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Popular Festivity and the Early Modern Stage: The Case of *George a Greene*

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The trajectory of English theatre during the sixteenth century has often been described as the “decline” of amateur dramatic activity and the “rise” of professional acting companies. These changes have frequently been attributed to shifts in religious practices. Protestant reformers, it has been said, were eager to purge the liturgical calendar of the feast days of saints, and many of the rituals traditionally associated with holidays were either radically reduced or completely eliminated. According to this view, within a single generation, the participatory religious theatre of the Middle Ages had been replaced by professional secular drama in the Renaissance public playhouses.¹

Recent work associated with the Records of Early English Drama (REED) project, however, has demonstrated the persistence of popular festive performance. Although the demise of the biblical cycle drama certainly took place, it has become increasingly evident that these plays were, in fact, never as widespread as has been generally assumed

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¹See, for example, Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1, 3, 94; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 579–83; and Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16. Of earlier work on the subject, Harold C. Gardiner’s vastly influential *Mysteries’ End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1946) is of central importance. For a useful corrective, see Paul Whitfield White, “Reforming Mysteries’ End: A New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999): 121–47. Detailed discussion of the impact of religious changes on popular festivity may be found in Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 69–110. For other influential accounts of the “reformation of manners,” see David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1967).

and were enacted only in urban centers such as Chester and York. Far more common across the whole of England were various kinds of theatrical and paratheatrical activity at the parish level: Robin Hood gatherings, May games, and dramatic performances tied to a single occasion. These more modest performance traditions continued to be popular well into the seventeenth century, and they were especially tenacious in the west of England and in the densely populated and frequently traveled Thames Valley area. Even in London, where scholars generally assume medieval festive customs did not survive, textual records that allude to May games and other holiday observances can be found well into the Renaissance.²

Because theatrical practices associated with popular festivities were generally unscripted, they have garnered much less critical attention than the cycle drama, which has left more extensive textual traces. Yet if regular participation in amateur performance was commonplace in early modern England, its impact on the growth of professional theatre must have been significant. How did playgoers' experiences with festive drama shape their expectations of the public theatres? What kinds of changes took place when theatrical customs associated with popular festivity were transposed onto the professional stage? In this essay, I explore such questions by focusing on the anonymous play *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*, first presented at the Rose Theatre in London in 1593.³

²See, for instance, a 1575 reference to May games in London and other "sporte . . . about this towne in the hollie daies," as transcribed in Duncan Salkeld, "New Allusions to London 'Shewes' and Playhouses, 1575–1605," *Early Theatre* 8, no. 2 (2005): 102. On parish drama, see Alexandra F. Johnston, "Summer Festivals in the Thames Valley Counties," in *Custom, Culture and Community in the Later Middle Ages: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas Pettitt and Leif Søndergaard (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1994), 37–56; Alexandra F. Johnston and Wim Hüskens, eds., *English Parish Drama* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996); Alexandra F. Johnston and Sally-Beth MacLean, "Reformation and Resistance in Thames/Severn Parishes: The Dramatic Witness," in *The Parish in English Life, 1400–1600*, ed. Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 178–200; John Marshall, "Gathering in the Name of the Outlaw: REED and Robin Hood," in *REED in Review: Essays in Celebration of the First Twenty-five Years*, ed. Audrey Douglas and Sally-Beth MacLean (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 72–94; and James D. Stokes, "Robin Hood and the Churchwardens in Yeovil," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 3 (1986): 1–25. See also Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), which appeared too late to be taken into consideration here. For work on similar subjects by historians unaffiliated with the REED project, see Martin Ingram, "Ridings, Rough Music and the 'Reform of Popular Culture' in Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 105 (1984): 79–113; and Margo Todd, "Profane Pastimes and the Reformed Community: The Persistence of Popular Festivities in Early Modern Scotland," *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 123–56.

³The play is often ascribed to Robert Greene, but its authorship is uncertain, as is its date of composition. Further discussion of the play's authorship may be found in Evelyn May Albright, "Eating a Citation," *Modern Language Notes* 30 (1915): 201–6; H. Dugdale Sykes, "Robert Greene and *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*," *Review of English Studies* 7 (1931): 129–36, and "Robert Greene and *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*," *Review of English Studies* 9 (1933): 189–90; Charles A. Pennel, "The Authenticity of the *George a Greene* Title-Page Inscriptions," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64 (1965): 668–76, and "Robert Greene and *King or Kaisar*," *English Language Notes* 3 (1965): 24–26; and James Seay Dean, *Robert Greene: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984). For a convincing argument against Greene's authorship, see Alan H. Nelson, "George Buc, William Shakespeare, and the Folger *George a Greene*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49 (1998): 74–83. For dates of composition, see Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, 3rd ed., revised by S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (New York: Routledge, 1989), who assigns the play to 1590, with terminal dates for composition of 1587 and 1593.

Since C. L. Barber first noted traces of festive traditions in Shakespeare's plays, scholars interested in early modern popular festivity have focused almost exclusively on their thematic and ideological implications.⁴ Most studies have been limited to customs represented within the imaginary world of the play. However, reading plays for fictional scenes of festivity, such as the sheep-shearing festival in *The Winter's Tale*, or for characters, such as Falstaff, who embody festive values, limits our analysis to only two avenues through which popular pastimes made their way into theatre. If festive traditions were constituted primarily through nontextual modes of cultural production, understanding their impact on early modern drama requires careful attention to performance.

This essay seeks to remedy this critical lacuna by addressing how festive rituals interacted with the presentational context of the public theatres. Because *George a Greene* does not depict actual holiday observances taking place within the fictional narrative, it serves as an especially useful site for exploring traces of festive culture that exceed the representational frame. Through analysis of three popular practices—communal feasting, festive combat, and the wearing of livery—this essay develops a theoretical framework for understanding how amateur performance traditions were integrated into London's professional theatres. Because the transformation of festive practices in the dramatic context involved numerous and complex historical processes, my goal here is not to be comprehensive, but evocative, to offer a model for thinking through these issues that might be of use to future scholars. When we attend to presentational dynamics of performance, dramatic elements that at first glance appear to have little festive resonance can, I contend, be seen more clearly as the reconstellated legacy of holiday practices. The canonical drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, I will argue, was not the culmination of an evolutionary trajectory—from medieval to Renaissance, religious to secular, amateur to professional theatre—but an active negotiation with contemporaneous festive performance practices.

Aside from these attribution studies, scholarship on the play is limited and tends to focus on its political valences rather than its performance implications. Edwin Davenport argues against the play's potential subversiveness in "The Representation of Robin Hood in Elizabethan Drama: *George a Greene* and *Edward I*," in *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries*, ed. Lois Potter (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 45–62. Daryl W. Palmer views it as a proponent of plebeian authority in *Hospitable Performances: Genre and Cultural Practices in Early Modern England* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992), 87–117.

⁴ See C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959); Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (London: Methuen, 1986); François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Naomi Conn Liebler, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: The Ritual Foundations of Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Thomas Pettitt, "Early English Traditional Drama: Approaches and Perspectives," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 25 (1982): 1–30, and "'This Man is Pyramus': A Pre-history of the English Mummers' Plays," *Medieval English Theatre* 22 (2000): 70–99; David Ruiter, *Shakespeare's Festive History: Feasting, Festivity, Fasting, and Lent in the Second Henriad* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry, eds., *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Communal Feasting

George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield is primarily concerned with the exploits of a “pinner,” or “pinder,” an official in charge of impounding stray animals. Its protagonist was a well-known folk hero appearing also in a number of ballads.⁵ Among the play’s many twists and turns are two curiously parallel episodes that bear the imprint of festive practices. The story opens with the Earl of Kendal, in the midst of a military campaign, seeking provisions for his soldiers from nearby Wakefield. When George and his fellow townsmen deny this request, the earl and his lords disguise themselves and leave their horses in George’s field to provoke the pinder into a fight. After some amusing shenanigans, Kendal is ultimately captured and delivered to the king. Later in the play—in an unrelated episode that is nonetheless strikingly similar in its dramatic construction—Robin Hood and his merry men also disguise themselves and trespass upon George’s field in order to provoke him into a fight. This time, however, the outlaw is not captured but instead calls an end to the altercation and invites George to join his band of merry men.

Both the fight with the Earl of Kendal and the fight with Robin Hood conclude with the pinder inviting his opponents to join him for a meal. After the altercation with Kendal, George says:

Why then, to honour G. a Greene the more,
Vouchsafe a peece of beefe at my poore house,
You shall haue wafer cakes your fill,
A peece of beefe hung vp since Martilmas,
If that like you not, take what you bring for me.⁶

The encounter with Robin Hood ends with a similar offer, conveyed in almost the exact same language:

Will you to my poore house,
You shall haue wafer cakes your fill,
A peece of beefe hung vp since Martlemas,
Mutton and veale, if this like you not,
Take that you finde, or that you bring for me. (F1v)

In both of these scenes, George offers his guests “[a] peece of beefe hung vp since Martlemas” (D1r and F1v). The feast of St. Martin, also known as “Martinmas” or “Martlemas,” was celebrated annually on 11 November. It was marked by the killing and preserving of livestock that would not survive until spring. George’s lines refer to this butchered meat, which was salted down and hung on hooks to cure for the winter’s consumption.⁷

⁵ Although the earliest copies of the ballad that remain extant today date back only to the mid-1600s, the Stationers’ Register first records “[a] ballet of Wakefyld and a grene” in 1557–58. There is clearly a relationship—albeit one that is not well understood—between the ballad and the stage play. For the Stationers’ Register entry, see Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640 A.D.*, 5 vols. (London: privately printed, 1875–94), 1:76.

⁶ *A Pleasant Conceyted Comedie of George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield* (1599), D1r. Subsequent quotations will be included parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 386. The corresponding early modern ballads make no mention of Martlemas. In one version, George offers Robin Hood “both bread and beef” and “good ale of the best,” and in

The narrative of the play offers no satisfying explanation for the allusion to Martlemas. The action of the story apparently takes place in the summer. When Kendal first encounters George, he provokes the pinder by allowing his horses to “eate their fill” of the latter’s grain (C2r–C3r). Apparently the field does not lie fallow as it would in winter, but is in the midst of the growing season. Lovers’ assignations take place while hidden amidst the tall grass of the “wheate close” (C1v), and cattle are feared to be grazing in the “corne” (C2r). When George fights with Robin Hood, his field is again described as it would have appeared during the warmest months of the year. The altercation begins when George’s sweetheart notices “[t]hree men come striking through the corne,” and comes to a head when the pinder challenges them by saying, “What, cannot the hie way serue youre turne, / But you must make a path ouer the corne?” (F1r).⁸

another, “bread and cheese” and “ale all on the best.” R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 147–49. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the ballads are from this edition. These versions of the ballad are identical to the ones found in F. J. Child, ed., *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882–98; reprint, New York: Dover, 1965). Both editions include a broadside version based on Bodleian Library Wood MS 402, leaf 42, printed for F. Coles, T. Vere, and W. Gilbertson, c. 1650–60, and a version based on Bishop Percy’s folio manuscript, British Library Additional MS 27,879, fol. 6r.

