

The Prince and the Hobby-Horse: Shakespeare and the Ambivalence of Early Modern Popular Culture¹

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Abstract

The Shakespearean hobby-horse, mentioned emphatically in *Hamlet*, brings into focus a number of problems related to early modern popular culture. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the word was characterised by semantic ambivalence, with simultaneously valid meanings of a breed of horse, a morris character, a foolish person, and a wanton woman. The overlapping of these meanings in different cultural discourses of the age (playtexts, emblem books, popular verse, pictures) exemplifies the interaction of different productions of early modern popular culture, from social humiliating practices to festivals and public playhouses. This attests to a complex circulation of cultural memory regarding symbols of popular culture, paradoxically both 'forgotten' and 'remembered' as a basically oral-ritual culture was transformed into written forms. In this context, the Hamletian passage gains new overtones, while the different versions of the playtext (Q1 & 2: 1603, 1604, F: 1623) also offer insights into the changing attitudes regarding popular culture, as it became gradually commercialised and politicised in the following decades. Finally, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* solidify a critical and sceptical attitude, which seems to have signalled the end of 'Merry Old England' on-stage and off-stage as well.

Keywords: Ben Jonson, Cultural Memory, Popular Culture, Transition, William Shakespeare.

1. *The Hobby-Horse Forgotten and Remembered: the Paradox of Remembrance*

'For O for O the hobby-horse is forgot' (3.1.133, Jenkins ed.)² – Hamlet's recollection of the forgotten hobby-horse before *The Murder of Gonzago* brings into focus significant problems of early modern popular culture, and its inherent ambiguity in a state of transition. The hobby-horse – together with old wives' tales and fairies – was evocative and symbolic of a popular culture,³ which was simultaneously remembered and forgotten, cherished and recalled with nostalgia as 'Merry Old England' while being stigmatised by the growing emotional and attitudinal distance on the part of the more educated and the middling sorts (Lamb 2006). In addition, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries forms of popular culture became commercialised in the context of a nascent money industry as well as being appropriated by royal image-making practices and politics (Hutton 1994). This ambivalence

is highlighted and dramatised in Shakespearean plays, which not only present but problematise popular culture in opposition to other contemporary plays and different cultural discourses of the age, which usually represent a less equivocal view. The Shakespearean hobby-horse differs from the ones which feature in anti-festivity Puritan writings (Stubbes 1583; Gosson 1579; 1582), ballads, emblem books, poems, songs and other plays in this respect, therefore examining its appearance and specific meaning in the given context may offer us a subtle and many-layered view on problems associated with early modern popular culture.

The hobby-horse stands at the intersection of different meanings and discourses in Shakespeare's age. The textual records regarding the hobby-horse are the most frequent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which period is also characterised by the multiplication of meanings around the hobby-horse, which could refer to a small Irish breed of horse, the wickerwork-and-costume dancing, prancing hobby-horse of the morris dance, as well as to wanton women and fools (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 'hobby-horse'). Therefore, the question of what the hobby-horse, this symbol of popular culture, meant precisely in different discourses and contexts of the age offers a challenging field of research, as a brief overview will attempt to outline, followed by a closer focus first on *Hamlet*, then on *The Winter's Tale* and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* for comparison and in order to illustrate the ongoing process of change regarding popular culture.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, probably written in an uneasy period of Elizabeth I's late reign yields a complex outlook on different forms of use and abuse of popular culture. The ambivalent attitude of the educated is clearly palpable in Horatio's sceptical words and Hamlet's malevolent jibes at Polonius and Claudius (to Polonius 'He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry or else he sleeps', 2.2.496, Jenkins ed., of Claudius/fool 'the king of shreds and patches', 3.4.103, Jenkins ed.). However, the references to jigs, games, ballads, songs and the hobby-horse create a significant subtext, which proves meaningful not only in relation to the play's intrinsic problems but also to a wider context. Prince Hamlet's appropriation of popular culture is more profound and multi-layered than suggested by Bristol, who emphasises Hamlet's aptitude to carnivalesque equivocation and laughter but places this mostly in scenes of grotesque mortality: when Hamlet is speaking about the politician Polonius's corpse as food for 'political worms' (4.3.20) and when he is talking to the gravediggers (5.1; see Bristol 1998, 246-250). I propose that the 'downward carnivalesque movement articulated by Hamlet, the players, and the gravediggers' compromising Claudius's political appropriation of Carnival, used 'as a means for reinforcing and making legitimate his otherwise dubious political authority' (Bristol 1998, 244) needs to be analysed in a broader framework. Prince Hamlet's relation and use of the hobby-horse and its peers sheds light on complex issues both within and outside the play. This appropriation also

recalls one of the basic dilemmas of definition with regard to popular culture, which is also subject for ardent debate in Shakespeare's age: what constitutes 'popular' culture, is it 'of the people' or 'for the people' (Burke 2009, 7-15)?

The dominant mood of *Hamlet* is obviously characterised by a strong feeling of nostalgia, which is also inherent in the idea of popular culture of the age. Elizabethan plays are interspersed with frequent recollections of 'Merry Old England', though the exact reference of this phrase remains obscure. As early as 1552 Dr. John Caius wrote about 'the old world when this country was called merry England' (quoted in Hutton 1994, 89), which became an enduring and often repeated expression in Elizabethan works and after the accession of James I, the reign of 'Good Queen Bess' seemed a lost golden age. According to the shifting periodical limits of living memory, or oral history, each bygone age appeared less complicated and easier to have lived in, the phrase 'it was never a merry world since' gaining in popularity. Nevertheless, nostalgic recollection was completed and gradually substituted by criticism and scepticism regarding popular culture in the plays of the Jacobean period. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1611) offers a different commentary on the subject, especially in the light of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), which presents the world of cony-catchers and the grotesque carnival of the fair with much less sympathy. Although Jonson was always more sceptical and consciously keeping aloof from being identified with the masses (cf. the paratext of his play, analysed later), the shift is conspicuous even in Shakespeare. The delicately balanced ambiguity of belief and disbelief, sympathy and scorn regarding hobby-horses, jigs and ghost-lore in *Hamlet* became replaced by a more disillusioned and sceptical look on such form of popular culture in *The Winter's Tale* (see Laroque 2011). This shift will be analysed in depth in the final part of this article.

