Spenser's 'apish crue': Aping in *Prosopopoiea or Mother Hubberds Tale*

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Abstract
This reading of *Mother Hubberds Tale* focuses on the Ape and his debt to the performing apes of the playhouse and baiting arena. The chapter outlines the history of the performing ape and its relationship to mimetic theory before considering the relationship between the speaking and embodied animal in the poem. I then analyse the Ape's behaviour, emphasising the contortions involved in his two-footedness, propensity for dance and gaming, and his adoption of elaborate costume. I end with a discussion of the role of pain in shaping the poem's exploration of animal personation and how it references anxieties about censorship. Throughout, I argue that Spenser's interrogation of the rhetorical figure of personation uses the animal to question modes of performativity in relation to social status, satirising the Elizabethan court but also asking wider questions about the links between prosopopoeia, the production of poetry and violence.

Keywords
Mother Hubberds Tale; prosopopoeia; apes; theatre; baiting; pain; censorship.

This chapter explores the hinge between prosopopoiea and aping in *Mother Hubberds Tale* (1591). A satire that draws heavily on the history of animal fable and beast epic, the poem is fixated on modes of dissembling and false counsel that aptly recall George Puttenham's famous description of prosopopoiea as the 'Counterfeit Impersonation' (Puttenham 2007, 324). The wily character of the Fox, Sir Reynold, acts as the propulsive force behind the poem's numerous acts of counterfeiting, while the Ape, described as the Fox's 'Goship' (Spenser 1989, 53), is his accessory. The Ape nonetheless makes an important contribution to the work of prosopopoeia in *MHT*, providing a mimetic physicality which compliments the Fox's verbal sophistication. The Fox and Ape thus command two skills which, when combined, aid in prosopopoiea's success: verbal and corporeal imitation. In what follows, I focus on the latter, exploring the Ape's kinship with the performing apes of the playhouse and the baiting arena in order to think about how the animal body's relationship to

imitation, performance and pain informs Spenser's meditation on the polysemous figure of prosopopoiea.

Spenser's Ape is at once the ape of Aesopian satire, the ape Dame Rukenawe from the beast epic Raynarde the fox, and the Duc d'Alençon's Master of the Wardrobe and principal messenger to the Queen, Simier, who Elizabeth famously called her ape (Greenlaw 1910, 535-61).[1] But he also evokes the real apes, baboons, and monkeys who were used for public entertainment, and occasionally appeared on stage and in animal baiting arenas. In the process, the Ape foregrounds the theatrical qualities of prosopopoiea by linking the poem's discursive acts of masking to embodied processes of animal mimicry, reminding the reader of the phenomenon of the performing ape who aped the postures and behaviours of a man. These enforced mimetic behaviours frequently involve painful acts of contortion as the animal body is trained to adopt unnatural shapes, forced to walk upright, or strapped to a horse while wearing human apparel and attacked by dogs (Fudge 2002, 11-12). In this context, aping involves distortion, twisting and constraint, actions that can evoke feelings of discomfort and pain that are visible, and audible, to the spectator, and that have a bearing on Spenser's exploration of aping and impersonation. Arguing that the often-painful manipulation of the performing ape's body informs the poem's understanding of the function and affects of prosopopoiea, I consider what happens to the Ape in *MHT* as he contorts himself into the shape of a man. In thinking about the Ape's embodied processes of human mimicry, I have in mind Karen Raber's argument that '*animal bodies* were as troubling to the emergent early modern divide between animal and human as was *animal reason*' (Raber 2013, 19). Spenser's mimetic ape disturbs

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[1] Elizabeth often gave her courtiers and intimates pet names, for example, Lady Margery Norris was her 'crow'. See Borman 2017, 357.

and problemmatises the divide between animal and human in ways that evoke discomfort and violence. If we find a performing ape looking back at us through the poem's multiple acts of counterfeiting or masking, its gaze drawing attention to the maiming of the animal by the human, then the rhetorical figure becomes involved in forms of disfiguration. The Ape's evoking of the animal body's twisting and contortion for the entertainment of humans, as well as his eventual punishment, which involves the dismembering of his ears and tail, may further serve as a prescient reminder that poets were similarly at risk of disfigurement, as they courted the risk of corporeal punishment. Prosopopoeia always reminds us that selfhood is a performance; what Spenser's Ape and his contorted body emphasise, is that that performance may involve pain.

