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Source: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 20-48

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2862830>

Accessed: 08-01-2020 16:37 UTC

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*Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony:
The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of
Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591**

by CURT BREIGHT

In a recent essay on new historicism Louis Montrose is concerned that “the terms in which the problem of ideology has been posed and is now circulating in Renaissance literary studies—namely as an opposition between ‘containment’ and ‘subversion’—are so reductive, polarized, and undynamic as to be of little or no conceptual value. A closed and static, singular and homogeneous notion of ideology must be succeeded by one that is heterogeneous and unstable, permeable and processual.”¹ Montrose’s critique and recommended solution seem both valid and commonsensical, yet they are infrequently practiced, perhaps nowhere more hegemonically than in discussions of Renaissance elite ceremonies. Scholars from David Bergeron to Jean Wilson have informed us that the Elizabethan royal progress was a conservative exercise: progress entertainments seem to be viewed fairly consistently as versions of what William Empson has called a “beautiful relation,” in this case between the queen and the English aristocracy.² But this variation on the “containment” theory presupposes a number of widely held yet questionable ideas about the possessing classes in England: hierarchical solidarity rather than elite competition; aristocratic subservience rather than self-assertion; a royal visit as honorific rather than politically calculated. Summer progresses and progress entertainments must be approached particularly, not monolithically; historically, not generically. Above all, they must be approached with a strong sense of Renaissance courtly practices, especially those of covert communication as detailed by George Puttenham and in a pro-

*I would like to thank the following people for their comments on earlier versions of this essay: Thomas M. Greene, G. K. Hunter, Jill Krave, and J. B. Trapp. I shall use the following abbreviations in the notes: *CSPD* = *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* and *HMC* = *Historical Manuscripts Commission*.

¹Montrose, 22.

²Bergeron, 63–64; Cooper, 144; Wilson, 143 n. 19: “The progresses were propaganda for the faithful, not gestures of goodwill to the potentially hostile.” A notable exception to the conservative view, although focused largely on martial entertainments at court, is McCoy. For “beautiful relation,” see Empson, 11.

logue to one of these very entertainments.³ Once we understand that political danger compelled courtiers to specialize in various forms of indirect communication, we can theorize that entertainments are complex rather than simplistic and then investigate the politics of these event/texts.⁴

From 20–23 September 1591, Queen Elizabeth punctuated her summer progress by sojourning at Elvetham in East Hampshire. There she was lavishly entertained by Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford, a man attainted for treason in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. As I have explained in a discussion of the major progress entertainment that preceded this one (Elizabeth's visit to the Roman Catholic Viscount Montague at Cowdray from 15–21 August 1591), it is crucial to understand and even be willing to speculate on contemporary political events in order to construct a context for the 1591 royal progress. Elizabeth's court visited areas that were often heavily Catholic and hence dangerous, even traitorous (in West Sussex and East Hampshire) and stayed at the estates of two aristocrats who had little reason to love the Elizabethan regime. It is clear to me that Elizabeth's government chose a southern progress primarily because such a move would allow it to keep better tabs on the war situation in Europe. The regime was never more militarily extended than in August, 1591, and thus a southern progress rather than one to the previously popular areas northwest of London would facilitate communications to the continent and spread the royal image to regions of potential disaffection and perhaps even revolt. R. B. Wernham additionally informs us that Elizabeth hoped to entice Henry of Navarre (the future Henry IV) over the Channel for a conference about the politico-military situation

³Puttenham, 250: the courtier "never speake as he thinkes, or thinke as he speaks, and . . . in any matter of importance his words and his meaning very seldome meete." See also the opening of the Woodstock entertainment, which instructs the reader to analyze the text for hidden meanings, in Cunliffe, 93: ". . . if you marke the words with this present world, or were acquainted with the state of the devises, you shoulde finde no lesse hidden then uttered, and no lesse uttered then shoulde deserve a double reading over, even of those . . . that have disposed their houres to the study of great matters."

⁴I use "event/text" because, as Spivak, 242, has theorized, "'events' are never not discursively constituted." In the case of entertainments, the difficult trick is to mount an argument while remaining aware that the text reflects yet also differs from the event. The theoretical problems circulating around these issues are well put in a brilliant exposé of murderous political events lying behind Geertzian "thick description" in Pecora, 243–76.

in France.⁵ At a time when the French wars were increasingly unpopular and desertions numerous, it was useful for the regime to check up on suspect counties and two suspected aristocrats who might parlay discontent into political advantage. Aristocrats persecuted by the Elizabethan regime were potentially dangerous not simply because of the concept of honor detailed by Mervyn James, which could buttress a “politics of violence,” but also because of Machiavelli’s political dictum: “Whoever believes that with great men new services wipe out old injuries deceives himself.”⁶

Edward Seymour made only one serious mistake in his political career—he deflowered a virgin of the blood royal—or so the judges assigned to annul his marriage declared. But actually, the deflowering was politically much less important than the possibility that Hertford had legally married Lady Catherine Grey, great-granddaughter of Henry VII and younger sister to the ill-fated Lady Jane Grey, whose head had been chopped off for being in the position to which Catherine aspired—successor to the throne. The year was 1561; Grey, Hertford, and infant son were in the Tower; and the newly established Elizabethan regime was worried about the succession problem. Although it may seem curious to talk about a “succession problem” in 1561, when Elizabeth was destined to survive for another forty-two years, Mortimer Levine has sufficiently demonstrated the importance of this problem for contemporaries who had recently witnessed the rapid passing of two previous Tudor monarchs. The problem involved two strong claimants to the succession: Mary Stuart, who had the stronger hereditary right but was also an “alien” and a Roman Catholic; and Catherine Grey, whose weaker hereditary position was propped up by Henry VIII’s will and her native birth. Thus any marriage involving these two women, especially a fruitful one, was perceived to be a major threat to the stability of Elizabeth’s new government. In short, Hertford paid the price for his love and/or ambition. After 1563 he never saw his wife, who died on 27 January 1567–68 while still in confinement. He himself remained under various sorts of restraint until 1571, and the fine of 15,000 pounds levied against him for his “crime,” although substantially reduced, was still being

⁵For a complete argument, see the opening paragraphs of Breight. See also Wernham, 324.