My contention is that *Hamlet* represents a specific period in transition when what is being lost and forgotten is still fresh in the memory, i.e. the ghost of popular culture haunts the play so strongly that hobby-horses, fools and such phenomena are forgotten and remembered with the same power, while a decade later commercialised and written forms of popular culture overwrite and seem gradually to efface the original ones. This process is strongly connected to the transition from an oral and ritually based popular culture to written and fixed forms, which, according to Jan Assmann, corresponds to a specific phase in cultural memory when 'ritual coherence' is replaced by 'textual coherence', the former characteristic of societies without writing, where a cyclical concept of time supports the collective memory represented in never-changing rituals. Textual coherence appears with literacy, and coalesces with the gradually canonised solidity of the stream of tradition, when ritual becomes text, which might be dangerous as it leaves room for alternative interpretations. In addition, texts may also be forgotten by not being read, therefore writing both preserves and endangers particular elements of cultural memory (Assmann

2006, 101-121). In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus's words on 'the poet's pen', which 'gives to airy nothing / a local habitation and a name' (5.1.16-17) may serve as an informative comment on this, highlighting the ambiguity that, although writing serves the purposes of preservation, fixing meaning and 'shaping' things, there are potential concomitant side-effects: the danger of distortion and misapprehension in reception and interpretation as well as due to the power of consciously 'distorting' poetic imagination. Writing thus may even paradoxically be a means of forgetting, as the 'vessel' which contains the formerly quite amorphous content might also drop out of memory by not being read and not being cyclically-communally repeated. Thus *lieux de mémoire*,⁴ places for remembering become textual *loci*, though their interpretation is individualised and they become subjects for potential criticism as opposed to a former communal understanding. The problem of truth and authenticity as associated with writing features strongly in *The Winter's Tale*, where the palpable lies in ballads are considered 'true' if written – at least to a naive country shepherdess, Mopsa: 'I love a ballad in print, a life, for then we are sure they are true' (4.4.261-262). We also find a deep ambivalence in the words of the oracle at Delphi *as well* which are both sounded and written in a parchment. The problem of verity in *The Winter's Tale* proves the contention that Shakespeare incorporated early modern popular culture in his plays in a much more complex way than most of his contemporaries: not only *in corpo*, i.e. as images and references evocative of a wider background⁵ but also as corporeal manifestations of his poetic ideas.

2. *The Hobby-Horse as a Palimpsest of Meanings: Morris Characters, Fools, Toys, Horses and Whores*

The most curious phenomenon related to the hobby-horse is that the *OED* records most meanings (a special breed of horse, the morris hobby-horse, a fool, a loose woman, a plaything; but not the usual present-day meaning of a 'favourite theme or pastime') by references from the second half of the sixteenth century or later. This fact definitely attests to its popularity in Elizabethan and early Jacobean times as well as to a curious overlapping of meanings in the age, which creates a form of palimpsest. Although one meaning may be superimposed on another as defined by the specific context, it can only partially efface other possible meanings, the remnants and echoes of which keep influencing semantic reference. Therefore the hobby-horse presents a complex phenomenon, varied in meaning and interpretation as well. In an attempt to uncover the partially hidden layers, the latency of meanings in the hobby-horse, the relation between contemporaneous but differing uses of the same word will be addressed, providing potential explanations for a curious mingling of meanings in the word 'hobby-horse', to which several scholars have called attention without offering wholly satisfying reasons for the phenomenon.⁶

The Oxford English Dictionary as well as the LION bibliography⁷ attests to the fact that the time of the hobby-horse being so (in)famously ‘forgotten’ corresponds to the time of its most frequent appearance in texts of cony-catching pamphlets, Puritan anti-festival attacks, songs and – most importantly – of plays. According to the number of records in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the primary meaning in the age was the hobby-horse of medieval and early modern festivities: ‘a figure of a horse, made of wickerwork, or other light material, furnished with a deep housing, and fastened about the waist of one of the performers, who executed various antics in imitation of the movements of a skittish and spirited horse’ (*OED* 1989, ‘hobby-horse’). It featured in morris dances,⁸ both in popular and elite surroundings, in rural or urban festivals, aristocratic entertainments and on the stage. Pictorial representations of it include the so-called Betley window (stained glass window of the early sixteenth century in a house at Betley, Staffordshire) and the image of morris dancers with a hobby-horse along the Thames, from c. 1620 (detail of the Dutch artist Vinckenboom’s *Thames at Richmond, with the Old Royal Palace*, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Hutton briefly summarises the elusive history of the hobby-horse as follows: ‘[T]he first surviving reference to it is in a late 14th-century Welsh poem by Gryffyd Gryg, who implied that it was a new development’. Later ‘it features as part of parochial finance ... by 1500 it was part of the entertainments of the royal court and familiar in Cornwall, where the author of the play *Beunans Meriasek* seems to describe it as travelling with a troupe. Thereafter it is encountered in the midland’s churchwardens’ accounts ... but none earlier than 1528’ (Hutton 1994, 61). Despite the sketchy nature of records, the interaction of and easy travel between popular and elite pastimes is not difficult to trace already in the early history of the hobby-horse. The history of the morris, of which the hobby-horse appears an almost inalienable part, demonstrates not only this oscillation between royal court and village church ale but also attests to it becoming a commodity, the most striking example being William Kemp’s *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600), the written account of his solo morris production, which both in performance and afterwards in print was aimed at individual profit.

The earliest morris reference in Shakespeare is made to Jack Cade in *Henry VI, Part 2*, act 3, scene 1: ‘I have seen / Him caper upright like a wild Morisco / Shaking the bloody darts as he his bells’ (3.1.363-365) or in the mostly Fletcherian late collaborative play of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where a whole group of morris-dancers gives a performance.⁹ As opposed to the examples given in the following pages, these earliest and latest Shakespearean references work more as direct evocative poetic devices than complex textual *loci*. They had actual reference e.g. to the actor playing Jack Cade, Will Kemp, who already by then was regarded as a famous morris dancer and clown.

The popularity of the hobby-horse of the morris in Shakespeare’s age might also be aligned with the concept of monstrosity and the grotesque, so

catching and attractive to the Elizabethan age. The late sixteenth century was characterised by simultaneous anxiety and curiosity regarding the ‘monstrous man-beast’, which corresponded to the then dominant form of the tourney-style hobby-horse, where man and beast are both visible as opposed to the earlier full costumes (tourney with a headmask). In this light, even Claudius’s reference to the French horseman offers a disturbing and not easily decipherable comment:

And they can well on horseback, but this gallant
Had witchcraft in’t. He grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse
As he been incorps’d and demi-natur’d
With the brave beast. (4.7.83-86, Jenkins ed.)

