SPRING 2012

The Colorado Historian

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL

History Club/Phi Alpha Theta and Department of History

University of Colorado at Boulder

SPRING 2012

The Colorado Historian

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL

Department of History
University of Colorado at Boulder
204 Hellems Building
Boulder, Colorado 80309-0234

Letter from the Editor

It is our pleasure to bring you the 2012 edition of *The Colorado Historian*. This year marks the second consecutive year we have published the journal after a three-year hiatus. I am pleased that we are able to continue this collection as it gives undergraduate students like myself an opportunity to grow intellectually and explore different eras of history. This journal is a collection of essays from University of Colroado undergraduate students who are history majors or casual history buffs. We thank all of the students who took the time to contribute their work. With this journal, our goal is to provide a scholarly medium to display the talent and hard work of these students.

We would like to thank the CU History Department for their invaluable counsel and guidance. Particularly, we want to thank our advisor Professor Matthew Gerber for his support for this project. We would also like to thank Patrick Tally, the undergraduate history advisor, for spreading the word about our History Club and this project. Finally, I would like to bring recognition to Patricia Helfenbein who made this entire journal possible. Her dedication to history is unparalleled and I appreciate her help with the copy editing process.

This journal has been a yearlong process and it is satisfying to see the finished product. The History Club has gone through several late nights of potlucks and presidential trivia to get here. I am proud to be a part of this process, as I have not only learned about history, but also what it takes to collaborate effectively with a team. Also, the dedication of these students never ceases to amaze me. I can barely write a 20-page paper for a class, let alone in my free time. We hope this journal continues to evolve for many years and encourage more research from students. Please enjoy and thank you for reading.

Best Regards,

Ben Macaluso,

Editor-in-Chief

Disclaimer

The Colorado Historian is an undergraduate academic journal written and edited by students with only minimal supervision of a faculty sponsor. The publication process begins by encouraging students both within and outside the Department of History to submit their work. Once the submissions are received, an objective and anonymous evaluation process begins. Submissions are evaluated on quality of analysis, clarity of organization, use of sources, and writing mechanics and style.

CU History Club/Phi Alpha Theta, the Department of History, and the editors of this volume assume no responsibility for the factual content of the published articles or the opinions of their contributors.

The Colorado Historian would like to thank all of the students who submitted their work for consideration.

The Colorado Historian

AN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL

SPRING 2012

Symbolism in Medieval Chess

Kimberley Smith

In contemporary western society, a game of chess is simply that: a game, a form of leisure fueled by the desire for a diversion from a mundane, everyday life, one filled with continuous hardship and strenuous labor. For some, the game's significance may even run slightly deeper, perhaps reflecting an intense determination to engage in strategic competition and the need to out-perform other players. In medieval society, however, a simple chessboard and the pieces that accompanied it were deliberately infused with certain valuable meanings. The game itself was a significant illustration of medieval society, a symbol that represented social status, moral values, religious meaning, and even cosmic significance. The medieval attitude towards chess, and even other forms of entertainment, was thus highly complex and charged with the potent mixture of metaphor and morality that defined European society in the Middle Ages.

The origins of the popular game that would come to embody the values of medieval Europe remain a topic of scholarly debate even to the present day. As a game involving a chequered board and pieces that are moved only within the guidelines of strict rules, chess probably finds its roots in a four-player game that originated in China, even though the first written records alluding to chess can be found in India. Indeed, the game of chess played by medieval Europeans bears a striking resemblance to *chaturanga*, a board game involving two players that had already been developed in northern India by the late sixth century.[1] From India, *chaturanga* most likely spread through Persia, where its name was changed to *shantranj*, and the game took on a symbolism that was distinctly Arabic. *Shantranj* rapidly became the most popular board game in Arab culture and was continuously celebrated in Arabic art and literature as a symbol of human suffering endured through fate.[2] So popular was this Arabic pastime that it made its way to Spain through the Moorish conquests of the eighth century and had entrenched itself in western European culture by the year 1000.[3]

The progression of chess from Arabic Spain to the Christian kingdoms of Europe can most likely be attributed to Charlemagne's territorial conquests in Iberia, and indeed, chess became a favorite pastime of the aristocratic classes as it filtered into the Frankish empire during the reign of the Carolingian kings. The understanding that chess was introduced during the time of a "golden age" ruled over by a powerful Christian king certainly contributed to its popularity, and the game's potential as a medium for allegory and symbolism, particularly of the Christian variety, were acutely recognized within a century of its induction into European culture. Indeed, given that the earliest references to chess in Europe are derived from manuscripts written in Spanish monastic institutions,[4] the game seems to have taken on an aura of Christianity in the West even before it became a distinguished component of European culture.

The *Jeu d'Echecs de Charlemagne*, a chess set dated to the eleventh century, stands as a

[1] Sally Wilkins, *Sports and Games of Medieval Cultures* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 101.
[2] "Chess Set," *Grove Art Online*, 15 March 2011.
[3] Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2.
[4] Ann E. Moyer, *The Philosopher's Game: Rithmonachia in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 23.

testament to the early importance of the game as a symbol infused with various meanings. As the legend goes, this particular chess set was given to Charlemagne as a gift from an Eastern caliph, and was intended as a sign of peace and respect for the power of the French emperor. The pieces are all of Arab design, and in addition to being made of heavy rock crystal, they are also unusually large. This suggests that the game was not intended for actual play, but rather was presented as a symbolic tool of friendly diplomacy. Given the solemnity and monetary value of the *Jeu d'Echecs de Charlemagne*, the board and accompanying pieces were more likely put on display in the royal treasury than made readily available for players at a gaming table.[5] The importance of chess as a symbol for diplomacy remained ingrained in European tradition even as late as the thirteenth century, when the leader of the *Hashshashin*, a powerful Islamic group, presented King Louis IX with a chess set, along with various gold and crystal treasures, as a symbol of their continuing peace and negotiation.[6]

Although the story of the *Jeu d'Echecs de Charlemagne* is probably just a myth, it is nevertheless clear that chess was a game permeated with complex symbolism, one that reflected the values of European society. This was in sharp contrast to the various other base entertainments in which the noble and lower classes alike often indulged. Drinking was recognized a pastime in and of itself, and no matter the game, players were often drunk with wine.[7] The Church, however, saw this as a sinful abuse of the blood of Christ. Gambling, even in the eyes of the profit economy, was considered wrong and immoral, a dishonest means of making money. The Church further condemned gambling by citing the New Testament and the story of Christ's violent reaction against merchants who centered their lives around making money.[8] Furthermore, if a woman took part in such sinful behavior, she was severely punished, and was usually given the death sentence.

In a society that was constantly either at war with another kingdom, suppressing internal threats, or sending pilgrims and knights to the east on crusade, violence was a necessary component of everyday life and usually manifested itself in sport.[9] Fueled by wine and the excitement of the game, violence continuously arose amongst the players. In a smaller town, it was not unusual for entire quarters, or even for the whole town itself to become involved in the fight. Although many were wounded and even killed, the local authorities exercised a certain amount of restraint when suppressing the battling villagers. The *battagliole*, or simulated battles, were seen as a useful form of training for real war, and thus when a fight broke out over the outcome of a game, it was usually allowed to go on until the participants were too exhausted to continue.[10] Of course, the most sophisticated, particularly knightly pastimes included archery, hunting, jousting, and other chivalrous duties in an open preparation for war.

The Church often condemned the diversions chosen as distractions from menial everyday labor, and it was nearly impossible to reconcile many forms of entertainment with the strict standards of Christian morality. Although the Church clearly understood the realities of a warring society, it vehemently used the language of peace and emphasized the importance of rules in order to control societal violence. The Church continued to voice strong opposition to

[5] "Chess Set," *Grove Art Online*, 15 March 2011.
[6] John of Joinville, "The Life of Saint Louis," ca. 1305-1309, John of Joinville and Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *The Chronicles of the Crusades* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), 258.
[7] John Marshall Carter, *Medieval Games: Sports and Recreations in Feudal Society* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 31.
[8] Paola Chiurulla, "Entertainment in Medieval Culture," (Umbra Institute, Perugia: 15 November 2010), Lecture.
[9] Carter, *Medieval Games*, 31.
[10] Chiurulla, "Entertainment in Medieval Culture," Lecture, 15 November 2010.

sports that resulted in serious injury, such as the tournament, in addition to opposing gambling and drinking. In general, however, the ecclesiastical community seems to have "grudgingly accepted the sports that honed the skills of warriors."[11] Clergymen even occasionally participated in violent sports and acts of war, sanctioning the use of violence for a just cause and personally justifying the necessary role of the *militi Christi*, or soldiers of Christ.[12]

As a unified institution, however, the Church was never able to develop a consistent attitude towards the game of chess. The majority of "what we know about medieval sport is almost entirely from the writings of churchmen and monks,"[13] and these writings display a vast range of opinions. As a game played by the lower classes and nobility alike, chess was frequently connected to dice and gambling, pastimes that, as we have seen, were already condemned as dishonest and blasphemous. Games of dice in particular were associated with "drunkenness, prostitution, and bad outcomes."[14] It is certainly possible that some early versions of chess were indeed played with dice, solidifying its unstable connection to the gambling environment. Chess thus faced Church repudiation right from the beginning, and many clerical (and even some secular) institutions banned chess sets from their halls.[15]

And yet we find that the "very first document that mentions chess pieces in Europe, Ermengaud of Urgel's *schacos*, is that of a count bequeathing them to the treasury of a church in 1008."[16] We learn that chess was even popular amongst the clergy, in defiance of the ban on ecclesiastical participation.[17] Clearly, then, if the playing of chess was forbidden in some institutions, even the Church still recognized the game's potential for symbolism as soon as it was introduced to Europe. Despite its early connections to the despised sports involved in gambling, the majority of the European population still considered it a game to be classed with hunting, riding, hawking, and various other pastimes of the courtly culture.[18] It is therefore hardly surprising that the game of chess became a common medium of expression, a game intended to convey a certain set of messages from the secular and ecclesiastical worlds alike.

Chess was, at first glance, a confirmation of the strict social boundaries of the medieval world. Each piece was clearly attached to a very specific to a social class, with the pawns representing the serfs and the peasantry, and the knights, castles, bishops, queen, and king each mirrored the figures for which they were named. Because of this enforcement of social roles, it is easy to see why chess was a popular courtly entertainment, emphasizing solidarity of the class boundaries and ensuring the dominance of aristocratic power. And yet the meanings that the pieces themselves were meant to convey ran much deeper than the mere representation of social division, for chess "became a way to model political order as well as a way for individuals to imagine their own civic identities."[19]

When Jacob de Cessolis, a Dominican monk in northern Italy, wrote his *Book of Chess* in

---

[11] Carter, *Medieval Games*, 54.
[12] Ibid, 33.
[13] Ibid, *Medieval Games*, 50.
[14] Olivia Remie Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: The *Libro de ajedrez* of Alfonso X, el Sabio." *Speculum* 82.1-2 (2007): 317.
[15] Oliver D. Plessow, "What the Artefacts Tell: Medieval Chess Pieces and the Interpretation of the Social Connotations of the Game of Chess," *The Mediation of Symbol in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times*, edited by Rudolf Suntrup, Jan R. Veenstra, and Anne Bollmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 121-124.
[16] Ibid, 125.
[17] Moyer, *The Philosopher's Game*, 30.
[18] Plessow, "What the Artefacts Tell," 125-126.
[19] Adams, *Power Play*, 3.

the late thirteenth century, he took special care to emphasize the attributes and importance of each piece on a chessboard. He first separates the pieces into "noble" and "common" categories, and describes their physical characteristics: the king, in addition to bearing a crown, holds an apple in his left hand and a scepter in his right; the queen is a beautiful woman wrapped in an ermine robe; each bishop sits in a chair holding an open book; the knights are riding their horses, bearing all of their armor and weapons; each rook wears a mantle and holds a staff in their hands.[20] The common pieces, or pawns, are then each described in terms of peasant professions, including farmers, carpenters, notaries, merchants, doctors, tavern keepers, toll keepers, and wastrels.

This was therefore a game that was exceedingly related to the common classes, and it is highly significant that de Cessolis uses a series of actual peasant professions to describe the pawns. Before the emergence of this particular allegory, the structure of society was represented as a body in which each limb would necessarily have to follow the orders of those above it. Yet de Cessolis suggests an allegory that "imagines its subjects to possess independent bodies in the form of pieces bound to the state by rules rather than biology."[21] To the lower classes in particular, this accentuates the strong possibility of social mobility, a concept that would have been inconceivable in the preceding centuries. Social mobility was further emphasized by the knowledge that anyone could play chess, especially since it was a game that required no knowledge of Latin, quite unlike *rithmomachia*, an early precursor to chess known as the philosophers' game.[22] Chess further devalued social boundaries because it was a game that Jews could play with Christians, nobility with the peasantry, "a free person could play with a slave, or a lover with a beloved, and either player might win."[23]

Although we know that chess was a game that transcended social divisions, it is predominantly the royals and courtiers who are most often actually depicted playing the game. Alfonso X of Castile deemed chess to be "the most noble" of all games, asserting that it "demands greater skill than the others,"[24] and the distinction between chess and dice games is even physically represented in medieval art, where the chess players could be depicted as any gender, race, or religion, usually within a richly decorated setting. And yet we find that "the dice players are shown in rowdy groups, gambling and drinking in taverns," a pastime that was already looked down upon and fiercely criticized.[25] Chess itself was often associated with courtly culture, and Alfonso X's *Libro de ajedrez* in particular depicts certain court personnel engaged in dramatic rounds of the popular game, from falconers and jesters to courtiers and courtesans. The courtly aura surrounding chess extended from the belief that the game signified a certain nobility: it was a game that required wisdom, strategy, and control. Chess thus represented the ideal society, one in which everyone works for the good of the community, and one that is ruled over by a just and righteous king.[26]

---

[20] Jacob de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, ca. 1290, translated by H.L. Williams (New York: Italica Press, 2008) 11, 17, 24, 30, 41.
[21] Adams, *Power Play*, 20.
[22] Moyer, *The Philosopher's Game*, 30.
[23] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile," 346.
[24] Alfonso X, *Libros del ajedrez, dados, y tablas*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1987) fol. 1v; 2:240, as quoted by Olivia Remid Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile," 316.
[25] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile," 316.
[26] Ibid, 317, 340.

Figure 1: A royal game of chess. *Table of Christian Faith*, fol. 1. ca. 1405.

It is therefore hardly surprising that learning to play chess, and to play effectively, became an essential component of noble and royal education alike. In medieval art, courtly depictions of gaming typically involve kings and queens themselves, usually playing chess and surrounded by their children, perhaps instructing them in the art of strategy (see Figure 1). The game is a clear symbol of war, with the pieces lined up in formation and the players strategizing to protect the king, and it was considered necessary for a king to play in order to enhance his potential for just and effective kingship. As Jacob de Cessolis describes the attributes of the king as an essential chess piece, we are reminded of the ideal virtues that a medieval king should display:

> "A king should radiate with virtues and grace. His will and desires should be so enriched by them that his character stands out above other people's […] It is the king's job to use force when kindness is not effectual […] In his right hand he should have a scepter, representing justice, by which he constrains evil subjects […] Mercy and truth both preserve the king […] Above all, the king should be gentle and compassionate."[27]

Perhaps in response to de Cessolis's comments, advisors and meticulous family members drilled young kings, princes, and nobles in round after brutal round of chess, emphasizing that the shame of losing a game would be magnified tenfold if the player were to lose an actual war.[28] Chess as war was a metaphor readily acknowledged in medieval Europe, and John of Joinville, in his chronicle of King Louis IX's crusade to the East, characteristically describes the soldiers advancing like the pieces in a game of chess.[29]

Perhaps because of the game's general association with entertainment, wisdom, royalty, and war, many of the chessboards described in written records as well as those that have survived the centuries are astoundingly rich in material. The most common materials used in making the pieces and board alike were walrus tusk, bone, cast metal, or simply wood. The Lewis chessmen, discovered in Scotland and dated to the mid-twelfth century, are carved from walrus ivory and whales' teeth.[30] For royals and wealthier nobles, pieces were made of rock crystal and inlaid with gemstones, with some of the pieces formed entirely from precious stones and metals. Although many of these boards were primarily designed as showpieces for a treasury, they probably did see quite a bit of use.[31]

The most prestigious and sought-after chess sets, however, were made from elephant ivory, such as the *Jeu d'Echecs de Charlemagne*. Ivory was desirable primarily for its exotic nature, for it symbolized the East, a foreign land abundant in glamorous curiosities: Muslim scientists and artists, mysterious creatures, and powerful caliphs. Playing with pieces carved from the tusks of an elephant was a novelty few were privileged to boast about. Yet ivory was

[27] Jacob de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 11-12.
[28] Adams, *Power Play*, 34.
[29] Joinville, "The Life of Saint Louis," 212.
[30] "Chess Set," *Grove Art Online*, 15 March 2011.
[31] Plessow, "What the Artefacts Tell," 119.

also intended to evoke a particular image in the players' mind, as well as a sense of honor and chivalry. In various medieval bestiaries, we find that elephants, whose tusks graced the pieces of many a royal chessboard, were renowned for their intelligence, their good memory, and their long lives. Though used in war, the elephant was seen as a naturally gentle animal, intrinsically inclined to be kind and protective. The elephant was also the ideal spouse, for they were believed to be nonadulterous, remaining in a state of chastity with their partner for life. This particular sense of purity was even linked to the original state of humanity before the Fall of Adam and Eve, and the elephant thus became a subtle symbol of innocence and the compassion of Christ.[32] Pieces carved from elephant ivory, then, were possibly intended to evoke this sense of original purity, as well as to encourage the player to emulate the natural qualities of the elephant.

In addition to the chivalrous and subtle meanings derived from ivory chess pieces, medieval chess also took on several deeply significant moral and religious connotations. Even the medieval origin of the game itself was widely constructed as a moral allegory. Before it developed the aura of medieval symbolism, chess was often associated with Palamedes, the Greek hero who saw through Odysseus' ruse of madness and forced him to fulfill his vow to fight in the Trojan War. According to ancient legend, it was Palamedes who invented *pessoi*, an archaic form of what would eventually become known as chess.[33] But with the emergence of the medieval world and its chivalric, Christian values, Palamedes's ancient pagan character gradually transformed to fit that of the ideal Christian hero. He thus became a Saracen knight who had converted to Christianity and imported chess from the orient. In medieval legend, he was most widely known for competing with Tristan for the Irish princess Isolde's hand in marriage and for serving King Arthur as a Knight of the Round Table.[34] The game of chess was practically inseparable from this popular character, and the chessboard pattern served as Palamedes's livery in courtly tournaments, enhancing the game's importance as a form of strategy and protection. In addition, Palamedes's heretical origins as a Saracen knight also ensured that the chessboard served as a representation of his conversion to Christianity and thus became a recognized symbol of the triumph of moral Christian values.

But Jacob de Cessolis proposes a different version of the game's invention and attributes the creation of the medieval game to a Babylonian philosopher named Xerxes. According to de Cessolis, Xerxes, a noble scholar who advocated the morality of justice, strove to create a scenario that would curb King Evilmerodach's evil ways and bring a semblance of justice to the lawless city of Babylon. Despite the knowledge that "the king might have him put to death for the reproof," Xerxes was determined to reform the king's "wicked life,"[35] and the final result of his trial and error was the game of chess. This was "a game filled with unlimited metaphors and parables," and, according to de Cessolis, "[b]ecause of the countless number of ways to play, because of the various meanings and metaphors, and because of the ingeniousness of the battles, the game has become famous."[36] Xerxes' courage and dedication to justice represented an ideal behavior and sense of morality, and from the moment of its medieval creation, the game itself was thus infused with these essential qualities.

---

[32] Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130-135.
[33] Chiurulla, "Entertainment in Medieval Culture," Lecture, 15 November 2010.
[34] Mike Dixon-Kennedy, *A Companion to Arthurian and Celtic Myths and Legends* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004), 333.
[35] Jacob de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 7.
[36] Ibid, 10.

