as an area of knowledge to be carefully guarded and to be shared only at enormous risk. (The Art of Secrecy 57)

Elizabeth Hanson agrees, and her work on torture in the early modern period underscores Slights's point that the self was indeed not only something to be "carefully guarded," but something that others believed could be forcibly exposed. This uncomfortable context created more tension in the masculine codes of honour; Royalists did not want to become dishonourable by abandoning the lord and prince to whom they had pledged allegiance, nor did they wish to expose themselves to unnecessary risk in a very risky time. Their answer, I would argue, is to affect a neo-Stoic withdrawal, to retire to a private space that allowed them to bring their minds to "RIGHT REASON" while at the same time recording their "patient" longing for the return of the "sun" as a passive protest against Cromwell's Protectorate.

Royalists who wrote during the Interregnum reconciled events by both creating a private space in their writings and by taking a neo-Stoic resolution to accept the
situation until God chose to relieve their punishment. According to Lois Potter, "the Royalist mode in the mid-century is increasingly characterized by [a] sense of darkness and confined spaces" (134). Royalist writers often use the trope of the womb to describe their writing process. Although this trope was common long before the Civil War, Cavalier writers represent the womb/self of the writer not as a place where life is begun and released into the world for the enjoyment of others, but rather a secret place in which things that must not be seen by the public take place. In this period men's genitals are "private" while women's reproductive organs are "secret." Or, as Katherine Eisaman Maus argues,

Perhaps...the womb is another of those small enclosures in which so many seventeenth-century poets discover their poetic identity and freedom; like Donne's little room, Carew's hidden garden, Lovelace's prison cell. (192)

For Royalists, the womb is not a space to bring forth new life but rather a secret place into which they may withdraw to understand their own lives. It is in this secret place that Royalist writers develop their ideas of honour that allow them to protect themselves against exposure to Roundhead justice.

Richard Lovelace's first volume of poetry, Lucasta (1649), develops this idea of

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Sir Philip Sidney, in his dedicatory letter to the Countess of Pembroke, describes his text as a child that he is "Loath to father" (738) and hopes that his sister's sponsorship of this "child" will allow it to be "perchance made much of" (738). Spenser, in turn, dedicates his Shepheardes Calendar to Sir Philip. Spenser addresses the book itself in his preamble, and explains that though it is a "child whose parent is unkent" it may fly to Sidney for "succoure" if it encounters the barks of "Envie" in the world (332). Examples of this trope in pre-Civil War writings are far too plentiful to list in detail.
the womb as an enclosed space from which to write with impunity. A dedicatory letter from Lovelace’s brother, Colonel Francis Lovelace, opens the volume. In it Francis uses the trope of writing as birth when he welcomes Richard’s “first borne flame” (2) into this world. Though Francis himself uses the poetry-as-child metaphor in much the same way as Sidney and Spenser, among many others, had used it before, his letter includes a defence against those who feel this child should have been kept secret; many had written dedicatory poems with their “season’d pens” and had “standing lifeguard to a booke” treated Lucasta “As if thy Child were illegitimate” (2). There were those, it seems, who believed that Lovelace’s volume should have remained hidden, like a bastard, and who, since it had been revealed, felt they had to stand guard over it to keep both it and its father from harm. Francis Lovelace’s letter claims legitimacy for his brother’s poems. James Howell, too, defends the legitimacy of his child/writings. Howell writes, in a letter addressed to “the Young Esquire” and dated 28 April, 1645, that although he has never been married he has had

divers children already, some French, some Latin, one Italian, and many English; and though they be but poor brats of the brain, yet are they legitimate, and Apollo himself vouchsafed to co-operate in their production. I have exposed them to the wide world to try their fortunes; and some out of compliment would make me believe they are long-lived. (Familiar Letters, 2:118)

Howell has procreated not with a woman, but rather with Apollo himself; and the absence of a female has required an alternate womb provided by Howell’s “brain.” Howell’s bizarre metaphor of his coupling with the (male) god underscores the
interiority of literary production; this impossible procreation must have taken place
within his own imagination, his "brats" a product of the hidden activity of his
brain/womb.

But Howell's "brats," like Lovelace's, have been "exposed" to the "wide world."
This exposure has, in turn, exposed Howell himself, for Howell makes clear, in his
address to the reader that

Speech is the index, letters ideas are
Of the informing soul; they can declare,
And show the inward man, as we behold
A face reflecting in a crystal mould. (FL 1: xxxv)

Howell would later write, in his first letter included in volume one, that it is "a true
familiar letter that expresses one's mind... The tongue and the pen are both of them
interpreters of the mind, but I hold the pen to be the more faithful of the two" (FL 1:3).
It is the self that is expressed or exposed in writing, and it is in the "darkness and
confined spaces" (Potter 134) that Howell and Lovelace find their poetical voices.

The model of interiority, of private spaces in which the brain functions as a
womb, is based upon both classical and contemporary philosophical discourses of a
separation between mind and body that, in turn, underpinned discourses of political
theory (including those offered by Lipsius and James I himself) that allowed a level of
dissimulation under certain political circumstances. Lipsius had articulated this
separation early in his Two Bookes of Constancie. For Lipsius, "man consisteth of two
parts, Soule and Body... These two are joyned together, but yet with a iarring
concorde, as I may say, neither do they easily agree, especially when controuersie
arisith about souerainty & subiection” (80). The idea that the mind and body were
different, yet “joyned” in “iarring concorde” was prevalent in seventeenth-century
discourse. It often appeared in discussions of the disparity between a person’s
appearance and the reality of what went on in their mind. We have seen it in the drama
of Shakespeare and Middleton, particularly in Iago’s and Claudius’s ability to hide
their true natures. We have recognized it in James I and VI’s assertion that there
sometimes exists a need for kings to dissimulate, to keep their thoughts and deeds
private. Royalists, too, concern themselves with the problems created in the discourse
of honour when one faces the risk of exposure. In his poem on Sir Peter Lely’s portrait
of Charles I with James Duke of York, painted in 1647 (Figure 9), Lovelace identifies
both the possibility of the exposure of the self, and the dangers inherent in such an
exposure if one’s self is Royalist. The poem is three stanzas, and in his first stanza,
Lovelace creates complex paradoxes through the use of oxymorons to underscore the
idea of a split self, and to tie that self to the model of neo-Stoic honour:

See! what a clouded Majesty! and eyes
Whose glory through their mist doth brighter rise!
See! what an humble bravery doth shine,
And griefe triumphant breaking through each line;
How it commands the face! so sweet a scorne
Never did happy misery adorne!
So sacred a contempt! that others show
To this (oth’ height of all the wheel) below;
That mightiest Monarchs by this shaded booke
May copy out their proudest, richest look. (57)

Figure 9: Sir Peter Lely: Charles I with James, Duke of York

Charles's majesty is "clouded," a common trope to describe the vanquished "sun" represented by the King in Royalist literature. Although Charles has been defeated by Parliamentarian forces, he has not lost his honour, for his "glory" arises out of the mists of these clouds, and his "humble bravery" shines in his face still. Charles's plight is a series of oxymorons; his "griefe triumphant" shows in the lines of his face and posture and his "happy misery" demonstrates his "scorne" for Parliament, though they are his conquerors. Like the neo-Stoics who will become a model for the Royalists after Charles's execution, Charles is happy in his misery, a misery caused not by his own actions, but by the turn of Fortune's "wheele," and his neo-Stoicism produces a model for even the "mightiest Monarchs" who find themselves thrown down by fickle Fortune.
The second stanza of Lovelace’s contemplation on Lely’s painting focuses on the young Duke of York whose emotions are joined to his father’s in a doubling that becomes common in the Royalist explorations of the self:

Whilst the true Eaglet this quick lustre spies,
And by his Sun’s enlightens his owne eyes;
He cares his cares, his burthen feeles, then streight
Joyes that so lightely he can beare such weight;
Whilst either eithers passion doth borrow,
And both doe grieve the same victorious sorrow.
These my best Lilly with so bold a spirit
And soft a grace, as if thou didst inherit
For that time all their greatnesse, and didst draw
With those brave eyes your Royall Sitters saw.

James’s spirits are raised by the model Charles provides; the Duke’s “owne eyes” are enlightened by his father’s “quick lustre.” Again Lovelace uses an oxymoron to demonstrate the divisiveness of the notion of honour and of the idea of the self in this period; James and Charles both “grieve the same victorious sorrow.” The self is shared in this grieving, but more important, the King is able to transfer himself to his son, and they “borrow” each other’s passions and remain victorious even in their defeat. Indeed, they can remain victorious in Lipsian terms precisely because their shared passions, both those they borrow from one another and those they individually share between grief and joy, bring them into balance—the main requirement for neo-Stoic virtue. According to Lipsius, writing during the war in Belgium, “Our mindes must be so
confirmed and conformed, that we may bee at rest in troubles and have peace euin in the midst of warre" (71). Yet this stanza does not ignore the warning implicit in the idea of mind/body separation. The self, it seems, can also be transferred to the painter, for Lely "didst inherit / For that time all their greatness." In doing so, Lely himself becomes "bold" and "brave," and the model provided by the "Royall sitters" becomes both the model of neo-Stoicism that Royalists should follow and a warning that following this model will require bravery and boldness under the new regime of Parliamentarian rule.

Finally, Lovelace's third stanza articulates the topos of the world turned upside down that becomes a commonplace in Royalist writings as well as underscoring the possibility of exposing the self:

Not as of old, when a rough hand did speake
A strong Aspect, and a faire face, a weake;
When only a black beard cried Villaine, and
By Hieroglyphicks we could understand;
When Crystall typified in a white spot,
And the bright Ruby was but one red blot;
Thou dost the things Orientally the same,
Not only paintst its colour, but its Flame:
Thou sorrow canst designe without a teare,
And with the Man his very Hope or Feare;
So that th'amazed world shall henceforth finde
None but my Lilly ever drew a Minde.
According to Lovelace the body and the mind are different, though joined entities. Royalists are forced to hide themselves behind a layer of deception, to mourn for their king in private, in this new world where the old ways of honesty and honour are gone. This ability to deceive, however, provided only limited protection for the Royalists, for Lely has demonstrated that the self can be discovered and exposed by others; Lely is able to see the inside of things and men—paint not only the ruby but “its Flame,” not only the man but his “very Hope or Feare.” In this stanza lies a veiled warning to Royalists: Lely has drawn a “Minde” and exposed Charles’s and James’s very self to public view. The exposure of this self has required a “bold spirit” and “brave eyes” for the world of the mid-seventeenth century is different, upside down, and dangerous.

Lovelace’s second “from prison” poem, “To Althea from Prison,” takes as its central focus the idea of the separation between body and mind, and in doing so arrives at what can be described as a neo-Stoic conclusion that although the body suffers, the self is free to be, like Lovelace’s interpretation of Charles I and James in Lely’s portrait, “happy in misery.” According to Maus, the seventeenth-century concern with the relationship between body and mind—with the idea of an interior self—is far more complex than the related question of where in the body the self exists: “the problem of how people possess interiors is not simply synonymous with the problem of how they inhabit their flesh; rather, the issues seem, as it were, knotted together, multifariously differentiated even while snarled and entwined” (182). Part of the neo-Stoic belief system was, I would argue, that passivity is possible precisely because people are able to separate the body from the self, mind and soul from flesh, and therefore can withstand whatever adversity is inflicted upon them. The soul,
according to Lipsius, is the "good part in man," separated from the "filth of the bodie and contagion of the senses" (81). This part of man

may somtimes be pressed down, but neuer oppressed: & these fiery
sparks may be couered, but neuer wholly extinguished. Those little
coales doe alwayes shine and shew forth thenmelves, lightening our
darknesse, purging our vnicleannes, directing out doubtfullnes, guiding

vs at the last to Constancy and vertue. (81)

neo-Stoic virtue is passive resistance, and the ideals of neo-Stoic resistance, that the
virtuous can suffer whatever they must in their bodies while still believing what they
will, is most apt for the Royalists of the mid-seventeenth-century.