Performing Apes

Keith Thomas argues that apes became popular pets in the sixteenth century, but they were unlikely to have been a very common presence in early modern England (Thomas 1983, 123).[2] Nonetheless, there are notable instances of simians appearing in the historical record as trained animal performers. Troupes of spider monkeys performed in baiting arenas and the ape known as 'blind Gew' was lauded as a performer with an uncanny ability to ape the human, to the extent that there is still some doubt as to whether the performer was an ape or a man (Knowles 2004, 138). The ape 'Old Jack of Paris-garden' was well known enough to be mentioned in several dramas (Strunk Jr. 1917, 219-20). At least one company of performing apes was licensed in 1606 and court masques seem to have been a particular source for ape

[2] There is evidence of a number of different animals being used on stage in the period, including bears and dogs as well as a wider culture of animal performance and spectacle as a source of entertainment. For discussion of the stage dog see Kesson 2020. On equine performance see Nash 2017.

dances (Knowles 2004, 138). An ape appears on stage in Marston's *Eastward Hoe* (1605) when Bettrice enters leading a monkey and Louis B. Wright speculates that trained animals may also have been an impromptu or occasional addition to productions rather than written into the plot (Wright 1927, 666; 669). Even if they were not appearing regularly on stage, numerous plays refer to the presence of performing apes in London and many men and boys also acted the ape, including 'baboonizers' who imitated baboons and the famous ape-actor Thomas Greene, lauded for his ability to imitate simians. Surveying drama from the period 1595 to 1616, Holly Dugan excavates a 'stunning slippage between human and animal actors' (Dugan 2013, 77-8) in early modern drama, highlighting the cross-species hybridity of performers whose status as either animal or human was uncertain. Apes also appear in the historical record as public performers outside the capital. In 1605-6 two men visiting Norwich presented a licence from the king and requested that they be permitted to show baboons in the city (Graves 1920, 248). Performing apes would ape human behaviour by dancing, playing dead, pretending to say prayers for Geneva, feigning disobedience when asked to perform for the Pope or other Catholic personages, and in the context of the baiting arena, wearing human clothing and being strapped to the back of a horse (Strunk Jr. 1917, 218-19 and Knowles 2004, 138). Many of these behaviours would have required the contortion of the simian body, particularly if the ape was required to walk upright, and as previously noted, in the context of the baiting arenas such as Paris Garden the physical pain and terror of being tied to a horse and pursued by dogs is unquestionable, with one eye witness recalling the screams of the terrified animal (Fudge 2002, 11-12).

Ape-human performers and their human baboonizing kin use mimicry to ostensibly reinforce species difference in the service of entertainment but in the

process often reveal troubling fears about the indeterminacy of species status. Erica Fudge points out that while the monkey on horseback is only ever human-like, an approximation of humanity which 'reinforces the status of the human viewer', this cruel pantomime paradoxically does not reveal 'the stability of species status, but the animal that lurks beneath the surface [of the human]' (Fudge 2002, 13; 15). A similar slippage was exposed by the presence of apes and human-ape actors on stage, with James Knowles arguing that the ubiquitous description of acting as 'aping' alongside the indeterminate categorisation of ape-actors, or baboonizers, meant that players risked becoming ape-like by virtue of engaging in performance, particularly performances involving cross-dressing (Knowles 2004, 139). Kim Hall, further, argues that this indeterminacy was racialised, with the merging of conceptions of 'apes, Africans and mimesis' part of a system of racial differentiation which nonetheless revealed anxieties about similitude (Hall 1997, 120; 139).[3] The phenomena of the performing ape and the ape-actor were also inflected by a long tradition of the ape being equated with the fool and associated with the human failings of curiosity, vanity and lechery (Janson 1952, 191; 201; 204; 208).[4] More broadly, the ape has stood as an emblem for the arts since classical antiquity, but also for unworthy or sycophantic imitation (Janson 1952, 287-325). It is in this vein that Ben Jonson critiques the poet-ape who 'makes each man's wit his own' (Jonson 1984, 46 l. 8), a thief who 'pick[s] and glean[s] (5) the texts of others in an action reminiscent of the combing fingers of grooming apes, before he becomes more bold and 'takes up all' (8). The ape that aped the human was thus a potent symbol of cross-species slippage with important ramifications for how early moderns conceptualised the

[3] Donna Haraway has famously called the Western study of primatology 'simian Orientalism', drawing attention to how the construction of the ape is always about the human (Haraway 1992, 11).
[4] Henry VIII's fool, Will Somer, had a pet monkey (Borman 2017, 141).

power and virtue of mimesis and by extension personation and prosopopoeia. Reading *MHT* through the lens of the violent history of the performing ape, my contention is that Spenser exploits his ape's ability to embody human behaviours such as walking upright, and donning human apparel, to explore the beastly, and often painful, effects of poetic counterfeiting in different contexts.