The *Moralitas de Scaccario*, a treatise on the moralities of chess commonly attributed to Innocent III, opens with, "The entire world is a chessboard, and its one end is white, while the other end is black; and this is because of the twofold condition of life and death, or praise and blame."[37] In order to assure a victory in chess, all of the pieces must work together to defeat the enemy player, and this was an allegory applied to everyday life. Through a moral imperative, individuals, like the chess pieces protecting the king, must assume equal portions of responsibility, enjoyment, and sacrifice to ensure the success of the community. If this was not done, not only would the game of life and morality be lost, but the selfish person who ignored his own moral responsibilities would also be plagued by shame and exposure. For in addition to being an instruction booklet, we see that Jacob de Cessolis' *Book of Chess* also functioned as a behavior guide for the realm, for both the king and the common peasant alike. De Cessolis's chess was equated with social roles and standards, making it an entirely public game. Each move was therefore subject to public judgment and scrutiny, much like the behavior of each individual, for "when their vices spill over […] the fabric of society is threatened."[38]

The moralities of chess extended into the art of the medieval world, where the game was represented in wall frescoes, tapestries, drawings, and illuminations. As opposed to a random set of pieces, chess images in medieval art depicted "an actual, playable chess problem,"[39] perhaps intended to emphasize the need for true morality as well as the relevance of an accompanying piece of writing. The artists of these illustrations even ensure that the players "often point or glance at significant pieces, and they sometimes hold relevant pieces in their hands."[40] But although a variety of players of varying ages, genders, ethnicities, and religions are shown playing chess, the games are nearly always won by the morally and socially dominant player, usually an upper-class Christian man.[41] In literature, chess also became an essential feature of courtly love, and in medieval romances and the various illuminations that accompanied them, the lovers are often depicted playing chess as a ritual of formal courtship. Alfonso X's *Libro de ajedrez* contains several illustrations that portray these scenes of "the lovers' game," one of which shows a game "played by a Christian man and woman, in which the woman loses and is shown handing over a ring to her victorious male opponent."[42] By extension, this woman is also handing over herself, with the chessboard signaling her defeat and the ring representing the consequences of that defeat and, perhaps, her surrender to marriage.

Not surprisingly, chess was also swept up in the demand for works of art that depicted Biblical scenes or Christian allegories. The chessboard itself was seen as a work of art, representing the correlation between Christianity and classical philosophy. The board was a physical manifestation of the invisible connection between space and time: it was a perfect eight-by-eight square, with the number eight signifying the eight celestial spheres mentioned by the Pythagoreans. All in all, these squares corresponded to the sixty-four generations between Adam and Christ, and the board was thus highly indicative of the connection the Christian and classical worlds.[43] Similarly, in the New Testament, Death is constantly personified as an actual, physical being, and in medieval art, chess became his game of choice (Figure 2: note that the

[37] *Moralitas de Scaccorio*, ed. Murray, *A History of Chess* 560-561; as quoted by Plessow, "What the Artefacts Tell," 109.
[38] Adams, *Power Play*, 35.
[39] Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile," 302.
[40] Ibid, 311.
[41] Ibid, 341.
[42] Ibid, (fig. 7), 324.
[43] Chiurulla, "Entertainment in Medieval Culture," Lecture, 15 November 2010.

king is in checkmate). A fifteenth century fresco in Täby church, Sweden, depicts a human man playing a game of chess with Death, personified as a skeleton with flesh dripping from his bones.[44] There are two possible interpretations of this image. The first is that Death is yet a further allegory for Satan, and the fresco is intended to portray humanity's continuous struggle against evil and immorality. The second interpretation is that Death is simply death, with the chessboard symbolizing a passage to the afterlife and the eventual triumph of eternity. Either interpretation, however, leads to the same conclusion, that it was possible for chess to transcend temporal powers and to extend into the heavens and the afterlife.

In the medieval world, chess took on a significance that was unprecedented by any medieval pastime: it became an essential component of a noble education; it was simultaneously the ideal symbol of just, strategic war and an icon of diplomacy; it represented the ideal Christian morality; it personified western medieval society; and it was also widely incorporated into medieval art and literature. Unlike the traditional pastimes of hunting, gambling, drinking, and various other amusements of the medieval world, chess was much more than a crude form of entertainment. Not only did the game represent the social structure of medieval Europe, it was also infused with essential moral and religious meaning. From the design of the chessboard itself to the very materials with which the pieces were made, chess was a physical and metaphorical representation of medieval values and beliefs.

Figure 2: Death playing chess with a king. 'Master B R with the Anchor.'
The Illustrated Bartsch. ca. 1480s.

[44] Plessow, "What the Artefacts Tell" (plate 32), 139.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

De Cessolis, Jacob. *The Book of Chess*. ca. 1290. Translated by H.L. Williams. New York: Italica Press, 2008.

John of Joinville. "The Life of Saint Louis." ca. 1305-1309. John of Joinville and Geoffrey of Villehardouin. *The Chronicles of the Crusades*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.

Secondary Sources

Adams, Jenny. *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Carter, John Marshall. *Medieval Games: Sports and Recreations in Feudal Society*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

"Chess set." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. 15 Mar. 2011 <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T016348>.

Chiurulla, Paola. "Entertainment in Medieval Culture." Medieval Culture. Umbra Institute, Perugia. 15 November 2010. Lecture.

Dixon-Kennedy, Mike. *A Companion to Arthurian and Celtic Myths and Legends*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004.

Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Moyer, Ann E. *The Philosophers' Game: Rithmomachia in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Plessow, Oliver D. "What the Artefacts Tell: Medieval Chess Pieces and the Interpretation of the Social Connotations of the Game of Chess." *The Mediation of Symbol in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times*. Edited by Rudolf Suntrup, Jan R. Veenstra, and Anne Bollmann. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 109-141.

Remie Constable, Olivia. "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: The *Libro de ajedrez* of Alfonso X, el Sabio." *Speculum* 82.1-2 (2007): 301-347. Print.

Wilkins, Sally. *Sports and Games of Medieval Cultures*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002.

Edward II and the Expectations of Kingship

Joseph Sarr

Following the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, the new line of kings that descended from William the Conqueror enjoyed a very secure and independent base of power. The once firm foundations of the English throne fractured throughout the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries thanks to the disastrous reigns of King John and Henry III. Although the crown managed to right itself under the acclaimed rule of Edward I "Longshanks," in 1272, the damage was done. The two previous rulers, through their tyranny and extravagance, convinced the nobility of England that the throne was incapable of ruling on its own. The issuing of Magna Carta in 1215 effectively curtailed Norman and Angevin power. Simultaneously, the baronage slowly accumulated more influence in governing England. A capable monarch, however, could run the country while limited by institutional guidelines. Even though his constant warmongering frustrated his nobles and drained the royal coffers to near depletion, Edward I's actions and decisions ultimately strengthened the English state by pacifying its enemies and satisfying its barons. Unfortunately, this monarchical redemption was short-lived. The king's son, Edward II, assumed the crown in 1307 and held it until 1327. During his reign, the new ruler had managed to reverse most of his father's advancements by completely alienating virtually every political constituency in England. The result was the first successful overthrow of an English king. Even though depositions and revolutions occurred with astonishing frequency during the early modern period, the notion was quite unheard of in fourteenth-century England. Edward II managed to shatter this norm because of how specific baronial expectations of kings had become. Up until his rule, English history had shown that prosperity increasingly occurred under the guidance of a politically-active, militaristic ruler, one who was strong-willed and independent enough to stand on his own, yet flexible enough to appease the baronage. Edward I's successful reign further defined this unspoken, yet growingly relevant archetype. Edward II, through a fatal combination of his passive and alienating behavior, dependence on favoritism, and constant military failures, fell short of such rigid expectations that his barons were ultimately forced to take extreme measures against him.

Although historians generally agree that Edward II's reign was a complete failure, and that the king himself was rather inept, debate has centered on the specific causes for his downfall. Early studies on the king were surprisingly sympathetic to him. James Conway Davies, a historian who wrote in 1918 on baronial unrest, portrayed Edward II as a poor leader, but not a terrible person. He was simply unprepared to handle the baronial opposition that had accumulated against the throne over time. Davies argued that the decline in the power of feudal relations, starting primarily during the reign of Henry II, increased discontent among the barons.[1] As administrative power consolidated within the king's household, magnates grew greedier for their share of the wealth. By the fourteenth century, baronial ambivalence to the power of the throne necessitated a particular type of king: a strong-willed military commander who could placate the opposition through force of personality and an insatiable political drive.[2] Even though Edward I certainly fulfilled such an assertive role, his son, by his very personality, was

[1] Davies, James Conway. *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II: Its Character and Policy*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 15.
[2] Ibid, pp. 77 – 78.

doomed from the start. Although Davies' early analysis acknowledged the problems of Edward II's passivity and favoritism, he placed greater emphasis on the issue of baronial discontent, which had risen to a boil under previous kings. Davies also rarely explored the other problems that Edward II inherited from his father in great detail, such as debt and the war with Scotland.

Unlike Davies, more recent historians tended to look at Edward II himself in an attempt to understand his demise. Historian Natalie Fryde argued that Edward II was a tyrant, and that his unquenchable lust for wealth was one of the main causes for his deposition.[3] Through excessive taxation, he eventually reversed the debts that his father had left him and grew indulgently wealthy. Although Edward II certainly was a greedy man, his father also occasionally incensed the baronage through over-taxation. Avarice was a fairly common trait among English kings, but unlike his predecessor, Edward II did not properly justify his accumulation of wealth. Edward I innovated with Parliament enough to persuade his magnates to fund his projects, but his son's failure to manipulate the institution left him at a severe disadvantage.

Edward II's favoritism was another of the prominent ignoble qualities which historians have associated with his fall. Though the notion that the king's favoritism escalated into homosexuality has remained one of the most widely portrayed aspects of his reign, specialists have questioned the validity of such a claim. Laurence Echard, an early 18th century chronicler of Edward II, wrote extensively on the king's infatuation with the Gascon Piers Gaveston, hinting that their love exceeded that of Edward II and Queen Isabella.[4] In a similar vein, Ranulph Higden, a chronicler who wrote in the mid-fourteenth century, noted that the king "…ardently loved one of his familiars, whom he sustained above all, enriched, preferred, and honoured."[5] Higden, through his careful word choices, also subtly emphasized Edward II's sexuality. Neither of these early accounts explicitly confirmed that his favoritism ever moved beyond what may have simply been a very brotherly friendship. Even the *Vita Edwardi Secundi,* one of the few surviving manuscripts written during Edward II's reign, remained vague on the subject, though its anonymous author noted that the king considered Gaveston his "brother."[6] W.M. Ormrod has examined the topic of Edward II's sexuality further, suggesting the king was simply slandered as a homosexual by his enemies and unfavorable chroniclers.[7] Regardless of the sexual nature of the king's favoritism, historians have generally agreed that his deference to his close friends was a fatal misstep. As with the case for preexisting baronial tensions towards the throne, Edward II's favoritism certainly crippled his authority and respect in Parliament, though not enough to account as the sole reason for his deposition. Some preceding kings had favorites as well, yet retained their thrones. Edward's downfall was therefore not the result of merely one overwhelmingly negative trait, but the culmination of several personal deficiencies (favoritism, military ineptitude, passivity, etc.) working in unison to prevent him from conforming to the increasingly defined archetype of a model king.

Taking up the reins of government from a predecessor was always a challenging task for any ruler, and the successor often inherited unsolved problems from the previous administration.

---

[3] Fryde, Natalie. *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II: 1321 – 1326.* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 88.
[4] Echard Laurence. *The History of England. From the First Entrance of Julius Caesar and the Romans to the End of the Reign of James the First. Containing the Space of 1678 Years*. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1707), 325.
[5] Dodd, Gwilym and Musson, Anthony, eds. *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*. (Rochester: York University Press, 2006), 32.
[6] Childs, Wendy R. trans. *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 14 - 15. (1) "Reuera fratrem suum semper appelauerat" (2) For convenience, henceforth referred to as the "*Vita.*"
[7] Dodd and Musson, 46.

Initial obstacles such as impending war, debt, and growing baronial unrest threatened Edward II's popularity and limited his political options as king, yet were all hurdles that successful kings of the past eventually overcame in one way or another. Edward I likewise experienced a rocky start to his reign, yet had triumphed through wise and decisive actions as both an administrator and as a warrior. Edward II's ability was truly tested in living up to the precedent set by his ancestors in dealing with these initial issues. His uncaring behavior and alienating methods, however, only exacerbated these problems and brought the country to ruin.

Actions taken by Edward I during the end of his reign increased the tensions between the king and the nobility much in the way Henry III's wars did in the 1260s. In response to questionable and unpopular taxations made by Edward I during the early 1300s, a new clause was added to Edward II's coronation oath, which demanded that he "uphold and defend the laws and righteous customs that the community of the realm shall choose."[8] Although the malicious intent and overall effectiveness of the addition was initially quite meager, the fact that the barons imposed it at all revealed the extent of their desire to curb perceived tyranny.[9] In spite of the generally sour baronial disposition towards the crown, Edward II's coronation was characterized by anticipation and enthusiasm on behalf of the barons and the Church. Feats and tournaments ensued, and a general sense of relief followed the death of the overbearing Edward I.[10] The newly crowned king, however, soon displayed foreboding tendencies.[11]

In marked contrast to the frantic manner into which Edward I threw himself in his efforts to stabilize England, his son noticeably procrastinated when dealing with political, rather than personal, measures. Edward II's passivity and lack of interest in fulfilling the administrative duties required of the king grew apparent to his nobility, which noted with dismay that he clearly lacked the administrative gifts and assertive qualities of his predecessors. In a sense, he replaced the grasping systematization of Edward I with his own personal brand of incompetence.

The most important task for Edward I was dealing with ongoing tension with Scotland. He suddenly died just when England had mobilized to resume fighting its old foe. By 1307 the kingdom was in disarray over whether the war would continue. Edward II likely understood the political importance of Scotland's pacification, yet never quite cared for its conquest as much as his father did. Writing a few years after the event, the anonymous author of the *Vita* remarked how several councils and discussions occurred "about the defence [sic] of the land of Scotland and the defeat of Robert the Bruce, but their outcomes did not become public nor result in action."[12] Partially out of financial necessity, but also indifference, Edward II postponed the invasion and instead merely strengthened the northern border.[13] Robert the Bruce, heir to the Scottish throne, personally enjoyed the respite, and after consolidating his power, began a campaign to ravage Northern England.[14] In contrast, after his own crowning in 1274,

---

[8] Fryde, 17.
[9] Davies, 349. Davies dated these baronial attempts to restrain the king back to Magna Carta in 1215. A clause in Magna Carta allowed for the assembly of a baronial committee to observe the king's actions. (pp. 345 – 348).
[10] Childs, 9.
[11] McKisack, May. *The Fourteenth Century, 1307 – 1399*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 5. For example, Edward II chose to recite his coronation oath in French rather than more formal Latin, which spread rumors of the king's illiteracy among the nobility. In reality, Edward II may have spoken French because it was the main language of most present at the ceremony.
[12] Childs, pp. 14 - 15. "Interea multi tractatus et consilia habita sunt de defencione terre Socia et expugnacione Roberti de Brutz; cuius tamen effectus fuerunt, nec in palam uenit neque de facto apparuit."
[13] Tuck, Anthony. *Crown and Nobility: England 1272 – 1461, Second Edition*. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 37.
[14] Fryde, 120.

Longshanks (Edward I) quickly set about preparing for war with Wales, which had become hostile to England while the new king was away fighting in the Crusades.[15] Edward II's failure to act quickly and decisively only worsened his situation when he declared war in 1310.

Immediate warfare against Scotland threatened to increase the crippling £200,000 debt, which his father had accumulated while funding his own wars.[16] It also, however, could make a positive impression on the doubtful baronage, showing that the new king possessed the assertive and decisive clout of his successful forebears. Instead, Edward II's passivity fractured his relationship with his barons, especially those in Northern England who suffered under the Scots. Many of them hated Edward II so much that they refused to join him on his 1310 campaign.[17]

Edward II, somewhat in the manner of a spoiled child, thoroughly enjoyed his status as king, yet despised much of the work that came with the job. His modified coronation oath mandated that he work with the involvement of his barons; yet the two groups rarely saw eye to eye.[18] Rather than aggressively domineer English politics, the lazy monarch preferred to do as little actual administrative work as possible, and acted only when trouble directly threatened his position. In an administration that had become "increasingly dependent upon the king's personal character, ability and diligence and upon the character and skill of the officials he appointed," Edward II's slowness, weak will, and incompetence rendered him an easy target for the more politically fierce baronage.[19] Edward I faced tension toward the crown lingering from Henry III's baronial wars in the mid-1260s.[20] His barons, however, were less united and less willing to impose serious resistance to him, and their lack of cohesion allowed him to manipulate them.[21] By the time Edward II took the throne, many of those barons had retired or died, replaced by a younger generation that compensated for their disorganization with superior ambition and a collective disregard for the binding royal obligations of their predecessors.[22] Edward II deliberately avoided engaging and combating his barons in Parliament, and postponed calling the assembly on multiple occasions to ensure that no progress was made. He even habitually shirked attending Parliament to go hunting.[23] Rather than pour his efforts into strengthening the country and his royal prerogative, the king preferred to waste time in idle recreation with his friends.

Again, the parliamentary precedents set by Edward I went unheeded during his successor's reign. In contrast to his son, who actively avoided Parliament, Edward I was the first English king to dominate the institution. Longshanks, who had experienced the dangers of the baronial war of Simon de Montfort firsthand, understood the importance of communicating with his magnates, and frequently called Parliament throughout his life.[24] Constantly keeping the baronage in the dark encouraged unrest. Although Edward I never enjoyed granting concessions to his magnates, he realized that working against them increasingly proved unproductive and that gaining their cooperation was often possible with a few royal favors. Edward I tactfully and

[15] Prestwich, Michael. *The Three Edwards: War and State in England 1272 – 1377, Second Edition*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 10.
[16] Ibid, 74.
[17] Valente, *Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England*. (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003). 126.
[18] McKisack, 6.
[19] Davies, 77.
[20] Tuck, 1.
[21] Ibid, 33.
[22] Davies, 76.
[23] Ibid, 77.
[24] Tuck, 5.

continually sought the support and favor of the barons by assisting them in implementing several series of reforms. By the 1290s "the issues raised in the barons' wars now seemed dead" and from that point onward he acted with less fear of diminishing royal prerogative.[25] As a result, Edward I appeased his magnates enough to finally wage war on Wales in 1276 and support his future excursions into Scotland.

Although Edward I certainly had his share of enemies among the baronage, his shrewd administrative expertise and commanding personality often overshadowed that of his opposition. Under the rule of his son, the political ambitions of the nobility flourished without a strong royal presence to keep them in check, and turned hostile as the king consistently failed to meet expectations. Some, like Thomas, earl of Lancaster, emerged as powerful adversaries to the throne. Exact reasons for Lancaster's antagonism towards Edward II are unknown, yet his anger with the king's incompetence led to his place at the head of royal opposition.[26] Because he lacked the force of personality to resist his barons, Edward II's massive inherited debts further subjected him to their whims. Financial pressure often produced royal concessions, as the king's meager revenue paled against those of rich barons.[27] Edward II's negligence of his royal duties led the wealthy Lancaster and many other magnates to draw up countermeasures forcing the monarch to fulfill his coronation oath and acknowledge baronial power, otherwise the nobility "would not have him for king."[28] Though the effectiveness of such measures was rather limited, their very existence demonstrated that the baronage fully intended to use legal force if the monarch continued to prove uncooperative.[29]

In addition to alienating his nobles to the point of sacrificing royal initiative, Edward II's selfish behavior also repelled the Church, a vastly more powerful and influential ally. Maintenance of friendly relations with the papacy was crucial for European kings. All ecclesiastical authority aside, the pope held considerable political and financial sway throughout Europe. The Church influenced English politics for centuries prior to Edward II, and successful kings understood how to properly negotiate with Rome to boost their international reputation and legitimacy. Tyrannical King John even realized the benefit of an alliance with the papacy, and took measures to ensure Pope Innocent III's backing in his war over Magna Carta in 1215.[30] Although his clerical taxation for the Scottish Wars strained their relationship in the last years of his life, Edward I largely maintained excellent ties with the Church. He participated in the Crusades as a young man and later successfully gained Boniface VIII's favor.[31] Edward I's diplomacy further benefited him in 1305 when he persuaded the pope to absolve him of all his baronial concessions and remove unfriendly archbishops from England.[32] Although Edward II initially fostered from his father's papal alliance, his poor behavior with future popes shattered England's once-powerful bond with Rome and aided ecclesiastical support for royal opposition.