Lovelace uses the ideas of neo-Stoicism to create a separation between his
imprisoned body and his free soul or self. It is while in prison for his political views
that Lovelace’s soul is free. Indeed, Lovelace’s soul experiences real freedom for the
first time in prison since the kind of freedom it enjoys when Althea comes to visit him
is more than that of “The Gods that wanton in the Aire” (7), the “Fishes that tipple in
the Deepe” (15), or the “Inlarged Winds that curle the Flood” (23). But it is not only
Althea’s presence that allows him such freedom. Rather it is when together his and
Althea’s “hearts with Loyall Flames” are filled (12) and when he shall sing “The
Sweetness, Mercy, Majesty, / And Glories of my KING” (19-20) that they are freer than
the fish or the winds. Here Lovelace ties his soul’s freedom to his honour; it is his
loyalty to Charles that allows him this freedom, and it is the incarceration of his body
that allows his soul to wander freely. Lovelace concludes this poem with what can be
interpreted as almost the definitive statement of neo-Stoic belief:
Stone Walls do not a Prison make,
Nor I'ron bars a Cage;
Mindes innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage;
If I have freedome in my Love,
And in my soule am free;
Angels alone that sore above,
Injoy such Liberty. (25-32)

Although imprisoned, Lovelace's soul "injoys" a freedom known only to "Angels" as long as he can choose his love. Lovelace's poem articulates both the neo-Stoic ideal and the problem faced by the new regime: Roundhead justice can remove Lovelace's bodily freedom, but it cannot "oppress" or "extinguish" the inward man; Lovelace's self is free to choose loyalty to the King.

Howell, too, explores the neo-Stoic ideas of freedom of the soul and of the frequent disparity between body and soul. In doing so, Howell participates in the political discourse of neo-Stoicism that advocates both prudence and reason. Arrested in 1643 for his Royalist sympathies, Howell was finally released in 1651, spending nine years in prison and writing over 25 published books, tracts, poems and volumes of letters while incarcerated. But Howell’s story is enigmatic; labelled a “malignant” (a name synonymous with Royalist in this period) and held in the Fleet prison, he was not entirely trusted by the Royalists either, defending himself in a letter to the King dated 3
September, 1644, against charges of “lukewarm” Royalism. Howell is, however, just
one example of the many men and women in this period whose allegiances were
equivocal and to whom cooperation and keeping silent meant staying alive to see the
return of the monarchy. Howell’s equivocation, though, was unique in the sense that
he saw himself as a martyr to the Royalist cause; he writes from the Fleet on 3
November, 1645, that “there are here some choice gentlemen who are my co-martyrs;
for a prisoner and a martyr are the same thing, save that one is buried before his death
and the other after” (FL. 2: 113). His equivocation can be explained not by a vacillation
between sides in the war, but rather by a neo-Stoic sense of distancing himself from the
corruption of his earthly kingdom, and concentrating on the Kingdom of God. In
Daniel Woolfe’s words, Howell’s inconsistency can be explained
with reference to a particular philosophical outlook of the late
Renaissance, that of neo-Stoicism; [neo-Stoics] also provide an index of
the shift in political morality, from principle to prudence, which marks
the seventeenth century in many parts of Europe. (278)

Howell’s 1651 dream vision, simply titled The Vision, takes as its theme a justification
for equivocation in the present circumstances of defeated Royalism. Moreover, Howell
uses the idea of separation between body and soul to explore the neo-Stoicism that was
an integral part of Royalist rhetoric following Charles’s defeat. In doing so, Howell
defends himself and others like him against the charges of “lukewarmness” in politics
or worse, against accusations of equivocation, a term closely allied with Catholicism in

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8For an excellent history of the charges levelled against Howell, and his own
perception of himself as a Royalist martyr, see Daniel Woolfe’s article “Conscience,
Constancy and Ambition in the Career and Writings of James Howell.”
this period.

_The Vision_ takes the form of a dialogue between the soul and the body. In Howell's dream vision his soul leaves the body and takes the form of another human being, a nun, with whom he can converse about the vagaries of the times. Unlike Margaret Cavendish's "Dialogue between the Soul and the Body," which depicts a discussion that attempts to determine which of the two controls the self (cf. Chapter Five, below), Howell's dialogue is clear that the Soul controls the body:

_Bodie: Alas! You know well that I am but an unwieldy lump of earth, a mere passive thing of my selffe. It is you that actuats and animats me, otherwise I could neither think, speak, or do anything; nay without your impuls I could have no motion at all._ (2)

But the human soul, according to seventeenth-century beliefs, is by nature divided into three parts: the vegetative, sensitive and rational souls combine to animate the human soul. Howell divides the soul even further when he complains that the rational soul—the part that makes him human—is subject to

- corroding cares, to griping thoughts, to a perpetual clashing and combating of the humours, insomuch that Man of all creatures is _Heautontimorumenos, a self-tormentor, a persecutor and crucifier of himself; all which are emanations from the Intellectual soul; which besides useth to puzzle the brain with sturdie doubts._ (4)

The tri-part soul given to man by God is further divided by its ability to think, and this division tears men apart from the inside by causing "sturdie doubts" long after the English Civil War has ended.
According to both Lipsius and Howell, one of the ways this internal strife can be avoided is by obtaining self-knowledge. The soul praises the body's articulation of its own corruption, part of which comes from Adam's and Eve's original sin. According to the soul

'self acquaintaince is, after the knowledge of the Creator, the wisest; it is one of the paths, though a flabbie one, that leads us to the high road towards heaven, (which is a rougher way than that you found o're the Alps and Pyrenean mountains;) The speculations whereof would make you truely value and vilifie your selfe, it should prick those tumours, and timpanies of pride that use to rise up in the humane creature, when he contemplates how near that vessel where in he slept so long in the bosom of his causes, is to the excrementitious parts. (15)

Self-acquaintance is one of the roads to salvation; it requires solitude and meditation (such as the opportunities found in prison) and its reward is entrance to Heaven. Howell reiterates this point when, after the soul points out at length the corruptions of passion that the body is subject to, the body responds with gratitude: "this discourse doth administer me but small comfort, yet I thank you that you make me know my self better, by displaying unto me my own condition" (37-38).

It is not enough to simply know one's self; people must learn to control themselves. Here Howell articulates the neo-Stoicism of the defeated Royalists for he confesses to his soul that "I fear none more than my selfe, who am indeed my greatest foe...I stand more in fear of my self than of the devil" (55). The body's fear arises out of its knowledge of its self, its corruptibility and its extremity of passion. The only way to
avoid this pitfall of passion is to renounce the cares of the world and meditate upon
God and the kingdom to come for God is the “sole and soverain good” and his
displeasure turns the self against the self. Howell confesses “[I] can never be friends
with my selfe, till I am reconciled to him [God], and that I conceive his countenance to
be turn’d again towards me” (74). The soul explains that if the body can control its
passions, if it meditates upon God and obeys its conscience, it will surely go to Heaven.
This advice prompts a long dialogue on whether or not the body, in its flesh, will rise to
Heaven on Judgement day. The soul assures the body that it will, although it will not
be the same as his corruptible body on earth. Howell’s body is sceptical; he cannot
understand how the body itself can go to Heaven, and the soul explains the difference
between substance and quality:

that same body of yours shall be rais’d the same in _substance_ not in
_quality_, for it will be made purer and freer from Corruption; as I during
the time of my separation I shall not change my _nature_ but my _state_; I
may be said to have no _integrity_, but remain as a _part_ of you till our
reconjunction. (144)

It is in this discussion that the explanation for those Royalists who co-operate with, or
at least do not oppose, the Parliamentary and Protectorate rule is made clear. In this
passage lies a parallel that cleverly draws together the notions of honourable selfhood
and politics; the state of the soul between the death of the body and the final judgement
is analogous to the state of the Royalists between the execution of the king and the
restoration of the monarchy they longed for. Royalists have changed their “state,” and
the play on words that implies both their individual selves and the governing body of
their country is significant. Royalists may live in a changed state, like the soul patiently
waiting for the body to join it in Heaven, and although they "may be said to have no
integrity," their souls will remain honourable in quality if not in substance.

Richard Lovelace, like many other Cavaliers, had fled to, and returned from
France during the wars. Lovelace was imprisoned twice, once in 1642 for appealing to
the Parliament for the rights of the King and again in 1648 after his return from France.
It was during this period of imprisonment that Lovelace wrote some of what, at first
glance, seems to be his most chivalric poetry, and his poem "To Lucasta from Prison" is
an excellent example of Lovelace's chivalric notion of honour. This poem can be read as
a social commentary from the Royalist perspective. The speaker of this poem is
imprisoned, and he uses his time to ponder "his own thoughts." He wonders what sort
of object is fit for his love. He begins by examining "Peace," which he cannot love since
she hates Earth, and thus cannot possibly love him (12-15). He cannot love "War" (16),
"Religion" (21) or "Liberty" (28) since those have all been spoiled, in one way or
another, by Parliament, which is itself unlovable: "Who's he that would be wedded /
To the fairest body that's beheaded?" (26-27). He cannot love either "a Reformation"
(32) or "the Publick Faith" (40) since a reformation cannot be controlled and the public
faith is untrustworthy. The only object that remains is the King himself (47), and here
Lovelace exemplifies the chivalric notion of personal allegiance. Charles is "th' only
spring / Of all our loves and joyes" (46-47); the King is the fount of all happiness, and
anyone who seeks to "eclipse his right" is "Blinded" (50-51). Lovelace ends the poem
by lamenting the "Error" that Parliament has committed (53), and, in a burst of
chivalry begs for "one sacred Beame / To light me where I soone may see / How to
serve you, and you trust me” (57-59); the speaker recognizes the king’s person as “sacred” and articulates the chivalric relationship between king and subject when he desires to “serve,” but asks nothing from the king except to be trusted.

But Lovelace’s chivalry is undermined by his focus on his own ability, and perhaps responsibility, to choose where his love will reside. Before the wars and his imprisonment Lovelace had loved Liberty alone, but she had left him, and his poem details his attempt to find another to love while Liberty is absent (1-4). He begins this attempt by stating that before he can begin to love he must “See!” (6) how worthy he deems the potential “objects” of his love; Lovelace must first rationally examine the objects of love still available to him to see if they prove worthy. He can then his “free Soule to that confine” that “’Twere possible I might call mine” (7-8). Lovelace must choose to whom he proffers his love. His lack of freedom, the absence of Liberty, makes this choice necessary. Moreover, with the King gone Lovelace and his contemporaries must “stande in our owne light” (46). The chivalric pledge to “serve” the King still exists, but Lovelace adds to this notion the neo-Stoic idea of the primacy of reason. The honourable obligation to be loyal to the king is now, in the absence of liberty, no longer an obligation at all but a choice made willingly by the Cavalier poet after having rationally considered the alternatives.

Seventeenth-century neo-Stoicism was not, however, simply about passivity and acceptance. The Lipsian paradigm also included provisions for active participation in politics. Lipsius, in Two Bookes of Constancie, provides a detailed discussion of the relationship between God, providence and destiny. In doing so, Lipsius removes one of the primary objections that could be levelled against Stoicism—its paganism.
According to Kirk, Lipsius “placed God above all; emanating from God was
providence; the resultant of God’s will, as expressed through providence, was destiny”
(39). In this way Lipsius reconciles the differences between classical Stoicism and
Christianity; he concludes that on the subjects of destiny, natural cause, chance and free
will the Stoics were in error, and that subjugating all to God’s will is what classical
Stoical theory lacked (39-46). Moreover, Lipsius’s “corrected” concept of destiny and
providence includes the need for action. In fact, in response to Lipsius’s question of
why, if all calamities are God’s will, do men defend their country at all, Langius,
Lipsius’s wise philosopher, responds

who tolde thee that Destiny worketh alone without coadiuuant and
meane causes? It is Destiny thou shouldest haue children: yet first thou
must sowe the seede in thy wiuues garden. To be cured of thy disease: but
so as thou vse the Physitian and good nourishment. (126)

Lipsius ties the idea of working with destiny directly to the context of civil war when
he argues that

if it bee Destiny that this weather-beaten shippe of thy countrey shall
bee saued from drowining, it is destinie withall that she be ayded and
defended. If thou wilt attain to the hauen thou must ply the oares, and
hoyse thy sayles, and not idly expect winde at will from heauen. (126)

Lipsius’s version of “God helps those who help themselves” is evident in the
fascinating changes William Davenant wrought in his adaptation of Shakespeare’s
Macbeth.

Though not published until six years after Davenant’s death in 1668, it seems to
have been written sometime before 1664, since Pepys reports attending a production of the play on 5 November, 1664. Among the revisions that Davenant creates are several completely new scenes involving Lady Macduff: one with Lady Macbeth early in the play (1.5) and two with Macduff (3.2; 3.6). According to Christopher Spencer, "many factors influenced these additions, but whatever else they do, they also fit the moral which is the organizing principle behind the adaptation Davenant produced" (15-6). That moral, again according to Spencer, is that ambition is an evil that can only lead to destruction. Spencer is, I think, correct in his assessment of the function of these additions, but he does not address the evidence of the doubled or split self that Davenant produces in the additional scenes, a notion that is intricately tied to a sense of national honour and to the ambition that drives seventeenth-century men and women to seek that honour (cf. Chapter Two, above).

