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- 1 When Prince Hal orders Falstaff to cease his obscene caricature of kingship in 1 Henry IV, thus surrendering his role to the English throne's true heir, the old knight argues vociferously against this enforced moment of theatrical usurpation:

FALSTAFF. Depose me, if thou dost it halfe so grauely, so maiestical-ly, both in word and matter, hang me vp by the heeles for a rabbit sucker, or a poulter's Hare.

Q1 1 Henry IV, E3^r; 2.4.395-7¹

- 2 Falstaff's blustering protest at being usurped from his "mock deposition scene" performance--having abused his future king and countrymen with euphuistic enthusiasm within the Boar's Head tavern--appears ironically prophetic and metatheatrically rich in detailing.² The passage confirms Falstaff's belief that his princely co-conspirator can never match the substance, nor weighty gravitas, of the knight's majestic portrayal. Hal's unilateral decision to recast himself as principal character in the "play extempore" (Q1, E1^r; 2.4.255) leaves Falstaff no recourse but to denounce the prince's performance skills.³ So confident is Falstaff in the ill-advisedness of this casting coup that he agrees to be hung "by the heeles" and exhibited to passersby should Hal prove fractionally more accomplished as a regal actor. Like small game hanging in a shopfront or above a market stall, the far weightier body of Falstaff would, with such ludicrous imagery, likewise hang upside down, his massive bulk prey to the mocking condemnation of his dramatic critics.
- 3 First published in the play's 1598 Q1 form, Falstaff's evocation of marketable animals hanging by their hind legs confirms the ubiquity of this daily commercial activity. In referencing "poulterers"--the archaic name for London's guild of master poulterers--Falstaff overtly associates the poultry trade with his uncomfortably envisioned display.⁴ As this essay argues, however, Shakespeare's "rabbit sucker" and "poulter's hare" reference, while specific in its marketplace imagery, actually subverts the traditional licentious image of London tradespeople, whose obscure medieval rights accorded them the warrant to sell rabbits and hares among their avian wares.⁵ In consequence,

Falstaff's straightforward description of dead animal corpses can conjure images of knightly punishment, the recent evocation of which in revised Spenserian form is developed further by Shakespeare, whose rural upbringing and ingenuity allow this culturally detailed three-line passage to leap into animated life.

Rabbit Sucker, Cony, and Hare Economics

- 4 Glosses to Falstaff's speech in *1 Henry IV* invariably comment on the fact that rabbit suckers—very young, unborn, or newborn suckling rabbits—as well as adult conies and hares, were normal wares for London poulterers.⁶ The etymological difference between Falstaff's "rabbit sucker" and its archaic counterpart, the "cony" (pronounced to rhyme with money), adds an economic imperative that modern usage tends to obscure.⁷ Formerly the "proper and ordinary name" for the adult European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), the term "cony" has been "superseded in general use by rabbit, which was originally a name for the young only."⁸ Falstaff's rabbit sucker, in its early modern context, represents not the full-grown buck or doe cony, but the less-than-year-old offspring of a breeding pair whose newborn "kittens" or "kits" are "naked, blind, helpless and totally dependent."⁹ Rabbit suckers reference, therefore, the least meaty examples of a poulterer's cony stock, with rabbit "kits" displaying size and potential nutritional equivalence to a small hen's egg. Unlike their Brown Hare (*Lepus capensis*) counterparts, several newborn rabbit suckers would be required to make a snack, let alone a full meal.
- 5 Poulterers were licensed, therefore, to sell mammalian members of the taxonomic order *Lagomorpha*—conies, rabbits, and hares of the *Leporidae* family—alongside chickens and geese, plovers, pheasants, partridges, eggs, and even butter.¹⁰ The medical benefits of this unusual association of food items is suggested by the self-professed "Doctor" Christopher Ballista, whose 1577 verse-guidance for the avoidance of gout advises the wary sufferer to "*suffice for foode, the Hen / and Chanticleere the bolde,*" as well as "*The Cunny, Hare, the Partridge, and / the Egge thats rosted rere: / And all the smallest Birds beside / that tender limmes doo beare.*"¹¹ Indeed, so close was the perceived relationship between rabbit suckers and eggs that they were, in culinary terms, considered one and the same. This anomalous situation, Colin Spencer argues, owes its heritage to medieval religious policy, which permitted rich monasteries to breed conies for in-house consumption, especially their unborn or newborn young.¹² Selectively reclassified by theologians like the 13th century Thomas Aquinas as aquatic and therefore not meat, rabbit embryos and/or kits could be eaten by monastic personnel on prescribed meatless days, thus circumventing their own strict ecclesiastical dietary rules.¹³
- 6 Although it is unclear when, in the following centuries, London's poulterers adopted (or adapted) such animal reclassifications, and gained license to sell lagomorphs (conies, rabbit suckers, and hares) alongside poultry and fowl, the formal right to so broad an array of creatures is officially recorded in the 1588 "Ordinances" of London's Worshipful Company of Poulters. The Company's statute lists "poultre wares and connyes" among their permitted vendible commodities, such produce denied to their guild brothers, the butchers.¹⁴ That "connyes" should feature in the Poulters' "Ordinances" alongside "poultre wares" is unusual enough, especially given the relatively recent full-scale introduction of domesticated conies into England as a food item. Despite Roman attempts to breed lagomorphs in England's unfriendly climate,

