Early Theatre
A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama

The Politics of Sport: John Day's The Isle of Gulls

Alexandra Finn-Atkins

Volume 27, Number 1, 2024

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1112490ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.1.5001

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

McMaster University Library Press / Becker Associates

ISSN

1206-9078 (print)
2293-7609 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Finn-Atkins, A. (2024). The Politics of Sport: John Day's The Isle of Gulls. *Early Theatre*, *27*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.1.5001

Article abstract

This article explores three scenes in John Day's understudied satiric drama The Isle of Gulls, reading the royal hunt, game of bowls, and double jest as examples of a cultural phenomenon that disguises politics as recreation.

Early Theatre
27.1 (2024), 55–76
https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.1.5001

Alexandra Finn-Atkins

The Politics of Sport: John Day's *The Isle of Gulls*

This article explores three scenes in John Day's understudied satiric drama The Isle of Gulls*, reading the royal hunt, game of bowls, and double jest as examples of a cultural phenomenon that disguises politics as recreation.*

In *The Isle of Gulls* (1606), John Day foregrounds sport — in its many variations — as the primary catalyst for the dramatic plot. The duke of Arcadia, Basilius, retreats to a remote island with his wife Gynetia and his two daughters Hippolyta and Violetta. Upon arrival, Basilius announces a unique challenge — an international tournament where suitors must kidnap the princesses to win their hands in marriage (1.1.20).[1] After instructing his brother to rule in his absence, he proclaims that 'this private retirement' will lead to 'publique satisfaction' (3, 5). This announcement attracts two sets of suitors to the island. Aminter and Julio assume the guise of Lacedemonian intelligencers while their rivals, Demetrius and Lisander, assume the identities of the woodman Dorus and the Amazon Zelmane. Despite the prominent focus on sporting and competition from the play's inception, these themes have garnered surprisingly scant critical attention. This article aims to bridge this gap by contextualizing a series of overlooked sporting events — the game of bowls, the double jest, and the royal hunt — within a broader context of political jostling and courtship. Through an examination of these elements and the use of sports-related figurative language in Day's play, I demonstrate how recreations function as dynamic sites for power exchanges and feminist resistance.

Scholars often characterize this play as a reworking of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Noting how Day draws his central plot and characters from Philip Sidney's influential work, critics also highlight the playwright's innovations, including modifications in genre (from prose romance to drama) and style (from moralizing to satiric) along with an updated cast that eliminates the oracle

Alexandra Finn-Atkins (afinnatkins@sks.org) is the chair of English at The Storm King School in New York.

and invents two rogues.[2] While Sidney emphasizes the royal hunt as a major focal point, Day explores issues of female agency, rhetoric, and power through a diverse repertoire of recreations. *The Isle of Gulls* not only showcases a variety of physical games including bowling, hawking, tennis, fencing, fishing, archery, cobnut, and cherry-pit, but also encompasses rhetorical games such as gullery and scenes of jest.[3] This intricate matrix of competitions in *Gulls* marks yet another, albeit under–recognized, departure from Sidney, serving as an apt vehicle for Day's firmly feminist and political concerns.[4]

Critics who analyze the play through a political lens, particularly in relation to royal figures and statesmen, have primarily focused on its satirical elements. Reading *Gulls* as a political satire, Richard Dutton posits that Basilius, whose title underwent a transition from king to duke during printing, evokes associations with King James I. Basilius's affinity for young gentlemen and his retreat to a secluded locale for hunting accentuate this connection.[5] Engaging in a similar vein of political interpretation, scholars have directed attention to Dametas, the duplicitous courtier and confidant of Basilius. Pauline Croft and Anne James, for example, discern parallels between Dametas, with his hunched-back demeanour and gullible disposition, and Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury.[6] While these analyses have fostered interpretations of the play as an anti-James or anti-Cecil satire, others maintain that *Gulls* is concerned with lambasting contemporaneous poets and playwrights. Frederick Gard Fleay, for example, characterizes *Gulls* as a literary satire replete with coded references to prominent writers including Ben Jonson, Samuel Daniel, John Marston, and George Chapman.[7] Given that playwrights often encoded allusions to evade censorship, these analogical readings may well have merit. The play's political contours, however, extend beyond this satiric mapping of political persons onto characters. In what follows, I will trace ways that the play illustrates how individuals negotiate cultural power through games and competition.

The relationship between sports and politics has found significant resonance in recent scholarship on other early modern texts. Scholars are displaying a growing interest in sports and games such as bowling, tennis, dice, and children's street games,[8] while noteworthy contributions from Leah Marcus and others examine illustrations of games and sports in various literary forms including plays, sonnet sequences, and pastoral poems.[9] In an adjacent context, scholars such as Daniel C. Beaver and Edward Berry have delved into depictions of hunting culture and forest reserves within the context of early modern English politics and national identity.[10] Another trailblazer, Gregory M. Colón Semenza, stands out for incorporating *Gulls* into his investigation of sports and politics in a cluster of

'anti-court' Jacobean satires.[11] Semenza illuminates a distinct resistance in these plays, including *Gulls*, to King James's belief in the societal benefits of unlawful sports, along the way portraying sporting activities in *Gulls* as uniformly negative, debauched, and problematic. Collectively, these scholars lay a robust foundation for understanding the political underpinnings of sports and merry pastimes. There is still work to be done, however, regarding how concerns about the political applications of literature and theatre are encapsulated, meta-dramatically, within the intricate plots of such dramatic works.

This article aims to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by shedding light on what is here termed the 'optics of the (a)political': a nuanced exploration of the process by which seemingly apolitical domains serve as arenas for covert political negotiations.[12] More specifically, I argue that the (a)political optics depicted in *The Isle of Gulls* reveal how seemingly recreational pursuits — specifically, bowling, jesting, and hunting — are used by individuals for political manoeuvring.[13] The play situates these three activities within the larger context of the kidnapping challenge, establishing a political framework within which both physical and rhetorical games unfold. Although the official rules of the kidnapping challenge designate the princesses as mere objects to be captured, their deeds and dialogues significantly shape the rhetorical exchanges and gameplay within the broader socio-political landscape of the play's fictional world. In what follows, I explore various dimensions of the play's sporting events, including the transformative nature of the game of bowls among the duke, duchess, Zelmane, and Violetta, the intricacies of the 'double jest' involving the duke's and duchess' gender-deceptive schemes with Zelmane, the royal hunt where Aminter and Julio conspire to abduct the princesses, and, lastly, the rhetorical strategies employed by various characters (metaphors, puns, wordplay). Highlighting the political nuances present in the depiction of games and sports, I show how in Day's play recreational activities emerge as inherently political: akin to theatre itself, they serve as arenas where characters, regardless of gender or status, possess the agency to enforce, subvert, or defy the prevailing status quo.