Although Davenant is not normally thought of as a "Cavalier" writer, his elucidation of "the theme of the evils of ambition, with a young king returning amid a chorus of praise to ascend his murdered father's throne, was no doubt complimentary to Charles II in the early 1660's" (Spencer 16). Davenant's adaptation is, however, more than just a panegyrical written to please his new king; in his added scenes this poet explores the ideas of who owns the self and how honour can be gained under the adverse and complex vagaries of civil war.

Interestingly, all of the "doubling" that Shakespeare creates between Macbeth and Banquo disappears from Davenant's text. Instead, he creates a doubled self, like Lovelace's Charles and James, between Lady Macduff and her husband in his first major addition to Shakespeare's play:
L. MACB: Madam, I have observed since you came hither,

You have been still disconsolate. Pray tell me,

Are you in perfect health?

L. MACD: Alas! How can I?

My Lord, when Honour call’d him to the War,

Took with him half of my divided soul,

Which lodging in his bosom, lik’d so well

The place, that ‘tis not yet returned.

L. MACB: Methinks

That should not disorder you: for, no doubt

The brave Macduff left half his soul behind him,

To make up the defect in yours.

L. MACD: Alas!

The part transplanted from his breast to mine,

(As ‘twere by sympathy) still bore a share

In all the hazards which the other half

Incur’d, and fill’d my bosom with fears. (1.5.1-14)

Unlike the Macbeth and Banquo of Shakespeare’s version who, in the beginning, are so doubled as to be nearly indistinguishable, Lady Macduff and her husband are halved when separated, only making a whole when they are together. Significantly, it was when “Honour call’d him to the War” that this unhappy division occurred; honour has caused the Macduffs’ singular soul to split. Lady Macbeth reminds her friend that Macduff, like her own husband Macbeth, is now safe at home, and so there is no longer
a need to worry. Lady Macduff disagrees, and explains that “dangers which have long prevail’d / Upon the fancy; even when they are dead / Live in the memory a-while” (1.5.16-18); the scars caused by civil war take much time to heal. Davenant makes the link between the neo-Stoic ideals, honour and war, particularly clear in the final exchange between the two women:

L. MACB: Although his safety has not power enough to put
Your doubts to flight, yet the bright glories which
He gain’d in Battel might dispel those Clowds.

L. MACD: The world mistakes the glories gain’d in war,
Thinking their Lustre true: alas, they are
But Comets, Vapours! By some men exhal’d
From others bloud, and kindl’d in the Region
Of popular applause, in which they live
A-while; then vanish: and the very breath
Which first inflam’d them, blows out agen. (1.5.19-28)

It was honour that called men to the defence of the king, but Lady Macduff articulates the neo-Stoic belief that everything that is happening has happened before and will happen again (Lipsius 198-200). Fortune’s wheel will turn, and honour gained by spilling the blood of one’s countrymen cannot last. Moreover, Lady Macduff believes, in true neo–Stoic style, that honour cannot be won by “popular applause” or by what Lipsius labels scornfully as “popvlar opinion” (95).

Davenant makes this exploration of the demands of civil war clear in his next additional complete scene. Here, the poet creates an explicit discussion of how one
maintains integrity — how a man can keep an honourable self — when his country is torn apart by civil war. Moreover, Davenant recreates Shakespeare’s own exploration of honour as he attempts, in his adaptation, to understand what honour requires of men when they are forced to live, as Royalists saw themselves forced to do, under the authority of usurpers and regicides. In Act Three, Scene Two, Macduff finally becomes fully aware that Macbeth is the only one who could have killed Duncan. In this brief scene Macduff explains to his wife, amid her protestations, that he must fight against the newly anointed king in order to restore his country’s and his own honour. His explanation and her opposition clearly articulate the problem with having lost a civil war; Macduff and his wife argue as to whether their predicament is God’s plan and should simply be borne, or whether he has an “honourable obligation” to defend his country against “the bloudy tyrants violence” (3.2.16):

MACDUFF: From Duncan’s Grave, methinks, I hear a groan
That call’s a loud for justice.

L. MACD: If the Throne
Was by Macbeth ill gain’d, Heavens Justice may,
Without your Sword, sufficient vengeance pay.
Usurpers lives have but a short extent,
Nothing lives long in a strange element.

MACDUFF: My Countreys dangers call for my defence
Against the bloudy Tyrants violence. (3.2.8-16)

For Lady Macduff, and for many of the defeated Cavaliers, the country’s problems are all a part of God’s plan, and vengeance upon the usurpers is God’s alone to wreak.
Lipsius's allowable action was not without ambiguity or limits for, as his persona, Langius, explains, "if thou see by certain and infallible tokens that the fatal alteration of the State is come, with mee this saying shall preuaile, Not to fight against God" (127). Lady Macduff protests her husband's notion of honour, which can only lead to trouble, and echoes Lipsius's complaint that many men only pretend to be concerned for their country but are really concerned for themselves and their property (Lipsius 87-9) when she accuses Macduff of being self-serving rather than honourable:

I am afraid you have some other end,  
Than meerly Scotland's freedom to defend.  
You'd raise yourself, whilst you wou'd him dethrone:  
And shake his Greatness, to confirm your own.  
That purpose will appear, when rightly scan'd,  
But usurpation at the second hand. (3.2.17-22)

Macduff's honour, it seems, is in a difficult position: if he does nothing he will, he believes, be ignoring the honour that comes from doing justice and defending one's country; if he fights against Macbeth, he may be seen as descending to Macbeth's level, usurping the throne that Macbeth has usurped. This conflict will be resolved in the final scene between Lady Macduff and her husband, also new in Davenant's version. Macduff decides, with his wife's approval, that he must flee to England to help restore the throne to its rightful heir, Malcolm (3.6.17).

This scene demonstrates that by the mid-seventeenth century honour has become a choice. Men are no longer honourable simply by pledging allegiance to the king, an obligation rather than a choice in the chivalric codes of masculine honour.
Rather, they are faced with difficult choices, and must make complicated decisions in order to create an honourable self that is not only apparent to their peers, but is in obedience to their consciences. Earlier Lady Macduff had stated that it was honour that had forced her husband to the wars; he had gone to fight for the rightful king in a war that was both foreign and civil, perpetrated by outsiders with the support of one of Scotland's own lords. By the time Macduff realizes that Macbeth is a usurper, Lady Macduff has reconsidered; Macduff should do nothing to dethrone Macbeth and restore the rightful king to his throne. Yet Lady Macduff does not believe that her husband should simply not care about honour; she argues that to do nothing is the most honourable course. Honour is a decision that Macduff must make.

Davenant, however, had the luxury of writing his play after the Restoration of Charles II. Other Cavaliers could not simply resolve the dilemma presented by being Royalist under the Parliamentary regime and Cromwell's Protectorate by having their characters go off to fight alongside the heir to the throne. The Civil War in England brought with it a crisis of honour, particularly for the Royalists who are forced to collaborate with the new regime while retaining their loyalty to their defeated, and eventually executed, King. This crisis, in turn, brings about a focus on the question of how to maintain integrity and carve out an honourable place in a complex and changing world of honour. Many Royalists turn to the philosophy of the neo-Stoics for their answer; neo-Stoicism ties together ideas of introspection, of self-knowledge that lead to knowledge of God, and of personal honour that distances the defeated Cavaliers from the realities of their defeat while simultaneously allowing them to live in safety under the regime of those who had been their enemies in war. Yet Royalist
writings do not really reject political participation; rather, they withdraw into a private space from which they may contemplate their situation and, significantly, circulate and publish writings that clearly long for the return of the monarchy; they can remain honourable in a changed code of honour that emphasizes control of one’s passions, obedience to the conscience, and behaviour that is designed to further the safety of the State.

Early modern neo-Stoicism’s synthesis of Seneca and Tacitus, its definition of virtue as duty and activity (McCrea 89), allows them to resist Parliament’s and Cromwell’s government both by their works and by their absence.⁹ Royalist writings that long for the return of the monarchy, that state they are neo-Stoically suffering through these “calamities,” and that demonstrate a control of the passions lacking in what they saw as the fanaticism of the “Puritans,” are themselves a profound political statement. The question is not whether the Cavaliers retained their honour or retreated. Rather, the Royalists writers of the English Civil War demonstrate that they retain their honour precisely through retreat, and that this retreat is not dishonourable nor is it disloyalty to their King but the creation of a private space from which to write. Lipsius had argued that adversity was good for the soul. In his treatise on constancy he asks the question: “If thou wilt be a Mariner, thou must be taught in tempests. If a soyledier,

⁹ Royalists had to look no farther than Tacitus’s Annals for examples, like that of Thrsea, of the power of absentee oneself from the court. Thrsea incurred Nero’s wrath by absenting himself from the senate and from political discussions. Tacitus reports that Cossutianus Capito, a consul, persuaded Nero to execute Thrsea on the grounds that his refusal to participate in Roman politics was “party-warfare against the government. It is secession. If many more have the same impudence, it is war” (391). Capito reinforces his argument by pointing out that “in every province and army the official Gazette is read with special care—to see what Thrsea has refused to do” (391).
in perils. If thou be a man indeed, why refusest thou afflictions?" (149). Neo-Stoicism, like chivalry and other forms of male honour, is inextricably linked to the concept of masculinity. In the seventeenth century, as now, how to be a man was a complicated and perplexing question. Then, as now, how to be a man of honour was perhaps an even more complex problem. For the Cavaliers, neo-Stoicism provided an answer; their adherence to neo-Stoic thought taught them to actively accept their "afflictions" and in so doing, allowed them to present themselves, to all their readers and especially to each other, as honourable men.

The community of honourable men, however, was, and is, only half the picture, for women had an enormous influence on masculine honour codes. Female opinion, and female writing, did much to influence the ways in which men defined, and attempted to manifest, masculine honour in the seventeenth century. Specifically, the works of Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish investigate notions of what it means to be an honourable man; these women participate in the discourse of honour, through their works, when they create descriptions and depictions of honourable men who are, like the characters created by male writers in this period, attempting to carve out a place of honour for themselves in a rapidly changing political world.
CHAPTER FIVE

Opening a Dialogue: The Gendered Discourses of Honour in

Cary's Mariam and Cavendish's Poems and Fancies

The seventeenth century was a period of extraordinary civil strife. The years from 1600-1660 saw rebellion, revolution, and civil war. They witnessed the execution of a king and experienced the chaos of nearly continuous uprising and rebellion throughout the Interregnum. One of the consequences of this period of civil violence and profound governmental change was, as we have seen, the creation of tension in the discourse of honour. It is within the context of this conflict of honour that Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam and Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies can be best understood, since both works are replete with images of, and discussions regarding, masculine and feminine honour codes, and both encompass an analysis of the relationship between those codes.

Contemporary response to this period of civil strife included greater emphasis on an important aspect of the seventeenth-century honour code: as we have seen, the discourse of honour began to include urgent appeals for control of one's passions. Cary's and Cavendish's work consistently oppose the violence inherent in the honour codes, advocating instead an honour grounded on peace, moderation and the regulation of one's emotions. A close examination of these women's writing reveals that the works are a response to the conflict within the masculine honour codes in this period of intense civil strife. Examining the historical context of this conflict facilitates an understanding of both Cary's and Cavendish's texts and the impact these texts had
on contemporary values.

Feminist theory and scholarship has, over the past thirty years or so, demonstrated the importance of women's writing in the Renaissance, and future studies will surely elucidate that importance. What is needed now, however, is an examination of the interface between male and female discourses. More specifically, we need to explore the dialogue between genders, and the gendered discourses of honour provide, I think, one of the many places in which this exploration can be undertaken. Elizabeth Cary's and Margaret Cavendish's participation in this dialogue is three-fold: both women demonstrate the manipulation of the opposite gender's codes of honour within their work; both women publicly discuss the activity of writing itself as an attempt to gain honour for the (female) author; and there exists a dialogue between these women's work and the work of male poets/dramatists of their time.

The discourses of masculine and feminine honour were, and are, separate but interrelated codes. Men and women of the seventeenth century were acutely aware of the honour codes of the opposite gender, and indeed male and female expectations of the opposite sex helped to redefine and shape the seventeenth-century ideas and ideals of honour, as they still do today. Moreover, the seventeenth-century discourses of male honour provided women with an arena in which to discuss that very masculine world; women's discussions of male honour provide a space for women to enter into and talk about politics.