For other early versions of this ballad, see “The Jolly Pinder of Wakefield,” in *The English Broadside Ballad Archive, 1500–1800*, (Santa Barbara: Department of English, Early Modern Center, University of California, Santa Barbara), http://emc.english.ucsb.edu/ballad%5Fproject/ballad_image.asp?id=20721 (accessed 27 February 2006), a digital facsimile of the copy in the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge University. See also the prose history and jest book titled *The Pinder of Wakefield: Being the Merry History of George a Greene the Lusty Pinder of the North . . . Full of Pretty Histories, Songs, Catches, Iests, and Ridles* (London, 1632), I3r–I3v; reprinted in E. A. Horsman, ed., *The Pinder of Wakefield* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1956). Subsequent quotations from the 1632 jest book will be taken from the facsimile of the original edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

There are also two ballads of George a Greene in British Library Additional MS 71,158, commonly referred to as the “Forresters” manuscript. The document dates from the mid-to-late seventeenth century (paleographic experts propose dates between 1640 and 1674), and there is some disagreement about the relationship between the ballads in this volume and those found in Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. One of the ballads is similar to the other extant versions. The second ballad differs more considerably from them. Arthur Freeman argues that this second version of the ballad is “entirely new,” whereas Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren contend that it “show[s] . . . knowledge of the play *George a Greene* (c. 1592), with some influence from the prose history of the *Pinner* which was in print by 1632.” See Stephen Knight, ed., *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript*, British Library Additional MS 71158 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998); Arthur Freeman, *Robin Hood: The “Forresters” Manuscript* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1993); and Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, eds., *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 13–15. In the Forresters manuscript, the pinder does not specify which foods he will give his guests: “A homely supper and hard bedds / My Genney shee will prepare / And welcome bee to her and mee / Shall bee youer [*sic*] cheefest fare” (ll.129–32).

⁸The nondramatic versions of the tale echo these lines. In the 1632 jest book (see footnote 7 above), Robin Hood’s men are described as “making new pathes ouer the Corne” (G2v). In the ballads, we find similar language: “Now turn again, turn again,” said the pinder, / ‘For a wrong way have you gone; / For you have forsaken the king his highway, / And made a path over the corn” (Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, stanza 3).

In addition, both the jest book and all extant versions of the ballad explicitly refer to the fight as taking place on “a long summer’s day” (*Pinder* 1632, G3r; Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, stanza 5). Similar language may also be found in an unpublished prose romance, *The Fawmows Hystory off George a Greene Pinder off the Towne off Wakefeild*, Lambeth Palace Library, Sion MS L40.2/E50, fols. 204–31, where George’s “pleasant and delightful fields” are imagined as “full of green corn,” which

Given that the fictional narrative is so clearly associated with summer, it is noteworthy that the only known performances of *George a Greene* took place in the dead of winter. Although the play was not entered into the Stationers' Register until 1 April 1595 and not published until 1599, Henslowe's *Diary* records that it was performed five times at the Rose Theatre in London by the Earl of Sussex's Men in December 1593 and January 1594.⁹ Two of these performances fell during Christmastide proper (on 29 December and 2 January), and another three took place shortly thereafter (on 8, 15, and 22 January).¹⁰ Henslowe does not mark the play as "ne"—that is, "new"—so it is possible that it was first performed prior to 29 December.¹¹ However, as Roslyn Knutson's careful assessment of the *Diary* shows, "[t]he first few performances of a new offering were often scheduled within a week of one another, but by the fourth show the performances were more widely spaced," with only one or two performances each month.¹² Given this pattern, and the fact that a week or less separated each of the known performances of *George a Greene*, it seems reasonable to assume that the play was a relatively new one. If the performance on 29 December was not its first showing, then the actual debut would most likely have taken place no more than a week or two prior to that date.¹³

the trespassers then "tread down" (chap. 10). A partial transcription of this late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century manuscript may be found in J. Churton Collins, ed., *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), 2:167–77. A more complete transcription is available in William J. Thoms, ed., *Early English Prose Romances*, 3 vols. (London: Nattali and Bond, 1858; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1970), 2:159–215. Thoms first consulted the manuscript in 1828; since that time, a number of leaves beginning around fol. 223 appear to have gone missing. Both because of these lost leaves and because the numerous editions of Thoms's text are paginated differently, I have thought it best to follow Thoms's transcription but to cite references by chapter numbers, which remain consistent throughout, rather than by folio or page numbers. My thanks to Rachel Cosgrove and Aaron Hope at Lambeth Palace Library for their assistance with this manuscript.

⁹ For the relevant diary entries, see R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20. For the Stationers' Register entry, see Arber, *Transcript of the Registers*, 2:295; and W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1934–59), 1:260 (item 158).

¹⁰ There is some evidence that the observance of the Christmas season extended beyond the official twelve days. A book of household regulations for Henry Percy, Fifth Earl of Northumberland, records amounts paid to players who "comyth to his Lordschipe betwixt Cristynmas and Candilmas [2 February]." It does not refer to performances at other times of year. See *The Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland, at his Castles of Wresill and Leginfield in Yorkshire*, ed. Thomas Percy (London, 1827), as cited in Peter H. Greenfield, "Festive Drama at Christmas in Aristocratic Households," in *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre, Lancaster, 13–19 July, 1989*, ed. Meg Twycross (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1996), 35. See also Olga Horner, "Christmas at the Inns of Court," in Twycross, *Festive Drama*, 41–53. Horner notes that the midwinter-term break at the Inns of Court typically extended from the end of November to 12 January, and that the Eve of St. Thomas, 21 December, may have marked the formal commencement of festivities (42–44).

¹¹ For a discussion of Henslowe's use of the "ne" designator as an indication of a play's commercial treatment as a new offering (whether or not it was a newly written play), see Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*, xxxiv–xxxv; and also Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 22–23.

¹² Knutson, *Repertory of Shakespeare's Company*, 32. "For example, *Tasso's Melancholy* was introduced 'ne' on 11 August 1594 and scheduled a second time a week later (18 August); over the next nine months, it appeared twice in September, twice in October, once in November, once in December, twice in January, once in February, and once in May, at which time it was retired" (Knutson, 32).

¹³ In *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), James Shapiro remarks that as of 1599, "[i]t had been over a decade since the play was first staged" (192). He draws

Instead of operating within the fictional temporality of a play set in the summer, references to Martlemas beef in *George a Greene* call to mind the time of year when the play was originally performed—Christmastide and the subsequent fortnight in January. Such casual assimilation of the presentational context into the fictional narrative is suggestive; rather than assuming that the cyclical rhythms of the sacred calendar were irrelevant for the “secular” stage, we might instead see this play as a telling instance of the ways in which holiday practices remained firmly embedded in the culture of playing. Calendar rituals took place throughout the year, but the seasons most notable for theatrical activities were the twelve days of Christmas and the holidays between Easter and Midsummer, referred to collectively as The May.¹⁴ It is well known that summer holidays frequently involved mock kings and queens, morris dancing, and other forms of festive role-playing. Winter holidays were also associated with performance traditions. On the traditional winter feast days between the Nativity and the Epiphany, private aristocratic households regularly hosted dramatic entertainments by both professional and amateur players.¹⁵ At Court, of the 561 recorded performances

on Alan Nelson’s article (“George Buc”) to describe Shakespeare’s discussion with George Buc over the authorship of *George a Greene* and suggests that this interview may have taken place in 1599, but I cannot locate any assertion in Nelson of a performance date of 1589 or earlier. Nelson does suggest that “though we can be pretty certain that January 1594 was its last performance, we cannot be so certain that December 1593 was its first performance” (82). As I argue above, the typical pattern of offerings suggests a debut in December, but I am less certain that January 1594 was, as Nelson suggests, the play’s final performance. Henslowe’s record-keeping was notoriously spotty. No performances of any kind are recorded in his diary between 1 February and 27 December 1593, two days prior to the first recorded reference to the playing of *George a Greene*. The record for the 1593–94 Christmas season continues through 6 February 1594, and then almost an inch of space is left blank at the bottom of fol. 8v before Henslowe begins fol. 9 with a recording of the plays performed “begininge at easter” by “the Quenes men & my lord of Sussex to geather” (see Foakes, *Henslowe’s Diary*, 21). Henslowe lists performances from 1 April through 8 April only. A new heading then precedes a short list of performances from 14 May through 16 May, and then finally, after another heading, begins a longer unbroken list of plays recorded from 3 June onward. Such significant gaps in the performance schedule recorded in Henslowe’s diary may well mask further performances of *George a Greene*. Of course, if Nelson is correct that the play was pulled from the repertory in January, then the summertime setting of the play is even more noteworthy, since it would have been performed *only* in December 1593 and January 1594.

¹⁴Midsummer, or the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, took place annually on 24 June. For further discussion of summer and winter holiday practices, see Hutton, *Rise and Fall of Merry England and Stations of the Sun*; Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*; and also John Forrest, *The History of Morris Dancing, 1458–1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Charles Phythian-Adams, whose work on calendar customs has been widely influential, argued that Christmas and May served as key markers for dividing the year into two halves: a “ritual” half of the year, encompassing the moveable feasts from Christmas through Midsummer, and a “secular” half of the year during which work days took precedence and major religious festivals were absent. See Phythian-Adams, *Local History and Folklore: A New Framework* (London: Bedford Square Press for the Standing Conference for Local History, 1975), esp. 21–25; and also Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*, 81–84. The priority given to Christmas and May in Hutton’s *Stations of the Sun* is also noteworthy. Modeled on “a classic old-fashioned ‘Book of Days,’ working its way around the circle of the year” (x), Hutton’s book is comprised of forty chapters, almost half of which are devoted solely to these two holidays.

¹⁵The holy days traditionally associated with the midwinter season, unlike those that fell at other times of the year, were able to survive the Protestant Reformation relatively unscathed. While reformers were eager to eliminate the “worship” of saints, feast days associated with Christ himself and those honoring the apostles and evangelists were thought of as categorically distinct. As Ronald Hutton notes, even during the most radical of the reformations under Edward VI, “the English Parliament retained the holy days of Christmas, Circumcision (New Year), and Epiphany, in Christ’s honor, that of St. John the Evangelist, and also those of St. Stephen and the Holy Innocents, both of which could

between 1510 and 1640, over 80 percent (450 of 561) took place during the Christmas season.¹⁶ Playhouse receipts at the public theatres were also noticeably and consistently higher than average at this time of year.¹⁷ For early modern playgoers, then, not only was the season represented within *George a Greene* associated with role-playing and dramatic activity, but so was the time of year when it was originally performed.