Speech and the animal body

Unlike the animal in fable and beast epic, defined by their capacity for often highly sophisticated speech, the performing ape on stage remains dumb. Aping in the context of public performance operates at the level of deportment and gesture, privileging the corporeal over the semantic. One of the ways that we can distinguish between Spenser's Fox and Ape is by linking them to fabular and performative modes. The wily Fox displays an acute linguistic facility, a capacity for persuasion and plausible untruths which powers the pair's ascent through the hierarchy of beasts. In contrast, it is primarily the Ape's performative body and its capacity for mimicry which allows him to rise to the throne of the king (although the Ape's ability as a storyteller is also of note, with the husbandman being suitably convinced by his complaint while pretending to be a soldier, that he 'Was griev'd, as he had felt part of his paine' (260)). The pair may then broadly represent differing generic categories in relation to prosopopoeia: the Fox counterfeits like the honey tongued Aesopian and fabular foxes famously epitomised by the wily Raynarde, while the Ape's body supplements this ability by counterfeiting like the performing ape of the playhouse and baiting arena. Arguably, both skills are essential for the success of prosopopoiea, a figure which as Gavin Alexander points out 'engages with, and is implicated in, many different degrees and forms of personation' (Alexander 2007, 108). The relationship between

Spenser's Ape and Fox bears this out. They are symbiotic and co-dependent; the Fox's wily nature, intelligence and quick tongue fuels their dissembling, but he often acts as the Ape's companion or servant in contexts when the Ape's body has the advantage of appearing more human. Their relationship thus mimics that between animal trainer and performing ape, recreating in animal form the assumption that human sovereignty over beasts is ensured by the capacity for speech but also allowing the two elements of prosopopoeia to confront one another. For example, when the pair disguise themselves as soldiers in order to provide cover for travelling without passport or warrant, the Fox gives the role of soldier to the Ape 'for you likest are / For manly semblance' (199-200) while he 'wayte[s]' (201) on him as a servant. When the Fox counsels the Ape to steal the skin of the Lion king, the Ape argues that he is best suited to rule because :

I am in person, and in stature
Most like a man, the Lord of everie creature,
So that it seemeth I was made to raigne,
And borne to be a Kingly soueraigne
[…] 1029-1032

The Fox then grumpily points out that he is most human in his wit: 'Man is not like an Ape / In his chiefe parts, that is, in wit and spirite' (1042-43). The differences between the two companions can thus be partly understood as a distinction between the fabular animal and the performing animal, one comprised of a persuasive, mimetic tongue and wit, the other of a primarily mimetic body.

The fabular animal has often been at the forefront of critical work on *MHT*, not least because critics have searched for the human beneath the Fox, famously reading him as a satire on Lord Burghley, or alternatively Adam Loftus, Archbishop of Dublin (Greenlaw 1910, 535-61; Danner 2011, 161-5; Herron 2008, 337). Redressing this imbalance, I focus on Spenser's Ape. I consider how the theatrical

contortion of performing apes informs his creation of a walking and dancing simian and place the animal body at the heart of his complex reading of the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia. *MHT* asks whether the machinations of churchmen and courtiers are all that far removed from the grimacing contortions of the performing ape, but the poem also considers how these embodied experiences, which powerfully disturb the divide between animal and human, and may evoke pain, relate to the discursive affects of literary personation.

Spenser's Ape

The Ape and the Fox are always performing in *MHT*. The masks that they adopt are self-consciously theatrical and involve changes in costume, gesture, speech and comportment. The more corporeal transformations, however, are very much the preserve of the Ape. The Ape's ability to walk upright and mimic the deportment of a man and when at court to dance, to play cards and wear fashionable clothing, is essential for the pair's success at dissembling and aids Spenser's satirising of the various estates through which they rise – ending with the Ape donning the skin of the Lion king and ruling in his stead. The first disguise adopted by the Ape, that of a soldier, relies on what the Fox calls his 'manly semblance' (200) and when they encounter a husbandman the Fox urges him to 'play his part' (234), causing the Ape to rear up onto his hind legs:

> Eftsoones the Ape himself gan up to reare,
> And on his shoulders high his bat to beare,
> As if good service he were fit to doo;
> But little thrift for him he did it too:
> And stoutly forward he his steps did straine,
> That like a handsome swaine it him became:
> When so they nigh approached, that good man
> Seeing them wander loosly, first began
> T'enquire of custome, what and whence they were? 237-45

The potential for bipedalism was one of the reasons why apes and baboons were so adept at mimicking humans, and along with their ability to sit on horseback, was a mode of performance likely privileged by animal handlers as part of their ape's performance repertoire. It is significant that the moment the Ape first engages in an action of counterfeiting it is marked by his change in posture, from moving on all fours to standing upright and walking 'stoutly forward'. Animal mimicry as an embodied process of manipulation and contortion thereby signals the point at which the Ape and the Fox begin their journey through the estates. This is a change that takes effort; the Ape rears up and makes his first steps with 'straine', indicating that his new deportment, while attainable, is unnatural and reliant upon him twisting his body into an abnormal shape. The use of conditional language ('like' and 'as if'), so that the reader is made aware that the Ape's simulation of a soldier's deportment is an approximation of the real thing rather than a true copy signals the implicit failure of this change, despite the husbandman's credulity. For the reader who has witnessed an ape walking upright in the playhouse or baiting arena, the anomalous nature of the Ape's bipedalism would be clear, but nonetheless the successful trickery of the naive husbandman secures the Ape's employment as a shepherd, allowing him and the Fox to eat the sheep that are left in their charge.