⁶James, 1; Machiavelli, 61.

paid off in 1579. Most importantly, Hertford's two sons, Edward and Thomas (the second conceived through benevolent laxity at the Tower), were rendered bastards. During Elizabeth's life they were thus unable not only to compete for the succession, but even to inherit their father's title and property. It was not until well after James's accession (on 14 May 1608) that Hertford's eldest son was granted a patent guaranteeing that he and his heirs would become earls of Hertford after Hertford's death. It is this politico-personal background that I choose to privilege as a relevant context for an interpretation of the Elvetham entertainment.⁷

A brief description of the text is necessary. The "Proeme" is directed to the reader and emphasizes how Hertford converted his small estate into an artificially natural world suitable for entertaining the queen, with temporary housing covered by leaves and branches and an artificial lake devised as the center of numerous shows. On the first day, Hertford rode out with his men to greet the queen and conduct her to his estate, where she was greeted in Latin by a poet. The text translates the Latin for the reader, but it was not translated during the event. Near the end of the speech, the poet referred to six virgins, representing the Hours and Graces, who removed blocks laid in the queen's path by "Envie" and sang a song while conducting Elizabeth to the house; the queen was additionally greeted by discharge of cannon from isles in the pond, and after supper she was entertained by six musicians. On the second day, Elizabeth viewed the most dramatic shows of the entertainment; she sat near the pond and watched a mini-drama featuring Nereus and his five Tritons, the virgin Neaera placed on a small ship, and Sylvanus with his fellow Satyrs; each of the three main characters delivered a speech to Elizabeth, but the central aspect of the show was Nereus' frustration of Sylvanus' desire for Neaera. On the third day, Elizabeth heard a pastoral love song in the morning, watched tennis in the afternoon, and enjoyed "curious fire-works" and a "sumptuous banquet" in the evening. On the fourth

⁷On the early succession problem, see Levine. My information about Hertford's early problems is derived primarily from Levine, esp. 13–29; also from the brief introduction in Murphy, 1–3; and from various entries under "Seymour" in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. For a document that captures the usual conspiratorial psychology of the Elizabethan period, see the queen's letter on Catherine Grey instructing the lieutenant of the Tower to interrogate her in a threatening manner in Harrison, 35–36.

and final day, Elizabeth viewed a dance by the “Fayery Quene” and her “maides,” heard the Fairy Queen’s speech and the fairies’ song, and then prepared to leave. All the previous characters were present for her departure; the poet gave a speech, and the queen departed while a song was sung by hidden musicians.

It is useful to begin a discussion by summarizing previous analyses of this entertainment. Harry Boyle argued that the water-show enacted on the second day was designed to defend the naval policies of the Howards, basing his argument on Hertford’s marriage to Frances, sister of Lord Admiral Charles Howard.⁸ Boyle’s case is provocative yet purely speculative, since he fails to prove that Howard was under any governmental pressure at the moment—and hence in need of defense—or to explain why Hertford would wish to organize a complex allegory for a mere brother-in-law. It is more reasonable to suppose that Hertford was interested in promoting his own agenda, especially given the fact that Charles Howard was perfectly capable of defending himself in far more direct ways—even if we suppose that he needed defense. Boyle’s article is thus open to attack not so much for its speculation as for its desire to treat speculation as fact. Its presuppositions are similar to another critic’s casual and unjustified comment about Hertford’s “desperate submission” to Elizabeth in this entertainment.⁹ Conventional courtly flattery should never be mistaken for desperate submission. Lucille Valentino’s approach to elite entertainments is more sensitive. She uses Marcel Mauss’s concept of “prestation” to theorize that aristocratic hosts were “giving rather than hoping to receive.” This approach, however, is too one-sided. Courtiers specialized in material self-aggrandizement, a competitive task in Elizabeth’s parsimonious court. Also, the contemporary custom of exchanging New Year’s gifts reveals the precise level of this reciprocal transaction. Valentino, unaware of Boyle’s article, also emphasizes the relevance of the Howard connection but adds the fact that Seymour’s brother was a key player in the Armada victory. Hence she argues that the entertainment is intended partially to stress the Howard/Seymour contribution to the queen’s greatest victory, and her discussion is all the more plausible for being less emphatic than Boyle’s specific topical identifications. Her

⁸Boyle, 146–66.

⁹This dubious comment is made by Yoch, 201.

argument is flawed, however, by the assumption that the queen's visit signalled Hertford's "return to favor" and that Elizabeth thus "set the seal on his forgiveness," while the earl "was anxious to present a splendid entertainment and allow the unfortunate past to be obscured by the brilliance of his present offering." Indeed, I shall argue that far from obscuring the past, the entertainment obliquely revivifies it—but only for the sake of rewriting it.¹⁰

It is undoubtedly the case that the entertainment features topical allusions to the current war with Spain, but these do not dominate the text. Therefore, it is not so important to elucidate individual topical references as to isolate significant threads and combine these in a coherent interpretation of the published text(s). It is especially important to ask who benefits from publication. A mere glance at the title-page of the text, dominated by Hertford's coat of arms, suggests that the earl was concerned *in publication* to promote himself and his lineage—not the queen, Charles Howard, or anybody else. There are three surviving texts of the entertainment in quarto, existing in two or three editions (depending on which critic is right): the British Library (BL) text lacks the important woodcut of the artificial lake, while the Cambridge (C) and Lambeth (L) texts include the woodcut, a double-quarto page positioned at the end of C and between the first and second pages of L. There are no significant variations among these texts, but a problem arises when we turn to Nichols' edition, which is reprinted by Wilson. The Nichols/Wilson (N/W) text has no external authority, since Nichols' putative copy-text does not survive. It is generally fuller than the extant versions, although it omits some key passages. It also includes a much more detailed woodcut of the artificial lake, along with an accompanying identification of its features. In addition, the N/W text has a more formal tone, i.e., it almost always prints a variation of "the Earl of Hertford" whereas the extant texts print "my Lord of Hertford," which indicates that the surviving texts were attempting to establish a personal tone. These facts cause a dilemma with regard to choice of texts. Where no significant dif-

¹⁰Valentino, 1, 4. Her discussion of Elvetham occupies 86–96. In an otherwise valuable biography of Elizabeth I, Haigh, 1988, 58, makes an assertion about Elizabeth's behavior at Elvetham which is open to serious question: "the favour of her company could demonstrate political rehabilitation: an old grudge had been forgotten, and a personal relationship re-established." Machiavelli would say that such grudges are never forgotten, never forgiven.

ferences exist between the extant texts and N/W, I shall quote from Wilson because her text is probably the most readily available edition. Otherwise, I shall quote from Bond's transcription of the BL version in his edition of Lyly.¹¹

Since the Seymours were in a position to bid for the throne, it was imperative that the entertainment express familial magnificence. The trick was to accomplish suitable diversions of the queen not just without loss of dignity but with augmentation of familial dignity and honor. Elvetham is second only to the Kenilworth entertainment (1575) in splendor, and all the more impressive because of severe limitations inherent in the location. Kenilworth was perhaps the finest castle in the realm, whereas "Elvetham House being scituate in a parke but of two miles in compasse or thereabouts, and of no great receipt, as beeing none of the Earle's chiefe mansion houses . . . his honor with all expedition set artificers a work, to the number of three hundred, many daies before her Majestie's arrivall, to enlarge his house with newe roomes and offices."¹² In effect, Hertford had to improvise, both geographically and poetically. The fact that the text was highly sensitive to a general readership is demonstrated by "The Proeme," which not only informs the "gentle reader" how to read, but also details the extent of the physical improvisation: 300 "artificers" constructed numerous temporary buildings and, most importantly, a huge artificial lake "cut to the perfect figure of a half moon" (100), containing three islands and a pinnacle. This crescent pond should, of course, be interpreted as a grand symbol of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth in one of her standard mythical roles as the virgin Diana, goddess of the moon.¹³ Indeed, Elizabeth is later addressed as Cynthia (an alternate appellation for Diana) by Nereus, Sylvanus, and the poet.

¹¹I have read all the original texts, but none has a claim of priority over the others. The BL, C, and L texts are all STC 7583: BL C.33.e.7.(9.); Cambridge University Library Bb*.11.50' (E); and Lambeth Palace Library 1593.28. For Bond's transcription see Bond, 1: 431–52. The most easily accessible modern edition is in Wilson, 96–118, but her text must be used with caution. The standard collection of Elizabethan ceremonies is in Nichols.