Moreover, references to Martlemas beef and wafer cakes suggest resonances between the meal George offers his guests and early modern Christmas feasts. As Felicity Heal's important historical study demonstrates, feasting was more closely associated with this holiday than with any other.¹⁸ An account of the "Archbishop Tobie Matthew his Graces Guests this Christmas at Bishopesthorp 1624 & 1625," for instance, records banquets with as many as a hundred guests during the Christmas holidays.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that beef was particularly associated with Christmas feasts. In one ballad condemning the decay of traditional holiday charity, the speaker laments that "Christmas bread and Beefe is turn'd into stons."²⁰ Robert Armin's *Foole Vpon Foole*

be held to have scriptural warrant. The traditional structure of the Twelve Days was thus preserved, and this was confirmed by the Reformation of Elizabeth in 1559–60" (*Stations of the Sun*, 25). Although the Scottish Kirk repeatedly tried to crack down on Christmastide festivities from 1561 onward, it was, for the most part, unsuccessful, and English traditions during this season were able to carry on largely uninterrupted. See Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, 25–33, for an account of the Kirk's activities. For an important corrective to the mistaken view that "Scotland after the Reformation is grim and joyless" (123), see Todd, "Profane Pastimes." Focusing on Aberdeen and Perth, she notes that Christmas and New Year activities were particularly popular and attempts to abolish them encountered significant resistance.

¹⁶On household drama during Christmastide, see Greenfield, "Festive Drama at Christmas," as well as Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) and "'A Commony a Christmas Gambold or a Tumbling Trick': Household Theater," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 39–58. For statistics on Christmastide court performances, see R. Chris Hassel Jr., *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 6.

¹⁷See, for instance, Christmastide earnings recorded in Henslowe's diary (Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*). Roslyn Knutson notes that "Henslowe's sums are remarkably high for certain holidays," including those during the Christmas season, and that "the receipts are often comparable to those of a 'ne' performance" (*Repertory of Shakespeare's Company*, 25).

¹⁸Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). Heal notes that "[a]mong these various high days and holidays a sharp distinction must be drawn between Christmas and the rest, for all sources point remorselessly to the significance of the former season as the prime occasion in the year for the provision of general entertainment" (70). Indeed, household account books detailing weekly food costs record sharp increases in expenditures during the Christmas holidays; for example, Sir Nathaniel Bacon, who spent £7–9 in a typical week during the winter months, laid out £28 3s. 11d. during one week in mid-December 1594, and then £18 5s. 5d. and £19 6s. 8d. during the subsequent two weeks (72).

¹⁹British Library Lansdowne MS 973, fols. 41v–42r. References to Christmas in popular literature concur with archival evidence. One Protestant pamphlet refers to Christmas as the "tyme of the yeare men vse customablye to make feastes & banquettes and there vnto for to cal theyr frendes, louers & neighbours." Thomas Becon, *A Christmas Bankette Garnyshed with Many Pleasaunt and Deynty Disshes* (London, 1542), A2v. George Whetstone's marriage manual, *Aurelia. The Paragon of Pleasure and Princely Delights . . . Plentifully Garnished with Morall Notes, to Make It Profitable to the Regarder* (London, 1593), offers a similar observation, remarking that "according to the condition of time, in Christmas," one might "sooner . . . finde a friend feasting in the Hall, then walking in the field" (B1v).

²⁰"Christmas is My Name," in Hyder E. Rollins, *Old English Ballads, 1553–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 373. The version reproduced in Rollins's text is a transcription of the copy found in British Library Additional MS 38,599, fols. 142r–142v, a commonplace book dated to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Another version of the ballad, titled "Christmas Lamentation, For the Losse of his Acquaintance, Showing How He Is Forst to Leaue the Country, and Come to London" (London, 1635), contains similar lines: "Christmas beefe and bread, is turn'd into stons."

(1600) also links beef to Christmas hospitality when he describes how, during the season, a “gallant Knight kept open house for all commers, where Beefe, Beere, and Bread was no niggard.”²¹ Mutton and veal—the other two meats that George offers to Robin Hood—were also consumed during winter feasts. The Pewterers’ Company, for example, recorded payments “for beffe xxxj^six^d for 4 leggs motton & ij legg veale xxj^s” in their accounts for “the 14 of december 1615 quarter dyners / 8 messe expences.”²² Considering that a glover or shoemaker in London around the turn of the seventeenth century might earn no more than £3 6s. 8d. (or 66s. 8d.) a year,²³ the sums of money laid out for these meats are not insignificant.

The meal George offers clearly goes beyond the more homely food described in the nondramatic versions of the tale. In addition to Martlemas beef, the pinder tells his guests to eat their fill of “wafer cakes.” In the corresponding ballads, he simply gives them bread. According to the *OED*, a “wafer cake” was “[a] very light thin crisp cake, baked between wafer-irons; formerly often eaten with wine”²⁴—hence our modern word *waffle*. Wafer cakes were not everyday fare, but usually associated with feasts. They are listed in the inventories of the Manchester Manor Rental Books, which record expenditures for “Wyne wafers and ffrutes to ye burgesses on ye faire daye” in 1610, and “wyne, suger wafers & other ffrutes vppon ye townsmenn on ye ffaire daye” in 1611.²⁵ Wafer cakes were served as part of Lady Isabel Berkeley’s funeral feast in 1516, the first course of which consisted of “cakys, comfetts, and ale”; the second course of “marmelet, snoket, red wyne and claret”; and the third of “wafers and Blanch powder with romney and muskadele.”²⁶ It is suggestive to note in this context, then, that itinerant makers and vendors of wafer cakes were often associated with traveling entertainers. They were listed alongside players in statutes regulating “rogues” and “vagabonds,” and Alexandra Johnston suggests that the term *waferer* “may also have the force of ‘wayfarer.’”²⁷ Both wafer cakes and traveling players seem to have been associated, not with common meals, but with feasts marking special occasions.

In early modern usage, *wafer cake* sometimes had a derogatory meaning. One character in Porter’s *The Two Angry Women of Abington* (1599), for instance, insults another by calling him “You whoreson Wafer-cake.”²⁸ More specifically, the term could be used to imply fragility. In Dekker’s *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (1636), women’s “[w]alls of chastitie” are compared disparagingly to “walls of wafer-cakes.”²⁹ In Shakespeare’s

²¹ Robert Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole, or Six Sortes of Sottes* (London, 1600), A4v–B1r. See also the revised and enlarged edition of this text, Armin’s *A Nest of Ninnies* (London, 1608), B1r.

²² Guildhall Library MS 22,181. The pages of this volume are unnumbered. Foliating the pages myself, I would place this reference on fol. 16r.

²³ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58.

²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), 2nd ed., s.v. “wafer” (*n.*, def. 1a).

²⁵ *Records of Early English Drama: Lancashire*, ed. David George (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 64–65.

²⁶ *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry*, ed. R. W. Ingram (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 509.

²⁷ *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. Alexandra F. Johnston (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 871. See also *Records of Early English Drama: Devon*, ed. John Wasson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 578.

²⁸ Henry Porter, *The Pleasant Historie of the Two Angrie Women of Abington: With the Humorous Mirthe of Dick Coomes and Nicholas Prouerbes, Two Seruingmen. As It Was Lately Playde by the Right Honorable the Earle of Nottinghamm, Lord High Admirall, His Seruants* (London, 1599), I4r.

²⁹ Thomas Dekker, *The Wonder of a Kingdome* (London, 1636), B1v.

Henry V, Pistol tells Mistress Quickly that while he is away at the wars, she should “trust none: for Oathes are Strawes, mens Faiths are Wafer-Cakes.”³⁰ Shakespeare’s usage here simultaneously draws on two contradictory meanings of the term: on the one hand, a wafer cake was delicate, fragile, and insubstantial; on the other hand, *wafer cake* was also the term used to refer to communion bread—the truest “substance” of them all for pre-Reformation believers. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the same religious changes that had divested the Eucharist of its power to transubstantiate had also given the term *wafer cake* distinctly negative connotations. Anthony Wotton’s *Answer to a Popish Pamphlet* (1605), for instance, condemns those who believe God might be “crusht vp together into the compasse [of] a baggage Wafer cake.”³¹

In *George a Greene*, however, the term *wafer cake* invokes not post-Reformation animosity toward traditional Eucharistic practices, but rather positive associations with communal feasting. In having George offer wafer cakes to his guests rather than bread, the play simultaneously calls to mind both sacred and secular feasts. While religious observance, communal feasting, and theatrical entertainment may seem like three separate categories to us, for early modern audience members they were traditionally intertwined. Spectators at performance events today pay to be entertained; actors are, in a sense, service professionals, providing commercial recreation in exchange for a fee. For early modern audience members, however, sharing food and engaging in dramatic activity were long-standing rituals for marking holy days as well as practical solutions for parish fund-raising. “Charity” as a concept extended not only to financial contributions, but also to social hospitality and personal amity.³² Church “ales”—communal events involving eating and drinking—were a common method for financing building repairs and other local expenses.³³ Their connection to dancing and music has been

³⁰Shakespeare, *Henry V*, TLN 870–71; 2.3.50–51. Quotations from Shakespeare’s plays are drawn from Charlton Hinman, ed., *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1996), with through-line numbers (TLN) followed by act, scene, and line numbers from G. Blakemore Evans et al., eds., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997). In the quarto version of *Henry V*, Pistol’s words are slightly different, but the meaning of *wafer cakes* remains the same: “Trust none: the word is pitch and pay: / Mens words are wafer cakes” (Q1, C1r).

³¹Anthony Wotton, *An Ansvvere to a Popish Pamphlet, of Late Newly Forbished, and the Second Time Printed, Entituled: Certaine Articles, or Forcible Reasons Discovering the Palpable Absurdities, and Most Notorious Errors of the Protestants Religion* (London, 1605), R1r.

³²Judith M. Bennett, “Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 134 (1992): 21. See also Maria Moissà’s critique of Bennett’s definition of charity in “Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England,” *Past and Present* 154 (1997): 223–34; and Bennett’s response, “Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England: Reply,” *Past and Present* 154 (1997): 235–42, esp. 240–41.

