

Gambling and Elizabethan Gentlemen

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Abstract Before the mid-seventeenth century when a developing understanding of probability transformed gambling, English gaming took place in the community rather than in dedicated institutions like casinos and so represented and interacted with more general social behavior. Different communities gambled differently; they had different status under the law. This article considers gentlemen’s gambling, arguing that in the absence of other constraints, notions of honor had a key role in shaping that activity. Contemporary accounts such as Sir John Harington’s “Treatise on Play” suggest that high-stakes wagering fell into the anthropological category of deep play, whereby gamesters staked excessive sums to win renown for their daring; secondly, it appears that such behavior was seen as a young man’s activity, with older men condemning immoderate wagering as their ideas about what was honorable shifted as they matured and became integrated into the community. In addition to age-related changes of attitude to gambling, a tension existed between Elizabethan ideals of gentlemen’s gambling behaviors and individual gamesters’ real circumstances. Some had limited money for wagering, others little time; youths from gentle families were sometimes indentured as apprentices or otherwise in situations that altered their relationships to time, money, and regulation. Consequently, even within this single sector of Elizabethan society, attitudes to gambling acquired a high level of complexity.

In a passage in *Toxophilus*, Roger Ascham’s 1545 encomium on archery, the author remarked that lords, with “libertie to lyste what they will” (that is, do what they wish) should avoid games of chance to set the meaner sort an example.¹ *Toxophilus* appeared soon after a definitive 1541 anti-gaming act that applied throughout Elizabeth I’s reign.² For two centuries, English parliaments had enacted legislation on archery with a dual aim: longbow proficiency demanded regular practice and so was made obligatory; rival pursuits, however, were outlawed, with the objective of halting the perceived decline in archery and ensuring a cohort of bowmen fit for service in England’s wars. Legislative concerns had centered initially on summer sports, which allegedly competed with archery for men’s time; gradually the focus shifted toward games of chance—sedentary, indoor pastimes associated with winter, which, it was asserted, rendered men too poor to afford bows.

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¹ Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*, ed. Edward Arber (London, 1868), 59.

² 33 Hen. VIII c. 9 (1541).

These laws, however, exempted social elites. Gentlemen might be fined for frequenting illicit gaming houses, but, unlike the gambling of subalterns, theirs was not inherently unlawful. Gentlemen served in the cavalry in wartime rather than as archers; besides, in general, laws incommoded them less. As legislators and magistrates, they regulated other people's gaming while they were little affected themselves by the rules.

Gentlemen were also less subject to gaming's deep structural constraints. To play, one needs both time and money to stake; gentlemen were popularly supposed to possess both. What, then, did condition their behavior? In this article, I interrogate Ascham's claim that when gambling they had liberty to do as they liked. If not, what factors constrained them?

Anthropologist Per Binde has concluded, based on a cross-cultural survey, that gambling activities interact differently with different cultures' varying exchange systems; he suggested in passing that the same might hold true of different groups within a community.³ Sixteenth-century England supports Binde's speculation: gentlemen, merchants, apprentices, and masterless men seem to have gambled diversely, reflecting their differential access to time and money. Elizabethan rogue literature described the makeshift economy of conycatchers—sharppers and swindlers, with time though limited means, who had elaborate schemes for fleecing the unwary at cards or dice. In the cases of servants and apprentices, time and money were both limited. Masters complained that apprentices had been accustomed “on the Thursdayes and other worke daies, to goe abroade to Gaming howses [and had] not onlie very vnthriftiliy lost and spent their own money. . . but also very lewdly [had] Lost and consumed away their masters money.”⁴ The gaming of merchants (who were wealthy but busy) likewise seems worth examining. Did financial speculation gratify needs that others addressed by gaming? If so, it did not divert them from work. Gentlemen's gaming was different again. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this investigation concludes that, restraints of time, money, and policing being absent, reputation was critical. Gaming provides a case study in how honor conditioned elite behavior.

Research into English gambling prior to the Restoration, lotteries excepted, is practically nonexistent. Any study, therefore, offers a substantial contribution. A sole article touches on English gambling before 1600; there is no book on the subject.⁵ More comprehensive histories of gambling gloss over the earlier centuries and tend to be popular rather than academic. This neglect has some excuse. About 1650, a Europe-wide gambling craze commenced, lasting to around 1800, that prompted many changes in English gambling (and the advent of the word itself). The same period saw probability theory emerge, paving the way for professional gamblers and gaming establishments. Gambling's greater prominence and social impact after 1650 has attracted more scholarly attention to it; it can also be explored

³ Per Binde, “Gambling, Exchange Systems, and Moralities,” *Journal of Gambling Studies* 21, no. 4 (2005): 445–79, at 473.

⁴ Bakers Court Minute (1589), cited in Charles Whitney, “‘Usually in the Werking Daies’: Playgoing Journeymen, Apprentices, and Servants in Guild Records, 1582–92,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1999): 433–58, at 456.

⁵ Nicholas Tosney, “The Playing Card Trade in Early Modern England,” *Historical Research* 84, no. 226 (2011): 637–56 (derived from his thesis on card playing).

in multiple ways. Conversely, Elizabethan gaming predated the understanding of chance that underpinned Enlightenment gambling; it was less extravagant; the surviving evidence is sparser and scattered. The different nature of gaming activities, along with the comparative paucity of evidence for them, necessitates a more ethnographic approach. However, since gambling was not confined to dedicated institutions, it can offer insights into society more broadly.

In an investigation of early modern Venetian gambling, Jonathan Walker invoked Clifford Geertz's influential concept of "deep play."⁶ During the Elizabethan era, the standard descriptor for high-stakes gaming was "great play"; this term was superseded by "deep play" in the seventeenth century. Geertz borrowed the latter term from Jeremy Bentham to characterize what goes on when gamblers stake large sums.⁷ Bentham, thinking probabilistically, considered it irrational; staking half one's possessions with an equal chance of win or loss risked losing half one's livelihood, whereas winning would only augment it by a third. The implications for quality of life must therefore be "always unfavourable."⁸ Deep play, Geertz argued, had a rationale, if not an economic one. At stake was reputation. As with dueling, risk accrued prestige.⁹ Following Geertz, Walker concluded that the ability to lose great sums with indifference came to mark nobility. He cited Renaissance stories of Spanish and Italian wagerers who agreed to be sold as galley slaves if they lost a bet.¹⁰

In this article, I also take an ethnographic approach. Gambling involved conspicuous consumption; men used it to affirm honor, importance, or masculinity—for self-fashioning, in short. Unlike religious writers, whose denunciations of gambling became increasingly strident during Elizabeth's reign, secular elites offered, at most, qualified criticisms. Honor, they appreciated, demanded that gamesters satisfy certain expectations, though youths and mature men had different notions of what those might be.

My investigation confines itself to games of chance played by men, partly to avoid the diffused focus that broadening the survey to sporting contests would entail, and partly because of gambling's strongly gendered nature. Elite women participated in card playing but not in dice play (nor tennis or cockfighting), while certain issues explored here pertaining to masculine gaming related differently, or not at all, to female gaming.

GREAT PLAY AND DEEP PLAY

The only work of the era devoted to elite gambling was John Harington's "Treatise on Playe." This lengthy and incisive anatomy of court gaming tackled

⁶ Jonathan Walker, "Gambling and Venetian Noblemen c. 1500–1700," *Past and Present*, no. 162 (1999): 28–69.

⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 412–53.

⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *Theory of Legislation by Jeremy Bentham: Translated from the French of Étienne Dumont by R. Hildreth*, 7th ed. (London, 1891), 106.

⁹ Geertz, "Deep Play," 432–42.

¹⁰ Walker, "Venetian Noblemen," 45, 48–57, 60–61. Walker remarks of this story "clearly it was a folk-tale" (45n71). However, it seems Barcelona did indeed hold lotteries in which losing participants became galley slaves: see Pascasius Justus Turcq, *On Gambling*, ed. and trans. William M. Barton (Ghent, 1561; repr., London, 2022), 140–41, and see esp. note 62.

gambling's definition, origins, and ill effects, while proposing a remedy for the latter.¹¹

Harington, the queen's godson and son of a Tudor official, disapproved of the court's excesses, though he was a courtier himself.¹² His connections, learning, perspicacity, and careful observation fitted him to describe court activities. His best-known work, *The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, contains the first account of a flush toilet; his "Treatise on Playe" features similarly inventive thinking. Several scholars note that his writings echoed Baldesar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, not least in the use of wit to cloak serious purpose.¹³ In the "Treatise on Playe," Harington posed as a largely objective observer with a "tolerant, sympathetic attitude" to his subject.¹⁴

The work has attracted limited scholarly attention.¹⁵ The manuscript, now held in the British Library, was first printed in 1775.¹⁶ Internal evidence dates its writing to Elizabeth's reign. A reference to "this deere yeer" led its eighteenth-century editor to propose dates of 1595 or 1597, both years of dearth.¹⁷ The only other clue within the text to the date of its composition is a self-deprecating opening statement that it may seem strange to find so trivial a piece among weightier subjects—but which subjects those were is unclear.¹⁸ Harington tackled serious matters (Ireland and the succession, for example) but seemingly at a later time. Rather than print his works after 1596, he commissioned lavish scribal copies for specific recipients; conceivably, this manuscript was a template used for transcription. Jason Scott-Warren has argued that Harington strategically deployed such gifts to win favor.¹⁹ That considered, it may be worth noting similarities between the "Treatise on Playe" and James VI of Scotland's brief discussion of gaming in his 1598 *Basilicon Doron*, a guide to kingship prepared for his son.²⁰ Harington did present James with other compositions, some during Elizabeth's reign, but he seems to have composed them after the dates generally suggested for the "Treatise on Playe." This renders it unlikely they were the more serious works it allegedly accompanied.