According to Joseph Addison, editor of The Spectator, a relationship exists between gendered notions of honour and the expectations of the opposite sex for, the great point of honour in men is courage and in women chastity. If a
man loses his honour in one encounter, it is not impossible for him to regain it in another; a slip in a woman's honour is irrecoverable. I can give no reason for fixing the point of honour in these two qualities, unless it be that each sex sets the greatest value on the qualification which renders them the most amiable in the eyes of the contrary sex. Had men chosen for themselves, without regards to the opinions of the fair sex, I should believe the choice would have fallen on wisdom or virtue; or had women determined their own point of honour, it is probable that wit or good nature would have carried it against chastity. (23 June, 1711).

This passage demonstrates that male and female honour were different, but closely interrelated codes and that both honour codes were developed in relation to each other so that each gender had intimate knowledge of the opposite honour code. Ian Maclean, finding similarly gendered characteristics of honour in his study *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, traces the Renaissance interrelationship between male and female honour codes back to Tasso:

According to Tasso, each sex has a dominant virtue, one which both sexes need for practice, but which is more important to one than to the other. The dominant virtue is chastity in the case of women, and courage in the case of men. The dominant vice for each sex becomes the antithesis of the dominant virtue (lack of chastity or cowardice), and the most excusable vice the antithesis of the dominant virtue of the other sex. (62)
The men and women of the seventeenth century recognized and, as we shall see, challenged the conventional notions of what makes an honourable man or woman.

In the seventeenth century, women were honourable because they were virginal or chaste, depending upon their marital status; their honour was contingent upon what sexual acts were committed and by whom. Moreover, as Antonia Fraser points out, giving birth was a “woman’s best chance to redeem herself from the sin of Eve and restore herself to honour” (68). In order to attain honour women were expected both to control their physical desires and to offer their bodies as repositories of future generations. Men’s honour, too, was about control, and, as Norbert Elias has demonstrated, it is in the seventeenth century that “constraints through others from a variety of angles are converted into self-restraints” (230). Partly as a response to the civil strife of this period, the discourse of honour began to include urgent appeals for the control of one’s passions. In 1660, for example, Colonel Ingoldsby of the Royalist forces could be publicly praised for his behaviour while capturing an enemy regiment:

one of the desperate Villains...discharged a Pistol at colonel Ingoldsby.

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1 Michael McKeon, in his article “Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760,” persuasively argues that the honour code shifted, in this period, away from an aristocratic male honour code. McKeon demonstrates that contemporary criticism of the concept of a natural or essential body led to a rejection of the aristocratic ideal of honour that was based on blood and birth. But, whereas McKeon believes that the honour code moved toward an emphasis on the honourable domestic female, I would argue, with Antonia Fraser among others, that women’s role in society, including their role in the honour code, was not elevated in the seventeenth century (The Weaker Vessel 524). Rather, the honour code simultaneously moved away from an aristocratic ideal and towards a broadened code of honour that demanded that all British subjects must control their passions and heed their consciences. For women, this was not an increase of freedom nor a recognition of their greater participation in the honour code; female honour was always based, throughout this century and earlier, on controlling their physical desires.
whose courage and mercy are in this most justly to be commended,
which could command his passions at that time not to revenge himself
on such miscreants. (Mercurius Publicus, 23 April, 1660)

Ingoldsby is honourable because he does not engage in the chivalric behaviour of
revenge or embrace the medieval honour code that demands a violent defence of one's
self against slights. Moreover, Ingoldsby is honourable because he can "command his
passions."

Both Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish, like the anonymous author in the
Mercurius Publicus, advocate self-restraint and mastery of one's passions in their work.
This is in part, I believe, a response to the extraordinary political atmosphere of their
times. Though writing almost fifty years apart, both Cary and Cavendish experienced
the vagaries of war; Elizabeth Cary would no doubt have heard about the Essex
Rebellion in 1603 and her husband, Henry Cary, Viscount of Falkland, was taken
prisoner in the Spanish Wars which absented him from England for three years.
Cavendish and her husband lived in exile, mostly in France, throughout the English
Civil Wars. The half century that separated these women, according to Maclean, would
have had little effect on their societal standing, for the Renaissance notion of woman
did not change much throughout the course of the seventeenth century. Both women,
perhaps as a result of this "notion," which limited women's independence and
attempted (although in many cases unsuccessfully) to confine them to the domestic
sphere, suffered from mental stress that manifested itself in depression and, at times,
eccentric behaviour. Despite these so-called prohibitions on women's independence,
both Cary and Cavendish choose as one of their themes the masculine honour code in
order to enter into the world of politics that was ostensibly forbidden to seventeenth-century women. In doing so, Cary challenges and Cavendish complicates conventional ideas of seventeenth-century masculine honour.

Although Cavendish has received serious critical attention, Elizabeth Cary's work has, until very recently, gone mostly unnoticed. Moreover, as Marta Straznicky points out, criticism of Mariam is "remarkably consistent in its biographical and mimetic orientation, generally reading the play in the context of the author's own struggle against oppression by her husband" (105). Laurie J. Shannon, too, laments that "the impetus to biographical criticism has been almost overwhelming" (139) on Cary's play. Much of the scholarship that has explored Cary's work has tended to focus on biographical links between her own life, culled from a rather problematic biography probably written by one of her daughters, and her best known play The Tragedy of Mariam.² Alexandra G. Bennett, however, has recently pointed out the difficulty in using Cary's biography as a tool with which to elucidate her play. According to Bennett, "The Lady Falkland Her Life is not, strictly speaking, hers at all — rather, she is a protagonist in a story of someone else's composition, and her representation is therefore shaped by the agenda of her biographer" (294). Scholarship that has avoided drawing parallels between Cary's work and the "facts" of her own life has quite rightly explored the gender politics of the play. Margaret Ferguson, whose stated purpose is to "prepare the ground for assessing the political significance of this play" ("The Spectre" 235-36), argues that spousal relations between Mariam and her tyrant-husband

²For a complete discussion of this biography, and for the work itself, see Margaret Ferguson's and Barry Weller's 1994 edition of The Tragedy of Mariam.
represent in microcosm the world of Jacobean politics, with its emphasis on absolutism
and the Divine Right of kings. Naomi Miller, in her article “Domestic Politics in
Elizabeth Cary’s The Tragedy of Mariam,” rejects the biographical approach that focused
“consistently on spousal relationships in the play” (355) and instead broadens her
study to look at the politics of familial ties with special attention given to motherhood.
Karen Raber’s work forms a middle ground between Ferguson and Miller; Raber views
the play as an indication that “Mariam’s subjectivity is the site for the mutually
constitutive positive power of absolutism and patriarchy” (“Gender and the Political
Subject” 331) but that Cary’s play represents “patriarchy as a flawed system” (334).
Although Raber recognizes the political content of Cary’s play, she too believes that the
social and political issues of the play “demand to be understood in the context of
Cary’s upbringing and marriage” (322).

What has yet to be explored, however, is Cary’s challenge of the conventional
male honour codes and her discussion of seventeenth-century political culture that
exists within that challenge. As Hilda Smith has argued,

in the seventeenth century when the household functioned more clearly
as a unit of the state in which the father established public order and
enforced accepted moral and religious values for his various
dependents, the distinctions between public and private, political and
nonpolitical, were less clear. And, when dynastic politics and a court
system meant socializing, plotting marriage and kinship strategies, and
included a patronage system that used the standing and contacts of both
male and female members of the governing class, then what was
masculine and feminine, private and public, political and nonpolitical
was blurred. (6-7)
Mariam’s familial relationships are not a microcosm of politics; they are political, and
Cary uses the notions of political honour to question the ideals and restrictions
imposed on both men and women by the gendered honour codes.

One of the ways in which Cary mounts this challenge to conventional honour is
by refusing to create characters who, as in the medieval miracle plays that form part of
her source, are stereotypically good or evil, virtuous or vice-ridden. Constabarus,
whose very name identifies him with the virtue of constancy, clearly loses control of his
passions in his tirade against women (4.6.310-350) despite a neo-Stoic acceptance of his
death sentence and his loyalty to Babas’s sons. On the other hand, Salome, the epitome
of the wicked woman, is not entirely evil since she does pause, though briefly and in
the end ineffectively, to ruminate on her stained honour which cannot allow her to
fulfill her desire for Sillius unless she “do the Hebrew wrong” (1.4.279). Salome, who
talks and thinks about honour more than anyone else in the play, has to remind herself
sharply that “‘tis long ago / Since shame was written on my tainted brow” (1.4.282-83)
in order to continue thinking through her plot to get rid of Constabarus, and it is
significant that her speech, in which she rejects the idea of female honour in favour of
the plan to divorce Constabarus, begins with the complaint: “Lives Salome to get so
base a style / As ‘foot’ to the proud Mariam?” (1.4.261-2). As much as we may not like
Salome, as much as she represents female dishonour and shame, she feels the sting of
Mariam’s abuse, and in this soliloquy Cary equates Salome’s rejection of honour to her
anger and disgrace at being “twit” with “nothing but [her] birth” (1.3.239).
Mariam, too, is not the paragon of virtue she seems at first glance. Although Cary draws a parallel between Mariam’s death and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Mariam is not without vice. Her treatment of Salome is, in fact, unbecoming a virtuous woman. She, like many seventeenth-century women, is caught in the struggle to maintain her honour as she is torn between loyalty to her family (especially her brother and grandfather who were murdered by Herod) and obedience and loyalty to her husband and king. Certainly obedience to both father and husband could be, and was, problematic for some seventeenth-century women, and Shakespeare encapsulates this difficulty when he has Cordelia tell her father:

You have begot me, bred me, lov’d me: I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.
Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
[To love my father all]. (1.1.96-104)

Yet, as Alexandra is so fond of reminding Mariam, she has remained with Herod, borne his children and felt love for her husband. Mariam was, it seems, not loyal enough to her family to shun Herod’s bed when he committed the murders, and not loyal enough to her husband to continue to overlook his acts of political execution committed in order to secure the Judean throne. Even the minor characters in this play
are complex: Pheroras’s plight draws some sympathy, but his selfish disregard for the lives of Constabarus and Mariam belies that pity (3.2.77-80); Alexandra has indeed suffered the loss of a father and son, but her hypocritical castigation of Mariam represents her not as sympathetic, but rather as self-serving (5.1.41-44); Doris, who has been pathetically cast aside, along with her son, undoes any sympathy that may have been created by her situation when she curses Mariam’s innocent children (4.8.615-24).

Cary’s ending too, especially in terms of the honour code, is conflicted and frustrates the readers’ expectations. While seventeenth-century readers, and twenty-first-century readers for that matter, would certainly not have expected a happy ending in a tragedy, Cary’s conclusion forgoes the implicit or explicit optimism of an emerging new or better world order. Instead, the heroine, Sohemus, Constabarus, and both of Babas’s sons are executed while Salome, Silleus and Herod live on. Herod, unlike Shakespeare’s Othello, has no epiphany regarding his own tragic flaw. Although he does consider his own part in his misfortune, there is no Cassio or Fortinbras ready to take over; nothing is learned or improved upon by the heap of bodies at the end of the play. Rather, Salome seemingly gets exactly what she wants and Herod is now not only a tyrant and despot, but also a madman. Cary even thwarts the readers’ satisfaction by failing to report the historical circumstance of Alexandra’s subsequent execution that

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3Nancy A. Gutierrez, in her study “Valuing Mariam: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis,” has argued that “the lack of closure in the play undercuts an interpretation of Mariam as a subversive document, offering an ambivalent comment on the role of women” (246). Nevertheless, if one moves beyond the play as a comment on the role of women, and reads it instead as a dialogue between genders, the “lack of closure” in the play is not really a lack at all. Rather, Cary’s ending unambiguously demonstrates that seventeenth-century notions of masculine, and particularly political, honour, consistently fail to produce a society in which the honest and honourable people reap the rewards of their admirable behaviour.
can be found in Lodge’s 1602 translation of Josephus, or Herod’s long, painful and eventually fatal disease, viewed by himself and his contemporaries as God’s retribution for having murdered his wife. Few critics have attempted to account for this uncommonly pessimistic ending, yet it is, I think, Cary’s attempt to challenge conventional ideas of masculine honour, particularly of political honour, that preclude a new world order from emerging in The Tragedy of Mariam.

The Herod of this play is, for readers, undoubtedly associated with the Biblical Herods who were responsible for the Slaughter of the Innocents, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the beheading of John the Baptist. Moreover, the Herod of the morality plays that may have been familiar to Cary’s original readers was the stereotype of wrath and anger. Cary’s Herod fits this stereotype absolutely, and in addition to the allusions to the Herods of old, Cary’s Herod is a tyrant and a despot who executes his subjects and murders his in-laws on a self-serving whim. Despite his ferocity, no one obeys this monarch: his wife refuses his bed, his brother contravenes his marriage negotiations, his vassals, Sohemus and Joseph, betray his confidence, and his sister manipulates him. Herod lacks honour on both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels of seventeenth-century political structure; he can neither command his subjects’ obedience nor control his own family. Yet, it is his own desire to appear honourable, and Salome’s cunning manipulation of that desire, that lead him to murder the one thing he truly loves; Salome makes her brother believe that in order to maintain his honour he must execute Mariam.