During the first seven years of his rule, Edward II's relationship with the Church rested primarily on his friendship with Pope Clement V, a reliable ally from his father's reign. Clement

[25] Ibid, pp. 3 – 5.
[26] Fryde, 19. Lancaster, along with a few other magnates, refused to assist the king when he declared war on Scotland in 1310, and eventually played a major role in the execution of Gaveston. (Haines, 251).
[27] Prestwich, pp. 74 – 76.
[28] Childs, pp. 18 - 21. "… dicentes quod, nisi rex petita concederet, iam non ipsum pro rege haberent ..."
[29] Tuck, 48.
[30] Valente, pp. 50 – 61.
[31] Tuck, 28. Edward I successfully conferred with the pope over emergency secular taxation of the clergy in 1297.
[32] Ibid, pp. 32 – 33. Edward I's successful reneging on his concessions was a major reason for the lengthening of the English coronation oath to include more restrictive measures on the king.

sympathized with the new king, and willingly assisted him in overcoming several initial obstacles to the throne.[33] Although many in the English clergy opposed Edward II, intercessions from Clement often negated their retaliatory efforts. The pope offered more than just clerical support to the king. Prior to the Battle of Bannockburn, he helped Edward II pay off a debt to a Genoese merchant by loaning the monarchy £25,000.[34] Edward II avoided spoiling his ties with Rome during these early years, though his good fortune may have relied less on his own wise decision-making than on the pope's considerable fondness for Edward I's family. Sadly for the king, Clement's death on May 26, 1314 spelled the end of charitable papal favors for the throne.[35]

The succeeding pope, John XXII, was less sensitive to Edward II's plight and considerably more critical of his poor relations with his barons. The king immediately made a bad impression on the Church in 1316 when he insisted on seizing one-third to half of ecclesiastical charity goods from the English clergy in order to finance against Scottish invasions. The author of the *Vita* remarked that "…this kind of contribution, which burdens the church, should bring about the lord king's ruin," since the goods in question were exempt from royal taxation.[36] Rather than blindly support the king as his predecessor did, John XXII actively tried to stabilize England during the 1320s, and constantly sent letters and legates to Edward II encouraging him to make peace with the nobility. His suggestions often fell on deaf ears, especially as the divide between the throne and the magnates widened in the years preceding the English Civil War.[37] Edward II's cold attitude towards the pope's interest in his affairs was reciprocated whenever he suddenly required the Church's assistance. In 1317, Edward II clumsily requested to be absolved from the restraints of his barons, and additionally gain a papal interdict on Scotland. John XXII coolly denied both wishes, though hinted that he would lend financial support to the monarchy if the king took up a Crusade for him.[38] The end result of the deterioration of relations between the throne and Rome came when John XXII clearly expressed his support for Queen Isabella's invasion of England in 1326, labeling her an "angel of peace"[39] Given the papacy's involvement in international politics, John XXII possessed the power to just as easily halt her invasion as bless it. Edward II's inability to maintain the backing of the most powerful civic and spiritual entity in Europe, however, was his undoing. In contrast to model kings, who heavily involved themselves with the Church, Edward II treated the pope as he did his barons and subsequently eroded ecclesiastical support. In the end, the only followers the king retained proved more detrimental to his legitimacy than those whom he had driven off.

Edward II's passivity and political incompetence was not due entirely to his weak personality. His tendency towards favoritism also drew the ire of numerous barons and often distracted him from attending to his royal duties. The notion of favoritism gained a negative connotation during the reign of Henry III, whose preference for his close friends and neglect of

[33] McKisack, pp. 7 – 8. For example, Clement once annulled a threat of excommunication leveled by Archbishop Winchelsey towards Gaveston.
[34] Prestwich, 94.
[35] Fryde, 138.
[36] Childs, pp. 132 – 133. (1) "Sane timendum est ne huiusmodi collecta, que grauat ecclesiam, domino regi cedat in ruinam." (2) Additionally, Edward II's incessant breaking of his coronation oath further damaged relations, since the oath required that the king protect the interests of the Church rather than capitalize on them. (Valente, 19).
[37] Fryde, 56, 177. John XXII's messengers were often imprisoned by the increasingly unstable and paranoid king.
[38] Childs, pp. 135 – 137.
[39] Haines, Roy Martin. *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon: His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284 – 1330*. (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 325.

his nobles led to de Montfort's devastating baronial war. Edward II's willing pursuit of his grandfather's damaging habit fractured his popular support. Edward I certainly frowned on the concept, and shortly before his death he entrusted Henry de Lacy to exile the prince's good friend, Piers Gaveston.[40] The general problem with favoritism was that the presence of particularly blessed outsiders threatened the balance of power between a king and his barons. By taking advantage of the king's friendship, these favored individuals "[threatened] magnates' possibilities of bettering themselves, or even of surviving."[41] Magnates grew in power through patronage and slow ascension up the political ladder. Favorites disturbed the established order because their elite status was often granted on the whims of the king. Furthermore, barons felt threatened by such intruders' nepotistic tendencies, since favorites commonly used their association with the king to assume control of baronial lands and rights. Even a favorite with no political ambitions was considered very dangerous because of his powerful personal influence on the king.[42] Gaveston was the first of Edward II's two notable favorites, the other being Hugh Despenser the Younger. Of the two, the former was barely a threat to the kingdom, yet the near-universal hatred he incited led to massive baronial opposition to the crown.

Gaveston's unpopularity grew in 1307, when Edward II "recalled [him, he] who had recently abjured the realm of England at [Edward I's] command."[43] His closeness with the king unsettled many barons, but his French heritage particularly incensed them. Many magnates expressed frustration that a foreigner from the English territory of Gascony gained such a lofty position in the eyes of the king. Their xenophobic rage escalated when Edward II generously awarded Gaveston the earldom of Cornwall.[44] The author of the *Vita* consistently ridiculed the favorite, observing how his sudden surge in status immediately went to his head.

> From these and other incidents hatred grew day by day, for Piers was a man very proud and haughty in bearing. He thought that all those whom [sic] the custom of the realm deemed equal to him were lowly and worthless, and that no one could equal him in valour. On the other hand the earls and barons of England looked down on Piers because he was a foreigner and formerly a mere squire raised to such splendour and eminence, nor was he mindful of his former rank.[45]

Gaveston's constant disrespect of the nobility reflected poorly on Edward II, who paid little mind to the rampant slander.[46] In light of Gaveston's insulting behavior, the king's obsession with the Gascon only aggravated hostility among the baronage. Occasionally, Edward II's preference for Gaveston over his magnates interfered with his ability to efficiently administer the realm.[47]

Edward II's favoritism with Gaveston never extended far into the political sphere. Most of the hate directed towards the man was on an intensely personal level, as he was not politically ambitious and did little to actively infringe on baronial rights or assume command of

---

[40] Fryde, 16.
[41] Ibid, 13.
[42] Prestwich, 72.
[43] Childs, pp. 4 - 5. "Petrum de Gaueston, qui nuper precepto patris regis terram Anglie abiuerat, reuocauit"
[44] Davies, 81. Not since the reign of King Stephen (1141 - 1154) had anybody outside of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy acquired an earldom (Fryde, 14).
[45] Childs, pp. 7 – 9. "Ex hiis et aliis in dies crescebat odium; erat enim Petrus homo ualde elatus et superbus in gestu. Nam omnes quos sibi pares regni consuetude esse dictabat, humiles et abiectos, nec ipsum in probitate quicquam attingere posse reputabat. Econtra comites et barones Anglie ipsum Petrum, quia alienigenam et humilem quondam armigerum, ad tantum decus et honorem prouectum, nec sui prioris status memorem, despiciebant."
[46] Haines, 74.
[47] Childs, 29. Eventually, the king refused to speak to any baron without the company of his favorite.

bureaucratic facilities. Instead, Gaveston's influence *upon* the administration was the factor that led to his demise.[48] The favorite constantly "led the king astray, advised the lord king badly, and persuaded him deceitfully," and also drained the already strained royal finances with his excessive spending.[49] Attempts to return the king's focus back to politics by exiling Gaveston to Ireland proved fruitless. Edward II's desperate pleas for the return and safety of the Gascon revealed how far his priorities strayed from what was expected him. In a successful effort to return his favorite, Edward II agreed to pass the Statute of Stamford in 1309, which addressed various baronial complaints from a decade earlier.[50] Whereas Edward I made concessions to his barons solely as a method of gaining power and obligation over them, his son gave way to their demands in a fashion that effectively acknowledged their domination of royal prerogative.

Gaveston did not live much longer after his return from Ireland. In spite of the concessions granted in 1309, Edward II's debts, wartime failures, and reluctance to act led to the Ordinances of 1311, a new measure designed to further ensnare the king under the law while simultaneously enhancing baronial power. The Ordinances stemmed from complaints towards various aspects of Edward II's rule, but centered on his preoccupation with Gaveston.[51] Unsurprisingly, of all the royal restrictions the Ordinances exacted, the matter of Gaveston's permanent expulsion from England most distressed the king. In an effort to save his favorite, Edward II hid the Gascon in Scarborough Castle, which enraged the baronage to near-revolt.[52] Gaveston was quickly discovered, captured, and brutally slaughtered by disgruntled barons at Lancastrian Blacklow. The king was distraught by the news, but people throughout the country rejoiced at the execution.[53] Unfortunately, Edward II had too little power to pursue any serious retribution. The Ordinances of 1311 effectively restrained him for the time being. Additionally, the aftermath of the murder saw the emergence of an anti-royalist faction in the baronage under Lancaster.[54] The example of Piers Gaveston brought to light only a few of the dangers that Edward II's favoritism posed. Although irritating to the baronage, the favorite did not truly threaten the stability of the kingdom until Edward II risked civil war to protect him. The king was a man "incapable of moderate affection," and although the powers he granted to Gaveston were essentially wasted on his politically indifferent character, they proved deadly to the kingdom (and Edward II himself) when given to Hugh Despenser.[55]

The latter half of the reign was marked by the corrupting influence of the Despensers, a father and son duo that filled the personal vacuum left by Gaveston's death. The elder Hugh Despenser was an old noble who served under Edward I. Unpopular among the baronage, he established an early alliance with then-Prince Edward II, who referred to the baron as "one of our friends" in 1301.[56] Despenser the elder supported the new king throughout his reign and sided with him in direct opposition to the baronage. Despite a few complaints regarding his administration as justice of the forest, public resentment towards him remained relatively low

[48] Davies, pp. 99 – 100.
[49] Childs, 34 - 35. "…Petrus de Gauestone dominum regem male duxit, domino regi male consuluit, et ipsum ad male faciendum deceptorie…"
[50] Tuck, 42.
[51] Childs, pp. 18 - 21.
[52] Prestwich, pp. 74 – 75.
[53] Childs, pp. 49 – 51.
[54] Prestwich, 76. To much critical acclaim, Lancaster personally took responsibility for Gaveston's execution (76).
[55] Childs, pp. 28 - 29. "Modum autem dileccionis rex noster habere non potuit…"
[56] Fryde, 27.

until the years preceding the English Civil War.[57] Although Despenser the elder largely served a close advisory role to the king, his son, also named Hugh, officially replaced Gaveston as Edward II's favorite and proved very interested in the politics of the realm.

The younger Despenser initially rose through the nobility on the side of royal opposition. In spite of his father's loyalty and influence with Edward II, he rarely received royal favors at the beginning of his career, and actually lost his lands to the king after disobeying a royal edict.[58] Despenser departed the baronial side during the Battle of Bannockburn to satisfy his shifting political interests. He soon gained the attention and favor of the king, and attained the post of Chamberlain from him in 1318.[59] Unlike Gaveston, who rarely used his unique position to gain power, Despenser quickly displayed his differences from his Gascon predecessor. Although he paralleled Gaveston in his close relationship with the king (and similarly developed a reputation as his lover), he sported loftier long-term ambitions and his political background somewhat explained his skill in pursuing them.[60] The new favorite showed a sense of pragmatism that his predecessor severely lacked, and had an appetite for power and wealth that typically manifested itself through numerous illegal land seizures in Edward II's name. The Chamberlain eventually convinced Edward to take control of areas such as Gower away from their rightful lords and hand them over to him. In retaliation, nobles from the surrounding Welsh Marches assembled to defeat Despenser and force the king's judgment upon him.[61] When the royalist forces mobilized in early 1321 and showed no sign of bowing to the barons, the Marchers began ravaging Despenser's lands.[62] By placing the illegal desires of his favorite ahead of the law, Edward II effectively started the English Civil War.

The first phase of the war went successfully for the Marcher forces, which devastated Despenser territories. The king, crippled by his financial straits, gave little resistance to the unified baronial front as they moved toward London. On 1 August 1321, the Marcher coalition neared the capital and demanded the exile of both Despensers from the realm.[63] The *Vita* lists the wide variety of accusations leveled against the two.

> Hugh was accused of being too greedy and thus unsuitable to be with the king; he was accused of being an evil counsellor [sic]; he was accused of being a conspirator and a liar; he was accused of being a destroyer of the people, a disinheritor of the crown, an enemy of the king and kingdom. All these things the barons alleged against Hugh, and persistently accused both father and son of these offences. There was no one to defend either the father or the son, no one to speak for them against the barons.[64]

Unable to retreat any further, Edward II caved into baronial demands and dismissed the pair from the kingdom. The absence of the two most hated men in England, however, fractured the

---

[57] Davies, 90.
[58] Ibid, pp. 91 – 92.
[59] Tuck, 59.
[60] Dodd and Musson, 39.
[61] McKisack, pp. 59 – 61. Marcher leaders included Lancaster, Roger Mortimer, and Edward II's brother-in-law, the earl of Hereford.
[62] Fryde, pp. 43 – 44.
[63] Ibid, 45.
[64] Childs, pp. 192 – 195. "Arguebatur Hugo nimium cupidus at per hoc regi minus ydoneus; arguebatur conspirator et falsus; arguebatur destructor populi, exheredator corone, inimicus regis et regni. Hec omnia contra Hugonem barones allegabant, et super hiis tam patrem quam filium constanter accusabant. Non erat qui patrem uel filium defenderet, non erat qui pro ipsis contra barones disputaret."

stability of the Marchers and an unwarranted act of treason against the queen at Leeds Castle that October swelled royal support.[65] Edward II displayed unusual tact and capitalized on the Marchers' disunity, spending the next few months leading his reinvigorated forces throughout Wales. By March 1322, he had lethally eliminated most of his opposition, recalled the Despensers, and executed Lancaster after the Battle of Boroughbridge.[66] Having temporarily defeated the barons, the Despensers' strengthened influence on Edward II took him on another downward spiral.

The years after Boroughbridge supplied most arguments for Edward II's tyranny. The Ordinances were annulled, baronial opponents murdered, and the Despensers continually appropriated more lands in the king's name.[67] From the early 1320s until his deposition, the king worked solely to enrich himself and his friends. According to Fryde, all of the embarrassments Edward II suffered because of his inherited debts returned to haunt England, as these troubles "created in him an obsessive preoccupation with wealth. This bore fruit in the last, most autocratic part of his reign … in the accumulation of vast reserves of treasure."[68] Edward II had the younger Despenser's undivided attention during his last years, and took his administrative suggestions to heart. The ensuing Despenser reforms primarily focused on enhancing monarchial finances and allowed the royal favorite to control the chamber and other institutions.[69] Although over-taxation and outright theft more than solved Edward II's lifelong financial troubles, his methods came at the cost of political capital in the form of support from his barons and from the Church.[70] Writing in the midst of the turmoil, the author of the *Vita* explained Despenser's involvement in the troubles of the day, noting that "the king's hardness is blamed on Hugh, like the other evils that take place at court."[71] While nobody dared stand against Edward II, his favorite's influence corroded any remaining support for him.

The king's favoritism nearly tore the kingdom apart in late 1324, when conflict broke out with France over control of Gascony. Convinced by the Despensers not to part with them, Edward sent Isabella to negotiate peace with the French king. In an unexpected move, the queen held herself for ransom in France, refusing to return until the king's favorite and his father were removed.[72] Edward II did not comply, but unlike previous efforts, royal privilege did not save the Despensers from the queen's ensuing invasion. The French invaders captured both Despensers, and executed them that November. The particularly grisly nature of their deaths and their widespread popular approval revealed how despised the men were, and Edward II's untimely fate shortly afterwards demonstrated the full impact of the Despensers' influence.[73]

The dangers of favoritism plagued kings throughout history, yet few suffered from the problem worse than Edward II. The effectiveness of the English monarchy, especially after Magna Carta, laid in the fragile balance of power between the king and his barons. Not only did favorites disrupt the balance, but intelligent, power-hungry ones like the Despensers actively

[65] Haines, pp. 132 – 133.
[66] Fryde, pp. 55 – 59.
[67] Prestwich, 83.
[68] Fryde, 87.
[69] Prestwich, pp. 84 – 85.
[70] Fryde, 100.
[71] Childs, pp. 230 – 231. "Verumtamen imputatur Hugoni Regis duricia sicut et alia mala que fiunt in curia."
[72] McKisack, pp. 81 – 82. Isabella and the Despensers hated and often plotted against each other.
[73] Fryde, pp. 192 - 193. Despenser the younger suffered an even more gruesome death than Gaveston, being drawn by four horses, hanged from a fifty-foot gallows, and his intestines torn out and set aflame before he was finally decapitated. Gaveston, by contrast, was merely stabbed and decapitated.

destroyed the foundations of the administration. Edward I never dreamed of sharing the throne with anyone, and while he made accommodations with his barons, he always retained as much power as he could for himself. Consequently, his regime proved one of the sturdiest in medieval English history. While Edward II clearly lacked his father's independence and decisiveness, he made a major mistake in sharing his power with his friends and allowing them to push their tyrannical agendas at the expense of the kingdom. Giving special privileges to favorites only diluted royal authority, complicated a delicate political system, and, in Edward II's case, exponentially accelerated his other political deficiencies. By essentially letting his friends run the country, the king allowed his passivity to run unchecked, and was distracted from dealing with the outside threats of Scotland and France. Conversely, the king's apathetic nature towards politics also fueled his favoritism, as he saw no need to rid himself of such a weakness in order to better comply with the standards of kingship.

Had Edward II not been so crippled by laziness and dependency on his favorites, he potentially could have redeemed himself through warfare. Military victories often served as a saving grace for unpopular monarchs, because they effectively proved a significant degree of competency in the ruler. England's kings had always built their reputations on wartime performances, as William the Conqueror, Richard I, and others attested. Edward I was already renowned as a great warrior when he became king because of his efforts in the baronial wars and the Crusades. His victory over Wales in 1283 cemented his authority early on in his reign, as did his subsequent pacification campaigns.[74] Longshanks' unpopularity towards the end of his long reign largely correlated to his taxation efforts for his Scottish campaigns. Throughout the Scottish Wars, the king continually met with popular unrest, even after the occasional victory against William Wallace. Attitudes changed, however, following the Scottish defeat at Stirling in 1304, and Wallace's execution the next year.[75] Edward I's final victory enabled him to quiet previous grievances against his actions. England's hold on Scotland, though, quickly fell apart in 1306 when Robert the Bruce rebelled.[76] The opportunity for Edward II to pursue his father's legacy by taming Longshanks' old nemesis practically ensured consolidation of his power, because successful defense of England, or preferably, re-conquest of Scotland, clearly demonstrated the strong leadership that barons expected in their monarchs. The Scottish threat served as a potential stepping stone to greatness if properly managed. Edward II's military ineptitude, however, in the Scottish campaign and other wars, produced far less glorious results.

The new king's interests were far removed from the war when he took power. His preoccupations with Gaveston not only delayed the resumption of conflict with Scotland, but also eroded his baronial support while giving Robert the Bruce precious time to strengthen his forces. The king's delays gradually alienated his nobles, and when he finally advanced into Scotland in 1310, he no longer had the backing of powerful magnates like Lancaster and Hereford.[77] Although the Scots rarely engaged the English in open battle, the fractured royalist forces progressed little in the campaign and retreated to Berwick within a year. Despite personally leading his troops into enemy territory, Edward II did not treat the retaking of Scotland with the same seriousness as his father. The author of the *Vita* doubted his sincerity towards the mission, and wrote that "the king was not going at last to Scotland in order to fight

[74] Prestwich, 15.
[75] Tuck, pp. 28 – 31.
[76] Haines, 32.
[77] Tuck, 45.