³³Church ales persisted even when Reformation leaders tried to suppress them. According to Alexandra Johnston, faced with this kind of resistance, local communities would “respond . . . to reprimands from visitations, but then, as the need for ready cash for repairs became imperative again, parishes . . . recorded a sudden influx of cash from a church ale.” Johnston, “English Community Drama in Crisis: 1535–80,” in *Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Hindley (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999), 267. For the most famous expression of sentiment against church ales, see Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses: Contayning a Discouerie, or Briefe Summarie of Such Notable Vices and Imperfections, as Now Raigne in Many Christian Countreyes of the Worlde: but (Especiallie) in a Verie Famous Ilande Called Ailgna* (London, 1583), M4r–M6r. All subsequent quotations will be from the 1583 edition and will be included parenthetically in the text. The popular pamphlet was subsequently reprinted in 1584, 1585, and 1595. For more recent editions, see also Arthur Freeman, ed., *The Anatomie of Abuses* (New York: Garland, 1973) and *The Second Part of the Anatomie of Abuses* (New York: Garland, 1973), as well as Margaret Jane Kidnie, ed., *Philip Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002).

widely documented; less well known are their links to Robin Hood activity. REED scholars have uncovered some relevant records in this regard: in Netherbury, Dorset, an ale held in 1567–68 involved “Robin hoode and Littell John & the gentle men of the said parish the chief actors in it”;³⁴ in Yeovil, Somerset, where Robin Hood activity continued at least until 1607, the famous outlaw was also termed the “Keeper of the Ale.”³⁵ As Katherine French and others have argued, eating and playing together at church ales “encouraged neighborliness, shared experiences, and spiritual well-being that added to a sense of community membership and local identity.”³⁶ The financial obligations attendant on such events were, as she puts it, “not just another burden imposed on the laity by a remote clergy, but an expression of local, communal, and spiritual expectations . . . an expression of religious faith rather than simply a response to the demands of church doctrine or polity.”³⁷ For early modern playgoers, feasting and dramatic activity were not neutral forms of celebration or entertainment; they were ways of demonstrating social responsibility and commitment to the local parish.

Rather than exemplifying post-Reformation disregard for festive ritual, then, references to Martlemas beef and wafer cakes in *George a Greene* suggest continuities between Catholic and Protestant holiday practices. More importantly, they demonstrate the importance of moving beyond the representational narrative if we are to appreciate festivity’s impact on theatre. Indeed, interaction between performers and spectators was essential to seasonal celebrations and fostered communal bonds. At Gray’s Inn during the 1594–95 Christmas season, for example, a performance of Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* was but one of the many entertainments, which also included the election of a student as the prince, a display on horseback by his champion, and the unexpected arrival of a mock-ambassador from Russia. All three figures also par-

Ales continued into the seventeenth century. Richard Carew mentions them in his *The Survey of Cornwall* (1602), ed. F. E. Halliday (London: A. Melrose, 1953), 141, and toward the end of that century, John Aubrey wrote that “there were no rates for the poor even in my grandfather’s days: but for Kingston St. Michael (no small parish) the church ale at Whitsuntide did their business.” John Aubrey, *Wiltshire: The Topographical Collections of John Aubrey, F.R.S., A.D. 1659–1670*, ed. John Edward Jackson (Devizes, UK: H. Bull, 1862), 10–11, as quoted in David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 45. On ales in general, see also Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 121–26. Clopper points out that a variety of *ludi* (games, plays, and other recreational pastimes) may have been mistaken for plays about the lives of saints (15–17, 127–37). Against this viewpoint, see Sally-Beth MacLean, “Saints on Stage: An Analytical Survey of Dramatic Records in the West of England,” *Early Theatre* 2 (1999): 45–62; and Clifford Davidson, “British Saint Play Records: Coping with Ambiguity,” *Early Theatre* 2 (1999): 64–111.

³⁴ Dorset Record Office D1/7623, fol. 17v, as quoted in Johnston, “English Community Drama in Crisis,” 257.

³⁵ See Stokes, “Robin Hood and the Churchwardens,” 5–6, 9–10.

³⁶ Katherine L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 102. See also Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 125–26; and Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 358–65. However, see Sheila Lindenbaum, “Rituals of Exclusion: Feasts and Plays of the English Religious Fraternities,” in Twycross, *Festive Drama*, 54–65, for an important corrective to the notion that the rhetorical emphasis on communal identity in such festive observances was necessarily predicated on socially inclusive institutional practices.

³⁷ French, *People of the Parish*, 99–100. On church ales and other forms of local entertainment as essential aspects of lay religious culture, see also Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; and Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

ticipated in the festive meal itself.³⁸ In 1601, Queen Elizabeth's Twelfth Night celebration at Whitehall began with courtiers dancing, continued with what an Italian guest referred to as a "mingled comedy with pieces of music and dances,"³⁹ and ended with the ritual destruction by the Queen's ladies-in-waiting of a banquet of confectionary. At such Christmas celebrations, actors and audience members were joint participants in shared holiday customs. The physical spaces associated with feasts encouraged performance in the center of the floor, in the unlocalized space of the *platea*.⁴⁰ Drama in such contexts promoted what David Wiles has referred to as "concelebration"—not passive viewing, but active participation.⁴¹

In *George a Greene*, however, the invocation of feasting and conviviality does not translate to its literal enactment onstage. The shared meal is relegated to the *locus*: it takes place offstage in the imaginary world of the story. Audience members in the public theatres snacked on apples and nuts,⁴² not on wafer cakes and Martlemas beef. Even as references to these special foods called to mind holiday traditions, feasting was still contained within the fictional representation. The professional theatre, unable to offer actual communal repasts, instead displaced them into the dramatic narrative.

While it is tempting to see this bifurcation as evidence of drama's evolutionary development from ritual to art, we might also see it as an especially telling instance of the intersection of two different contemporaneous performance practices. The play's references to feasting construct the audience as participants in seasonal customs. In lieu of bodily presence at an actual table, playgoers could join in the feast by using their minds. Their "imaginarie Forces" (TLN 19; Prologue 18), as the Prologue to *Henry V* calls it, conjured up the Martlemas beef and wafer cakes typical of Christmastide. In asking spectators to do this mental labor, the play positioned them not as passive consumers of commercial entertainment, but as active co-celebrants of a festive event.

³⁸ Desmond Bland, ed., *Gesta Grayorum, or, the History of the High and Mighty Prince Henry Prince of Purpoole, Anno Domini 1594* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1968); Margaret Knapp and Michael Kobialka, "Shakespeare and the Prince of Purpoole: The 1594 Production of *The Comedy of Errors* at Gray's Inn Hall," *Theatre History Studies* 4 (1984): 70–81; Robert E. Burckhart, "The Surviving Shakespearean Playhouses: The Halls of the Inns of Court and the Excavation of the Rose," *Theatre History Studies* 12 (1992): 173–96; and David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147–49.

³⁹ "[U]na commedia mescolata, con musiche e balli." Quoted in Leslie Hotson, *The First Night of Twelfth Night* (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1954), 202. The Italian guest, a young noble named Orsino, Duke of Bracciano, is discussed at greater length in Hotson's work. See also Wiles, *Short History of Western Performance Space*, 145–47. For additional examples of Christmas festivities and drama in aristocratic households, see Westfall, *Patrons and Performance*.

⁴⁰ Although I use the terms *locus* and *platea* here in the sense offered by Robert Weimann in order to emphasize actor/audience interactivity at holiday events, his discussion of early modern dramaturgy gives primacy to spatial dynamics that I view as but one of many material conditions that constituted theatrical performance. As I argue elsewhere, the dramaturgical dynamics that Weimann assigns to physical space might more usefully be understood in terms of theatre's relationship to its own signifying practices. See Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, ed. Helen Higbee and William West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), as well as my revision of his formulation in "Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of *Locus* and *Platea*," *New Theatre Quarterly* 22 (2006): 283–98.

⁴¹ Wiles, *Short History of Western Performance Space*, 145.

⁴² Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 43–44.

Representation functioned not as a distancing mechanism, but as an alternative form of participation.⁴³

Involving the audience in this way integrated them into a unified whole, an affective community growing out of festive performance in the absence of the actual social ties found at parish events. Whereas today shared meals are viewed as personal engagements, early modern playgoers were predisposed to think of feasts as public enterprises.⁴⁴ Associated with group identity and the promotion of neighborliness, communal feasting bound together participants in social and spiritual fellowship. In the theatre, these cultural associations encouraged audience members to imagine themselves as part of a corporate unit. Although the communal identity thus forged was temporary, the resulting effects would, for all that, be no less real.⁴⁵ Indeed, the ephemerality of this performatively constructed community had its advantages. Playgoers were not bound by the same obligations in the theatre as they would be at parish events, which involved significant peer pressure—financial, social, and moral. Parishioners were expected to contribute their labor and material resources to festive events; attendance was strongly encouraged, if not mandatory; and failure to participate was viewed as willful separation from spiritual fellowship.⁴⁶ In the theatre, audiences could enjoy the experiential benefits of communal affiliation without the same strings attached.

⁴³ This performance dynamic parallels the situation with the religious drama. Playgoers were key participants in Corpus Christi cycles and other biblical plays. They represented the crowd condemning Christ at the Crucifixion or the masses that might be saved or damned at the Last Judgment. Anne Barton has argued that it was this audience function—that is, their role as representatives for all of humanity—that was taken over by the “everyman” figure in morality drama. Identifying with this protagonist, spectators, in essence, watched themselves—leading to a kind of double vision that Barton saw as contributing to a growing distinction in early modern dramaturgy between the play world and the real world. The shared meal in *George a Greene* might be viewed in a similar way, as an onstage surrogate for actual festive commensality. Barton’s interpretation usefully highlights the centrality of the audience’s role, which applies also to *George a Greene*. However, I disagree with her teleological narrative, whereby morality drama is seen as the evolutionary culmination of the biblical plays. Morality plays were not less “religious” than biblical plays, but a different forum for expression of spiritual beliefs. Indeed, if we are to judge by the popularity of moralities on the public stage, audiences found the “everyman” figure just as engaging as their own role as *populus* in the biblical plays. Similarly, *George a Greene* was not less “festive” than drama performed during actual holiday feasts, but offered a different performance mode for dealing with some of the same social energies. See Anne Righter [Barton], *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 23–31.

⁴⁴ As Heal puts it, “[f]or modern Western man hospitality is preponderantly a private form of behaviour, exercised as a matter of personal preference within a limited circle of friendship and connection” (*Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 1), whereas in early modern England “domestic beneficence and good entertainment was [*sic*] often a matter of public concern” (2).

⁴⁵ This performance dynamic is analogous to what we find at rock concerts or political rallies today. When a singer or speaker addresses the audience en masse with a locution such as “Hello, Chicago!” the crowd expresses its affiliation with this group identity by cheering in response. The integration of the audience is achieved performatively, rather than being founded on actual social bonds. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), Philip Auslander makes a similar observation, though from a different direction, when he argues that the sense of community produced among an audience at a live event is ultimately fictitious, deriving more from the feeling that the rest of the audience “clearly values something you value” (55) than from interpersonal connections developed over time as part of a community. His contention that “the communal bond unifying such an audience is most likely to be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity” (55) cannot be applied without modification to early modern theatre. See also Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

⁴⁶ On communal pressures to contribute to group events, see Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 109, and Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, 331–32. Heal notes that a sense of corporate identity was so pronounced that “it is often difficult to calculate who is entertaining whom at a particular municipal

There were also advantages for the playing company. By *not* enacting the feasting, actors were able to minimize expenses while using traditional ideas about festivity to reinforce the authority of the professional theatre. In early modern England, feasting was not merely an expression of amicable feeling, but a way to augment the host's social status. Gentry who held elaborate feasts were thought of as honorable, their reputations enhanced by their open hospitality. Town leaders also frequently used ritual commensality to reinforce their social standing.⁴⁷ In *George a Greene*, the pinder's function as host contributes to his authority, both within the fictional narrative and in the actual playhouse. Not only is he the town's principal representative in its dealings with outsiders such as Kendal and Robin Hood, but he is also the lead actor—and thus the leader—of the actual performance event.⁴⁸ The play activates these overlapping roles at the moment George offers Martlemas beef and wafer cakes. By collapsing the feasting inside the narrative with that which typically took place during the Christmas season, it mobilizes George's social authority as host within the world of the play and extends it outwards into the performance event itself. Positive cultural associations with feasting and, in particular, with the role of the host are here transferred to the actor-character-festive leader and, from there, disseminated into the audience experience.