A Game of Bowls: Playing in Earnest or in Jest?

Delving into a specific example, this section focuses on the game of bowls in act 3, which operates as a veiled romantic competition between players. Bowls, also known as lawn bowling, is a game involving a small ball called a jack and larger flat-ended balls called bowls. After the jack is rolled on the green, the players attempt to roll their bowls as close to the jack as possible. The winner of the

game is the player or team that rolls at least one of their bowls closest to the jack. Throughout the scene of bowls within Day's play, there is an uneasy seesawing between the game as earnest (serious, political) and the game as jest (comedy, entertainment). That the characters in *Gulls* are not just playing a game of bowls is an unstated fact that all in the scene understand but never explicitly acknowledge. Instead, to attain their desired outcome each adopts their own covert strategy reflecting their gender, age, and relative position of power. While Lisander (disguised as Zelmane) uses the game to get closer to Violetta and thus the duke's inheritance, Violetta, Gynetia, and Basilius each adopt different strategies to win over Zelmane's affection. Ultimately, this scene creates a platform where complex gender- and status-inflected negotiations can take place both discreetly and in plain sight.

The rivalries between players subvert expectations of what is important during a sporting competition since the two teams are not directly competing for the win. In fact, the game of bowls was set up by Lisander for him to confess his love to Violetta, thereby bringing him much closer to winning the lover's prize and inheritance of Basilius's dukedom. Speaking in private, Lisander encourages Violetta to 'play smooth and fine, / The smallest helpe that is, will make you mine' (3.3.22). These instructions conflate the game of bowls and the game of love, with triumph in one naturally leading into the other. Similarly, when it comes time to pair up, the players choose partners they hope to woo as opposed to choosing teammates they know are athletically skilled. Violetta suggests that the old ought to be beaten by the young and that, by this logic, she should be paired up with Zelmane (the object of her desire) and someone who returns her interests. Even though the duke and duchess are also vying for Zelmane's attention, the players agree with Violetta that the 'old', the duke and duchess, ought to pair up, while the 'young', Violetta and Zelmane, should become their competition. As the game unfolds, it becomes clear that the duke and duchess are playing against Zelmane and Violetta, yet they are also vying for the affection of Zelmane as individuals. Although the duke and duchess are at the top of the political food chain, they still battle for power within their marriage by competing with each other for Zelmane's affection. The players do not view the game of bowls as a sphere completely separate from their ordinary lives but rather as a platform through which to carry out their deepest aspirations and desires.

For the younger pair, the game of bowls is the first step in a romantic courtship. Lisander is quite explicit about his primary intention to court Violetta. During a flirtatious conversation spoken privately away from their opponents, he confesses that within this game of bowls, there is also present 'A match twixt you

and me' (3.3.28). In response to Lisander's advances, Violetta develops the game-in-a-game motif, confessing that she would never bet on a player (or suitor) so low and 'die in debt' (33). (At this moment Zelmane has not yet revealed his identity as Prince Lisander to her.) In this context, the double meaning of 'match' reveals the game-within-a-game approach that Lisander is consciously aware of and has helped construct. On the one hand, they are engaging in a 'match', or competition against each other, perhaps in their attempts to smoothly win over the other's affection without seriously offending the duke and duchess. On the other, they make a quality 'match', as in a prospective husband and wife. In both meanings, Lisander prioritizes his affection for Violetta above the actual game of bowls that is taking place.

For Gynetia and Basilius, the game of bowls represents an opportunity to one-up each other and achieve the upper hand in their established marriage. Although one could argue that their desire for Zelmane is genuine, their advances are more likely driven by their competitive natures and desires to feel the most in control. While both attempt to woo Zelmane, their approaches are different. Gynetia is direct and confident in her pursuit of Zelmane. Even when Violetta attempts to chastise her mother for acting jealous, Gynetia denies her accusation and confirms that the only person she has been eyeing during the game is Zelmane. Basilius's strategy to attract Zelmane depends more upon his display of authority, most notably by the constant regulation of the performance and actions of others. For example, when the young couple wins the match, Zelmane jokes that their winnings also comprise a kiss. Expressing his power, authority, and influence, Basilius warns his daughter to 'kisse not out' her maidenhood (57), thereby demonstrating his role as someone who enforces rules and controls the behaviours of his subordinates. These two moments highlight the complex desires and motivations of the players and how the desire of the duchess and duke for Zelmane motivates their actions and jests during the match. Even characters who already possess a great deal of social and political power may feel the need to jostle for authority within their smaller family circle.

Given that the game of bowls becomes a platform for courtship and competitions for power, the concepts of chastity and maidenhood situate young women in a 'game' in which they do not necessarily want to partake. Take, for example, Violetta's response to the constant regulation and, specifically, her father's comment about not kissing 'out' her maidenhood. Having been taught that her chastity is her most valuable possession, Violetta delivers a passionate speech in which she describes maidenhood as an object that is pawned by women:

> For lovers indentures are nea're fairely drawne,
> Until the maidenhead be left in pawne,
> As earnest of the match, so mothers sed,
> And so will daughter do when Mams be dead. (362–5)

Violetta references the inherited belief passed on from mother to daughter: that is, women's chastity is a social currency and locus of a maiden's desirability and power. In response to this statement, Gynetia asks if her daughter has lost her virginity, to which the princess responds, 'Sigeor Noe' (68). Although the rest of the scene is marked with puns and double entendres, the princess's directness here indicates that there is no room for ambiguity surrounding her maidenhood. Although Violetta does not necessarily agree with this gendered ideology, she recognizes that the stakes of losing one's virginity before marriage are far too high. It is a rule in the game of courtship that simply should not be broken. Rather than being situated as active players in the game of politics, the princesses and female-presenting characters take on the role of pawns, objects of currency that give meaning to the game yet for whom the rules provide much less individual agency, choice, and flexibility.