Later in the poem when the Ape steals the skin of the Lion king, his act of thievery is achieved by walking on tiptoes as this enables him to sneak up on his target unnoticed. In this way, Spenser again equates theatrical dissimulation and trickery with the human quality of walking upright:

> Upon his tiptoes nicely he up went,
> For making noyse, and still his eare he lent
> To everie sound, that under heaven blew;
> Now went, now stept, now crept, now backward drew,
> That it good sport had been him to have eyed:
> […]1009-13

The Ape circles his prey with caution, potentially alternating between being on two feet and four as he 'now stept, now crept', shifting between human and animal postures as he endeavours to be quiet. While the Ape's cautious approach is comic, evoking the movements of performing apes whose exaggerated gestures and deportment provided amusement for audiences, it does not minimise the seriousness of his actions, which are no less than treason. It is thus the Ape's ability to mimic the deportment of a man that enables him to evince the worst of human failings. Simian bipedalism is therefore one of the sources of ape-human cross-species indeterminacy and in *MHT* this indeterminacy means that the Ape is able to remind the reader of the beastliness of humanity and the potential abuse of systems of personation associated with the theatre and prosopopoiea.

The Ape's two-footedness further highlights how the animal's ability to blur distinctions between species ultimately registers the precarity of human claims for moral superiority. An upright posture, alongside speech and facial expression, was closely associated with the capacity for reason (Boehrer 2002, 10-11). For example, Helkiah Crooke in his *Microcosmographia* (1615) argues that 'human bipedal stature allows mankind to exercise the faculties of speech and reason, lets him gaze upward to heaven, and frees his hands to work his will on the world' (Crooke 1615, 4-5). The Ape's ability to walk on two feet not only draws attention to the beastliness of humanity but also troubles any reading of humanity's facility for reason as a unique attribute. If the ape can walk, can they too 'gaze upward to heaven'?[5]

Alongside the Ape's capacity for two-footedness, gesture and deportment are frequently emphasised by other characters and animals that advise the Ape and Fox

[5] Laurie Shannon highlights the difficulty of using 'footedness' as a category of identification when describing apes and argues that Shakespeare and his contemporaries repeatedly signal the precariousness of human two-leggedness (Shannon 2013, 92-3).

how to perform particular roles. The Mule, bringing news from court and instructing the Fox and Ape on how to ascend the court hierarchy, stresses the importance of embodied performance. He proffers advice that tellingly follows his description of the Lion king's preference for seeing 'wilde beasts' (620) 'on foote' (623) and 'enchaste with chaine and circulet of golde' (624) in a show of tame obedience which is at odds with their true nature:

> But (said the Ape) how shall we first come in,
> That after we may fauour seeke to win?
> How els (said he) but with a good bold face,
> And with big words, and with a stately pace,
> That men may thinke of you in generall,
> That to be in you, which is not at all:
> […] 643-648

A 'bold face', 'big words', and a 'stately pace' will provide the Ape and Fox with a suitable disguise which will allow them to pass as gentlemen. A 'stately pace' is a mode of walking which is measured and confident, a pose of civility and gentility. The mule argues that walking in this manner will imply grandeur and substance, cloaking the Ape's lack of social status. Crucially this is a form of deportment which is again dependent upon the Ape's ability to walk upright and it is indeed this particular skill that allows the Ape to pass for a gentleman when he and the Fox enter the court. The Ape's upright posture is at this point accompanied by a crucial change in costume:

> So well they shifted, that the Ape anon
> Himselfe had cloathed like a Gentleman,
> And the slie Foxe, as like to be his groome,
> That to the Court in seemly sort they come.
> Where the fond Ape himself uprearing hy
> Upon his tiptoes, stalketh stately by,
> As if he were some great *Magnifico*,
> And boldlie doth amongst the boldest go. 659-666

In a prefiguring of the Ape on tiptoe as he steals the Lion's skin, the Ape wears the clothes of a courtier, rears up and 'Upon his tiptoes, stalketh stately by', cutting a swathe through the court. The image is ridiculous and satirises the exaggerated foppery and acute self-consciousness of courtiers who vied for the Queen's attention. Nonetheless, the success of the Ape's performance means that he passes for a '*Magnifico*', an individual of high rank. The term is associated with Italy, perhaps linking the Ape's sartorial disguise to the stereotype of the Machiavellian Italian courtier, but it also stresses his foreignness and draws attention to the fact that he is out of place.