Although Jenkins and other editors gloss this passage briefly as either a personal allusion to the cavalier mentioned in Castiglione or as a reminder of Claudius’s comparison to a satyr and ‘of kindred animal images’ (*Hamlet*, Jenkins ed., gloss. 369, 543-544), the half-man-half-horse image of the Norman strongly recalls Hamlet’s hobby-horse, the ‘incorps’d’ half-man, half-beast monster. Although Jenkins also refers to centaurs here, the phrase ‘grew into his seat’ rather evokes the shape of the hobby-horse (cf. the Betley window) in the audience’s imagination than the centaur, which presents not a man *riding* a horse, but the man’s upper body substituting for the head and neck of the horse. In addition, the centaur belonged to Humanist erudition, while the ever-present morris hobby was well known to the masses. The reference to witchcraft (rather than magic) also reaffirms the strong link to popular culture.

The early modern hobby-horse was also a play-horse (as it is even today): ‘a (childs) hobbie-horse, *bastob, ou cheval du bois d’un enfant*’ (Sherwood 1632, *French-English Dictionary*, as quoted in *OED* 1989), appearing in a number of pictorial representations of the age both in England and on the Continent.¹⁰ When surfacing in texts, however, it often became a complex object of both nostalgia and dismissal as a children’s pastime not fit for grown-up men. George Puttenham’s reference to this toy – though alluding to both attitudes – emphasises the nostalgic aspect, scolding King Agesilaus though in very cautious wording with a tone of lenient moralising:

No more would it be seemely for an aged man to play the wanton like a child, for it stands not with the conueniency of nature, yet when king Agesilaus hauing a great sort of little children, was one day disposed to solace himself among them in a gallery where they plaied, and tooke a little hobby horse of wood and bestrid it to keepe them in play, one of his friends seemed to mislike his lightnes, ô good friend quoth Agesilaus, rebuke me not for this fault till thou haue children of thine owne, shewing in deede that it came not of vanitie but of a fatherly affection, ioying in the sport and company of his little children, in which respect and as that place and time serued, it was dispencheable in him & not indecent. (Puttenham 2011, 234; emphasis mine)

The hobby-horse in this meaning appears as an object of nostalgia, thus adding another interpretation to the Hamletian complaint of the forgotten hobby-horse even for an early modern audience – the yearning for a lost Golden Age, that of easy play, innocence and childhood. The easy association between popular village festivities, children, foolishness and the toy hobby-horse also appears in the engraver Francis Delaram's one-page print entitled *Will Sommers King Heneryes jester*. It features Will Sommers with a jester's cap tucked in his belt while in the background a boy is riding a hobby-horse surrounded by other forms of childish and popular entertainment. The verses printed below reaffirm the association between visual appearance and essence: 'What though thou thinkst mee clad in strange attire, / Knowe I am suted to my owne deseire ... All with my Nature well agreeing too'.¹¹

The toy hobby-horse features as a worthless trifle in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, and in Peacham's emblem book, *Minerva Britanna* (1612) in *Vanae merces. Ad Nauplaum*, where the woodcut presents an ape holding a hobby-horse, a windmill, a fox's tail, beads and a rattle. The verse castigates foolish knights who return from their adventurous sea expeditions parading like Jason though only bringing back trifles instead of the golden fleece: 'Hee is thence return'd a worthy Knight awaie, / And brought vs back beades, Hobbie-horses, boxes / Fannes, Windmills, Ratles, Apes, and tailcs of Foxes' (Peacham 1612, 168).

Foolishness provides the origin for the third meaning in Shakespeare's age. In *Much Ado About Nothing* the hobby-horse becomes a synonym for a dim-witted, stupid man or fool, with Benedick referring contemptuously to Don Pedro and Claudio when exiting with Leonato: 'I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these hobby-horses must not hear' (3.2.64-66). The morris called for easy association as the Fool was another traditional figure of the morris dance, and both the hobby-horse and the Fool were responsible for a close interaction with the audience, collecting donations and frolicking with members of the audience: the Fool beating them with his bauble or pig's bladder, the hobby-horse pulling girls under its costume. In the Betley window the hobby-horse appears with a ladle in its mouth for collecting donations, the ladle referring to the direct addressing of the audience as the hobby-horse cajoled the onlookers to pay. Foolishness and levity are easily attached to the behaviour of both the hobby-horse and the Fool during the morris dance; therefore the conflation of the two meanings must have seemed uncomplicated and easily available for an early modern audience, well-versed in the traditions of the morris.¹² As the phrase 'the hobby-horse is forgot' gained in popularity around the turn of the century, the interchangeability of fools and hobby-horses seems to have turned into substitution, as Ben Jonson also attests:

But see the Hobby-Horse is forgot.
Foole, it must be your lot,

To supply his want with faces
 And some other Buffon graces.
 You know how ...
 (Ben Jonson, *Entertainment at Althrope*, 1603, ll. 286-290)¹³

The association between wanton women and the hobby-horse, however, proves more complicated, although it is well-known from the following Shakespearean quotations:

ARMADO: But O – But O –
 MOTH: ‘The hobby-horse is forgot’
 ARMADO: Call’st thou my love a ‘hobby-horse’?
 MOTH: No, master. The hobby-horse is but a colt, and your love perhaps a hackney.
 (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 3.1.26-30)

BIANCA [speaking to Cassio about the handkerchief]: This is some minx’s token,
 and I must take out the work; there, give it the hobby-horse, wheresoever you had
 it, I’ll take out no work on’t.
 (*Othello*, 4.1.151-153)

LEONTES: My wife’s a hobby-horse; deserves a name
 As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
 Before her troth-plight.
 (*The Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.276-278)

The hobby-horse in the previous quotations is explained in the glossaries as a ‘wanton, loose woman, even a prostitute’, which meaning is further supported by the words ‘minx’ or ‘hackney’ or ‘flax-wench’, all alluding to a pejorative, degraded image of women, closely associated with sexuality. (The ‘O’ of Armado’s love pains being another bawdy reference to the female genital organ). How and when did the image of hobby-horses played by a man and the image of wanton women intermingle? Folklore and anthropological studies explain this by pointing to the fertility aspect implied by the hobby-horse (Brissenden 1979, 6), who frightened and captured girls, sometimes taking them away ‘under its skirt’, i.e. the costume, which might account for a transposition of bawdy sexuality from one to the other. This is nicely expressed in the following short verse from *Cobbes prophecies, his Signes and Tokens* (Anonymous 1614, D3r), which shows hobby-horses and women in parallel grammatical structures and a rhyming pattern, emphasising an equal share of joy for both parties:

But when the Hobby-horse did wihy,
 oh pretty wihy,
 Then all the Wenches gaue a tihy,
 oh pretty tihy.