¹²Wilson, 99. All further citations will be in the main body of the discussion by page number, except where noted.

¹³Valentino, 88, asserts that the "very shape of the pond recalls Howard's victory over the Armada, for the Spanish battle-formation was a crescent or half-moon." The evocation of the "battle-formation" was probably intended, but there is no evidence to suggest any explicit praise of Howard's role in the victory. Moreover, a crescent formation was hardly unique in naval strategy.

But curiously enough, virginal mythography competes with a kind of sexual discourse as Elizabeth is also equated with Venus, goddess of love. Although this is not unique—especially in view of her brief association with Venus at Cowdray—nevertheless it constitutes part of a thread of sexual references which runs throughout the entertainment. This thread not only unifies the events but also serves to rewrite the sexual history of Hertford and Lady Catherine Grey. Since Valentino and Boyle (especially) have already elucidated certain topical features of the entertainment, I wish to isolate this sexual aspect before placing the event/text in a larger political context. The issue of desire is especially resonant not only because it is present, but because its central moment is the possibility of a “rape” which cannot help but evoke the sexual politics of the Hertford/Grey dilemma thirty years earlier, in which the earl was found guilty of rape. Moreover, the rape is relevant because it still had an impact not only on the fate of one aristocratic family, but also on the succession and hence the course of the entire nation. Since Elizabeth was more often cast as Diana than Venus by contemporary writers and since the entertainment is preoccupied with sexuality, it seems useful to ask how Elizabethan readers might have interpreted this text—especially given contemporary recognition that a “double reading over” might yield interesting secrets.

After Elizabeth had “entred into Elvetham Parke, and was more than halfe way between the Park-gate and the house, a poet saluted her with a Latine Oration, in heroicall verse” (102).¹⁴ Elizabeth is explicitly called “Augusta,” an imperial appellation especially appropriate in view of the crescent pond, which probably seemed to promise a *naumachia* similar to the ancient one devised in celebration of Augustus’ victory at Actium. Implicitly, Elizabeth is equated with Diana in her capacity of controlling the ocean: “More rich than Seas, shee doth commaund the Seas.”¹⁵ This implicit reference will be rendered explicit on the following day, when she is addressed by Nereus as “Faire Cinthia the wide Ocean’s Empresse” (109). Elizabeth soon discovers that the Poet represents the host: “Under my person Semer hides himselfe, / His mouth yeelds prayers, his

¹⁴The Latin oration on 102–04 is translated on 104–05, and to avoid awkwardness I shall not provide two sets of page numbers. The existence of a translation indicates that the published pamphlet was intended to appeal to a broad readership.

¹⁵“Ditior est Ponto, Pontum quoque temperat una.”

ie the olive branch.”¹⁶ The word “foecundat” is not translated, but it means “to make fertile or fruitful; to fertilize.” It initiates a shift to a new series of ideas a few lines later:

Behold, on thee how each thing sweetly smiles,
 To see thy brightnes glad our hemispheare:
 Night only envies: whome faire stars doe crosse:
 All other creatures strive to shewe their joyes;
 The crooked-winding kid trips ore the lawnes;
 The milkewhite heafer wantons with the bull;
 The trees shew pleasure with their quivering leaves,
 The meddow with new grasse, the vine with grapes,
 The running brookes with sweet and silver sound.
 Thee, thee (sweet Princes), heav'n, and earth, and fluds,
 And plants, and beasts, salute with one accord:
 And while they gaze on thy perfections,
 Their eyes desire is never satisfied.¹⁷

This passage involves animal and vegetable fecundity, i.e., birth, growth, and especially desire resulting in copulation: the specific sexuality of heifer and bull is recapitulated in the final lines, in which Elizabeth herself is said to incite sexual desire in all of nature.

The subtext for this passage is the opening of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, which itself had been closely imitated by Spenser in the *Faerie Queene* (4.10.44–47). The Elvetham passage is a loose imitation. It borrows some otherwise common vocabulary such as “rident” and “blanda,” but the subtext is most evident in emulous lines such as these: “Limulus *insultat* per pictos hoedus agellos/ Passibus obtortis” and Lucretius' “inde ferae, pecudes *persultant* pabula laeta” (I.14). Lucretius commences his poem with a grand invocation to Venus as “Quae . . . rerum naturam sola gubernas” (I.21), or in effect, the origin of all things. Thus through *imitatio* the poet casts Elizabeth as Venuś, not lascivious herself but inspiring

¹⁶“Se namque Semeri/Obsequiosa meis condit persona sub umbris:/ Qui fert ore preces, oculo foecundat olivam.”

¹⁷“En rident ad vestros omnia vultus/Suaviter, immensum donec fulgoribus orbem/ Elisabetha novis imple: nox invidet una:/ Astra sed invidiae tollunt mala signa tenebras./ Caetera, qua possunt, sacrae gratantur Elisae/Laetitia, promptosque ferunt in gaudia vultus./ Limulus insultat per pictos hoedus agellos/ Passibus obtortis; et torvum bucula taurum/Blanda petit; tremulus turgescit frondibus arbos,/ Graminibus pratium, generosa pampinus uva:/ Et tenui latices in arena dulce susurrant,/ Insuetumque melos: Te, te, dulcissima princeps,/ Terra, polus, fluvii, plantae, pecudesque salutant:/ Dumque tuam cupide mirantur singula formam, / Infixis haerent oculis, nequeuntque tuendo/ Expleri.”

in others a quite natural and fecund desire. Her role is cemented when the three “Howrs” and three “Graces,” traditional handmaidens of Venus, accompany her to her lodging. They then sing a song that reiterates the major themes of the poet’s oration, e.g.:

Now th’ ayre is sweeter than sweet balme,
And Satyrs daunce about the palme:
Now earth, with verdure newly dight,
Gives perfect signe of her delight. (106)

Although the time of the entertainment was end of summer or beginning of autumn, the earth is said to produce new plants. The “Satyrs,” traditionally lecherous figures, are roused to perform a dance which evokes popular culture, i.e., the Maypole dance. Indeed, given the fact that Sylvanus and his crew of satyrs were set to appear for the following day’s major show, it seems likely that the song is not imaginative but referential: just as the Hours and Graces actually strew flowers while walking, singing, and referring to their activity, so it is probable that everyone witnesses the satyrs performing a quasi-Maypole dance evoking the rites and desires of spring.