Early modern gambling in England was traditionally associated with the seven deadly sins, yet Harington was atypical in stressing the role of pride.²¹ Charles

¹¹ John Harington, "A Treatise on Playe," in *Nugae Antiquae: Being a Miscellaneous Collection of Original Papers in Prose and Verse*, ed. Henry Harington and Thomas Park, rev. ed., vol. 1 (London, 1804), 186–232.

¹² Gerard Kilroy, "The Courtier in the Margins," in *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. Gerard Kilroy (Farnham, 2009), 3–24, at 11, 19.

¹³ Kilroy, "Courtier in the Margins," 4; Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford, 2001), 240.

¹⁴ D. H. Craig, *Sir John Harington* (Boston, 1985), 115.

¹⁵ Craig, *Sir John Harington*, 113–15; Ruth Hughey, "The Harington Manuscript at Arundel Castle and Related Documents," *Library*, 4th ser., 15 (1934–35): 388–444, at 402; Simon Cauchi, "Recent Studies in Sir John Harington," *English Literary Renaissance* 25, no. 1 (1995): 112–25, at 118.

¹⁶ John Harington, "A Treatise on Playe," British Library, Add. MS 46371, fols. 1r–30r.

¹⁷ Craig, *Sir John Harington*, 20; Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 204n7.

¹⁸ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 186.

¹⁹ Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift*.

²⁰ James VI, *The Basilicon Doron of King James VI*, ed. James Craigie, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1944–1950), 1:193.

²¹ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, 1952), 183, 193.

Cotton's *Compleat Gamester* (1674), more representative of early modern outlooks, called gaming "an enchanting *Witchery*, gotten betwixt *Idleness* and *Avarice*."²² Thomas Elyot's 1531 *Boke Named the Governour* linked dice play to virtually every sin except pride: "tediousness of virtuous occupation" and "sleep superfluous"; avarice and "coveting of another man's goods"; swearing; "fury or rage"; suspicion; gluttony; even lechery.²³ For Harington, however, "excessive play" originated with "pryde, covetousness, and slowne: of which, slowne causeth the frequentation of it; pryde, the greatnes; and avarice, the greedines."²⁴ Idleness, in short, led men to spend too much time playing; greed produced behavior such as cheating; pride caused the staking of extravagant sums. This analysis united the period's three greatest sins. The medieval era considered pride the worst sin; in the later Middle Ages, avarice supplanted it in importance, but by the sixteenth century sloth was at the forefront.²⁵ Great play was particularly connected with gentlemen. Pride was a peculiarly aristocratic failing; the rich alone could wager large sums. Sloth and avarice, however, were universal: rogue literature and anti-gaming statutes both squarely associated subaltern gambling with idleness and criminality.

Relatively speaking, Elizabethan gaming was modest. While Lawrence Stone found a rise in aristocratic wagers between 1558 and 1641, that increase really began in the 1590s; only after James I's accession did "gambling orgies at Court" become a "byword for prodigality."²⁶ Scholarly consensus is that European gambling's heyday did not arrive until 1650.²⁷ Nevertheless, at court in England, substantial sums were already being staked. Over Christmas of 1602, John Chamberlain informed a correspondent, the court had witnessed "great golden play, wherein Mr. Secretarie [Robert Cecil] lost better than 800l. in one night, and asmuch more at other times, the greatest part whereof came to Edward Stanleys and Sir John Lees share."²⁸ Harington remarked that if Elizabeth were to stake at the same rate as certain courtiers, proportional to her estates, she would gamble away dukedoms and baronies at a sitting.²⁹ Exorbitant wagering was not limited to games of chance.³⁰ Duke Bracciano, in John Webster's play *The White Devil* (1612), complains to his wife that he feels she will shortly not let him "racket away five hundred crowns at tennis" without nagging him.³¹ Comparable sums were already genuinely being spent in the 1590s: in 1598, Chamberlain reported, "the new Countesse of Southampton is brought a bed of a daughter, and

²² Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester* [. . .] (London, 1674), 1 (italics in original).

²³ Thomas Elyot, *The Booke Named the Governour*, ed. S. E. Lehmborg, new ed. (London, 1962), 89.

²⁴ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 196.

²⁵ See Lester K. Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom," *American Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (1971): 16–49; Ann Wagner, "Idleness and the Ideal of the Gentleman," *History of Education Quarterly* 25, no. 1–2 (1985): 41–55, at 43–44.

²⁶ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), 567–72, at 570.

²⁷ David G. Schwartz, *Roll the Bones: The History of Gambling* (New York, 2006), 98 and passim; David Miers, *Regulating Commercial Gambling: Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford, 2004), 17–38.

²⁸ Chamberlain to Ralph Winwood, 17 January 1602/03, in *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McClure, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1939), 180.

²⁹ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 206.

³⁰ Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (London, 1969), 30.

³¹ John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (Manchester, 1996), 2.1.181–83. Unless otherwise specified, references to plays are to act, scene, and line.

to mend her portion, the erle her father hath lately lost 18000 crownes at tennis in Paris.”³² These large sums reflect the rise in wagers identified by Stone over those years. In the 1580s, Robert Dudley and Henry Percy were venturing lower amounts.³³ The threat that gambling posed to elite society in post-Restoration England prompted new laws to curb excessive stakes.³⁴ Under Elizabeth, however, no comparable legislation was proposed, perhaps indicating that the social impact was felt less keenly, though Harington’s “Treatise on Playe” indicates that concern was felt.

Gentlemen certainly wagered more than the “small play” of humbler folk. Robert Dudley’s disbursement book records a payment of twelve pence in 1585 to his servant Edward Willperforse, “wich he won of a wager which your lordship lost . . . the vj [6th] of November.” To suit his man’s means, Dudley’s wager was low. On 8 June, when his wife “plaid with my Lord of Darbie att cardes,” Dudley’s pursebearer had given her twenty pounds, a sum four hundred times greater. Four days earlier, Dudley himself had wagered away ten pounds with Derby.³⁵

In principle, however, waste of gentlemen’s “most precious tyme” at play was deplored as much as wasted money.³⁶ “Whosoever will not be noted with the fowle infamy of Idlenes,” remarked Harington, “let him not bee a continuall gamster.” Gaming was a distraction from weightier affairs: “When wee are grown . . . to a general indisposycyon to all business, then commonly wee embrace play to avoyd sleep.”³⁷ If the “use of Dice, Cards, and other disportes [is] good to recreate the minde,” noted Haly Heron, “the immoderate abuse of them all, is not commendable, but hurtefull and pernicious.”³⁸

As the qualifications to these statements suggest, gaming was not condemned unequivocally. Gentleman authors typically expressed the view that, in small quantities, play could be “a kinde of remedy. . . against slowth.”³⁹ Elizabeth’s reign was a moment of peculiar idleness for the aristocracy.⁴⁰ “Your employments being none at all, as most men’s are,” Henry Percy told his son, gaming was “merely yielded unto out of ease.”⁴¹ Limited gambling was tolerated in “worthy persons of eyther sex (specially attending in cowrt).”⁴² Attending in court involved much waiting; any alternative to complete idleness, “mother of all vice” and “first suggester” of sin,

³² Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 8 November 1598, in McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 1:52.

³³ Henry Percy, *The Household Papers of Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564–1632)*, ed. G. R. Batho, Camden Society 3rd ser., vol. 93 (London, 1962), 19–21 and passim; Robert Dudley, *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1558–1561, 1584–1586*, ed. Simon Adams, Camden Society 5th ser., vol. 6 (London, 1995), 178, 182, 189, 192, 193, and passim.

³⁴ Miers, *Regulating Commercial Gambling*, 27, 32–34.

³⁵ Dudley, *Household Accounts and Disbursement Books*, 258, 259, 330.

³⁶ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 187; see also Wagner, “Idleness and the Ideal of the Gentlemen,” 41–55.

³⁷ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 187, 198, 199–200.

³⁸ Haly Heron, *A Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie, Entituled: The Kayes of Counsaile* (London, 1579), 96; see also James VI, *Basilicon Doron of King James VI*, 1:193.

³⁹ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 197; see also James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:187, 191.

⁴⁰ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 185.

⁴¹ Henry Percy, *Advice to his Son by Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1609)*, ed. G. B. Harrison (London, 1930), 99.

⁴² Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 200.

was preferable: “Undoubted it were much better to be occupied in honest recreation than to do nothing.”⁴³

Claims that play was rest from labor were rarer, although some bourgeois moralists allowed that it improved productivity: workers, like bows, lost their spring if kept strung tight but, if loosened when not being used, remained flexible.⁴⁴ In Scotland, James VI advised his son that he might “lawfully play at the carts or tables [an early form of backgammon]” when he had nothing better to do “(as a good King will be seeldome),” or when ill or tired of reading, or in bad weather.⁴⁵ English gentlemen, though, treated play as a pastime that interrupted idleness, not work.

In practice, they used it to dispose not only of time but money. Avarice was not a significant incentive for great play. Consistent winning at games of chance was hard to maintain in the era before probability theory was understood, since players could not calculate the chances that useful cards would turn up.⁴⁶ The result was that winning was not fundamentally the motivation of gentlemanly players. Success implied one might be cheating, something that concern for one’s reputation would actively discourage. Greed might motivate fraud but not large wagers: chance, united with cheating, meant that (honest) players who staked high would simply lose more. Dicers branded themselves fools if they played honestly, cheats if they won, asserted Elyot.⁴⁷

For Harington, pride and covetousness were antagonistic.⁴⁸ Gentlemen, he maintained, performed liberality for honor’s sake:

*Now, that you may playnly see it is pryde cheefly that moves men to great play, (specially in cowrte and in publyque assemblies whearsoever;) mark, I say, the greatest and the moste professed great players, if they will not in pryvat mens howses, or in their own, (if they have any,) play as small game as need be, whearas to play the same, nay fyve tymes the same stake in other places, they wold cownt themselves disparaged for ever. . . . This pride in gaming would fayn be taken for a kynde of magnanimytie and bowntifull disposycion; and thearfore, as I sayd, the more publicke the place is, the more honorable the presence, the deeper the play groweth; and then, as though two shillinge and sixe pence had not as many sillabells in it as one hundred pownds, you shall heere them still talkinge of hunderdes and thowsands. And whearfore is all this, forsooth?—because the beholders may extoll theyr brave myndes, and saye one to another, “Did yow ever see gentlemen that cared so little for theyr money, so brave, so bountifull, etc.”*⁴⁹

Tellingly, Chamberlain, in his accounts of court gaming, related who lost how much, mentioning winners secondarily if at all.⁵⁰

⁴³ James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:187 [“mother of all vice”]; Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 199 [“first suggester”]; Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 88 [“Undoubted, etc.”]. See also Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 96.