'Wihy/Wehee' indicates the horse's sound from Middle English times onwards, 'tihy/teehee' already appeared in relation to female sexual joy in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, where Alisoun, the young wanton wife in 'The Miller's Tale' did 'tehee' (line 3740), i.e. tittered and giggled after Absolon kissed Nicholas's backside. *OED* records this word meaning 'a representation of the sound of a light laugh, usually derisive ... usually in female use', citing examples ranging from Middle English to early modern times (*OED*, 'wehee' and 'tehee'). The onomatopoeic nature of both rhyming words (wihy, tihy) even more emphatically refers to the strong orality or the 'acoustic factor' and the atmosphere of joyful and bawdy entertainment shared by women and men in the costume of the hobby-horse.

However, the shift in gender still poses a problem. The Maid Marion or the Lady of the morris was usually played by men, and although we have ample evidence of cross-dressing in festivals and on the stage, they mostly entail men dressed up as women, while in these Shakespearean passages there seems to be no uncertainty of gender – they directly refer to women. (Although we must bear in mind the fact that, as all female parts were played by boys or men, a double-edged irony may also be at work in these references). Despite the problematics of gender on stage, this overlapping of meanings must be explained as we find the association of wanton women and hobby-horses in other texts of the age. Light women and hobby-horses featured in playtexts and even in later emblem books, as in George Wither's recounting of warnings against marriage: 'Some, fancy *Pleasures*; and such *Flirts* as they, / With ev'ry *Hobby-horse* will run away' (Wither 1635, Book 2, XXI). Breton's *Pasquils Mistresse*, 1600 is even more interesting in this respect as it records the use close to the concepts appearing in *Hamlet*. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark exhibits a scornful attitude to women he considers unvirtuous, Ophelia and Gertrude. Breton's 'unworthy mistress' is also compared to different animals (cow, sow, parrot, fox), as 'she can simper like a mare / and like a hobby-horse can holde her heade' (Breton 1600, D1r) while playing the wanton on a wooden bench. Consequently, wanton women and hobby-horses are easily brought into meaningful connection by Shakespeare's age.

As another explanation for equating wanton women and horses, I suggest that different semantic fields and circulating cultural narratives intermingled in the last decades of the sixteenth century as popular shrew-narratives were superimposed on the tradition of the vanishing (and commercialized, cf. Kemp's) morris. The early modern shrew narratives implied the association of taming women and horses, which was even further strengthened by the original meaning of a 'hobby', i.e. a kind of Irish horse. Florio's Italian-English dictionary (1598) explains *Vbino* as 'a hobbie horse such as Ireland breedeth', in 1609, Dekker's *Gull's Horne-book* also refers to real horses: 'At the doors, with their masters hobby-horses, to ride to the new play' (*OED*, 'hobby-horse').¹⁴ The concept of 'mounting or leaping' women sexually also helps connect the two concepts, for which a great number of examples can be detected in the

age. 'To take his leap' was the technical term for the copulation of mare and stallion. According to Lamb, 'to take a hobby-horse turne or two' also referred to the illicit sexual activity inherent in the figure of the hobby-horse.¹⁵

Besides the comparisons in dramatic texts between the gait of the horse and the wife – both considered goods of the husband (Hartwig 1982)¹⁶ – the conduct books of the age, advising good household management frequently referred to the similarities of taming horses and wives (Heaney 1998; Sloan 2004), which was made even more direct by the 'homeopathic' practices of early modern ballads. (E.g. *Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curste Wyffe, Lapped in Morelles Skin, for Her Good Behavyor*, as reprinted in Dolan 1996, 257-288). Social humiliating practices, like the Skimmington ride, carting, or the scold's bridle also associated the loose tongues and loose behaviour of women with horses. The Skimmington ride, though intended to punish mismatched couples, henpecked husbands and shrewish wives, featured a neighbour as a substitute victim, who had to ride through the village, often facing the tail of the horse amongst peals of laughter and derision (Ingram 1984). The association between a mismatched horse and rider and wife and husband was easy to make for the early modern onlookers, due to the still prevalent analogous thinking of the supposed superiority of husband over wife, human over beast, will/reason over passion.¹⁷

Some forms of punishment for shrews and scolds also entailed humiliation and association with horses. The two categories (the shrew representing 'home misrule', the scold being a legal category) often overlapped, as women's major weapon has always been their tongue, and any female subject opposing the traditional hierarchy was often demonised as a shrew, a scold or a witch (Boose 1991; Dolan 1996). One form of punishment was carting, where the female offender was put on an open cart and wheeled through the town. Although not on a horse, the horse-drawn cart and the woman on it were in metonymical relation, being objects of derision and shame, as it is clearly recognised by Shakespeare's Katharina Minola, who defies being made a stale, i.e. a laughing stock for men's derision – after references to courting/carting her are made (1.1.52-58).

The scold's bridle served as an even more obvious connection between unruly horses and women – although the first extant references to it come from after Shakespeare's career, it might have been known earlier. The metal cage surrounding the woman's head was equipped with a metal (often spiky) gag put into the mouth, effectively silencing and hurting the unruly member of the female body. The scold was then led through the town/village, often on a leash, thus emphasizing not only her inferiority but also her bestiality and similarity to horses. The first pictorial reference comes from 1655 from Ralph Gardiner's *England's Grievence Discovered* (London, 1655), where we see a scold with the metal cage on her head and the tongue suppressor in her mouth, being led on a leash by a man (reprinted in Dolan 1996, 291). Even

today, boisterous horses are said to have a 'rigid or hard' mouth, which needs to be tamed, and managing the horse relies heavily on the controlling power of the horse's bridle, on the power over its mouth. Although some scholars doubt that such an instrument of humiliation and torture was in use in Shakespeare's time, the numerous references to bridling the unruly tongue in texts and images of the age proves that this association was ready-made for Shakespeare's contemporaries. The verb 'bridle' also appeared in prestigious normative discourse, as e.g. in the *Homily of the State of Matrimony*, appearing in *The Second Tome of Homilies, of Such Matters as Were Promised and Entitled in the Former Part of Homilies* (first published in 1563, as reprinted in Dolan 1996, 170); marriage was supposedly 'brydlyng the corrupt inclinations of the fleshe'. In conclusion, the overlapping of unruly women and horses might account for the semantic interchangeability of wanton women and hobby-horses.