Thus—whether she liked it or not—Elizabeth immediately found herself scripted more strongly as a sexual goddess than a virgin one, and the theme of desire is not allowed to lapse on the second day. Instead, it is transformed into a simultaneously bold and ludic representation of a potential rape. The shows of the second day were the most spectacular since they were centered almost wholly on the crescent pond. The main actors are Nereus (“Prophet of the Sea”), Sylvanus (“a God of the Woodes”), and “Neaera, the old supposed love of Sylvanus” (108). The narrator devotes many paragraphs to a clarification of the events even before the verse speeches, including the significant reference to Neaera as the “old *supposed* love” of Sylvanus, as well as a repeated assertion that “Scottish gigs” were played on the pinnacle of Neaera. Nereus’ speech does not advance the Venus-theme but instead recasts Elizabeth as “Cinthia.” His address is partly a political allegory against Spain, partly a colonialist fantasy of “endlesse treasure.” After an intervening song, Sylvanus and his followers approach Elizabeth “from the wood.” Sylvanus gives the queen a “scutchion, ingraven with goulden characters,” on which is inscribed ““Detur dignissimae.”” The presentation of the escutcheon recalls the similar prac-

tice of giving impresa shields to the queen during tilts and other martial entertainments at court, but the escutcheon's similarity to the golden apple in the Judgment of Paris renders the event a conflation of two different traditions. Like Nereus, Sylvanus addresses the queen as "Cinthia," but also asserts that her "worth breeds wonder; wonder holy feare;/ And holy feare unfayned reverence." He tells the history of the "scutchion":

Amongst the wanton dayes of goulden age,
 Apollo playing in our pleasant shades,
 And printing oracles in every leafe,
 Let fall this sacred scutchion from his brest;
 Wherein is writ, 'Detur dignissimae.'
 O therefore hold what Heaven hath made thy right,
 I but in duety yeeld desert her due. (111)

Sylvanus, however, is quickly distracted from the queen when Nereus announces the presence of Neaera:

Nereus. But see, Sylvanus, where they Love doth sit.
Sylvanus. My sweet Neaera, was her care so neare?
 O set my hearts delight upon this banke,
 That, in compassion of old sufferance,
 She may relent in sight of Beauties Quene.
Nereus. On this condition shall shee come on shoare,
 That with thy hand thou plight a solemne vow,
 Not to prophane her undefiled state.
Sylvanus. Here, take my hand, and therewithall I vowe.
Nereus. That water will extinguish wanton fire.

Nereus, in pronouncing this last line, "did plucke Sylvanus over head and eares into the water, where all the sea-gods, laughing, did insult over him." (111-12)

Although Sylvanus briefly refers to Elizabeth as "Beauties Quene," this reference does not wholly overcome the curious re-writing of the ancient myth. The inscription on the escutcheon, "'Detur dignissimae,'" is almost certainly an imitation of the phrase used by George Peele in his courtly drama, *The Araygnement of Paris*: "Detur Pulcherrimae."¹⁸ In Peele's play, the initial judg-

¹⁸3: 78 (II.i). In R. M. Benbow's introduction to the play, we learn that the "presentation of the golden apple to the Queen and the resolution of the judgment story by this means is a commonplace of Renaissance flattery" (20). But the Elvetham Latin phrase is traceable to Peele's play because his own "Latin inscription is not in the classical accounts of the judgment. It is probably a translation of Caxton's 'and ther was

ment by Paris is overturned at the conclusion when Diana awards the golden apple to Queen Elizabeth, who competes with each of the three quarrelsome goddesses on her own level: majesty, “power in armes,” and beauty. Thus Elizabeth is rendered the indisputable centerpiece of the play’s finale. At Elvetham, however, Elizabeth is “dignissimae,” not “pulcherrimae.” Moreover, she is temporarily displaced from the center of the show, since Sylvanus is quickly drawn to meditate on the beauty of his beloved nymph, Neaera. The moment of Sylvanus’ humiliation is undeniably playful and amusing, yet it cannot help but recall the personal history of Hertford. The threat of ravishment here recapitulates the condemnation of Hertford for deflowering a virgin of the blood royal—but it does so only by way of denial or ludic frustration of the potential rape. If an identification of Hertford with Sylvanus seems gratuitous, the text bolsters the association through an important symbol of peace, the olive branch. In the initial greeting of Elizabeth on the first day, the poet asserts that he represents Seymour: “Under my person Semer hides himselfe, / His mouth yeelds prayers, his eie the olive branch; / His praier betoken duety, th’ olive peace” (104–05). When Sylvanus appears he too is carrying an “olive tree” (111). Sylvanus’ traditional lasciviousness and his earlier reference to the “wanton dayes of goulden age” not only exculpate his current desire but also remind the viewer/reader that days of youth are days of sensuality. In addition, the Cytherean attributes of Elizabeth help to explain the incitement of desire: just as she had caused renewal and sexuality upon entering the estate, she now appears to inspire a potentially sexual encounter. These attributes are muted during the first two speeches—especially since Nereus and Sylvanus both address her as Cinthia—but they are obliquely revived in Neaera’s speech, in which she says that Nereus had predicted the appearance of a “sea-borne Quene” (112). This is an allusion to Elizabeth as Venus, in one myth generated from the hacked off genitals of Uranus, and hence ironically appropriate to a queen who frequently opposed the marriages of her courtiers.

The episode is thus a kind of struggle between desire and chastity, but the conflict does not take place in the queen herself. Instead, it occurs among the figures surrounding Elizabeth. Histor-

wreoton aboute thys apple in the grekysh langage be hit gyven to the fayreste” (122, note to l. 364).

ically, numerous courtiers such as Raleigh, Leicester, Carey, and Essex experienced severe royal displeasure on the discovery of their covert marriages. The best explanation for this strange phenomenon seems to be the political advantages inherent in the construction of a splendid court focused solely on the inimitable virtues of Gloriana. The courtiers listed above, however, did not engineer dynastically threatening marriages. Hertford did. Hence the likely symbolism of the Sylvanus/Neaera episode is two-fold: natural youthful desire heightened by the influence of the royal Venus exculpates the urge to copulate, and most significantly, the urge is here frustrated anyway by the trickery of Nereus. Through a symbolic show, then, Hertford not only forgives his own youthful sensuality but even cleverly rewrites the rape. In a courtly culture accustomed to search for covert messages, however twisted the logic of this bizarre communication may seem to us, the prevention of Sylvanus could be taken to mean the rejection of the decision whereby Hertford had been convicted of rape.

It cannot be claimed that this episode must have a given “meaning” in relation to Hertford’s personal history, nor that it has any meaning at all. But circumstantial similarities would undoubtedly have reminded courtly spectators of the Hertford/Grey dilemma, and this decision to jog the collective memory may have been intended to recall that a “rape” *did* occur and, more importantly in current political terms, that it bore fruit. In any event, the entire entertainment is preoccupied with sexuality. On the third day Elizabeth was treated to a pastoral song of “Coridon and Phyllida” which advances this theme. The song is not a conventional one lamenting frustrated love, but a reiteration of the rites of May and above all, successful love. At the end of the song, Phyllida is made the “Lady of the May” (1114). Wilson asserts that “Hellenore’s being made the Lady of May in [Spenser’s] *FQ*.III.x.44. is an indication of her sexual laxness, but it is doubtful if such an implication is intended here.”¹⁹ On the contrary, it is hard to deny what the song says, namely, that “Love . . . was with kisses sweet concluded,” which strongly implies consummation. Thus the song constitutes a return to the positive theme of natural sexuality in springtime introduced on the first day and temporarily interrupted by the defeat of Sylvanus. On the fourth and final day, Elizabeth faced a kind of

¹⁹Wilson, 164 n. 89.

mirror image when the “Fayery Quene” appeared in a garden below her. Although the Fayery Quene addresses Elizabeth as “Phoebe” and therefore recalls her virginal aspect, she also obliquely advances the sexual theme by saying that “amorous starres fall nightly in my lap” (115). More importantly, in the subsequent “Fairies Song” previous ideas are indirectly reiterated:

Elisa is the fairest Quene,
That ever trod upon this greene.
Elisaes eyes are blessed starres,
Inducing peace, subduing warres. (116)

The notion of trodding upon the green evokes popular culture and the rites of May,²⁰ while the line on peace and war again reflects Lucretius’ Venus, who causes peace by subduing Mars, the god of war (I.31–37). An hour later Elizabeth left Elvetham, and the poet lamented her departure in verse. Although he again addresses her as “Cynthia” and thus implies her virginal aspect, the central idea of his farewell involves the loss of Elizabeth as a life-giving force, as Venus:

Leaves fal, grasse dies, beasts of the wood hang head,
Birds cease to sing, and everie creature wailes,
To see the season alter with this change:
For how can Sommer stay, when Sunne departs? (117)

The poet’s speech parallels, by exact contrast, his initial greeting: just as the queen’s arrival was said to have initiated a new springtime by virtue of her Cytherean influence, so her departure causes the natural world to endure the reality of autumn, or decay and death. Such a device rounds off one of the major themes of this entertainment—the natural fecundity inspired by the queen’s mere presence.