⁴⁴ Thomas Wilcox, *A Glasse for Gamesters and Namelie for Suche as Delight in Cards & Dice* [. . .] (London, 1581), sig. A6; Thomas Newton (translating Lambert Daneau), “A Discourse of Gaming, and Specially of Dyceplay,” in *True and Christian Friendship* (London, 1586), sig. Er–Ev.

⁴⁵ James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:193–94.

⁴⁶ See Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (London, 1975), 1–56.

⁴⁷ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 88–89.

⁴⁸ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 212–13.

⁴⁹ Harington, 203–4 (my emphases).

⁵⁰ McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 1:52, 180.

Harington treated the fact that bystanders influenced the stakes as understood. In Elizabeth's presence chamber, gaming amused not only the players but others who "intertayn[ed] themselves with beholding it." They expected a performance and were disappointed not to see large sums actually changing hands. When great lords played for high stakes using fragments of card as counters, lacking ready money, "the beholders have taken small pleasure in beholding this play, though hundreds were really and indeed lost thereat." Harington described rural bowls matches at which large sums were wagered that were only later paid over: "The country people, that saw no mony walking, helde themselves deluded."⁵¹ For true enjoyment they had to see money won and lost.

Christopher Hatton, when hosting foreign ambassadors and "knowinge the generall humor of the meaner sort to love to see great play," had his friends divert the deputation's lowlier members with card-playing while he entertained their masters. The players paid their own losses later, but Hatton supplied a thousand pounds, so that every time a shilling was actually bid, a pound could be laid down, "that the summes playd might seem great, the show bountifull, and the substance not un-supportable." In short, elite gambling frequently had observers whose expectations of seeing large amounts won and lost influenced the stakes; players had to satisfy these expectations of gentlemanly conduct.⁵² Harington thus urged courtiers to adopt Hatton's scheme. If ostensibly high bids masked lower ones, this would be "gentlemanly for shew, little for loss, and pleasant for company and recreation." Players would impress, while onlookers would be "as well entertayned and theyr thoughts as well pleased, as if so moche golde were truly wonne and lost." At the same time, true high wagers would be discouraged, since for every shilling genuinely staked, one would need to carry about a pound.⁵³ When Harington persuaded his acquaintances to practise this "counterfet gaming" with only fifteen shillings in contention at a sitting in reality, the "vulgar beholders did holde it for the noblest and royalest play they had seen; only marvelling to see such sober gentlemen play so much in an howr as they wear not used to spend in a week."⁵⁴

Harington was writing during a period when gambling intensified. Perhaps he inflated the importance of bystanders. However, he claimed to base his arguments on observation, evidence, and self-examination and appealed to his readers' own experience.⁵⁵ The gambling he described seems to have involved deep play in Geertz's sense. One expended money to win reputation. High wagers displayed liberality and generosity, reflecting the Latin *generosus*, as noble and well-bred. Harington emphasized that he aimed not to condemn gambling but to "establish an honor and order in that, which in wise mens opinions is now both dishonorably and disorderly abused, specially in that house whence the pattern and lyght of all honor and order should come [Elizabeth's court]."⁵⁶ He accepted that spectators should

⁵¹ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 200, 207–8.

⁵² Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 210–11. For a discussion of the need to satisfy expectations of this kind, see Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J. G. Peristiany (London, 1965), 21–77, at 21–22.

⁵³ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 207, 228–32.

⁵⁴ Harington, 208.

⁵⁵ Harington, 195–96.

⁵⁶ Harington, 187.

witness high stakes. Early modern society thrived on spectacle, which made courtiers' behavior influential: "Lordes," remarked Ascham, "be lanterns to leade the lyfe of meane men."⁵⁷ But extravagant stakes could impoverish gamblers and so constitute a poor example. Harington thus aimed at reconciling great play's social necessity with its repercussions.

His proposal involved a benign confidence trick, with spectators duped into applauding wagers less impressive than they looked. His play resembled behavior described later by the Jesuit John Gerard, although in that case for a different end:

A well-known persecutor of Catholics . . . found us, or so he thought, playing cards. Actually we had put the cards away to attend to better things as soon as the servants had gone downstairs, and we had resumed our game when this gentleman was announced. So he found us sitting at the card-table piled with money. I should explain that whenever I was with Catholics and we had to stage a game in circumstances like these, we had an understanding that everybody got his money back at the end and that the loser said an *Ave Maria* for every counter returned. In this way I often played . . . when there was occasion to act a part and make bystanders think that we were playing for money in good earnest.⁵⁸

Deep play involved self-fashioning. By displaying readiness to cast money away casually, gentlemen set out to reinforce popular expectations about their character: that it would feature liberality, indifference to expense, and so forth. Conversely, there were assumptions about priests, too, including that they did not gamble.⁵⁹ Gerard used the pretence of great play to mislead: his highly particular form of self-fashioning subverted notions about how the gentry and priesthood conducted themselves, to create the impression that he belonged to the former. His strategy paralleled Harington's arguments for counterfeit great play at court: it would satisfy players' wish to appear magnificent while minimizing damage to themselves or others. Gentleman gamblers who resorted to deep play (the anthropological phenomenon) used great play (high stakes bids) to establish a reputation for themselves. Whether they deployed regular great play or the deceptive versions that Harington and Gerard championed varied according to whether their intentions were straightforward or not.⁶⁰

A YOUNG MAN'S VICE

If gentlemen used gambling for the purpose of self-fashioning, it could equally reflect social insecurity. Stone argued of conspicuous consumption more generally that new arrivals on the aristocratic scene—the Cecils, Hattons, Dudleys, Southamptons, and Pembrokes—flaunted their riches to compensate for a lack of roots. Their doing so

⁵⁷ Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 59 (referencing gambling).

⁵⁸ John Gerard, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. Philip Caraman (London, 1951), 170.

⁵⁹ Gerard, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, 161, 165. Jesuits were often recruited from the gentry, so could readily impersonate lay gentlemen.

⁶⁰ Harington and Hatton conceivably inspired Gerard, or were themselves inspired by earlier Jesuits. Both had connections with Catholic networks. See Kilroy, "Courtier in the Margins," 7; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, s.v. "Hatton, Sir Christopher (c. 1540–1591), Courtier and Politician," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12605>.

led established families to follow suit.⁶¹ And like the new rich, young men also had imperfectly established identities, which they strove to shore up through staking large sums—perhaps one reason contemporaries treated immoderate gambling as a young man’s vice. Harington took it for granted. “Games playd at for wagers” were “one of the moste dawngerows rockes at which the youth of this island suffer voluntary shipwrack.” While other critics saw it as a “spoyler of yowth,” he did not urge total prohibition for, as he admitted, “I shoulde have all our yowng lordes . . . against me.” Moreover, cozeners were “the ruyn of infinit young gentlemen.” Earlier in the 1590s, Robert Greene had famously exposed the activities of conycatchers, describing ruses such as “Barnard’s Law,” whereby teams of conycatchers, seemingly unacquainted, fooled a victim into staking all his cash against a seemingly drunk opponent, who promptly won it all.⁶² Since people were now better informed about conycatchers’ tricks, observed Harington, “theyr cheefe hope is for owr yowng captaynes to come ritche from the Indyas.”⁶³

Other writers held similar views of gambling as a young man’s vice. Haly Heron, “tutor to John Kay the younger, Gent.,” wrote a 1579 conduct guide to marshal Kay through “the daungerous course & aduentures of youth.”⁶⁴ Dicers were “witlesse folke, or wilfull youth,” “ledde by fond affections of youth” to indulge in “childishe pastimes.”⁶⁵ Such views were not unique to Elizabethan England. Roger Ascham had earlier observed (1544) that there was “no one thinge yat crokes youth more then suche unfeull games.” A French work translated by Geffray Fenton cautioned, “Play is occasion of infinite evils, as is expressed commonly upon the experiance of yong men now a daies”: “From quarrels, iniuries, othes, renouncing of God, yong men fal into inuentions of theft and robberye, with other practises of more wickedness.”⁶⁶

Early modern drama expressed the same viewpoint. In the farcical morality play *Liberality and Prodigality*, first performed around 1567, Dick Dycer, one of the conycatchers who strips the young gentleman Prodigality of his money, is repeatedly called a “boy.”⁶⁷ Quicksilver, *Eastward Ho!*’s gambler, was an apprentice. Bassanio, the young protagonist of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, had “disabled [his] estate” by attempting to show a “more swelling port” than his “faint means” allowed. Gambling seems to have contributed to his downfall: a friend proposed a thousand-ducat wager on which of them would father the first son.⁶⁸ Similar

⁶¹ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 183–88.

⁶² Robert Greene, “A Notable Discovery of Cozenage [1591],” in *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets: An Anthology of Elizabethan Low Life*, ed. Gãmini Salgãdo (Harmondsworth, 1972), 155–92.

⁶³ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 194–95, 187, 226–27. Harington may have considered his own proposal that players should dupe spectators with fraudulent great play a benign and witty equivalent of conycatching behavior.

⁶⁴ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, epistle dedicatory, unpaginated.

⁶⁵ Heron, 94, 92.

⁶⁶ Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 58; Geoffrey Fenton, *A forme of Christian pollicie drawne out of French by Geffray Fenton* (London, 1574), 134, 136.