3. *Hamlet: Haunted by the Ghost of Popular Culture*

In such a varied semantic context Hamlet's hobby-horse deserves revisiting. Although a number of brilliant studies touched upon the problem of the hobby-horse, they mostly focused on other aspects.¹⁸ The lines in act 3, scene 2 surrounding *The Murder of Gonzago* are pregnant with meanings and gestures related to popular culture, and offer us a new and enriched reading not only of this passage, but also of the play itself. These passages prepare the onstage and offstage audience for the play-within-the-play while commenting on it continuously, and finally they serve as an epilogue to both *The Murder of Gonzago* and the dramatic action of *Hamlet* in this scene.

The King's neutral question ('How fares our cousin Hamlet?') launches the first puns on Hamlet's part with air/heir ('I eat the air, promise-crammed') and Polonius's role as Caesar as a capital/Capitol calf – with a potential extradramatic reference to the *Julius Caesar* performance of the newly opened Globe in 1599. Then Hamlet turns to Ophelia, and to the bawdy: 'Shall I lie in your lap?', 'That's a fair thought to lie between maids legs'. This bawdiness is strengthened by the sexual innuendo inherent in Hamlet's answer of 'nothing', which was also a slang expression for the female privy parts and the pun on 'country/cuntry manners'.¹⁹ Consequently, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, acts as a Lord of Misrule, arranging for a light and lewd entertainment during festival time, like e.g. the twelve days of Christmas. According to Hutton, Lords of Misrule reigned under different names in different surroundings throughout the sixteenth century, employed by mayors, sheriffs, universities, inns of court and even by the royal household. The most famous one was George Ferrers at the end of Edward VII's reign, who organised indoor entertainments and outdoor spectacles like e.g. a hobby-horse joust, had his own coat-of-arms and retinue, and 'combined the traditional fun of inversion and parody with a dash of Renaissance metaphysics' (Hutton 1994,

90-91). Although in Elizabeth's reign the name was used more loosely to denote different carnivalesque leaders (Stubbes called a summer lord a Lord of Misrule), the original association of Lords of Misrule and organised indoor (Christmas) festive spectacle seems to have been retained, at least partially. In this light, Hamlet may be considered a Lord of Misrule, who acts out a spectacle himself – combining and performing the roles of the fool and the harassing hobby-horse as well. Thus Hamlet is the fool, the 'only jig-maker', twisting and playing on words while performing the role of the hobby-horse, who plays with a girl. His words carry a strong sexual meaning even before the (in)famous hobby-horse makes an appearance in the lines following:

HAMLET: So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables! O heavens - die two months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But, by'r lady 'a must build churches then, or else shall 'a suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For O! for O! the hobby-horse is forgot'. (3.2.127-133, Jenkins ed.)

Hamlet's role as the Lord of Misrule is reaffirmed by the way he comments continuously on what is going on on stage and off stage, finally presenting a song in easy and catchy meter, in style quite similar to Lear's Fool's chants:

What, frighetd with false fires?
Then let he stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play,
For some must laugh while some must weep –
Thus runs the world away! (Q1 9.174-178)

The end of the scene in Q2 also strengthens Hamlet's positioning as the Lord of Misrule – at the end of the scene (before Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter), he rounds off the on-stage and off-stage performance with calling for music several times.

HAMLET: Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
For if the King like not the comedy
Why then belike he likes it not, perdie.
Come, some music! (Q2 3.2.283-287)

This passage cannot be found in Q1, and in the Folio the two messengers enter before this call for music, which gives a different interpretation to the scene, rather attaching it to the later 'recorder' metaphor; however, Hamlet's role as an organiser of entertainments seems indisputable. The relation of the three texts is still subject of scholarly debate. Nevertheless, what proves instructive from our point of view is to what extent and how they feature carnivalesque references to popular culture. In act 3 scene 2 even the shortest Q1 version features the 'capitol calf', the 'jig-maker' and the hobby-horse forgotten,

though the memory is not of a 'great man' but a 'gentleman'.²⁰ Curiously, in Q1 possible references to bawdy carnival are reaffirmed (while the sexual 'groaning' is cut from the Folio), where even Ophelia appears joyfully taking part in flirtation, while Hamlet's lines are much more abrupt and rude:

OFELIA: Your jests are keen, my lord.

HAMLET: It would cost you a groaning to take them off.

OFELIA: Still better – and worse!

HAMLET: So you must take your husband. (*to Players*) Begin! Murderer, begin! A pox! Leave thy damnable faces and begin! Come! *'The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge!'* (Q1 9.160-164)

In addition there are some textual versions that pose a dilemma – the 'pooopies' in Hamlet's offer to Ophelia in 'I could interpret the love you bear if I saw the pooopies dallying' (ll. 144-145) might refer to the 'puppets' of the other texts (a clear reference to popular culture) as a simple printing error but it also might mean the female genitals, according to Thompson and Taylor glossing this phrase. This latter interpretation strengthens the bawdy in the interaction of Hamlet and Ophelia, which is even more underlined by the fact that previously Q1 featured the (in)famous and equivocal (nunnery/brothel) 'Go to a nunnery' eight times (7.162-194) as opposed to Q2 and F, where it appears only five times. In conclusion, the earliest Q1 version shows the most traces of being a cut version for the public theatre as opposed to its title page that refers to prestigious surroundings of earlier performances of Cambridge and Oxford (Patterson 1989, 16), and we might say that this view is supported by its ruder language. Interestingly, even the 'good' Q2 a year or two later exhibits more vulgarities than the more prestigious Folio, as e.g. in Hamlet's earlier monologue in act 2, scene 2, the well-known Folio first-line being 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (2.2.544). Although it is a passionately coarse soliloquy in all versions, featuring asses, John-a-dreams, scullions (kitchen servants) and drabs (whores), the change in the Q2 very first line is still shocking as Hamlet cries out: 'Why, what a dunghill idiot slave am I' (Q2 7.404).