In addition to this game-within-a-game, this scene overturns the idea perpetuated by some game theorists: that sports are mere recreations — opportunities to have fun and to escape political or familial obligations. In the following passage, the players ask each other if they speak in 'earnest' or in 'jest' while discussing Lisander's suggestion that Violetta reward him with a kiss:

> LISANDER Our winnings come, a kisse and bate the rest.
> GYNETIA What doe you kisse *in earnest or in jest?*
> VIOLETTA In earnest in good truth.
> BASIL Troth, kindley sed,
> Take head you kisse not out your maidenhead
> VIOLETTA In jeast?
> BASIL In earnest. (3.3.54–8; my emphasis)

These two rhetorical modes of 'in earnest' and 'in jest' represent at least two types of communication. Earnest speech is generally sincere and explicit, such as when Gynetia speaks plainly of her sexual attraction to Zelmane. Jesting is often more playful and implicit, such as when the duke and the duchess hope to trick each other into believing that they have a shot with Zelmane. The difficulty of deciphering between earnestness and jesting — particularly within the context of

sporting — allows political work to not only remain hidden but also disguised as recreation. What Day shows here is not that games are separate from everyday life but rather that the common misconception that games are illusory or apolitical is an idea designed to conceal the real navigations of power that are taking place. This game is not simply a game; it is a stage on which individuals seek to assert, maintain, or enhance their desirability, authority, and worth, and this phenomenon seems to manifest across political and social statuses.

The Double Jest

Given the relatedness of physical and verbal competition, Day reasonably includes scenes of jest in his repertoire of sporting activities unfolding on the isle. In seventeenth-century England, the term 'jest' encompassed various verbal expressions intended to provoke ridicule or laughter including funny one liners, jeering speeches, idle stories, and elaborate jokes.[14] Despite jesting's association with fun and entertainment, scholars such as Pamela Allen Brown and Chris Holcolmb have demonstrated that it can serve serious ends.[15] Similar to how sports and games can possess covert political functions, jests can become vehicles for discussions on taboo or politically sensitive ideas and perspectives; jokes and other forms of implicit communications are not as easily censored as more earnest forms of speech or explicit rebellion.

In *Gulls*, the duke employs the optics of the (a)political to justify the merit of an elaborate jest he has concocted. Displeased with his wife's behaviour, Basilius suggests to Zelmane that the two of them conspire against Gynetia, for they have now been on the island for twelve months and need some 'domesticall merriment' (3.1.68). Concealed behind a veil of greenery, Duke Basilius observes as Gynetia showers Zelmane with praise, and Zelmane subsequently reveals his true identity. Gynetia confesses her adulterous thoughts and intentions to Zelmane, unknowingly betraying her mental sins while the duke overhears. In a response reminiscent of Dametas, the duke's reaction to this revelation takes on an anti-woman tone, implying that all women share an inclination for betraying husbands with infidelity (139). And yet in turn, the duke becomes unwittingly ensnared by Zelmane, whom he perceives as a player in his game but who is, in fact, manipulating the duke. This resistance to a centralized royal power reveals the play's feminist-leaning agenda, which prompts theatregoers to reflect on the perpetuated injustices.

In this play, inequity and patriarchy persist when powerful players effectively hide their true motives beneath stated intentions. For instance, the disguised

political function of the duke's jest appears to keep Gynetia in her subordinate place by using her attraction towards Zelmane against her. The final revelation that Gynetia has been courting a man pretending to be an androgynous woman would make her look foolish, and the duke's role as author and publisher of such a jest serves to enhance his authority within their marriage and on the isle. In addition to the potential motive of humiliating his wife, Basilius employs the practical joke to get closer to Zelmane. We see this motive hinted at in the duke's comment to Zelmane that this jest is the path that will 'give us a smooth passage to our love' (87). But is the duke referring to his love for Zelmane, his wife, or the love between his princesses and their future husbands?

Ironically, mirroring Lisander's ongoing plot, the duke's motivations differ from those he presents outwardly. Lisander participates in the state-sponsored challenge to advance his status by winning one of the princesses, while the duke uses the jest to reassert his royal authority by becoming closer with Zelmane. Although the duke never explicitly states the political stakes or true motives behind his jest, 'domesticall merriment' is not likely his only motivation (68). Instead, the duke seems to utilize competitions such as the kidnapping tournament and this jest to quell any threats to his royal power that might arise, whether that be an unworthy suitor wooing his daughter or an Amazon stealing away the attention and service of his wife. Although the duke's motivations remain ambiguous, other characters confess their true motivations for participating in recreations. Lisander, for example, agrees to the duke's plan to advance his status by gaining the duke's daughter's favour. Aware that he can use this game to his advantage, Lisander agrees and instructs the duke, 'shadowe your selfe in your [garden] Arke, & leave me to give her entertainment' (92–3).[16] Flirting with Violetta is now an act authorized by the duke and one that brings Lisander one step closer to winning the lover's prize. The ambiguity surrounding true motives dramatizes the optics of the (a)political and highlights how political negotiations, disguised as mere recreations, often occur discreetly in plain sight.

This phenomenon is acted out metatheatrically; that is, the play is self-conscious about its reflections on the associations between its own performativity and the dramatized sports depicted within. Theatre and sport explicitly parallel one another, such as when Violetta states that she is unsure how to interpret her parents' 'sport' as their father courts Zelmane, the manly Amazon, thinking she is a woman, while their mother dotes upon her as if she were a man (3.2.97). Violetta comments that if this were a 'prettie Court comedie', she would wish a role that involved beating her mother and 'play[ing] the lovers part' herself (98–9, 103). Day uses both the physical and rhetorical modes of sporting, comparing scenes

of jest to theatre, where both require actors to role-play under the guise of make-believe and entertainment.