Following the exchange between Salome and Herod, in which Salome, like Iago, recommends several methods of murdering Mariam, Salome herself gives the
command for Mariam’s execution. When Salome returns to Herod’s rooms he, at first, refuses to believe that the death sentence has been delivered, and when he does realize that Salome has given the order, he instantly tries to rescind it: “Send word she shall not die” (4.7.403). Salome, however, reminds Herod that his wife has, or so he has been led to believe, been unfaithful, that “foul dishonours do her forehead blot” (4.7.406).

Herod, once again, approves the order for Mariam’s execution for her alleged betrayal is “the fault alone” for which “shall Mariam bleed” (4.7.408). Significantly, neither mentions Mariam’s alleged attempt to poison her husband and king, and Cary, in the “Argument,” avers that Herod was “more moved with jealousy of Sohemus, than with this intent of poison” (68). Herod, once reminded that his honour has been undermined by his wife’s infidelity, is convinced she must die. Herod will, once more, begin to ruminate on Mariam’s beauty and his love for her, and once more Salome will lead him back to a discussion of Mariam’s assault on his honour for, though she pretends to agree with Herod that Mariam’s wit is “world-amazing” (4.7.428) she reminds Herod that

She speaks a beauteous language, but within
Her heart is false as powder: and her tongue
Doth but allure the auditors to sin,
And is the instrument to do you wrong. (4.7.429-32)

Salome perverts Herod’s sense of honour—he has been “done wrong” by Mariam—in order to strengthen his resolve to carry out his wife’s death sentence. As Naomi Miller puts it, “for all Salome’s assertions that she is ‘the custome-breaker’ who will ‘show my sex the way to freedom’s door,’ that ‘door’ for Salome seems to consist of skill at
manipulating men rather than a resolve to stake out an alternative locus of authority”
(362).

Salome herself is not without honour. In fact, she spends much of her time thinking about female honour. Cary’s wonderful irony is that although Salome rejects the traditional idea of chastity as a woman’s sole basis for claiming honour, and although she has dishonoured herself and both her husbands with her murderous and adulterous behaviour, her plot to revenge herself against Mariam is precisely because her honour has been undermined by Mariam’s constant harping on Salome’s birth and lineage. Salome, in fact, has no grudge against Mariam other than the scorn Mariam has shown her, for Salome wishes that Mariam not live

... my birth t’upbraid,

To call me base and hungry Edomite:

With patient show her choler I betray’d

And watched the time to be reveng’d by sleight. (3.2.93-96)

Salome’s anger has been simmering, and her plot to have Mariam executed is a result of her having “watched” for an opportunity to take revenge against Mariam’s derogation of Salome’s own honour.

Conversely, although Constabarbus has often been read as the epitome of honour, representing the constancy, tradition and loyalty demanded by seventeenth-century notions of kinship, Cary creates for this character an absurd duel scene that undermines both the reading of Constabarbus as the quintessence of chivalric or traditional honour and a residual seventeenth-century discourse of honour that lauded
a more medieval or chivalric notion of what it meant to be an honourable man. In
doing so, Cary enters both the seventeenth-century discourse of honour and a budding
dramatic tradition of mocking the chivalric idea of single combat that would last
throughout the Renaissance and well into the Restoration.  

The very idea of the duel between Constabarus and Silleus is, in terms of
Renaissance norms and morals, ridiculous. What we have is an adulterer challenging
the legal and proper husband, whom he has cuckolded, to a duel over the honour of
the adulterous wife. Constabarus has been dishonoured by Silleus, and if a duel is to be
fought it should, by rights, be Constabarus who is the challenger. There even existed, in
Sir William Segar’s 1602 treatise *Honour, military and ciuill*, a mandate for Constabarus’s
right to challenge Silleus for, according to Segar, “who is so impudent as will deny that
if inury be done, or the goods or honour of other men be taken, but hee from whom the
dame was taken is iustly caused to become an enemie?” (4). Silleus, in committing
adultery with Salome, has taken both Constabarus’s honour and, in Judean and
Renaissance law, his property. Yet it is Silleus who issues the challenge. The
unbelievability of this situation is compounded when Constabarus claims he cannot
fight for Salome’s good name since he has “vow’d” and “vows must unbroken be”
(2.2.292). Constabarus’s wedding vows, it seems, have been superseded by his new  

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4For an example of this interpretation of Constabarus see Laurie J. Shannon’s
“The Tragedy of Mariam: Cary’s Critique of the Terms of Founding Social Discourses.”

5I wish to acknowledge and express my gratitude to Professor Jean MacIntyre
for drawing my attention to this tradition and for sharing her research and manuscript
with me.
oath not to protect the name of his scheming wife.⁶

According to Segar, the reason why so many seventeenth-century men lacked honour was that “the greatest number of men, are not well informed what Vertue meaneth” (208). Segar goes on to correct this lack of understanding by asserting that “Vertue is a good habite, and true perfection of reason.” (208). This virtue can be discerned in a man when he exhibits justice, temperance or modesty and, most importantly, fortitude (208). Thus, Constabarus, though not honourable in the chivalric sense of the word, since he fails to wreak revenge upon Silleus, is honourable in his extraordinary exercise of reason. Constabarus will not fight with his wife’s lover since

For her, I pity thee enough already.

For her, I will not mangle thee:

A woman with a heart so most unsteady

Will of herself sufficient torture be. (2.4.313-16)

The cuckolded husband has reasoned that loving Salome will be punishment enough for Silleus. Constabarus, moreover, offers a list of causes that are just:

I prithee give me some other quarrel ground

To find beginning: rail against my name,

Or strike me first, or let some scarlet wound

Inflame my courage, give me words of shame;

⁶Both Cynthia Herrup and Richard Cust, in several different studies, have done extensive work on slander cases in early modern England. Several of the cases that they analyze and elucidate are ones in which husbands have brought slander cases before the courts after their wives’ chastity or fidelity has been abrogated. Herrup’s most recent study, A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, is particularly useful in the exploration of slander cases involving accusations of unchastity.
Do thou our Moses's sacred laws disgrace,
Deprave our nation, do me some despite. (2.4.301-06)

Constabarus provides Cary's readers with an encapsulated version of the causes for
dishonour: disparaging a man's name, a physical attack, mocking one's religion or
nationality. Yet, Constabarus sees the loss of his wife as neither shame nor dishonour,
and fights only when Silleus finally calls him a coward.

Here Cary challenges the residual seventeenth-century ideas of chivalric
honour. Constabarus does not take revenge though, even according to Segar, the garter
king of arms, he has the right to do so. Rather, he finally fights when he no longer has a
choice, when his very masculinity is at stake. Even then Constabarus knows how to
behave with temperance, modesty and reason. He refuses to kill Silleus when he has
the chance, and even takes the Arabian king to his home in order to nurse him back to
health. Constabarus is a soldier; he has swung his "sword with daring valiancy, /
Amongst the faint Arabians" (4.2.343-44), but Cary allows him to avoid the paradox of
honour that soldiers must face; Constabarus knows how to behave in peace as well as
in war, and he chooses not to kill, off the battlefield, a man he would have happily slain
"At the Arabian battle th' other day" (4.2.342).

Significantly, Cary follows this strange duel scene between Constabarus and his
Arabian foe with the Chorus's speech at the end of act two. The Chorus, immediately
after Constabarus vows to "ope [his] bosom" to Silleus (2.4.397), interjects with its
observations that

To hear a tale with ears prejudice,

It spoils the judgement, and corrupts the sense:
That human error, given to every state,

Is greater enemy to innocence.

It: makes us foolish, heady, rash, unjust,

It makes us never try before we trust. (2.4.401-06)

While the function of the Chorus is to comment upon the entire act, and thus this speech has often been interpreted to refer to the rumour of Herod's death, its placement directly following the duel scene serves to foreground Cary's thematic concern with honour as the ability to control one's passions. Silleus has heard a "tale" regarding Constabarus' "slander of [Salome's] unspotted name" (4.2.297), and his reaction has been a rash challenge to a duel that he has no business making. The result of this combat is his being wounded and his honour reduced, particularly since he is the Arabian king and the victor, Constabarus, is not of royal blood. In this chivalric exhibition, Silleus is indeed an "enemy to innocence" as he is challenging the wronged husband of an adulterous wife. Silleus is carried off the stage by his enemy, his valour compromised, his cause unjust, and with the looming threat of a fainting spell, for Constabarus' final line is one of concern for Silleus: "Thy loss of blood I fear will make thee faint" (2.4.400).

Margaret Cavendish, like Cary, warns of rash judgement as a cause for dishonour. Cavendish's work, and particularly Poems and Fancies, consistently opposes the violence inherent in the honour code, advocating instead, like Cary's Chorus, a masculine honour code based on peace, moderation and control of one's passions. A close examination of this work reveals that it is, in part, a response to the conflicts within Cavendish's cultural context of intense civil strife; Cavendish's opposition to
violence is based upon her experience as a woman who lived, and wrote, through the English Civil War. Cavendish links political peace to honour in "A Dialogue betwixt Anger and Patience." Patience tells Anger that not only does the inability to control his passions have physical consequences, it also dulls the senses and makes one inarticulate:

Anger why are you so hot, and fiery red?
Or else so pale, as if you were quite dead?
Joynts seem unset, Flesh shaken, and Nerves grow slack,
Your Spirits all disturb'd, your Senses lack,
Your tongue doth move, but not a plain word speak,
Or else words flow so thick, like Torrents great. (87)

Anger responds by ridiculing Patience, claiming that anger is righteous when "stung with wrong" (87). Patience, however, strengthens this argument by claiming that anger is caused by hasty reactions to the passions and, more important, it leads to dishonesty:

Alas it is for some supposed wrong:
Sometimes you have no ground to build upon.
Suspition is deceitfull, runs about,
And, for Truth, it oft takes wrong, no doubt.
If you take False-hood up, nere search them through.
You do a wrong to Truth, and yourself too. (87)

Patience explains that though Anger is correct in arguing that wrongs must not be

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7For readability and convenience, and because many of Cavendish's poems have fewer than ten lines, all references are to page number.
ignored, a hasty reaction leads to miscarriages of justice. Patience relates control over
one’s passions, which leads to a calm seeking of redress rather than a “hot” reaction, to
the honourable action of protecting the innocent:

If I take time, I clearly then can see,
To view the Cause, and seek for remedy.
If I have wrong, my selfe I well may right,
But I do wrong, if Innocence I strike. (87)

But Anger argues that Patience’s slow reaction to wrongs has ruined its reputation;
Patience is viewed by society as without sense. According to Anger, Patience is too dull
to know when it is being offended:

Most of the world do think you have no Sense,
Because not angry, nor take no Offence.
When I am thought right wise, and of great Merit,
Heroik, Valorous, and of greater Spirit. (87-88)

Anger believes it is the more “Heroik” and “Valorous” or, in other words, the more
honourable, because of its violent reaction to offence. Patience, however, gets the last
word in this poem for it replies that Anger is “mad” and that no one will “care for your
great brags” (88). Patience offers Anger some advice, and in the closing lines of the
poem Cavendish makes it clear that for her honour is not won in war or violence:

Let me give councell, Anger, take’t not ill,
That I do offer you my Patience still.
For you in danger live still all your life,
And Mischief do, when you are hot in Strife. (89)
Patience, in the end, is patient with even Anger itself, and hence it avoids a life of
"danger" that bespeaks not honour, but rather "Mischief." One can easily imagine this
poem being spoken by the Chorus at the end of act two of Cary's play. The message in
the poem applies to all the characters in Mariam and could have been delivered in the
duel scene with Constabarus speaking Patience's part while Silleus takes Anger's lines.