Robert the Bruce, but so that he might prudently avoid the king of France's summons."[78] Further proof of Edward II's misplaced priorities appeared shortly after the issuing of the Ordinances of 1311. In a last-ditch effort to prevent Gaveston's mandatory exile, he sought the assistance of Robert the Bruce, offering him control of Scotland if he protected Gaveston. Bruce wisely denied him.[79]

As Edward II's baronial conflicts and general disinterest distracted him from continuing the Scottish Wars in the post-Ordinance years, Robert the Bruce effectively reunited Scotland and repeatedly devastated Northern England. By May 1314, an unusually reinvigorated Edward II assembled 20,000 of his best troops and set off to defeat the Scottish king. The Scots' subsequent victory at Bannockburn on 23 - 24 June 1314 wrecked Edward II's wartime credentials.[80] His slowness to act on the Scottish threat had earlier tarnished his image, but his complete loss of Scotland as a potential English holding shredded his reputation. Furthermore, the aftermath of Bannockburn gave Lancaster and several other opposing barons undeniable leverage over the king, and confirmed his inadequacy as a leader in their eyes.[81] Aside from a minor engagement shortly after Boroughbridge, Edward II avoided fighting Scotland for the remainder of his reign, and instead focused on destroying his rebellious barons.[82] In 1324, after years of continually raiding the North, Bruce negotiated with Edward II for a truce, which the king accepted, further implying to his barons how he lacked the strong will of his father.[83]

Hopes for the conquest of Scotland faded in the mid-1320s, but conflict with France loomed on the horizon. In 1324, war officially broke out between the two kingdoms. The English seneschal of Gascony destroyed a French fortress on the border of Agenais, prompting the French king, Charles IV, to occupy the English territory.[84] Edward II ignored Charles' summons to come to France and negotiate settlements. Edward I encountered similar problems with France during the final decade of his life when he attempted to invade Flanders in 1297. His war was largely unsuccessful, and he frantically worked to seek peace when hostilities flared in Scotland in the early 1300s. He traveled on a diplomatic mission to France and managed to persuade King Philip IV to return Gascony in 1303.[85] War against France introduced several risks largely absent from the Scottish Wars. Not only was the country considerably more powerful than Scotland, but defeat presented a greater threat to the integrity of the English realm. Scottish victories did not necessarily imply significant losses of native English territory. Alternatively, conquest by France almost certainly meant the loss of Gascony, England's only longtime foothold on the continent. Edward I understood the grave implications of losing such vital lands, and even endured escalating tensions in Scotland in order to ensure that Gascony remained in English hands. Not only did Edward II's decision to send Isabella to negotiate in his place precipitate her invasion, but it also showed that he cared less about saving the Gascon lands than an English king should. Despite sending troops to France, the monarch himself

[78] Childs, pp. 22 - 23. "non enim accessit rex finaliter in Scociam ut Robertum de Brutz expugnaret, set ut mandatum regis Francie caute declinaret."
[79] Ibid, pp. 38 – 41.
[80] McKisack, pp. 36 – 39.
[81] Prestwich, 77.
[82] Haines, pp. 260 – 270. Following Bannockburn, Scotland continued to invade Northern England. Edward II's lack of attention to the conflict cemented resentment among the inhabitants of the region.
[83] Childs, 223. Bruce realized England's relations with France had deteriorated by that point, and used Edward II's compromised position to his advantage.
[84] Tuck, 71.
[85] Ibid, pp. 21 – 26.

remained at home with his favorites throughout the entire French War.[86] Isabella secured peace in the summer of 1325, and although the English throne retained control of Gascony, its authority in the area was severely curtailed.[87]

The prospect of two major wars with foreign powers would have presented Edward II with ample opportunities for redemption in the eyes of his disillusioned nobles had he won either of them. The Scottish Wars offered him the chance to carry on his father's legacy and reunite the British Isles. Defeating the French also guaranteed favor in the eyes of the general populace, considering how deeply France had troubled Edward I. By 1324, the king certainly possessed the wealth to successfully wage war against either nation, and though he poured about £65,000 into the French War, he could have easily spent much more.[88] Decent kings of the past successfully kept the realm safe from outside threats; great ones not only protected the kingdom, but also added to its splendor, as Edward I did with Wales. Edward II failed both expectations, because he continually allowed the Scots to invade England and nearly lost Gascony at the same time. Ironically, the only war he decisively won was the English Civil War, the outcome of which only benefited himself and the Despensers while plunging the rest of the kingdom into destitution. The final culmination of the king's failures appeared in Isabella's invasion in 1326. Edward II never had a chance to succeed against the queen, who marched unopposed through the realm, gathering support from London, the pope, and the remainder of Edward II's barons, who had long since given up on the king.[89] Abandoned by the administration, the king and the Despensers fled, but were quickly captured.

Following the executions of the Despensers, the king was summoned to Parliament by the queen and his magnates in early January 1327. Members of the baronage and the clergy discussed deposing Edward II in favor of the rule of his wife and son. The barons filed their complaints in the Articles of the Deposition, which summarized the faults of the king.

> The Articles charged Edward with being incompetent to govern, unwilling to listen to wise counsel, destroying the Church and many noble men of the land, losing Scotland, Ireland, and Gascony, breaking his coronation oath to do justice to all, stripping his realm and, by his cruelty and weakness, showing himself incorrigible and without hope of amendment.[90]

The monarch was officially deposed in favor of Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer on 25 January 1327. Though many initially questioned the legality of the deposition, Edward II found little sympathy among his former barons. He was imprisoned in Berkeley Castle that April. By late September, however, Edward II was dead, allegedly the victim of murder.[91]

Edward II's twenty-year reign seems unusually long in hindsight, considering how despised the man was. Deposition, however, was still quite uncommon in the early fourteenth century. The king's modified coronation oath put his actions under the rule of the law, but the ultimate legal punishment of royal disobedience remained unclear. Edward II's barons forced him to obey his oath through intimidation tactics, legal maneuvering, and, in extreme cases, civil war, but dethroning or assassination were never popularly pursued as solutions. In medieval English politics, baronial restraint, rather than deposition, was favored when dealing with bad

---

[86] Childs, pp. 228 – 231.
[87] Fryde, pp. 147 – 148.
[88] Ibid, 145.
[89] Prestwich, pp. 86 – 87.
[90] McKisack, pp. 88 – 91.
[91] Ibid, pp. 93 – 95. Accounts of the nature of the king's death vary, though the most popular ones claim an assassin fatally sodomized Edward II with a fiery metal rod (Dodd and Musson, pp. 53 – 57).

kings. Popular belief suggested that God's divine punishment would eventually strike down tyrants in due time.[92] Edward II's case was the first time in which England's Parliament legally declared the king an enemy of the state and forcibly removed him from power. The extremity of the king's multiple failings and the realization that he would never fulfill his royal expectations made deposition a viable goal. By 1327, all other legal options for restraint were exhausted and the kingdom faced complete ruin. Though they cited the legality of Magna Carta in allowing them to level notoriety charges against Edward II, the barons moved cautiously throughout the entire deposition process because they had no clear idea how the kingdom would continue afterwards.[93]

Although Edward II's fall from authority was primarily the result of his own failures as a politician, military leader, and human being, his story nevertheless contains an air of tragedy. The author of the *Vita*, who wrote during the king's reign, recollected the anticipation he and much of England had for their new ruler upon his ascension. He continually hoped that Edward II would shed his incompetent, lazy behavior and follow the example of Nebuchadnezzar, the Assyrian king who "before the twelfth year of his reign did, we are told, nothing memorable, but in that twelfth year of his reign he began to flourish and to conquer nations and kingdoms."[94] Edward II, in rare moments such as his victory in the Civil War, displayed the flashes of competency that his anonymous chronicler desired. Unfortunately, every moment of model kingship was dashed by several instances of idiocy, selfishness, and unjustified cruelty.

In his own way, Edward II established a new royal model for future rulers to observe: the definitive bad king. His reign put a face on the ultimate result of failure to comply with the standards of good leadership. Although Edward III managed to rise out of the chaos of 1327 by fulfilling was expected of him, other monarchs subconsciously treaded his father's path and unsurprisingly met with similar fates.[95] Over time Edward II accumulated a variety of labels, which attempted to sum up his failure in a nutshell: tyrant, incompetent soldier, homosexual, etc. Though some such titles still hold merit, the explanation for his fall from grace was far more complicated than history often implies. Many kings, even the much-lauded Edward I, had a few tyrannical qualities, yet most compensated for them in several significant ways. Edward II's disappointing and irredeemable performance across multiple fronts ultimately cost him his crown. His passive and estranging behavior towards his magnates, proclivities to favoritism, and constant military failures all drifted fatally far from the precedent set by the great kings of England's past. Despite Edward II's handicaps, he truly sealed his fate by refusing to learn from history or even from the example of his own father. All the signs of what his barons expected of him were fairly obvious from the outset of his reign. The new clause in his coronation oath, which bound the king to obey and defend the laws of the community, revealed in very explicit terms that attitudes toward royal prerogative had changed since the rule of Edward I. In the new royal system, Edward II had a choice. He must adapt to the changes and fulfill expectations or ignore all warnings and indulge his own interests. His dreadful reign, particularly when viewed between those of his father and son, testified to the overall wisdom of his final decision.

---

[92] Valente, pp. 18 – 19. Support for such beliefs was the example of the tyrant King John, who died relatively young.
[93] Prestwich, 98.
[94] Childs, pp. 152 – 153. "Nabugodonosor ille potentissimus rex Assiriorum ante annum regni sui duodecimum nichil egisse legitur memorandum, quod anno uero regni sui duodecimo cepit florere et gentes et regna sibi subicere."
[95] Prestwich, 2, 146. Edward III, though more chivalric in manner than his temperamental grandfather, maintained excellent ties with his nobles and was an outstanding military commander. In contrast to Edward II, he is remembered as one of the most renowned medieval European kings.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Childs, Wendy R. trans. *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

Echard Laurence. *The History of England. From the First Entrance of Julius Caesar and the Romans to the End of the Reign of James the First. Containing the Space of 1678 Years*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1707.

Secondary Sources

Davies, James Conway. *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II: Its Character and Policy*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1918.

Dodd, Gwilym and Musson, Anthony, eds. *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*. Rochester: York University Press, 2006.

Fryde, Natalie. *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II: 1321 – 1326*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Haines, Roy Martin. *King Edward II: Edward of Caernarfon: His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284 – 1330*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003.

McKisack, May. *The Fourteenth Century, 1307 – 1399*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Prestwich, Michael. *The Three Edwards: War and State in England 1272 – 1377, Second Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Tuck, Anthony. *Crown and Nobility: England 1272 – 1461, Second Edition*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Valente, Claire. *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.

Social Smokescreens

Laura Zaepfel

Although officers of the law and the upper classes often considered highwaymen scoundrels and criminals, literary representations and romantic exaggerations of bandit characters revealed tensions within their surrounding rural community. These literary portrayals were mechanisms for illuminating the socioeconomic, political, and to a lesser extent, religious difficulties of early modern England. These representations were the same when highwaymen murdered or kidnapped, threatened, and even when they drank to their success over the now knocked-down upper class. The role of the literary highwaymen was not only to reflect and critique the changing conditions in early modern England but also to imitate varying cultural patterns such as the erosion of the chivalric code. Within narrative descriptions, highwaymen were charming rogues who set out to rob and beat those who occupied a higher economic status than themselves, man or woman. They were men of daring escapes and cunning plans, using their weapons to frighten and force the public roads into submission. When literary highwaymen stopped someone on the roads, the victims represented aspects of an entitled elite that the public recognized. Besides these traits, bandits were commoners, giving up a poor lifestyle for that of a criminal because of the wealth gained in the robberies. The way that literary depictions were used in determining the social appeal of highwaymen indicated distinct differences from the narratives and representations associated with earlier outlaw legends.

To contextualize where these literary highwaymen stood compared to the real life issues they represented, and why they are so different in action and style than medieval legends, it is necessary to characterize social trends in early modern England. For instance, the country was coming out of a civil war and a Protectorate was founded, only for the state to fall back under monarchal rule, which was also the time when highwaymen such as Patrick Flemming and Old Mobb emerge. During this early period, laws were passed to ensure the protection of a Protestant state, and Catholics were removed from positions of power, especially those connected with Ireland. These laws also redistributed land in the kingdom, allowing for the creation of more powerful landowners who supported king and country, as well as weakening the peasantry who were losing their ownership of land. Moving forward in time, England lost another monarch because of the usurpation of the crown through the Glorious Revolution. Between all these events, classes mixed and influenced each other, as well as transferred ideas among themselves. A middle class of merchants slowly appeared and peasants were weakened even more by industrial advancements. The themes of conflict within these time periods also appear in the texts of highwaymen, beginning with the declining status of the religiously powerful and the rise of secular authority and wealth, before moving forward with the times and focusing on class and status of individuals trying to improve both their social and economic situations.

The literary bandits of early modern England did not replicate the medieval outlaws found in ballads.[1] Instead, highwaymen took to a criminal lifestyle because they were desperate

[1] A medieval outlaw is known mostly for their chivalric nature and slightly higher than peasant status, such as a yeoman. They also mainly 'fought' against religious figures. They could be reintroduced into the social order through kingly pardon because they were fighting the corrupt system and not necessarily using banditry for personal gain. An example would be the Robin Hood legends.

to find wealth in a community where none was to be found outside high, noble bloodlines or a rising upper middle class. The individuals who became highwaymen were not the yeomen of medieval legends but were from some of the poor communities in pastoral areas. After all, according to Eric Hobsbawn, "bandits belonged to the peasantry... they cannot be understood except in context of the sort of peasant society which, it is safe to guess, is as remote from most readers as ancient Egypt, and which is as surely doomed by history as the Stone Age."[2] The impoverished nature of their surroundings drove the men to be robbers. Had another option been open in the strict social hierarchy of early modern England perhaps fewer would have turned to such violence and disturbance. Because they came from the poor communities, the breeding grounds for bandits were "those forms of rural economy or rural environment which have relatively small labour demands, or which [were] too poor to employ all their able-bodied men."[3] These men had no means to supply themselves at home without going farther into debt and were often victims of enclosures and other market forces that impoverished rural areas. Their presence in the community became a drain on an already limited supply of resources.

Instead, these men found their own work as highwaymen, taking from those who had enough to spare, especially gentry, who seized land from the community in the first place. When these young vagabonds' exploits were gathered into narratives, the focus was on the victims as overlords and greedy individuals instead of on the highwaymen as criminals. Turning the focus on the victims in an attempt to make them appear less sympathetic illustrated that those corrupted by wealth, such as merchants and middle class townsfolk, who made more money than those in agriculture, would find justice from some authority outside the central state offices, on which they had a chokehold, should they come out of the cities. These highwaymen also demonstrated that there was a rising need for the wealthy to deal with the poor in society, as rural spheres of influence came into contact with modern trends of expanding urban areas. No longer were bandits concealed in wooded areas that were far away from towns and cities. Highwaymen could often be found right outside the gates of these urban centers because that was where their own rural communities could now be found. The backgrounds of these outlaws put them on pedestals for the lower classes, the ones that were weighed down by labor and economic vulnerability.

Medieval outlaws, on the other hand, had the ability to gain some heroic status due to their desire to help those around them through courtly generosity, helping the classes that could not help themselves. Early modern highwaymen wanted to overcome their poverty and low social status, showing a heightening in class tensions in early modern times in comparison to medieval times. Robin Hood would eagerly lend a hand or even money to those in need if they were honest. Take, for instance, the outlaw's interaction with an impoverished knight. The man had fallen on hard times due to his son killing another man. The offended family was paid off but debts were called in by a local abbot, who was known for wanting wealth more than offering religious help, from whom the knight was on his way to beg an extension. But the man was honest in having told Robin's company that he carried only ten shillings. When searched to make sure he was not hiding any more, this was found to be true. In reply to the injustice that the nobleman suffered, Robin "opened his coffers and four hundred pounds were told over to the knight, and with it Robin made him a present of new cloth to mend his apparel, and a horse and harness worthy of his estate."[4] According to the literary traditions of highwaymen, they would

[2] Eric Hobsbawn, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 130.
[3] Ibid, 31.
[4] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 103.

never have stopped to help anyone who might have had a title attached to their name. Their literary representations showed them to be cunning, skilled, and still smarter than those from whom they were stealing, but the wealth remained within their own pockets and was not handed out without some sort of return profit. Unlike their medieval counterparts, the goods stolen from the gentry were used to create a new renegade and counterfeit upper class.

Early modern highwaymen represented a distinct evolution from medieval outlaws, characters who promoted certain ideals about class and other everyday problems. They stepped into the literary traditions of Robin Hood and his gang of thieves, whose stories resounded because they addressed the grievances of medieval society. Bandits and highwaymen in early modern English texts also concentrated on grievances, their legends critiquing society and highlighting the socioeconomic, political, or religious tensions of the period. Other similarities existed between these medieval outlaw and early modern highwaymen legends. For instance, Robin Hood in his early ballads resembles the bandits of the modern age, because the hero is "a full-blooded medieval brigand, who, even if his conduct is redeemed by a courtly generosity to the poor and deserving, is a brigand nevertheless and can be called by no other name."[5] These brigands, both medieval and early modern, were violent and threatening to those who they deemed worthy of being their enemies. When it became necessary to shed blood, all these outlaws could do so and did. They lived outside the law by choice, were bandits regardless of the intentions of social justice behind their robberies. Still, literary embellishments allow for what would normally be considered downfalls and negative traits, such as murdering and kidnapping, by explaining that their actions were the only way to work within a corrupt system.

Alongside these tendencies towards robbing at gunpoint the unarmed wealthy found outside their urban areas, these highwaymen are depicted as being able to charm their way into purses and out of trouble. Some bandits allegedly used their silver tongues to sweet-talk victims out of their gold or into a trap. They could end up under arrest or in front of a judge and jury and still slip out the back door. These men could ruin the plans of the police and higher authority, such as judges, through skill and cunning that the officers did not possess. These clever traits mocked the authorities of the 1600s and 1700s, when highwaymen literature is primarily set. For example, Jack Rann, a highwayman who when placed on the dock in front of Justice Sir John Fielding, is recorded in a narrative as having said of the crimes of which he was accused, "I know no more of the matter than you do, nor half so much, neither."[6] Although the defense of his actions reflects a measure of insolence and is even flippant, Rann went free due to the fact that no one with the prosecution could positively identify him as the robber. This type of evasion from officials stemmed from narratives made bandits heroes within their time periods, as they were the common man but glorified through their robbery. These literary figures had found a way to rise in the strict social hierarchy of early modern England to which tradition and birth might have never allowed them to ever ascend in reality. Highwaymen could work and win in a system by staying outside the grasp of those individuals whose wealth gave them power of state and justice, while their own wealth came from criminal means. These literary portrayals suggested power could be obtained by anyone who wanted it, even the poor. They entertained the hopes of the lower classes that needed to survive in a world run by those with wealth who could 'buy off' the justice system. These outlaws were not ordinary men but in fact illuminated

[5] Ibid, 3.
[6] Charles G. Harper, *Half-Hours with the Highwaymen: Picturesque biographies and traditions of the "Knights of the Road*" (London: Chapman & Hall, 1908), 344.

ideas of how weak central authority was in early modern England and how it was easy to slip into and out of criminal behavior.

These literary representations were based on the actions of the 'real' highwaymen, their home communities glorifying them because of their climbing social statuses. Due to their banditry, they were able to help their home communities and spread their stolen income. When wealth was wanting in the home, bandits removed themselves from the area and from using communal supplies and then returned with cash and goods in large quantities. The wealth they acquired through robbery was redistributed by selling off the stolen goods to the rural merchants, boosting the economy of these areas and leading to monetary gain of the peasants with whom they interacted to trade their plunder. They were opportunists whose narratives in turn represented the tensions in country and city relations, as well as changes in the urban landscapes of places such as London, where contact between towns and rural areas increased with expanding city borders. With these interactions came new ideas of how social and economic statuses come about, and social lines began breaking in the communities that supported highwaymen legends and texts. These tensions between country and city were exploited as avenues to become rich by highwaymen, as literary figures kept their real counterparts in high social esteem.