Metatheatrical elements in early modern drama, including Day's use of metatheatre in act 3, prompt audiences to reflect on the performed situations.[17] This mode often requires spectators to ponder the predicament that is being performed, thereby including them in the process of critical reflection and cultural analysis — what Deb Streusand calls taking 'reflective distance' from dramatic plots.[18] The comparison between theatricality and rhetorical manipulation, a type of sporting, reveals the importance of exposure and concealment in the ethical reflections prompted by dramatic performances. Theatricality often opens the eyes, ears, and hearts of its audience members to the cultural operations that control exchanges of status and power; in other words, theatricality is designed intentionally to open the spectators' eyes to human behaviour and action. By contrast, rhetorical manipulation or the optics of the (a)political conceals, masks, and downplays such interactions, thereby having an exclusionary effect on audience members. Drawing this contrast between metatheatre and (a)political optics underscores the significant interplay between exposure and concealment in fostering ethical reflections within dramatic performances and texts. Day's use of metatheatre invites the audience not only to witness the characters' actions but also to contemplate the enduring injustices tied to gender, authority, and power.

The Royal Heist and Strategies of Play

The royal hunt in act 2 takes on a political function within the gameplay of the kidnapping tournament while also raising questions about the ethics and politics of this violence-based sport. In seventeenth-century England, hunting's political dimensions were complex; with laws restricting lower classes from participation in royal forests, the hunt was often a privilege reserved for the elite.[19] While accessible to those of royal blood, overindulgences in hunting, including the multi-day escapades enjoyed by King James and his court, were severely mocked.[20] Engaging these ideas in *Gulls*, Day reveals multiple and varied political uses of the royal hunt. In one early scene, he contrasts what is seen publicly by spectators (recreation, physical competition) and what is plotted privately by participants (mental strategy, political motivations). This blood sport allows individuals to vie for status and power, leading us to question the moral underpinnings of their actions.

Participants in the kidnapping challenge within the play see the royal hunt as an ideal moment for the abduction. On this day of spectacle and celebration, the

princesses and their guardians will have their defences lowered, leaving room for the young women to be secretly captured — a realization first made by Dametas. Upon carefully selecting the locale of the heist, Dametas delivers a pre-hunt speech discussing politics via the language of sight and blindness. Standing alone, he comments that 'now' the 'web' of his 'hopes' is 'upon the loombe of perfection' (2.2.16–17). Reflecting on the position of Aminter and Julio who are hiding in a thicket of bushes, he declares that they

> see and not see, all mum, you know your que,
> The games your owne, if you can hunt true. (19–20)

These lines address the hunters' ability to use sport to their advantage. They 'see' because they view the hunt as an opportunity to capture the princesses and thus gain the lover's prize, yet they do 'not see' that Dametas is hijacking the hunt. The kidnapping ultimately occurs on the sidelines of the event, blinding the duke and distancing Dametas from the political heist. Even before the royal hunt begins, Day highlights the seeming contradiction between the celebratory appearance of this sporting event and the way its participants use the event for their own gain.

By exploring the political contours of the royal hunt, Day clues his audience into serious ethical concerns, most notably Dametas's misogyny and sexism. This attitude towards the hunt manifests in a conversation between the scheming courtier Dametas and the two suitors Amniter and Julio. Intending to manipulate them to his advantage, Dametas tells the suitors that he will make their abduction of the princesses easier by separating the young women from the main location of the event. He also instructs them to act violently if confronted with resistance, telling them that raping the princesses or killing the duke are both viable options. Aminter and Julio, however, view Dametas's plan as unethical and counter to the celebratory atmosphere. Julio comments that this method is violent and 'clean opposite to the intent of the challenge' (1.3.102–3). Despite their shared interests in politicizing the hunt, Dametas and the two suitors disagree on how to ethically carry out the heist. There is no issue with the political contours of sports but rather with those who approach their gameplay in ways that promote blatant violence and disrespect.

Casual misogyny displayed by Dametas in his kidnapping plan is explicitly mocked by the two suitors. After Dametas leaves, the princes employ animal metaphors to condemn his immoral behaviour. Aminter compares him to the 'court-spyders' who weave webs of flattery and deceit in the 'ears of greatness' (126–7). Julio states that he is like 'unnecessarie worms' who nibble their way

into the 'true borne gentrie' and 'undermine' nobility (130–4). These comparisons figure scheming courtiers as creatures edging their way into political circles unobserved. Yet the two players, unlike their nemesis, possess moral conscience, ending their conversation with a promise not to use violence: 'though his intent be base, / Our enterprise shall weare a noble face', echoing the princesses' earlier declaration that they hope the winners have handsome faces (153–4). While Julio and Aminter themselves will not act cruelly, they vow to make use of Dametas's disloyalty and questionable play. Emerging as formidable competitors, the princes prioritize honest self-interest; they see their opponent making a poor move and do nothing to stop him. Dametas's profit-driven ethics and sexist attitude contrast with the princes' strategic yet honest gameplay. Politics itself is a kind of game, and Day differentiates between the skilled and the incompetent.

Vision and foresight are two qualities of expert politicians and players, yet Dametas lacks both. While attempting to blind the princesses, Dametas is clueless to his own blindness, for Lisander and Demetrius have just tricked him. He truly believes they will give him their gold for helping them to serve the duke. Unlike Julio's and Aminter's social awareness, Dametas's inability to see his own gullibility prevents him from anticipating the moves of other players. While he proceeds to gain power by concealing his self-serving motives and actions, he cannot grasp the limitations of his own sight.

Another failure of Dametas's play is his inability to differentiate between rule breaking that is harmless and rule breaking that is harmful. In his monologue, he considers how different players respond when they are presented with unethical or rule breaking opportunities. In his advice that 'The games your owne, / if you can hunt true' (2.2.19–20), his use of the plural second person appears to address Aminter and Julio. However, during the dramatic performance, one might also imagine Dametas invoking the audience, thereby adopting the impersonal 'you'. Functioning as an aphorism, this line invokes the ability of individuals to prosper, or to own the 'game' (as in challenge or object of pursuit). If one 'hunts', or participates in the challenge, in a way that is 'true', one is following the rules. Because Dametas is the least truthful character, his actions can only be considered truthful if he is playing by an unspoken set of rules that no other players are aware of — a key manoeuvre of the optics of the (a)political. Yet Dametas's comment may also be read as an instance when a deceitful character delivers an ethical reflection, suggesting that to 'hunt true' does entail following the explicitly stated rules. The ambiguity surrounding these lines enacts the difficulty in identifying the political optics at work as well as the individual motivations of each player. The unseen/seen motif emerges during the pre-hunt monologue and off-stage

kidnapping attempt, characterizing the plot as potentially threatening to social stability, as the characters are unable to discern who is threatening the princesses' safety and what is motivating their actions.