To identify the sexual theme is not to explain it, but strangely enough, it is possible that the queen herself sought to scrutinize some of the devices presented to her. Obviously, she could not view the major shows a second time, but she ordered a second playing of certain songs presented on the third and fourth days—and perhaps not only for the sake of pleasure. Elizabeth must have been

²⁰“Green” here can be taken to mean “a piece of public or common grassy land situated in or near a town or village, from which it often takes its name; a ‘village green,’” e.g., 1718 *Freethinker* No. 80.173 “Every Holiday, she danced upon the Green” (see *OED*).

moderately disturbed or at least fascinated by her primary role as a goddess inciting growth and sexual desire—a stark contrast to her usual role as the Virgin Queen, a figure who frustrates desire in spectacles such as *The Four Foster Children of Desire* (1581), and to whom Daphne flees in order to escape the lust of Apollo in the *Sudely* entertainment (1592). Moreover, in the 1590s Elizabeth was usually cast in a virginal role by poets such as Spenser, Jonson, and Raleigh, as well as in a famous passage in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which is sometimes connected to the *Elvetham* entertainment.²¹ As I argued above, I believe that the sexual thread is a covert meditation not so much on the queen herself as on the contradictory impulses arising among courtiers inspired by Gloriana, who simultaneously freezes and sparks desire. If the *Sylvanus* episode is a retrospect on Hertford's unpleasant history—a device intended to rewrite the “rape” amidst laughter that helps to distance its serious implications—the larger sexual context in which it is placed serves to suggest the positive aspects of fertility. The Elizabethan reader is covertly reminded that while their current sovereign is barren and aging and has no heir, her Cytherean influence results in fruitfulness. Contemporary readers concerned to scrutinize the text could not have helped but reflect that Hertford was the father of two noble sons who had a claim to the throne.

If Elizabeth's court probably journeyed south for specific political reasons, the narrative opening of Hertford's entertainment captures a crucial feature of his ceremonial strategy:

. . . about three of the clocke his Honor seeing all his Retinew well mounted and ready to attend his pleasure, hee drew them secretly into a chief thicket of the Parke, where in few words, but well couched to the purpose, hee put them in mind, what quietnes, and what diligence, or other duetie, they were to use at that present: that their service might first work her Maiesties content, & thereby his Honor, and lastlie their own credite, with increase of his love and favour towards them. This done, my Lord with his traine (amounting to the number of 3. hundred, and most of them wearing chains of gold about their necks, and in their hats Yellow and Black feathers) met with her Maiestie two miles off, then comming to *Elvetham* from her owne house of *Odiham* four miles from thence.²²

“Retinew” is a key word because it signifies the system of retaining, i.e., the feudal practice of gathering followers as a kind of body-

²¹See Patterson, 54.

²²Bond, 1: 434.

guard. The number of retainers could indicate an aristocrat's power or pretensions to power. According to Richard McCoy, Elizabeth "permitted Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk," whom she later executed, "to retain a hundred men in his service, . . . notwithstanding the Act against Retainers", and he was escorted to and from London by a 'worthy company,' making his passage through the city into a kind of formal progress." If Hertford's 300 men thus constitute a resistance to the Act against Retainers, the text's reference to their good service as an enhancement of his "Honor" militates against another supposedly royal prerogative. As McCoy affirms, most Renaissance commentators asserted that only the monarch can confer honor. But in this case the conferral of honor is more complex: the men's good service is required to accomplish "her Maiesties content, & thereby his Honor, and lastlie their own credite, with increase of his love and favour towards them." Here Elizabeth is merely an intermediary in a project to advance Hertford's honor and to bind him even closer to his men.²³ In fact, the entire thrust of my interpretation is based on the decentralization of Elizabeth that this passage implies: the queen seems to be the focus of the entertainment, but in transferral from event to text she is displaced by Hertford's desire for self-aggrandizement.

It is thus crucial to recognize that Hertford's greeting was an unmistakable expression of his own power. Unlike the Cowdray entertainment, in which the potency of the queen's vast retinue is faced by a lone armed porter, Hertford's gesture is part of a militant aristocratic tradition that was destined to end around 1620. A greeting which involved 300 mounted men, combined with the fact that Hertford could assemble another 300 "artificers" at fairly short notice to enlarge his house, meant that the earl was capable of fielding a small army. Furthermore, Lawrence Stone informs us that already by "1583 the Earl of Hertford was using the old system of retaining to pre-empt the products of a London gunmaker," which presumably means that he had long since been concerned to secure a force loyal to himself and his family — an obvious point of wisdom in the contemporary political atmosphere.²⁴ In fact, the main reason

²³McCoy, 19, 12–13; also 91.

²⁴See Stone, 1967, 104. See also *idem*, 1965, 219 and Bernard, 85–86. Stone's fine sense of humor and of Realpolitik in this period is a corrective to the politically naive,

why Elizabeth opposed the extensive conferral of knightships in the field, especially by Essex in the 1590s, was not because it cheapened knightly status but because it tended to bind commander and soldier in a relationship of mutual loyalty. Hertford's practice of feudal retaining must have had a similar goal. His militant gesture at the outset of the entertainment, of course, is not a threat but an oblique indication that he could not be attacked with impunity, as well as a tangible realization of his powerful status intended to impress all observers and readers, not merely the Elizabethan court. Just as Sylvanus held an "olive tree" in his right hand yet was followed by Satyrs carrying "bowes made like darts" (111), Hertford symbolically held out the olive to Elizabeth under the guise of the poet's oration—but was accompanied by a virtual cavalry of retainers.

Indeed, it is entirely possible that the queen's inclination to visit Hertford at Elvetham, "of no great receipt, as beeing none of the Earle's chiefe mansion houses," was a conscious desire to make him appear small and inconsequential. But regardless of the queen's intentions, the inherent disadvantages of location were ceremonially countered not only by the forceful greeting but also, much more importantly, by the aura of potency and wealth which imbued the whole atmosphere of the entertainment. According to Abraham Rosman and Paula Rubel, certain Indian tribes of North America possess flexible rules of political succession which allow a prospective candidate to enhance his rank through ceremonial extravagance.²⁵ This "potlatch" theory of culture becomes highly relevant to the Elvetham entertainment when we understand that Hertford's sons were potentially viable candidates for the throne. The political context of the late Elizabethan succession problem helps to explain not just the earl's willingness to sponsor an exorbitant upper-class binge, but especially the carefully constructed account(s) of the event. Convention and conservatism required that he honor and please the queen, but the primary motive for publication—especially in view of the earl's politically marginal position—was

e.g., when he asserts that Leicester's wise fortification of Kenilworth Castle, the strongest aristocratic fortress in the realm, put him "in a position to defy all comers, even perhaps his sovereign" (1967, 107).