With this exploitation of anyone and everyone who possessed wealth that dared to venture out from the city came a degraded sense of chivalry, which was a common theme found in medieval legends. Because highwaymen were brigands with their own benefit alone in mind, they were willing to attack anyone who might have goods about them, whether it was a man, woman, or child. Robin Hood allowed women to pass through his woods unharmed, something highwaymen did not do if the woman had gold. This is demonstrated by a passage from a narrative of Old Mobb, a highwayman who had a long life and prospered at his trade enough to support a wife and family for years. In the scene, the highwayman meets a wealthy widow who had just buried her husband and weeps when stopped by the man. His response to her illustrates how women were perceived in this period.

> 'And is your Losing your Husband then, says he, 'an Argument that I must loose my Booty? I know your sex too well, Madame, to suffer myself to be prevailled on by a Woman's Tears. Those Crocodile Drops are always at your Command; and no doubt but that dear Cuckold of yours, whom you have lately buried, has frequently been persuaded out of his Reason by their Interposition in your Domestick Debates. Weeping is so customary to you, that every Body would be disappointed, if a Woman was to bury her Husband, and not weep for him; but you would be more disappointed, if no Body was to take Notice of your Crying; for according to the old Proverb, the End of those Tears is another husband.'[7]

Old Mobb outright refuses to allow something such as a woman's weeping to prevent his acquisition of wealth. His explanation is that the woman is crying only because that was the best way to encounter another potential husband so as to increase her own wealth and possibly her status as well. As charming bandits, literary highwaymen were to be above the wiles of women and behave in a way that would relinquish the most wealth from their victim. The sex of the victim should not and did not matter for both literary and real highwaymen, as a standard of behavior was only to be alluded to by highwaymen in dress and speech, not in manner as that would make them too much akin to the upper classes and less relatable to the peasantry. This behavior towards women demonstrates a waning in the chivalric ideals of the medieval period as

[7] "The Life of Old Mobb," *A General History of Highwaymen, Pirates, e&* (London), 131.

urbanization and industry appeared in England. Another example of the waning of these chivalric ideals is that medieval outlaws typically accosted clergy who passed by the wooded areas they sought out as places of command. During the medieval period, any man of religious nature was seen as part of a corrupted class that held wealth and power above everyone else. By the time of the highwaymen, England's religious nature had divided among many groups and bandits dismissed clergy all too often in their stories as they were no longer as wealthy. Early modern bandits preferred to seize a royal or noble cart that was passing by their section of road just outside city limits. This change in authority and who held power in society demonstrates the tensions between classes, a tension that defined highwaymen but set them apart from medieval outlaw heroes as they dealt with different classes.

Earlier highwaymen dealt with similar issues as medieval outlaws. This can be seen in the attitude towards the religious community, specifically in how Catholics and clergy were treated in England. The farther from medieval culture, society, and politics that highwaymen legends are found, however, the less religiously-inclined they become, depicting the changing mind-set of the public in early modern England. The highwayman Patrick Flemming can be seen illustrating these issues of religion, being one of the earlier bandits in the highwayman mold. The elements within his legend diverge into two distinct paths: one coming from London while the other originates in Dublin, as Flemming as an Irishman as well as a criminal, respectively. Within these two different accounts of his deeds, the language used to set them apart depicts not only the waning tensions between Protestants and Catholics but also the shift towards using the public to criticize and criminalize those of a different ethnic descent. In many early highwaymen legends, the use of an ethnic quality is what makes an individual criminal to begin with before their exploits into robbery and other activities are even mentioned. This attitude is especially true for the Irish, who the English have repeatedly found as a source of discontent in Great Britain.

Irish and English relations were strained during the time period in which highwaymen emerged in legends and other texts. They were seen as part of the "peripheral communities of Europe" and had been pushed back to Ireland in an attempt to centralize and empower the Protestant faith in England.[8] In the 17th century, the 'New English' came into Ireland to conqueror and create plantations that would benefit the empire as a whole, taking land from the Irish and 'Old English' who had been there for centuries.[9] A few years later, when the Irish rebelled and took sides in the English Civil War, Cromwell invaded Ireland taking more land from those who traditionally owned it and created penal laws against Roman Catholics. Not only were the Irish being prosecuted for their religion during the 1600s, but also their livelihood and wealth were being taken away when their lands were confiscated. With this background, the differences in language used to describe Patrick Flemming between the English and Irish tales signified not only religious tensions but also political ones as well.

To begin, the accounts of Patrick from London are quite severe. Taking just the title of his text, Patrick Flemming became a named "Irish Murderer and Highwayman."[10] The narrative begins with warnings of how he was cunning and violent from an early age and disrespectful to

[8] On the "peripheral communities of Europe," see Colin Kidd, "Gaelic Antiquity and National Identity in Enlightenment Ireland and Scotland," *The English Historical Review*, 109. 434 (Nov. 1994): 1198.
[9] Ibid, 1198.
[10] Alexander Smith, *A compleat history of the lives and robberies of the most notorious highway-men, foot-pads, shop-lifts, and cheats, of both sexes, in and about London and Westminster, and all Parts of Great Britain, for above an Hundred Years past, continu'd to the present Time* (London, 1719), 49.

men of the clergy. The earliest escapades in which Flemming is seen are directed at a priest when he was a child, the acts implied by the text to be due to his Catholic upbringing and inability to take on a career in service. In fact, he was a footboy to a wealthy lady in his area of birth but took more to games such as Cricket and Ninepins than business, illustrating the negative traits of laziness and disruptiveness that the English promoted Irish Catholics as having.[11] Flemming ties up one of the clergy while he is resting and writes "whoremonger" on the wall so when the priest wakes, he can see it. What his tricks on a sleeping priest seem to entail is a lack of respect for authority in Irish and Catholic upbringing, so much so that they do not respect the men that are supposed to be leading their own communities. Also, it shows the English disregard for the Catholic clergy, as the term used to describe the priest are negative in nature and outright say that the man is corrupt, from taking money to live higher than his status to intercourse with women. Flemming confirms English suspicions that Catholics are criminals, and his advancement into a corrupt lifestyle at such a young age entails that it is not his surroundings but his birth that make him this deviant.

While the English look upon Flemming with worry about the Irish and Catholic influence in their own society, the Dublin text of the same story shows another side of the highwayman. In this account, his title is not 'murderer' or even 'highwayman.' His tagline is, instead, substituted with the much smaller crime of "a notorious robber."[12] As this text comes from the country of Flemming's birth and an ethnic understanding of the waging of crimes against an English upper class, the language is much more genteel and the focus on the man's Irish legacy is celebrated while his religion is mentioned only once as a side-note. Other information, such as his education before becoming a criminal, is included in the Dublin text as well, which had been skimmed over in the English story as something that had to be taught by a wealthy outsider. In the Irish account, Flemming was sent to school before he was even in service of any wealthy patron, having parents who made an effort even though they were not the best off financially.

> The parents of Patrick Flemming were very poor People, and when he was born lived in Athlone, supporting themselves only by Labour: yet as poor as they were they took some Care to send him to School as long as they could afford, where, being a Boy of a ready Wit, he learned to read and write tolerably well in a short Time. At thirteen Years of Age he was recommended to the Countess of Kildare for a Foot Boy; but when he came to get a full Belly, he grew so unlucky and negligent of his Business that he was soon dismissed.[13]

This is an instance of exemplifying Patrick's Irish upbringing. Even though his parents were poor, they understood the importance of an education and were not ignorant about the ways the world around them ran. There was no outside force that worked on the family until Flemming was taken away at the age of thirteen and put into service working for a wealthy countess, the same lady who was at the beginning of his education in the London version because "being the eldest Child, he had the most Education bestowed upon him, which was one of the meanest; for he neither write or read."[14] In fact, the narratives directly contradict each other as Patrick is well learned in the Dublin account. There is, however, the case of how he then was dismissed with a

[11] For an account of his being given to games, see Ibid, 50.
[12] "The history of Patrick Flemming, a notorious robber." *A genuine history of the lives and actions of the most notorious Irish highwaymen, tories and rapparees, from Redmond O Hanlon, the famous Gentleman-Robber, to Cahier na Gappul, the great Horse-Catcher, who was executed at Maryborough in August 1735*. 3rd edition. (Dublin, 1747), 43.
[13] Ibid, 43.
[14] Smith, *A compleat history of the lives and robberies of the most notorious highway-men*, 49.

"full Belly." This change to the highwayman's manner, instead of being key to his Irish nature of laziness as the English version depicts, is a recognition that wealth and leisure would make one forget their business and fall into ruin morally. The parents, who are poor but work hard, have given their son an education and a head start in the world that changed his fortunes to that of servant instead of hard labor. But the prosperity of that upper class lifestyle caused corruption to Patrick's work ethic, a change that exemplifies the nature of how the upper and lower classes interacted. Even though the peasants are working hard, the upper classes are simply given what they have and grow lazy as Patrick did.

Another aspect of the texts that depicts the tensions of a changing society is that the language surrounding both the London and Dublin versions of the story of Patrick Flemming begins to illuminate the shift away from the medieval outlaw legends and brings criminality into its next stages, that of the highwaymen. Patrick, in both stories, is still dangerous. In London, however, he became more sinister due to his Irish and Catholic descent. This trend that ethnicity made the criminal more than the religion demonstrates a change in public thinking, one that supports the removal of people who are different or break the status quo from English society. The state was "undeniably ruled by a Protestant monarchy; and Catholics were subject to stringent penal statutes and regarded with suspicion by most right-minded Protestants."[15] Politics were becoming more important to the wealthy, and the government was slowly gaining powers over the church and the monarch. In other words, the upper classes were becoming more authoritative in the country due to their wealth and status. The structure and outline of what made a criminal was changing with these shifting politics as well, the idea heading towards an enemy of the people and the state instead of an enemy of the king. During the period, this change makes sense as the monarch was waging his own battles to regain control over the elite classes and an abstract nation.

The audiences of each narrative should be considered as well. For instance, the London version of Flemming's legend can be found a text that is making an attempt to catalogue criminals. The book was to be used by the upper classes as a defensive measure, information that would contribute to their knowing and understanding the lifestyle of criminals who would be coming after their purses. The Dublin text, however, appears in a book full of similar legends but does not specify who the text is for. This text seems to be for entertainment, more to be a story of an Irish outlaw who stood up to the rich and English in their own country and more akin to the medieval legends than the budding highwaymen stories. Because of these traits in each of the narratives, the larger socioeconomic issue of class based on ethnicity and wealth instead of position in the church was coming into focus.

Although the church was important to the medieval outlaws who predated the highwaymen, the landed elite formed the community that was attacked by these early modern bandits from their lower and middle class origins. At times, those in the middle class found it easier to become outlaws than to work within a system that was structured to keep wealth and control in the hands of a small, privileged group. Dick Turpin was a man of this middle class, the son of a butcher and having been through some schooling. Instead of being part of the poor rural community as earlier highwaymen were, Turpin was in a position of more comfortable living but had no more desirable prospects for future advancement than rural individuals. He was successful for reasons that had more to do with knowledge of economics and the local community that he came from, but he could not have made the impact he had without first being a part of a certain class strata. Another man, Old Mobb, is perhaps a more insightful example as

[15] Penelope Corfield, "Georgian England: One state, many faiths," *History Today.* 45.4 (1995), 16.

he was on the cusp of medieval, criminal lore. He was considered to be a man "who robs like a Gentleman" and most of his story depicts the man quoting passages of intellect that would require some knowledge of reading.[16] Although his youth was not a subject of discussion in these tales, the possibility that he was taught by clergy is evidenced by his making Biblical illusions. Again, like Patrick Flemming, Old Mobb's narratives can be found not long after medieval outlaws had begun to be more fairytales and less critiques of contemporary issues.

The problems that Old Mobb addressed were the growing want of wealth in communities outside the royal circle in city centers, the expanding middle class of which Dick Turpin later becomes a part, and the shifting focus of the public from religion to other interests such as science. The first and last parts are quite prevalent in one of Old Mobb's encounters with a doctor on the highway. After stopping the doctor, Old Mobb demands any money the other has on him. This man, a "Quack-Slaver" as he is called, not only has wealth but is willing to lie about it to keep his investments intact.[17] In response, Old Mobb gives a reply that encompasses the declining status of religion, as religious ideas are used to describe the concepts that are replacing it, and a shift towards science or, in this case, medicine. Another concept also depicted is the growing discontent towards those who have money and can use that to promote themselves, even when anyone of a lower status would be found in error and criminalized.

> This is the Devil correcting Sin with a Witness, quoth Old Mobb, Can I ruin People more than you, dear Mr. Theophrastus Bombastus? You are a scrupulous, conscientious Son of a Whore, indeed to tell me of ruining People. I only take their Money away from them, but you often take away their Lives; and what makes it the worse, you do it safely, under a Pretense of restoring them to Health; whereas I should be hanged for killing a Man, or even Robbing him, if I were taken.[18]

This entire speech echoed the larger economic and social justice system of early modern England that places one class above another due to wealth. Old Mobb understood the consequences that surrounded these social tensions. He and this doctor were different due to their standing in society and would never receive the same treatment from any justice system though technically both have killed people. A pretense existed that those who had that which those who had not could never obtain, just as Old Mobb could not be pardoned for killing someone even though the doctor had taken perhaps more lives than the highwayman had.

Other implications can be pulled from the same passage as well. A different interpretation of the idea of what it means to 'ruin' people presented itself in the man's speech. Old Mobb takes their wealth, which in effect would take the status away from those who need money to keep themselves in power and places of prestige. Should he steal from those who are poor, however, he takes very little from them both in aspects of money and status. In other words, Mobb would not impact the life of the lower classes because they had nothing for him to take. The rich would have been the only ones affected by robbery, as they had something to lose: wealth and power. The doctor, on the other hand, steals people's lives, taking from everyone equally, yes, but also taking the extreme. What the public saw in this illustration of the doctor's economy was he had to prove his worth through superior knowledge that could easily take away not only a life but also a chunk of a community system. What the public saw in Old Mobb,

---

[16] For an account of him being named "who robs like a Gentleman," reference "The Life of Old Mobb," *A General History of Highwaymen, Pirates, e&,* 127.

[17] "Quack-Slaver" means that he is a doctor who gives remedies that are unproven, inefficient, and sometimes dangerous. Ibid, 133.

[18] "The Life of Old Mobb," *A General History of Highwaymen, Pirates, e&,* 134.

however, was a man who not only was at their level socially, even perhaps a little above it, but someone who was willing to take what he needed and nothing more. In this way, the criminal bandit was celebrated over the healer with knowledge and prestige. The highwayman's economy was to take and then trade or spend the goods they had, working within a system that was understood on the lower levels of society. As such, this society was able to move forward economically with the help of these highwaymen.

Outlaw legends go out of their way to place the 'hero' of the text into situations that will portray various issues of the time period, and as such, highwaymen are smokescreens for larger socioeconomic problems of early modern England. To begin with, these criminals picked their robberies specifically because of the value seen in the victim.

> Moreover, the highwayman delivered a more specific and hence potentially more powerful social critique than that of his predecessors. He was, after all, discriminating in his choice of victims, collecting "contributions" only from the rich or those who traveled by coach, while the fact that he robbed on horseback and dressed like a beau seemed to suggest the possibility that the "Knight of the Road" was not the only thief disguised as a gentleman.[19]

The wealth of the entire country sat with only a small class of people, the landed elite that controlled the government. This group was comprised of those who, as seen above, could afford coaches and to travel in style. But the highwaymen also dressed as these upper classes did, offering a contrast to the strict class system ideals that the peerage was above the commoner. This dual image of rich dress, the same characteristics being given to the 'Knight of the Road' as well as the individual he robs from, illuminated that criminality was in the eye of the beholder and robbery was not always considered illegal by all social standards. By dressing akin to their victims, highwaymen took the sympathy that might have been associated with these wealthy gentry and replaced it with contempt for the class type being robbed, as the public associated these upper classes with criminal behavior such as seizing peasant land.

The common public, using the outlaws as magnifying glasses of their own society, could pinpoint the place from which the wealth being taken had originated. Who they mostly found at the origins were themselves as the victims of lords, landowners, and greedy merchants who in the texts were on the wrong end of the highwaymen's guns. By taking from those who had 'stolen' from the common man, however, highwaymen gave credence to the idea that they could avoid official justice by placing themselves alongside the upper classes. This juxtaposition allowed wealth to be seen as a tainting element, which made the system of justice where wealth of the accused determined the sentence of the crime, just as corrupt. An atmosphere of criminality was placed over those in power due to this depiction, such as those in the seats of Parliament and with noble or royal patronage or blood. What this message of tainted income also illustrated was what happened to highwaymen who did not redistribute locally the goods and cash they 'inherited.' As Andrea McKenzie argues,

> Interestingly, it was the highwayman's resemblance to the gentleman in those very externals that had in the early eighteenth century so well qualified him as a social critic — his dress, his dissipation, and his reputation for gallantry — that, after about 1750, increasingly opened him up to scorn.[20]

[19] Andrea McKenzie, "The Real Macheath: Social Satire, Appropriation, and Eighteenth-Century Criminal Biography," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69.4 (Dec. 2006), 584.
[20] McKenzie, "The Real Macheath," 600.

The same aspects of their robberies that had made the highwaymen protectors of the commoner, stealing from the rich to affront their power, were turning into the reasons that they were less desired in a region. There was a line that was being crossed by the highwaymen that made them more criminal than heroic, one that had to do with how they were spending their wealth. When the literary bandits grew too magnificent and akin to the classes that the poor perceived as oppressing them, the highwaymen's tales end at the gallows with less sympathy to his plight.

Jack Rann, more commonly known as 16 String Jack, was one of these tainted highwaymen and his narrative cuts short due to the power he perceived he had when so much alike the upper classes. He was caught and hung at the age of approximately twenty-four while other highwaymen lived well into their thirties, some even with families off in the country. Rann worked as a coachman for the upper rungs of the social hierarchy but in an attempt to emulate their dress and infiltrate their society normally cut off to someone of his station, Rann ran up debts that brought him to the highwayman lifestyle. But by robbing individuals like those he served, money easily fell into his pockets and Rann could continue living outside his means and station. That did not mean, however, that he continued to socialize with those of his working station. Instead, Rann is seen flaunting his riches and not redistributing them to the lower class which he came from.

> And, moreover, of what possible use are brave costumes, but to flaunt and flourish about in? And when you do so flourish, you must needs go the pace altogether. There were excellent companions in those places to which Rann most resorted, as a gentleman of fashion, a Vauxhall, and elsewhere; and there were the card-tables, where he had a passing run of luck; and there were the women.[21]

Rann dressed in "flowered-satin waistcoats, and full-skirted damasked coats of silk, elaborately embroidered," gaining him his nickname due to the 16 colored ribbons he would attach to the knees of his breeches.[22] This extravagance was a tribute to those who could afford frivolous goods such as ribbons or silk in excess, those who commoners observed as exploiting the lower classes' work. What was troubling about the narrative was that even though his appearance mocked the upper classes, Rann spent the goods he stole in expensive clubs and extravagant dining houses, not in the local shops and inns that held people of the status into which he was born. He began to act like those from whom he is stealing, not simply playing the part of a gentleman to gain the upper hand against those who have oppressed his class. As such, his legend is less sympathetic towards the robber than that of the other highwaymen and ends sooner than most narratives of the same nature. His economic standing and use of the peerage's haunts made Rann as corrupt as they were, mixing the highwayman in with the powers of exploitation instead of portraying him as an outlaw who stalked the roads to raid individuals who had taken from him as a peasant. Rann was an example of how the peasantry had power at least over their own class to pull down those who stepped outside their place to rise above the masses, if not beyond as the literary highwaymen represent.