By focusing on the result of winning, Dametas establishes a teleological approach to sports and politics that is goal-oriented and narrowly focused. Although humanists often viewed sports as a means by which to enjoy oneself and develop personal characteristics and athletic abilities, Dametas participates entirely for victory and profit. Even after the duke announces the end to their 'Forrest sport' and that 'A second chase of lovelier sport's begunne' (ie, the duke's challenge), Dametas continues to scheme (2.2.156, 157). He hatches a new plan to expose the plots of Aminter and Julio to the duke. Reflecting on the ethics of sport, he states: 'All things are lawful that do profit bring / A wise man's bow goes with a two-fold string' (166–8). The first line of this couplet reveals the profit driven ethics of Dametas, who considers all profitable actions to also be lawful. The second line praises foresight and persistence, for an archer with more than one string has the means to carry on if the first proves ineffective. Dametas's strategy in the game of political advancement is both Machiavellian — unethical behaviours are 'lawful' if they allow him to get ahead — and relentless — he always brings an extra string. Such gameplay is not only immoral but also counterproductive since attention to the merit of the process yields better long-term results.

If this archery metaphor engages the teleological ethics practised by Dametas, another instance of the same metaphor reflects on the strategy of wit. In act 2, Dametas declares to Basilius that jests are, as in shooting, hardest hitting when they strike the target's 'very white' centre (2.2.90). While players must learn and practice the art of shooting, they must also possess the mental capacity to identify and hit the desired target. Because good shooting requires knowledge and practice, writings from the period often promoted archery as morally superior to other games of chance or recreation. In *Toxophilus*, for example, a treatise on the art of shooting, Roger Ascham praises bowmen for their lifelong dedication to the sport.[21] But practicing archery for a lifetime also served as an antidote to unlawful games that encouraged drinking or other debauched behaviours. Although unlawful games such as dicing and bowls were prohibited on the sabbath in many rural towns, lawful ones such as shooting and archery were mostly exempt from this list.[22] Lawful games are those that require practice and strategy, have a specific set of rules and parameters, and direct participants towards a desired outcome. Isn't it curious that Dametas, the most disliked character, compares his duplicitous behaviour to a game that was perceived as virtuous and traditionally

English? This sporting metaphor reveals that even the most virtuous and lawful games can be exploited for political gains. It is not the games themselves that ought to be judged but rather the actions carried out by participants — a line of thought that the play develops further in commentary exchanged by the two princesses.

Serving as a precursor to Dametas's conversation with the two suitors, the princesses condemn the violence inflicted on animals during the hunt, which is not justified by any profit that the sport may, or may not, bring. Violetta pities 'these poore beasts' who are led 'to their death' by the 'covetous Foressters' (2.2.44, 48, 46). Refuting this belief, Dametas invokes 'the end of their creation', or the belief that the purpose of animals is to eventually reach their death (49). In disagreement with the teleological ethics advanced by Dametas, Hippolyta denounces the fleshing that has just taken place, whereby hounds are given small pieces of deer flesh to arouse their senses. She states that their 'end' is to 'live in peace' and characterizes the foresters as those who embody a 'tyrannie of greatness without pittie' (50–1, 53). The foresters allow their desire for covetousness to justify the 'trembling state of their inferiors' (55). In the closing lines of Hippolyta's speech, she commands these hunters to 'cease' the 'tyranny' against the 'poore beasts' since just as 'you love your lives', these animals are like us and 'loth to die' (58–9). Invoking government and politics with the word 'tyranny', Hippolyta critiques hunters for using the sport to assert their dominance over the natural world and its creatures. The princesses challenge this ideology, condemning those who utilize hunting as a vehicle for misogyny, anthropocentrism, and violence.

Given the princess's resistance, this passage can also be read as proto-feminist. Violetta's words resist the treatment of animals and female-presenting bodies, including Zelmane, as objects to be chased, dominated, and discarded. The princesses often complain about their lack of agency, their father's limitless control, and their distaste towards maidenhood. They joke that they live in a 'servile liberty', with their jailors preventing them from travelling without supervision or experiencing intimacy beyond what is imagined in their dreams (3.2.24). Dametas, who is no stranger to misogynist actions and jokes, brushes off Hippolyta's impassioned appeal, calling her 'too tender-harted to be a good huntswoman' (2.2.60–1). Unlike the speeches made by Dametas and Basilius, the princesses' complaints are witty and persuasive. The royal ladies may not be official players in the kidnapping challenge, but they voice their own beliefs and desires with irrefutable clarity and eloquence. Although the rules of the royal competition characterize them more as pawns than as players, their awareness of

this political framework allows these women characters to find pockets of agency and self-expression.

Sporting Metaphors and Political Rhetoric

Implicit critiques of Basilius's courtship game manifest in various types of figurative and strategic language. Literary devices such as puns, wordplay, and slippages help to express different ideological perspectives. Take, for example, the puns on 'heart' and 'game' used in the conversation between Dametas and the princesses about the violence of the hunt. In response to Dametas's accusation of the women being 'too tender-harted', Violetta accuses the huntsmen of being too 'hard-harted' and wonders whether these gallants have overspent their wits, with no energy left to participate (2.2.62). The pun on 'heart', as in muscular organ, and 'hart', as in adult male deer, emphasizes the materiality of the animal: it both *is* and *has* a heart. This wordplay, as in other scenes, offers a veiled critique of violence and misogyny. Throughout the princess's debate with Dametas, the meaning of 'game' fluctuates between the challenge and the hunt, a wordplay inviting comparisons between the two kingly sports, especially the women's sensitivities to the violence committed in both. In response to Violetta's comment, Dametas tells the young women not to worry, reassuring them that they will have suitors. The princesses repeat that they do not want to marry cowards, but Dametas, uninterested, excuses himself to climb the hill and 'make discoverie of the game' (79). Which 'game' is Dametas referring to, the hunt for the deer or his scheme to have the princesses kidnapped? Likely both. In this scene, vague and unclear references work to downplay, normalize, and hide such violence against animals and against women. The vocabulary and language used to discuss recreational pursuits reveals their political, and at times unethical, functions and purpose.