By moving feasting from church ales and banquet halls to the fictional world within the dramatic representation, acting companies did not disavow ties to popular customs, but redeployed them to serve different performance conditions. Even as this new context altered actor/audience dynamics, it continued to promote traditional cultural values linking feasting to neighborliness and communal spirit. What changed was not the observance of festivities *per se*, but the performance practices used to engage with them.

Festive Combat

Whereas the shared meals in *George a Greene* illustrate the displacement of popular rituals *into* the fictional story, the pinder's fights with the Earl of Kendal and Robin Hood exemplify a different way festivity was incorporated into drama. Physical conflicts in the play are represented not as dangerous forms of violence, but as lively athletic contests that end in reconciliation. These moments in the narrative can be understood through the lens of festive combat—a form of competition that encouraged good fellowship and community bonds. Moreover, they reveal what happened when seasonal customs were actually performed onstage, rather than relocated into the imaginary world of the play.

Although fighting may seem to us entirely distinct from festive customs, it was an important aspect of seasonal observances in early modern England. During summer holidays, displays of martial prowess served both as entertainment and as a fund-

junct. Many of the feasts and celebrations that punctuated the corporate and guild year were not given for guests by a host or group of hosts, but were shared meals, self-financed or at least partially so, by the assembled company" (306).

⁴⁷ See Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, esp. 12–14, 24–25, 301–2, 389–93. The converse was also true. In Exeter, for example, the town elites were "confident in their control of their society, and therefore did not overtly seek the reinforcement that might have derived from elaborate commensality" (338).

⁴⁸ In this sense, George functions as the equivalent of the "summer lord" or "Robin Hood" mentioned in parish records. See below for further discussion of leaders of early modern popular festivities.

raising strategy. The leader of summer festivities was usually known as the “Summer Lord” or “Robin Hood.”⁴⁹ In the Thames Valley and in the west of England, Robin Hood served as the chief fund-raiser for the parish and was, as Alexandra Johnston has described, the “combined producer and stage manager of the festival events.”⁵⁰ His duties were similar to those of his winter counterpart, often referred to as the Lord of Misrule.⁵¹ Both functioned as event coordinators, managing administrative details and collecting and distributing funds. Both also served as chief role-players in the communal entertainments, promoting the revels by acting the principal parts. The Robin Hood of the summer games was not a subversive outlaw, but was chosen from the ranks of respectable parish leaders.⁵² He and his band of merry men solicited money for the community’s needs through a variety of techniques, including what Johnston refers to as “the combat game”—that is, “a wrestling match or an archery contest or a fight with staves.”⁵³

The physical conflicts in *George a Greene* especially resemble the last of these holiday sporting contests. During his fight with Kendal’s men, the pinder demands that his servant “fetch me my staffe” (D3r). The altercation with Robin Hood also involves the use of staves, with each of the outlaw’s men required to have “a good bat on his necke, / Able to lay a good man on the ground” (E3v).⁵⁴ The ensuing dialogue focuses further attention on this choice of weapon:

⁴⁹ In *The Early Plays of Robin Hood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), David Wiles argues that Robin Hood and the May Lord, or Summer King, were the same figure. However, see Johnston and MacLean, “Reformation and Resistance,” 183n15, and Johnston, “The Robin Hood of the Records,” in Potter, *Playing Robin Hood*, 27–44, esp. 29–30, 33, 36, for compelling arguments against Wiles’s assertion. For a view somewhere in between, see Paul Whitfield White’s introduction to the texts of the late sixteenth-century Robin Hood games in Knight and Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 281–82.

⁵⁰ Johnston, “Robin Hood of the Records,” 33, 40.

⁵¹ In his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), Philip Stubbes, the notorious antitheatricalist, indicates that summer games were organized by the “Graund-Captain (of all mischeefe) whome they innoble with the title of my Lord of Mis-rule” (M2r). Because other accounts more frequently give this name to the leader of winter revels, Stubbes’s remark suggests something of the interchangeability of these figures. Indeed, the account books of one winter king, who was in charge of the festivities in Mary Tudor’s household during the 1521–22 Christmas season, refer not only to masks and costumes—features we might expect to be common to both seasons—but also to bows and arrows and expenditures for morris bells and coats—customs normally thought to take place during summer revels (see Johnston, “Robin Hood of the Records,” 36). What distinguished the leaders of the summer and winter festivities from each other were the social formations of which these figures were a part. The summer lords and Robin Hoods were connected to the parish, which assumed responsibility for expenditures. The winter lords of misrule were members of aristocratic households or were elected by their peers at universities and at the law schools known as the Inns of Court; sometimes their expenses were covered by the corporate unit, and at other times they had to assume financial responsibility themselves. For an example of the latter, see Elisabeth Boucher, ed., *The Diary of Sir Simonds D’Ewes (1622–1624): Journal d’un Étudiant Londonien sous le Règne de Jacques 1^{er}* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1974), 48–49, 108–15, 125. At the Inns of Court, funds for festivities could also be raised through gambling games and fines levied against those who refused to serve as festive leaders (see Horner, “Christmas at the Inns of Court,” 44, 47, 51n16).

⁵² For evidence of “Robin Hoods” who were churchwardens or other prominent parish leaders, see Marshall, “Gathering in the Name of the Outlaw,” and Stokes, “Robin Hood and the Churchwardens.”

⁵³ Johnston, “Robin Hood of the Records,” 34–35. For further accounts of Robin Hood activities, see Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, and Hutton, *Stations of the Sun*, 270–74.

⁵⁴ Although the outlaw initially instructs his men to “Bend vp your bowes, and see your strings be tight, / The arrowes keene, and euery thing be ready” (E3r), this weapon is quickly thrown over in favor of staves. Bows and arrows were traditionally associated with Robin Hood both in the ballads

SCARLET: I will haue Frier Tukes.
 MUCH: I will haue little Iohns.
 ROBIN: I will haue one made of an ashen plunke,
 Able to beare a bout or two. (E3v)

Staff-fighting is also the primary mode of combat in several other scenes. The play makes much of the “ancient custome of *Vaile staffe*” (G2r), a tradition whereby “none may beare his staffe vpon his necke,” but must “traile it all along throughout the towne” (F2r). All who fail to abide by the custom must “haue a bout” (F2r) with the local shoemaker.

Beyond the choice of weapons, fighting in *George a Greene* also resembles festive sport in that both end in reconciliation. Real-life Robin Hood games integrated individual parish members into a communal whole by encouraging their active participation in staged fights, both as spectators and as combatants. Funds generated from these events were fed back into the parish to support community needs. This same ethic of assimilation can be found in the Robin Hood narratives. Both ballads and prose fiction frequently describe the outlaw fighting all day long with an equally skilled opponent before finally admitting that he has met his match and inviting his rival to join his band of merry men.⁵⁵ In one prose account, extant in manuscript form only, one of the members “recruited” through this method is George a Greene:

Whersoever he [Robin] hard [heard] of any that were of unusual strength and hardynes, he would disgyse himselfe, and, rather then foyle, go like a begger to become acqeynted with them, and after he had tryed them with fyghting, never give them over tyl he had used means to drawe them to lyve after his fashion. After such maner he procurd the Pynner of Wakefeyld to become one of his company, and a freyr called Muchel, though some say he was another kynd of religious man, for that the order of fryers was not yet sprung up.⁵⁶

Combat is here not the result of an accidental meeting, still less of a violent encounter, but a strategy that Robin Hood consciously employs to expand his group of follow-

and in parish Robin Hood celebrations. John Wasson notes that in 1588, when Robin Hood gatherings were ended at Chagford, Devon, the “summer rode” was sold off, but Robin Hood’s “silver arrow” was retained; see, Devon Record Office, MS Chagford Add/A PW 3, fol. 32, quoted in “The *St. George and Robin Hood Plays* in Devon,” *Medieval English Theatre* 2 (1980): 67–68. He speculates that this arrow was “Robin Hood’s prize for winning the archery contest” (68). He also notes another similar reference in the accounts of Exeter St. John’s, which records expenses for “renovation of St. Edmund’s arrow for Robin Hood” (Devon Record Office, MS D.D. 36769, nb 1, quoted on 68).

⁵⁵See Knight, *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript*, xx, and Marshall, “Gathering in the Name of the Outlaw,” 81. For a similar argument focusing on parallels between Robin Hood tales and the institutional structures of local parishes, see John Marshall, “‘Comyth in Robyn Hode’: Paying and Playing the Outlaw in Croscombe,” *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 32 (2001): 345–68. Citing Beat Kümin’s work, Marshall argues that “the institutional principles upon which parish assemblies were founded bear striking resemblance to those underlying the Greenwood. The parish . . . was sustained by a system of shared values that emphasised the horizontal ties that bound its members, rather than the vertical line of hierarchy that divided them. . . . In addition, Robin’s legendary means of acquiring wealth for redistribution may only have been adopted by the parish at the symbolic level of game, but the charitable ends were practically the same” (359). See also Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400–1560* (Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1996), esp. 37–39.

⁵⁶British Library Sloane MS 780, formerly 715, fol. 157r. This manuscript is generally referred to as “The Life of Robin Hood” and is dated to circa 1600. I am grateful to Thomas Hahn of the University of Rochester for a copy of the transcription above, which is drawn from his work-in-progress for a published edition of the document. Thanks also to Henry Griffy of Ohio State University for pointing me to an earlier transcription of the document in Thoms, *Early English Prose Romances*, 2:124–37.

ers. Of the men of “unusual strength and hardynes” that he tests in this manner, the two mentioned by name (the “Pynner of Wakefeyld” and the “freyr called Muchel”) both appear in our play. The account suggests not only a connection in the popular imagination between the pinder and the outlaw, but also the centrality of fighting to their relationship. Moreover, the fact that, before being admitted to Robin Hood’s men, all potential recruits must be “tried . . . with fyghting” suggests the importance of combat as a mode of social incorporation.