imported conies were only successfully bred, albeit as luxury commodities, in the decades following the Norman Invasion of 1066.¹⁵ Selectively introduced from mainland France, and legally defined alongside "*the Pheasant, and the Partridge*" as the "*beasts and foules of warren*"—with "warren" originally referring to any creature that "*may be taken, with long winged haukes, or hauks of pray*"—lagomorphs remained royal property.¹⁶ Only "*by the kings grant*," therefore, could a "*great quantitie of ground [be] inclosed*," for the hunting of these "*Beastes and Foules of the Warren*," the sport reserved for the nation's gamehawking aristocratic elite.¹⁷ With the killing of these creatures prohibited under the same royal prerogative that applied to deer and boar, England's poor were denied free access to lagomorphs as staple food.¹⁸

- 7 Several significant factors led to an eventual loss of the cony's regal status, most likely triggered by the famine and subsequent social unrest caused by the Little Ice Age of c. 1315, as well as the devastating effect of the Black Death (that killed up to a third of Europe's population over a four-year period), which arrived in England in 1348.¹⁹ The social and economic upheavals that followed these horrific events led to the inevitable unenforceability of "free warren" charters, while the free-ranging success of these fast-breeding creatures guaranteed their repurposing as common dietary fare.²⁰ When, therefore, the opportunity to add previously prohibited luxury food items to the marketplace, who better to sell both "*Beastes and Foules of Warren*" than poulterers, whose vending of fowl and gamebirds, including pheasant and partridge, was already firmly established.
- 8 An appreciation of the relative value of lagomorphs in a poulterer's inventory, certainly in the latter half of the 16th century, is possible because of City of London price controls that highlight the economic significance of Falstaff's "rabbit sucker" and "poulter's hare" remark.²¹ A table drawn up 9 July 1577, for instance, apparently occasioned by "the greedy covetousnes of the Poulters" and recorded in *Letter Book Y* of the Court of Aldermen, stipulates the "price of poultry wares to be solde in the [poulterers'] shoppes."²² The maximum price, for example, of a "Cygnette" was set at six shillings and four pence (approximately US\$112, or €95, in 2017 real price commodity value), while equally rare "Cranes" could realize six shillings (\$106; €90).²³ By contrast, a "best capon," "large and fatt," was capped at two shillings (\$35; €30), a "go[o]se in the Markett" one shilling (\$18; €15), and "chickens ffatt and largiste" five pence (\$8; €7).²⁴ The "beste" adult "conye," by contrast, could be sold for between four and five pence (\$6.25–\$8; €5.25–€7) depending on the religious season, while "seconde conyes" earned between three and four pence (\$5–\$6.25; €4.25–€5.25).²⁵ By no means a cheap commodity, poulterers' best conies still compared favorably against their avian counterparts in relative value. In 1586, for example, a freeman craftsman such as a carpenter, mason, or plumber (a skilled worker in lead) could buy three such conies with his daily wage of approximately one shilling and three pence (\$22; €19); a two shilling (\$35; €30) capon would seem a luxury indeed, while a cygnet or crane, at nearly a week's wages, would seem inconceivable.²⁶
- 9 The *Letter Book Y* pricing directives, which attempt to control inflationary tendencies in the poultry trade, confirm the everyday ubiquity of Falstaff's market-inspired imagery. As such, the absurdity of Falstaff's rabbit sucker and poulter's hare remark need only be considered as ironic juxtaposition between this diminutive foodstuff and the knight's ungainly bulk. There is, however, a subtler desexualized implication to Falstaff's speech, which subverts the traditional association between the conies sold by

poulterers and the similar-sounding "conies" of London's streetwalking prostitutes.²⁷ Described by Fabienne H. Baider and Sara Gesuato as symptomatic of the "lexicalized metaphors" that European languages share in appropriating animals and birds as disparaging terms for women, the homonymic cony/cunt sound-imagery was one Shakespeare might easily have employed.²⁸ Indeed, that such metaphors were not outside Shakespeare's comic lexicon is evidenced by Alice and Katherine's "*de coun*" exchange in *Henry V* (3.5.46-47), or Hamlet's "country matters" remark to Ophelia (*Hamlet* 3.2.104). By avoiding the lexicalized "cony" metaphor, Falstaff's speech effectively dissociates itself from that less savory market--not for animal, but human flesh.