²⁵I owe this reference to Valentino.

the unparalleled opportunity for self-advertisement and promotion of familial honor.

The Elizabethan succession problem in the 1590s was growing especially acute. Different forms of evidence for contemporary anxiety about this problem can be cited. For example, the early succession play of the 1560s, *Gorboduc*, was reprinted in 1590; Peter Wentworth, parliamentarian agitator on this issue, was jailed for the first time in August, 1591, but went ahead and published a tract in 1593 which caused permanent imprisonment; and Father Robert Persons published a 1594 book on the succession which irritated the Elizabethan regime. In short, if the Earl of Hertford were the kind of lackey which most of the handful of commentators on the entertainment have made him out to be, a man “anxious” and engaged in a project of “desperate submission,” why would he take dangerous steps to advance himself and his family, simultaneously destabilizing the queen’s position and hence paying the price for his bold attempt? Hertford’s sons, Edward (Lord Beauchamp) and Thomas, were bastards. The decision which rendered them illegitimate could, however, be overturned through legal methods. Strangely enough, or so it would seem at first glance, it was the second son Thomas who initially tested the legal waters by submitting an appeal against the decision on 20 November 1580. He repeated the appeal every year from 1581 to 1588, except 1583. Significantly, he dropped the appeal during 1589 and 1590 but renewed it about two months after the queen’s visit to Elvetham and again the following year.²⁶ It is possible that the two-year abeyance of the appeal indicated Thomas’ recognition of its utter failure but that he renewed it in the aftermath of the apparently successful entertainment of Elizabeth by his father. In any event, the renewed attempt yielded nothing, but this did not prevent Hertford from taking up the cause three years later.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, “the skilled strategist can turn a capital of provocations received or conflicts suspended, with the potential ripostes, vengeance, or conflicts it contains, into an instrument of power, by reserving the capacity to reopen or cease hostilities in his own good time.”²⁷ Hertford chose to “reopen hostilities” in late 1595, and it is worth asking why he selected this mo-

²⁶See *CSPD 1591–1594*, 121, 281–82.

²⁷Bourdieu, 15.

ment rather than the seemingly more favorable aftermath of his 1591 entertainment. The answer lies, I think, in the book published by Persons writing under the pseudonym of R. Doleman. Persons, ever the astute propagandist, argued that although the Elizabethan regime could rightly claim that the first son Edward was a bastard—since there were no witnesses of his father’s marriage to Catherine Grey—the second son, Thomas, could be considered legitimate. The argument for his legitimacy was founded upon the fact that in the examinations of Hertford and Grey, both claimed that they were married, and hence the examiners themselves constituted witnesses of what was now (before the conception of Thomas) a legal marriage.²⁸ Jesuitical cleverness was never more irritating to the regime than this, since the advancement of yet another potential claimant tended to split the Protestant opposition and hence weaken its stand against Persons’ candidate, the Spanish infanta.

Thus Hertford’s attempt in late 1595 in the Court of Arches to overturn the regime’s 1563 decision was not simply a desire to ensure his sons’ inheritance but a move to render them “royal.” Unfortunately for Hertford, however, the government was one step ahead of him. On 21 June 1595, the regime was grilling a man named Nicholas Williamson on a charge of treason. He was asked to give testimony about any conspiracies against Elizabeth and specifically any “plot or practice for the Succession.” He replied that “as for my lord of Huntingdon, my lord of Hertford or my lord of Derby, I could not learn of any friends or favourers they had beyond sea.” The regime was obviously growing nervous about a potential claim by Hertford, since Lord Burghley was studying the case sometime around 10 July 1595.²⁹ It seems clear that Burghley would not be involved in this task unless the threat were a serious one. Letters from Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sydney indicate something about the course of events: on 29 October Hertford was put under house arrest in London, and on 7 November committed

²⁸Persons, pt. 2, chap. 6, 136–39.

²⁹*HMC Hatfield*, 5: 251–54 (for Williamson) and 273–74 (for Burghley): “Memorandum that . . . Heneage . . . has by her Majesty’s special command delivered to . . . Burghley a written book . . . containing 80 folios . . . containing a process against . . . Hertford, and Lady Katherine [Grey] . . . attainted, in a cause of pretended matrimony, and a definitive sentence given against them both by the . . . Archbishop of Canterbury . . . and other commissioners.”

to the Tower; on 12 November it was “given out that Lord Hertford’s son shall be no more called Beauchamp but Seimor and that he is sent for;” on 29 November Hertford’s wife was in London begging the queen for mercy, but on 13 December still had not been granted an audience with Elizabeth.³⁰ The queen, however, did write a letter to Lady Hertford on 5 November “to assure you of the continuance of our former grace to *yourself*, and to preserve your spirit from those perturbations which love to the *person offending*, and apprehension of the matter so far unexpected, might daily breed in your body and mind . . . so believe that we . . . will use no more severity than is requisite for others’ caution in like cases, and [*sic*] it shall stand with honour and necessity” (emphases mine).³¹ Elizabeth gave no explicit guarantees about Hertford, but he was apparently released sometime in January, 1595–96.

Hertford was probably imprisoned not primarily because of his legal attempts but because the authorities “discovered” a conspiracy by Sir Michael Blount to “hold the Tower upon the death of Elizabeth against the lords of the privy council . . . and to deliver it into the hands of . . . Hertford, the Suffolk claimant to the throne.”³² I say “discovered” because the Elizabethan regime was adept at manufacturing conspiracies. Blount’s plot of 1594 was revealed only in November, 1595, as the result of an investigation concerning his behavior during massive riots on Tower Hill in June, 1595. But regardless of whether the conspiracy was real or feigned, it indicates the government’s anxiety about Hertford’s claim to the succession. A brief sojourn in the Tower probably had the desired influence on Hertford’s familial zeal, but it is important to recognize that in this political world the attitude of the central figure in conspiracies real, imagined, or fabricated might have little to do with the actions of “supporters.” (Lady Jane Grey was a mere teenage girl who probably had no royal ambitions, but this did not preclude decapitation.) Once Persons had cleverly stirred the political waters by proving that Thomas (at least) was legitimate, any number of unpleasant conspiracies might crop up. Indeed, a few months after Hertford’s release Sir John Smythe attempted to rally some forces in Colchester around the claim of Thomas Seymour. Thomas had

³⁰HMC *Penshurst Place*, 2: 177, 183, 184, 192, 197.

³¹Harrison, 238.

³²Manning, 216.

apparently been lured into this “conspiracy” without knowledge of Smythe’s intentions, and it is worth noting that one strong basis for the uprising was hatred of impressment for Elizabeth’s wars. The movement quickly fizzled out, but it is instructive to discover that in the usual search for a devilish conspiracy Sir Edward Coke jotted down seven “interrogatories” on the back of an examination, including: “1. Letter to Mr. Seymour and his wife. 2. Book of succession . . . 5. Letters to Mr. Seymour.”³³ The “Book of succession” was Persons’ troublesome tract, but Thomas had probably learned enough from his father’s recent experience to avoid incoherent military plots which tended to fail and then result in executions.