Although the references to contemporary theatre can be found in all versions, Q1 puts more emphasis on 'playing the clown'. In the scene where Hamlet instructs the Players, Q1 features several sentences that are unique to this early text only. Interestingly, Hamlet seems to mock the same extemporizing he is engaged in at the moment. Indeed, his lines are full of catchphrases and jokes which were presumably current then; in a word, he is acting the clown while mocking him, which reaffirms the carnivalesque in his complex character:

HAMLET: And – do you hear? – let not your Clown speak more than is set down. There be of them, I can tell you, that will laugh themselves to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh with them – albeit there is some necessary point in the play then to be observed. O, 'tis vile and shows a pitiful ambition in the fool that useth it.

And then you have some again that keeps one suit of jests – as a man is known by one suit of apparel – and gentlemen quotes his jests down in their tables before they come to the play, as thus: ‘Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge?’ and ‘You owe me a quarter’s wages’ and ‘My coat wants a cullison!’ and ‘Your beer is sour!’ and, blabbering with his lips and thus keeping in his cinquepace of jests when, God knows, the warm Clown cannot make a jest unless by chance – as the blind man catcheth a hare – masters, tell him of it’. (Q1 9.23-38; sentences in italics only in Q1, not in Q2 or F)

These subtle differences underlie the shift in attitudes to popular culture that characterised the first decades of the seventeenth century, which will be examined in the following section. The years 1600-1604 (*Hamlet’s* conception and the first quartos) display a transitory period in the sense that both the old and the new seem equally powerful – the old world being associated with the ‘merry England’ of hobby-horses, fools, and Old Hamlet, with the feeling of times unavoidably changing. Under such circumstances memory and forgetting fight an equal battle, which is epitomised in Hamlet’s forgetting and recalling the hobby-horse in a play where the Clown/Fool features only in his spectacular absence, partly as performed and recalled by the Prince or as a skull.

4. The Winter’s Tale and Bartholomew Fair: from Criticism to Scepticism

The transformation of popular culture due to its commercialisation and later politicisation are palpable in the plays of the 1610s. One example for this is the attitude of the educated middling sorts and the aristocracy towards elements of popular culture.²¹ After Theseus’s clear refusal of ‘antique fables’ in the 1590s, Horatio’s cautious attitude to popular folklore in *Hamlet* is palpable in his answer to superstition about ghosts: ‘So have I heard and do in part believe it’ (1.1.170, Jenkins ed.). He believes and he does not; as a Wittenberg-educated Humanist scholar, he should not, but recalling his Danish identity and faced with the ghost, he must. A shift is detectable even in this respect: Theseus’s clear refusal attests to a rather solid framework of thinking about popular and elite culture in Elizabeth’s reign, while *Hamlet* is a work of transition: the old world is crumbling apart, Elizabeth is aging without an heir, the famous clown Will Kemp has gone on a solo commercial venture with his nine-day morris, and popular culture has been commodified with success (cf. the Globe Theatre). However, the memory of a lively and ritually stable popular culture is still strong. A decade later, *The Winter’s Tale* already voices criticism and scepticism regarding the verity and authenticity of popular culture, when e.g. Antigonus’s dream of ghosts is presented as more of a parodic piece with its exaggerations than an authentic and persuasive account of ghost-lore, and his refusal to accept folk superstitions is soon overwritten by credulous belief in shrieking ghosts. Antigonus’s character is further discredited by his sudden and strange death as ‘exit pursued by a bear’.

ANTIGONUS:

I have heard, but not believ'd, the spirits o' th' dead
 May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother
 Appear'd to me last night; for ne'er was dream
 So like a waking. To me comes a creature,
 Sometimes her head on one side, some another;
 I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
 So fill'd and so becoming; in pure white robes,
 Like very sanctity, she did approach
 My cabin where I lay; thrice bow'd before me,
 And gasping to begin some speech, her eyes
 Became two spouts; the fury spent, anon
 Did this break-from her: ...
 And so, with shrieks
 She melted into air. Affrighted much,
 I did in time collect myself and thought
 This was so and no slumber. Dreams are toys:
 Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously,
 I will be squared by this.
 (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.3.16-27, 36-41)

In this late play even Shakespeare criticises the authenticity of popular culture (or presents, as Laroque calls it, 'the hybridity of popular culture', Laroque 2011). Not only Autolycus, the balladmonger, pedlar and conman/cony-catcher is a less sympathetic and lively character than Bottom and Falstaff, but the verity of anything belonging to popular culture is touched with dramatic irony. The naive country shepherdess, Mopsa, ensures us that textualised versions are true ('I love a ballad in print, a life, for then we are sure they are true' 4.4.261-262), while the topic of ballads is outrageously nonsensical:

AUTOLYCUS: Here's one, to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed.
 (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.263-266)

Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, which – according to a 1631 title page and the Induction – was performed in the Hope Theatre in 1614, exhibits open criticism and sarcasm regarding popular culture. Most of the Induction consists of the monologue of the Scrivener, an educated man, who is condescending and disillusioned. He condemns nostalgia for the 'sword-and-buckler age of Smithfield' and the bad taste and judgement of the audience, who still swear that the best plays are the 25-year-old *Jeronimo or Andronicus* (i.e. Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*). He openly criticises playwrights 'like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries' (Ind. 124-125), and expresses his scorn for playwrights and plays that cater

for the lowly taste of the masses. Even the hobby-horse is mentioned not in its usual context but as a reference to the sexual liberty of the fair: 'Nor has he the canvas cut i' the night for a hobby-horse man to creep in to his she-neighbour and take his leap there!' (Ind. 19-21). Here, the hobby-horse man is the seller of toy hobbies, who has sex ('takes a leap') in the booths during the Fair.