- 10 The ease with which Shakespeare might have offered a sexual nuance to Falstaff's dialogue, based on the early modern pronunciation of "cony" and its oft-ignored age difference to a young rabbit, is highlighted by a comment in John Lyly's *Endymion*, a Children of Paul's play most likely presented in 1588 and printed 1591.²⁹ Written by the playwright whose creative style provided the euphuistic tone of Falstaff's deposition scene, *Endymion* introduces the braggartly Sir Tophas, whose delight in food and potential for military cowardice is decidedly proto-Falstaffian in its blustering humor. It is, however, Sir Tophas's fascination with "olde Matrons" that informs our understanding of the character's less normative sexual preferences.³⁰ In Act 5 scene 2, for example, Sir Tophas describes his lust for the decrepit sorceress Dipsas with imagery derived from the poulterer's stall. Counter to traditional representations of older males hopelessly chasing after younger women, Sir Tophas claims instead to "preferre an old Cony before a Rabbet sucker, and an ancient henne before a younge chicken peeper."³¹ Sir Tophas's predilection for "olde Matrons" is sufficiently unconventional to warrant the disdain of the young pages in whom he confides. Unsavory as Sir Tophas's coarse sexual imagery appears, his associative animal remark confirms contemporary perceptions of age- and size-differentiation between young rabbits and older conies, while celebrating the gerontophilic appeal of mature female partners.
- 11 Although Sir Tophas's word-choice mirrors Falstaff's later description of young rabbits, it does not explain Shakespeare's avoidance of a sexualized pun on the word cony, or his choice of less contentious lagomorphic names. Falstaff's precise allusion to a "rabbit sucker" and "poulter's hare" might, in its apparent coyness, be a consequence of the old knight likening himself to these creatures, with the effeminizing implication of the cony/cunt association influencing his word-choice. Avoidance of the nuanced word "cony" elides, however, the fact that a late-16th-century poulterer might just as easily be a woman as a man. Such alternative gendering for poulterers is suggested, for example, in the anonymous 1590s play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*.³² In Act 3 scene 5, when Gonorill intercepts letters to her father and sends them instead to her sister, the Messenger entrusted with provoking Ragan's animosity towards the unfortunate Leir confirms that he "will so tounge-whip" the reputation of the king that he "will / Leaue him as bare of credit, as a Poulter / Leaues a Cony, when she pulls off his skin."³³ For the anonymous author of *King Leir*, it seems appropriate to gender the "Poulter" as "she" when describing the skinning of a cony, the act emblematic of the baring of Leir's authority and credibility.
- 12 With the poultry tradesperson as likely to be a woman as a man, it is not surprising that sexualized imagery should be applied to female poulterers because of word-association

with their cony wares. Such sexualization is confirmed, for example, by John Heywood's 1562 Epigram 15, "Of cheapnyng of Conies."³⁴ Addressing the object of his desire, "Iane," who "sellst sweete conies" in her "poultry shoppe," Heywood's epigram expresses how "none" of the poulterer's lagomorphs are "so sweete" as the woman now endearingly referenced as "sweete conye moppe."³⁵ What at first sight appears playful banter turns decidedly sleazy, however, as "Iane" is asked the humiliating question, "What is the pryce of thee?"³⁶ Jane's quick-witted retort, "At what pryce so euer my selfe shalbe solde," does little to dampen the unpleasantness of this overt sexual invitation based on associative "cony" wordplay.

- 13 Similar sexualized imagery appears in Lyly's *Mother Bombie*, in which the youthful Candius (one of four youngsters swapped at birth and nurtured by unsuspecting fathers) offers to read the palm of the less-than-bright maiden, Silena. Mirroring Mother Bombie's later soothsaying skills, Candius reflects on Silena's hand, commenting that her "line of life is good, Venus mount very perfect," and that she "shall haue a scholler" for her "first husband."³⁷ Candius's barely-disguised sexual reference to Silena's Mons Venus receives an obscure reply from the uneducated innocent. Silena responds to Candius's sexual innuendo by exclaiming, "you are well seene in carnes durt, your father was a poulter, ha, ha, ha."³⁸ Silena's retort—with "carnes" corrected to "cranes" in the 1598 Q2 version—appears at first sight little more than simpleton's logic.³⁹ The girl's unwillingness to engage in nuanced flirtation makes her reference her suitor standing ankle-deep in fecal matter, excreted by long-necked long-legged *Grus grus* cranes, birds that traditionally stand motionless for long periods of time, sometimes balancing on one leg.

- 14 Silena's obscure reference to cranes and poulterers appears less confusing, however, when considered as a sexualized poultry-inspired pun. In France, *grue* (crane) was a 16th-century slang word for a street prostitute, an allusion to these women spending long hours "standing and waiting" for their customers like their patient avian counterparts.⁴⁰ As Baider and Gesuato argue, however, bird-inspired "lexicalized metaphors" like this demonstrate the "cross-linguistic applicability" and potentiality of such imagery as both French and English analogous constructs.⁴¹ In consequence, the crane (whose price on a 1577 London poulterer's stall was, we remember, a princely six shillings or €90) might just as easily act as lexicalized metaphor for prostitution on the streets of London, as it did on the streets of Paris.⁴² If the crane's propensity for standing still for long periods of time does indeed cross cultural boundaries as a metaphor for street-based prostitutes awaiting their passing clients, Silena's recognition of Candius's "dirty" interest in her "Venus mount" no longer reads as simpleton's logic, but associative logic that perpetuates the "semantic derogation" of women.⁴³ Silena, recognizing Candius as a predatory suitor, derogatorily alludes to his interest in street-corner prostitute "cranes," Candius's metaphorical propensity for which leaves him ankle-deep in crane "durt". Since cranes were both commodities in a poulterer's stock, and appropriate to describe street-corner prostitutes, it is not surprising that Silena should mock Candius's family heritage. Her retort, that Candius's "father was a poulter," offers a male-gendered pejorative riposte that is both logical and effectual in its trade-based specificity.