Cavendish, like Cary's Chorus who avers that "The fairest action of our human
life / Is scorning to revenge an injury" (4.Chorus.629-30), speaks out against the
violence that is an inherent part of the masculine honour code, including the violence
that takes place when revenge, an integral part of the discourse of honour, is the
motivating factor. It is important to remember that Cavendish writes within the context
of the English Civil War in which her brother was killed, she and her husband exiled,
and her mother's tomb desecrated, the bones strewn wildly about the churchyard.
Cavendish's anti-violent stance, then, can be easily interpreted as directed as well
toward the violent responses that led to the Civil War, and in this stance Cavendish
comments upon the political events of her time. There is, nevertheless, scholarly debate
regarding whether Cavendish can be considered a political commentator. Much
Cavendish scholarship disputes her contribution to political and feminist thought in
the seventeenth century. As Karen Raber points out, "Margaret Cavendish is a difficult
playwright for critics, feminist or otherwise, to deal with" ("Our Wits" 464). Catherine
Gallagher, Cavendish's most prominent critic, has argued against reading Cavendish's
work as a political discourse or as participating in the world of politics. For Gallagher,
Cavendish uses images of absolute monarchy to create a world "isolated and complete
unto herself" (137). Gallagher argues that later female writers of the seventeenth
century, although they "retained Cavendish's stress on the autotelic woman but removed her from the vortex of solopsistic regression," were constrained to free "woman's sovereign self from the complete political and social isolation in which Cavendish had placed her" (144). Sandra Sherman, likewise, argues that Cavendish dissociates herself "from...intertextuality" (184); according to Sherman she is "outside discourse" (207) and thus rejects the political and social realities of her time, choosing instead to create an autonomous mental realm in which she herself can claim the authority of authorship.

More recent scholarship, however, has moderated the work of Gallagher and Sherman. Jay Stevenson, in his article "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," discovers Cavendish's participation with, and contributions to, the philosophical discourse of the seventeenth century and further argues that Cavendish engages in political discussions in her work when she "uses atoms to explain, rather than to criticize, such political problems as war and revolution without taking sides as she would have had she incorporated moral values into her cosmology" (535). While Cavendish's Royalist politics, so clear in her work, make it difficult to perceive her as not "taking sides," Stevenson's point that she uses atomist theory to discuss politics is a good one. Karen Raber, too, has demonstrated Cavendish's participation in her culture and in her political milieu by illustrating the way in which Cavendish uses her work to restore her husband's diminished honour, belittled by his so-called poor handling of the military campaign at Marston Moor and his subsequent flight to France. Raber speculates that the reason Cavendish's publishing career was supported by her husband was precisely that her work did much to invigorate his tarnished reputation.
and that in doing so "she constructs a mutually affirming dialogue between herself and her husband" which can be expanded into the world of politics when this dialogue becomes, by extension, one "between herself and a displaced, defeated English aristocracy" ("Our Wits" 493). While it is true that Cavendish uses her writing to participate in the cultural codes of her time—in the discourses of philosophy and of honour, she also uses masculine honour codes to enter into the discourse of that other very masculine world—the world of politics.

The association between writing, politics and honour is made explicit in Poems and Fancies. From the onset Cavendish forges this link when she writes "To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies" to "Condemne" her "not as a dishonour to your Sex, for setting forth this work" (sig. A3), and Cavendish further makes the connection between writing and politics when she acknowledges that

I shall be censur'd by my owne Sex; and Men will cast a smile of scorne
upon my Book, because they think thereby, Women incroach too much
upon their Prerogatives; for they hold Books as their Crowne, and the
Sword as their Sceptre, by which they rule, and govern. (sig. A3"

Writing, for men, is a political tool, and it is their books that allow them to create a system of politics whereby only men may "rule and govern."

Notions of kingship, like the ones explored in Cary's look at tyranny and absolutism, converge in the seventeenth century to form a complicated and unstable labyrinth of political honour, itself reflective of a complicated and unstable political system. For Margaret Cavendish, the aristocratic and royalist Duchess of Newcastle, who had not only lived through the English Civil War but also spent several years in
exile as a result of it, this exploration of politics took the form of faction, sedition and
danger. In her four line poem “What Atomes causes Sicknesse,” Cavendish states her
opinion that the body’s ills can be related to the concept of Civil War:

    When sicke the Body is, and well by fits,
    Atomes are fighting, but none the better gets.
    If they agree, then Health returns again,
    And so shall live as long a Peace remain. (15)

Cavendish later becomes more specific in her exploration of the disease in the body
politic in her two short poems “Of the Animal Spirits” and “The War of those Spirits.”
In “Of the Animal Spirits” Cavendish attempts to define “Those Spirits which we
Animal doe call.” They are the spirits which “In the body Kingdoms may divide, / As
Nerves, Muscles, Veines, and Arteries wide” (104). Cavendish goes one step further
when she likens the strife of these spirits to specific diseases in her poem “The War of
Those Spirits”:

    Sometimes these Animal Creatures they doe jarre,
    And then those Kingdoms all are up in war,
    And when they fight we Cramps, Convulsions feele,
    Gouts in our toes, and Chillblaines in our heele. (104-05)

For Cavendish civil strife in the body politic causes pain and disease.

    While Cary uses the family to create a microcosm of the world of politics,
Cavendish creates her microcosmic body politic in the human body. In her “The
description of their World, which is the Body,” Cavendish explains that

    The Arteries are the Ocean deep, and wide,
The bloud and the Sea which ebbs, and flows in Tide:
The Nerves great continent they travell through,
Muscles are Cities, which they traffic to. (105)

This world, however, is not without its dangers to its travellers. In “Peace” Cavendish argues that “When there is peace, and all do well agree” then “through the Nerves they travell without feare” (105). Cavendish reiterates this idea in “Similizing the Body to Many Countries” in which she assigns each body part a country. In this poem Britain becomes the liver, France, Italy and Spain the nerves, and the heart and head represent the East and West Indies respectively. More significantly, Cavendish warns, in the final line of the poem, that “Life” which passes through this body “great danger finds” (105). Life as part of a community, for Cavendish, is dangerous and fearful, and the only way that all will be well is when peace reigns within and between the governments of countries.

Moreover, Cavendish links political peace to honour in “a Dialogue betwixt the Body, and the Mind” when she has the body complain that

If I ’scape drowning in the Watry Maine,
Yet in great mighty Battels I am slaine.
By your Ambition I am forc’d to fight,
When many Wounds upon my Body light.
For you care not, for you a Fame may have
To live, if I be buried in a Grave. (60)

The body complains that it is Mind’s slave and must fight because of Mind’s ambition, and in so doing advocates a peace and control of the passions that lead to war. Mind, it
seems, is indifferent to Body’s suffering since it will live on in reputation or fame.

Cavendish’s use of masculine honour codes to discuss politics is most clear in her
“Dialogue betwixt Peace, and War.” Here War’s boast that it is “A Mint of true
Honour, that Valour coines” is undermined by Peace’s assertion that peace is a “Nurse
to Religion, and Comfort to all Hearts” as well as “the Guardian, which keeps Vertue
safe” (91). This Virtue is female chastity, for “Under my Roofe security shee hath” (91);
Peace is a state in which people’s hearts can be comforted and in which women can be
safe. War, on the other hand,

      Makes the Vulgar Multitude to drink

      In at the Eare the foule, or Muddy Sinck

      Of Factions Tales, by which they dizzy grow,

      That the cleare sight of Truth they do not know. (90)

Honour, then, cannot exist in War where honesty and truth are “dizzy” as a result of
War’s factious “Tales” being whispered in their “Eare.” More to the point, Cavendish
here plays upon notions of masculine honour to advocate a political policy of peace in
England. War erroneously believes that honour is to be found in heroic action, and
mocks Peace for cowardice and idleness for Peace would live “in a poore cell” and
sleep life away “If [sleep] but keep thee safe” (91). Peace, however, maintains that it
performs the true duty of honour by protecting the virtue of women, for it is only in
Peace’s house that Vertue, identified by one of Cavendish’s rare uses of a gender
specific pronoun, “shee,” can have “security.”

This desire for peace is reflected in Cavendish’s politics. Although Cavendish
ostensibly saw herself, as a woman, excluded from politics, she embeds in her poetry
an expression of her own political opinions mediated through her discussions of
masculine honour codes. In her 1664 Sociable Letters Cavendish bitterly complains that

As for the matter of Governments, we Women understand them not, yet
if we did, we are educated from intermeddling therewith, and almost
from being subject thereunto; we are not tied, not bound to State or
Crown; we are not made Citizens of the Commonwealth, we hold no
Offices, nor bear we any authority therein; we are accounted neither
Useful in Peace, nor Serviceable in War; and if we be not citizens of the
Commonwealth, I know no reason we should be given subjects to the
Commonwealth: and the truth is, we are no Subjects. (27)

This complaint regarding the ways in which women are prohibited from the political
world is itself a profound political statement. Cavendish’s “we are no Subjects” is a
highly ambiguous statement, and while it can be read as a lament at female exclusion
from politics, it is equally a statement of rejection: Cavendish states that if women are
not extended the rights and privileges of citizenship, then they are not responsible for
its duties and loyalties either. Nor does Cavendish’s complaint keep her from making
the political recommendation that “the commons should be kept like Cattel in Inclosed
Grounds, and whencesoever any did Break out of their Bounds they should be
Impounded” (Sociable Letters 137). These opinions are consequences of her political
belief in absolutism, a political concept that Cary vilifies in her representation of
Herod. But for Cavendish absolutism leads to the avoidance of factionalism; for
Cavendish there can be only one ruler, and her aesthetic, her work, and the events of
her life demonstrate that for her that ruler is the legitimate Stuart king.
Cavendish makes her royalist politics, and her gender politics, clear in one of the final poems of the collection; in “A Battle between Honour and Dishonour” both combatants are female, and these two women will decide the outcome of the English Civil War. Dishonour, of course, has won since Honour, who had once lived “with great applause” (when “all did obey her, none did break her laws”), now “With grief and sorrow” complains “How that her sons and servants all are slaine” (178). In this poem Honour is allegorized in the form of a woman and a mother; Dishonour, too, is female, and the masculine honour code, epitomized by military battle, becomes, in the end, a matter for the women to decide. Cavendish, having begun her volume of poetry by using the masculine codes of honour to create a space for herself in which to comment on politics, ends the volume by returning to the military metaphor with, as in her address to “All Noble, and Worthy Ladies,” women doing battle in order to gain the right to seek honour for themselves. And, whereas in her appeal to women that begins the volume Cavendish creates a parallel between writing and the ability to govern, in “A Battle between Honour and Dishonour” she allows women to govern absolutely; Cavendish has, as author, granted political power to all of her sex.

Cavendish nevertheless acknowledges that there exist differences in male and female honour in her “Epistle to Mistress Toppe” that appears in the dedicatory section of Poems and Fancies. In this letter Cavendish seeks to justify her decision to publish her work, explaining that she is not

ashamed of my simplicity, for Nature tempers not every Braine alike;

but tis a shame to deny the Principles of their Religion, to break the

Lawes of a well-governed Kingdome, to disturbe Peace, to be unnaturall,
to break the Union and Amity of honest Freinds, for a Man to be a Coward, for a Woman to be a Whore. (sig. A4")

Cavendish anticipates Addison's summary, in which it is dishonourable for a man to be a coward or a woman to be a whore, and echoes Constabarus's list of honourable reasons to engage in duelling (which, interestingly lacks the constraints against the whorishness that he refuses to defend with his sword), but Cavendish goes on to claim that "the reason why I summon up these Vices, is, to let my Freinds know, or rather to remember them, that my Book is none of them" (sig. A4"). An interface between male and female honour exists in this epistle as Cavendish ungenders her writing; she lists a set of "vices" common to both sexes, proceeds to gender the vices in cowardly men and whorish women, and finally excuses her writing altogether when she states that her book is "none of them;" her work is honourable regardless of her gender, for it is genderless—neither cowardly nor whorish.

Cavendish further blurs the boundary between male and female honour when she depicts women as warriors by creating a military metaphor in defence of her own desire to write:

for I know Womens Tongues are as sharp, as two-edged Swords, and wound as much, when they are anger'd. And in this Battell may your Wit be quick and your Speech ready, and your Arguments so strong, as to beat them out of the Feild of Dispute. So shall I get Honour, and Reputation by your Favours; otherwise I may chance to be cast into the Fire. But if I burn, I desire to die your Martyr. (sig. A3")

Honour, then, even for women, is won by battle, and Cavendish offers herself as a
martyr to a female honour that is couched in the language of masculine, military honour codes. Although Cavendish will claim that politics are out of the female sphere—she has chosen to write this poetry instead of busying herself "out of the Sphere of our Sex, as in Politicks of State" (sig. A5)—her earlier parallel between writing and governing belies her blithe defence that she writes in order to keep herself from interfering in politics.

Cary, too, ungenders her writing, but her chosen method is much different from Cavendish’s. While Cavendish’s characters, particularly in the allegorized dialogues, are either not gender identified or are unexpectedly female—Honour and Dishonour, for example—Cary’s characters are definitely identified as either male or female. Yet Cary, like Cavendish, blurs the lines between male and female honour; she draws parallels between the behaviour of men and women in this play, allows an extraordinary amount of political and personal power to a woman in Salome’s manipulations of the king, and, again like Cavendish, embeds a discourse on the right of women to seek honour by writing within her text.

