

**“When I am in game, I am furious”:
Gaming and Sexual Conquest in Early Modern English Drama**

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Abstract

This thesis argues that games and gaming in early modern English theatre serve as the conduit through which certain forms of masculine conquest are embodied. Representations of games in Renaissance drama, such as backgammon or chess, or now obsolete pastimes like fast-and-loose or barley-break, by way of both textual references and staged examples, serve to conflate success at gaming and sexual dominance as originating from the same imperative. Such games, popular throughout the period, contained analogies of conquest within their rules and socially accepted methods of performance because they echoed the values of a patriarchal society that placed critical importance upon the same. Indeed, in the newly urban culture of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, games and gaming became a substitute for warfare, providing men an opportunity to test their aptitude for masculinity, a perceived necessity for the health of individual and society. To neglect the practice of masculine acts risked not only the individual male's masculinity, but could subsequently place the patriarchal society in jeopardy. The regular conflation of sexual and gaming metaphor can be seen as a critical precaution against the possibility of effeminacy attacking a man in the midst of heterosexual congress. In relation to these concepts, this thesis provides new readings of the anonymous Arden of Faversham, Thomas Middleton's Women Beware Women and his William Rowley collaboration The Changeling, William Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost and Antony and Cleopatra, along with an extended analysis of Middleton's A Game at Chess, suggesting that a full appreciation of the games and gaming references is essential to understanding these plays in Renaissance terms.

Certification of Thesis

I hereby certify that the research, experimental work, analysis, findings, and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been submitted for any other award.

Signature of Candidate

Date

Endorsement

Signature of Principal Supervisor

Date

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