Highwaymen who fought for their own good brought more prosperity to their home community or to the areas where they hid, which was a reason that Jack Rann's narrative was shorter than the rest. In a way, highwaymen created a system for a rural district to gain an economic advantage over those around them, who relied mainly on agriculture to sustain themselves. By using the local peasants who were proficient in trade, bandits could gain sanctuary and expand legends of their deeds, as well as have their legends exaggerated for them

[21] Harper, *Half-Hours with the Highwaymen*, 341.
[22] Harper, *Half-Hours with the Highwaymen*, 341.

by these locals who promoted them as local heroes. As such, highwaymen's exploits became essential to the communities around them, even to the extent of connecting them to other markets in the area. In short, criminal pursuits outside the rural community and into the urban outskirts became,

> an important element in the modern sector of local economy, being redistributed, through local shopkeepers, innkeepers and others, to the commercial middle strata of rural society; all the more effectively redistributed since bandits (unlike the gentry) [spent] most of their cash locally, and [were] in any case too proud and too freehanded to bargain.[23]

Although many legends of highwaymen tend to steer their narratives towards the action of robbery on the roads and not what happened after these events, the literature on one highwayman by the name of Richard 'Dick' Turpin provides lengthy accounts of the events after his robberies. He was known to have repeatedly frequented bars and inns that were similar in status to his own upbringing. The robbery also stored goods at various local places, including his own father's home, before selling them to local merchants. Turpin remained part of the community into which he was born, becoming a highwayman because he had few means to advance outside his social status of butcher. This kept him close to the classes that praised his legends, unlike Jack Rann who opted out of his own society for the corruption of the higher classes. This places a distinction within the criminal community then; that one robber can be worse than another that echoes the mentality of Old Mobb's narrative with the inept doctor as well.

> The robber band is outside the social order which fetters the poor, a brotherhood of the free, not a community of the subject. Nevertheless, it cannot opt out of society. It needs and activities, its very existence, bring it into relation with the ordinary economic, social and political system.[24]

This outlaw seemed to catch the attention of the public because he was such a 'good' highwayman; even after being caught, he was placed in about a hundred plays, ballads and chapbook histories.[25] His ability to evade the law and steal items beyond high-end goods from those on the roads but also luxury goods such as horses, made his legends appear larger than life and created an escape for those who were in lower statuses, such as butchers like the Turpin family. Again, there is the idea of the common man rising up to gain wealth beyond his means and being able to stay out of trouble because of cunning and local help, which was provided due to his association with the peasant classes. Turpin was portrayed as effective in boosting the economy of the area, rising above and beyond the status into which he had been born. Turpin's legend inspired excitement in the lower classes because he was not corrupted by the wealth or reputation that he was gaining as was 16 String Jack. Instead, he stayed within the societal structure that profited most from his burglary and removed some of the power that the elite classes held over the area.

Highwaymen did not only represent the social and economic trends of the times then but were also specific to a certain class that benefitted from the narratives, both in the literature and in reality. These highwaymen were also specific to their time period, the 1700s, because their tales, though popular, were short lived, with the exception perhaps of Dick Turpin. The legends associated with the bandits ran their courses then disappeared as other changes and problems came to be represented in narrative form that interested the common public more. So the literary highwayman illustrate the,

---

[23] Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, 84-85.
[24] Ibid, 83.
[25] Harper, *Half-Hours with the Highwaymen*, 173.

> social roles bandits [were] supposed to play (and therefore often [did]), the values they [were] supposed to represent, their ideal - and therefore often real - relationship with the people. Yet such legends operate not simply among those familiar with a particular bandit, or any bandits, but very much more widely and generally. The bandit is not only a man, but a symbol.[26]

These literary figures represented real individuals who opened up the communities from which they came to new sources of income and prosperity. Turpin, Mobb, Flemming, and Rann were all characters but also had criminal records and felt the noose around their necks personally. What their narratives depicted, however, was that the commoner could rise from an impoverished social status. Although exaggerated and popular literature in "the 1720s marked the apogee of the highwayman or street robber not only as a social critic but also as a celebrity in his own right," the legends allowed for the lower classes to spread the idea that they had control over aspects of society that the upper classes would not have them believe.[27] Also, the texts illustrated an avenue for increasing one's wealth and status in a social structure that exploited the poor. It made sense that with "the contemporary acceptance of a hierarchical social system, such men [highwaymen] were the natural leaders to whom a discontented peasantry, which had no wish to arrogate to itself democratic rights to share in government, might turn."[28] In other words, highwaymen during this period were social deviants who promoted the issues of the lower class through their legends. Their functions changed with the times, classifying them more as symbols for their communities' issues than criminals, and slowly the legends faded due to amplified risks to safety and security that could be seen by those who were joining the increasing middle class of which Dick Turpin was a part.

As the depictions of the outlaws changed from individuals such as Old Mobb to those more akin to 16 String Jack Later, bandits were deemed criminals instead of gallant foes of the wealthy. This could have to do with the crackdown of the upper classes on rogues that threatened their powers in rural areas and mocked their class standards, as well as the increasing middle class as mentioned above. What the alterations in attitude towards the highwaymen came down to was the idea of what made a gentleman, how the highwaymen related to this idea, and the changing view on who was wealthy enough to rob from. As noted by McKenzie,

> It is no wonder that the title of gentleman was both coveted and contested: as Steven Shapin has argued, early modern English gentlemen enjoyed a cultural monopoly of honor and hence, by extension, the associated virtues of "fortitude, fidelity," and, not least, "valor." The role of social critic may have conferred upon the real-life street robber or highwayman a claim to gentility that was nominal at best; nonetheless, as I have suggested, the popular satiric juxtaposition of morality in high life and low could invest the words and gestures of the condemned, especially those who died bravely and cheerfully, with considerable critical weight.[29]

The shifting definition spoken of above affected the entire social structure, both high and low classes. Because the highwaymen were considered to have died bravely, some even cheerfully due to the celebrity status that would result in their deaths, the ideas behind them lost weight. They became less symbols of the commoner and more characters for entertainment. Though gentlemen, robbers should have been able to move on the social ladder, something that was not

[26] Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, 127.
[27] McKenzie, "The Real Macheath," 590.
[28] Keen, *Outlaws*, 205.
[29] McKenzie, "The Real Macheath," 603.

possible once they became known as emulating and having powers connected to the upper classes. This ensured that "after about mid-century, the space that had once granted not only the literary but even the 'reallife' highwayman or street robber a forum to declaim against the hypocrisy and the moral turpitude of his betters was rapidly closing."[30] Their backgrounds faded as their status became more important and, as the passage points out, their forum to degrade the rich was disappearing as the peasants stopped using them to illustrate their injustices. In short, the highwaymen became less symbols for the commoners, for whom they originally fought, and more for themselves, as a counterfeit upper class that could also rob, beat down, and exploit the lower classes should they choose. These themes can be seen throughout the tale of Jack Rann, and even in moments of the legend of Dick Turpin as he becomes more and more renegade and less communal. The legends of Patrick Flemming, who promoted the secularization and ethnic divisions in society, and Old Mobb, who illustrated increased knowledge among the lower classes and a lack of chivalric code, were no longer as important due to their rural histories. Instead, it was the middle class highwayman who skirted the urban areas that were focused on such as Turpin. Finally, the highwayman was a criminal as exemplified by Rann because he was too incorporated into the classes that he was supposed to be fighting against.

As these definitions of gentleman and criminal were changing alongside socioeconomic conditions in early modern England, the common peasantry found they needed a way to express their dissatisfaction with the increasingly impersonal, class-divided, rigid social structure of which they were a part. The avenue they chose was a critique of society through the legends of various highwaymen. Their victims occupied positions in society that offered privilege and wealth. This status the bandits took away, giving the lower classes an upper hand over the elite. By taking this action, the highwaymen followed in the tradition of medieval outlaws before them. Yet the language and style of their robberies illuminated the changes that had taken place in society from the medieval to the modern period. Their narratives containing contemporary issues of the poor fighting against those who were corrupt in the common public's eyes made the highwaymen legends appealing to their audiences. As such, highwaymen's roles as peasant renegades that preyed on the socioeconomic and politically powerful made them an integral part of the peasant community in early modern England.

[30] Ibid, 603.

Bibliography

Primary

"Old Mobb." *Anecdotes, bon mots, traits, stratagems and biographical sketches of the most remarkable highwaymen, swindlers and other daring adventurers, Who have flourished, from a very early Period, to the present Time. To which is added, a great number of apposite curiosities. Collected and Comprised, so as to Render the Whole Both Cautionary and Entertaining; and as Much An Object of Wonder as of Pity!* London, 1797. 44-55.

Smith, Alexander. *A compleat history of the lives and robberies of the most notorious highway-men, foot-pads, shop-lifts, and cheats, of both sexes, in and about London and Westminster, and all Parts of Great Britain, for above an Hundred Years past, continu'd to the present Time.* London, 1719.

"The history of Patrick Flemming, a notorious robber." *A genuine history of the lives and actions of the most notorious Irish highwaymen, tories and rapparees, from Redmond O Hanlon, the famous Gentleman-Robber, to Cahier na Gappul, the great Horse-Catcher, who was executed at Maryborough in August 1735. To which is added, the gold-finder: or, the history of Manus Maconiel, who under the Appearance of a stupid, ignorant Country Fellow, (on the Bog of Allen, by the Help of his Man Andrew) play'd the most notorious Cheats and remarkable Tricks on the People of Ireland that were ever known.* 3rd edition. Ed. J. Cosgrave. Dublin, 1747. 43-48.

Secondary

Barlow, Derek. "Turpin, Richard [Dick] (bap. 1705, d. 1739)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. 2004.

Corfield, Penelope. "Georgian England: One state, many faiths." *History Today.* 45.4 (1995): 14-21.

Harper, Charles G. *Half-Hours with the Highwaymen: Picturesque biographies and traditions of the "Knights of the Road*." London: Chapman & Hall, 1908.

Hobsbawn, Eric. *Bandits*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Keen, Maurice. *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend.* New York: Routledge, 2000.

Kidd, Colin. "Gaelic Antiquity and National Identity in Enlightenment Ireland and Scotland." *The English Historical Review*. 109.434 (Nov. 1994): 1197-1214.

McKenzie, Andrea. "The Real Macheath: Social Satire, Appropriation, and Eighteenth-Century Criminal Biography." *Huntington Library Quarterly*. 69.4 (Dec. 2006): 581-605.

Sugden, Philip. "Rann, John (*c.*1750–1774)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. 2004.

The *Gran Armada* of 1588 and the Commanders of the English Military

Forrest Kutscher

England numbers among the few European states that have remained autonomous throughout modern history. Yet this island sanctuary has faced the threat of foreign domination innumerable times. King Philip II of Spain's 1588 mobilization of the *Gran Armada* against his northern foe represented perhaps the direst of these instances.[1] Armed with what was believed to be an invincible fleet and an equally esteemed army, the Catholic monarch viewed as inevitable a triumph over the heretical Elizabeth I.[2] England, however, was saved from such a destiny thanks to the expertise with which naval commanders Sir Francis Drake and Charles Howard, second baron of Effingham and first earl of Nottingham, handled their respective posts.[3] Both men exhibited exemplary leadership during their control of the island's defensive flotilla, putting their egos aside and acting in coordination to allow a concerted effort to successfully repel superior enemy forces.[4] Howard, lord admiral of the English fleet, listened respectfully to the advice his vice-admiral Drake, who in turn accepted his subordination with a quiet dignity unusual for a man so fiercely independent.[5] These qualities proved instrumental in the 8 August victory over the *Gran Armada* by the combined English forces at the Battle of Gravelines.[6] This success on the high seas was fortunate for the island, as a landing in Kent by the Army of Flanders under the leadership of the esteemed Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, would have likely proved disastrous given the record of military failure by the English commander, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester.[7]

Lord admiral Charles Howard, second baron of Effingham and first earl of Nottingham, demonstrated his aptitude as supreme commander of the English naval forces not through innovative battle strategies, but rather by paying great heed to the advice he received from many of his subordinates. The lord admiral was modest enough to recognize that those under his directive had extensive experience on the high seas and could provide valuable advice at the height of a crisis.[8] Foremost among his inferiors was vice-admiral Sir Francis Drake, a veteran sea captain both renowned by the English and reviled by the Spanish for the innumerable swashbuckling endeavors he had so eagerly taken against the latter's merchant fleet.[9] It was testament to the esteem in which each man held the other that, upon demotion, the fiercely independent Drake quickly recognized Howard as his superior and that the lord admiral then treated him as an equal by relying on his insights.[10] Indeed, after the 8 August 1588 Battle of Gravelines Italian writer Petruccio Ubaldino recorded at the behest of Drake that:

---

[1]Paul E.J. Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 139.
[2]M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado and Simon Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada* (Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1991), 225.
[3]Neil Hanson, *The Confident Hope of a Miracle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 205.
[4]Roger Whiting, *The Enterprise of England: The Spanish Armada* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 134.
[5]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 205.
[6]Whiting, *Enterprise of England*, 134.
[7]Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, 139.
[8]James McDermott, "Charles Howard."
[9]Kelsey, "Sir Francis Drake."
[10]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 206.

> Sir Francis Drake, out of respect to the rank and dignity of the office and in honour of the Lord Admiral, lowered his own admiral's flag to pay tribute to Lord Howard, from whose ship the Vice-Admiral's flag was taken down and sent as a gift to Drake, who was thus able to use it as his own from that moment.[11]

Drake thus openly acknowledged the supremacy of Howard by removing from his flagship the prestigious symbol of his office—as he had until then been Admiral in the West—and immediately after hoisted that of the vice-admiralty for all to see.[12] Although this represented to Drake a decrease in both income and rank, he accepted the situation partly due to the significant role that Howard had earlier played in convincing Queen Elizabeth I that her strategy of massing the English fleet in the Narrow Seas was unwise; such a plan gave gauge of the weather to the Spanish along with an opportunity to land anywhere along the South Coast.[13] Howard recognized the feasibility of Drake's substitute course of action wherein the bulk of the English fleet was instead based near Plymouth, a location that would allow the flotilla to counter any attempt at landing on the part of the Armada while simultaneously defending the length of the Channel.[14] Furthermore, it could stalk the Armada from windward as it ventured towards Flanders.[15] Howard hence deferred to Drake and used his advantageous position in the nobility to communicate to Elizabeth the necessity of following this plan, one which may have saved England from the Spanish fleet. It is because of this and related instances that Howard remains to this day a revered English naval commander; it was not his own plans that earned him eternal fame, but rather his great foresight to include those of Drake in a successful strategy. At the time of his May 1585 elevation to the prestigious post of lord admiral, Howard had already directed royal fleets in 1570, 1578, and twice in 1582.[16] On none of these occasions, however, had the ships under his control been militarily involved. In fact, on his first expedition in 1570 to screen the ships carrying King Philip II's fiancé to Spain, Howard allowed his co-commander Sir William Winter to enjoy effective command of the fleet, recognizing his own lack of experience and instead embracing the courtly role necessitated of him to ensure that this endeavor could be passed off as merely diplomatic.

Such was the case in 1588 when Howard, as commander of England's fleet, deferred to the practical knowledge Drake had amassed in his exploits, going so far as to say: "I did and will yield ever unto them of greater experience."[17] Drake and Howard worked in conjunction to ready the English fleet for its inevitable showdown with the *Gran Armada* by making fundamental changes in the naval design of three of the queen's most important warships: the hulls were made both longer and narrower, a lower silhouette was created, and firepower was increased.[18] Such changes made a critical difference in the Battle of Gravelines.[19] Most important was that the tonnage of the total fleet was increased to 40,021 tons, a significant improvement, despite still being 10,000 less than that of the Spanish fleet.[20]

---

[11]Whiting, *Enterprise of England*, 156.
[12]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 205.
[13]Ibid., 204.
[14]Ibid., 202.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Robert W. Kenny, *Elizabeth's Admiral* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 34.
[17]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 204.
[18]Kenny, *Elizabeth's Admiral*, 113.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 117.

> At any rate, the lord admiral was an officer progressive enough to see the advantages of the new pattern, and the ships built or rebuilt during his tenure incorporated it. During the first two years he was in office, the navy built three major ships, bought a fourth, the *Ark Royal*, "the pride of the fleet" and Howard's flagship in 1588, added new pinnaces, and rebuilt and enlarged some of the older ones. So by the first days of the Armada year the queen had twenty-five ships above a hundred tons and eighteen pinnaces capable of extended service. The increase in the number of vessels had not been great—from thirty-one to forty-three—but the increase in tonnage was greater. And the effort, considering the financial demands made upon the queen, was considerable.[21]

While deficient in total tonnage, Drake and Howard were able to bring to battle 85 more craft than the Spaniards, a numerical advantage that would prove decisive.[22] Thus the lord admiral and the swashbuckler demonstrated an extraordinary degree of teamwork that resulted in an outstanding state of preparedness for the coming battle with the imposing *Gran Armada*. Further coordination during the actual battle would prove instrumental in garnering a surprising and decisive victory over the Spanish juggernaut at the Battle of Gravelines.

Howard and Drake exhibited the same high level of teamwork in battle as they did in preparing their fleet. Following Drake's advice, Howard initiated a series of devastating maneuvers upon the *Gran Armada* that left the supposedly invincible fleet in tatters.[23] The lord admiral wisely deferred to tactics perfected by the sea dog that took advantage of the flaws plaguing Philip's flotilla while simultaneously negating those afflicting his own.[24] Drake recognized that the imposing naval force levied upon England was not actually a single and cohesive whole but rather an unstable conglomerate of numerous ethnicities, languages, and loyalties—each of which could readily be exploited.[25] Indeed, this lack of coordination on the part of the Spanish "was a characteristic that was of… disadvantage for the effective conduct of a strategic offensive, in which unity of action and uniformity of purpose are of the essence…"[26] Upon a chance sighting of the straggling flagship *El Gran Grifon* on 3 August, Drake seized the moment. Engaging in close battle, he demonstrated that the British cannons could penetrate the thick hull of an Armada ship if fired at a sufficiently close range. While previous efforts to disable such massive galleons had been met with disheartening results wherein cannonballs merely lodged themselves in outer planking or even occasionally bounced off, Drake's cannonballs went through the Spanish ship, completely disabling it.[27] Because this development had occurred only as a result of the extremely close proximity at which Drake bombarded the ship, the key to victory was thus revealed to lie in breaking through the Armada's considerable defensive formation so as to allow English vessels to isolate individual enemy craft and then unleash upon them completely overwhelming force.[28] This strategy thus relied heavily on the

[21]Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, 113-114.
[22]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 117.
[23]Ibid., 139.
[24]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 280.
[25]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 82.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid., 280.
[28]Ibid.

one quality for which English ships were undoubtedly the superior of their Spanish counterparts: mobility.[29]

Due to their sailing prowess and boat speed, English captains were able to control their position and range during a battle.[30] As was previously mentioned, however, Howard's own fleet was itself heterogeneous, a quality wherein his captains tended to follow into battle the leader of their choice and subsequently attack in an improvisational and ineffective manner.[31] The dynamic lord admiral astutely took note of Drake's tactical discovery as well as his own fleet's tendencies. He consequently reorganized his fleet into four squadrons led by Drake, himself, Martin Frobisher, and John Hawkins.[32] This strategy allowed Howard to accommodate the independent nature of his fleet. He left the various vessels under his command free to fully achieve the same tactical success previously exhibited by Drake during his attack on *El Gran Grifon*; groupings of English ships maintained a safe distance from the crescent formation taken by Spanish craft and then used their own maneuverability to quickly close the gap at a pace that the enemy could not to match.[33] The warships guarding the flanks essential to the cohesiveness of the Armada's defensive formation thus saw their range advantage negated as the English vessels closed in.[34] Upon achieving sufficient proximity, the English broadsided the hostile ships and then launched continuous volleys into their sterns from heavy bow guns and broadside guns.[35] This positioning gave them time to make a quick retreat to reload in safety, minimizing the risk of being either grappled or boarded by an enemy force.[36]

The latter strategy was of utmost importance because it protected the English from a distinct Spanish military advantage—soldiery.[37] The Army of Flanders was widely regarded as early modern world's best fighting force, a veritable behemoth nursed on the wealth of the New World. Should its troops have achieved a close-quarters presence with the predominately seafaring English crewmembers, the outcome of such a confrontation would have strongly favored the Spanish.[38] The actual purpose of the *Gran Armada* was to successfully convoy these troops to Kent, from where they could begin an incursion.[39] The Spanish ships were thus not manned entirely by sailors, but rather by a preponderance of infantry: of the 25,696 men that departed La Coruña, 18,288 were soldiers, more than twice the amount of seamen.[40] The true danger posed by an increased proximity with Spanish ships lay therefore not in their guns but rather their warriors; the strategy expounded by Drake negated this particular threat, a tactical advantage that would prove essential to English victory. By exploiting the unmatched maneuverability of the English ships, then, Drake shattered the *Gran Armada* three-fold: the uncharacteristically long range of the Spanish guns was negated while at the same time the short-range, heavy-shotted 'battery' pieces of the English were allowed to reach their full destructive potential; furthermore, this same maneuverability negated any danger of Spanish boarding

[29]Michael Lewis, *Armada Guns* (London: Ruskin House, 1961), 190.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 82.
[32]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 280.
[33]Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, 150.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.
[37]Lewis, *Armada Guns*, 190.
[38]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 225.
[39]Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, 149.
[40]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 212.

parties, an event where the enemy would have proven most dangerous. This thus clearly demonstrates the genius of both Sir Francis Drake and Charles Howard; the former was clever enough to devise a successful strategy, and the latter was wise enough to recognize its potential. The presence of these qualities was fortunate, as it is likely that without such coordination the inept Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, would have easily been defeated on land by the far more experienced Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, and his famous Army of Flanders.