⁶⁷ Published as *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality*, 1602, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford, 1913), 3.2.541–83. The play was performed in front of Queen Elizabeth around 1600, then subsequently printed, but its style dates it to a much earlier period. For a discussion of the work’s history, see T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (Leicester, 1962), 110–18.

⁶⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 1.1.123–25; 3.2.213. All citations from Shakespeare are from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells et al., 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2005).

things happened in real life, although not all great play involved youths. Robert Cecil still staked large sums into his thirties; Lord Scrope (1533/34–1592) appears to have done likewise.⁶⁹ However, the archetypal great player was young.

Wagering nested within prodigality more generally. Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564–1632), who succeeded to his estates in 1585 aged twenty-two, recalled that “out of [his] means of £3,000 yearly [he] had made shift in one year and a half to be £17,000 in debt” through expenses on “hawks, hounds, horses, dice, cards, apparel, mistresses,” etc.⁷⁰ In Mary Tudor’s reign, Henry, Lord Berkeley (1534–1613), likewise indulged in tennis, bowls, cards, dice, hunting, and hawking, “delights that drew on greater totalls in his Accompts at the years end then his revenue would support.”⁷¹ Other cases of extravagance have been less clearly itemized. Naunton reports that Lord Buckhurst (ca. 1536–1608) “spent in his youth the best part” of the “vast patrimony” left him by his father, until Elizabeth’s “frequent admonitions diverted the torrent of his profusion”; William Blount’s “untimely prodigalities” helped impoverish his brother, Lord Mountjoy; William Paulet, Marquis of Winchester (1474/75–1572), and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1506/07–1570), “both younger Brothers . . . spent what was left them, and came on trust to the Court.”⁷² In such cases, gaming probably featured within a syndrome of dissipation.

In 1561, after William Cecil dispatched his nineteen-year-old son, Thomas (1542–1623), to Paris to acquire accomplishments, the young man ran riot. His father, denouncing him as “an immoderate lover of dice and cards; in study soon weary, in game never,” cut his allowance to curb his activities. Thomas then borrowed from companions and stole from his governor. Fearing that he would return “a spending sot, meet to keep a tennis court,” his father expressed the wish he could be “committed secretly to some sharp prison” to fix the problem.⁷³

In 1598 at age twenty-five, William Cecil’s former ward Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, was likewise in Paris.⁷⁴ In addition to his losses at tennis, he was staking four thousand crowns an evening at cards.⁷⁵ He had left England after assaulting one of Elizabeth’s attendants, who had requested him to stop card

⁶⁹ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 569–70; Chamberlain to Ralph Winwood, 17 January 1602/03, in McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 1:180; “Bond in £200, Henry Scroope kt. Lord Scroope of Bolton to Mathew Smyth of Middle Temple, gent,” 5 January 1565, AC/D/7/5, Bristol Archives.

⁷⁰ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 81.

⁷¹ John Smyth, *The Lives of the Berkeleys, Lords of the Honour, Castle and Manor of Berkeley in the County of Gloucester from 1066 to 1618*, ed. John MacLean, vol. 2 (Gloucester, 1883–85), 281, 284–85, 363. For contemporary views on the hazards of inheriting young, see Keith Thomas, *Age and Authority in Early Modern England: Raleigh Lecture on History*, 1976 (London, 1976), 15.

⁷² Robert Naunton, *Fragmenia Regalia: Probably Written around 1630; Reprinted from the Third Posthumous Edition of 1653*, ed. Edward Arber (Westminster, 1895), 55, 56–57 (also 25).

⁷³ Cited and discussed in Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth* (New York, 1961), 211–17; see also Louis B. Wright, introduction to *Advice to a Son: Precepts of Lord Burghley, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Francis Osborne*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Ithaca, 1962), ix–xxvi.

⁷⁴ Park Honan, s.v. “Wriothesley, Henry, Third Earl of Southampton (1573–1624), Courtier and Literary Patron,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30073>; A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare’s Southampton: Patron of Virginia* (London, 1965), 43–57.

⁷⁵ “French Advertisements,” 2 October 1598, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire: Part VIII (1598)*, (London, 1899); Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 569.

playing in her presence chamber for the night.⁷⁶ Gambling, in short, was associated with antisocial activities. It belonged to the culture of excess whereby young men challenged the patriarchal norms of manhood that advocated moderation.⁷⁷ Gaming debts could lead to violence or theft; alternatively, they might prompt larger wagers. Short of cash in Paris, Southampton staked high in hopes of winning; his playing for show now ceded to playing to win.⁷⁸

Youthful excess tended to abate with age, however. When seriously in debt in 1587, Henry Percy created a disturbance at his mother's house regarding his sister, whom he wished to marry to a gambling partner.⁷⁹ He continued to be hot-tempered, coming close to fighting several duels in his mid-thirties. He incurred royal displeasure by spitting in an opponent's face in James I's presence.⁸⁰ However, after marrying in 1594, he began writing a guide for his son in 1596, urging the boy to live prudently; he completed it in 1609, "time having well worn all humours of riot" out of his system.⁸¹ Experience had changed his views. Percy's guide addressed a gentleman's possessions, servants, family, and giving. Condemning his past errors, he analyzed why he had made them. Lords should ensure they knew their finances and estates better than anyone, he maintained, as they would then know how their wealth was spent and would minimize wastefulness. "All men that consume their estates are for the most part ignorant what they have; what the worth of it is; what the particular commodities thereof may be; how difficult it is to gather together so much."⁸²

Patterns of men's gambling supply evidence that attitudes to honor altered over their lifetimes. Mervyn James identified a reconceptualization of honor over the course of the Tudor era, from a stress on lineage and personal autonomy toward a service-oriented, state-centered Protestant ethos.⁸³ Richard Cust, however, has argued for coexisting discourses of honor. Catholic gentry, he contended, continued to prefer the earlier conception because, since their faith barred them from most offices, notions of honor founded on office-holding were unattractive.⁸⁴ Cust's argument seems applicable to young gentlemen whose culture of excess resembled the old-style manner of asserting honor. They, too, were typically debarred by their youth from those roles that conferred honor. The difference was that, unlike Catholics, young Protestant men became eligible for honorable positions as they aged.

At the same time as they aged, young men's views seem to have modified. Most written works that addressed gambling had authors who had attained maturity ("man's estate"), understood as extending from about thirty to fifty years old.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Rowse, *Shakespeare's Southampton*, 120.

⁷⁷ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 93–126.

⁷⁸ Rowse, *Shakespeare's Southampton*, 126–27.

⁷⁹ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 9; Percy, *Household Papers*, 20.

⁸⁰ Mark Nicholls, s.v. "Percy, Henry, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564–1632), Nobleman," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21939>.

⁸¹ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 85.

⁸² Percy, 76–87.

⁸³ Mervyn James, "English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485–1642," *Past and Present*, Suppl. 3 (1978).

⁸⁴ Richard Cust, "Honour and Politics in Early Stuart England: The Case of Beaumont v. Hastings," *Past and Present*, no. 149 (1995): 57–94.

⁸⁵ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 54, 58.

Percy's excesses began in 1585 when he was twenty-two; he wrote his guide between the ages of thirty-three and forty-six.⁸⁶ Sir Thomas Elyot (ca. 1490–1546) wrote his *Boke Named the Governour* at age forty-one. Harington (bap. 1560, d. 1612) wrote his "Treatise on Playe" around 1597, when he was thirty-seven. James VI's *Basilicon Doron* (1598) dated from his early thirties.⁸⁷ This pattern was not invariable: George Whetstone claimed that his *Rocke of Regarde* (1576), published when he was twenty-six, reflected his life history, which had featured an attempt to murder him. If so, he had serious reason to reflect younger than usual on his dissipated conduct.⁸⁸

Writers generally adopted the voice of experience. Some confessed, like Percy, to having been gamesters themselves. Whetstone alleged his account—written for the "behalf and forewarning" of "unstayed youth, who hauing the raines at libertie, [are often] tyred out right with prodigalitie, before they be brought into any perfect order of spending"—was "invented for the most, of experience."⁸⁹ Harington professed embarrassment that the gamblers' tricks he described revealed that he was "not so ignorant of them as I owght to be." He claimed he had been stimulated to write his treatise through having "so hardly (and perhaps skantfully)" escaped the risks great play entailed.⁹⁰

Mature men's writings reflected competing discourses of manhood and honor. As young gentlemen, most had used deep play to impress their immediate circles, constructing identities through wild behavior. A transformation of outlook occurred as they aged: although in youth some had embraced the unwritten code spurring them to gamble recklessly, they now reacted against it.⁹¹ While not condemning gambling outright, they worried over its repercussions. Acquiring families appears to have mellowed them. As fathers, they wrote advice manuals seeking to forestall their sons' unruly behavior.

RIVAL NORMS

Older men's critique of the unruly behaviors of youth was three-pronged, emphasizing gambling's risk to the individual, impact on the community, and harm to reputation. Religious writers were categorical: wagering and games of chance were both sinful.⁹² Elizabethan gentlemen, though, treated the distinction between honest recreation and idleness as one of degree. Heron counseled against "only immoderate use of Dyce playe;" gambling was acceptable to "recreate the minde" but pernicious in excess.⁹³ In his "Treatise on Playe," Harington sought to restore honor to court

⁸⁶ Introduction to Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 43–44.

⁸⁷ Introduction to Elyot, *Book Named the Governour*, v; Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 204n7; James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 2:1–38, esp. 4.

⁸⁸ Thomas C. Izard, *George Whetstone: Mid-Elizabethan Man of Letters* (New York, 1942), 11.

⁸⁹ George Whetstone, *The Rocke of Regard, diuided into foure parts*, ed. John Payne Collier (London, 1868), esp. the preface, i–vi, and fourth part ("The Orchard of Repentance"), 183–331.

⁹⁰ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 195, 208–9.