The underlying dramatic irony that discredits popular culture in *The Winter's Tale* thus becomes more obvious in Ben Jonson, paradoxically especially in *Bartholomew Fair*, which is supposedly his most carnivalesque play, the dramatisation of the marketplace itself. However, the grotesquely fat body of Ursla, the pig-woman, who sells all kinds of flesh from pork to young wanton girls is more disgusting than alluring in its vitality. Falstaff was said to 'lard the earth' as he was walking, but Ursla's sweating and later injured body is a far cry from the fat knight's carnivalesque vitality. She is sweating and whining so profusely that a spectator cannot but help but laugh at her – instead of with her, which would stand closer to the universal and inclusive nature of carnival laughter (Bakhtin 1984, 11-12). Although she is the 'fatness of the Fair' (2.2.112) and is associated with carnival on several occasions, her being a scold (cf. reference to 'cucking-stool', 2.5.106), a prostitute and a bawd rather reinforces the commercial aspect of the utopian 'Lubberland' (3.1.71), which undermines the opportunity for presenting an exuberant festive popular culture.

Ursla, the commercial woman, cannot raise festive laughter since Jonson's Fair is a commercial venture, where the foolish ones are duped, stripped and robbed.²² Jonson's scepticism and scorn about anything belonging to popular culture is evident from his use of popular culture. As a shrewd playwright, he employed elements and symbols of popular culture, but his authorial intention was evident from the start: his satirical attitude aimed at uncovering the ills and follies, his comedies always served some form of social corrective. In *Bartholomew Fair* hobby-horses appear as toys, cheap and useless commodities in the Fair, belonging to 'such like rage' as babies (dolls) and puppet-plays (Prologue, ll. 4-6). Even the 1631 Quarto Title Page attests to a judgment passed on popular culture, with a quotation from Horace's *Epistles*, referring to the laughing philosopher Democritus, implying that he would laugh at this audience as well, on the grounds that they are 'deaf donkeys'.

The 'discovery' of the ills of popular culture is supported by the presentation of the character of Cokes, whose name refers to him being a ninny and an ass (Hibbard's gloss, 34). He comes from the country and stupidly buys up the whole store of toy hobbies and dolls. He has a child's fancy for toys, while his carelessness about his things and the simple joy of stealing a pear, as well as his utter enjoyment of the puppet-show underlie the equation of fools, children and hobby-horses. He is described by other characters as 'a child i'faith' (5.4.194), or 'a resolute fool ... and a very sufficient coxcomb' (3.4.36-37). His nostalgic recollection of his childhood memories of listening to ballads at the fireside and

looking at them pasted up in the nursery (3.5.43-45) emphasises his naivety that can only be compared to Mopsa's in *The Winter's Tale*.

Bartholomew Fair represents the corruption of popular culture on several levels. Jonson aptly illustrates the commercialised 'underworld' of the fair in Nightingale the ballad-singer and the cutpurse Edgeworth's criminal duo, who strip Cokes bare of all he possesses, following in the vein of cony-catching pamphlets and literature (on cony-catching see Pugliatti 2003). They also recall their counterpart in *The Winter's Tale*, Autolycus. The ballad titles and themes are as nonsensical as the ones in *The Winter's Tale*, with an even stronger touch of parody, like e.g. 'The Windmill blown down by the witch's fart' (2.4.16). Although anti-festivity Puritans like Stubbes are also mocked in the figure of Zeal-of-the-land Busy, this character discredits not only hypocritical Puritans but also hobby-horses and other elements belonging to popular culture. Curiously, while Jonson mocks the Elizabethan Puritan Stubbes, he also discredits the vigour of country festivals, which can be felt even in Stubbes. However, in *Bartholomew Fair* such carnivalesque symbols become associated not with devilry but with childhood nonsense in Busy's answer to Leatherhead, a seller of toy hobbies. The two passages are worth quoting in full:

Thus al things set in order, then haue they their Hobby-horses, dragons & other Antiques, together with their baudie Pipers and thundering; Drummers to strike vp the deuils daunce withal ... marche these heathen company towards the Church-yard, their pipers pipeing, their drummers thundring, ... dancing, ... their handkerchiefs swinging about their heds like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters. Then, after this, about the Church they goe into the church-yard, where they haue commonly their ... banqueting houses set vp, wherin they feast, banquet & daunce al that day & (peradventure) all the night too. And thus these ... furies spend the Sabaoth day. (Stubbes, 1583, M2r-v)

LEATHERHEAD: What do you lack, gentlemen? What is't you buy? Rattles, drums, babies – BUSY: Peace, with thy apocryphal wares, thou profane publican – thy bells, thy dragons, and thy Toby's dogs. Thy hobby-horse is an idol, a very idol, a fierce and rank idol; and thou the Nebuchadnezzar, the proud Nebuchadnezzar of the Fair, that sett'st it up, for children to fall down to and worship. (3.6.49-56)

The puppet-show at the end – meant to crown the commercial festival of the fair – also plays on the ambivalence of puppets, which are simultaneously presented as living characters and clothes on a stick. The Puppet of the Ghost of Dionysos is seen as a toy hobby-horse (5.5.56), and all majesty of either ghosts or ancient gods is ridiculed in the show and in the comments by the spectators. The final komos, when everyone is invited to 'drown the memory of all enormity in your biggest bowl at home', forcing even Justice Overdo to remember that he is 'but Adam, flesh and blood' (5.5.90-97), though it recalls the generous open door and table of the wealthy at Christmas in Tudor England, is actually a form of

punishment for Overdo's pretensions. Finally, the Epilogue addressed to the King tilts the play even more definitely towards elite entertainment, where hobby-horses and 'such like rage' are only recalled as childhood folly. The final stage in the process of the hobby-horse's degradation is its politicisation by Milton in 1645: 'The word Politician is not us'd to his maw, and therupon he plaies the most notorious hobbihors, jesting and frisking in the luxury of his nonsense' (as quoted in *OED*, 'hobby-horse'). By the end of the golden age of Renaissance theatre the high-spirited and merry hobby-horse of the morris became an object of disgrace and stupidity, first as associated with wanton women then with childhood nonsense to be discarded and scorned. The ambiguities inherent in the polysemous hobby-horse of earlier decades seem to have given way to a less equivocal and more elitist approach to popular culture by the 1640s.

¹ An earlier version of the first part of this article has appeared as Pikli 2012. The issues developed in the 2012 text were those I presented for discussion at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011). The present article is a differently oriented and further elaborated reflection on the theme of the hobby-horse.