In the play *George a Greene*, physical conflict is likewise represented as the means for integration into the community. When George “*fighths with the Shoemakers, and beates them all downe,*” his erstwhile opponents invite him to “crush a pot before we part” (F3r). The pinder responds:

A pot you slaue, we will haue an hundred.
Heere, Will Perkins, take my purse,
Fetch me a stand of Ale, and set in the Market place,
That all may drinke that are athirst this day. (F3r)⁵⁷

Even though the pinder “swinge[s] . . . well” (F3r) the shoemakers, they clearly bear him no ill will. Moreover, camaraderie is extended from combatants to spectators, with George fronting the money for an entire community’s drinking (“That *all* may drinke”; emphasis added). When the pinder discusses seating arrangements, he further suspends social hierarchies in favor of communal equality: “You that are strangers,” he enjoins, “place your selues where you will” (F3v). Earlier in the scene, the shoemaker specifically uses the term “strangers” to distinguish insiders from outsiders.⁵⁸ The fight transforms these “strangers” into neighbors; combat is not disruptive, but instead promotes conviviality.⁵⁹

The figure of George a Greene as friendly combatant appears to have had deep associations with traditional seasonal observances—associations that extended outside the theatre and no doubt informed the play. In *The Pinder of Wakefield*, a jest book published in 1632, Kendal’s men challenge George to “play with them on Midsummer day next comming at all manner of weapons whatsoeuer,” followed the next morning by “a match at footeball” and later “in the afternoone to wrestle with them” (A3r).⁶⁰ A prose romance version of the story, found in a manuscript at Lambeth Palace Library, also links the pinder to festive practices. Here, upon encountering George and Robin

⁵⁷ The subsequent stage direction, “*They bring out the stande of ale, and fall a drinking*” (F3r), indicates that this action takes place onstage.

⁵⁸ The shoemaker’s explanation of the custom of “*Vaile staffe*” (G2r) refers to those unaware of the practice as “stranger[s]”: “My friend, I see thou art a stranger heere, / Else wouldest thou not haue questiond of the thing. / This is the towne of merrie Bradford, / And here hath beene a custome kept of olde, / That none may beare his staffe vpon his necke, / But traile it all along throughout the towne, / Vnlesse they meane to haue a bout with me” (F2r).

⁵⁹ Post-combat reconciliation through communal drinking is also a feature of the prose versions of the story. In the account of the fight with Kendal’s men found in the 1632 jest book (see footnote 7 above), as soon as the wounds of those “that were hurt were drest,” the entire company repairs to “my Host Banks” where “to drinking they went merrily” (F1v–F2r). In the Lambeth Palace Library prose romance manuscript (see footnote 8 above), after George and Robin Hood fight with the shoemakers, all are reconciled when the pinder “presently commanded a barrel of the best and strongest ale should be brought and set in the streets” and “call’d for a deep wayssel-bowl” with which he drinks to the health of his erstwhile opponents (chap. 12).

⁶⁰ See footnote 7 above.

Hood, the shoemakers “bid them down with their may-poles, and withal began to strike their staves from their necks” (chap. 12).⁶¹ This reference to staves as “may-poles” accords with the seasonal resonances of the “country morris-dance” that the shoemakers present after the fight is over (chap. 12). Richard Brathwaite’s *A Strappado for the Diuell* (1615) also associates George a Greene explicitly with May games, when it juxtaposes “[t]he Pindars valour and how firme he stood, / In th’Townes defence ‘gainst th’Rebel Robin-hood” with “[h]is many May games which were to be seene, / Yeerely presented vpon Wakefield greene.”⁶² All of these versions of the pinder’s story link fighting with the summertime holidays.

Given these festive associations, it is especially significant that fighting in the play also echoed stand-alone athletic displays. Sporting contests were regularly staged at various London venues, including the public playhouses. They were not only part of representational dramas, but also functioned as popular entertainments in their own right. *George a Greene* invokes these spectator sports when it presents the pinder’s altercation with Kendal as a kind of prizefight:⁶³

GILB: Come, my Lord, cheerely, Ile kill him hand to hand.
 KEND: A thousand pound to him that strikes that stroke.
 GEORG: Then giue it me, for I will haue the first.
Here they fight, George kills sir Gilbert, and takes the other two prisoners. (D3v)

Although the fight results in death, the dialogue foregrounds issues of competition and reward. Who will strike the first stroke? Who will win a thousand pounds? These are the questions that, at least rhetorically, precipitate onstage combat. What is at stake in this scene is what was at stake in stand-alone athletic contests.⁶⁴

George’s conflict with Robin Hood is also presented as an athletic contest. In the ballads, this fight with the outlaw follows the “Robin Hood meets his match” motif: lengthy combat with a single opponent that lasts “a long summer’s day, / A summer’s day so long.”⁶⁵ The theatrical version, by contrast, is organized as a series of competi-

⁶¹ See footnote 8 above for a more complete description of the Lambeth Palace Library manuscript.

⁶² Richard Brathwaite, *A Strappado for the Diuell. Epigrams and Satyres Alluding to the Time, with Diuers Measures of No Lesse Delight. By Misoasukos, to his Friend Philokrates* (London, 1615), O6r (emphasis in original). The passage continues by making explicit that the games here described also involved the dancing and music typical of May festivities. Wakefield Green, it directly states, is “[w]here louely Iugge and lustie Tib would go, / To see Tom-liuely turne vpon the toe; / Hob, Lob, and Crowde the fidler would be there, / And many more I will not speake of here” (O6r).

⁶³ The term *prizefighting* is sometimes understood to refer only to the sport of boxing, or pugilism. However, the texts I discuss below make clear that the meaning of *prize* in early modern usage was more expansive.

⁶⁴ For more information about stand-alone athletic contests and fights in London arenas, including the public theatres, see Mary McElroy, “Organized Sporting Contests in the Early English Professional Theater,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport / Revue Canadienne de l’Histoire des Sports* 21 (1990): 30–48, as well as two essays McElroy has co-authored with Kent Cartwright, “Expectation, True Play, and the Duel in Hamlet,” *Arete: The Journal of Sport Literature* 1 (1983): 39–56; and “Public Fencing Contests on the Elizabethan Stage,” *Journal of Sport History* 13 (1986): 193–211. For analysis of cultural discourses surrounding fighting and sports, see Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Gregory M. Colón Semenza, *Sport, Politics, and Literature in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

⁶⁵ Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 147–49, stanza 5. See footnote 7 for a discussion of the different versions of the ballads.

tions against different parties. George matches first with Scarlet, then with Much, and finally with Robin Hood:

GEORGE: Sirra, darest thou trie me?
 SCARLET: I sirra, that I dare.
They fight, and George a Greene beats him.
 MUCH: How now? what art thou downe?
 Come, sir, I am next.
They fight, and George a Greene beates him.
 ROBIN HOOD: Come sirra, now to me, spare me not,
 For Ile not spare thee.
 GEORGE: Make no doubt, I will be as liberrall to thee.
They fight, Robin Hood stayes. (F1r–F1v)

This sequential structure—with separate fights taking place one after another—was typical of actual athletic contests.⁶⁶ It also resembles the description of George's fight with Kendal's men in the 1632 jest book, in which each pair of contestants, referred to as "gamesters," plays "three bouts" (F1v).

Indeed, in this latter text, combat with Kendal's men is explicitly imagined as a prizefighting display akin to those staged in London's professional performance arenas. When the earl and the pinder first agree to a fight, George indicates his intention to "haue printed bills" (A3v), a common practice for advertising performance events in London.⁶⁷ The episode proper, titled "How the *Kendall* men and *Hallifax* men, according to promise, came to play their Prize with *George* and his Companions" (E4v), then begins, as stand-alone athletic contests did, with a procession and proclamation to gather the audience:

In the morning, as the order is, the Drumms and Colours went vp and down the streets, which made such a great concourse of people: The weapons were brought and throwne downe, George and his Companions on the one side, and the Hallifax and the Kendall on the other side; and to it they went. (E4v)

This fight is clearly represented as a spectator sport. The description of the event is peppered liberally with references to the audience, which periodically gives "a great shout" and twice cries "Wakefield hath got the Prize" (F1r–F1v).⁶⁸ Like prizefights in London playhouses, the show takes place on a raised platform, referred to as a "Stage" (F1r).⁶⁹ The event's conclusion is marked by the sounding of drums and trumpets, also employed in playhouses for both theatrical productions and athletic contests.⁷⁰ Brief

⁶⁶ See McElroy, "Organized Sporting Contests," 33, and also McElroy and Cartwright, "Public Fencing Contests," 199–200.

⁶⁷ See Tiffany Stern, "'On Each Wall and Corner Poast': Playbills, Title-Pages, and Advertising in Early Modern London," *English Literary Renaissance* 36 (2006): 57–89.

⁶⁸ The longer ballad in the Forrester's manuscript (see note 7) describing George a Greene's fight with Robin Hood also foregrounds the role of the audience. The outlaw tells Little John and Will Scathlock to "stand you in ken / This combatt to behould," and explicitly warns them not to "medle with vs / I charge you on paine of life" (ll.55–58).

⁶⁹ "[A]t the third bout Miles hoskt [*sic*] the Kendall mans Halbert out of his hands, and with the but end of his owne threw him cleane off the Stage; that there was a great shout among all the people" (F1r). Note that Horsman's edition of *The Pinder of Wakefield* emends "hoskt" to read "hefft" (54 and 95), but I retain the spelling of the original.

⁷⁰ "[T]he people gaue a great shout, the Drums did beat, the Trumpets did sound, and the Masters of Defence, gaue the Prize to the Wakefield Townsamen. Then all cryed Wakefield, Wakefield" (F1v). On

stage directions, such as “*They fight, and George a Greene beats him*” (F1r), offer few clues as to how fights in plays might have been enacted. The 1632 jest book’s description of the fight with Kendal’s men underscores connections between drama and sport: both were entertainments presented before spectators and associated with festivity. Indeed, connections between theatre and combat extended far beyond early modern London: even as late as 1709, “play acting and prize fighting” were both outlawed together in an order issued by the Governor’s Council of New York.⁷¹

If feasting in *George a Greene* exemplifies one way that festivity was transformed in the playhouses, combat highlights a second, different strategy: theatre could literally enact holiday customs onstage. Performers did not simply allude to fighting; they engaged in the actual practice. Festive combat was especially well-suited for live enactment because it could be spectacular without extensive monetary outlay.⁷² Moreover, it allowed playing companies to activate and capitalize on certain notions of spectatorship. By situating audience members as witnesses to actual onstage combat, theatre placed them in the same position they would have inhabited at parish events: as spectators to communal ritual. This role was not a passive one, but was understood as an essential form of participation. One royal injunction from 1569–70, for instance, punished not only organizers and performers of prohibited entertainments in Cambridge, but also those who were “merely” spectators:

No fencing-, fighting-, or dancing-school nor dicing house, nor cock-fight, nor bear- or bull-baiting shall be within the town of Cambridge or be attended (there) upon a fine of 40 s to be imposed on the one who has violated this statute or any part of it.