In contrast to the standard trope for cony-associated mockery of poultry tradespeople, however, Falstaff's avoidance of cony puns dampens audience expectation for broad sexual wordplay, substituting it instead with the specificity of animal age-

differentiation. In consequence, the homonymic cony is demurely hidden from Boar's Head view. What, other than a desire to avoid prurient punning might Shakespeare's alternative word-choice suggest? To answer this question, we need interrogate Falstaff's rabbit sucker and poulter's hare comment as the fitting image for the representation of the recently reimagined knightly punishment of baffling, Shakespeare's appropriation of which includes his innovative decision to associate this humiliating act with the vending of animals in London's markets. As subsequent dramatic uses confirm, Shakespeare's rabbit/hare imagery sets the trend for playhouse references to the physical threat of being baffled in the decades to come, now permanently and irreversibly linked to dead lagomorphs in their poulterer's-stall suspended form.

Baffling Falstaff like a Rabbit or Hare.

- 15 Falstaff's chosen forfeit, of being hung by the heels for all to mock, has long been considered appropriate to his knightly status. In his 1822 *Shakespeare Glossary*, for example, Robert Nares alludes to the verb to "Baffle," which means to "use contemptuously; to unknight," while suggesting that "[s]omething of the same kind is implied" in Falstaff's offer to expose his defenseless body to public ridicule.⁴⁴ Expanding on his technical description, Nares suggests that baffling "was originally a punishment of infamy, inflicted on recreant knights, one part of which was hanging them up by the heels."⁴⁵ A 21st-century definition of "to baffle," meaning to "subject to public disgrace," and specifically "to disgrace a perjured knight with infamy," confirms the Falstaffian suitability of the term.⁴⁶ That so status-specific a punishment was already in Shakespeare's mind is suggested by Falstaff's earlier reference to baffling in Act 1. Describing his intent to steal a purse on the morrow, Falstaff informs his prince that, should he fail this task, Hal can "call" him a "villaine and baffell" him (Q1 A4^v; 1.2.88).⁴⁷ The old knight's comment ironically reinforces the degrading potential of a punishment fully envisioned in the later mock deposition scene.
- 16 Because the contemptuous "punishment of infamy" that Nares references is sufficiently archaic to warrant additional explanation, editors of *1 Henry IV* invariably add highly descriptive glosses to Falstaff's "baffle me" remark. Jean E. Howard, for example, describes the "practice" of baffling, "in which perjured knights or effigies of them were hung upside down in public places."⁴⁸ Similarly, David Bevington describes baffling as to "vilify, disgrace, especially to degrade a perjured knight with infamy by trumpeting his dishonour and hanging him or his image with the heels upward."⁴⁹ Bevington cautions, however, that "Shakespeare's use" of the term baffle is "in general more metaphorical than this."⁵⁰ Because of its metaphorical status, neither Howard nor Bevington allude to baffling in their "rabbit sucker/poulter's hare" footnotes.⁵¹ By contrast, David Scott Kastan is less circumspect when describing how a "baffled knight would have his armour confiscated and he (or sometimes only his shield as a symbol) would be publicly suspended upside down."⁵² It "is easy to forget," stresses Kastan when directing his reader to the deposition scene, "that Falstaff is a knight and could indeed be formally baffled."⁵³ Shakespeare might, as Bevington suggests, be using the term "baffle" metaphorically, thus referencing the symbolic reversal of a knight's shield. Nonetheless, the physical punishment to a knight's body (while only parenthetically his shield) informs Kastan's visualization of Falstaff's marketplace

imagery, which in turn reinforces Nares's *Glossary* observations in surprising detail. The early-19th-century focus on the horrors of knightly punishment consequently elides the metaphorical or symbolic potential of Falstaff's rabbit/hare remarks.