Characters within the play often use sporting metaphors to perpetuate anthropocentric and misogynistic beliefs. Act 1 contains a riveting verbal exchange between the duke and his daughters, using hunting and hawking metaphors to various ends. Hippolyta mocks her father for putting up with Dametas's duplicity, warning him to buy some spectacles; otherwise she is going to scratch out his eyes, an action she calls a 'blind match' (1.1.77). The duke responds by calling her a 'haggart', or an untrained hawk, invoking her obligation to 'obeidence' as well as his paternal authority (78, 79). This comparison draws parallels between his daughter and an animal, the hawk, that is owned by hunters and used as an accomplice. This language adopts popular, albeit clichéd, hawking tropes, reinforcing gendered distinctions between the trainable (typically female)

falcon and power-seeking (typically male) falconer.[23] Elaborating on his hunter-like power, the duke affirms his royal authority to 'raise' or 'cast men down' (84). In response to disobedience, the duke reasserts his right to power; he is in the position to create and authorize the rules for recreations, whether that be the courtship tournament or the forest laws. As the duke casts aside his light-hearted attitude during this moment of resistance, we are exposed to his perception of royal power and anxieties about his subjects' potential for noncompliance or rebellion. This figurative language establishes intersections between male royal authority, the hierarchical relationship between humans and their subordinates, and the hunt — a theme that circulates throughout the play.

Fishing metaphors invoke the rhetorical fight for mastery and control. Hoping to trick Dametas, Lisander compares their rhetorical prowess to fishing.[24] The men must use their 'wits' to fish for Dametas like oyster shells with 'thy pearl' and to get Dametas to prefer Demetrius to his service (2.1.99–100). In their conversation, fishing is a metaphor for the suitors' secret trap: to use Dametas to become acquainted with the duke and his daughters. Myra E. Wright has shown how this sport relates figuratively to poetic expression, affirming that the poetics of both dramatic and educational texts 'compare the human experience of being deceived to the piscine experience of getting caught'.[25] Day's fishing metaphors similarly serve as apt vehicles for exploring the power dynamics of rhetorical persuasions, such as the description of the prince's manipulation of Dametas as fishing for oyster pearls. When considering the cultural context, we might view the schemes of Lisander and Demetrius in a more positive light than the malicious gullery of Dametas because fishing, like archery, was often considered a more virtuous and profitable sport. In *The Secrets of Angling* (1613), John Dennys reflects on this angler's craft: 'if Hunting and Hawking have beene thought worthy Delights, and Arts to be instructed in, I make no doubt but this Art of Angling as much more worthy practice and approbation'.[26] Dennys's lines create a hierarchy of sporting activities based on the profits that are gained from ethical behaviour.

Within this framework, the play explores the relationship between the legitimacy of cultural values and language practices. Before the royal hunt takes place, Dametas makes misogynistic remarks that liken power-seeking men to hunters. Upon spotting Lisander for the first time and mistaking him for a woman, Dametas relates men's hunting prowess to their sexual relations: 'we olde Courtiers can hunt a Cony [rabbit]' and 'make her cry out like a young married wife of the first night' (1.4.17, 18). These lines conflate violence against women with the sexual pursuits of older male courtiers. This women and animal prey comparison invokes the events that Dametas has planned for the royal hunt to help facilitate

the kidnapping of the two princesses. By using the plural pronoun 'we', Dametas suggests that not only he but also other courtiers engage in this type of hunt. Framing this behaviour as common normalizes the feeling of entitlement towards animals and women. Patriarchal practices and casual violence in royal sport and familial relationships derive their legitimacy not only from language but also from common practice.

While the play vocalizes this perspective on the validity of authority, Day seems to mock this belief. Elsewhere in the play, Dametas adopts the language of the hunt to reflect on his position of power above other courtiers and women. He describes his status above 'Inferior persons' to a falcon, with little birds flying away at the sight of him, his breath like a mighty wind, his person like a morning star, seen only about the rising of the sun, a common pseudonym for ruler or king (3.2.223–4). The irony here is that others view Dametas as unworthy of his position; his inflated ego makes him a figure of controversy and resentment. Rather than side with Dametas, *Gulls* advances a more feminist-leaning agenda. It gives voice to these misogynistic beliefs and thought processes so that they can be countered and severely mocked.

In *Gulls*, Day shines a glaring light on the ethical dimensions of gameplay, crafting representations of sport that embody and perform ideas about gender, authority, and power that are circulated both *literally*, with dialogue, character development, and plot, but also *figuratively*, through similes, metaphors, and cultural connotations.

The Competition's End

Metaphorical associations among sport, jesting, and play-making reappear in the play's final act. The scene opens with Dametas's arrival at Diana's Oak, where the woodman Dorus, a disguised Demetrius, has revealed that a large sum of money was buried under the tree by Aristomones. What Dametas does not realize is that Demetrius, working alongside Lisander, has gulled him. The pair has sent him on a wild goose chase so that they can more easily escape with Hippolyta and Violetta. The scene opens with Dametas discovering an unusual poem whose lines condemn self-love and direct its discoverer towards Adonis's Bower, the location where the duke's challenge comes to an end. The poem prompts Dametas's harsh realization that he has been gulled and transforms his egocentric behaviours into an uncontrollable desire for violence and revenge.

Unlike the princesses' witty and logical speeches, Dametas's verbal response to losing the game of gullery is imbued with anger, revenge, and a thirst for blood.

He curses both 'villainous poetry' and its authors for having misled him to this location where he was hoping to find gold (4.5.100). Using the language of the hunt, he imagines the poets waiting to be applauded for their work to ultimately be greeted with 'mewes and hisses' (119). These condemnations will come from the 'empty guls' who like sly foxes or spent deer watch hidden in the 'gallery corners' waiting for their moment to strike (121, 120). He pictures the posters being torn to death like deer by this kingly sport and maybe even by their friends. We might interpret this scene as demonstrating the immoral behaviour encouraged by sport, or specifically the activity of losing, perhaps supporting Semenza's claim that the play depicts all sports as debauchery. Yet the overarching results of this game, and thus the game itself, also facilitate a restoration of justice and social order. Inciting internal resentment and distrust, the immoral acts Dametas has been committing at court are alleviated by this ethical exposure. Sport becomes a great equalizer rather than a tool of oppression.