² As later on the several textual versions of *Hamlet* will be contrasted, from this point on I refer to the different editions in the following way: 'Jenkins ed.' refers to the conflated version of Arden 2 when the textual differences are of little significance, while Q1, Q2, F refer to the critical editions of these texts by Thompson and Taylor in Arden 3.

³ I agree with Mary Ellen Lamb's proposition that together with fairies and old wives' tales, the hobby-horse should be considered as a symbol of popular culture, with differing interpretations in differing 'productions' (Lamb 2006, 1-25 *et passim*).

⁴ 'Such aides-mémoires are also the *lieux de mémoire*, memory sites in which the memory of the entire national or religious communities is concentrated, monuments, rituals, feast days and customs' (Assmann 2006, 8-9).

⁵ Relying on the audience's intimate knowledge of the things mentioned, the references to popular culture such as mentioning a 'maypole', 'May Day', usually worked as 'popular emblems that conjure[d] up an entire scene in which the carefully coded symbols were familiar to everyone' (Laroque 1993, 46). Laroque's phrase of a 'popular emblem' is particularly apt – partly due to the popularity of emblem books in the age, but more importantly alluding to the method of *ut pictura poesis*, the interdependence of word and image in an emblem. This way even a direct verbal reference to a hobby-horse, like the one in *Love's Labour's Lost*, could evoke a whole range of meanings and images, especially if this potential was exploited by the poet – and Shakespeare was never one to miss such a chance.

⁶ Cf. 'The sexual connotations of the hobby-horse were both feminine and masculine. In the feminine sense, the hobby-horse is equated with a whore, or at least a promiscuous person' (Brissenden 1979, 5). 'As for the word "Hobby-horse", it acquired a succession of meanings, beginning as "gee-gee", "pet hobby" or childish fancy, and ending up as "woman of easy virtue or dissolute morals"' (Laroque 1993, 46).

⁷ In the period 1477 to 1640 the *Literature Online* database lists 9 entries and 10 hits in poetry, 35 entries and 75 hits in drama, 4 entries and 4 hits in prose for the 'hobby-horse'.

⁸ Due to space constraints, the mysterious history of the medieval hobby-horse cannot be treated here. I will simply recall that E.K. Chambers mentions and describes the hobby-horse in his wide-ranging account of the medieval stage (Chambers 1903, 142, 196-197). However, one interesting fact needs to be mentioned here: Cawte translates the fourteenth-century Welsh

poem, which expresses a nostalgic (!) attitude to the 'once magnificent' hobby-horse (Cawte 1978, 11). Jane Garry's article tracing the history of the morris from agricultural ritual and folk custom and then to courtly entertainment and popular theatre makes a highly valuable attempt at following the morris through the centuries; however, a lot of questions cannot be answered with certainty – therefore the real 'history' and meaning of the morris remain a challenge and a mystery (Garry 1983).

⁹Brissenden's informative essay on Shakespeare and the morris collects all these references, although he does not offer any serious categorisation and explanation for them.

¹⁰Cf. e.g. an early sixteenth-century Flemish calendar, in the British Library, and a French wood carving from 1587, as they appear in Endrei and Zolnay 1986, 15-16, 32-33.

¹¹Cf. the digital reproduction in Folger Shakespeare Library ART 256-916, <<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/6859o4>>, accessed 15 Dec 2011.

¹²Brissenden's explanations for this line seem less persuasive to me: 'He [Benedick] may merely mean that Claudio and Don Pedro are dim-witted, like a hobby-horse, or perhaps he is being contemptuous, as the Variorum editor seems to suggest, since the hobby-horse had fallen into disfavour under Puritan influence. A third possibility is that Benedick is implying that their talk is as empty as the hobby-horse's wooden mouth, manipulated by the dancer to open and shut with a dry clacking sound, but signifying nothing' (1979, 6). However, neither Benedick appears as one with Puritan sympathies nor the reference to the full-costumed hobby-horse (complete with headmask and snapping mouth) seems probable, as the late sixteenth – early seventeenth-century hobby-horses were rather the visible composite of a half-man, half-horse being.

¹³Quoted by Montgomery 1956, 219. Although Montgomerie's numerous associations between *Hamlet* and diverse folklore phenomena are definitely interesting, they are, however, too easily made without further analysis, therefore the reader is not convinced of their validity.

¹⁴It is important to note that the third record the *OED* provides for this meaning seems incorrect if one reads the source more carefully: in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* 3.4. 'A Carroch ... with four pyed hobbyhorses' as quoted in *OED* s.v. 'hobby-horse' is actually an ironic remark by Wasp on the childish ignorance of Cokes, who bought up the toyshop with all the hobby-horses and dolls, therefore the 'little odd cart' and the four hobby-horses may be actual toy hobbies: 'You are in Smithfield; you may fit yourself with a fine easy-going street-nag for your saddle again Michaelmas term, do. Has he ne'er a little odd cart for you to make a caroch on i' the country, with four pied hobby-horses? Why the measles should you stand here with your train, cheaping of dogs, birds and babies? You ha' no children to bestow 'em on, ha' you?' (3.4.21-27).

¹⁵'A respected and well-loved performer at church ales in the reign of Henry VIII, the hobby-horse came to signify low taste or even illicit sexuality by the close of Elizabeth's reign' (Lamb 2006, 15).

¹⁶Hartwig also mentions a 1534 treatise on husbandry which contains the word 'brydell', the 'leaping', the idea of commodity and the management and 'gait' of horses and women.

¹⁷A similar attitude is observable in late sixteenth-century Hungarian libellous verse condemning unruly women, and comparing them to mares and horses to be tamed (cf. Pikli 2010).

¹⁸Lindley focuses on revenge tragedy, Liebler on wider-ranging anthropological issues and Bristol on a more generally conceived idea of carnival and Claudius's appropriation of it. These aspects would also deserve revisiting in light of what is said about the hobby-horse. However, this may only be the topic for a later study.

¹⁹Smith refers to this pun and such inherent bawdiness in country ballads (1999, 171).

²⁰The lines are the following: 'Nay, then, there's some likelihood a gentleman's death my outlive his memory. But, my faith, he must build churches then, or else he must follow the old epithet: "With ho, with ho, the hobbyhorse is forgot!"'

²¹Supporting the claims of Lamb and Burke, regarding the 'withdrawal of the elite'.

²²Cf. the process of commercialisation of festivity, Bartholomew Fair and Smithfield in Haynes 1984.

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