- 17 Nares's literal, proto-Foucauldian fascination with Falstaff's "by the heeles" dialogue, with its voyeuristic image of a disgraced knight's corporal punishment, seems at odds, however, with historical descriptions of baffling in its early modern context. The earliest explanation of the term to "*Baffull*" appears, for example, in Edward Hall's 1548 chronicling of Henry VIII's conflict with his Scottish rival, James IV.⁵⁴ James's disastrous 1513 insurgency, which culminated in his defeat and death at the Battle of Flodden, provides the backdrop for Hall's description of Henry's northern campaign, led by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey. With reference to his promise to meet on the field of battle at the allotted time and place, Surrey suggests that his enemies "*shoulde Baffull hym*" if he does not keep his chivalrous word.⁵⁵
- 18 As Hall explains, Surrey was employing a term of singular significance to his northern adversaries. Deemed as a "*great reproache amonge the Scottes*," the act of not keeping one's oath was sufficient to warrant "*a man [being] openly periured*," thus permitting his accusers to "*make of hym an Image paynted reuersed, with hys heles vpwarde, with hys name, wonderynge cryenge and blowing out of hym with hornes, in the most dispitefull maner they can*."⁵⁶ Hall's account of a knightly guarantee to a Scottish foe suggests a somewhat localized instance of derisory humiliation through visual imagery, not dissimilar to contemporary illustrations of cuckolds with horned heads. The repetition of this narrative in Richard Grafton's 1569 and Raphael Holinshed's 1577 chronicles, and their respective marginal notes explaining "*Baffullyng* what it is," confirm the obscurity of the punishment outside Scotland.⁵⁷
- 19 The same reference to baffling as a symbolic act of representational violence against a knight's good name also appears in Sir William Drury's account of Queen Elizabeth's suppression of the 1569 Northern Rebellion, an insurrection in support of Mary Queen of Scots that occurred fifty-six years after the 1513 Flodden incident.⁵⁸ In a letter reportedly written by Sir George Carey (later 2nd Baron Hunsdon) to the Scottish Lord Fleming, Carey accuses the rebel of a "*trayterous acte*," and challenges him to knightly combat: "*Otherwyse I wyll baffull your good name[,] sounde wyth the tru[m]pet your dishonor, & paint your pictor with the heles vpward, & beate it in despite of your selfe*."⁵⁹ Carey's message reiterates the humiliating threat of conflict by proxy, with the painted image of the inverted Fleming suffering the physical blows that, had his cowardice not kept him distant, would fall on the knight's corporeal self.
- 20 A literary version of this threat is likewise referenced by Thomas Nashe, whose personal awareness of Carey's Northern Rebellion letter is certainly feasible, given the close relationship Nashe shared with his Carey patrons, Sir George and Lady Elizabeth.⁶⁰ As if mirroring his benefactor's 1569 challenge, Nashe notes, in his 1592 *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, a similar fate befalling writers incapable of developing their own distinctive style, but who endlessly plagiarize others. Directed primarily at the Reverend Richard Harvey, brother of Nashe's arch-rival Gabriel Harvey, *Pierce Penilesse*'s censure encompasses all preachers who regurgitate Calvinist rhetoric, rather than compose sermons of their own. Nashe denounces such plagiarism, while suggesting that these clerics' "*names would be baffuld on everie Booke-sellers stall*" should their theological piracy be exposed.⁶¹ Four years later, during his continuing bitter dispute with Gabriel Harvey, Nashe's 1596 "Respondent" *Pierce Penilesse* in *Have with you to*

Saffron Walden again references baffling as a symbolic act. Claiming that his detractors regularly "baffull and infamize" his name, Pierce requests that they delay their attacks until he is dead and "in heauen, & shall neuer feele it."⁶² Later, Pierce's bitter complaint, that he is "baffuld [...]" in print throughout *England*,⁶³ yet again confirms the disgrace of baffling in purely literary terms.⁶³

- 21 Whether in Hall's historical narrative (repeated verbatim by Grafton and Holinshed), in Drury's epistolary report, or in Nashe's satiric swipe at his print-based detractors, the term "to baffle" retains its symbolic reputation as humiliation of one's "good name," as opposed to actual physical harm. The full realization of this punishment as a physical as opposed to visually metaphorical slight does not occur, therefore, until its violent appearance in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. In Book VI Canto vii of the 1596 augmented edition, published contemporaneously with Nashe's *Have with you* and perhaps a year before first performances of *1 Henry IV*, prince Arthur is described punishing the "Recreant" knight Turpin.⁶⁴ Having failed in his treacherous assassination attempt, Turpin is reviled, berated, and cashiered by Arthur, who also divests the knight of his lance-borne pennon. In addition, Turpin is "by the heeles [...]" hung vpon a tree, / And baffuld so, that all which passed by, / The picture of his punishment might see" (FQ VI.vii.26-7).⁶⁵ Spenser's allusion to the "picture" evoked by Turpin's "punishment" might imply an awareness of the "paynted" chronicle heritage of the original Scottish penalty. Alternatively, Spenser might be influenced by Tarot playing cards popular in Europe from the 15th century, whose trump-card Hanged Man images echoed the Scottish humiliation in graphic, non-life-threatening detail. Whatever the significance or otherwise of the chronicle histories or Tarot card games, Spenser's creative alteration to the term baffling, which makes the Scottish act of cowardly shaming no longer "paynted" for Turpin, but physically embodied in the recreant knight's hanging form, alters and re-envisions the metaphorical punishment in a violent and immediate way.
- 22 Rather than humiliation through print or image-based ridicule, the baffled knight now suffers a real and potentially agonizing physical torture, which mirrors the "inverted, animal-associated hanging" penalty inflicted by European legislators on convicted Jews.⁶⁶ Known as the "Jewish execution," and employed throughout the later middle ages in northern and Mediterranean Europe, the hanging upside down of Jews accused of theft between two equally inverted bloodthirsty hounds became the racial rather than status-specific punishment of Christian choice.⁶⁷ Spenser's embodiment of the symbolic baffling of a knight's good name, strangely similar to a painfully protracted method of execution reserved for Europe's Jewish community, adds a physical reality to the recreant Turpin's plight. Nonetheless, Spenser's baffling image breaks fundamentally from the punishment's original intention of merely humiliating and denigrating a knight's good name.
- 23 When, therefore, Falstaff agrees to similar humiliation, thus equating himself with a baffled knight strung up by the heels like small game above a meat vendor's stall, his ludicrous suggestion builds on Spenser's re-envisioning of the term with graphic specificity. Even Falstaff's earlier exclamation to be called "a Iew else, and Ebrew Iew" (Q1 D4^r; 2.4.173), when read in the "Jewish execution" light, compounds its violent imagery.⁶⁸ The old knight's subsequent behavior might warrant his Spenserian baffling several times over, but the image of Falstaff's inverted and suspended mass, and its glossing in commentary as a direct allusion to an ancient punishment, distorts the