Had the Army of Flanders reached English soil, it would have likely wrought disastrous consequences for England given the incompetence of its military chief, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester.[41] Chosen by Queen Elizabeth I as Lieutenant and Captain-General of the Queen's Armies and Companies not for his experience but rather for the life-long infatuation she held for him, Leicester was ill-respected by his peers in both the court and military due to what they saw as unwarranted favoritism.[42] Most telling of his inability to command was Leicester's consistent refusal to heed the advice of those who, although his nominal subordinates, greatly exceeded him in combat experience:

> Lacking wide and continuous experience in the field, Leicester overestimated Spanish strength. A number of his contemporaries like Bingham and Williams were far less impressed, having had more recent service in the armies against which they now fought. Williams believed in the superiority of the English and the Dutch, given the right leaders or leader. Although he supported Leicester at first, his disillusionment with his commander's military and diplomatic tactics grew.[43]

Most evidence of Leicester's inability to effectively lead troops into battle comes from his time spent as governor-general of the Netherlands, during which he oversaw the calamitous loss of the town of Sluys in 1587.[44] When on 2 July Leicester and his 5,000 soldiers were convoyed to Flushing, Dutch sentinels defending Sluys against a Spanish siege rejoiced at the arrival of these reinforcements by firing increasingly intense volleys at the Spanish enemy.[45] However,

> Their confidence was wholly misplaced. Leicester's first attempt to relieve the town came when he landed near Ostend at the head of 4,000 infantry and 400 cavalry, but with an incompetence or cowardice that surprised no one on the Dutch side, when he saw the Spanish forces massing to repel the attack, he lost his nerve, re-embarked his troops and sailed back down the coast. Two weeks of such futile sorties, manoeuvres and landings left the English forces no nearer to reaching the embattled and desperate defenders of Sluys.[46]

Here then is clearly shown the minimal, if not nonexistent, extent to which Leicester would have fulfilled the role of Lieutenant and Captain-General of the Queen's Armies and Companies earlier bestowed upon him by Elizabeth I.[47] Along with his complete absence of bravery was an equal lack of strategic aptitude. Although a Dutch sailor by the name of van Trappen had provided Leicester with accurate intelligence regarding the potential benefits of a relief attack from the sea given Parma's minimal shoreline defenses, the ships that the people of Sluys amassed on 20 July were subsequently forced to disperse when the earl's hesitance to initiate a

[41]Whiting, *Enterprise of England*, 157.
[42]Simon Adams, "Robert Dudley."
[43]Alan Haynes, *The White Bear* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1987), 189.
[44]Ibid., 184.
[45]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 153.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Haynes, *White Bear*, 191.

joint maneuver led to its eventual abandonment due to stormy weather.[48] It was only six days later, when the Sluys capitulated due to shortages of both gunpowder and morale, that the complete truth in the information conveyed to England's hapless commander by van Trappen was revealed; by then, however, it was far too late.[49] In this Leicester also exhibited a disastrous lack of a quality essential to the success of any military leader: knowing who to trust. Leicester did not take van Trappen's information seriously because its validity was called into question by another seaman named Drogue, in whom Leicester mistakenly decided he would vest his trust.[50] It is thus easy to imagine the likely disastrous outcome that an invasion of England by Parma's Army of Flanders would have wrought on an English army under Leicester's command.

> When the earl awaited review by the queen at his camp in West Tilbury in 1588, he had managed to amass a force numbering several thousand men.[51] However, whether he would actually have led them into battle against Parma is open to question. His record in The Netherlands showed that he was sufficiently in awe if not in fear of Parma to avoid a confrontation with him, and his apparent preference was simply to retreat in the face of an invasion, laying waste to the country until the Spaniards' lack of provisions forced them to withdraw.[52]

Even setting aside Leicester's ineptitude, the power of Parma's own Army of Flanders cannot be overstated. Soldiery in early modern Europe saw its peak in the lethality of Philip's ground troops, who were considered to be the most highly-trained and best-armed fighting men on the continent.[53] Moreover, the size of his army in April 1588 was estimated at around 65,000 men of varying nationalities, of whom roughly 18,000 were to be convoyed via the *Gran Armada* to Kent, the area whose defense was under the ultimate jurisdiction of Leicester.[54] Sir Walter Ralegh determined that, given the speed at which the Army of Flanders had proven itself capable of advancing during various campaigns in the Netherlands, wherein it had traversed the countryside at a rate of ten miles per day against the Dutch—who were far more organized in their opposition—a Spanish advance could have reached London a mere week after a successful landing at Kent.[55] Indeed, when four years after the defeat of the Armada Parma invaded Normandy with 22,000 men, he proved himself a commander capable of marching such a force 65 miles in just six days.[56] The consequences of Leicester's likely inability to counter such an able commander at the helm of the greatest land army in all of Europe has been counterfactually investigated by numerous sources, wherein the fears of Raleigh may be understood: Parma had at his disposal 23,000 men, all of whom were to fight against a largely inferior opponent and therefore could have reasonably besieged the capitol soon after landing such a force.[57] The only possible obstacle that Parma might face would be those English soldiers tasked with defending London. As the landing of the Spanish forces would be in Kent, however, these troops would also be commanded by Leicester.

---

[48]Ibid., 184.
[49]Ibid., 184-185.
[50]Ibid., 184.
[51]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 379.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 225.
[54]Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567 – 1659*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 231.
[55]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 169-170.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Eugene L. Rasor, *The Spanish Armada of 1588* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 183.

The *Gran Armada* deployed in 1588 to topple Queen Elizabeth I's Protestant England by the fervently Catholic King Philip II of Spain represented one of the gravest threats to the island's security in all of its history.[58] Supposedly invincible and transporting the deadliest land force Europe could muster, this massive fleet saw the success of its divinely inspired mission as inevitable.[59] Such optimism was not without merit, as the ultimate land invasion of the unmatched Army of Flanders would have been met by British forces under the command of the hapless Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester.[60] Faced by an enemy their superior in command and training, those unfortunate soldiers tasked with protecting the home county of Kent from the brilliant Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, would have likely proven unable to halt the experience Spanish troops given the incompetence of their own leader.[61] History is full of military upsets, however, and England was saved from a likely defeat on land by a brilliant and improbably victory at sea engineered by an extraordinary pair of English naval commanders. Lord admiral Charles Howard, second baron of Effingham and first earl of Nottingham, forewent the arrogance common among those of high military rank and instead listened to the invaluable advice of his experienced vice-admiral, Sir Francis Drake.[62] In return, the independent-natured Drake uncharacteristically accepted his subordination with a quiet dignity and helped Howard engineer the perfect strategy to defeat an overwhelming naval force.[63] This historic pairing ultimately prevented the *Gran Armada* from successfully establishing the Army of Flanders upon England's shores; the goliath that was Spain's fleet was subsequently toppled at the 8 August Battle of Gravelines.[64]

[58]Hammer, *Elizabeth's Wars*, 139.
[59]Rodriguez-Salgado and Adams, *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*, 225.
[60]Haynes, *White Bear*, 192.
[61]Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 204.
[62]Hanson, *Confident Hope of a Miracle*, 204.
[63]Ibid., 205.
[64]Whiting, *Enterprise of England*, 134.

Bibliography

Adams, Simon. "Robert Dudley." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (8160).

Hammer, Paul E.J. *Elizabeth's Wars*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Hanson, Neil. *The Confident Hope of a Miracle*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Haynes, Alan. *The White Bear*. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1987.

Kelsey, Harry. "Sir Francis Drake." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (8022).

Kenny, Robert W. *Elizabeth's Admiral*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.

Lewis, Michael. *Armada Guns*. London: Ruskin House, 1961.

McDermott, James. "Charles Howard." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (13885).

Parker, Geoffrey. *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567 – 1659*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Rasor, Eugene L. *The Spanish Armada of 1588*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Rodriguez-Salgado, M.J., and Simon Adams, eds. *England, Spain and the Gran Armada*. Savage, MD: Barnes & Noble Books, 1991.

Whiting, Roger. *The Enterprise of England: The Spanish Armada*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988

An Illusion of Liberation:
Mabel Dodge in the Context of Feminism, Progressivism, and Her Time

Emily Krochmal

Introduction

The turn of the twentieth century in the United States saw a new kind of woman emerge. Beginning with the Progressives, and moving into feminism, women and men alike began to question women's role in society. Some remarkable trailblazers in this societal transformation, such as Ida Tarbell or Margaret Sanger, stand out. As with some of the most influential and acclaimed characters of the Progressive Era, there is often much ambiguity as to the virtue and direction of their agendas. Mabel Dodge Luhan is one such character. In some respects extraordinarily feminist, in others a seemingly true Progressive woman, and yet always somewhat transparent as to her perceived dependency on men, Dodge does not fit neatly into one category of American society. Dodge was conflicted; she experimented with her cultural influence and sexuality, yet did so in a vain attempt to define herself independently of male approval. She never blazed a truly feminist path, but instead participated in acceptably "feminine" progressive projects, and pushed the limits of society in a search for identity, not cultural transformation in America.

Mabel Dodge, née Mabel Ganson (1879-1962), led a dynamic and vibrant life. Her childhood in Buffalo, New York, was affluent yet filled with neglect and deep unhappiness.[1] In her early twenties, Dodge was married, had a child, and widowed within a matter of a few years. She would go on to marry three more times and have numerous love affairs. In 1905, Dodge moved with her second husband, Edwin Dodge, to Florence, Italy. For the next eight years, she cultivated her love for art, literature, and culture. Dodge opened her salon to a number of notable artists, collecting their ideas and viewpoints, and observing their interactions.[2]

After nearly a decade, Dodge was unfulfilled by the Florence art scene and decided to return to America, establishing herself in Greenwich Village. There, Dodge cultivated one of the most famous salon cultures in American history. She regularly brought together artists, feminists, anarchists, and writers. She referred to them, "the movers and shakers" of the time.[3] Additionally, during her New York years, Dodge contributed to an activist journal, *The Masses*, supported the Women's Peace Party, and promoted new psychological thinking.[4] By 1916, Dodge became overwhelmed by the many directions in which her life seemed to be moving, and her third husband, Maurice Stearn, suggested that they move to Taos, New Mexico.[5] Here, Dodge fell in love with the non-materialistic and apparently harmonious lifestyle of the Pueblo Indians, as well as one particular Pueblo, Antonio Lujan. She spent the rest of her life working towards personal exploration and preservation of Native American culture.

---

[1] Summary from Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 15-18, 21-27.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Intimate Memories: The Autobiography of Mabel Dodge Luhan*, ed. Lois Palken Rudnick (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 202.
[4] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, x.
[5] Lois Palken Rudnick, "Luhan, Mabel Dodge," http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-01225.html; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Accessed Nov. 4, 2011.

Historiography

Although Mabel Dodge led a life of sexual freedom and social influence, her internalization of traditional Victorian gender norms restricted from her establishing a true sense of identity and, therefore kept her from reaching her full potential as a force of feminine transformation in American society. This essay seeks to define Dodge within the context of Progressive society. More specifically, I have researched the extent of her feminist inclinations, where they intersected with her Progressive ideals, and how traditional Victorian values influenced her beliefs and actions. My guiding question for this research is: How can Mabel Dodge's feminine values, ideals, and behavior be defined within the context of her time? To answer this question I define the concepts of the new woman, feminism, and Victorianism. Then I examine Dodge's life and legacy for ways in which she expressed each of these qualities and how they intersected. I also explore how Dodge compared to her contemporaries as well as how she defined herself.

Dodge cultivated an environment in which her contemporaries could meet and discuss ideas that would shake up societal norms, yet Dodge never challenged the status quo very much herself. Though Dodge experimented with her own social influence and sexual autonomy, her struggles to define herself as a woman and as an individual left her with seemingly little drive to push at the structures of traditional gender roles.

Several well-researched biographies have been published about Dodge. Perhaps the most widely read is *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds*, by Lois Palken Rudnick, a leading historian on the subject. In *New Woman, New Worlds*, Rudnick argues that Dodge was sexually liberated yet restrained by her own perceived dependency on men.[6] Furthermore, although she ultimately depicts Dodge in a positive light, Rudnick calls attention to the idealistic, often lofty quality to Dodge's motives. She portrays Dodge as someone who dove into her cultural surroundings, not just for aesthetic pleasure but also with a desire to change the world. Even though Dodge's intentions may have been good, Rudnick criticizes Dodge for failing to create any realistic plans for making a difference. Dodge supported a number of radical causes during the course of her lifetime, though Rudnick exposes how Dodge frequently did little more than follow the crowd. Dodge's far-reaching dependency on men makes Rudnick hesitant to label her a feminist, but she does acknowledge that Dodge was a new woman because of her independence, sexual freedoms, and cultural influence. This essay builds upon Rudnick's argument to suggest that Dodge's struggle to form an individual identity for herself stemmed largely from her perceived dependence upon men for personal fulfillment. Additionally, this essay calls into question if Dodge was truly a "New Woman,"[7] or simply a woman who remained true to traditional gender roles, but had greater opportunities to explore her world than the average American woman of her time.

There are many biographies of Dodge that follow a more specific trajectory. Flannery Burke's text, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's*, explores Dodge's role in patronizing influential art movements, specifically during the later part of her life in Taos. It provides a clear view into the workings of Dodge's fourth marriage to

[6] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, xii.

[7] The New Woman was an early twentieth century feminine ideal. The New Woman was educated, relatively liberated from the lonely confines of domesticity, and played an important role in bettering modern society. The New Woman was not as radical as the feminist woman; she still possessed Victorian values of virtue, purity, and primary childcare provider. From William Winnifred Harper Cooley, *The New Womanhood* (New York, 1904), n31.

Antonio Lujan, a Pueblo Indian of Taos. Burke acknowledges Dodge's contributions to the Taos art culture, absolving her of being just another white New Yorker using New Mexico as their "playground."[8] Burke acknowledges that Dodge's freedoms were expansive for her time, though she does not go as far as to label her a new woman or a feminist.

Another text that focuses on a specific aspect of Dodge's biography is Patricia Everett's *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to Be Friends*. In this book, Everett has meticulously assembled the correspondence between Dodge and the influential writer Gertrude Stein.[9] In their letters, Dodge and Stein share their love of collecting art and artists and discuss the current trends and events of the time. This book provides deep insight into the personalities of both women as well as the world in which they lived. Everett's portrayal of Dodge is more inclined towards depicting her loneliness and dependency on others. Everett interprets Dodge and Stein's correspondence as unequal, with Dodge giving much more than Stein.[10] Everett's work serves as a point of comparison between the social and cultural influences of Dodge and Stein. When examined against Stein, a true feminist leader of her time, it is clear that Dodge never reached her potential as a new woman. Where Stein was bold and confident in her writings to Dodge, Dodge presented herself as insecure, confused, and hesitant.

In addition to biographies dedicated specifically to Dodge, there are several books written on feminism and the changing role of women that cover her life in significant depth. Patricia Meyer Spacks' text, *The Female Imagination*, explores how women of the early twentieth century responded internally to their changing external environments. Of Dodge Spacks argues, "She shares with…many women who write about themselves the peculiar self-image that insists on the self as powerless and dependent, while concealing their energy of anger."[11] This essay argues that Dodge did not see herself as powerless—she knew she could seduce men and host gatherings of influential people—but instead she understood her power as a limited product of her role as an inferior female, not as a new woman or as a self-reliant individual.

While Spacks, like Rudnick, resists labeling Dodge a feminist, June Sochen actively does so in her feminist history of the Greenwich Village counterculture, *The New Woman: Feminism in Greenwich Village, 1910-1920*. As part of the anti-war movement, Dodge argued that the "'only hope of permanent peace lies in a woman's war against war,'" since she felt that men were too "mesmerized" by fighting.[12] Spacks defines the feminism in Greenwich Village as a "self-conscious group of intellectuals who valued ideas and tried to make abstract principles based on their actions."[13] This description, Spacks states, clearly fits well with the actions and aspirations of Dodge as she fought for cultural and societal change.[14] However, this essay attempts to demonstrate how Dodge did not live in pursuit of societal change; her actions that

---

[8] Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 3.

[9] Gertrude Stein was an influential writer, feminist, art collector, and cultural commentator of the early twentieth century.

[10] Mabel Dodge Luhan and Gertrude Stein, *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends: The Correspondence Between Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein, 1911-1934*, ed. Patricia R. Everett (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 10-16.

[11] Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1975), 218.

[12] June Sochen, *The New Woman: Feminism in Greenwich Village*, 1910-1920 (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 100.

[13] Ibid., 119.

[14] Ibid., 120.

broke traditional codes of conduct were largely in attempt to achieve her own sense of worth, not to change the status quo for others.

Primary Sources

To define Mabel Dodge in the context of her society, I rely heavily on a few key primary sources. First, I examine Dodge's autobiography, *Intimate Memories*, to gain insight into her thoughts, identity, and character. This is an incredibly valuable source because it provides a channel into Dodge's mind and how she viewed her own place in society. I also look at the leftist magazine, *The Masses*. Dodge was a significant contributor to the magazine, both as an editor and an author, so this source reveals some of the causes that she supported. She was also a close friend of the magazine's head editor, Max Eastman, and had a passionate love affair with one of the contributors, Jack Reed. The fact that she was closely involved with the staff of *The Masses* suggests that she identified with this group of radicals and their beliefs. Finally, I study Dodge's correspondence with the feminist and writer, Gertrude Stein. Their relationship served as a useful model for Dodge's interactions with others, women in particular, as well as a platform to explore whether she shared in Stein's radical ideologies and actions.

Upon examination of Dodge's personal writings and her interactions with her peers and the world it is clear that she spent her life trying to fill a void in her own self-worth. Dodge did live an autonomous life, moving freely from lover to lover and place to place, yet failed to be a transformative force in American society. Dodge was a progressive, largely limiting her activism to causes that were traditionally appropriate for her gender's "social housekeeper" role. The actions she did take as a liberated woman were in attempt to find herself, and not to challenge gender roles. Dodge experienced tensions between the modern and progressive pulls of her peers in Greenwich Village and Taos and the internalized gender norms of Victorian tradition.

In *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement In America*, historian Michael McGerr asserted, "no American explored the possibilities [of new liberation] more passionately and purposefully than Mabel Dodge."[15] Although she explored liberation, Dodge never truly achieved it. She had external freedoms that surpassed those of most women at the time: her own accessible wealth, the ability to travel the world, few constraints on her aesthetic and sexual endeavors, only one child, and no need to work to support a family. Despite this apparent autonomy, Dodge's own writings and accounts of her contemporaries suggest that she did not see herself as liberated or self-reliant. Though Dodge's life seemed one of independence, sexual freedom, and social influence, her liberated actions were an attempt to reconcile her lack of self-worth that resulted from an internalized dependence on men, rather than a push for new gender roles in American society.