None of the students shall play at ‘shields,’ nor stand by as an idle onlooker of those who do play, nor be present at a cock-fight or a fencing game or dancing or a bear- or bull-baiting upon a penalty of 3 s 4 d as often as he is punished in this matter.⁷³

That is, the same fine was levied against the *existence* of such activities (the fact that they “shall be within the town”) as it was against those who “attend” there. For students, the fine applied equally to those who “play at ‘shields’” and those who “stand by as an idle onlooker.” In a sense, we might say, spectators and participants received equal fines because spectators were those who participated through their eyes. In such a context, fighting was not a “spectator sport” per se, but a practice that integrated viewers into both the presentational action and the social formations that those actions reinscribed.

the use of drums and trumpets in playhouses, see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574–1642*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 156. On drums and trumpets as advertisement for plays, see Stern, ““On Each Wall and Corner Poast,”” 58, esp. note 3.

⁷¹ Don B. Wilmeth and Tice L. Miller, eds., *The Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

⁷² Spectacular food was much more complicated to stage. “Marchpane,” or marzipan, carefully crafted to resemble animals or buildings, is recorded at aristocratic feasts, but it involved significant skill and expense to produce. Chris Meads speculates on the use of pasteboard to represent marzipan in the public playhouses in *Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in English Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 59–69. For stage directions instructing characters to enter bearing napkins, an economical way of making figures appear “as if” from an offstage meal, see Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 148–49.

⁷³ *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, ed. Alan H. Nelson, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 1144.

Feasting and fighting, then, exemplify not merely two different festive practices that were represented in early modern drama, but two different performance modes through which popular customs were transformed in the playhouse. Moreover, each of these performance modes came with consequent participatory modes. Feasting enhanced audience affiliation with communal identity by constructing imagination as a form of festive participation and by associating representation as a performance mode with holiday ritual. Fighting mobilized a different set of strategies toward the same end: by adopting combat as presentational action, it made playhouse spectatorship into a form of festive participation. By encouraging playgoers to take on the role of spectator-participant at an actual holiday ritual, theatre performatively constructed the kinds of communal identity that were produced by real-life parish events. Although it is tempting to view feasting and fighting as polar opposites—one positive and unifying, the other negative and divisive—both generated revenue for the community and strengthened social bonds. In the theatre, these seemingly disparate practices worked together to promote commercial performance as itself a holiday tradition.

The Wearing of Livery

As we have seen, festive practices could be woven into early modern theatre in radically different ways. Communal feasting and athletic contests in *George a Greene* might be understood as two end points on a continuum: at one extreme, holiday customs could be shifted into the representational fiction; at the other, they could be literally enacted onstage. Although this model is a bit schematic, its linearity directs our attention to a third possibility: the incorporation of popular customs in the theatre at the intersection of representation and presentation. This “intermediary point” can be understood most clearly through an analysis of livery in *George a Greene*.

In its most basic form, livery—distinctive clothing marked out by color, cut, and insignia—identified persons as members of particular households. Retainers might also receive part of their salary in the form of clothes. Livery thus served two distinct functions: it was a symbolic marker of identity as well as economic compensation for services rendered. These two functions intersected in dramatic representations of household livery practices. In Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, when Launcelot leaves Shylock in order to serve Bassanio, the latter bestows livery on Launcelot as a sign that he has been accepted: “Take leaue of thy old Maister, and enquire / My lodging out, giue him a Liuerie / More garded then his fellowes: see it done” (TLN 713–15; 2.2.153–55). Livery’s household function is also represented in *George a Greene*. When the servant Jenkin “conjures” George’s beloved, his reward is a “sute of green, and twentie crownes besides” (D4r). Later, when Robin Hood invites George to join his merry men, he asks:

George, wilt thou forsake Wakefield,
And go with me,
Two liueries will I giue thee euerie yeere,
And fortie crownes shall be thy fee. (F1v)⁷⁴

⁷⁴Except for the longer of the two ballads in the Forresters manuscript, the giving of livery and a fee in exchange for service can also be found in all of the *George a Greene* ballads. In one version of the ballad, appended to the end of the 1632 jest book, the language used to describe the episode even strongly resembles the lines in the dramatic version: “If thou wilt forsake thy Pinder his craft, / And wend to the greene wood with mee, &c. / Thou shalt haue thy Liuerie twice in the yeere, / And forty

In offering not only clothing but also monetary payment, these scenes underscore the economics of allegiance. However, livery was not a neutral form of currency. It was both payment for services rendered and, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass demonstrate, “a form of incorporation, a material mnemonic that inscribed obligation and indebtedness upon the body.”⁷⁵ Jenkin’s reward as George’s servant is to be physically marked *as* George’s servant; Robin Hood’s men must accept gifts of clothing that reinscribe them as Robin Hood’s men.

These representations of livery as household practice are fairly straightforward. When we move beyond the fictional narrative to the actual performance event, however, livery’s function becomes more complicated. In *The Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock first appears with Launcelot after the servant’s switch in employers, the stage direction reads: “Enter Iew, and his man that was[,] the Clowne” (TLN 835; 2.5.0). As he walks onstage, Shylock declares, “Well, thou shall see, thy eyes shall be thy iudge, / The difference of old *Shylocke* and *Bassanio*” (TLN 836–37; 2.5.1–2; emphasis in original). Within the imaginary fiction, these words emphasize differences between the two households—mirroring the cultural and racial differences thematized in the play as a whole. In performance, however, Shylock’s comment draws attention to the servant’s change in costume. Since Launcelot’s new allegiance is visually marked by new livery, it is the audience whose “eyes shall be [their] iudge, / The difference of old *Shylocke* and *Bassanio*.” Livery within the narrative here ironically highlights the actors’ sartorial practices.

A similar interplay between representational fiction and presentational action can be seen in *George a Greene*. Although we cannot be certain, the original actors in the play were probably dressed in green. Henslowe’s theatrical inventories record “vj grene cottes for Roben Hoode,” “j green gown for Maryan,” and numerous other items clearly meant for the famous outlaw.⁷⁶ When George and Robin Hood offer green clothing to their retainers, their actions refer not only to the household function of livery within the fictional narrative, but also to the material conditions of theatrical presentation itself. Here, however, the use of livery moves beyond its function in *The Merchant of Venice* to foreground continuities between playing and festivity. At summer revels, parish members playing Robin Hood and his men would often be clothed in “Kendal green.”⁷⁷ Philip Stubbes wrote that the summer lord’s followers wore “liueries, of

Crownes shall be thy fee, &c.” (I3v). Other versions of the ballad place more emphasis on the color of the livery—green and brown—and foreground the giving of livery while omitting the promise of a monetary fee. All are variations of the two ballads found in Dobson and Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*.

⁷⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20. On livery and servants working against their masters’ interests, see Amanda Bailey, *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 51–76.

⁷⁶ These include “j hatte for Roben Hoode,” a “Roben Hoodes sewtte,” and “the fryers trusse in Roben Hoode” (Foakes, *Henslowe’s Diary*, 317–18, 322–23). In addition to livery, the color green also features in the play’s references to Martlemas beef. According to Robert Boyle’s treatise, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours First Occasionally Written, among Some Other Essays to a Friend, and Now Suffer’d to Come Abroad as the Beginning of an Experimental History of Colours* (London, 1664), A5r, b3v [sic], and Aa8r–Aa8v, the process of preserving beef with salt frequently caused it to take on a green tinge. I am grateful to Bruce Smith for bringing this reference to my attention. For more on green, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. chap. 6, “The Curtain between the Theatre and the Globe,” which briefly addresses questions of costume and livery.

⁷⁷ For the use of Kendal green in Robin Hood games, see Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, 13; Sally-Beth MacLean, “King Games and Robin Hood: Play and Profit at Kingston upon Thames,” *Research*

green, yellow or some other light wanton colour" (M2r),⁷⁸ and his account concurs with evidence from churchwardens' books and council records.⁷⁹ Green livery was also featured during winter festivities. Henry Machyn notes in his diary that, during the 1551–52 Christmas season, followers of "the kynges lord of myssrule" each wore "a balderyke of yelow and grene abowt ther nekes" as they processed through London.⁸⁰ At the Inns of Court, holiday revels included a "Master of the Game" arrayed in green velvet and a "Ranger of the Forest" dressed in green satin and carrying a green bow and arrows.⁸¹

Beyond the similarity in color, there was also a similarity in function. Both professional theatres and seasonal celebrations employed clothing as symbolic markers of identity. Yet, in both cases, those signifiers did not point to stable, fixed identity. Whereas livery in the household context clearly defined social role and status, in both the festive and theatrical contexts it signaled shifting and ephemeral identities. Allegiance to the local Robin Hood was temporary, confined to holiday time. Sartorial markers in the theatre were similarly temporary signifiers. Green clothing might distinguish a member of Robin Hood's band in one play while serving a very different function in another. The same actor wore different costumes not only on successive days, but also, given the prevalence of doubling, within a single play. Indeed, the practice of a single player taking on multiple roles became an increasingly essential component of early modern performance. The fifteenth-century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* included twelve characters divided among nine different performers. By the early years of Elizabeth's reign, each actor took, on average, three to four parts in a single play.⁸² By the end of the sixteenth century, we find that, in *The Seven Deadly Sins, Part Two* (c. 1590), John Sincler played five different roles and Richard Cowley played seven.⁸³ Clearly, a system where clothing indicated stable identity could not be literally enacted onstage. In a theatre that required extensive doubling of parts, audiences had to identify characters by costume, not by actors' faces.

Holiday rituals and public playhouses also made use of livery's other function: in these contexts, as in the household setting, livery served not only as identity marker,

Opportunities in Renaissance Drama 29 (1986–87): 89; Stokes, "Robin Hood and the Churchwardens," 5; and Wasson, "St. George and Robin Hood Plays in Devon," 67.

⁷⁸ For the relation between the terms "summer lord" and "Robin Hood," see footnote 49.

⁷⁹ The churchwardens of Thame, Oxfordshire, noted payments in 1555 for "13 yards of green" and "2½ yards of yellow cotton" for coats for summer morris dancers (Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, 5). In Aberdeen, a procession involving Robin Hood required "arrayment made in green and yellow" (13).

⁸⁰ John Gough Nichols, ed., *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, from A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563* (London: The Camden Society, 1848; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1968), 13. The parade, which took place on 4 January, was led by "a standard of yelow and grene sylke with Sant Gorge," followed by musicians, and then "a gret company all in yelow and gren" (13). Although red, blue, and other colors were also associated with the winter lords of misrule (see Machyn's diary entry on page 28, for instance), the repetition of green and yellow in these accounts is nevertheless noteworthy.

⁸¹ William Dugdale, *Origines Juridicales, or Historical Memorials of the English Laws, Courts of Justice, Forms of Tryall, Punishment in Cases Criminal, Law Writers, Law Books, Grants and Settlements of Estates, Degree of Serjeant, Innes of Court and Chancery* (London, 1666), as cited in Horner, "Christmas at the Inns of Court," 45. Although Dugdale wrote later in the seventeenth century, the practices he describes took place in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries at the Inner Temple, where Christmas games frequently involved a hunt or mock hunt.