Thomas died on 8 August 1600, and thus any further machinations would have to center on his older brother, Lord Beauchamp. There is scattered evidence of interest in and support for his claim.³⁴ Other evidence beginning 2 January 1602–1603 indicates the possible involvement of Hertford himself in arranging a marriage between Beauchamp’s eldest son William and Arabella (or Arbella) Stuart, a woman whose own claim to the English crown was hereditarily second to James’s in the Stuart line, but theoretically prior due to her birth on English soil. Such a marriage would have united the two major claims of the Stuart and Suffolk lines, but Arabella was arrested even as the queen approached death.³⁵ (No wonder she refused to attend Elizabeth’s funeral.)³⁶ Hertford’s vehement denial of complicity was surprisingly believed, but it becomes question-

³³See *CSPD 1595–1597*, 236ff. for numerous entries on this uprising. The anti-“draft” passages are on 243, in Smythe’s examination, in which he claimed that he pitied the “destruction of his countrymen,” and viewed the draft as illegal.

³⁴On 30 March 1603, the second Lord Burghley wrote to his younger brother, Sir Robert Cecil, and asked whether rumors of Beauchamp’s flight to France were true. Another letter written sometime before August, 1603, by William Francis alias Clerke to Sir Griffin Markham reports the rumor that Beauchamp had been proclaimed king at Northampton by Sir Richard Knightly. For these two letters see *HMC Hatfield*, 15: 18, 222–23.

³⁵See the various entries in *HMC Hatfield*, 12: 583ff., and *Dictionary of National Biography* under “Arabella” (Stuart) and “Seymour, William.”

³⁶See Clapham, 114: “The Lady Arbella Stuart, being of the royal blood, was especially required to have honored the funeral with her presence, which she refused, saying that, sith her access to the Queen in her lifetime might not be permitted, she would not after her death be brought upon the stage for a public spectacle” (hereafter cited as Clapham by page number in my main discussion). Arabella’s incisive comment evinces yet again contemporary recognition of the politics of performance.

able in view of the fact that William and Arabella were eventually married in secret in mid-1610. Both were almost immediately imprisoned, yet both managed to escape. Arabella was caught and sent to the Tower, where she died in 1615. William remained on the continent until after her death, when he was reconciled with James and thus returned to England.

Historical hindsight encourages us to view the succession as unproblematic, but contemporaries were not so carefree. Some indulged in grand speculations, like the anonymous letter-writer of circa 1598–1600 who projected a Cecilian conspiracy to support Lord Beauchamp. One of the grimmer aspects of this letter is the assertion that Arabella was “fit enough to make a Queen Jane of,” i.e., suitable for decollation.³⁷ But the most acute commentator, perhaps, is John Clapham:

. . . God himself that would have so great a matter effected without any opposition, used the provident care of the Councillors as a means to prevent all tumults and disorder that might have ensued upon the first certain report of the Queen’s death, whose lingering sickness gave no small furtherance to their designs; for they appointed continual watch to be kept in the city during that time. Divers Popish priests likely to raise sedition were transported into France, some others, known professors of the Romish religion, committed to safe custody, and all wandering and suspected persons arrested in most parts of the realm. Certain ships of war also, being ready to go forth, were stayed to guard the seacoasts against any outward attempts. The prudent carriage of these matters was attributed chiefly to the care and wisdom of Sir Robert Cecil. (104)

Peaceful succession was not achieved because everyone was quiescent, but because the queen’s slow death allowed clever politicians to engineer it. Deportation, imprisonment, and above all, the show of force were useful tools. Clapham proceeds to comment on Hertford’s activities:

. . . the Lieutenants of Counties . . . by direction from the Lords of the Council, proclaimed the King in their several governments, and namely the Earl of Hertford, a man somewhat suspected by reason of his son’s pretended title, showed himself not slack in that business; for himself proclaimed the King at Salisbury, either for that, as some thought, he saw the stream run so strongly another way as it was in vain for him to oppose it, and so, making use of the occasion, he might purchase a good opinion for his forwarding; or else haply, which I verily believe, being satisfied that the right was elsewhere than in his

³⁷*CSPD Addenda 1580–1625*, 406–09.

own family, he had no intention at all to set his son's claims on foot. For doubtless, if he had attempted it, he should have made a hopeless hazard of his fortunes and life. (106)

Clapham's acuteness momentarily breaks down when he asserts belief in the second hypothesis, but he captures the essence of the situation in his final sentence. Hertford had already done what he could for his sons, thereby suffering a brief imprisonment intended to teach him (and others, as Elizabeth's letter reveals) a valuable lesson. His education was undoubtedly completed when he watched a fellow earl suffer decapitation in a private ceremony at the Tower. The execution of Essex was a salutary reminder—for the few lords who were present and sitting just a few feet from the block, almost in range of flying specks of blood—that challenges to the established order were disallowed.³⁸ And in this period, at least, the order to be established was under the firm guidance of an enormously astute politician, Sir Robert Cecil.

As we pay more attention to the historical facts only outlined here, it becomes increasingly difficult to view the Elvetham entertainment as a spectacle of pure submission. But history cannot provide the theoretical framework necessary to resituate the entertainment in a context of self-interest. The encounter between Hertford and Elizabeth was a highly sophisticated confrontation, but one which in no way featured a debasement of majesty. Indeed, degradation of the queen would have been equivalent to self-degradation, since Hertford's family was in a historical position to bid for the throne. These royal ambitions help to explain the tenor of the entertainment, but only if we acknowledge the curious phenomenon of aristocratic extravagance and formulate a theory to account for this aspect of cultural difference. Renaissance overexpenditure among the elite has long since been recognized as a way of life which seems to defy the logic of economic self-preservation, but it is too infrequently discerned that extravagance could be calculated. The "potlatch" theory of Rosman and Rubel is valuable be-

³⁸See *HMC Hatfield*, 11: 83–84, which informs us that the earls of Cumberland and Hertford, Viscount Bindon, Lord Thomas Howard, Lord Darcy, and Lord Compton were present at Essex's execution. See also *CSPD 1598–1601*, 591ff. A letter from Egerton, Buckhurst, and Cecil to Lord Thomas Howard (Constable of the Tower) seems to indicate that the queen orchestrated the show: "Her Majesty will have some seven or eight noblemen named by her to be there" (591). The noblemen "sat on a form placed before the scaffold" (592), i.e., they had the best seats in the house. Such a spectacle must have been an object-lesson for Hertford.

cause it provides a way of perceiving excess, paradoxically, as a means of self-aggrandizement for specific political purposes. But in this case it is only part of the story. Hertford's ceremonial strategy involved a demonstration not only of wealth but of power, and the dispersal of his wealth was directed not only to the queen but to everyone.