Spenser goes on to emphasise the strangeness of the Ape's costume, linking his clothing not only to Italy but also to the East:

> For he was clad in strange accoustrements,
> Fashion'd with queint devises never seene
> In Court before, yet there all fashions beene:
> Yet he them in newfanglenesse did pas:
> But his behaviour altogether was
> *Ala Turchesca*, much the more admyr'd
> And his lookes loftie, as if he aspyr'd
> To dignitie, and sdeign'd the low degree;
> That all which did such strangenesse in him see,
> By secrete meanes gan of his state enquire,
> […] 672-81

Clad in the Turkish fashion, Spenser constructs the Ape's appearance as strange in the sense of other or alien as well as aloof. He is explicitly being linked to an orientalising narrative which connects the acquisition of luxury goods from the East to the performance of social status, vanity, novelty and fashion, a link which Spenser critiques for blinding the onlooker to the true nature of the courtier under the clothes. His apparel is also strange because it is novel. It is an instance of 'newfangleness' which surpasses that of other courtiers and prompts questions about his 'state'. The Ape's innovative costume draws attention away from his animal nature and low status

but it cannot be easily interpreted using English systems of sartorial place epitomised by the sumptuary laws (2000, Jones and Stallybrass, 188). The costume's newness and strangeness, accompanied by the Ape's 'loftie' looks, mean that it obfuscates rather than providing a true indication of status. These instances of clothing transforming or disguising the wearer are precursors to the Ape's eventual donning of the skin and crown of the Lion king as the ape who plays the '*Magnifico*' becomes the ape who plays the king.

There are echoes here of *vanitas* imagery in which apes wear clothing and jewellery while gazing into a mirror (Janson 1952, 212-16). The image of the clothed ape also recalls the pictorial theme of the peddler and the apes, a popular subject in Medieval and Renaissance visual arts throughout Europe. In these images a sleeping peddler, suggesting sloth, is robbed of his wares, including combs and clothing, by a troupe of apes. In some instances the peddler himself is disrobed while he slumbers (a story which may have influenced Spenser's depiction of the slumbering Lion king who has foolishly removed his 'royall ornaments' (998))(Janson 1952, 216-25). The other place where costume served to trouble the reading of status was of course the playhouse. It was common for apes to be dressed up in human apparel in the baiting arena or as a part of a performance or dance but the phenomenon of the base born player taking on the role, and the crown, of a king also shadows the Ape's costume changes in *MHT*, doubling down on the poem's self-conscious performativity in a fashion which equates low born status with animality in a variety of contexts. Spenser's joke is at the expense of courtiers whose appearance in the newest fashions is akin to watching a performing monkey and he is explicitly linking such affectations to foreign imports, but Spenser's Ape also recalls the actual monkeys who were trussed up in doublet and hose for entertainment as well as their human counterparts

who traversed boundaries of species and status in performance. Along with his capacity for bipedalism, it is the Ape's clothing that makes his dissimulation possible. The importance of his costume for the success of his disguise is made clear when the Ape is run out of court 'in his rent rags' (936), following the banishment of the Fox. Disgraced courtiers would often forfeit their clothing to the crown. During the reign of Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell's apparel was confiscated upon his arrest (Borman, 2017, 196). So the Ape's dishabille mirrors the role of costume in registering a change in courtly status. It is also perhaps an indication that without his handler, the Fox, the Ape is unable to clothe himself.

As well as his wearing of costume and his ability to walk upright, the Ape's performance at court is augmented with further acts of 'showe' and 'play' that emphasise his ability as an actor and again dwell upon the particular qualities of his body, its flexibility and ability to mimic the more acrobatic aspects of human performance. All of these attributes recall the behaviours of performing apes.

> Thus did the Ape at first him credit gaine,
> Which afterwards he wisely did maintaine
> With gallant showe, and daylie more augment
> Through his fine feates and Courtly complement;
> For he could play, and daunce, and vaute, and spring,
> And all that els pertaines to reveling,
> Onely through kindly aptness of his joynts. 689-695

The Ape's athleticism helps him to maintain his credit at court as he revels in vaulting and dancing (these skills were of particular importance for courtiers as Elizabeth famously enjoyed dancing, including the athletic galliard (Borman 2017, 308)). Elite dance, in the words of Skiles Howard, had evolved into 'a means for courtly self-fashioning, an instrument for the acquisition and exercise of social power' (Howard 1998, 3), so the Ape's dancing ability is a significant way in which he acquires status and prestige. The 'aptness of his joynts', his flexibility and acrobatic ability,

commend him to his peers and cement his social position. Spenser is here conflating the dancing courtier with the dancing ape found in courtly masque and other performance spaces but also signalling the importance of the body for securing preference at court.