Childhood

The Victorian culture that shaped Dodge's childhood greatly influenced her paradigm of understanding of women's roles. According to Michael McGerr, "A [Victorian] wife was expected to devote herself to making [the] home both a soothing refuge for her husband and a nurturing preparation for her sons' eventual immersion on the economic struggle."[16] Thus, a woman's worth in Victorian society was grounded upon her marriage and the service she

[15] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 238.
[16] Ibid., 10.

provided to the men in her life. Dodge grew up in a household characterized by tensions between Victorian and modern ideas of the women's role. Her mother and father's relationship was deeply unhappy, and her mother attempted to assert "masculine drive within the confines of a highly conventional feminine role…"[17] Dodge may have dealt with confusion regarding gender roles when observing her parents' marriage. Plus, she described a childhood completely devoid of affection, claiming, "I have no recollection of my mother's ever giving me a kiss or a smile of spontaneous affection, or of any sign from my father except dark looks and angry sound."[18] The need for affection that Dodge developed in childhood would haunt the entirety of her life. Dodge carried her conflicted experience of women's roles into her adulthood. She internalized both the Victorian understanding of women as incomplete and incapable without a husband, as well as a modern desire for autonomy. This identity confusion led her on a never-ending quest for self-fulfillment.

Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein: A Conflict of Interests

The relationship between Dodge and Stein, two women who appear to have shared common values and experiences, demonstrates how Dodge did not truly realize her own freedoms while Stein, on the other hand, took great advantage of her own. Gertrude Stein was one of the most notable writers of the twentieth century. Known for her lesbian relationships, especially with Alice Toklas, Stein was an influential feminist in many ways. [19] Stein and Dodge shared much in common in terms of their roles as women in society; it was Stein and her brother, Leo, who inspired Dodge's Greenwich Village salon, and they "converted her to modernism and opened her up to the possibility of self-transformation through the language of art."[20] Dodge, in turn, was the first and most powerful promoter of Stein's work, fueling much of her initial success in America. For instance, Dodge wrote in "Speculations, or Postimpressionism in Prose" for the *Arts and Decorations* magazine that "Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint…Language becomes with her a creative art, rather than a mirror of history."[21] This article was widely read among the literary connoisseurs and high society, and made Dodge almost as famous as it made Stein. Dodge's article became an impetus to Stein's success, demonstrating Dodge's agency in culture and society. After Dodge wrote "Speculations," Stein's work was widely sought out in America, whereas it had only been popular in Europe prior to the article's publication.[22] Stein, admiring Mabel's creation of a Florence cosmos, wrote the *Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia*, which states, "The days are wonderful and the nights are wonderful and the life is pleasant…There can be climax."[23] Writings like this show that, at least at one point, these women viewed and respected each other as progressive, fresh, and successful. Stein admired Dodge's ability to create a place of beauty and culture, and Dodge respected Stein's new and radical writing style.

Although these women shared similar interests, they understood their role and influence in society drastically differently. While Stein participated in the cultural sphere to push a

[17] Rudnick. *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 17.
[18] Luhan. *Intimate Memories*. 23.
[19] Luhan and Stein. *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends*, xi.
[20] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 42-43.
[21] Luhan. *Intimate Memories*; Mabel Dodge Luhan and Gertrude Stein, "Speculations, or Postimpressionism, In Prose," *Arts and Decorations*, March 1913.
[22] Luhan and Stein, *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends*, 9.
[23] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*; Mabel Dodge Luhan and Gertrude Stein, "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia" (1912), 266.

modernist feminine agenda, Dodge did so in attempts to get bolster her own self-worth through the attention she received from others.

Both Stein and Dodge were known for their sexual experimentation with women as well as their overall sexual freedom and exploration.[24] Emerging from a previous generation of Victorian values, sexual exploration signified a major shift in women's rights. Victorian society dictated that women did not seek out sexual pleasure, but instead only oblige their husband's natural desires and create offspring.[25] For Stein and Dodge to not only seek out personal pleasure, but to do so with multiple partners of both genders was radical for their time. Stein and Dodge appear to be representative of a new kind of women: globe traveling, creative, sexually free, influential, and powerful. However, while Stein embraced her sexuality and cultivated a long-term commitment with Alice Toklas, Dodge demonstrated a need for self-fulfillment through numerous sexual exploits and a continued confusion from pulls of conflicting societal forces.

Upon closer examination of Stein and Dodge's correspondences, it is clear that they had some striking differences. While Stein was confident and direct in her writings, Dodge often came across as needy and insecure. Numerous times throughout their friendship, Dodge begged Stein to "please write back quick!" or pleaded with her to answer letters and stop ignoring her.[26] Dodge frequently complimented Stein by asking things such as, "Why are there not more real people like you in the world?"[27] On the contrary, Stein rarely offered more than a polite remark in exchange. This greatly unequal relationship suggests a striking contrast. Stein was a woman who had a strong sense of confidence and autonomy, while Dodge was a woman who, despite her activities in society, still demonstrated a deep-seated dependency and a sense of inadequacy. As Patricia Spacks argues, Dodge was constantly in need of people to give her validation and to make her feel less alone.[28] Dodge's correspondence with Stein indicates that she sought confidence and reassurance in return for her generous compliments. Stein did not indulge Dodge's insecurities; she limited her correspondence to more intellectual topics and ignored Dodge's trivial chat and pleas for attention.[29] Not surprisingly, it was Stein who terminated the friendship.

Dodge's explanation of the ending of her friendship with Stein further suggests how she internalized the notion that women's issues were simple and somewhat unimportant, relative to the affairs of men. In discussing the matter she wrote,

> Gertrude-for some obscure reason-was angry. Leo told me it appeared to her that there was some doubt as to which was more important, the bear or the one leading the bear [in reference to Stein's success and Dodge's fame that came from promoting Stein's work], but I felt it was Alice's final and successful effort in turning Gertrude from me-her influencing and her wish, and I missed my jolly fat friend very much.[30]

Instead of acknowledging that matters of career might be crucial enough to make Stein end the friendship, Dodge presented herself in a trivial, almost gossipy, way by reducing the matter to jealousy and female cattiness. As Dodge was an intelligent and largely astute woman, this kind of assumption suggests that she is playing a role assigned to her by traditional society. Contrarily,

---

[24] Luhan and Stein, *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends*, 6.
[25] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 239.
[26] Luhan and Stein, *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends*, 47.
[27] Ibid., 39. Emphasis in original text.
[28] Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, 224.
[29] Luhan and Stein, *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends*, 12-16.
[30] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 94.

Stein appears to value her career and public image as a successful female writer more than her friendship with Dodge. This career-driven determination that Stein possessed was uniquely ahead of her time. Instead of mirroring Stein in this regard, Dodge remained trapped in the notion that women should pursue men and friendships, but not careers too.

Cultural and Political Life

Dodge often exhibited Progressive sentiments, during both her years in New York and her time in Taos. In New York during the Great War, Dodge supported women's anti-war movements, claiming that only women could truly understand the devastation of war.[31] She worked with the Women's Peace Party and sympathized with Jane Addams' International League for Peace and Freedom.[32] During her New York years, Dodge also explored Freudian psychology, indicating that she held the Progressive belief that "human beings were malleable, that people's problems could be exposed and put right."[33] In Taos, Dodge "addressed the issues that still challenge us: the possibility of survival in an individualistic world, in a country where community is rarely found; in a land that slowly chokes itself on the effluence of industrial processes."[34] In this manner, Dodge delved into the most basic essence of Progressivism: the struggle with the nature of individualism. Progressive reformers were often quite individualistic in their actions and reform endeavors, yet as a whole they strongly condemned individualism. This accurately describes Dodge, especially in the later years of her life when she lived with a Pueblo tribe in New Mexico. Of Pueblo simplicity and communalism Dodge wrote,

> But how could there be anything between these groups [the white Americans and the Pueblo Indians], when one set of them had lived here always and raised all they needed off their land and had only the most sketchy monetary system, which was still in the process of being imposed on them by the other group, who had arrived a short three hundred years ago and were only here to make money?[35]

Dodge was a true Progressive reformer in the sense that she rejected materialism and individual desires (in the later years of her life, at least) and encouraged working to promote the common good.

Dodge was also a Progressive woman in that she played the role of social housekeeper, or the "angel in the house."[36] While Progressive women were reformers and had some social influence, their power was often limited to "feminine" causes, such as peace movements. Progressive women were not like feminists who "proclaimed the natural equality of women [and] challenged traditional roles that Western culture defined as womanly roles."[37] Dodge, like the Progressive woman in general, did not dramatically challenge traditional gender roles. She married, relied on a man for her livelihood, and bore a child.

Dodge expanded her social circle beyond progressive reformers, however. Dodge is arguably best known for the salon she kept in Greenwich Village, New York, for it was a cosmos of culture, creativity, and influence. Dodge opened up her home on a weekly basis to writers, radicals, artists, and political figures out of a "desire for a new cosmos: one that was dedicated to

[31] Sochen, *The New Woman*, 119.
[32] Ibid., 102.
[33] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 243.
[34] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, xi.
[35] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 216.
[36] Quote from Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age* (1896). Quoted in Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 91.
[37] Sochen, *The New Woman*, ii.

wiping out the past, her own as well as the oppressions of the collective human past." [38] She supported and explored the numerous new causes of her time by thinking, writing, and, most importantly, creating a forum for free thinking and discussion.

Dodge's salon appears to be a serious testament to her new, liberated ideals, especially on the matter of women's rights. She hosted the most serious and dedicated activists. For example, "women like Henrietta Rodman risked their jobs (in her fight to have the city of New York allow married women to teach) and others, like Margaret Sanger, their freedom (in her fight to give birth control information to working-class women)."[39] It would seem as if Dodge's cosmos had a clear women's liberation agenda. On the contrary, Dodge did little more than "collect" people. She never joined a cause like Rodman's or Sanger's herself, but instead followed the movements of the crowd in an attempt to establish her own sense of self. Dodge spent time with feminists, but was never a feminist herself.

Dodge demonstrated admiration for the Heterodoxy Club, a group that aimed to give women in the workforce more acknowledgement and power. Of the Club she wrote, "New York was largely run by women; there was a woman behind every man; in every publisher's office; in all the editorial circles; and in the Wall Street offices, and it was the judgment and intuition of these that determined many policies, but they were anonymous women."[40] Dodge frequently hosted members of the Heterodoxy Club in her salon. Although she showed admiration, it is not likely that she would have ever joined the Club herself. Her motives behind the salon were not driven purely by ideology.

In fact, Dodge's primary incentives behind creating her cosmos were arguably more about creating her own identity in a world in which women's roles and positions were rapidly shifting. In reference to her time in New York, Dodge wrote, "I had the reputation of being radical, emancipated, wealthy, and daring, but in reality I was none of these."[41] Instead of surrounding herself with activists for the true causes of her time, Dodge hoped to make sense of, or even create, her own identity through others. According to historian Patricia Spacks, "She [was] eccentric and 'free.' Yet no external freedoms can solve the problem of one who organizes her sense of identity around other people."[42] Instead of engaging in self-exploration, Dodge conformed to the expectations and boundaries of others, overwhelmingly to those of her husband and of a male-dominated society. Throughout her life, Dodge struggled to achieve any sort of self-actualization, and, thus, resorted to playing "Muse" to those around her.[43] This was rooted deeply in her interactions with men and early twentieth century American society.

Dodge was a relatively well-known figure who often associated with radicals and progressives of the time. One of the best examples of this is her contribution to the leftist magazine, *The Masses*. Edited by her friend Max Eastman and her lover, Jack Reed, *The Masses* espoused socialism, women's suffrage, and sexual freedom. Dodge was both an occasional writer for the magazine as well as a short-term editor. When Eastman gave Dodge editorial privileges, he encouraged her to have "unconditioned freedom of expression."[44] The magazines she edited contained the usual material of *The Masses*: articles such as advertisements for "New suffrage literature pamphlets," over a dozen books about sex, and articles like "Confessions of a

[38] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 59.
[39] Ibid., 83.
[40] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 128.
[41] Ibid., 127.
[42] Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, 226.
[43] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 41.
[44] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 129.

Feminist Man."[45] This type of material indicates that Dodge was likely enthusiastic about feminist causes. Furthermore, for the October 1916 issue, in a poem titled "Two Contentments," Dodge wrote, "In freedom sharing as the sun as free-/I am content."[46] This poem indicates that Dodge placed a great value on the ideal of being liberated.

Dodge was never truly free from the constraints of dependency that she placed upon herself. In *The Masses*, just one year after penning "Two Contentments," she wrote something more raw and perhaps more demonstrative of her true feelings. In a story titled "The Eye of the Beholder," Dodge tells the tale of a female dancer who found success and satisfaction only through a manager who admired her. Of the dancer she exclaimed, "when he saw her no longer, she became nothing."[47] This story seems to be a sad and ironic representation of Dodge's own life: a woman who had talent and freedom but could not identify herself as anything worthwhile without a man.

Romantic Relationships

Starting from early adulthood, Dodge appeared to defy her Victorian background by indulging in hearty and widespread sexual exploration. It would seem the she used sex as a path to liberation and power. As a young woman, Dodge was involved in a romantic relationship with at least one woman, which she described as lustful and stormy. When it came to men, her emotions often seemed to be less about passion and more about control and identity. Of this, Dodge said, "My interest in men was in discovering my effect upon them, instead of responding to their feeling for me."[48] If not trying to control them, Dodge claimed to use men simply for her own sexual pleasure. For example, in describing her affair with Paul Draper she wrote, "As for me, I didn't think of it in terms of love. I wanted a strong draught of human fire blowing upon me and I found I was drawing it out of Paul…"[49] Furthermore, Dodge supported Margaret Sanger's views on free love, in which, sex was "the first duty of men and women…[and] pleasure [was] the goal."[50] In these ways, Dodge appears to be representative of a new, liberated woman who used sexual freedom to advocate for feminine equality in the right to pleasure and self-determination.

In fact, Dodge's sexual adventurousness was less about liberation and more about her need to fabricate an identity through relations with others, especially men. Even though she was had various affairs, Dodge did so under the traditional restraints of male approval. She found self-worth through, what Virginia Woolf described as serving the function of a "looking glas[s] possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size."[51] Dodge was quite candid about this. She often claimed that she could achieve nothing without a man to use her. "Time and again as an adult, she lapsed into neurasthenic depressions during which she claimed she could accomplish nothing without a man…"[52] For example, Dodge exclaimed, "I wonder, I really do, if any woman can ever do anything that is not drawn out of her by the man."[53] Although Dodge explored sexual freedom, her Victorian background, combined

[45] Max Eastman, ed., *The Masses*, 6, no. 39 (March 1914): 4-5.
[46] Mabel Dodge, "Two Contentments," *The Masses* 12, no. 3 (1916): 6.
[47] Mabel Dodge. "The Eye of the Beholder." *The Masses* 9, no. 76 (1917): 7-8.
[48] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 282.
[49] Ibid., 86.
[50] Ibid., 120.
[51] Ibid., xii.
[52] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 17.
[53] Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, 48.

with yearning to define herself in terms of those around her (and feel affection and worthwhile from those people), produced a woman who restricted her own capabilities to within the confines of how men could utilize her.

All people use social interactions to construct some parts of their identity. This is normal, healthy human behavior when a person still retains a personal sense of self. Dodge was not able to contribute her own individual notions of identity to her image. She relied extensively on the people around her to construct who she was, and this created within her a constant, unfulfilled desire to get the approval and attention of others. Furthermore, this need often obscured her motivations for joining projects and causes or distracted her from really immersing herself in them successfully. Dodge's identity development was greatly hindered by the conflicted tensions she felt between her Victorian understanding of women's roles and her experiences with a more liberated and empowered feminine role. Dodge's struggle with identity limited her from gaining the self-assurance she needed to see herself as a liberated woman.

Confronting Femininity

However in several ways, Dodge embraced femininity and found power and purpose in it. The most profound example of this lies in her accounts of giving birth to her son, John. "Maybe the reason is plain," she wrote, "for; [sic] biologically, at that moment I myself was of greatest value to this fruitful earth that I have ever been before or since."[54] Despite of all her struggles with identity, Dodge was fulfilled by woman's ability to give birth and the clarity it provided her, writing "I thought the power left my womb and ascended to my brain, and from that questionable point of vantage it could challenge other brains."[55] Motherhood provided Dodge with fleeting, yet compelling, moments of personal purpose and value.

Dodge's positive experiences with femininity were limited. In fact, her roles of mother and wife caused her just as much strife as fulfillment. Of marriage she said, "when I was twenty-one, I was married-the passive, the truly feminine experience."[56] Not only did Dodge acknowledge that she played into the role of the passive women, she identified with it. Also, immediately after childbirth, Dodge resented the role she had committed to, saying, "I felt sorry for myself and wounded all over my life…it seemed I didn't want a baby after all."[57] Dodge would struggle with her disappointment in feminine roles throughout her life; yet she continued to follow the scripted roles they provided her.

Conclusion

Mabel Dodge was an extraordinary person. On the surface, her life tells the tale of a woman who shook off the shackles of historical feminine norms and lived an independent, influential, and empowered life. Although she did this in some external ways, Dodge never really reached her own potential. Those shackles may have become less visible on her exterior, but they remained chained tightly to her identity. Dodge deeply internalized negative feminine norms of dependency and inferiority, which prevented her from being a truly new, liberated woman. Gender studies historian, June Sochen, defines the New Woman as "a woman who left the home for the factory, a career, and the marketplace."[58] In this sense, Dodge certainly was a

[54]Ibid., 57.
[55] Ibid., 113.
[56] Ibid., 53. Emphasis in text.
[57] Ibid., 55.
[58] Sochen, *The New Woman*, ix.

New Woman. However, she is also a strong example of how it takes more than the lifting of obvious, external restraints to truly liberate a formerly repressed population. Throughout our history, we have seen that it takes a great amount of time and the hard work of remarkable individuals to defy the long-lasting effects of social marginalization.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dodge, Mabel. "Two Contentments." *The Masses* 12, no. 3 (1916): 6.

Dodge, Mabel. "The Eye of the Beholder." *The Masses* 9, no. 76 (1917): 7-8.

Eastman, Max (Ed.). *The Masses*, 6, no.39. (March 1914): 4-5.

Eastman, Max. *Venture*. New York : A. & C. Boni, 1927.

Luhan, Mabel Dodge. *Intimate Memories: The Autobiography of Mabel Dodge Luhan*. Ed. Lois Palken Rudnick. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.

_____ "The Secret of War," *The Masses* (November 1914): 13-16.

_____ "We Women Want to Stop War," n.d., in vol. 10, *Intimate Memories.*

Luhan, Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein. *A History of Having a Great Many Times Not Continued to be Friends: The Correspondence Between Mabel Dodge and Gertrude Stein, 1911-1934*. Ed. Patricia R. Everett. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

_____ "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia." (1912). 265-268.

_____ "Speculations, or Post Impressionism in Prose." (1913). 269-273.

Van Vechten, Carl. *Peter Whiffle*. New York: Modern Library, 1929

Secondary Sources

Burke, Flannery. *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan's*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2008.

Lasch, Christopher. *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual As a Social Type.* New York: Knopf, 1965.

McGerr, Michael. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Rudnick, Lois Palken. *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

_____"Luhan, Mabel Dodge," http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-01225.html; *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000. Accessed Nov. 4, 2011.

Sochen, June. *The New Woman: Feminism in Greenwich Village*, 1910-1920. New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972

Spacks, Patricia Ann Meyer. *The Female Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1975.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Krochmal recently completed her B.A. in History. She is currently finishing her Licensure in Secondary Social Studies Education. Emily believes that all students should experience history in a dynamic and culturally relevant way. She intends to build upon her studies at CU to bring a lively history into high school and middle school classrooms.

Forrest Kutscher will graduate from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Russian. His focus of study is twentieth-century Eastern European geopolitics and the ways in which Cold War developments have impacted international economic relationships.

Joseph Sarr graduated from the University of Colorado in Fall 2011 with Bachelor's degrees in History and Art. He has academic interests in Medieval England, the Crusades, and the early Roman Empire. When he is not out hiking in the mountains or shooting pictures, he is usually studying about the Latin language, warfare, and ancient weaponry. He is currently planning on returning to school to further his education in history.

Laura Zaepfel has just finished her senior year with two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in History and the other in English Literature. She has spent most of her time in classes dedicated to European history, where her interests intersect with her travels.