The final scene restores truth, justice, and order. Although Lisander and Demetrius seemed to concoct a foolproof scheme for winning the princesses, we learn that Aminter and Julio have secretly put a wrench in their plan. Disguised as Lacedaemonian intelligencers, Aminter and Julio persuade the other pair of suitors to keep guard over the princesses while they announce their victory to the others. Upon discovering they have been made gulls, Lisander and Demetrius inquire whether their opponents followed the rules and won fairly. Defending their victory, Aminter and Julio credit the ladies' compliance as crucial to the success of their plot. Aminter reveals: 'I do not thinke but the ladies had some hand int' (5.1.294). Not persuaded by this justification, Lisander and Demetrius attempt to duel; however, the duke steps in to declare the end of the challenge:

> Nay gentlemen we bar all violence, the liberty of our challenge was to all alike equally free, and since those by faire play have won em, it stands with our honor to see them peaceably possest of em. (363–6)

This final speech not only dismisses the resistance expressed by Lisander and Demetrius but also refrains from identifying clear winners of the challenge. The broad reference pronouns 'those', 'em', and 'them' could refer to Aminter and Julio, the two princesses, or the two sets of new couples. The duke's unclear language leaves room for Aminter, Julio, Hippolyta, and Violetta to be happy benefactors, if not triumphant winners, of his courtship game. In response to this speech, Hippolyta appears to confirm that the two princesses willingly gave up their maidenhood: 'Better to givet then have it stolne perforce' (372). Yet the

syntax encourages us to question the order of these events. Are the princesses only pretending to be accepting of the outcome so that they might not be viewed as powerless? Or are they genuinely accepting of their marital fate? Either way, Aminter and Julio are at least aware of the importance of appealing to both the princesses' agency and their desire, and these men end up winning this royal competition, at least according to the official ruling announced by the duke.

In this satire, Day portrays recreations as useful sites for discreet political interaction and rhetorical manipulation. Recreation is often associated with mirth, escape, or pleasure — activities that are not typically directed towards a specific outcome. Yet in *Gulls*, systems (patriarchal Arcadian government) and individuals (Basilius, Dametas, the male suitors) use merry pastimes to gain or maintain power. They turn towards (a)political spheres either to subvert the social strata or to conserve it. Beginning at varying levels of society, these characters use recreations to hide, cover up, downplay, deny, and/or increase their profitability, likeability, or social status. By situating politics within recreations, the benefactors of such words and actions obscure the mechanism allowing them to profit.

Up to this point I have remained focused on figurative language and relationships between characters. Yet there is one innovation worth considering further: that is, the motivating factor behind the duke's retreat to a remote island with his family. In Sidney's *Arcadia*, Basilius meets with an oracle who predicts via a riddle the future of his daughters. While the elder daughter is to be stolen away by a prince, the younger will embrace unnatural love. Basilius retreats to the island in an attempt to avoid the oracle's prophecy. This plot centres on the uncontrollable outcome of love and destiny, with the duke ultimately possessing little control over his daughters' courtships and marital unions. This framing differs from Day's version of the events, which begins with Basilius's announcement of a courtship tournament, thereby creating the game-within-a-game and introducing multiple and far-ranging players. Each of the participants possesses their own motivations, intentions, and behaviours, which directly influence the outcome of competitions such as the game of bowls, scenes of jests, and the royal hunt. The kidnapping tournament set up by Basilius may even be part of a broader game to take control of his family and marriage, thereby stripping any control from Gynetia regarding their daughters' future husbands.

In *Gulls*, there is always an overlap between physical and verbal competitions, and the sporting activities are often falsely yet intentionally marketed as recreational escapes from the political world. When exposed, however, this mechanism of power exchange also allows for individual participants to retain control over their futures, whether that means succeeding by ascending the social ladder or

failing by descending it. *Gulls* ultimately teaches its audience to be more aware of transactions of status and power that are not always in plain sight, empowering them to engage in political interactions; for Day, there is no oracle behind the scenes controlling destiny but rather power and control over one's life always remains within reach.

Notes

1 All references to the play come from John Day, *The Isle of Gulls: A Critical Edition*, ed. Raymond S. Burns (New York, 1980).

2 Herbert Wynford Hill, 'Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Elizabethan Drama', *University of Nevada Studies* 1 (1908), 1–59; Alexander Gavin, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney 1586–1640* (Oxford, 2006), 263, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199285471.001.0001.

3 Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, 2001), 176–7. Cobnut is a children's game in which a hazelnut is tied to the end of the rope held by two players who take turns trying to hit each other. Cherry-pit is another children's game involving the throwing of cherry pits (or, in some versions, marbles) into a small hole in the ground.

4 On the literary afterlife of Sir Philip Sidney's works, see Gavin, *Writing After Sidney*; Lisa M. Klein, *The Exemplary Sidney and the Elizabethan Sonneteer* (Newark, 1998); and Raphael Falco, *Conceived Presences: Literary Genealogy in Renaissance England* (Amherst, 1994).

5 Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Iowa City, 1991), 179.

6 Pauline Croft, 'The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 1 (1991), 43–69, https://doi.org/10.2307/3679029; Anne James, *Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England* (Toronto, 2016), 71–112, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442620056.

7 Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559–1642* (New York, 1969).