As well as maintaining his credit at court by dancing, the Ape accompanies his virtuoso athleticism with an ability to entertain with sleight of hand. He reads the fortunes of courtly ladies 'Out of their hands' (699), juggles and performs conjuring tricks: 'he so light was at legier demaine, / That what he toucht, came not to light againe' (701-2). The light-fingered Ape is a consummate entertainer, but also a potential thief. Both of these characterisations are possible due to the similarities between the hand of an ape and the hand of a human. Monkeys can make adept pickpockets and I wonder if Spenser knew of stories of performing apes being trained as thieves.

All of the actions which make the Ape a successful courtier - his choreographed deportment, his adoption of novel clothing associated with the East, his dancing ability, juggling and card tricks - are associated with the performing ape of the playhouse and baiting arena. The theatrical nature of these behaviours means that the Ape's body is explicitly linked to the 'show' and false flatteries of insincere couriers, the 'apish crue' of my title: men who performed and dissembled in order to gain favour. Nonetheless, there remains an intriguing link between the bodily behaviours of the dissembling Ape and the poem's description of a virtuous courtier.

> He will not creepe, nor crouche with fained face,
> But walkes upright with comely stedfast pace,
> And unto all doth yield due curtesie;
> But not with kissed hand belowe the knee,
> As that same Apish crue is wont to doo:
> […] 727-731

The emphasis on the good courtier 'walking upright' rather than engaging in servile creeping cannot help but recall the Ape on his tiptoes. The rhyming of 'face' and 'pace' also echoes the same pairing as it appears in the advice proffered by the Mule when he tells the Ape and Fox to enter the court 'with a good bold face, / And with big words, and with a stately pace' (645-6). A further reminder of the difficulty of locating the difference between the upright courtier and the upright ape even when the courtier is sincere and not feigning, this is an instance of cross-species indeterminacy which recalls the legendary baboonizers.

Spenser does make a distinction between the body of the ideal courtier and that of the 'apish crue' when he highlights the importance of training for war. This becomes a criticism of the apish-body that is designed for performance, contrasted with the battle-ready body of the true courtier. While the virtuous courtier 'casts to sew the chace / Of swift wilde beasts, or runne on foote a race, / T'enlarge his breath (large breath in armes most needfull) (743-4), wrestles and stretches his arms with 'Eughen bowe' (747), the Ape spends his time 'mumming' and 'masking', playing with 'dice' and 'cards' and 'shuttlecocks' (802-4). Ostensibly the Ape is playing 'thriftles games' (801) while the ideal courtier hones his body for martial pursuits, but it is worth remembering that the sports of archery and wrestling are themselves games and that there has always been an important overlap between play and war, an overlap epitomised by the courtly tournament and joust (Huizinga 2018, 98). This then begs the question of how we are to distinguish between courtier and Ape, if both are ultimately playing?

A further component of the Ape's performance is tellingly his composition of poetry. The Ape 'could fine loving verses frame, / And play the Poet oft' (809-10), devising erotic verse which brings 'Chaste Ladies eares to fantasies impure' (820). A

literal poet-ape, the Ape writes frivolous poetry designed to titillate, although worryingly in a further muddying of the distinctions between the false apish courtier and his genuine counterpart, there is no indication that his versification is poor or that he is necessarily stealing the work of others in the manner of Jonson's 'thief' (3) who 'takes up all' (8). If anything, the anxiety lies in his seeming ability to 'play the poet' convincingly, just as he has played the many other roles that have bought him to court (Brown 1999, 196-200). There is an implicit criticism here of the courtiers who used the language of love in order to gain favour with Elizabeth but the Ape's apparent skill also blurs the distinction between the genuine poet, poet-ape, and simian.

Highlighting the importance of performance for the establishment of social place, Spenser has his ape change his costume and deportment, dance, write poetry and juggle as he works his way through the estates. The effect is ultimately to satirise the actions of courtiers vying for attention and power, drawing attention to their affected mannerisms and reliance upon tricks, props and show. But the Ape's game also renders species status, and its attendant hierarchies, indistinct, so that aping (whether in the form of human or simian performance) undermines claims for humanity's superior reason and morality. This sceptical view extends to the poem's description of the ideal courtier, as it becomes all too clear that the virtuous gentleman is not easily distinguished from his aping counterpart.