Several previous scholars working on Mariam—Ferguson, Miller, Shannon and Straznicky among them—have recognized Cary’s exploration of women’s right to write and publish in the seventeenth century in the thematic concern with public speech throughout the play. According to Bennett, "The fact that a woman chooses to begin her play with her heroine musing upon the significance of public utterance is highly suggestive of the metadramatic possibilities of the text" (299). Likewise, Ferguson links the play with the mode of "meta-drama"; Mariam, according to Ferguson, is a play which is itself about the act of playwriting further complicated by the dissent against
the parallels between loose speech and loose morals of women in this period. Others have pointed out that Cary’s choice of genre itself is a forum for dissent. Andrew Hiscock, for example, writes that Senecan tragedy “overtly foregrounded intellectual and cultural debate, stressing the exploration of political doctrine and dissent” (98).

Betty Travitsky concurs when she argues that Senecan tragedy provides a site in which Cary can contrast the legal definition of *feme covert*, which stated that married women were “covered” or the property of their husbands, with the right of women to speak their political opinions publicly. Moreover, Margaret Ezell has brilliantly argued that “by confusing ‘public’ with ‘publication’ we have misinterpreted the manuscript activities of these early women writers” (257). According to Ezell, it is twentieth-century scholarship that has labelled men’s manuscript circulation as “coterie” while women’s unperformed drama has been referred to with the more negative “closet” drama (249).

“Closet” or “coterie,” Cary’s curiously published and (perhaps) unperformed play, like Cavendish’s works, did have an intellectual readership and there existed a complex social relationship between Elizabeth Cary, her work, and her social context.8 Barbara Lewalski has neatly encapsulated this complex relationship and its impact on contemporary values when she argues that Cary’s play explores the claims of conscience, the analogy of domestic and state tyranny, the

8Marta Straznicky, in particular, explores this relationship in her article “‘Profane neo-Stoical Paradoxes’: The Tragedy of Mariam and Sidnean Closet Drama.” Here Straznicky explores and elucidates the relationship between Cary and the Sidnean circle, presided over by Mary Herbert, and argues that examining the “neo-Stoical discourse” of this play “reveals a woman author who is anything but domesticated, a woman author who in fact shares a politically charged cultural literacy with the intellectual aristocracy of her day” (109).
powers of kings and husbands, the rights and duties of subjects and
wives, the justification for resistance to tyrants, the role of counselors
and favorites, and, most interesting, the possibility and power of
nonviolent or passive resistance. (194)

What is absent from Lewalski’s list, however, is Cary’s exploration of gendered honour
codes, and the way in which Cary uses her drama to participate in the seventeenth-
century discourses that attempt to understand a complex and unstable system of
masculine honour that is further complicated by the introduction of gender
(in)difference.

One of the most important aspects of the seventeenth-century discourse of
honour was the debate about who had the power to bestow honour. James I’s Basilikon
Doron argues that only the monarch has the power to raise his loyal subjects; the Earl of
Essex had a habit of knighting his friends without Elizabeth’s consent; and Shakespeare
raises Othello in a meritocratic environment. Middleton’s Fat bishop is a sycophant
who runs from side to side seeking the one with the most power to grant honourable
status and its more material benefits. Iago and Salome attempt a type of self-granting
honour that is not dependent on any authority except their own. The vanquished
Cavalier poets maintain their honour through their loyalty and association with the
rightful, though deposed, king. Cary, too, explores the power to grant honour, and
further complicates this debate by elucidating women’s power to “lift” men into
positions of honour and title.

Indeed, Herod has become king of Judea, according to Alexandra, because her
father’s “too ready hand / Did lift this Idumean from the dust” (1.2.95-96). Herod’s rise
to power also owes much to his marriage to Mariam, as do the royal titles granted to both Salome and Pheroras, as Mariam points out in her tirade against Salome: “Though I thy brother’s face had never seen, / My birth thy baser birth so far excell’d, / I had to both of you the princess been” (1.3.232-34). Salome, in turn, has raised the status of Constabar, and as Mariam does to her, Salome uses this knowledge against her husband when she fumes: “Did I for this uprear thy low estate?” (1.6.397). Salome herself will be raised by Sileus if her plans are successful, for though she claims that it is “not for glory I thy love accept” (1.5.357), Sileus has promised that “Thou shalt, fair Salome, command as much / As if the royal ornament were thine” (1.5.349-50).

Pheroras, whose status has been raised by his brother’s marriage to Mariam, credits Herod alone with his increase in honour, for Herod “did raise my head” (2.1.25) but is now preventing him from, in turn, further elevating the status of his slave-girl lover, Graphina. Graphina has already expressed gratitude to Pheroras whose “hand hath lifted me from lowest state” (2.1.57). Both men and women have the power to grant honour to others, and Cary’s examination of this power explores the marriage negotiations which demonstrate that raising the status of men is as much a product of female connections as it is of loyalty, friendship and allegiance to other men. Cary makes this point clear when she has the Chorus, at the end of act one, elucidate this honour gained through other efforts as a false honour:

Those minds that wholly dote upon delight,

Except they only joy in inward good,

Still hope at last to hop upon the right,

And so from sand they leap in loathsome mud.
Fond wretches, seeking what they cannot find,
For no content attends a wavering mind.

If wealth they do desire, and wealth attain,
Then wondrous fain would they to honour leap:
[If] mean degree they do in honour gain,
They would but wish a little higher step.

Thus step to step, and wealth to wealth they add,
Yet cannot all their plenty make them glad.

Yet oft we see that some in humble state,
Are cheerful, pleasant, happy, and content:
When those indeed that are of higher state,
With vain additions do their thoughts torment.

Th’one would to his mind his fortune bind,
Th’other to his fortune frames his mind. (1.Chorus.493-510)

While this speech is seemingly about seeking “variety” (it is, on the surface, a
castigation of Mariam’s inability to know what she wants) beneath the Chorus’s
condemnation of Mariam lies an astute analysis of masculine honour codes. The
masculine pronoun used in the final couplet of stanza three belies its interpretation as a
tirade against Mariam’s vacillating feelings for Herod. Moreover, although the final
two stanzas refer directly to Mariam’s “expectation of variety” (1.Chorus.518) readers
already know that Mariam, unlike Salome, is not seeking a change in husbands; she has
been unable “To learn to love another than my lord” (1.1.28). Rather, the Chorus’s discussion of wishing to “leap” beyond what one already has is, within the play, a comment upon the raising of Herod, Pheroras and Constabarus through marriage and, within the social context of the play, an analysis of marriage negotiations that barter wealth for title in a rapidly changing seventeenth-century class system.⁹

Honour is, in effect, a behavioural code, and Cary uses the behaviour of her characters both to elucidate and to challenge seventeenth-century ideals of what constitutes honourable behaviour in men and in women. From the beginning Cary’s titular hero behaves like a man. In her opening soliloquy Mariam equates herself with Caesar:

How oft have I with public voice run on
To censure Rome’s last hero for deceit:
Because he wept when Pompey’s life was gone,
Yet when he liv’d, he thought his name too great. (1.1.1-4).

Mariam has, however, learned “by self-experience” (1.1.9) to feel what Caesar felt; she has become “manly” in her emotional behaviour. Salome, too, behaves like a man, and although her personal honour system is perverse or non-existent, she has murdered one husband because the law prohibits her from divorce, and wishes only to be able to behave like her brother, Herod, in putting off a spouse of whom she has grown tired.

⁹Lawrence Stone’s The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641 is still one of the most detailed studies of the class conflicts of early modern England, and Mervyn James’s Society, Politics and Culture also discusses the rise of the middle class in this period. Susan Amussen’s An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England builds upon the works of Stone, James and others by including an analysis of the relationship between gender and class in this period, with particular attention to marriage negotiations.
Significantly, both Caesar and Herod have been raised in honourable status by their
behaviour: Caesar’s leadership of Rome came with Pompey’s death and Herod has
cemented his claim to the Judean throne by repudiating Doris and marrying Mariam.
By contrast, Mariam has been “censur’d” for her “public voice,” and Salome’s
reputation has been ruined by her dishonourable and unchaste behaviour.

Not only do women behave like men in this play, but men also behave like
women, and Cary cleverly demonstrates that though Mariam is a virtuous heroine and
Herod an evil tyrant, there are many similarities between the two. Herod, like Mariam,
is conflicted in the way he feels about his spouse. Mariam’s soliloquy begins the play
by stating her complex feelings of love and hate for Herod; Herod, upon having
Mariam arrested for treason, laments:

   Oh, now the grief returns into my heart,
   And pulls me piecemeal: love and hate do fight:
   And now hath love acquired the greater part,
   Yet now hath hate affection conquer’d quite. (4.4.243-46)

Herod, like Mariam, is torn by his mixed emotions regarding his spouse. Herod, also
like Mariam, comes, even within his madness, to recognize the part he played in his
own misfortune. Mariam, on her way to execution, ruminates on what has befallen her;
she realizes that she has erroneously depended on her feminine beauty and has
underestimated Salome’s power. Still, Mariam takes part of the blame upon herself:

   Am I the Mariam that presum’d so much,
   And deem’d my face must needs preserve my breath?
   Ay, I it was that thought my beauty such,
As it alone could countermand my death.
Now death will teach me: he can pale as well
A cheek of roses as a cheek less bright,
And dim an eye whose shine doth most excel,
As soon as one that casts a meaner light.
Had not myself against myself conspir’d,
No plot, no adversary from without
Could Herod’s love from Mariam have retir’d. (4.8.525-35)

Mariam has not only “conspir’d” against herself by mishandling Herod, but she has
“presum’d” her beauty would save her from Herod’s wrath. Herod, too, has
considered his part in his own misery, for Herod

had but one inestimable jewel,

And therefore may I curse myself as cruel:
Twas broken by a blow myself did strike.
I gaz’d thereon and never thought me bless’d,

But when on it my dazzl’d eye might rest,
A precious mirror made by wondrous art,
I priz’d it ten times dearer than my crown,
And laid it up fast folded in my heart:
Yet I in sudden choler cast it down,

And pash’d it all to pieces: ’twas no foe
That robb’d me of it; no Arabian host,
Nor no Armenian guide hath us’d me so:
But Herod's wretched self hath Herod cross'd. (5.1.119-32)

Herod's speech bears a remarkable resemblance to Mariam's. Both husband and wife blame themselves, in part, for what has happened to them; Herod and Mariam both couch their discussion of their own behaviour in terms of an interior "foe" or "adversary" who has caused this misfortune rather than an outside force. Cary reinforces this parallel when, in addition to the similar language and content of the two speeches, she has Herod describe his wife as "A precious mirror made by wondrous art"; when Herod looks at Mariam, he can see himself.

Male characters, too, behave like other male characters, and women emulate other women. Salome, as we have seen, "twits" Constabarus with his birth in much the same way as Mariam has harangued her. Alexandra and Doris are both mothers seeking to avenge their displaced sons.¹⁰ Pheroras wishes to emulate his brother in choosing his own wife regardless of consequences, and the similarities between Josephus, Constabarus and Silleus are made clear when Constabarus exclaims, "I was Silleus, and not long ago / Josephus then was Constabarus now" (1.6.461-62). Cary's linking of behaviour, and desired behaviour, between genders in Mariam serves to undermine gender difference; she equates male and female desires and female and male methods of obtaining those desires. In so doing, she collapses the boundaries between what is honourable male and female behaviour; in this tragedy men and women are not much different, and the world cannot then be easily or neatly divided by gender difference in order to exclude women from "masculine" dialogues.

¹⁰Naomi Miller's article explores this parallel in great detail, and draws further parallels between Doris's and Mariam's positions as mothers who seek title and honour for their male offspring.
Both Cary and Cavendish develop characters who challenge the notion of
difference between male and female honour, political participation and merit. Both
create characters who are both good and bad, virtuous and non-virtuous, and of both
genders. Constabarus is faithful and loyal, his wife is not. Honour and Dishonour are
both female, yet display masculine military prowess. Mariam, like Constabarus, is
constant in her chastity though her husband pitilessly casts off his first wife when he
sees Mariam. All of the activities of the men and women in these works have political
ramifications. Moreover, both women subtly discuss the idea of public speech and, by
extension, public writing in their work; if men and women are not so different, why
should women not write and publish as men do? And, in fact, women do write and
publish in much the same way as men.