8 Katherine Steele Brokaw, 'The Roll of Dice and the Whims of Fate in Sixteenth-Century Morality Drama' in *Games and Theater in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Tom Bishop, Gina Bloom, and Erika T. Lin (Amsterdam, 2021), 89–113, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048553525-006; Paul Menzer, 'Bowling Alone or The Whole Point of No Return' in Bishop et al., *Games and Theater in Shakespeare's England*, 159–78,

https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048553525-009; Callan Davies, 'Bowling Alleys and Playhouses in London, 1560–90', *Early Theatre* 22.2 (2019), 39–65, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.22.2.3918; Marissa Greenberg, 'Playing (in) the Streets: Games and Adaptation in *The Merchant of Venice*' in Bishop et. al., *Games and Theater in Shakespeare's England*, 179–99, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048553525-010; Mark Kaethler, 'Against Opposition (at Home): Middleton and Rowley's *The World Tossed at Tennis* as Tennis', in *Games and Game Playing in European Art and Literature, 16th-17th Centuries*, ed. Robin O'Bryan (Amsterdam, 2019), 203–18, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvd58v94.12; Kevin Chovanec, '"Now if the devil have bones, / These dice are made of his": Dice Games on the English Stage in the Seventeenth Century', in O'Bryan, *Games and Game Playing*, 139–56, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048544844-007; Gina Bloom, *Gaming the Stage: Playable Media and the Rise of English Commercial Theater* (Ann Arbor, 2018), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3mt93h; Bethany Packard, 'Playing Prisoner's Base in Marlowe's *Edward II*', *Marlowe Studies* 4 (2014), 5–27; Tom Bishop, 'Shakespeare's Theater Games', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40.1 (2010), 65–88, https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-2009-014; Paul Budra, *Play Extempore: A Shakespearean Role-Playing Game* (self-published, 2010), https://www.sfu.ca/people/pbudra/books.html.

9 Arthur F. Marotti, '"Love Is Not Love": Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order', *English Literary History* 49.2 (1982), 396–428, 397, https://doi.org/10.2307/2872989; Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (New York, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199754755.001.0001; Louis Adrian Montrose, '"Eliza, Queene of Shepeardes" and the Pastoral of Power', *English Literary Renaissance* 10.2 (1980), 153–82, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1980.tb00789.x; Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1975), https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8501240; Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (London, 2004), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203708446; Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago, 1986).

10 See Jeffrey S. Theis, *Writing in the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral Nation* (Pittsburgh, 2009) and Daniel C. Beaver, *Hunting and the Politics of Violence before the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511660184, for discussions of forests, woodlands, and other hunting reserves as culturally significant spaces in English political identity; Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge, 2001) discusses the history and culture of hunting, especially the customs and values of blooding rituals, masculinity, and coming of age.

11 Gregory M. Colón Semenza, *Sport, Politics, and Literature in the English Renaissance* (Newark, 2003), 104. These 'anti-court' satires present all sports as inherently unlawful and morally corrupt: *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (ca 1600–4) blurs distinctions between lawful sports, such as hunting, and unlawful ones, such as poaching. *Eastward Ho* (1605) condemns the immorality and lawlessness associated with hunting and an absent king.

12 By 'political work' I refer to actions that either give, take away, or conserve power in its many and varied forms. My ideas on this concept are influenced by Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623–1624* (Cambridge, 2010), 14–19.

13 Unlike explicitly political spheres such as government meetings, the negotiations transpiring in (a)political spheres, such as stage plays or sporting events, are designed to cloak, rather than publicize, exchanges of power.

14 'In jest' means the 'opposite of earnest or seriousness; trifling sport, fun … without serious intention, in joke, in fun'. *Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED)*, s.v. 'n. jest'.

15 Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 2003), https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501722363. Brown suggests that female jesting, wit, and laughter often served as vehicles for female agency and rhetorical power; Chris Holcomb, *Mirth Making: The Rhetorical Discourse on Jesting in Early Modern England* (Columbia, 2001), 11–14.

16 Basilius, in other words, is instructed to conceal himself behind the decorative garden structure. The arch 'would provide concealment from the others on the stage but permit the audience full view of Basilius' according to Raymond S. Burns, 'Introduction', in Burns, ed., Day, *The Isle of Gull*s, 155.

17 Here I use the term metatheatre loosely, agreeing with Stephen Purcell that 'Gulling and overhearing scenes are metatheatrical' not only because 'their characters occupy spectator-like positions' but also because the 'game is being played on two planes at once, and both play and performance orchestrate repeated and humorous collisions between the two'. Stephen Purcell, 'Are Shakespeare's Plays Always Metatheatrical?', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 36.1 (2018), 19–35, 29 https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2018.0002. Coined by Lionel Abel in the 1960s, the term metatheatre has re-emerged in new work on early modern gender, rhetoric, and historical performance. See Sarah Dustagheer and Harry Newman, 'Metatheatre and Early Modern Drama', *Shakespeare Bulletin: The Journal of Early Modern Drama in Performance* 36.1 (2018), 3–18, https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2018.0001; Bridget Escolme, 'Public Eye and Private Place: Intimacy and Metatheatre in *Pericles* and *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 36.1 (2018), 111–30, https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2018.0007; Deb Streusand, 'Distance without

Distraction: Audience Response to Metatheater in Early Modern Plays', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 37.2 (2019), 231–50, 237, https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2019.0032.

18 Streusand, 'Distance without Distraction', 237.

19 Theis, *Writing the Forest*. Theis argues that forests and woodlands were culturally significant spaces and played a major role in constructing English identities at both an individual and national level.

20 Edward Berry notes how 'satiric representations of the King's obsession with hunting often escaped censorship and were highly popular among theatregoers.' *Shakespeare and the Hunt*, 205.

21 Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*, ed. Peter E. Medine (Tempe, 2002).

22 Steven Gunn, 'Archery Practice in Early Tudor England', *Past & Present* 209 (2010), 53–81, 54, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtq029.

23 Carolyn E. Brown, 'Juliet's Taming of Romeo', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 36.2 (1996), 333–55, https://doi.org/10.2307/450952. Brown explores Shakespeare's reversal of typical hawking language and its gendered implications in *Romeo and Juliet*.

24 This type of fishing metaphor appears in other seventeenth-century plays such as Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. When Claudio and Don Pedro attempt to gull Benedick into believing that Beatrice is in love with him, Claudio says: 'Bait the hook well; this fish will bite' (2.3.101). Here I cite Stephen Greenblatt et. al. *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York, 2008). In these lines, fishing reflects the hypothetical wooing of Beatrice by Benedick.

25 Myra E. Wright, *The Poetics of Angling in Early Modern England* (New York, 2019), 2, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203730010.

26 John Dennys, *The Secrets of Angling Teaching, the Choisest Tooles, Baytes and Seasons, for the Taking of any Fish, in Pond or River: Practised and Familiarly Open[ed] in Three Bookes* (London, 1635?; STC: 6612), A4v.