Pain and mimesis

The manipulation of the Ape's body in the poem, his flexible, apt 'joynts', his ability to walk upright and dance, to play card tricks and wear fashionable attire, are a satire of the grimacing poses and exaggerated bodily movements of Elizabethan courtiers: a satire which exploits the troubling overlap between animal and human bodies. But

because the Ape's behaviour recalls the contortion of the actual bodies of performing apes forced to dance or to walk upright, the spectacle of the ape-human performer not only emphasises the performativity and absurdity of courtly theatre but also its violence.

The most common performance arena for trained apes was the animal-baiting ring. In these spaces animal bodies were painfully contorted and potentially maimed for public entertainment. At the end of *MHT*, when the Ape is punished by the Lion king for his usurping of the throne, the animal body is subjected to a violent maiming which recalls the bloody spectacle of baiting:

> […] th'Apes long taile (which then he had) he quight
> Cut off, and both eares pared of their hight;
> Since which, all Apes but halfe their eares haue left,
> And of their tailes are utterlie bereft. 1381-84

The Ape's torture and visible disfigurement recalls so-called Barbary apes, tailless simians associated with North Africa and thought to be particularly trainable and capable of passing for human beings (Maisano 2013, 67). The physician Galen, for example, preferred to dissect Barbary apes because of their physical similarities with humans (Finger 1994, 16). The monkey's tail was also a bawdy image and baboons were famous for having both a long tail and tool, attributes that Holly Dugan speculates may have been mimicked with prosthetics by baboonizing human performers (Dugan 2013, 81). The removal of the Ape's tail both renders the Ape more human, drawing attention to humanity's beastliness in the process, and serves as an act of emasculation. The cropping of the Ape's ears recalls his earlier anxiety that by wandering without passport he and the fox will be taken for rogues and 'for eare marked beasts abroad be bruted' (188). Ear marking was a way of indicating ownership more commonly applied to livestock, but I wonder if animal handlers marked their apes in a similar fashion given that performing animals were a source of

income and proof of ownership was important if the animal wandered. The loss of the Ape's ears would then obliquely reference the marking of the animal body as a sign that they were property and the erasure of that sign as the whole ear is removed and with it any identifying mark.

The recounting of the Ape's punishment does not describe the inevitable pain attendant upon dismembering, however. The description is detached and clinical and no attempt is made to evoke the agony that is felt by the animal body. Instead, the poem as a whole often links pain to storytelling in ways which separate sensate experience from the body. For example, the Fox when detailing his motivation for wandering to seek better fortune, asks the Ape to 'Heare then my paine and inward agonie' (58). The husbandman, having heard the Ape and Fox's fabricated story of the Ape's history as a soldier 'Was griev'd, as he had felt part of his paine' (260). Pain is thereby understood to be something that can be articulated and conveyed to a listener or reader (whether the tale is true or false) but it is not described or felt as embodied sensation in the poem. The word 'pain' is further linked to the act of dissembling, of which the Ape's contortion is one element. When the Fox prompts the Ape to 'play his part' (234) when the husbandman approaches, he argues that the man will 'yeeld them timely profite for their paine' (236). Pain in this context is more about effort (taking pains) rather than foregrounding physical pain, even if the Ape strains to haul himself upright. This effortful act of performance is preferable, however, to the pain of hard labour. The Ape, when speaking to the husbandman, claims that despite his wish to 'take what paines may anie living wight' (271) his right hand 'may no painfull worke endure' (275).

Pain, its articulation and its avoidance, is thus attendant on the successful construction of story and performance. So while the Ape's body and its mimetic

capabilities are made possible by acts of potentially-painful contortion and he suffers a horrendous action of dismembering, reminding the reader of the actual pain experienced by performing apes, pain is generally a literary phenomenon rather than embodied or sensate in the poem. This helps to shape an important aspect of *MHT*'s exploration of the power and risk of prosopopoeia: namely the threat that the poet may be risking life and limb through literary acts of personation.

The Ape's maiming, a price extracted in part because of his playing of the poet, evokes public acts of judicial corporeal punishment enacted upon humans, themselves a form of spectacle and entertainment. The amputation of body parts was a rare punishment associated with systems of censorship (Patterson 1984, 45-6). John Stubbes lost a hand for criticising the proposed match between Elizabeth I and the Duc d'Alençon in his *Gaping Gulf* (1579), a work published by Hugh Singleton who also published Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (1579).[6] William Prynne famously had his ears cropped in 1634 for publishing *Histriomastix* (1632). The Ape's loss of his tail and his ears thereby links the suffering animal body, maimed for entertainment and possibly to signal ownership or its obfuscation, to the public torture and visible maiming of the human body in the theatre of judicial punishment. Given that the beast fable was a genre associated with highlighting unequal power relations and often satirised the corruption of magistrates and rulers, the maiming of the Ape gestures towards the risks that the poet takes when using the animal to speak to contemporary events (a risk that was arguably too great given the fact that *MHT* was famously 'called in').[7] Spenser's poem thus gestures towards its own undoing by reminding the reader of both the spectacle of the baited and tortured animal and the tortured body of the poet, a synchronicity further realised in the pun implicit in the loss of the Ape's

[6] See Hadfield 2012, 126-7.