recent heritage of this phrase's sinister significance, reimagined in *The Faerie Queene* only a few months before. As we shall see, however, appropriation is insufficient to describe the fundamental alteration of Spenser's baffled imagery, whereby Shakespeare equates it specifically with rural practices solely associated with the hunting of cony and hare.

Hulking and Hocking Falstaff's Hare

- 24 That Shakespeare's reimagining of Spenser's physicalized description impacted later dramatic representations of baffling seems confirmed by two King's Men plays presented at least a decade after *1 Henry IV* was first performed by its Chamberlain's Men forebears. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *A King and No King* (performed 1611; published 1619), and their *Philaster* (performed c. 1608-1610; published 1620 and 1622), both reference baffling in decidedly physical ways. The first of these plays by publication though not performance, *A King and no King*, concerns the supposed incestuous lusts of King Arbaces of Iberia.⁶⁹ On his return from a successful campaign against the neighboring Armenians, Arbaces is accompanied by his cowardly army captain, Bessus, who provides the comic focus of the drama. In a solitary onstage moment that echoes Falstaff's "catechism" in *1 Henry IV* (5.1.140), Bessus confesses his faults and describes how he survived mistreatment when penniless and hungry. Admitting his plan repeatedly to "lie" and "abuse people for [his] meate" until a suitable punishment was meted on him (3.2.11), Bessus explains the expected outcome of his obnoxious behavior:

BESSUS. In this state I continued till they hung me vp by th'heeles and beate me with hasle sticks, as if they would haue baked mee, and haue cosen'd somebodie with mee for Venison: After this I rail'd, and eate quietlie: for the whole Kingdome tooke notice of me for a baffel'd whipt fellow.

A King and No King, 3.2.15-20; F3^r

- 25 As a baffled and whipped coward whose "reputation came principally by thinking to runne away" (3.2.6-7), Bessus fulfils his comic function in the play.⁷⁰ The circumstance of being hung by the heels and viciously beaten with painful hazel sticks, and his subsequent near invisibility thereafter, ensures not only that Bessus's good name is debased, but also that he earns no further condemnation. Thus, freed from all honor, Bessus could act dishonorably. Only his newfound military reputation, imposed by circumstance and against his will, prevents Bessus returning to his post-baffled state of social invisibility. Despite Bessus likening himself not to a cony or hare, but to a deer, the coward's fear that his body would be baked and sold as faux venison confirms the culinary connotation of his baffling remark. That the play's 21st-century editor, Lee Bliss, sees Bessus alluding to the "traditional punishment for recreant knights," is confirmed by her note to this passage.⁷¹ Nonetheless, Bliss makes only passing reference to Falstaff as one of several *miles gloriosus* sources for Bessus's comic character.⁷²
- 26 If *A King and No King* confirms an appreciation, at least by Beaumont and Fletcher, that mere mention of being hung by the heels could conjure images of cowardliness and game-based gastronomy, then far greater emphasis is placed on the plight's lagomorphic significance in their slightly earlier play, *Philaster*, a tragicomedy whose eponymous hero is the rightful heir to Sicily's throne.⁷³ Published at least a decade after first performances at the Globe in two distinct 1620 and 1622 quarto forms, *Philaster*

describes the perilous trials and loves of Sicily's ex-prince, who, residing openly in the court of his father's usurper, suffers the indignity of seeing his beloved Arethusa (the new king's daughter) betrothed to the Spanish prince Pharamond. After several mishaps, which include Philaster's astoundingly ill-advised stabbing of his beloved Arethusa in a fit of jealous rage, the ex-prince is placed in prison to await execution. Public support for Philaster is sufficiently strong, however, for a Sicilian mob immediately to rise in rebellion, their rampage led by a lowly sea Captain.