⁹¹ For a dialogue between Age and Youth, see Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 93–94.

⁹² James Balmford, *A Short and Plaine Dialogue Concerning the vnlawfulnes of playing at Cards or Tables, or any other game consisting in chance* (London, 1593); Wilcox, *A Glasse for Gamesters*; Newton, *True and Christian Friendshippe*.

⁹³ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 89, 96.

gambling, which had become disordered.⁹⁴ James VI cautioned his son against extremes: “Neither a madde passion for losse, nor falshood vsed for desire of gaine, can be called a play.”⁹⁵ Even Elyot, who condemned dicing strongly, did so in a chapter on “exercises, which if they be moderately used be to every estate of man expedient,” and he conceded that cards and tables were “somewhat more tolerable” than dice.⁹⁶ For Harington, the idea of “holy and wise preachers” that dice and cards were “unhonest, ungodly, unlawful, and by wise princes owght to be banished” was mistaken: “Play by skrypture is a thinge indifferent.” James held the same opinion.⁹⁷ Writers did not deny that an excessive gambling lifestyle could present spiritual risks but left such matters “to the divines” to address.⁹⁸

Gambling did present dangers to the body, though. Wagering, a tavern sin associated with drunkenness, brawling, and nuisance, could lead to violence.⁹⁹ In 1602, Chamberlain reported, “Boughton, that served the Archbishop of Caunterbury, was stabd and kild in a brabble at bowles by his Lords page . . . with the bishops owne knife.”¹⁰⁰ Consistent winning (with probability not understood at the time) was interpreted as cheating. Elyot warned that “because always wisdom [that is, expertise] is therein suspected, there is seldom any playing at dice but thereat is vehement chiding and brawling, horrible oaths, cruel, and sometime mortal, menaces.”¹⁰¹

Moreover, cards and dice, providing no exercise,¹⁰² offended the utilitarian perspective on recreation whereby approved sports constituted military training.¹⁰³ The lifestyle of the gambler was generally unhealthy: in Heron’s considered view, a gambler “so much distempere[d] himselfe” with “more tothesome than holesome” foods, “untimely feeding and insatiable quaffing, long standing, unwholesome sitting, night walkyng, and inordinate watching,” that he shortly became a “pale ghoste haunted with greate sicknesse, and poysoned with loathsome foule diseases” like “cold rheums,” “painfull gout,” and “loathsome dropsy.”¹⁰⁴ William Blount constituted an example: he died young, “hauing too much weakened his body by his vntemperate youthfulness.”¹⁰⁵

Elyot insinuated that gambling was effeminizing—a common slur on behavior that defied patriarchal models of manhood.¹⁰⁶ According to Heron, dicers claimed

⁹⁴ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 187.

⁹⁵ James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:195.

⁹⁶ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 88–90.

⁹⁷ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 186–87, 217; James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:191, 193.

⁹⁸ Harington and Elyot use very similar wording: Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 198 (“I will leave to the divynes to tell you . . . what became of them that did ‘eate and drinke, and rose up agayn to play’”); Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 90 (“These be the fruits and revenues of that devilish merchandise [gaming], beside the final reward, which is more terrible; the report whereof I leave to divines”).

⁹⁹ See Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 53–56; Whetstone, *Rocke of Regard*, 239–60.

¹⁰⁰ Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 26 April 1602, in McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 1:139.

¹⁰¹ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 88–89; see also Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 55–56.

¹⁰² Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 88; Ascham, *Toxophilus*, 58; Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 63–64.

¹⁰³ Brailsford, *Sport and Society*, 8–25; Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 63–64; Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 59–69, 91–94; James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:187–91.

¹⁰⁴ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 92–93.

¹⁰⁵ For Blount, see William Camden, *Tomus alter; & idem; or, The historie of the Life and Reigne of that Famous Princesse, Elizabeth* (London, 1629), 117.

¹⁰⁶ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 28–30, 94.

they were “yong and lustie” and their behavior was manly and honorable: “Dothe the nicenesse of women become us? Or shoulde we be curious in diet like vnto Ladies?” Their hard-living lifestyle would fit them for soldiering, they maintained; when wagering, they risked their livelihood, while the associated swearing, drinking, and brawling bore some resemblance to army life. Heron responded that “suche intemperance and disorder” was instead likelier to leave them hospital cripples. “Neyther is it womanly softnesse to auoyd sicknesse, nor wanton diet to seek the meanes to pre-serue health.”¹⁰⁷ To abstain from excessive gambling was not effeminate, in short. Though gamesters might assert that their neglect of their health and well-being was like that of duelers or soldiers and so epitomized manliness, critics intimated that shunning healthy outdoor pursuits for sedentary alternatives was effeminate.

The economic danger was certainly plain. A riotous life could lead to ruin. Wrote Whetstone, who had inherited his father’s legacy at age twenty-three, “Youthes, from rod to freedome leapt / Are thrall to sharper whips.”¹⁰⁸ Gentlemen could be fleeced by conycatchers, as happened in *Liberality and Prodigality*. Quicksilver in the play *Eastward Ho!* exchanged counterfeit gold for genuine silver for gallants who preferred to stake gold.¹⁰⁹ Bystanders encouraged great play, as did intoxication: Elizabethan rogue literature was clear that conycatchers used ale to help extract their victims’ money.¹¹⁰

Acquaintances could be as perilous as strangers. The desire not to fall short of richer companions induced gamesters to over-stake. Harington therefore advised that players should wager considerably against those poorer than themselves.¹¹¹ Henry Percy cautioned against play with inferiors who might have their own agendas: “Dicers, carders, bowlers, cockers, horse-runners” who urged gaming might seek either “to cheat you themselves, or to use you as an instrument [to ensnare others]. . . because men of your place will be less suspected than those whose necessities inforces to such a trade of life.”¹¹²

Impoverishment through gambling could bring about “base shifts.”¹¹³ Borrowing money during gambling sessions was not unusual,¹¹⁴ yet the debtor might be incapable of reimbursing his creditors. A gamester unable to repay money lost might be “constrayned to disappoynt hys especiall good friendes of sundrye dayes of paiment. . . [and] driven to fly, not for feare of his enemyes, but least hee be pursued of his best friendes.”¹¹⁵ As Percy recalled, having resorted to such expedients himself, “Poor creatures waiting in every corner made me think a back door an honest sally to escape their importunities, a disease that haunteth an honest mind and a great

¹⁰⁷ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 93–94.

¹⁰⁸ Whetstone, *Rocke of Regard*, 259.

¹⁰⁹ Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston, *Eastward Ho!* [1605], ed. C. G. Petter (London, 1973), 1.1.36–40.

¹¹⁰ See Robert Greene, “The Second Part of Cony-Catching [1592],” in Salgãdo, *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 193–229, at 208; Cuthbert Cony-Catcher [pseud.], “The Defence of Cony-Catching [1592],” in Salgãdo, *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets*, 339–77, at 341.

¹¹¹ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 205–7.

¹¹² Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 112–13; also James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 1:197.

¹¹³ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 195.

¹¹⁴ Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household, 1250–1600: Good Governance and Politic Rule* (Oxford, 1988), 94; Percy, *Household Papers*, 20, 49; Dudley, *Household Accounts*, 168, 226, 228, 345, 357.

¹¹⁵ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 90.

debt.”¹¹⁶ To evade appeals for assistance, the friends of a gambler in difficulties might start to avoid him: “Now is he forst to try his friendes / His monie to provide, / Where he on flocks may see them fleete, / Which fawned in his pride.”¹¹⁷

Thus Bassanio, in this predicament in *The Merchant of Venice*, finds acquaintances growing “exceeding strange,” hurriedly departing whenever he appears.¹¹⁸ The play’s plot hinges on his resort to suretyship: convincing a friend to guarantee a loan. “Beware of suretyship” was proverbial advice.¹¹⁹ The practice could endanger guarantors who became entangled in acquaintances’ debts. Conversely, creditors and guarantors could collude to beggar men who sought loans. The goldsmith Touchstone in *Eastward Ho!* attributed his prosperity to having “had the horn of suretyship ever before my eyes [as a danger to avoid]. You all know the device of the horn, where the young fellow slips in at the butt-end, and comes squeezed out at the buckle [the mouthpiece].”¹²⁰ Contemporary images abounded, showing a man thrust into a large horn and emerging through the narrow end thin and stripped of assets.¹²¹ Indebted gamblers might resort to criminality, cheating others: “In suche sort, with the ruyn of infinit young gentlemen, the dycing-box mayntains a hungery famylee.”¹²² Debt could thus begin a vicious circle ending in violence or arrest.

Conduct guides presented wagering as a threat to self-sufficiency and credit, both integral to notions of manhood and honor.¹²³ Such things affected a gambler’s friends, family, and society at large. “Who,” demanded Elyot, “almost trusteth his brother, whom he knoweth a dice player?”¹²⁴ Far from demonstrating generosity or indifference to money, Harington insinuated, great play left gamblers failing in their duty toward inferiors to whom they should behave responsibly. He imagined bystanders at a gaming session discussing players’ actions away from the table: one roughly putting off a creditor (“God damme me, if I pay you not the next mony I receive”); another refusing a poor woman’s offer of fifty pounds in a year’s time for “a copy-holde in which shee had a widdows estate,” instead selling the land for thirty pounds straightaway, claiming “hee had such present need of mony hee could not stay so longe”; a third accusing his bailiff of paying day laborers eightpence a day when “hee myght have had them for viid.’ Loe the bownty of these magnificall players!”¹²⁵ Heron’s perspective was broader still: the dicer’s “riotous effusion of hys goodes and landes” was like the “shipwracke of a common wealth, or cruel spoile of a whole country.” He sketched a grim picture of the community whose “Lorde [was] an unthrift”: “rentes rackt without offence . . . tenaunts punisht without cause . . . Downe with woodes . . . auncient buildyngs . . . stately Towers . . . Princely halles . . . Why should lands lye unsolde and the Lorde lacke his libertie? . . . Alas poore

¹¹⁶ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 81.