[7] See Patterson 1991, 47 and Hadfield 2012, 265.

tail as the animal tail is conflated with the literary tale, signalling Spenser's acknowledgement that *Mother Hubberds Tale* could similarly be cut off

In the *Faerie Queene* (1596) Spenser would demonstrate just how keenly he felt the threat of corporal punishment. In Book V Arthur and Artegall enter Mercillae's palace to be greeted by a grizzly sight:

> There as they entred at the Scriene, they saw
> Some one, whose tongue was for his trespasse vyle
> Nayled to a post, adiudged so by the law:
> For that therewith he falsely did reuyle,
> And foule blaspheme that Queene for forged guyle,
> Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
> And with lewd poems, which he did compyle;
> For the bold title of a Poet bad
> He on himselfe had ta'en, and rayling rymes had sprad.
> (Spenser 2007, V.ix.25)

The poet is identified as one Bonfont, newly re-named Malfont, the Bon 'raced out' (26, 5) and replaced with Mal on a sign that hangs over his prone body. The writer is publicly humiliated and the instrument of his downfall, his tongue, horribly mutilated. The body is thus shown to suffer for the 'bold speaches' (25, 6) made by a poet playing at counsellor, publically punished as 'adiudged so by the law' (25, 3). The naming of Bon/Malfont also alludes to the danger of publishing as 'font', then as now, corresponds to typeface, associating his blasphemies with the ink of the printing press: 'euill words, and wicked sclaunders' (26, 9) are all the more dangerous for being set in print. While little sympathy is shown for Malfont - Arthur and Artegall pass him by without comment - it is clear that Spenser acknowledges the risk involved in aspiring to the 'bold title' (25. 8) of the public poet, a risk which he first explored through the character of his maimed Ape in *MHT*.

Conclusion

The Ape's ability to mimic the postures and behaviours of humans, walking upright, stalking like a '*Magnifico*', donning fashionable clothing, dancing and playing games, all rely on the innate similarities between the two species, a similarity which was routinely exploited for the purposes of entertainment in the playhouse and baiting ring. The actual bodies of simians thus lie behind and animate the embodied processes of mimicry that the poem describes. Cross-species resemblance can be supplemented and amplified using learned behaviours which rely on contortion as well as the use of embellishment in the form of costume. Natural affinity between animal and human can thereby be augmented through (often-painful) systems of performance. Spenser's Ape draws attention to these performative augmentations, successfully harnessing the skills of the performing ape in order to ascend through the hierarchy of beasts.

The Ape's performances draw attention to cross-species indeterminacy and with it the beastly actions of counterfeit courtiers. In the process, the aping body becomes associated with unnatural postures, twisting, disfigurement and pain. What is particularly significant for Spenser's exploration of prosopopoeia, is the fact that it is the telling of tales/tails which frequently activates the pain attendant on the Ape's contortion and punishment, rather than direct references to the body. *MHT* is replete with acts of violence that result from the Ape and Fox's dissimulation, from their murder of the sheep they are supposed to shepherd, to their eventual punishment. Their performances at court result in the suffering of the honest courtier who in futilely waiting for preferment is 'borne to disastrous end' (907); the Ape's impersonation of the Lion results in the entrance of 'monstrous beasts' (1122); while the Fox proceeds to pillage the nation in order to feed his numerous children. The literary realm thus acts as a powerful source of pain. It is therefore not only the act of personation itself which involves discomfort: the process of masking transfers, and

arguably magnifies, that pain so that it is felt by others who suffer the ill effects of the Ape and Fox's dissimulation. In a startlingly ambivalent reading of the moral value of poetry, Spenser seems to be claiming that prosopopoeia's masking penetrates the surface, relying upon the disfigurement and distortion of the underlying referent but that this process of disfiguring figuration then precipitates violence and pain in other contexts. Prosopopoeia is thus far from being a benign action that only superficially transforms an animal; rather in *MHT* it is embodied and articulated in ways that trouble any simplistic view of poetic manipulation and theatrical show as didactic.[8] The implication is that the poet, in engaging in the action of personation, enters into a realm where the imagination can have real, and painful, affects upon bodies in the world. It is the Ape's performing body, reminiscent of the contorted bodies of performing simians, which animates the link between prosopopoeia and pain. The animal reminds us that literature can hurt.

[8] This accords with Brown's reading of the Fox and Ape as amoral poets when he posits that *MHT*, like the *Complaints* as a whole, brings to the fore an uncertain and ambiguous view of poetry and its moral and didactic value (Brown 1999, 184).

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