- 27 At the height of the Captain's Act 5 revolt, which triggers the release of Philaster and the promise of his return to power should he quell the insurrection, the mob corners the morally corrupt Pharamond. In the 1622 "second Impression" of the play's "corrected, and amended" Q2 text, the Captain confronts his Spanish captive in a moment of elevated non-comic danger.⁷⁴ With butchering glee, the Captain exclaims, "do you see sweete Prince, / I could hulke your grace, and hang you vp crosse-leg'd / Like a Hare at a Poulters and do this with this wiper" (5.4.30-32).⁷⁵ Considered by David Bevington as a possible "recollection of Shakespeare's line," although lacking in Falstaffian bluster and seemingly unconnected to the baffling imperative of its Scottish forebear, the Captain's far harsher Q2 *Philaster* imagery evokes the beating of the hapless Spaniard with a wooden cudgel or "wiper," prior to "hulking" or disemboweling his prey, and unceremoniously hanging him by his heels like a vended hare.⁷⁶
- 28 The Captain's reference to hanging the Spaniard by his heels not only mirrors the supposed baffling of Falstaff, but also adds the threat of hulking his victim, thus echoing Falstaff's plaintive Q1 fear of being mistakenly "Inboweld" at Hal's command, and metaphorically prepared as food: "if thou inbowel me to day, Ile giue you leaue to powder me and eate me too to morrowe" (5.4.110-11).⁷⁷ Beaumont and Fletcher, however, employ a very specific word when describing the Captain's threat, one unambiguously, and only, associated with the hunting of hares. In George Gascoigne's 1575 tract *The Noble Art of Venerie*, for example, when describing how best to reward hounds after a hare coursing, the hunter is advised to "hulke" the hare, "which is to open hir and take out hyr garbage," thus making her more palatable to the hunting dogs.⁷⁸ Because hare's meat was deemed indigestible to dogs, Gascoigne adds that, when "hulked and stripte out of hyr skinne," the hare's body should be stuffed with "bread, cheese, and other small morsels," so as not to make the hounds "sickly."⁷⁹ The 1622 Q2 *Philaster*, therefore, offers a passing reference to disembowelment surprisingly detailed in its hare-coursing specificity.
- 29 That the Captain's threat to "hulke" Pharamond was, by the 1620s, sufficiently obscure that an audience might not fully appreciate the appropriateness of its disemboweling imagery is suggested by the word's inclusion in John Bullokar's list of "hardest words in our Language."⁸⁰ Bullokar's 1616 dictionary of potentially incomprehensible English words defines "Hulke" as, "To open a hare or cony, to take out the garbage," thus suggesting the relative rarity of the term's use.⁸¹ With its explicit allusion to disembowelment, and even more obvious association with the executorial horrors of hanging, drawing and quartering, Q2 *Philaster* adds a sinister connotation to Falstaff's seemingly comic self-portrayal, while incorporating a detailed allusion to the sport of hare coursing to supply the poulter's stall.
- 30 The Captain's "hulking" threat in Q2 *Philaster* might add horrific mutilation to the Spenserian image of baffling as a punishment for recreant knights, but this same

section is subtly altered in the earlier 1620 Q1 version, differentiated by its alternative Phylaster and Pharamont character spellings.⁸² Long considered a censored version of the play, and thus adjusted to reflect King James's ongoing attempts to make peaceful settlement with the Spanish, Q1 *Phylaster* offers a sanitized, less lethal form of threat.⁸³ Predating its Q2 cousin's publication by two years, Q1 *Phylaster* presents the equally belligerent Captain, who confronts the cornered and breathless Pharamont with alliterative relish: "doe you huffe sweete Prince? I could hock your grace, and hang you crosse leg'd, like a Hare at a Poulterers stall."⁸⁴ Again mirroring Falstaff's description of hanging like a hare, while adding the marketplace locus of the "stall," the Captain's intimidating threat changes "hulke" to "hock," thus introducing the uncomfortable, undoubtedly painful, though potentially less fatal fate of being hocked or disabled by hamstringing.⁸⁵ Used as an ancient punishment for offenders, hocking or hamstringing involves the cutting of the lateral and medial hamstring tendons, which results in the victim's inability to stand correctly or to flee. When expressed by a xenophobic citizen, the disabling reality of this Q1 *Phylaster* threat, while undoubtedly less deadly than its Q2 hulking counterpart, adds a descriptively visual and, in hunting terms, species-specific image of an immobilized hare, pierced through the heels and suspended for stallholder display.