¹¹⁷ Whetstone, *Rocke of Regard*, 248.

¹¹⁸ Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, 1.1.57–68.

¹¹⁹ Malcolm Jones, “The Horn of Suretyship,” *Print Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1999): 219–28.

¹²⁰ Jonson, Chapman, and Marston, *Eastward Ho!*, 1.1.50–54 (including editorial note); William Fennor, “The Counter’s Commonwealth (1617),” in *The Elizabethan Underworld*, ed. A. V. Judges (London, 1930), 441–48.

¹²¹ For numerous examples, see Jones, “Horn of Suretyship,” 20–24.

¹²² Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 226.

¹²³ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 188–95.

¹²⁴ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 90.

¹²⁵ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 204–5.

Tenaunts with such a thriftlesse landlord oppressed.”¹²⁶ Heron’s description resembled Percy’s account of his own youth.¹²⁷

Such critiques judged gamesters for their impact on the community and evoked a context wider than that of the players’ immediate circle. If they indulged in great play to acquire not money but reputation, commentators implied, that reputation might be a bad one. “Ye fame & good name of euerye man,” stated Heron, “[are] no sooner in question, than when he is knowen to be a common gamester.”¹²⁸ Who, demanded Elyot, “hearing a man, whom he knoweth not, to be called a dicer . . . supposeth him not to be of light credence, dissolute, vain, and remiss?”¹²⁹ For Harington, wagering games risked shipwreck “both of fame and fortune.”¹³⁰

However, behind these accounts, the young gamesters’ own perspective can be glimpsed. Heron’s straw men claimed gambling toughened them for soldiering. By hazarding themselves physically and financially, they hoped to gain credibility and affirm manliness. Deep play sought precisely the dangers critics warned of, thus reflecting players’ counter-code of manhood and honor.¹³¹

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL HONOR

Gentlemen’s ideas about honor shifted as they matured and acquired responsibilities. Young men’s deep play revolved around the individual within a limited peer group: as with Russian roulette, one hazarded oneself to extort respect. Older men, however, saw honor in communal terms. Inconsiderate conduct could damage one’s own repute and that of one’s family.

The leading scholars of early modern honor have not investigated how gentlemen’s views on it might alter over their lifespans. James explored society’s shifting attitudes; Cust compared different groups’ distinct standpoints; Pollock directed attention to honor’s communal aspect. None, however, considered the evolution of individual viewpoints. Shepard’s research into manhood does address transformations that took place as men aged and implicitly engages with honor, but honor is not her chief concern.¹³² Men’s views about gaming, at least, plainly did change, reflected in the advice they penned for their sons. Their developing feelings about gaming therefore potentially hold insights into how attitudes toward honor itself shifted.

Honor, according to ethnographers, is negotiated between individuals and their communities: to be accorded honor, one must act so as to merit it.¹³³ This study follows Frank Henderson Stewart’s useful distinction between two forms of

¹²⁶ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 91–92; also, Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 207–8.

¹²⁷ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 81–83.

¹²⁸ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 90.

¹²⁹ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 90.

¹³⁰ Harington, “Treatise on Playe,” 194–95.

¹³¹ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 93–113.

¹³² James, “English Politics and the Concept of Honour”; Cust, “Honour and Politics”; Linda A. Pollock, “Honor, Gender, and Reconciliation in Elite Culture, 1570–1700,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 1 (2007): 3–29; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*. Pollock’s case that families sought to conserve their collective honor could usefully be considered in regard to the families of gamesters, but doing so lies beyond the scope of this study.

¹³³ Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” 21–25.

honor. Horizontal (or negative) honor is attributed to individuals by their peers as a matter of course. One can forfeit, damage, or regain horizontal honor but cannot augment it; because peers have equal status, nobody can rise relative to others. However, vertical (or positive) honor, typically elicited from below, does have gradations: one can win esteem and outstrip former equals. In both cases, the most obvious form of honor involves social status. Someone of a given rank can expect deference from inferiors and courtesy, on grounds of equality, from peers. However, competitive forms of vertical honor exist, reflecting, for example, military prowess: heroes command respect from less valorous social equals.¹³⁴

These generalizations help explain William Cecil's advice to his son Robert to be "humble yet generous" toward superiors and "familiar yet respectful" with equals, and to show "much humility and some familiarity" to inferiors: "The first prepares a way to advancement; the second makes thee known for a man well-bred; the third gains a good report which once gotten may be safely kept." In other words, Cecil advises his son to tender vertical honor to superiors and horizontal honor to equals and to elicit vertical honor from those below.¹³⁵

Attitudes toward gambling can be understood in these same terms. Men such as Harington had concerns about great play but recognized the imperative to sustain one's reputation, especially with inferiors. At court, "greater persons showle . . . play on a velvet carpet, handle nothing but golde, talke of nothing but powndes," so as "not to neglect the honorable shew of the place."¹³⁶ Low wagers could compromise one's honor, just as wearing insufficiently fine clothes would.¹³⁷ This counsel treated honor in horizontal terms, as something that could only be conserved or lost. Lavish play was essential not to acquire honor but to secure it: liberality reasserted one's status within the existing social framework. Once it had an impact on persons other than bystanders, however—for instance, on family, creditors or tenants—it became dishonorable. In his "Treatise on Playe," Harington proposed a sardonic compromise: spurious high stakes would preserve players' reputations among spectators without sacrificing it in the wider community.¹³⁸

Young men's deep play took a different approach, using self-hazarding wagers to achieve Stewart's "competitive vertical honor."¹³⁹ Players staked their livelihoods to extort respect, much as soldiers risked their lives "seeking the bubble reputation / even in the cannon's mouth."¹⁴⁰ The renown earned would reflect personal courage, not prior status. This was a high-risk strategy. Honor derived from danger, but danger might lead to downfall. Moreover, older men did not recognize this honor. In addition, gamblers who dealt in bad faith with inferiors, "waiv[ing] their right to respect" from them, were damaged in the eyes of peers.¹⁴¹ In effect, staking high to win vertical honor forfeited horizontal honor, not merely because

¹³⁴ Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago, 1994), 54–63.

¹³⁵ William Cecil, "Certain Precepts for the Well Ordering of a Man's Life (c. 1584)," in Wright, *Advice to a Son*, 7–13, at 12–13.

¹³⁶ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 205–7.

¹³⁷ Elyot, *Book Named the Governor*, 102–3; Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 547–49.

¹³⁸ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," esp. 207–11, 227–32.

¹³⁹ Stewart, *Honor*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.1.152–53.

¹⁴¹ Stewart, *Honor*, 59; see, for example, Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 204–5.

of the actual expedients that gamesters might be driven to (cheating, defaulting on debts, harsh treatment of employees, and so on) but also because dishonorable behavior had gradually come to be associated with great play.

The manner in which Harington described gamblers' activities indicates that he felt players were jeopardizing their honor: his statement that gamesters used great play to display "magnanimytie and bowntifull disposycion" immediately preceded his account of bystanders describing the stinginess and meanness toward others by the same "magnificall players" when away from the gaming table.¹⁴² Aristotle had classed magnanimity and magnificence as virtues. Each occupied an intermediate space between two vices—magnificence between vulgar ostentation and parsimony, magnanimity between pusillanimity and conceit.¹⁴³ However, Aristotle's condemnation of the failings that bookended each virtue was qualified: "These dispositions are vices, but they do not actually bring disrepute, because they are neither harmful to one's neighbors nor particularly offensive."¹⁴⁴ Harington, though, detailed how gamesters' largesse did hurt others, insinuating it therefore did bring disrepute.

If their activities were liable to forfeit the esteem of others, this may not have mattered to young gamblers. Conduct manuals were written by their fathers' generation; they sought prestige within their own. Young men formed their own "honor group," with its internal "honor code."¹⁴⁵ Aspirants had to conform to the hard-living lifestyle that Heron described; reputation within the group reflected the extent to which one did so. Thus, "if they happen to bring in their company, learning, virtuous business, liberality, patience, charity, temperance, good diet, or shamefastness, they must leave them without the gates."¹⁴⁶

In short, while it was broadly accepted that, to uphold honor, one must stake to a certain level, some players wagered high to enhance their reputation. In such cases, rank reflected the respect one was held in, not vice versa: individual prowess trumped corporate status. It was probably not coincidence that the groups associated with conspicuous expenditure of this sort were those whose claim to "horizontal" respect from fellow elites was least established: the newly rich and the young.

Gambling's critics were not just older than those they addressed but also more enmeshed in the community, with families, positions, and responsibilities. These represented alternative sources of honor. When Harington's "Treatise on Playe" appeared around 1597, for instance, he was well anchored in society: he had succeeded to the family estates in 1583 aged twenty-two and married the following year. Becoming a justice of the peace around 1586, he participated in county government for the rest of his life. His writings have been described as showing a "humanistic concern for 'the common weal.'"¹⁴⁷ By the time he wrote about gambling, his experiences meant that he saw it in a broader, communal context. Sir Thomas Elyot's

¹⁴² Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 203–5.

¹⁴³ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 2004), 89–99.

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, at 93. For Aristotle's influence on Renaissance thought, see A. D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, no. 33 (1970): 162–70.

¹⁴⁵ Stewart, *Honor*, 54.

¹⁴⁶ Heron, *Newe Discourse of Morall Philosophie*, 92–94.

¹⁴⁷ Jason Scott-Warren, s.v. "Harington, Sir John (bap. 1560, d. 1612), Courtier and Author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12326>.

life (1490–1546) had earlier followed a similar path. At the time his *Boke Named the Governour* appeared in 1531, he had married (1510), succeeded his father (1522), served as justice of the peace (for Oxfordshire and Wiltshire from 1515 to 1529 and for Cambridgeshire from 1530), and been sheriff of the two former counties in 1527 and 1529.¹⁴⁸ When James VI wrote the *Basilicon Doron* (1598), he had ruled Scotland as a minor from 1567, in his own right from 1584, married in 1590, and been a father from 1594.