From the very outset Hertford was concerned to demonstrate and augment his status. As I argued above, it is extremely significant that he rode out with a "cavalry" of 300 men to greet the queen. According to Lawrence Stone, the Tudors wished to diminish the stature of the overmighty subject, and one of their methods was to reduce the number of retainers loyal to any given aristocrat.³⁹ Thus Hertford's show of force was an expression of power which flew in the face of what Stone sees as a conscious governmental policy. Moreover, the earl's wealth was signified by the fact that nearly all the horsemen wore chains of gold. Such a display was undoubtedly intended to convey a message to Elizabeth and her retinue. But it also functions within the text as the beginning of an appeal to a larger audience. The text seeks to advertise the magnificence and benevolence of the Seymour family, and it is worth considering how this is accomplished. In "The Proeme," i.e., before the formal narrative of events comprising the actual entertainment, we learn that the artificers had prepared a "Bowre" for various governmental officers, but also "An other to entertaine all commers, suiters and such like."⁴⁰ Moreover, the earl's hospitality to everyone is reiterated in an especially attractive way: "An other kitchin with a very long range, for the waste, to serve all commers."⁴¹ We know that commoners were present because some were apparently frightened by Sylvanus (112), an admittedly pejorative reference to the gullibility of "countrey people" but one which also informs the reader that these people were among all the "commers" to taste Hertford's bounty.

"The common man identifies power with luxury"⁴²—and not only the common man. What appears to be a two-fold strategy of expressing power and wealth is, in fact, mutually reinforcing or in-

³⁹Stone, 1967, 97.

⁴⁰Bond, 1: 432.

⁴¹Ibid., 1: 433.

⁴²Fuentes, 171. This comment from a modern, politically oriented writer is relevant because it concerns the attitude of a courtier to Philip II in a novel sensitive to the ceremonialism of the Renaissance.

tertwined. Like Foucault's identification of power-knowledge,⁴³ the earl's power and wealth are inseparable. Thus certain narrative comments seem to be casual or apologetic, but really function to promote Hertford's prestige:

Were it not that I would not seem to flatter the honorable minded Earle; or, but that I feare to displeas him, who rather desired to expresse his loyall dutie in his liberrall bountie, then to heare of it againe, I could heere willingly particulate the store of his cheare and provision, as likewise the carefull and kind diligence of his servantes, expressed in their quiet service to *her Majestie and the Nobility*, and by their loving entertainment to *all other friends or strangers*. But I leave the bountie of the one, and the industrie of the others, to the just report of such as beheld or tasted the plentifull abundance of that time and place. (107; emphases mine)

This comment takes the form of an ancient rhetorical trick (e.g., "I shall not mention the pious deeds of my ancestors," etc.), and again, it is crucial to note that the queen is not the focus of attention: *all* are served, honored, and hence *courted* by the earl on the first day of the entertainment. At the end of the third day another splendid banquet was served, and unlike the first one, a fireworks display occurred as they feasted: "During the time of these fire-workes in the water, there was a banket served, all in glasse and silver . . . by two hundred of my Lord of Hertforde's gentlemen, everie one carrying so many dishes, that the whole number amounted to a thousand: and there were to light them in their way a hundred torch-bearers" (115). It would seem that the 300 men whom Hertford had employed as a cavalry were now used for what must have been a dazzling spectacle. It is especially interesting to consider part of what was served to the guests: "Her Maiesties Armes in sugar-worke. / The severall Armes of all our Nobilitie in sugar-worke."⁴⁴ It is impossible to know whether these were consumed, but since the queen had a sweet tooth it seems unlikely that she would have declined this opportunity to indulge in some delicacies. If so, we can also assume that Elizabeth was served with her own arms, since it would have been indecorous to allow anyone other than the queen to eat the royal arms. The banqueters could not have known at the time that all the printed accounts of the entertainment would feature a prominent device on the title page—in some cases, hand-

⁴³For a succinct discussion of this concept, see Sheridan, 220–21.

⁴⁴Bond, I: 449. For another example of the family's sense of its own magnificence, see the illustration of the Hertford tomb in Spring, 128.

painted like the woodcut of the lake. This device was the arms of the earl of Hertford. Thus regardless of whether they ate them or not, these delicacies were self-consuming artifacts (as it were), especially by contrast to the bold and permanent illustration on the title page. The Elizabethans were far more attuned to such symbolic gestures than we are. Indeed, our modern editions often fail to reproduce title pages, which are frequently important signifiers. In this case most readers could not help but notice that Hertford's arms stake a claim to centrality which cannot be dislodged even by the most flattering praise of Elizabeth.

The conventions of courtly communication guaranteed that nothing in this entertainment would be direct or hazardous. But there are potentially disturbing moments, as when the Satyrs are "at their *reproche* neare her Majesty," automatically and unjustifiably taken by editors to be a misprint for "approche." Perhaps most strikingly, the English translation of the poet's Latin oration—a translation only provided in the text and not occurring at the event—renders the earl's name "Semer." This choice, rather than the proper "Seymour," is both audacious and ironic given the fact that Hertford was suspected by the regime. It could mean then what it means now, as evinced by Vincentio's desire to discover "what our seemers be" in I.iii of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. "Semer" is not subversive, but it does provide one strong hint that the obsequiousness of the host may be a mask. It destabilizes the reader in a way that the event itself could not. But lack of subversion, or rather, conventional courtly flattery should not mislead us. The Earl of Hertford, in the words of Gaveston at the outset of Marlowe's *Edward II*, employed the brilliant services of "wanton poets, pleasant wits, / Musicians," not so much in order to manipulate the royal figure—which was Gaveston's objective—as to assert his own *honor*. Such a move was neither conservative nor radical but simply pragmatic. It was especially practical when the succession was undecided and various competitors were preparing themselves for a potentially bloody struggle over the throne.

Reinterpretations of Elizabethan culture, including elite entertainments, must be undertaken without being hindered by illusions about Elizabeth and her subjects. As Christopher Haigh has recently explained, the hoary myths of a reverential historiography instituted by Camden and institutionalized by his spiritual heirs, as well as courtly myths increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of

decay, opposition, and murderous militarism in the 1590s, must not be allowed to obscure the facts of political struggle in this period.⁴⁵ Textual surfaces should not displace Realpolitik. At the end of the text the narrator says that “Her Maiestie was so highly pleased. . . that shee openly protested to my Lord of Hertford, that the beginning, processe, and end of this his entertainment was so honorable, as hereafter hee should find the rewarde thereof in her especiall favour.”⁴⁶ Except for a belated lieutenancy rewarded in 1602 which may have constituted a kind of bribe by Cecil—who sought a stranglehold on power and the succession after the death of Essex and only achieved preeminence when he cashiered Raleigh and other enemies after James’s accession—no discernible “favour” occurred: no real political office under Elizabeth and, especially, no hope that Hertford’s sons would be given any chance to inherit his property. Elizabeth’s sincerity at the end of the entertainment is matched only by Hertford’s. If she was unwilling to “favour” him, he was certainly willing to destabilize her position by seeking redress at law—and in a period notorious for its political instabilities. The Elvetham entertainment and, in fact, its immediate predecessor at Cowdray should teach us that the political context of these events must be foregrounded, or otherwise we are doomed to perpetuate the myths of Camden.

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⁴⁵For an acute discussion of William Camden’s success in setting the “historiographical agenda” and establishing a myth of Elizabeth which has influenced historiography to the present day, see Haigh, 1984, 1–25.

⁴⁶Bond, 1: 452.

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