Cavendish’s and Cary’s works not only explore, within their thematic concerns,
the dialogue between male and female honour codes, particularly political power and
honour, they also participate in a literary culture and context with male-authored texts.
The parallels, both in characterization and thematic threads, between Cary’s Mariam
and Shakespeare’s Othello have often been noted by critics.\(^{11}\) Mariam’s crisis of
conscience, as both Hiscock and Ferguson have pointed out, is analogous to
Shakespeare’s portrayal of Hamlet. Cavendish includes in Poems and Fancies a prose

\(^{11}\)Of the many articles that explore this connection, Kim F. Hall’s “Beauty and
the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender” and Theresa D. Kemp’s “The
Family is a Little Commonwealth: Teaching Mariam and Othello in a Special-Topics
Course on Domestic England” are most useful in that they provide, along with an
analysis of the similarities between the two plays, a pedagogical model for teaching the
plays in juxtaposition.
piece, entitled "A Circle Squared in Prose," 12 in which she combines the ideas of truth, honour and politics:

Honesty is the Circle without Ends, or by-respects, but is honest for
Honesties sake. But to square this Circle, it is very difficult, and hard for
Honesty to take part with foure sides without Faction: for when there is
siding there's Faction, and where Factions are, there is Partiality, and
where Partiality is, there is Injustice, and where Injustice is, Wrong, and
where Wrong is, Truth is not, and where Truth is not, Honesty cares not
to live. (49)

Here Cavendish echoes, consciously or unconsciously, Thomas Hobbes's articulation, in his 1651 political treatise Leviathan, of the relationship between honour, truth and politics. For Hobbes, "to believe, to trust, to rely on another, is to honour him; signe of opinion of his virtue and power. To distrust, or not to believe, is Dishonour" (153).

Hobbes makes his point absolutely clear when he writes that "Honourable is whatsoever possession, action, or quality, is an argument and sign of Power" (155) and that "Honour consisteth onely in the opinion of Power" (156). Honour, then, cannot live without truth, and, according to both Cavendish and Hobbes, truth cannot exist in a situation that includes faction or partiality. Both Cary and Cavendish, too, explore the notions of kingship, tyranny, absolutism, and honourable disobedience that form a significant part of the discourse of honour in the seventeenth century, particularly in the works of Shakespeare and in Middleton’s A Game at Chess. Moreover, in

12 Although Cavendish’s Poems and Fancies is primarily a book of verse, it does contain several prose works. In this particular piece she explains, in the margin, that "because my Lines are too long for rimes, there-put them in prose" (48).
representing a neo-Stoical concern for fortitude and Christian patience in Mariam, Constabarus and many of Cavendish's allegorized characters, Cary anticipates and Cavendish articulates the major concern of the Cavalier Poets of the English Civil Wars as well as takes up a tradition most apparent in the Sidnean circle, a literary milieu which included both male and female authors such as Fulke Greville and Mary Herbert.

Both Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish, then, enter into, and influence, the unstable seventeenth-century discourse of masculine and feminine honour, particularly as those codes of honour concern political participation. In addition, both women attempt to collapse gendered boundaries of honour as they create works that focus on the similarities between men and women and between male and female desires and behaviour. For Cary, and especially for Cavendish, this blurring of boundaries is a strategic rhetorical device that allows them to enter into the political discourse of their time, and to proffer political advice to their personal friends, their readers and their monarch (to whom both women dedicated their work). This strategy, in turn, enables both women to criticize implicitly the political policy of prohibiting women from obtaining "public voice" in the seventeenth-century. That is not to say that taking the complicated and unstable discourse of honour as a topic of exploration is a gendered strategy; Cary and Cavendish both have male counterparts in the use of this device to discuss politics and to participate in their cultural milieu. Rather, these female authors' use of honour as a site in which to enter the political and philosophical discourses of the seventeenth century opens up a dialogue between their work and the male-authored texts of their period. If joining a political and philosophical dialogue, if
desiring a space in which to offer one's political opinion, and if successfully creating
that space, is masculine, then seventeenth-century women are indeed "now
transformed to men" (Mariam 1.6.421).
CONCLUSION

The discourse of honour has been, and is, a complicated and pervasive discussion. Although the word "honour" carried with it a wide variety of connotations in the seventeenth century, as it does in ours, the code of honour can be seen as a continuum. At one end is an ancient, chivalric honour with its emphasis on violence, rank, and allegiance to a single lord. At the other lies a more politicized and moralized honour which demanded allegiance to the collective state and behaviour consistent with the individual Christian conscience. This continuum or spectrum is apparent not only in the documents extant from this period, but also in the works of fiction produced during the Renaissance. Shakespeare and his contemporaries explore the evolving honour code and, more specifically, examine the question of what constitutes an honourable man.

This question was complicated, for the honour codes had begun, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to evolve into a system that demanded political allegiance and moral rectitude. According to James, "in the sixteenth century honour was increasingly required to adapt itself to the demands of religion, and to those of the state" (320). Further, the chivalric honour codes, with their inclusion of acceptable violence in defence of one's lord, had provided a justification for rebellion in that an honourable vassal could, and should, rescue his lord from evil and corrupting influence or counsel. The more modern code of honour contained no such outlet, for "by the end of the sixteenth century, honour had become too firmly integrated into the structure of the monarchial state, under the queen, the fount of honour, for its terms to
provide an effective idiom of dissent" (James 459). The ancient honour code's emphasis on unfailing allegiance to a single lord (often the monarch in the case of noblemen) became focussed instead on allegiance to the collective lord of the state. Moreover, as John Guy points out, "whereas the word 'state' had possessed no political meaning in English history...by the second half of Elizabeth's reign it was used to signify the 'state' in the modern sense" (352). Allegiance, an important aspect of the honour code, had evolved from a feudal concept of loyalty to one's lord to a political ideal of allegiance to the state as a social entity.

In addition to this politicization of the honour codes was a moralization of the elements that constituted an honourable man. Men were told, in sermons, in tracts, and even in ballads, to examine their individual consciences to ensure that their actions were in accordance with God's word. In this way they would gain public honour. In particular, the swearing of oaths, once a clear indication of an honourable man, became an area of concern to moralists as they attempted to educate the public about elements of honour. In fact, Edmond Bicknoll asks, in his sermon A Swoord Agaynst Swearyng, "was euer any age so outrageous in othes? So blasphemous in railing? So rooted in periurie?" (3). And, although casual swearing dishonoured the swearer, it also dishonoured God by both taking his name in vain, contrary to the third Commandment, and by granting divine powers to persons or things other than God, for

if any other be taken in [God's] place, if any other be sworne by, if any other be called vpon, either for grace, to geue bessying vnto trueth, or for might of power, to reuenge falsehood. For what is that, but cleane to
forsake the Lord & to attribute omnipotency or al power & strenght to
some other. (Bicknoll 15)

Promise, then, had become casual, abused and, above all, a sign that men were given to
lying and thus felt the need for, and demanded of others, an oath for nearly every
statement (Babington 6).

Promise, nevertheless, continued to occupy an important place in the codes of
honour. It could be used in important or weighty matters to bring a necessary note of
seriousness or solemnity to an important utterance. It was the essence of honour,
making a private or internal commitment public which is, of course, the only way in
which honour, as a public code, can be recognized. The writers of this period, however,
make it clear that the use of an oath must always be in accordance with a moral
cause—one which coincides with the Christian conscience and with the word of God.

Specifically, these writers were unanimous in their belief that the oath of
vengeance was not in keeping with moral rectitude and was therefore dishonourable.
Barnaby Rich writes this belief in his 1609 treatise, Roome for a Gentleman:

Vertue alloweth a iust Reuenge, and admitteth the defense of property
and right: yet true it is, that the Law of God willeth vs to be of that
perfect patience, as not onely to endure iniurious wordes, but also
quietly to digest and put vp all other wrongs that are offered, what, or
howsoeuer. (7)

In 1630, Richard Braithwaite makes the connection between revenge and dis Honour
even more apparent when he asks if a man can “put up disgrace without observance,
or observing it, not revenge it, when his very Honour (the vitall bloud of a Gentleman)
is impeached?" (43). Braithwaite rhetorically answers this question by pointing out that no imputation can truly be said to staine a pure or undefiled soule, whose inward sinceritie (like a brazen wall) beats backe all darts of envie or calumnie; so it is not in the power of the evill to detract from the glory of the good. (43)

Thus, for Rich and for Braithwaite, to revenge is to dishonour one's self since the "chiefest honour" lies in "abasing" one's self and in "so much sleighting the applause of men, as the only aime is to have a sincere and blameless conscience in them" (Braithwaite 63-64).

It is these themes, these elements of masculine honour, that we have seen shifting, overlapping and interplaying in the literature of the first half of the seventeenth century. Shakespeare's examination of oaths and promise, of revenge and ambition in Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth, overlaps with Middleton's ambitious Black House pieces. Moreover, Middleton's exploration of the nexus between masculine honour codes and a sense of nationalism not only takes up Shakespeare's elevation of English honour in Malcolm's creation of Earls, but also anticipates the discussion of whether honour is manifest in allegiance to the monarch or the state that we have seen in the writings of the Civil War. Moreover, the urgent calls for neo-Stoic control of one's passions and the condemnation of factionalism that form the central theme of the writings of Cary and Cavendish are evident, also, in the writings of male authors of this period, particularly in Shakespeare's creation of Horatio and in Davenant's expanded character, Lady Macduff.

These works not only investigated the complex codes of masculine honour, they
both influenced those codes and were influenced by them. In fact, I have argued that literature is one of the methods of encoding honour in this period. Moreover, these writings were produced during periods of significant political upheaval in the seventeenth century, and this study has attempted to draw connections between those events and the evolution of masculine honour codes. The Essex Rebellion, the Spanish Match, the accession of a new monarch and, of course, the Civil War all had a considerable impact on the shifting emphasis of masculine honour from a chivalric and violent code to a more moral and civic system.

Indeed, the association between honour and politics is discernible in our own period, and the concepts of honour that we have seen in seventeenth-century literature are still employed in political discussion, and especially in political criticism, today. The Honourable Suzanne Tremblay, for example, stated in the Canadian House of Commons, on 20 October, 2000, that the Liberal government “has had the blackest and most dishonourable week in its history.” Ms. Tremblay was speaking with regards to the spending anomalies revealed by the Auditor General’s Report. Similarly, Time magazine, on 8 May, 2000, quotes Marisleyis Gonzalez, cousin to the famous Elian, as informing President Bill Clinton that “you do not deserve to dishonor my family like you have dishonored yours” (7), presumably a veiled reference to his illicit affair with Monica Lewinski.

The association between honour and politics, then, exists today as it did in Shakespeare’s time. It has, however, changed in subtle and nebulous ways which are now, as they always have been, difficult to grasp and to articulate; men and women today struggle, I believe, to understand what it means to be honourable in much the
same way as Renaissance men and women did. An exploration of the historical discourses of honour can, however, aid us in gaining some understanding of what honour means today. We can see, in the literature and other writings examined in this study, the seeds of an evolving system of honour that includes civic duty and moral rectitude; masculine honour codes once grounded in violent battle and revenge have now come to be applied to an American President’s infidelity.

Though the chivalric honour code did not simply disappear in the seventeenth century, and residual chivalric notions still exist today, the male honor code was evolving during the seventeenth century into a code that was both more moral, requiring Christian patience and the ability to control oneself, and more civic, requiring individuals to pledge allegiance to the collective State rather than the person of the monarch. And, although, according to J.S.A. Adamson, “when rebellion broke out in England in 1642, the political nation had been, for over a decade, obsessed with medieval precedent” (83), the nature of Civil War itself, coupled with the already inherent contradictions within the medieval honour code and the competing concepts of honour that had been circulating through the discourse of honour in this period, created “something new” in the “image of order” that helped to define what constituted an honourable man. Edmund Waller would, following the Civil War, write a poem entitled “Of the Last Verse in the Book,” and although the poem treats of old age and impending death, Waller’s final stanza encompasses the transition of honour, the threshold where chivalry met other discourses of honour, that he, along with his seventeenth-century contemporaries and predecessors, faced in the course of the English Renaissance:
The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,

Lest in new light through chinks that time has made;

Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become

As they draw near to their eternal home.

Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,

That stand upon the threshold of the new. (13-18)

The seventeenth century, I think, is a "threshold" for a shifting emphasis in the masculine honour codes. It is in this period that masculine honour codes come to mean something different in that heroic deeds and violence are no longer the determining factors of the community of honourable men. It is in this period that men and women contemplated, incorporated and examined both an honour system grounded in feudalism and one more civic and moral; seventeenth-century writers and readers were in a period of transition—they viewed "both worlds at once" in a way that we, in the twenty-first century, do not. Shakespeare and Middleton, Howell and Davenant, Cary and Cavendish stood "upon the threshold of the new" concepts of honour, and those concepts, explored in their work, provide the history of masculine and feminine honour codes of today in which duelling is unheard of, revenge is against the law, and the once unequivocal word of honour is often no more than a little white oath.
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