The fact their conduct guides were frequently written for sons implied maturity but also a stake in society as head of a household. These guides were commonly composed as the son passed beyond the father's control. William Cecil prepared one to accompany his son Thomas to Paris, another when his son Robert attained his majority; Walter Raleigh wrote from the Tower of London, perhaps soon after incarceration, instructing his boy from afar. Henry Percy commenced his guide in the 1590s, on his son's birth, but he wrote the majority in 1609, likewise in the Tower, as a "last gift" in case of his execution. Captive in England, Mary Stewart reputedly did likewise. In Scotland, James VI composed the *Basilicon Doron* following a dream that he would shortly die. Francis Osborne penned his 1655 guide when his son entered Oxford.¹⁴⁹ Percy's observation that "most fathers want wit or temper beguilingly to win [a] youth to good . . . when by authority fathers may run a nearer course" suggests the shift to persuasion reflected a diminished capacity to command.¹⁵⁰

Those they addressed had different characteristics. Typically, young gentlemen depended for their sense of self on a narrower peer group; they had fewer roots and responsibilities, domestic or public. With age, though, that could change. After Thomas Cecil's misadventures in Paris began in 1561 at age nineteen, he returned to England, allegedly "amended," in January 1563. From that point, his responsibilities commenced. He sat in Parliament five times, beginning in 1563. He married in 1564. Around 1600, he became president of the Council of the North. Although he did not cease gaming, his period of profligacy predated these responsibilities: he was respectable enough by 1576 to be the dedicatee of George Whetstone's denunciation of dicing and dissipation.¹⁵¹ He had acquired alternative sources of honor, ones potentially threatened by a riotous lifestyle; he now had family honor to safeguard. Henry Percy's conduct guide advocated the prudent approach to finance he had disregarded himself in his youth, witnessing an altered perspective. He warned his son against the "wanton toys" of court, whose "delights will allure you above your means; for young men are as stiff in their reputations as the best, but

¹⁴⁸ Stanford Lehmborg, s.v. "Elyot, Sir Thomas (c. 1490–1546), Humanist and Diplomat," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8782>; Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Sir Thomas Elyot: Tudor Humanist* (Austin, 1960).

¹⁴⁹ Wright, introduction to *Advice to a Son*, xxi, xxiii; W. Lee Ustick, "Advice to a Son: A Type of Seventeenth-Century Conduct Book," *Studies in Philology* 29, no. 3 (1932): 409–41, at 410–11, especially note 2; Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 36, 43–45, 49–50; James Craigie, introduction to James VI, *Basilicon Doron*, 2:4–6.

¹⁵⁰ Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Read, *Mr. Secretary Cecil*, 211–17; Thomas Windebank, cited in Wright, introduction to *Advice to a Son*, xv; Richard Milward, s.v. "Cecil, Thomas, First Earl of Exeter (1542–1623), Courtier and Soldier," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4981>; for Cecil's gambling in the 1580s, see Dudley, *Household Accounts*, 221; Whetstone, *Rocke of Regard*, 184.

less able to understand in what it consists, for oftentimes they are deluded with appearances.”¹⁵²

Even as Percy wrote, the young Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was much deluded with appearances. In 1597, a duel between the two men was avoided only because Southampton had hurt his hand at *ballon*, a tennis-like game.¹⁵³ His hasty marriage of 1597 seems to have been the result of his mistress’s becoming pregnant. “I do not find a disposition in my son to be tied as yet,” his mother had remarked in 1594, when he incurred a five-thousand-pound fine to William Cecil, his guardian, for refusing to marry the bride who had been selected for him. While he remained “impetuous” throughout life, in his thirties he turned to politics, patronage, and the promotion of American settlement, retreating from earlier self-destructive antics.¹⁵⁴

Maturity brought young men to a better understanding of their interests, a greater stake in the community, and the capacity to assert honor in new ways, shifting their perspectives to such an extent that the same men might now caution against immoderate gambling. They set reputation against a more panoramic backdrop, acknowledging gaming’s societal and personal consequences; they now needed to negotiate their honor with a new constituency. One Jacobean sermon of 1624 contrasted “cutting of a Card, casting of a Die, throwing of a Bowle, watching of a Cocke” with a rival ideal of gentility that consisted of “good Hospitalitie, vertuous actions and generous deeds.” Gentlemen should “dwell in the Countrey, governe their Tenants, set peace among their neighbours, and maintaine their houses.”¹⁵⁵ Elizabethan gentlemen seem to have reached comparable conclusions as they aged.

FURTHER NUANCES

Reputation was not the sole factor influencing gambling. At the beginning of this article, I divided society according to ownership of time and money and then examined gentlemen, the group allegedly possessing leisure and wealth. In this schematic approach, the divisions constituted ideal types, not genuine categories. Different gentlemen had different access to the two variables—some were busy, others poor—and possession of either might alter during their lifetimes. Conversely, not all men with time and money were, strictly speaking, gentry. Gentlemen gambled with non-gentlemen (and also women): Robert Dudley’s household accounts, for example, record money lost at a gaming house in Croydon.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, concentration on time and money disregards legal and moral codes. The gentry, though mostly immune to anti-gaming laws, were subject to religious strictures, although Catholic, Church of England, and “hot Protestant” doctrine on gambling potentially varied. In short, a complex balance governed men’s gaming.

¹⁵² Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 52.

¹⁵³ Harrison, introduction to Percy, *Advice to his Son*, 5–47, at 15; Nicholls, “Percy, Henry.”

¹⁵⁴ Park, “Wriothesley, Henry”; Rowse, *Shakespeare’s Southampton*, 53–56 (citing Southampton’s mother at 55), 123–25.

¹⁵⁵ John Barlow, as cited in J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (London, 1969), 115.

¹⁵⁶ Dudley, *Household Accounts*, 246.

Individual gambling behavior likely reflected tension between personal situation and the expectations arising from ideals of gentility and honor. As Julian Pitt-Rivers has defined it, “Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. . . Honour, therefore, provides a nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in the individual through his aspiration to personify them.”¹⁵⁷ The Elizabethan concept of the gentleman had diverse origins and so was somewhat confused. Possession of arms defined the gentleman, but other traits and behaviors were also important.¹⁵⁸ Harington makes clear that popular expectations could condition gentlemen’s wagering.

Different members of the gentry had different expectations to satisfy, however. If young men who reacted against patriarchal norms aimed to impress peers, the devout had a trickier passage to navigate: the eyes of God were trained on them. Elizabethan Protestant writers increasingly denounced gambling. Their world picture precluded randomization. Providence, Calvin had declared, guided the path of every raindrop. Games of chance constituted lottery, which, except in serious matters, should never be used: God had personally to decide every chance outcome and thus was distracted from weightier business.¹⁵⁹ Although dice play was worse than cards and tables, which combined chance with skill, the latter were still unacceptable.¹⁶⁰ Religious writers likewise repudiated wagers as a form of thievery. Unlike secular elite authors, they opposed gambling unconditionally. The godly had therefore to reconcile secular acceptance with hardline religious opposition, something increasingly difficult from the end of Elizabeth’s reign as gambling intensified while radical Protestantism also flourished. Jacobean parents expressed concern to university authorities that their undergraduate sons would take up gaming.¹⁶¹ The case of Nicholas Ashton, who had a puritan background, indicates that these kinds of fears were well-founded: he mingled with dicers, played tables, sometimes all night long, and attended race meetings.¹⁶² Even the fervent Protestant John Bruen (1560–1625), whose biography testifies to a detestation of games of chance, embraced secular amusements in his youth.¹⁶³ In 1560–61, the former Marian exile Richard Bertie (1517–1582) occasionally spent a few shillings or pence at cards, dice, or tables; on Christmas Day he gave his children five shillings to play cards and authorized his wife to play for small sums during an illness. His successor’s household rules, while observing that “continual usage of unlawful games” would provoke “great wrath and dissention” unless kept moderate, authorized his servants to play games (apart from dice) in his home, as long as “the value of the sports be not

¹⁵⁷ Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” 21–22.

¹⁵⁸ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 49–51, 66–71; Ruth Kelso, “Sixteenth Century Definitions of the Gentleman in England,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 24, no. 3 (1925): 370–82.

¹⁵⁹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), 120–24; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John T. McNeil, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1960), 207–8.

¹⁶⁰ Balmford, *A Short and Plaine Dialogue*, sig. A4v; William Hinde, *The Very Singular Life of John Bruen, Esquire, of Bruen Stapleford, Cheshire*, ed. William Coddington (New York, 1857), 59–62.

¹⁶¹ J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry: The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England* (London, 1984), 83.

¹⁶² *The Journal of Nicholas Assheton of Downham, in the County of Lancaster, Esq., for Part of the Year 1617 and Part of the Year Following*, ed. F. R. Raines (Chetham Society, 1848), 61–62, 79–80.

¹⁶³ Hinde, *Very Singular Life of John Bruen*, 16–29.

more than the gamester's ability may bear."¹⁶⁴ Religious denunciations plainly had limited influence.