- 31 The punishing potential of hocking, and the word's alternative form "houghing," appears in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Performed by Worcester's Men in 1603, but not published until 1607, Heywood's play introduces Nicholas, servant to Master John Frankford, who overhears the dastardly attempts by his master's friend Wendoll to seduce Frankford's wife Anne. Intent on foiling this adulterous union, Nicholas offers his rhetorical aside: "Dos not the rascall *Wendol* go on legs / That thou must cut off, hath he not Hamstrings / That thou must hough?"⁸⁶ Whether expressed by an angered servant or a rebellious citizen, the hocking or hamstringing threat of the Captain in Q1 *Phylaster* against the unwelcome Spanish prince Pharamont confirms the punishing intent of this debilitating act.
- 32 Regardless of whether Beaumont and Fletcher agreed or disagreed with the subtle alterations in meaning between the two quarto versions of their play, the imagery remains in both Q1 and Q2 *Philaster* of a hare hanging above a poulterer's stall in line with Falstaff's comical fate. The same image, re-envisioned as a venison carcass, likewise occurs in *A King and No King*. The threat of hamstringing in Q1 *Phylaster* might more closely resemble the hamstrung image of the "baffled" Spenserian knight, as echoed in *1 Henry IV*, but the removal of any suggestion of disembowelment effectively alters the violent impact of the Captain's Q2 aggressive display.

Baffled Conclusion

- 33 As we have seen, Falstaff's topical allusion to animals hanging above a poulterer's stall suits the comic absurdity of his imagery. Evoking an everyday market scene, Shakespeare offers localized immediacy to Falstaff's pained response to Hal, while also inviting his audience's wry pleasure in its absurd visualization. Of more significance, however, appears the fact that Shakespeare is employing a knightly punishment whose physicalized reimagining stems from Spenserian adjustments to an ancient Scottish attack, not against a knight's body, but against his reputation. Based on its fanciful re-envisioning in *The Faerie Queene*, and reminiscent of punishments inflicted on Jewish

people in mainland Europe, Falstaff's reference to baffling sets the tone for subsequent lagomorphic imagery in Jacobean dramas that span the entirety of James's reign. Not realized prior to 1 *Henry IV*, the marketplace specificity of Falstaff's blustering offer suggests Shakespeare's appropriation and adaptation of Spenser's newly-imagined physical punishment for knights. Shakespeare develops this baffled image by associating it firmly with rural hunting pursuits that ultimately result in dead lagomorphs hanging and readied for sale. Shakespeare's baffled punishment, metaphorically mirrored in the hunted, hulked, and hocked conies, rabbits, and hares that poulterers display on their London stalls, subsequently acquires its own permanence in the early modern dramatic canon as an appropriate trope for threatened violence and harm.

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ABSTRACTS

In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff enacts his histrionic mock deposition scene, only to be usurped by England's true heir, Prince Hal.irate at his actorly demotion, Falstaff praises his own performance skills, while suggesting that, if found lacking, he should receive a punishment befitting his knightly status. Likening Falstaff to small game hanging in a shopfront or above a market stall, Shakespeare offers the ludicrous imagery of diminutive rabbit suckers and poulter's hares as analogous with the metaphorical baffling of his cowardly knight's massive bulk. With its systematic reference to the multiple methodologies of close textual analysis, intertextual evidence, and cross-linguistics and substitutions, this essay argues that Shakespeare's "rabbit sucker" and "poulter's hare" dialogue, while superficially referencing London's poultry tradespeople, is actually adopting and adapting an obscure Scottish punishment, recently revised and reimagined with dangerous intensity in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Shakespeare builds on this Spenserian imagery, adding his own animal-inspired evocation of rural hunting practices with culturally rich detail. Originating in Shakespeare's obscure textual reference to an everyday marketplace image of inverted helplessness and humiliation, Falstaff's rabbit sucker and poulter's hare metamorphose into the standard dramatic trope for punishing violence and aggression, their newly-envisioned disemboweled carcasses displayed openly in Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* and *Philaster*.

Dans *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff se livre à une scène de déposition parodique avant de se voir remplacé par l'héritier véritable du trône d'Angleterre, le Prince Hal. Courroucé de se voir ainsi rabaissé, Falstaff vante ses talents d'acteur tout en suggérant que s'il en manquait, il devrait recevoir une punition digne de son statut de chevalier. En comparant Falstaff au gibier exposé en devanture de magasins ou suspendus au-dessus d'étals de marché, Shakespeare offre une image dérisoire de petits lapereaux ou de lièvres de volailler comparable à l'affront métaphorique fait à la corpulence de ce lâche chevalier. Fort d'un recours à la micro-lecture, à l'intertextualité et à la linguistique comparée, le présent essai démontre que ce dialogue shakespearien au sujet de lapereaux et de lièvres de volailler offre non seulement un aperçu fascinant des attitudes de la société vis-à-vis des marchands de volaille mais adapte également une obscure sanction écossaise, récemment revue et réinventée avec une intense violence par Spenser dans *The Faerie Queene*. Shakespeare retravaille cet imaginaire spenserien, en y ajoutant sa propre évocation de pratiques cynégétiques rurales, riche en détails culturels et inspirée par les animaux. À partir d'une obscure référence textuelle à l'image du marché comme lieu d'humiliation et d'impuissance inversées, le lapereau et le lièvre de volailler émergent comme une trope représentant la violence des punitions et de l'agression, leur carcasse évidée mise en scène ouvertement dans *A King and No King* et *Philaster* de Beaumont et Fletcher.

INDEX

Keywords: Baffle, Cony, Faerie Queene, Falstaff, Henry IV Part One, Poulterer, Rabbit, Spenser.

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