⁸² W. R. Streitberger, "Personnel and Professionalization," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 337–55, 340.

⁸³ Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 105.

but also as object of economic exchange. Robin Hood revels were not leisure activities outside the realm of commerce, but were meant to generate revenue for parish needs. As David Wiles notes, the term livery could be used to designate either clothing or paper badges:

The great liveries were undoubtedly those given by Robin as Lord to his selected company, the small were those sold to spectators. The great liveries would have been garments or partial garments made either of painted cloth or of paper and having the Lord's emblem painted onto them. The same emblem appeared on the paper livery badges, and certified that the wearer was a recognised retainer of the Summer Lord.⁸⁴

Paper livery badges were sold to spectators in exchange for a small donation. According to Stubbes, participants wore "badges & cognizances in their hats or caps openly" (M3r). Parishes might sell anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand badges bearing the insignia of Robin Hood or the May Lord.⁸⁵ These figures are quite large when compared with population records and suggest that participants from neighboring parishes would travel to the locations of revels.⁸⁶ Like the selling of raffle tickets at church bazaars today, livery badges were a form of fund-raising for the local community. In the theatre, livery also served an economic function. Early modern actors were, quite literally, traffickers in the used-clothing trade. Theatrical producers such as Philip Henslowe were also pawnbrokers and secondhand clothing dealers. Some of what they bought was, in fact, *real* livery—clothing bestowed on servants as compensation for their labor. Henslowe and others sold these to the acting companies for use as costumes in theatrical productions.⁸⁷

Both festive practices and theatrical performance, then, mobilized a duality inherent in livery's household function as both identity marker and commodity. However, in these performance contexts, livery's semiotic and economic functions intersected in complicated ways. Costumes in the professional theatre were granted the power to signify identity. Yet a costume appropriate for use only in a single play was a poor financial investment.⁸⁸ Even as clothing was essential for constituting and differentiating

⁸⁴ Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, 13.

⁸⁵ At Reading in 1501, 200 liveries were prepared for the summer games; at Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, 400 badges were supplied in 1563 (Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, 9, 13–14). At Kingston upon Thames, payments are recorded for 600 badges in 1537, 900 badges in 1516, and 2,000 badges in 1520 (MacLean, "King Games and Robin Hood," 86, and Wiles, *Early Plays of Robin Hood*, 13). The number of pins used to attach the livery badges also suggests something of the scale of summer festivities. At the Kingston games, 1,700 pins were purchased in 1509, and 3,000 pins were purchased in 1536 (MacLean, "King Games and Robin Hood," 87).

⁸⁶ As MacLean notes in the case of Kingston, the population of the town was small enough that "even if every man, woman and child in Kingston parish purchased a livery from Robin Hood, there are some years in which we have another 500 people or so to account for" ("King Games and Robin Hood," 87). See also Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, 113–20, who, although he does not discuss livery specifically, offers evidence that residents of neighboring towns were among the target audience for seasonal games.

⁸⁷ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 181–93. For more on the secondhand clothing trade and its ties to theatre as well as to thievery, see also Natasha Korda, "The Case of Moll Frith: Women's Work and the 'All-Male Stage,'" in *Women Players in England, 1500–1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 71–87.

⁸⁸ Costumes were frequently the most costly investment that players had to make. Whereas the writing of plays usually cost around £6, a woman's gown might cost up to three or four times that amount. Indeed, "[t]he Earl of Leicester paid £543 for seven doublets and two cloaks, at an average cost for

among roles, it could be transferred from one play to another only when evacuated of fixed symbolic meaning. Both qualities were central to the economic viability of the theatres. Livery in the festive context functioned in similar ways. During real-life holiday observances, livery badges operated as markers of identity. At the same time, the actual purpose of selling these badges was to raise funds for parish needs. Participants were well aware that such symbols of allegiance were temporary and nonbinding; it was only because livery badges were *not* “real” that they could be sold. Both professional theatre and seasonal festivity needed livery to work in two contradictory ways at once: livery’s symbolic resonances depended on traditional understandings of clothing as identity marker, but at the same time, this semiotic function had to be erasable in order for livery to serve as an object of economic exchange.

If feasting and combat in *George a Greene* exemplify two different modes through which theatre incorporated festive practices, livery offers a third possibility: by integrating holiday traditions into the very semiotics of the medium itself, theatre could simultaneously represent and enact festive customs. By including as part of the story the bestowing of livery, the play calls to mind ways in which clothing might signify stable social identity. Jenkin’s “sute of green” (D4r) denotes him as George’s servant; George’s “[t]wo liueries . . . euerie yeere” (F1v) will mark him as one of Robin Hood’s men. At the same time, theatre’s commercial success required clothes to operate as mobile signifiers, pointing to shifting and multiple signifieds. Rather than obscuring the fact that livery’s economic function forced its semiotic function to pull in two different directions, theatre associated this potentially problematic contradiction with festive role-playing.

In doing so, professional players used their own semiotic system to foster greater audience investment. Whereas feasting and combat worked toward similar ends by encouraging participatory notions of imagination and spectatorship, livery capitalized on the participatory connotations of financial contributions at parish festivities. In purchasing livery badges, spectators at summertime games became active co-celebrants and co-creators of the performance event. It is not merely that holiday rituals required financial backing, but rather that charitable donations were themselves a form of festive role-playing. Badges signified both economic and theatrical support: they marked wearers as donors *and* as Robin Hood’s followers. This overlap between the semiotic and economic functions of livery incorporated spectators at parish celebrations into the social body. That this form of participation was essential to group identity may be seen in Philip Stubbes’s complaint that those who refused to purchase livery badges were “mocked, & flouted at, not a little” (M3r).

In the public playhouses, such forms of social pressure no longer applied in the same way. Audience members paid admission at the door. As in parish games, an economic contribution was required of spectators, but that monetary investment no longer guaranteed active participation in the role-playing itself. The theatrical support of playgoers had to be solicited in other ways. Connecting costumes in the public theatres to seasonal livery practices transformed the entrance fee into a contribution

each item rather higher than the price Shakespeare paid for a house in Stratford” (Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 13, quoted in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 178). As Jones and Stallybrass so aptly put it, “[w]hatever we might think about the price of an Armani suit, we could not equate its cost with the price of a house” (178).

to the community. Paying for admission would then not be a socially neutral transaction, but would position playgoers as responsible neighbors generously donating to the communal cause. Financial support, social investment, and theatrical participation were intertwined. By linking their own performance practices to holiday rituals in this way, professional actors appropriated the authority of festive traditions—what early modern writers would have referred to as “ancient customs”—for the new and financially risky institution of the public theatre.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Feasting, fighting, and livery are not simply three isolated popular practices that influenced early modern drama, but are, taken together, a kind of map or model of the *range* of performance modes through which festivity was integrated with theatre: 1) communal feasting exemplifies the displacement of holiday customs into the fictional representation; 2) festive combat, their enactment on the actual playhouse stage; and 3) livery, their incorporation into the semiotics of the performance medium itself. Through each of these mechanisms, the public stage sought not to differentiate itself from parish revels, but to increase audience engagement by capitalizing on their similarities. Professional theatre was, in this sense, quite conservative, growing out of and reinscribing traditional social formations.

Such continuities between drama and seasonal customs indicate more than simply the existence of overlapping and contemporaneous cultural practices; rather, they suggest that generic distinctions between theatre and festivity are, for this period, very difficult to sustain. Although the historical processes through which they eventually diverged are too complex to assess here, *George a Greene* does highlight one important factor contributing to this separation: differences in the material constraints of the parish and the playhouse altered the implicit exchanges at the heart of performance, and thus the economic valences of dramatic representation. Whereas combat in the public theatres could still be staged effectively in ways that mirrored its function at parish revels, feasting and livery could not. In lieu of actually sharing food, audience members used their imaginations to call up real-life feasts; in lieu of purchasing livery badges, costumes were deployed in ways that echoed Robin Hood games. Although these practices legitimated the professional theatre by grounding it firmly in the festive tradition, they also required different ways of thinking about the social meanings of performance. In the playhouse, spectators' contributions, whether in the form of personal energy or material resources, did not directly benefit the local community, as was the case in the parish setting; instead, *imaginative* exchange took the place of *actual* exchange. Audience investment, financial or otherwise, in the performance event resulted not in some concrete manifestation of genuine social bonds—say, a new roof for the parish church—but in ephemeral affective experiences. Those experiences, while certainly a part of festive role-playing games, acquired a new fungibility in the public playhouses. Whereas presentational spectacles such as displays of athletic prowess or acrobatic skill had long been understood as the kinds of entertainment for which one might have to pay, representational theatre was not thought of as requiring special

⁸⁹ See Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, 33–49, for a brief account of the “precarious and changeable” (34) state of the commercial acting companies in the late sixteenth century. A more detailed history may be found in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

training or talent. Role-playing games were simply part of the fabric of everyday life, not a purely professional enterprise. The performance dynamics I have been tracing in *George a Greene* are part of the process through which dramatic representation (in the case of feasting) and the semiotics enabling that representation (in the case of livery) came to be understood as exchangeable commodities. Although this shift did not arise from a conscious attempt to distinguish drama from festivity, it may have eventually solidified into generic distinctions between them.

Once the affective experiences produced by performance became fungible, they could be untethered with greater ease from the seasonal particularities that gave meaning to parish ritual. Plays were traditionally understood as performance events tied to specific occasions, but could they instead be thought of as discrete entities, repeatable regardless of temporal context? Could time be thought of as a neutral phenomenon, a homogenous continuum rather than a ritual cycle? Before drama could be viewed as being instantiated in consistent “productions,” both of these questions had to be answered in the affirmative.

Contemplating these kinds of changes in conceptions of time forces us to reevaluate our own critical practices. Seasonal rituals rely on a cyclical notion of time—a paradigm at odds with theatre histories based on linear movement from past to present. However, examining theatre as holiday practice reveals that neither of these temporal models is adequate. Festive performance requires not only time’s circular return to a particular season, but also the reinvention of past tradition as current living practice. This “polychronicity”—what Michel Serres has referred to as “crumpled” time—raises questions about both the historicity of performance and the performance of historicity.⁹⁰ What counts as the “past” when we discuss festive theatre as living practice? How do we conceptualize historical change when performance is also ritual (re)enactment? Conversely, what does it mean to mark the passage of time through holiday performance—that is, through the invocation, embodiment, and appropriation of practices whose re-presentation allows them to comment on time itself? Questions such as these encourage us to think more critically about the historiography of theatre. A teleological narrative *from* ritual *to* drama renders the latter the privileged object of study. Understanding festivity and theatre as imbricated in each other, however, complicates assumptions about theatre as an ontologically separate entity. Its implications thus extend far beyond early modern drama to challenge paradigms at the heart of theatre studies as a whole.

⁹⁰ Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 59. Serres offers a topographical model of “a time that is gathered together, and with multiple pleats” (60). On performance and overlapping temporalities, see also Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).