However, gentlemen's actual circumstances also affected their gambling: ideals and ideology had to be squared with reality. When social elites had so much leisure that moderate gaming was recommended to combat sloth, even men with less spare time perhaps had enough of it. Conversely, men battling financial constraints had incompatible imperatives. Reputational considerations might encourage extravagant liberality; at the same time, money troubles could be an incentive to play to win. Moreover, financial position was not static: over time, it might improve. If men's notions about honorable gambling shifted, therefore, the roles that aging and altering circumstances played in that shift cannot be disentangled. Older men likely had less time to gamble but perhaps also less interest. Younger men, more inclined to wager immoderately, frequently had less money: if they were heirs, they might not yet have inherited, or they might be younger sons or minors. Once men were in their prime, new expectations emerged. Allegedly, the humoral imbalance that predisposed young men to excessive behavior abated as they attained maturity (presumably reflecting real physiological development), enabling them to meet patriarchal expectations of rationality and self-control.¹⁶⁵

Equally, gambling might impoverish men, changing their priorities. While Southampton was losing huge sums in Paris, he was attempting to borrow money for his return home. Rowse suggests that he was hoping to support himself by high-stakes play.¹⁶⁶ If so, his wagers no longer aimed at displaying liberality and indifference to loss. The onset of penury might lessen the influence of pride. Indeed, after losing their own money, gentlemen were sometimes obliged to adopt conycatchers' techniques. Cozeners who had stripped young gamesters of their possessions recruited them to ensnare others: "Pure neede then makes him leane on those / That earst did live by him."¹⁶⁷

Equally, changes in legal status could alter access to wealth or leisure. Some gentlemen, Percy, for instance, succeeded to estates that could support riotous expense. But younger sons who became apprentices, meanwhile, found themselves with limited money. Their time was their masters'; they became subject to anti-gaming regulations. Theirs was a transitional state, however. Apprentices who prospered might become merchants (wealthy but busy), then later retire to country estates as gentlemen. Harington referred to "many ritche merchawnts and goldsmiths in Cheap," some from "worshipfull howses" who later rejoined the gentry.¹⁶⁸ Sir Hugh Myddelton (1556/60?–1631), sixth son of a member of Parliament, was one example. Apprenticed in 1576, he became a Cheapside goldsmith and moneylender and by 1592 was very wealthy. He purchased a Middlesex estate and became a member of Parliament under James I, who in 1622 made him a baronet.¹⁶⁹ Conversely, some

¹⁶⁴ Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Ancaster, Preserved at Grimsthorpe* (Dublin, 1907), 468–69, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 54–58.

¹⁶⁶ Rowse, *Shakespeare's Southampton*, 126–27.

¹⁶⁷ Whetstone, *Rocke of Regard*, 256, 259, 313; also Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 226.

¹⁶⁸ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 225.

¹⁶⁹ Mark S. R. Jenner, s.v. "Myddelton [Middleton], Sir Hugh, Baronet (1556x60?–1631), Goldsmith and Entrepreneur," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19683>.

apprentices left their masters and became conycatchers (with time but no money).¹⁷⁰ Such changes often involved documented alterations of status: apprentice indentures, freedom of the city, grant of arms, outlawry for debt. New options and expectations as regarded gambling ensued.

Staged two years after Elizabeth's death, the play *Eastward Ho!* dramatized social mobility of this kind. The plot featured two pathways taken by younger sons of gentlemen, both apprentices to a Cheapside goldsmith, each responding differently to their new situation and embodying distinct attitudes to honor. One of the young men, Golding, accepts his changed status: "I am born a gentleman . . . The trade I have learned of my master . . . I trust taints not my blood."¹⁷¹ He embraces his new occupation and progresses swiftly; granted his freedom early, he is straight-away elected alderman's deputy in the Goldsmiths' Company.¹⁷² At the play's end, he seems destined to make his fortune and resume his birth status (4.2.65–75).

The second apprentice, Quicksilver, never forgets he is "gentleman born" (1.1.137). He unremittingly asserts his status: "Though I am a prentice, I can give arms . . . I am a gentleman, and may swear by my pedigree" (1.1.97–99, 101–2; see also 2.1.110); "Why, 'sblood, sir, my mother's a gentlewoman, and my father a Justice of Peace" (1.1.22–25). He plays tennis, gambles, wears fine clothes, swears, gets drunk, and keeps a horse and mistress (1.1.96–138 and opening stage direction). It is made clear that he does so to assert his continuing gentility (1.1.101–2, 108–9, 114–16, 137–38; 2.1.95–96). His master remarks, "When he had two year to serve, [he] kept his whore and his hunting nag, would play his hundred pound at [card games], as familiarly (and all o' my purse) as any [lord] on 'em all; had his changeable trunks of apparel standing at livery, with his mare, his chest of perfumed linen, and his bathing-tubs: which when I told him of, why he—he was a gentleman, and I a poor Cheapside groom!" (4.2.219–26).

After Quicksilver's indenture is canceled (2.1.112–18), he engages to lure other persons into the grasp of the usurer Security via the "horn of suretyship" (2.2.11–13; 2.2.129–33; 2.3.1–51). By play's end, he has been press-ganged as a masterless man, then imprisoned for defrauding his former master to support his lifestyle (4.2.82–95). However, he has a high reputation among fellow prisoners: "The royalest fellow that ever was bred up i' the city! He would play you his thousand pound a night at dice; keep knights and lords company" (5.3.41–46).

If Quicksilver is the stereotypic young gamester, Golding represents the more mature perspective, something underlined by his master Touchstone's approval and his improbably early rise within the company. He embraces his new position, abjuring the extravagance typical of young gentlemen. Quicksilver, in contrast, uses conspicuous consumption, deep play included, to affirm ongoing gentility. While this renders him a rogue, among fellow rogues it wins him the standing he desires.

Although the play's plot engaged with new, specifically Jacobean issues such as the "inflation of honors" under James I,¹⁷³ apprentices' circumstances are unlikely to

¹⁷⁰ Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford, 1996), 202–8, 324–41.

¹⁷¹ Jonson, Chapman, and Marston, *Eastward Ho!*, 3.2.103–5.

¹⁷² Jonson, Chapman, and Marston, 2.1; 4.2.

¹⁷³ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 71–82.

have changed materially after Elizabeth's reign. Playgoers were expected to accept Quicksilver and Golding as familiar and plausible if exaggerated figures. The work dramatizes gentlemen's diverging paths through life, inflected by formal alterations in status but by their own choices too. While men used gambling to assert gentility, their behavior changed in response to developments in their lives and to the altering access to time and money these entailed.

CONCLUSION

By the late sixteenth century, gambling had definitional power: issues of manhood, honor, and gentility conditioned elite gambling behavior. While for most gentlemen, gentility was a given, some used gaming to bolster wobbly claims to status. Young men adopted a culture of excess, deep play included, to challenge prevailing norms of manhood—though with maturity, their views often changed. Gambling expressed competing ideas about honor too: young men's "competitive vertical honor" versus older men's concern for "horizontal honor."¹⁷⁴

If fixation on winning was ungentlemanly, losing presented the opportunity to demonstrate noble qualities. Thus the Earl of Pembroke allegedly spent two thousand pounds one night, paying his own losses but returning all that he won to the losers. He paid, in effect, to showcase his "magnanimytie and bowntifull disposition."¹⁷⁵ That such acts were remembered testifies their utility. A former servant described Pembroke's conduct to Harington many years later.¹⁷⁶ When Lord Berkeley needed only throw two or higher with two dice to win at tables, he asked bystanders "Will you see mee loose this game?" He then did so by landing one die atop the other, ace uppermost. John Smyth recounted the exploit twenty years afterward.¹⁷⁷

Moralists applied universal laws to ascertain *whether* anybody should gamble—the gentry treated gambling as acceptable, then considered *how* one should gamble. Elizabethan gentlemen declared games of chance indifferent to God, preceding by several decades the Reformist community's internal debate that reached the same conclusion.¹⁷⁸ Conduct guides suggest that mature men's views were subsumed within broader attitudes to honor and manhood, which favored self-control and moderation, just as religious authors condemned gambling altogether, in conformity with overall beliefs about chance.

Young gentlemen held other perspectives. Their identities less firmly established, they used extravagant wagers to assert honor, competing to risk themselves. This behavior more closely fitted older-style conceptions of honor. Mature men (supposedly) played in moderation to sustain but not sacrifice honor, concurring with the new ethos of honor, expressed through behaviors such as self-government, service, and piety. As youths achieved "man's estate," becoming heads of households and eligible to hold office, their behaviors often shifted. Hence the transformation

¹⁷⁴ Stewart, *Honor*, 54–63.

¹⁷⁵ Harington, "Treatise on Playe," 203–4.

¹⁷⁶ Harington, 220.

¹⁷⁷ Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, 2:263.

¹⁷⁸ See Diane Willen, "The Case of Thomas Gataker: Confronting Superstition in Seventeenth-Century England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 43, no. 3 (2012): 727–49.

implied by conduct guides: honor acquired by maturation demanded mature behavior, exhibiting the self-controlled qualities now needed to demonstrate authority. Changing attitudes to gambling potentially cast light on attitudes to honor more generally. In some respects, games of chance fundamentally suited the original notion of honor, which prioritized steadfastness in the face of adverse fortune, keeping one's promise (in this case, to pay wagering debts), and a competitive spirit implicit with violence. Mature men's more sedate gaming fitted newer conceptions of honor that stressed self-government and moderation.

In fact, elite gambling presented a dilemma in terms of honor. Wagering away money to impress witnesses with one's largesse conflicted with various incentives to play to win; impoverishing oneself in pursuit of honor could ultimately result in dishonorable conduct. However, Harington's "counterfeit great play" featured its own contradictions, as when he argued that courtiers could maintain their honor by duping people—actions not wholly unlike those of conycatchers. Perhaps he excused the deception involved on the grounds that it did no harm. He had implied that Aristotle's extenuation of such vices as over-ostentation—that they harmed nobody—was inapplicable to great play, because it did harm others. His justification of "counterfeit great play" may have been the reverse: although it tricked people, it did so with good intent.

Whether Harington expected his idea to be adopted is debatable; he conceivably proposed it more to showcase his wit than to achieve reform. Certainly, reform did not eventuate. Gambling, intensifying as he wrote, proliferated in Jacobean England. A European craze then commenced in about 1650, reaching England with the Restoration. It coincided with the emergence of probability theory, which revolutionized all aspects of gaming. These developments triggered new efforts at regulation, in the course of which the gentry lost its exemptions from anti-gaming legislation. Those, however, commenced in the later seventeenth century.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Miers, *Regulating Commercial Gambling*, 17–38.